

JYU DISSERTATIONS 82

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**Ville Häkkinen**

# **From Counterrevolution to Consolidation?**

**Language of Nation-building in the Hungarian  
Parliamentary Debates, 1920–1928**

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES

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# **From Counterrevolution to Consolidation?**

## **Language of Nation-building in the Hungarian Parliamentary Debates, 1920–1928**

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella  
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi Historica-rakennuksen salissa H320  
toukokuun 24. päivänä 2019 kello 12.

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by permission of  
the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Jyväskylä,  
in building Historica, hall H320 on May 24, 2019 at 12 o'clock noon.



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2019

Editors

Anssi Halmesvirta

Department of History and Ethnology, University of Jyväskylä

Timo Hautala

Open Science Centre, University of Jyväskylä

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Permanent link to this publication: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-7766-5>

ISBN 978-951-39-7766-5 (PDF)

URN:ISBN:978-951-39-7766-5

ISSN 2489-9003

*In loving memory of Merja Häkkinen*  
(1949–2016)

## ABSTRACT

Häkkinen, Ville

From Counterrevolution to Consolidation? Language of nation-building in the Hungarian parliamentary debates, 1920–1928

Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2019, 273 p.

(JYU Dissertations

ISSN 2489-9003; 82)

ISBN 978-951-39-7766-5 (PDF)

This dissertation analyses the use of political language related to nation-building in the Hungarian Parliament between 1920 and 1928. After defeat in the First World War, the domestic revolutions and the Peace Treaty of Trianon that had caused considerable territorial losses, the Hungarian counterrevolutionary government had to stabilize the political situation in the country and regain its legitimacy. The tool for this stabilization was an increasingly nationalist and exclusive conceptualization of the Hungarian nation, as well as reliance on national history. The societal groups deemed suspicious, such as Socialists and Jews, were not only excluded rhetorically from the sphere of patriotic, loyal and politically competent Hungarians, but also through legislation and oppression barred from being equal members of society. The government-led history politics appropriated the memory and ideals of the most renowned statesmen, yet gave them strictly counterrevolutionary contemporary redescrptions; as an example, Lajos Kossuth, the hero of the 1848 Revolution, was promptly redescrbed as a moderate reformist. In foreign policy, the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, the need to regain the lost territories, was conceptualized as a national mission; the lost unity of historic Hungary was to be restored and the Hungarian brethren suffering under foreign rule reunited with the fatherland. To achieve this, the government was ready to resort to both international co-operation and clandestine activism.

The analytical approach to political language applied in this study is based on how the Members of Parliament rhetorically constructed arguments and to which values, shared experiences and historical references they appealed. Empirical study indicates that even almost a decade after the revolutionary years the conservative government mainly relied on the counterrevolutionary rhetoric; the Communist threat was a constantly applicable tool to discredit the opposition. The results challenge the established historiographical view of István Bethlen's premiership (1921–1931) as an era of reformist and 'conservative-liberal' politics. The concept of 'consolidation' linked to Bethlen in no way signalled the abatement of the confrontational political atmosphere, but instead Bethlen himself repeatedly appeared in Parliament in order to maintain and renew the rhetoric of exclusion against his political opponents. The preponderant role of revision in foreign policy led already in the late 1920s to a considered collusion with Mussolini's Italy, which rendered Hungary economically and politically dependent on the Fascist state.

The rejection of political pluralism eventually served to undermine the ostensibly secure position of the government when faced with the challenge of the extreme Right. In the 1930s the only way for the government to respond to this challenge was to make concessions towards the radical Right. Thus, 'consolidation' proved to be a rhetorical tool to which the government resorted when the need arose, but which in no way contributed to the actual, long-term stabilization of the regime.

Keywords: 1920s, counterrevolution, history politics, Hungary, nationalism, nation-building, political language, parliament

# TIIVISTELMÄ

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Väitöskirjassa analysoidaan kansakunnan rakentamiseen liittyvää poliittisen kielen käyttöä Unkarin parlamentissa vuosina 1920–1928. Ensimmäisen maailmansodan tappion, kotimaisen vallankumousten ja mittavat aluemenetykset aiheuttaneen Trianonin rauhansopimuksen jälkeen Unkarin vastavallankumouksellisen hallituksen oli kyettävä vakauttamaan maan poliittiset olot ja rakennettava legitimeettinsä uudelleen. Tämän vakauttamisen välineenä oli tiukan nationalistinen ja ulossulkeva kansakunnan käsitteellistäminen ja historiaan tukeutuminen. Epäilyttäviksi katsottuja ryhmiä, kuten sosialisteja ja juutalaisia, ei vain retorisesti suljettu isänmaallisten, luotettavien ja poliittisesti kompetenttien unkarilaisten ulkopuolelle, vaan heidän tasa-arvoista toimintaansa yhteiskunnassa rajoitettiin myös lainsäädännön ja painostuksen kautta. Unkarin historian maineikkaimpien suurmiesten muisto ja ihanteet asetettiin politiikan palvelukseen, samalla kuitenkin antaen niille tiukasti vastavallankumoukselliseen politiikkaan sidotut merkitykset, jolloin esimerkiksi vuoden 1848 vallankumouksen sankari Lajos Kossuth uudelleenmääriteltiin maltilliseksi reformistiksi. Ulkopoliitikassa Trianonin rauhansopimuksen revisio, menetettyjen alueiden takaisin hankkiminen, määriteltiin kansallisen tehtävän kautta; historiallisen Unkarin yhtenäisyys oli palautettava ja vieraan vallan alla kärsivät unkarilaiset veriveljet liitettävä takaisin isänmaahan. Tämän toteuttamiseksi oltiin valmiit paitsi kansainväliseen yhteistyöhön, myös valonarkaan aktivismiin.

Tutkimuksessa käytetty tapa analysoida poliittista kieltä perustuu siihen, miten parlamentaarikot retorisesti rakensivat argumentteja ja millaisiin arvoihin, jaettuihin kokemuksiin ja historiaviitteisiin he vetosivat. Empiirinen tutkimus osoittaa, että vielä lähes vuosikymmenen vallankumousvuosien jälkeen konservatiivihallitus tukeutui pääasiassa vastavallankumoukselliseen retoriikkaan; kommunismin uhka oli alati käyttökelpoinen väline opposition diskreditointiin. Tulokset haastavat historiantutkimuksessa vallitsevan käsityksen István Bethlenin pääministerikauden (1921–1931) reformihenkisyydestä ja ‘konservatiivis-liberaalista’ politiikasta. Bethlenin nimeen liitetty ‘konsolidaatio’ (vakaus- ja yhtenäisyyspolitiikka) ei lopulta merkinnyt poliittisen ilmapiirin vastakkainasettelun lientymistä, vaan Bethlen itse osallistui usein parlamenttikeskusteluihin vahvistaen ja uusintaen poliittisia vastustajiaan ulossulkevaa retoriikkaa. Revision ylittämätön rooli ulkopoliitikassa puolestaan johti jo 1920-luvun lopulla tietoiseen yhteistoimintaan Mussolinin Italian kanssa, mikä asetti Unkarin taloudelliseen ja poliittiseen riippuvuussuhteeseen fasistihallintoa kohtaan.

Poliittisen pluralismin torjuminen johti lopulta hallituksen näennäisesti ylivoimaisen aseman heikkouteen nousevan äärioikeiston haasteen edessä. 1930-luvulla hallituksen ainoa keino vastata haasteeseen oli myönnytysten tekeminen oikeistoradikaalille politiikalle. Näin ollen ‘konsolidaatio’ osoittautui vallanpitäjien retoriseksi keinoksi, jota hyödynnettiin tarpeen vaatiessa, mutta joka ei merkinnyt järjestelmän vakauttamista pitkällä aikavälillä.

Asiasanat: 1920-luku, historiapolitiikka, kansakunnan rakentaminen, nationalismi, poliittinen kieli, parlamentti, Unkari, vastavallankumous

**Author's address** Ville Häkkinen  
Department of History and Ethnology  
P.O. Box 35 (H)  
40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland  
ville.m.hakkinen@gmail.com

**Supervisors** Docent Anssi Halmesvirta  
Department of History and Ethnology  
P.O. Box 35 (H)  
40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Professor Pasi Ihalainen  
Department of History and Ethnology  
P.O. Box 35 (H)  
40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland

**Reviewers** Docent Heino Nyyssönen  
Department of Philosophy,  
Political Science and Contemporary History  
University of Turku, Finland

Docent Miklós Zeidler  
Department of Modern and  
Contemporary Hungarian History  
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

**Opponent** Docent Heino Nyyssönen  
Department of Philosophy,  
Political Science and Contemporary History  
University of Turku, Finland

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For nearly ten years I have known that I would one day defend a doctoral dissertation. Yet, the closer to the day I have journeyed, the less likely it seemed that I would ever reach it. What back then appeared as work well suited to my competence has over the years turned into a struggle over my personal and academic identity and credibility. As I write this, the last piece of the upcoming dissertation, I'm still confused about what the process has resulted in and how it has left me. Nevertheless, I can rejoice in the fact that the work is finally nearing completion, and it is my rewarding task to thank those who have taught and guided me; those who have shared my joy in the time of hubris; and those who have stood by me in the moments of despair.

First of all, I want to express my gratitude to my supervisors. With his immense knowledge of Hungarian history, Docent Anssi Halmesvirta has guided me in my quest to analyse the political language in interwar Hungary, first during my master's thesis and then in the lengthy process of my doctoral dissertation. Anssi has led by example, by his own tenacity and passion for intellectual history, yet at the same time left me free to search for – and eventually find – my own path. Professor Pasi Ihalainen, as the other supervisor and the head of the Research Center of Political Cultures, has diligently directed me to pursue the state of the art in political history, urging me in the right direction at the right time. Pasi has not only demonstrated what a truly excellent international network means, but also generously allowed me to benefit from it, a favour for which I remain profoundly thankful. Together, they have been invaluable mentors over these years; even at times when they have disagreed with each other, in so doing they have compelled me to make choices of my own and to trust my judgement under pressure – thus letting me learn the core skills of an independent scholar.

Docent Heino Nyyssönen has kindly agreed to be both preliminary examiner and opponent at the defence of my thesis. I deem it an honour to defend my dissertation against the challenge posed by the foremost Finnish expert on Hungarian political language, a challenge I'm looking forward to with both elation and awe. Docent Miklós Zeidler, as the other pre-examiner, proved to be a true specialist in interwar Hungarian history by providing excellent and meticulous feedback, thus helping me to greatly improve the final form of the study. During the past year, Virginia Mattila has been a faithful language editor, tirelessly correcting my various language mishaps, always working with remarkable efficiency and promptitude. All potential mistakes still remaining are naturally my own responsibility.

My nearest co-workers in the study of political cultures and parliamentary debate, Elina Kauppinen, Miina Kaarkoski, Matti Roitto and Teemu Häkkinen, have provided constant peer support in constructing, maintaining and contesting what is included in the history of political language and political thought, and especially what 'multisitedness' could possibly mean. Tuomas Laine-Frigren and Kenneth Partti are longtime fellow travellers on journeys both concrete and



intellectual to Hungary, Hungarian language and culture. Professors Pertti Ahonen and Antero Holmila have shown confidence in my skills and kindly invited me to participate in their projects, thus offering valuable experience of academic work. In general, the Department of History and Ethnology is a work community which has shown me encouragement and tolerance even at times when my work has not progressed as expected. The two Heads of Department during my time here, Jari Ojala and Heli Valtonen, have been essential in creating such a permissive work environment.

There are numerous people in Hungarian academia to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. Already during my master's studies I had the pleasure of meeting two renowned scholars, Professors Ignác Romsics and György Tverdota, who were ready to counsel an eager novice regarding the particularities of Hungarian history. Back in 2014, Tamás Dobszay originally introduced me to the digitized archives of the Hungarian Parliament, enabling the very project in its present form. Professor Gábor Gyáni and Dr. Gergely Romsics have provided me with insightful advice and support in various phases of the study. Over the years, my brief yet significant encounters with Dávid Turbucz, Rudolf Paksa, Krisztián Ungváry, Zsuzsanna Varga, Réka Marchut, György Képes and Kinga Beliznai Bodi have rendered invaluable advice concerning the interwar era and its diverse interpretations, thereby reinforcing my trust in the continued relevance of my research. Furthermore, my thanks are due to Professor Johanna Laakso, whose sharp insight into present-day Hungary and the political use of history there has greatly enhanced my motivation for this study by constantly reminding me that Hungarian history is not something provincial and marginal, but does indeed matter in the European perspective.

My thanks to Dr. Karin Bischoff, Professor Cornelia Ilie and Dr. Marion Löffler for their support in writing the article that comprises the core of Chapters 2.3 and 2.5. I remain thankful to the two anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Language and Politics* for their constructive comments on that article, as well as to John Benjamins Publishing for allowing the republication of the material in dissertation form.

The Department of History and Ethnology and Faculty of Humanities (and Social Sciences) at the University of Jyväskylä have entrusted me with funding for the most part of the doctoral studies. And just as I was on the verge of despair over the expiry of funding, the Emil Aaltonen Foundation granted me a scholarship that enabled me to complete the work in good order.

As noted earlier, writing this thesis has been a long and arduous process that has in many ways taken its toll on me. My deepest thanks to my beloved Noora for having stood by me through all the times I've been absent in body or mind. Since the early days of my dissertation project, my dear Elli has provided much-needed distraction from work and a constant reminder that home and work are best kept separate, a point I have been able to keep in mind, if not always to adhere to.

For all my achievements, I am forever beholden to my parents. Their faith in my abilities and expertise, the loving and encouraging atmosphere of my

childhood, have laid the foundations of all I have achieved, in my life, this dissertation included. I take particular delight in the moment I can present the finished work to Markku. It pains me that Merja is no longer among us to share the moment of joy and pride. I dedicate this study to her memory.

Jyväskylä, 24.4.2019,  
Ville Häkkinen

# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

TIIVISTELMÄ

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

ON NAMES AND TRANSLATIONS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	15
1.1	'Consolidation' problematized .....	15
1.2	Sources.....	20
1.3	On methodology .....	30
1.4	The interwar era in historiography .....	38
2	COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY STATE, EXCLUSIVE NATION.....	47
2.1	Introduction.....	47
2.2	State-building from the ashes. "Restoration of constitutional life" debate in 1920 .....	50
2.2.1	From Calvary towards resurrection .....	50
2.2.2	Redescriptions of constitutionalism .....	59
2.2.3	The firm hand of the Regent.....	62
2.2.4	A mock constitution.....	66
2.3	Redescribing the nation. The <i>Numerus Clausus</i> law of 1920 .....	68
2.3.1	For the nation, against 'over-representation' .....	68
2.3.2	"There is no such thing as a Hungarian Jew!" The denial of integration.....	71
2.3.3	The anti-Semitic aspect of exclusive nation-building.....	73
2.4	"Hunger is a subjective feeling" – The debate on the conditions of political prisoners, 1923.....	75
2.4.1	Warm barracks and clean clothes? .....	75
2.4.2	The moral viewpoint at the core of the criticism.....	81
2.4.3	The limits of parliamentarism .....	84
2.4.4	The intersecting rhetorical strategies .....	90
2.5	The heyday of consolidation? The amendment to the <i>Numerus Clausus</i> , 1928 .....	92
2.5.1	Making a virtue of necessity .....	92
2.5.2	The pitfalls of a 'gentlemanly' anti-Semitism .....	97
2.6	Conclusions. Conditional virtues .....	98
3	A NATION BUILT ON HISTORY .....	101
3.1	Introduction.....	101
3.2	For the Dead or for the Living? Canonizing the memorial day of the fallen, 1924 .....	104
3.2.1	The controversial war effort redescribed.....	104

3.2.2	Widows, orphans and war profiteers.....	109
3.2.3	Reinterpretations of patriotism .....	113
3.2.4	Heroes or traitors? Redescribing the POWs.....	119
3.2.5	Not too solemn a session.....	122
3.3	The teachings of the Greatest Hungarian. Codifying the memory of István Széchenyi, 1925 .....	126
3.3.1	The counterrevolutionary Széchenyi .....	126
3.3.2	The many interpretations of Széchenyi .....	131
3.3.3	A quantum of Széchenyi .....	139
3.4	Canonizing Lajos Kossuth and the Revolution of 1848, 1927 .....	140
3.4.1	The contemporary uses for Kossuth in 1927 .....	140
3.4.2	The careful construction of Kossuth as a model patriot.....	143
3.4.3	The revolutionary Kossuth. Opposition redescription attempts .....	148
3.4.4	The counterrevolutionary Kossuth. The commemoration bill in the Upper House .....	155
3.4.5	Kossuth reformed.....	160
3.5	When history does not come up to the expectations. The curious case of the Sándor Petőfi memorial bill of 1922.....	162
3.6	Conclusions. In the name of the heroes, against deglorification .....	167
4	THROUGH REVISION TO RESURRECTION. THE ROLE OF FOREIGN POLICY IN NATION-BUILDING.....	170
4.1	Introduction.....	170
4.2	The overarching Trianon, 1920 .....	173
4.2.1	Conceptualizing the unspeakable.....	173
4.2.2	Unyielding nationalism and organic unity .....	176
4.2.3	Government credibility at stake.....	181
4.3	The making of “Civitas Fidelissima”, 1922.....	184
4.3.1	The Sopron crisis, the referendum and the commemoration bill .....	184
4.3.2	Rituals of reminiscence.....	187
4.3.3	Multi-layered experiences, questions of responsibility and merit .....	189
4.3.4	A breakthrough from the confines of Trianon? .....	194
4.4	In search of international support. The League of Nations accession debate, 1923 .....	196
4.4.1	Hungary and the League: High hopes and original defects .....	196
4.4.2	Towards a more equal League .....	201
4.4.3	Revision in the centre .....	207
4.4.4	International and national consolidation in the making.....	210
4.4.5	Nurturing the many hopes .....	215
4.5	A way out of isolation? The treaty of friendship with Italy, 1927.....	218
4.5.1	Crafting a new world order, once again.....	218

4.5.2	Power ambitions or sincere mutual respect? Redescribing Italy's role .....	221
4.5.3	The limits of parliamentary speech .....	229
4.5.4	Grasping the historical moment - the favourable discourse of the Upper House.....	238
4.5.5	Collusion in the name of the nation .....	242
4.6	Conclusions. Revision as a national mission .....	245
5	CONCLUSIONS: 'CONTAINMENT' OVER 'CONSOLIDATION' .....	248
	YHTEENVETO.....	255
	SOURCES.....	262

## ABBREVIATIONS

FN	<i>Felsőházi Naplók</i> , Protocols of the Plenary Sessions of the Upper House
KI	<i>Képviselőházi Irományok</i> , Bills and motions of the House of Representatives
KN	<i>Képviselőházi Naplók</i> , Protocols of the Plenary Sessions of the House of Representatives
MÉL	<i>Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon</i> , Hungarian Biographical Lexicon
NI	<i>Nemzetgyűlési Irományok</i> , Bills and motions of the National Assembly
NN	<i>Nemzetgyűlési Naplók</i> , Protocols of the Plenary Sessions of the National Assembly

## ON NAMES AND TRANSLATIONS

The names of persons have been written according to the Hungarian orthography but using English name order; e.g. *Bethlen István* → *István Bethlen* (but not *Stephen Bethlen*). The only exception are the monarchs, whose names are written according to the English custom; e.g. *Szent István* → *St. Stephen*. The last ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, who used the regal name *Karl I* as Emperor of Austria and *Károly IV* as King of Hungary, is referred to as *King Charles*.

When it comes to geographical names, there are numerous chances of confusion, as the contemporary Hungarians still referred to places in recently ceded territories by their Hungarian names, even though at that time they were (and still are) known by their vernacular names. To resolve this, the places beyond the post-Trianon boundaries of Hungary are referred to by their Hungarian names with the vernacular name given in brackets at the first mention; e.g. *Pozsony (Bratislava)*. The same also applies to the then-Italian port of *Fiume*, currently known by its Croatian name *Rijeka*.

As for the states whose official names changed during the period, *The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* is called *Yugoslavia*, as was the custom even before the official change of the name (1929). However, in the case of *Soviet Russia* (until 1922) and *the Soviet Union* (since 1922), both names are used in order to convey the changing contemporary conceptualization of the new state.

All translations from Hungarian are by the writer unless otherwise stated. In addition to the subject matter, the translation is intended also to convey the tone and rhetorical composition of a message while remaining faithful to the original expression. Also noteworthy in relation to translation is that the Hungarian language in practice has only one past tense, whereas differentiation between imperfect, present perfect and past perfect is usually achieved by the use of auxiliary words. In the English translations the writer has used the corresponding English tenses to convey the sense of chronology.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 'Consolidation' problematized

The tumultuous years around the end of the First World War have been subjected to thorough historical analysis in an attempt to outline the remarkable inter-European changes in the political landscape. The era was likewise defined by the break-up of the continental empires, the national independence movements and the subsequent emergence of new nation-states. The calls for democratization, the rise of the ideas of parliamentary government and international co-operation were offset by authoritarian movements, increasing nationalism and the escalation of political violence, especially in the new nation-states and the defeated powers. In both domestic and international spheres, the construction of the post-war world order was from the outset an open-ended process, where the diverse and entangled discourses of crisis and mitigation as well as the post-war traumas and hopes for a brighter future all contributed to the highly contingent and uncertain political processes. In the scholarly literature, attempts to conceptualize these developments have led to designations such as the years of 'reform and revolution', 'the twisted paths' of the European states, or the era of 'contesting democracy'.<sup>1</sup>

In many respects, Hungary stood in the crossroads of those concurrent and entangled developments: a defeated power which had faced domestic revolutions and had been partitioned at the end of the First World War, being compelled to realign its domestic and foreign political thought. These developments are studied from the perspective of *nation-building*,<sup>2</sup> in this study

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Gerwarth 2007, Gerwarth & Horne 2013, Gerwarth 2017, Ihalainen 2017, Leonhard 2014, Müller 2013.

<sup>2</sup> In a more general sense, nation-building is understood as the socio-political process of constructing a sense of integration and a common identity (and, conversely, an image of the other) within a more or less homogenous population through the (re)creation of national symbols and traditions as well as development of institutions and infrastructure. These are then applied to legitimize and stabilize the authority of a centralized administration over the said population within a politically and

specifically understood as a *discursive* process which simultaneously constructed and utilized the conceptualizations of Hungary's past and present roles, encompassing the legitimation of the post-war power structure, the relationship to the memory of the World War involving the breaking-up of the Empire and Hungary's position in the making of the post-war international order.<sup>3</sup>

In Hungary, the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy in October 1918 had led to the emergence of a liberal-democratic republic, whereas in March 1919, a Communist takeover had brought about the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic. During the Communist regime, the pre-war elites organized as a counterrevolutionary movement, with the partial support of the Entente. The simultaneous engagements with the successor states, coupled with Entente pressure and scant international support eventually resulted in the fall of the Soviet Republic and the establishment of a counterrevolutionary government in the autumn of 1919. The reaction, fuelled by the dismay of the old elites at the 'desecration' perpetrated by the revolutionaries, coupled with the radical nationalism of the post-war extreme Right, resulted in the construction of a counterrevolutionary state according to a conservative and nationalist conceptualization of the Hungarian identity. Contrary to the more modern sense of constitutional debates in most other European states in the post-war era, in Hungary the models of nation-building and state-building were consciously drawn from the past. When parliamentary life recommenced in 1920, the monarchical form of government was reinstated, Admiral Miklós Horthy<sup>4</sup> was

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geographically defined state. Connor 1972; Hippler 2005; Mylonas 2017; Tilly 1992; Vares & Vares 2019.

<sup>3</sup> One might justifiably argue that these processes constitute not only *nation-building* but also *state-building*. The definitions of these two concepts overlap in both practical use and scholarly discourse, and cannot be completely differentiated in this study, either. For the most part, I have chosen to prefer the former as an analytical concept, as the cases studied mostly deal with the symbolic elements of creating and maintaining the nation and less with the administrative and institutional side (Chapter 2.2. being an exception).

<sup>4</sup> A son of a Calvinist gentry family, Miklós Horthy de Nagybánya (1868–1957) chose the career of an officer in the Austro-Hungarian navy. Between 1909 and 1914 he served as an aide-de-camp to Emperor Francis Joseph. During his career in the navy and in the court, he got to know several notable persons who would influence his later political career, including the Hungarian politicians István Tisza and István Bethlen, the future British emissary to Hungary, Sir Thomas Hohler, as well as Archduke Charles, the future King. In the World War, Horthy distinguished himself in the Otranto Raid of 1917 and was subsequently promoted to the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, the last to hold the office. For him, the pre-war world and gentlemanly culture were the ideals he clung to, abhorring the revolutionary tumult, which he saw as the main reason for the defeat of the Central Powers. Seeing Soviet rule become a reality in Hungary provoked him to join the counterrevolutionary movement in Szeged in May 1919. As the senior officer, he quickly rose to prominence, first as the Minister of War in the provisional counterrevolutionary government, then as the Commander of the National (White) Army. His resentment of Communism contributed to the spirit of 'cleansing' the land of revolutionaries, one of the leading forces behind the White Terror during the counterrevolutionary campaign in Transdanubia. After taking control of Budapest, Horthy, with the support of István Bethlen and Pál Teleki, was able to appear as a credible figure capable of filling the post-revolutionary power vacuum and was tasked by the Entente representatives with stabilizing the domestic unrest and forming a stable government. This was formalized on 1 March 1920, when he was elected Regent of



elected Regent, and most of the reforms made during the republican phase gradually recalled. In 1922 the two main parties, the Christian National and the Smallholder parties merged to form a unified governmental party<sup>5</sup> which went on to command a supermajority in all elections until 1939, assisted by a biased electoral law and open ballot in most constituencies.

As a result of defeat in the World War, Hungary, the former ruler of the eastern part of the Dual Monarchy had been reduced to one third of its pre-war territory and population, a tragic loss finalized in the Treaty of Trianon of 1920. Instead of gaining independence, Hungary became an 'unwilling successor state', stripped of its regional dominance and political leverage. Moreover, the former Slovak, Romanian and Croatian subjects, now organizing within independent states, had occupied large parts of historic Hungary and were deeply mistrustful of the former imperial power. In a foreign political sense, the Hungarian nation-building came to be characterized by the omnipresent consternation at Trianon, a spirit of isolation and siege and, as a result, persistent revisionism, the desire to make good the territorial losses in one way or another.

In the language of nation-building, the experiences of defeat and revolution, perceptions of internal enemies and international humiliation, were all tied together in a spirit of existential threat against the very concept of Hungarian nation.<sup>6</sup> The response was a consciously exclusive reconceptualization of nation, which was then applied to legitimize and operationalize the nationalistic domestic and foreign policy: the glorious interpretation of Hungarians as a united and ardently patriotic nation which time and again had withstood foreign oppression, made it feasible to ostracize the un-Hungarian internal enemies, who were simultaneously held responsible for past catastrophes. In a foreign political sense, the reinterpreted nation was tasked with what was perceived as its timeless mission: to regain its place among the leading powers of Central Europe and, most importantly, to reclaim the lands to which it was 'entitled'.

A study on the language of nation-building thus enables an analysis of the manifold forms of Hungarian nationalism in the 1920s. The level studied is parliamentary debate, within which the authoritarian government needed to rhetorically legitimize its resolutions, but also engaged in rhetorical contestation with the parliamentary opposition over the core tenets of nation and national mission. Basing the analysis on the very level of parliamentary argumentation, we will be able to access the actual dynamics of discussion; which arguments were used to legitimize the consciously anti-modern political development and what kind of alternatives and challenges, if any, were presented. In this respect, I argue that the construction and conceptualization of the Hungarian nation was on the level of political discourse an inseparable element in the construction of the regime itself; the legitimacy of the government depended on the organic,

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Hungary, a post in which he would serve until 1944. MÉL: Horthy, Miklós; Turbucz 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Agrarian, Smallholder and Civic Party / *Keresztény-Keresztyn Földműves-, Kisgazda- és Polgári Párt*, usually referred to as Unity Party / *Egységes Párt*. Romsics 1999, 183.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Gerwarth 2017, 12–13.

homogenous and exclusive conceptualization of the Hungarian nation, with its glorious past and historic mission to regain internal stability and international credibility. Accordingly, this narrative destined the government to take the matters at hand and guide the nation into a better future. This applied to the three interrelated central themes of the study: the construction of the regime and the use of the exclusive conceptualization of the nation in domestic policy; the political use of history, officially defining the interpretations of the nation's past and their commemorations to suit the conservative nationalist narrative; and the projection of the conceptualization of national mission to the foreign policy, its use in the legitimization of the manifold forms of revisionist policy.

This approach also makes it possible to problematize the conceptualizations over the nature of the regime. In many cases Hungarian historiography on the interwar era has been at pains to settle on a name for the regime and most often ended up with appellations such as 'semi-authoritarian', 'semi-parliamentary' or 'intermediate' system, that is to say, the undeniably authoritarian elements were offset by the parliamentary pluralism and functioning democratic organs.<sup>7</sup> This study began on the premise, supported by the majority of the historiography, that after the aggressively *counterrevolutionary* (*ellenforradalmi*) phase in the early 1920s, government policy was mitigated in the latter years in the spirit of *consolidation* (*konzolidáció*) aimed at stabilizing the regime and the national economy and creating political unity in place of the former party rivalry. Consolidation has been attributed to Prime Minister István Bethlen,<sup>8</sup> whose premiership lasted from 1921 to 1931 and has been described as a gradual and pragmatic evolution towards a functioning 'conservative-liberal' polity, which even succeeded in taming – for a while – the opposing forces of the Social

<sup>7</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 304, 353–360, 374; Püski 2006, 7–8, 259; Romsics 2017, 199–200.

<sup>8</sup> A scion of a Transylvanian aristocrat family, Count István Bethlen (1874–1946) entered the dualist-era Parliament as early as 1901 and continued there until its dissolution in 1918. A moderate conservative politician, he emphasized national unity, that is, the unity of Hungarians against the minority nationalities within the Dual Monarchy, supporting the Hungaro-centric cultural and nationality policies promoted by Albert Apponyi. Towards the end of the World War, Bethlen desperately argued for social reforms in order to curb the appeal of the radical demands of the nationalities and revolutionaries that would eventually cause Greater Hungary to disintegrate. After the revolution of 1918 Bethlen remained in political life to counterbalance the radical liberalism of the Károlyi government. However, as power shifted to the Communists in 1919, he fled to Vienna, becoming one of the leaders of the loose counterrevolutionary movement. He soon formed an alliance with Horthy, campaigning for the stabilization of the regime, and rose to the premiership in April 1921. Bethlen's person and political style came to dominate the following decade; he progressed pragmatically in gathering the conservative and agrarian forces under the Unity Party and, despite internal disputes, had definite control over the political machine until the end of the decade. As a careful reformist, Bethlen pursued political and economic stabilization through the discourse of consolidation, reaching its greatest popularity in the mid-1920s. He was able to withstand the criticism heaped upon him during the Franc forgery scandal in 1926, but was pressured into resigning in 1931 due to allegedly negligent handling of the financial crisis caused by the Great Depression. He remained a prominent conservative leader and confidant to Horthy until the end of the Second World War. MÉL: Bethlen István; Romsics 1995.

Democrats and the Extreme Right.<sup>9</sup> The success story of consolidation has been reinforced by downplaying the anti-democratic aspects of the regime; for example in the narrative that the government won elections in the 1920s not because of the biased electoral law, but because of its appeal to all social segments through its pragmatic deeds.<sup>10</sup> Thus the original research hypothesis, reflected in the headline of the study, was that also on the level of the language of nation-building, exclusive counterrevolutionary discourse would give way to a more inclusive language of consolidation, an effort to stabilize and legitimize the regime by rhetorically mitigating the bitter antagonism of the immediate post-war period.

This hypothesis, however, proved to have one central flaw. What, if anything, did the concept of consolidation actually mean in contemporary political language?

“CONSOLIDATE

1) TO JOIN TOGETHER INTO ONE WHOLE: UNITE

2) TO MAKE FIRM OR SECURE: STRENGTHEN

3) TO FORM INTO A COMPACT MASS”<sup>11</sup>

“CONSOLIDATION

STABILIZATION OF A LABILE ECONOMIC OR POLITICAL SITUATION”<sup>12</sup>

Judging from the dictionary examples, the politically comprehensive meaning of consolidation would be stabilization of political unrest, uniting different political factions and/or securing one’s leading position. On the surface, the consolidation discourse applied by Bethlen could be seen to fulfil these ideals: within a year of his inauguration in 1921 he succeeded in stabilizing the political structure after two years that had seen five successive short-lived governments, withstood the return attempts of the former King Charles, brought the Smallholder and Christian National Parties under the umbrella of the Unity Party and curtailed the influence of the radical Right, at the same time mitigating the negative publicity caused by the White Terror. He appeared to be the guarantor of Hungary’s stability and foreign political reliability in the West.

Yet the empirical study of the political language from the counterrevolutionary moment of 1920 to the alleged heyday of consolidation in 1928 leads not only to the rebuttal of the hypothesis but also to the questioning of the very concept of consolidation. Therefore the title of the study ended up as a question rather than a proposition. What the study reveals is that the

<sup>9</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 163; Ormos 2006, 78–79; Romsics 1995, 151, 177.

<sup>10</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 198.

<sup>11</sup> Merriam-Webster: CONSOLIDATE.

<sup>12</sup> “[I]ngatag gazdasági vagy politikai helyzet megszilárdulása.” Magyar etimológiai szótár: KONSZOLIDÁCIÓ. This content given to ‘consolidation’ is obviously affected by the very same historiographical meaning studied here.

government repeatedly resorted to exclusive conceptualization of the Hungarian nation and made use of it to contain the opposition. Despite momentary concessions made out of necessity,<sup>13</sup> the government always had the counterrevolutionary discourse at hand and repeated the very same accusations of disloyalty and un-patriotism towards the opposition throughout the era, with little intent to build political plurality or mutual trust between the parties, even at the level of rhetoric. Consolidation turned out to be a consciously vague catchword, which the government applied tactically when the need arose to appeal to the inclusive strain of nation-building, never explicating its content and resisting all attempts on the part of the opposition to define it. Instead of 'consolidation', one might thus speak of 'containment', which was how the government maintained its power position in relation to the opposition.

The main research question will therefore be how the government used the conscious ambiguity between the counterrevolutionary and consolidation discourses in order to implement its exclusive nation-building; how it defined and made use of the concepts of nation, national past and national mission to legitimize its policy; in which cases it was forced to incorporate more inclusive tones and to which ends; and, how did the opposition participate in the rhetorical contestation over the ownership and content of the abovementioned concepts and their uses. Analysis of these questions linked to interwar nation-building also reveals Hungary's position at the centre of transnational currents in political language. While the Hungarian nation-building was symptomatic of the East Central European atmosphere of mutual distrust, border and minority disputes and the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism, what is even more important is that it was simultaneously part of the inter-European discourse of post-war reorganization, where all national actors made use of transnational momentum and shared 'western' concepts of political development, while giving them diverse domestic redescriptions.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2 Sources

The main sources of this study are the protocols of the plenary sessions of the Hungarian Parliament, namely the unicameral National Assembly (*Nemzetgyűlés*) from 1920 to 1926 and the House of Representatives (*Képviseelőház*) and the Upper House (*Felsőház*) of the bicameral Parliament (*Országgyűlés*) from 1927 to 1928. The documents are available as digitized archival records in the Hungarian Parliamentary Collection (*Magyar Parlamenti Gyűjtemény*) of the Library of Parliament (*Országgyűlési Könyvtár*), which includes both the protocols of the plenary sessions (*naplók*) and the bills and motions (*irományok*).<sup>15</sup> The Stenographers' Office of Parliament has produced verbatim records of the

<sup>13</sup> See especially Chapter 2.5.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Evans 2007; Ihalainen 2017; Vares & Vares 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Országgyűlési Könyvtár, Magyar Parlamenti Gyűjtemény, <http://www.ogyk.hu/hu/magyar-parlamenti-gyujtemeny> (24.4.2019).

sessions, complete with interruptions and other instances of (un)parliamentary conduct, which makes the collection extremely useful in the study of parliamentary language. In addition, the Library of Parliament has also digitized the Parliamentary Almanacs, the contemporary biographies of Members of Parliament. These, along with the later publication, the Hungarian Biographical Lexicon (*Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*), are used to present contextualizing information on the Members participating in the debates and how their personal backgrounds possibly affected their political stances. As the study is situated at the intersection of parliamentary history and the historical study of political language, the cases chosen and the analysis applied to them give ultimately less emphasis to *what* was decided and what kind of impact it had in political processes and more to the question of *how* the decisions were presented, legitimized and challenged rhetorically, and what the competing discourses reveal about underlying values and conceptualizations of nation. Still, all this cannot be done without knowledge of the historical context and the parliamentary procedure.

The tradition of the Hungarian Diet dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the Golden Bull issued by King Andrew II in 1222 is in Hungary considered a proof of the long history of constitutionalism, which the Hungarians eagerly compare to the Magna Carta.<sup>16</sup> However, the tradition of representative politics also encountered significant changes and discontinuities during the centuries; the status and summoning of the medieval and early modern Diets was not constitutionally determined and often remained at the discretion of the reigning monarch. During the Habsburg era, the Austrian rulers were nominally dependent on the Hungarian Diets in budgetary matters, but could summon and dissolve them with few constraints and pit the nobles against each other to achieve favourable results.<sup>17</sup> Thus the Hungarian parliamentary tradition in the modern sense can be traced at the earliest to the revolutionary parliament of 1848, and in more permanent form to the Hungarian parliament of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy since 1867, the first standing Hungarian-language legislature.<sup>18</sup> Even in the dualist era, parliamentary life witnessed unparliamentary practices that restricted the openness of the debate; obstruction was common and, as a reaction, the House Rules gave extensive authority to the Speaker and the government to control the debate and to keep the opposition in check.<sup>19</sup>

The post-war, counterrevolutionary political structure was legitimized in part by appealing to the historical origins and favourable interpretations of the 'ancient constitutionalism.' Simultaneously, the restrictive practices of the dualist era were reinstated to constrain political mobilization and parliamentary dissent. Suffrage, having reached its peak of 40 per cent of the population in the 1920

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<sup>16</sup> Kontler 1999, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Cartledge 2006, 19–22, 65–66, 98, 154.

<sup>18</sup> For the sake of clarity, the post-1848 institutions are called Parliaments and the earlier institutions Diets, even though their Hungarian names (various forms of *országgyűlés* / *nemzetgyűlés*) overlap.

<sup>19</sup> Romsics 1999, 55–56; te Velde 2005, 216.

elections, was hastily amended by an executive decree before the 1922 elections, imposing clauses related to education and permanent residence that reduced the franchise to some 30 per cent of the population. Moreover, in rural constituencies the ballot was declared open, which obviously allowed landowner magnates to exert pressure on the agricultural workers in order to support the government.<sup>20</sup>

Another and more contemporary matter of continuity and change concerned the dissolution of the dualist-era parliament in 1918 and the opening of the post-revolutionary parliament in 1920.<sup>21</sup> While numerous pre-war Members returned to Parliament in 1920, the political and social composition of the House, as well as the political climate, had changed considerably. The old party structures, gathered according to the pro-Habsburg and pro-independence sentiments,<sup>22</sup> had lost their relevance almost overnight.<sup>23</sup> Party life flourished, and as a result there were usually over ten parties represented in the Parliament. Parties were also formed and dissolved rapidly and their ideological fundamentals were often vaguely defined and/or overlapped with others.<sup>24</sup> The concept of political mobilization of the masses remained alien to many leading politicians, including Bethlen himself, who believed in the aristocracy's natural right to rule and, at best, believed that democracy and parliamentarism should be steered and regulated from above.<sup>25</sup> For them, elections were a formal and proper act of renewal of their mandate in the name of the nation, whereas opposition attempts at mobilizing the electorate were condemned and repelled, at times with duress.<sup>26</sup>

A revealing example of the heterogeneity of the parties was the agrarian Smallholders' Party, which embraced political orientations ranging from agrarian socialism to liberal democracy and right-wing radicalism.<sup>27</sup> 'Smallholder', epitomizing an idealized, original, free Hungarian peasant was such a powerful concept in the political parlance that the government party wanted to appropriate it for its own purposes.<sup>28</sup> As Prime Minister István Bethlen was able to integrate the smallholders into the government party in 1922, ideological party affiliation further weakened, and the government party became a loose conglomerate of conservative forces under Bethlen, maintaining its hegemonic position through the electoral law and other procedural legislation. During the 1920s Bethlen reinforced his position by pitting the conservative,

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<sup>20</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 239–242; Püski 2009, 73, 78; Romics 1999, 183.

<sup>21</sup> Püski 2006, 232; Romics 1999, 54–55.

<sup>22</sup> The so-called '67- and '48-parties, referring respectively to the years of the Compromise and the Revolution.

<sup>23</sup> Although the question of legitimacy, i.e. whether the House of Habsburg still possessed the right to the Hungarian throne, still divided politicians in the early 1920s. See e.g. Romics 1995, 148.

<sup>24</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 173.

<sup>25</sup> See Romics 1995, 44–45.

<sup>26</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 265, 284–285.

<sup>27</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 165.

<sup>28</sup> See e.g. István Bethlen's inauguration address in 1921, Bethlen 2000, 120. This appropriation was one of the common tropes in the East Central European nation-building. Evans 2007, 218–219; Mylly 2002, 55–56.

smallholder and radical factions against each other to maintain control of the party.<sup>29</sup>

The ranks of the conservative parties most often consisted of lawyers, as the study of law was one of the socially acceptable educational choices for a gentleman – another being a military career, and accordingly several former officers also had their seats in Parliament. The mere degree did not, however, determine a person's actual career, as their expertise ranged from administration to journalism, to university and high school teaching positions, whereas some of them pursued their livelihood as landowners. The Social Democrats, in turn, fielded experienced party veterans with worker backgrounds but diverse education, including legal expertise and knowledge of the international workers' movements. Many Members had served or continued to serve in various levels of local and national administration. Thus, they also acted as direct representatives of their hometowns and regions, with mandates and responsibilities stemming from more than merely their present elected position.

The re-establishment of the Upper House in 1927, an elitist and corporative structure modelled after the pre-war order, was itself a sign of the regime's attempt to maintain the status quo and further counterweigh popular participation in politics and the influence of the opposition present in the House of Representatives.<sup>30</sup> The Upper House consisted by definition of several groups; the House of Habsburg and the upper aristocracy had their own representatives; the churches were represented by bishops and the jurisdiction by the presidents of the highest courts. The cities and counties could appoint their own representatives, as did the national organizations and chambers of commerce. Lastly, the Regent had the prerogative of recognizing individuals by creating lifetime Members.<sup>31</sup> The sessions of the Upper House were remarkably scarce and of somewhat less relevance to daily politics than those of the House of Representatives, and it eventually had a more ceremonial role in the policy-making of the era. Still, the nature of the discussion is worth comparative analysis, when applicable:<sup>32</sup> whereas the government did not need to face the opposition in the Upper House, it nevertheless had to negotiate with the members of the aristocracy and clergy, who represented their own interests and ideological backgrounds.<sup>33</sup> This posed a need for rhetorical redescriptions equally applicable to the legitimist aristocracy as well as the Catholic and Protestant clergy. Even as the rhetorical culture was more elevated and less confrontational, the need for rhetorical legitimization remained.

The parliamentary procedure itself was in the making in the early 1920s, which can be seen in the diffuse debates and the fact that the even the Speaker was not always aware of the correct procedure.<sup>34</sup> The House Rules were amended

<sup>29</sup> Püski 2006, 55–57; Romsics 1995, 199.

<sup>30</sup> Püski 2006, 247–248.

<sup>31</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 325–327; Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932; Lengyel & Vidor 1922; Vidor 1921.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapters 3.4. and 4.5.

<sup>33</sup> Püski 2006, 247–248.

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 49; 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 481.

in 1924 in order to facilitate the legislative process and prevent filibustering, but it also returned the provisions for the Speaker to have Members removed from the lectern or even expelled from the Chamber if they wandered off the point – a vague definition which, as we shall see, allowed for politically motivated reprimands.<sup>35</sup> Parliamentary and unparliamentary conduct and the Speaker's responses to them are worth studying: the use of irony, obstruction, insult or eloquence distinguish especially heated subjects. In some instances rhetorical challenge to the government was tolerated as the government wanted to construct a more positive picture of itself; on other occasions, the House Rules were directly applied and even abused in order to muzzle the opposition that had dared to question a central policy resolution.

The legislative process in Parliament entailed three readings: the first designated a bill to a certain Committee, the second included the presentation of the bill and the Committee report in the House as well as the plenary debate, and the third formally accepted or rejected it. In this study, the focus is on the second reading and the polyphonic debate the government needed to endure in order to have the resolutions rhetorically legitimized and formally accepted in the House.<sup>36</sup> Generally, the debate was opened by the proposer, who most often represented the Committee concerned, presenting the bill and arguing for its importance. The opening speech was sometimes followed by a speech from the minister responsible, and then the floor was open to the representatives of the parties, beginning with the largest, that is, the Unity Party. The first two or three speeches from the loyal representatives of the government party attempted to reinforce the stance on the matter already before the opposition had its say on it. Before closing the debate, individual members had the right to return to the matter in order to rectify misunderstandings or defend themselves against offences *ad hominem*. This part of the procedure sometimes resulted in lengthy sequences of accusations and counter-accusations. Finally, the minister responsible was given an opportunity for the last word on the matter, to conclude the debate, respond to open questions – and, more often than not, to conveniently dismiss the opposition arguments to the best of his ability.<sup>37</sup>

Altogether the analysis concerns twelve parliamentary debates beginning from the first sessions of the post-war and post-revolutionary Parliament in February 1920, when the counterrevolutionary regime was officially set up through the provisional constitutional settlement and the instatement of Horthy as the Regent and ending with the debate on the amendment of the *Numerus Clausus* legislation in 1928, in which the government applied the most consolidatory and inclusive tones in its language of nation-building. As stated above, the choice of these reference points is intended to contrast the discourses of counterrevolution and consolidation in the parliamentary debates, aimed at studying the change – or the lack thereof – in the tone of the language of nation-building.

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<sup>35</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 340–342; Püski 2009, 80–81; Romsics 1999, 207–208, 256.

<sup>36</sup> Püski 2006, 259.

<sup>37</sup> Kontler 1999, 350.



In the selected cases, the very dynamics of the parliamentary debate deserve to be closely reproduced; in analysing the course of the debate, not only the recurring and exceptional forms of argumentation become apparent, but also the structural and procedural factors, which turned out to have a profound influence on the entire upkeep of the regime and without which the sustained parliamentary legitimization of the government could not have been achieved. The nature of the debates can be divided into two distinct forms. In one of these the House was deeply divided on the subject matter, and the case was closer to the classical debate *pro et contra*.<sup>38</sup> However, in the other form the subject matter was often a ceremonial item, such as the commemoration bills presented in Chapter 3, where the House in principle stood united behind the legislation, but rhetorical differences ensued in the contestation over the conceptualizations of nation and national history embedded in them, all parties attempting to interpret the canonized past to suit their own narratives.

A study on such a long interval necessitates a careful choice of the material to be considered. The corpus of parliamentary debates between 1920 and 1928 encompasses tens of thousands of pages and is thus impossible to survey in its entirety. Possible research strategies concerning the choice of a preferred or relevant sample would have been numerous. Structurally the most consecutive and continuous series of debates were the budgetary debates for every fiscal year. If these were chosen, one would be able to read politicized choices and valuations in relation to the discourses of nation-building. Another possibility, especially from the viewpoint of parliamentary culture and also with regard to the ongoing atmosphere of crisis, exclusive nationalism and the search for internal enemies, were the recurring debates on parliamentary indictment and challenging of the parliamentary immunity of certain Members of Parliament. These were surprisingly common throughout the era; Members accused each other of misconduct, reported about external violations of their own immunity, or were scrutinized as disciplinary action by the Speaker.<sup>39</sup> The parliament spared no effort in going through these violations, the standard fare of nearly every plenary session.

The strategy chosen for this study, however, has been to take into account specifically those moments when themes of nation-building appeared explicitly in the topics of the debates, i.e. when it was deemed important enough to parliamentarily deliberate and define various aspects of the Hungarian nation, through either the (re)creation of legal institutions, the exclusion or incarceration of internal enemies, the canonization of its past or rebuilding Hungary's place in the international arena. The goal of this study is thus not to reconstruct the *political processes* that took place concerning, for example, anti-Semitism in Hungary, the Trianon Peace Treaty or the subsequent revisionism – as these have been thoroughly examined by Karady and Nagy (2012), Hanebrink (2006),

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<sup>38</sup> Which is often seen in the modern study of parliamentarism as the 'ideal' type of parliamentary debate in contrast to 'non-debating' assemblies. In this respect, the Hungarian case somewhat eludes definition. See e.g. Palonen 2016, 230–233; Palonen 2018, 10–11.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. Chapter 4.5.3.

Ungváry (2013), Romsics (2001) and Zeidler (2007) to name a few – but rather analyse the *language* used to conceptualize and legitimize them. Neither are the debates selected the most significant in relation to the ‘turning points’<sup>40</sup> of political development in interwar Hungary (although some of them are also that), but their selection highlights the central role of the concept of nation, its construction and diverse applications in the background of various policy resolutions.

The relevant debates are scrutinized according to the following, partially overlapping themes. Firstly, the analysis deals with the post-war and post-revolutionary discourse of ‘reconstruction from the ashes’; this includes state-building, nation-building, creating unity among Hungarians and conversely the exclusion of unwanted groups. The counterrevolutionary rhetoric appealed to the narrative of an indivisible millennial nation, the will and unity of which had been repeatedly broken by foreign oppression, as illuminated by the examples of Ottoman rule or the darkest years of Habsburg domination, with which the revolutionary years were now identified. After such a painful break in the historic tradition, the nation was not only allowed, but also compelled to awake, to cleanse itself from the sins of the past and return to the path of its historic mission.<sup>41</sup> Key debates begin with the questions of parliamentary legitimacy and sovereignty as well as the constitutional considerations of 1920 and debates on the very concept of constitutionalism; how the return to a monarchical state form and the appointment of Horthy as Regent were constructed and legitimized.<sup>42</sup> As noted above, the interwar nation-building was a consciously exclusive process that included the construction and exclusion of internal enemies, appealing, for example, to the politicization of anti-Semitic sentiment. In the debates concerning the *Numerus Clausus* bill in 1920 and its amendment in 1928, the arguments for and against the limitations of Jewish influence in Hungarian society reveal the construction and reformulations of Christian National political thought as an umbrella concept of nation-building that was applied to legitimize discrimination. The case also shows how government made use of the deep ideological divisions in the House concerning the key conceptualizations of the nation: as the extreme Right invariably demanded stricter discrimination and the liberal Left its complete abolition, the government could legitimize its actions as ‘golden mean’ solutions against the two extremes.

The dichotomy of inclusive and exclusive discourses of the nation also included the government’s strained relationship to the Social Democrats, who in the general counterrevolutionary discourse were continuously branded as agitators and revolutionaries, but after 1921, as a result of a pact between Prime Minister Bethlen and the chairman of the Social Democratic Party Károly Peyer, were allowed to return to Parliament and gained representation in all elections until 1944.<sup>43</sup> The tense parliamentary relationship between the Left and the Right

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Romsics 1999.

<sup>41</sup> See also Anderson 2007, 264–268.

<sup>42</sup> See also Püski 2006, 14–16.

<sup>43</sup> According to the pact, the Social Democratic Party was allowed to function and participate in the elections, but refrained from organizing strikes and curtailed its

is in itself an interesting strain in the nation-building discourse: the Social Democratic and Liberal opposition acknowledged the same core tenets of Hungarian nationalism, yet attempted to redescribe and reformulate them to legitimize their policies instead of those of the government. At the same time, government used the exclusive conceptualization of nation also to exclude the opposition from politics, recurrently returning to their alleged revolutionary misdeeds. This is also represented by the case of political prisoners, debated in 1923; as the opposition appealed to the concepts of human rights and rule of law in claiming the inequity of incarceration without trial, the government retorted by diverse accusations against the integrity of the opposition Members in an attempt to rhetorically disqualify the Social Democrats from being equal and reliable partners in Parliament.

The second thematic, the political use of history, is represented by the four commemoration bills debated between 1922 and 1927; one for the fallen of the World War, one for the reformist statesman István Széchenyi, one for Lajos Kossuth and the Revolution of 1848 and the only abandoned one for the revolutionary poet Sándor Petőfi. These were applied in a politically motivated sequence echoing the Koselleckian dimensions of *Aufschreiben*, *Abschreiben* and *Umschreiben*;<sup>44</sup> the commemoration of the fallen was used to codify the recent past, applied to suit the World War in the grand national narrative of sacrifice and to reconstruct Hungarian military virtue. The subsequent two cases deal with the continuation and reapplication of an established historical tradition. The figure of Széchenyi, through his general acclaim and moderate policies, was usable for the government in its need to emphasize careful reformism over any kind of revolutionary idealism. In contrast, the commemoration of Kossuth and the Revolution of 1848 needed more conservative redescriptions to be incorporated in the official narrative and was also challenged more vehemently by the opposition. The last example, the attempt to construct a similar commemoration law concerning Sándor Petőfi, deals with the challenge of the established narrative, as the gap between his personal revolutionary ideas and the favourable narrative remained unbridgeable, and amidst a tumultuous debate, the bill was abandoned. The historico-political bills reveal the role of history as not only a national but also a nation-building discipline. The historicized nation was constructed backwards, starting from the present situation, in order to establish the interpretation that the present situation was the only possible and proper result of a natural evolution, represented by the canonized narrative of the past, and that the nation had repeatedly been saved from peril by visionary statesmen, with whom the present government in turn identified itself.<sup>45</sup>

The foreign political discourse on revision and the rhetorically constructed hope for a 'national resurrection' included the attempts to restore Hungary's lost

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influence in the trade unions. As a result, the party leadership also cleared its ranks of too radical voices that could have endangered the party's existence. Püski 2006, 63; Romsics 1995, 175.

<sup>44</sup> Koselleck 1989, 663–664.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Anderson 2007, 273, 280.

international greatness, its 'natural' leading role in East Central Europe, and to break away from the confines of the Peace Treaty of Trianon. Again, the conceptualization of the Hungarian nation was pivotal in the revisionist discourse: as the nation had an inalienable right and an historical mission to regain its former glory, the nation-centred arguments were in constant interplay with those of foreign policy. Additionally, the understanding of national interest was linked to the exclusive conceptualization of the nation as it was argued that only the government and its supporters possessed the wisdom to conduct beneficial foreign policy, whereas those arguing for more liberal or internationalist views were again branded detrimental, unpatriotic and untrustworthy – even though both sides at times used the very same rhetorical tools or ultimate arguments; the language of the Social Democrats and Liberals was equally nation-centred, arguing against Trianon and for revision, only dissenting in the means to achieve this.<sup>46</sup>

This line of analysis of debates opens with the ratification of the Treaty of Trianon itself in July 1920, in which the government was forced to rationalize the impossible; how could Parliament officially acquiesce to the break-up of the historic Hungary? In that debate it was already obvious how the trauma of Trianon – in addition to its undisputed influence at all levels of society – was also consciously constructed to serve as a politicized argument in the counterrevolutionary nation-building and state-building and the inevitable policy of revision. This was followed in 1922 by the official commemoration bill of the Sopron plebiscite, the only successful revision attempt until 1938,<sup>47</sup> which in turn sheds light on the dual practice of the revisionist policy that included both reliance on treaties and unscrupulous opportunism; even though Prime Minister Bethlen publicly appealed to the international negotiations that had been able to bring justice to Hungary, he also quietly accepted the activity of the radically revisionist and irredentist organizations, as also seen in the Sopron case.<sup>48</sup>

Hungary was admitted to the League of Nations in 1922, and accession was discussed in the Parliament from January to February 1923. Hungary's motivation for accession was self-evident: to use the League of Nations as a forum to negotiate Trianon revision in accordance with the victors. As Bethlen expressed it, Hungary still wanted to trust the idea of a treaty system and impartial mediation.<sup>49</sup> The debate included explicit conceptualizations of the 'Hungarian truth'; that is, how Hungary needed to use publicity in international fora in order to gain sympathy, which would lead to concrete concessions. The nature of the League was redescribed and contested in the debate between the government and the opposition, who both perceived in it prospects to realize their ideals.

Hungary's search for international orientation and support indeed consisted of several overlapping and interrelated trends and discourses. In early

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<sup>46</sup> See also Romsics 1995, 257.

<sup>47</sup> Save for a few village-level border corrections in 1922–1923 in the aftermath of the Sopron plebiscite. Vares 2008, 282–289.

<sup>48</sup> Romsics 1995, 156–158, 209, 229; Zeidler 2013, 181.

<sup>49</sup> Zeidler 2013, 178–180.

1920s, the Hungarian foreign policy discourse had a distinctive anglophile orientation; Hungary had received British support already in the counterrevolutionary state-building phases and had subsequently been able to convince consecutive British governments of its stabilizing nature in East Central Europe.<sup>50</sup> As a result, the Hungarian governmental discourse had incorporated an outspoken belief in British 'fair play',<sup>51</sup> which would eventually prove beneficial for Hungary. However, in 1927, the revisionist agenda found another path, as the rapprochement between Hungary and Italy resulted in a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation. Through the treaty, the anglophile orientation was gradually replaced by a more defiant language of revision and allegiance to Italy; the open support of an active player in the politics of Eastern Europe would finally help Hungary to break out of international isolation. This was linked to the broader geopolitical discourse of a 'new Europe', arising from the confines of the restrictive peace treaties and the patronizing western powers. However, this choice also led to rhetorical contestation over the nature of Fascist Italy and its value as a companion. Even though the government went to great lengths to neutralize the accusations of the Social Democrats towards the Fascist state, it also needed to stay within the confines of the conservative status quo, not giving the radical Right any leeway in its attempts to identify Hungary's political structure with that of Italy. Despite all the revision hopes attached to Italy, the government duly noted that Hungary was in no need of Fascism or Fascist parties. The same applied to the rapprochement with National Socialist Germany in the 1930s.<sup>52</sup> However, by the end of the 1930s, the price of the support and the territorial awards had become too high, and the government was driven into political and economic indebtedness to Germany, which eventually caused Hungary to join the Axis in the Second World War.<sup>53</sup>

During the 1920s the government approached domestic and foreign policy matters with conscious ambiguity of counterrevolution and consolidation, inclusive and exclusive nationalism, contingency and dogmatism, the conflicting aspects applied tactically to suit the contemporary need. As Mari Vares notes, Hungary was a key player in "the political-territorial crisis of the post-First World War Central Europe"<sup>54</sup>, suffering from the regional instability and mutual distrust, but also contributing to these. The debates selected reflect the ongoing nature of the post-war crises, originating in the defeat, revolutions and Trianon, and consciously maintained rhetorically by their repeated application as the cornerstones in the legitimization of the government policy. Another rhetorical use of the crisis atmosphere was the reiterated play on the provisional nature of the post-war world order; the revision discourse especially constantly counted on the hope that the border questions of East Central Europe would never be

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<sup>50</sup> At times, British sympathies for Hungary were indeed high; even the Labour PM Ramsay MacDonald expressed his support for Bethlen, yet this never resulted in direct support for the revision project. See Romsics 1995, 117-118, 201, 219.

<sup>51</sup> See e.g. István Bethlen, 19.7.1928, FN III/1927, 79; Zeidler 2007, 84.

<sup>52</sup> See e.g. Romsics 1995, 170, 310.

<sup>53</sup> But that's another story.

<sup>54</sup> Vares 2008, 12.

finally settled, and every opportunity was seized to get them back onto the agenda.<sup>55</sup>

The choice of relevant debates has naturally involved the omission of certain matters in the process. Of these, the three most notable deserve an explanation. Even though the competing conceptualizations of the nation were not limited to the confrontation between government and the Left-liberal opposition but also involved the contestation between the conservative elite and the radical Right, the latter is not discussed *per se*, as it is covered in detail in existing research.<sup>56</sup> It nevertheless does appear in the dynamics of discussion, especially in the cases of *Numerus Clausus*, treatment of political prisoners and the commemoration of the fallen of the World War, in which cases the government had to rhetorically manoeuvre between the viewpoints of the radical Right and the Left and even made temporary coalitions with either side if it perceived the other to be gaining too much ground.<sup>57</sup>

Another case omitted is the multi-stage debate about preparing, resolving and implementing land reform. Even though the government repeatedly applied the idealized conceptualization of the 'smallholder peasant' as the backbone of the 'true' Hungarian nation in contrast to the 'immoral' urban intelligentsia and proletariat, the ultimate scope of land reform remained limited, as the government did not want to undermine the established position of the landowner magnates and the Catholic Church, being dependent on their support. This duality would make land reform discourse a most interesting case in the study of the language of nation. However, the mere scope of such a multi-dimensional debate, extending from the pre-war years to the legislation debate in 1923–1924 and beyond, as well as the numerous interpellations and corrections concerning its implementation, would be beyond the scope of this study, especially as it would necessitate taking into account the social and economic dimensions.<sup>58</sup> The same applies to the question of electoral law, debated since the era of the First Republic in 1918 and again in 1922 and 1925. It would be a part of a more structural study on Hungarian parliamentary life, covered elsewhere.<sup>59</sup>

### 1.3 On methodology

Theoretically, the study is based on the established paradigm of treating nations and nationalism as political, cultural and linguistic constructions rather than as natural constellations, which was how contemporary national elites sought to present them. Anachronistic projection of the past onto the present has been and remains one of the main tools in defining one's own group as exceptional and

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<sup>55</sup> For a contemporary observer's account of the atmosphere of alternating hope and despair, see Waltari 1929, 76–77.

<sup>56</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, Gyurgyák 2012, Paksa 2013.

<sup>57</sup> See Chapters 2.3., 2.4. and 3.2.

<sup>58</sup> See Kontler 1999, 347, Romsics 1999, 136; Sipos 2014.

<sup>59</sup> See Boros & Szabó 2008; Püski 2006.

entitled to some ‘historically’ determined advantages, such as a ‘natural’ right to certain territory. Moreover, nation-building has intrinsically been linked to state-building, when the newly created nation-states came to be headed by the same national elites invoking myths of ‘origin’ and narratives of ‘awakening’, thus becoming the self-proclaimed ‘guiding lights’ of the nation and its mission.<sup>60</sup> Conceptualizations of an indivisible and timeless nation have been especially popular among Hungarians, who easily trace their ancestry to the 9<sup>th</sup>-century Conquest of the Carpathian Basin (*Honfoglalás*) and beyond and, moreover, perceive themselves as a nation surviving foreign onslaughts for centuries and retaining their ‘original’ and peculiar national character.<sup>61</sup> As we shall see, several overlapping narratives of a national past have been applied to construct and maintain the conceptualization of a ‘millennial’ nation with all the privileges and obligations this concept allegedly confers. Even though nationalisms are by definition interactive and multi-layered processes between elites and peoples, theorists and adopters,<sup>62</sup> this study concentrates on the top-down nature of nation-building, namely the definition, application and contestation of the concepts of nation at the highest level of political debate, the national Parliament.

What is referred to as *history politics* or *historico-political discourse* in this study is the conscious application of the past in political language and government policy; arguments, references and metaphors anchored in historical events and figures, and in its most explicit form, official commemoration and legal canonization of history in the form of memorial days and memorial laws, as seen in Chapter 3.<sup>63</sup> Historico-political discourse is a predominantly inseparable part of the Hungarian political language, appearing as a form of argumentation in nearly every case studied; one might thus also be tempted to use the concept of *historical mindset*, yet I do not propose that historical argumentation was somehow psychologically inherent in Hungarians, and thus I always approach it as a conscious political act. The cognate concept of *history culture*, in turn, is usually understood as the broad comprehension of the past within a culture, constructed, reinforced and disseminated through e.g. schoolbooks and popular culture. While it is beyond question that Members of Parliament in the interwar era were both products of the Hungarian history culture (having received the Hungarian classical education with a major emphasis on national history) and contributors to it (e.g. when issuing decrees on memorial days), I shall deliberately limit the scope of my analysis to the history-political discourse on the parliamentary level and not venture into the broader interaction between history politics and history culture.<sup>64</sup> As is typical of the politicization of history, the actual events of the past have sunken into a

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<sup>60</sup> Anderson 2007, 38–39, 59–61, 154–156, 267–268; Halmesvirta 2012, 37–39, 46; Hippler 2005, 8–10; Hobsbawm 1994, 15, 18–19, 55, 92–93, 103–104, 117; Trencsényi 2013, 88–89.

<sup>61</sup> Trencsényi 2013, 74–76, 78

<sup>62</sup> Hippler 2005, 11; Hobsbawm 1994, 19–20.

<sup>63</sup> On the question whether this constitutes ‘use’ or ‘abuse’ of history, see Nyysönen 2016; Nyysönen 2017a; Nyysönen 2017b.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Jouttijärvi 2017; Leukumaa-Autto 2018.

multi-layered morass of politically motivated interpretations and narratives; the interwar era has become an object of history politics in its own right, as it has been assigned politically motivated interpretations.<sup>65</sup> This study applies parliamentary debates for the very reason that they reveal both the content and the tone of contemporary political language. As the speech acts are analysed within context and not taken at face value, the mere repertoire of words, the construction of arguments and the choice of concepts, including the scope of what was accepted, speaks volumes of the policy embedded in language.

Linguistic nationalism – a result of Hungarian belonging to the Fenno-Ugric language family yet with its language area geographically in the middle of Indo-European languages – contributed to the sense of exceptionalism.<sup>66</sup> Thus, language politics over the ages have contributed to Hungarian nationalism and nation-building. In the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Hungarian had become the official language of the eastern part of the Dual Monarchy, an essential concession to Hungarian sovereignty, readily applied by Hungarian elites as a tool in the subjection of other nationalities, whose language was assigned a politically and culturally inferior status in relation to Hungary.<sup>67</sup> The importance of language as a cohesive force of the nation remained after the World War. The reduced and linguistically homogenized population was bound together even more strongly by language and its exceptionalism as opposed to the neighbours; a component in the foreign political victimization discourse was indeed the idea that the politically humiliated and isolated Hungarians were also linguistically alone in the midst of Slavic and Germanic languages – or even besieged by them – and doomed to remain incomprehensible to others.<sup>68</sup>

The linguistic peculiarities had also a role in the forming of the very concepts of nation: in Hungarian, the word for ‘nation’ is *nemzet*, distinct from the word for ‘people’, *nép*. Especially in the interwar era, this distinction was consciously used as a tool of conservative policy; the Hungarian nation was the natural, millennial unit under gentlemanly rule that carried the connotation of a great and glorious past, whereas ‘people’ was a banal concept with plebeian, subsequently leftist connotations, emanating among others from the name People’s Republic of Hungary (*Magyar népköztársaság*) used by the revolutionaries of 1918.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, at the level of parliamentary debate this was transformed into an argument where government and Parliament were not *politically responsible* to their electors among the people, but *historically responsible* to the organic nation. Representational of the organic conceptualizations of nation, the interwar nation-building discourse had an explicitly medicalizing

<sup>65</sup> Nyssönen 1999, 17; Püski 2002, 210–213.

<sup>66</sup> Hobsbawm 1994, 75.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson 2007, 155–159; Trencsényi 2013, 82–83. On language policy and linguistic nationalism in transnational comparison, see Ihalainen & Saarinen 2015; Pernau 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Laakso 2014, 321. This, in turn, led to the embrace of Turanist and Fenno-Ugric kinship ideas and their political applications in the interwar era; see Halmesvirta 2010.

<sup>69</sup> Coincidentally, also the official name of the Socialist Hungary between 1949 and 1989. Chapter 3.5. shows how thoroughly the concept ‘People’s Republic’ was banished from the political vocabulary.



tone; that the nation had succumbed to the ailment of Socialism or had suffered an investation of ‘parasitic’ forces (i.e. Jews).<sup>70</sup> Reciprocally, the government’s legitimacy was constructed through its ability to administer the remedy, however bitter.<sup>71</sup>

The Hungarian word for ‘citizen’, *polgár*, is a loan word from German *Bürger* and has the same dualist meaning, denoting not only belonging to the political community but also belonging to a certain social class.<sup>72</sup> This served the elitist and exclusive discourse preferred by the government that sought to limit the sphere of politically enlightened people as strictly as possible. One can thus argue that the very construction of the Hungarian national language had been a fundamental part not only of nation-building but also of state-building, as choice of words and application of concepts had constructed and legitimized the conceptualizations of ‘true’ Hungarian identity and ‘rightful’ rule of the realm. Linguistic metaphors and arguments continued to appear in the cases analysed in this study; for example, during the debate on the Széchenyi commemorative bill, one argument on behalf of Széchenyi’s epoch-making role was his temerity in addressing the officially Latin-language Diet of 1825 in Hungarian.<sup>73</sup> The conceptualizations of nation and nationalism were repeatedly brought before Parliament to be defined and canonized to contribute to the legitimacy of the conservative government.

The methodological approach chosen for this study is therefore founded on the tradition of language-oriented parliamentary history, including the study of how the role and key conceptualizations of parliamentary life were debated and defined within the parliament itself.<sup>74</sup> In this case the main issues are: how the competing conceptualizations of nation were systematically used in the heated debate in the Hungarian parliament over the key values of democracy, civil rights, the constitution and the precarious matters of foreign policy; how history, the recent past and shared experiences were transmitted to the daily political discourse and used as convincing arguments within it; and how the parliamentary conventions and rituals as well as the boundaries of parliamentary conduct were defined and applied during the debate.

In the Hungarian case, there was also continuous contestation over the concept of the political itself;<sup>75</sup> for example, with regard to the historico-political canonization of certain interpretations of the past, the conservatives attempted to prevent ‘petty politicking’ which would ‘deglorify’ the honourable memory of the past. The opposition, in turn, seized on the same argument, turning it into the form that open and critical discussion about the past was indeed a prerequisite

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<sup>70</sup> See Chapters 2.2. and 2.3. respectively.

<sup>71</sup> See also Leukumaa-Autto 2018, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Magyar etimológiai szótár: POLGÁR. On the political significance of *Bürger*, see Koselleck 1989, 658.

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 3.3.; see also Hobsbawm 1994, 106.

<sup>74</sup> See e.g. Häkkinen 2014, Ihalainen, Ilie & Palonen 2016, Ihalainen 2005, Ihalainen 2010, Ihalainen 2016, Ihalainen 2017, Ilie 2016, Kaarkoski 2016, Pekonen 2014, Roitto 2015.

<sup>75</sup> On the interrelated concepts of *policy*, *polity*, *politicization* and *politicking*, see Palonen 2004.

to paying it proper respect.<sup>76</sup> Such attempts at depoliticizing certain questions within the parliamentary debate were common tools of consciously linking nation-building to state-building and government legitimacy; connecting contemporary and contingent processes to the fundamental values of the nation intended to actively limit the possible choices and interpretations within the deliberative process. The elitist nature of the Hungarian polity contributed to the use of depoliticizing language.<sup>77</sup> Concepts such as *politics*, *political* and *democracy* were highly suspicious; they were often used in combinations as ‘mass democracy’, ‘one-sided party politics’, ‘demagogy’, ‘awkward political situations’ or even ‘blind rule of the raw masses’ that connected them to unwelcome phenomena; at the level of shared experience, the negative valuation of democracy was directly linked to the failure of the Károlyi government and the subsequent Communist coup.<sup>78</sup> In this sense, this study is an example of applying the modern analysis of politics to a most conservative and depoliticizing environment, as defined by contemporary conservative theorists like Friedrich Meinecke and Carl Schmitt; as if there existed one idealized and objectively correct line of action that only needed to be detected by enlightened statesmen, not created through deliberation, let alone contested by someone outside the elite.<sup>79</sup>

This study nevertheless endeavours to challenge those interpretations that portray such a quasi-authoritarian polity, with its tendencies towards imperative mandate and limitations on the freedom of parliamentary deliberation, as somehow inherently ‘politically uninteresting.’<sup>80</sup> On the contrary; seen from the chosen perspective, the depoliticizing acts performed by the Hungarian government within Parliament are themselves most interesting examples of the creation and application of language from a position of power. The very tenets of parliamentarism were under constant renegotiation and restrictive reinterpretation. Moreover, the parliamentary immunity of certain opposition members was also repeatedly questioned and scrutinized according to the established procedure. Even though far from an ‘ideal parliament’,<sup>81</sup> the Hungarian Parliament was nevertheless more than ‘a silent assembly’ or ‘merely ratifying assembly’,<sup>82</sup> as the parties, despite their inequality in relation to the procedure, engaged in lively, even heated debate over the interpretations and rhetorical ownership of the concepts of nation.

The study looks quite closely at the pragmatic level of uses of political language, focusing especially on individual speech acts and the rhetorical construction of arguments. Coming down to the micro-level of the actual dynamics of certain debates, closely following the debate over contested issues,

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>77</sup> See e.g. Greven 2001, 101

<sup>78</sup> Trencsényi 2013, 118–119. This was a clear continuation of the transnational, historic trajectory of the negative interpretation of democracy, see Ihalainen 2010, 5–8.

<sup>79</sup> Buchstein 2002, 108; Palonen 2003, 3. Schmitt 1926/1985, 11, 16–17, 34, 46–48.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Palonen 2009, 9–11; Palonen 2016, 230–233.

<sup>81</sup> Palonen 2018.

<sup>82</sup> Ihalainen, Ilie & Palonen 2016, 7.

it reveals the wide variety of connections and competing conceptualizations applied as arguments.<sup>83</sup> It also demonstrates how the core tenets of the nation remained beyond question, but were repeatedly reformulated to suit individual debates. Unparliamentary conduct – heckling, obstruction, interruptions and insults – is also in itself part of the parliamentary dynamics and its analysis.<sup>84</sup> The strategies the opposing parties applied in rhetorically challenging each other reveal recurring patterns of a clash of ideologies and world views, such as the ubiquitous use of the memory of revolutions and the variety of concepts linked to them.

Concentrating on the micro-level of debate, special emphasis is placed on the construction of arguments as acts of connection:<sup>85</sup> when the matter under discussion is connected to a shared experience or value, it is also revaluated, either in endorsement or contempt. In this context, *political language* is understood as a repository of commonly acceptable concepts and valuations of concepts. In their individual speech acts, the political agents in turn invoke these in differing ways in order to make their individual argument. As Balázs Trencsényi formulates it, this approach considers political language “as interrelated semantic-rhetorical frameworks mediated by certain keywords used by different communities of speakers.”<sup>86</sup> This applies to the case of inter-war Hungary, where most Members of Parliament, including the Social Democrats, shared the classical education with emphasis on national historiography and Hungarian ‘gentlemanly’ social norms. These all contributed to the shared comprehension of certain uncompromising values and unquestioned concepts of nation and nationalism applied as abovementioned ‘keywords’ in the debates, the opposing parties competing over the credibility of their arguments in connecting their aspirations to these. Within the debates one can find what kind of arguments were rhetorically valid and to which audiences they appealed. The changes of wording, changes in the persuasive power of certain arguments, can reveal shifts in the rhetorical strategies employed by the parties. Thus, even as parliamentary arguments seldom posed a severe challenge to governmental policies, they reveal the basis of the political culture embedded in language.<sup>87</sup>

A version of rhetorical redescription (*paradiastole*),<sup>88</sup> connecting arguments can have diverse effects and range from subtle references to broad narratives. In creating such arguments, Members attempted to connect their agenda to the (assumed) expectations of the audience. These connections are rhetorical acts that can take the form of comparison, identification, confrontation or redescription. All these create links between real-world processes (actions, historical events) and abstractions (values, ideals). The broadness of such connection-based arguments varies considerably, ranging from simple metaphoric utterances to carefully crafted parables that began with the Hungarian historical tribulations

<sup>83</sup> Ihalainen 2010, 21–23, 32–33; Kaarkoski 2016, 14–15.

<sup>84</sup> Ilie 2016, 138–139; te Velde 2005, 216.

<sup>85</sup> Or deliberate disconnection.

<sup>86</sup> Trencsényi 2004, 159; see also Pocock 1973.

<sup>87</sup> See also Ilie 2016, 134.

<sup>88</sup> Skinner 1999, 67–69; Palonen 2004, 6–7.

and ended up using them as a model for contemporary politics. Such arguments were also used to construct a nation and to exclude those who did not share the same vision of the past. The numerous references to the revolutions of 1918 and 1919 in particular used them both as a counter-argument to any kind of radicalism and as a tool for placing certain opponents, e.g. Liberals and Social Democrats, in the suspicious sphere of sympathizers of revolution. Thus, revolution is an example of an unquestioned argument, the negative value of which could not be contested; even the Social Democrats eventually complied with this rhetorical precondition, as openly embracing the revolution would have led to reprisal; instead, they chose to speak about the revolutionary years as a tragedy, not forgetting to mention the excesses of the counterrevolutionary retribution.

Individual parts of an argument may be subjected to remodelling and restructuring in order to adapt to new situations and developments, but the argument itself remains a tool for the legitimization of political action, which compels it to maintain connection to a universally accepted value. Conversely, analysis of an argument as a conscious act of connection reveals what was politically sound and valid; which were those rhetorical cornerstones the argument wanted to reach. Members indeed went to great lengths to reinforce their arguments by connecting them to widely accepted concepts.<sup>89</sup> Bringing the analysis to the level of parliamentary argumentation can reveal the contemporary dynamics of discussions; how the core concepts of nation were presented, applied and contested.

Thus the methodological approach begins essentially at the atomistic level of argumentation, the very act of rendering rhetorical and conceptual interpretations credible by appealing to existing values.<sup>90</sup> The argumentation is then contextualized to the dynamics of the entire debate, the counter-arguments, references and metaphors used in it, to gain an understanding of the forms of wielding the political power applied and reflected in rhetoric. Yet it must be remembered that the variation in choice of arguments in the repertoire of certain speakers does not imply ideological or conceptual change as such; it stays within the confines of mere practicality and the speaker's skill in adaptation. One must therefore be careful in drawing conclusions about an agent's personal principles or ideological attitudes, because the ideology can be revealed only through wider contextualization of a discourse. When analysing arguments as connections, the question of the speaker's 'real intentions' or even the veracity of the statements remains secondary. An example of an argument without 'honest intention' was the use of the concept of land reform in Hungary: since 1918 a land reform had been repeatedly promised in political speeches, yet no government had the will

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<sup>89</sup> See also Kaarkoski 2016, 30–32.

<sup>90</sup> Values are here understood as the underlying, sometimes also unspoken fundamental ideals of a community, which are shared by the majority, but to which individuals appealed in diverse ways. In doing so, as Halmesvirta argues, they appear as public moralists in defending the 'proper' operationalization of the said values in politics, which is one way to formulate what I call a connecting argument. Halmesvirta 2017, 9–11.

to realize it. Nevertheless, its importance as an argument lay not in its truthfulness, but in the values and concepts with which it was connected. One can learn that the repeated procrastination of land reform was justified by presenting it as confiscation of private property – that is, creating a direct connection to the threat of Socialism and the memory of the revolutions, which in turn were such negative values that anything connected to them could be formulated as unacceptable.<sup>91</sup>

Thus political language comprised an arsenal of key arguments, such as the memory of the revolutions, to which political questions were repeatedly connected or reframed, even without direct substantial connection to the matter. These were also consciously created in the wake of the post-war upheaval, the most notable being the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, the idea of which was created immediately after the losses became evident and thereafter applied in both domestic and foreign political discourse. In addition to these arguments on a general level, the parliamentary debate also saw the emergence of powerful arguments based on individual or group experience. War veterans and former prisoners of war had their say when military virtue and national duties were on the agenda; people from ceded territories voiced their eager support for any revision initiatives. In parliamentary debate these discourses were brought in as natural, irrefutable and readily intelligible forces that formed the basis of their arguments. The emotional weight of such experiences as the World War and the losses of Trianon must not be underestimated.<sup>92</sup> In the same vein, arguments of a spatial, temporal or transnational nature were applied to imbue political aims with credibility. Especially concerning the language of revision, multiple interpretations of the international politics, physical boundaries, political time and space, were projected onto the Hungarian case and Hungarian expectations, competing for rhetorical superiority.

To conclude, the study concentrates on the level of parliamentary use of language, especially the concepts of nation, as an element in the wielding of political power, the very struggle over interpretations and conceptualizations.<sup>93</sup> This is not a structural study about policy formulation from its preparation within government, through the committee level and up to the execution and implementation of the bills.<sup>94</sup> Nor should it be seen as a study on ‘mere rhetoric’,<sup>95</sup> as the conscious choices made in the level of political language simultaneously reflected and created political room for manoeuvre. *Das Sagbare* was the prerequisite of *das Machbare*; the boundaries of what kind of political action was applicable were actively being shaped by what was rhetorically constructed as possible.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, once created, a rhetorical construction could be reapplied

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<sup>91</sup> István Bethlen’s inaugural address in 1921, Bethlen 2000, 125; Romsics 1995, 60, 195.

<sup>92</sup> Ilie 2016, 134.

<sup>93</sup> Pekonen 2014, 29.

<sup>94</sup> On the earlier discussion over the need for more or less comprehensive approach to the process of parliamentary decision-making, see Häkkinen 2014, 41–43, Kaarkoski 2016, 25–27 and Roitto 2015, 46–48.

<sup>95</sup> See e.g. Ihalainen & Saarinen 2015, 33; cf. Romsics 1995, 265.

<sup>96</sup> Steinmetz 1993, 26–28; Steinmetz 2002, 91.

and recontextualized to legitimize diverse political ends. Ergo, political acts are preceded, enabled and legitimized through speech; words have power in themselves and it is never indifferent, how certain events, acts or people are conceptualized. At the time of writing, when hate speech is repeatedly transformed into physical violence, one hardly needs to be reminded of this. The same was true of Hungary in the 1920s. As a tangible example, when in 1920 the government chose to apply anti-Semitism in its post-war construction of an exclusive Hungarian nation, the rhetorical rationalization of the *Numerus Clausus* was closely connected to the recent memory of the World War and the revolutions; Jews as war profiteers, Jews as revolutionaries and Jews as wandering immigrants who compromised the national unity. Even when the government toned down the anti-Semitic discourse in the late 1920s, the very same arguments remained applicable nearly 20 years later, when Parliament debated the Jewish laws of 1938; time and again Jews were profiteers, deserters and revolutionaries; the arguments had transcended their temporal context and become available for the legitimization of another wave of anti-Semitic policies, aiming at much more severe discrimination.<sup>97</sup>

#### 1.4 The interwar era in historiography

This chapter considers the Hungarian historiography of the 1920s as the immediate context and the necessary background of this study. It aims to clarify the prevailing conceptions of the era, the main points of research and the possible gaps therein. The interwar era, or the Horthy era (*Horthy-korszak*),<sup>98</sup> is an extensively researched theme in contemporary Hungarian historiography and remains an object of constant discussion and contradictory interpretations. Many of the studies on the matter still include some kind of moral question about the nature of the regime; of democracy, authoritarianism, anti-Semitism, the rise of Fascism and the guilt of participating in the Second World War.<sup>99</sup> In the years of state Socialism, the interpretation was ideologically straightforward: until the 1970s the regime was unequivocally Fascist, and even after the ideological thaw in the 1970s and 80s, still reactionary and authoritarian.<sup>100</sup> The historiography after the change of regime in 1989 has, in turn, diverged along different lines, where interpretations – especially of a popular and/or politically motivated nature – range from harsh criticism to higher esteem and calls for rehabilitation.<sup>101</sup> The

<sup>97</sup> Compare e.g. Nándor Bernólak, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 185; Vidor Dinich, 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 358 with Gábor Balogh, 5.5.1938, KN XVIII/1935, 299–302.

<sup>98</sup> While *Horthy-korszak* is an established concept in both Hungarian and international historiography, in this study the era and the corresponding political structure are referred to as *interwar era* and *counterrevolutionary regime*, in order to avoid the misleading emphasis on Horthy; see below.

<sup>99</sup> See e.g. Püski 2002; Romsics 2002, 22–26.

<sup>100</sup> Deák 1992, 1062; Püski 2002, 208–212; Püski 2006, 259; Turbucz 2014, 9–11.

<sup>101</sup> On the matter of conflicting interpretations see e.g. Dreisziger 1996; Püski 2002, 213; Turbucz 2014, 9–10.

politicized historiography has, throughout the ages and diverse political inclinations, represented such a classical view of history as a national discipline that complies with the very same premises of nation-building this study endeavours to analyse; that the Hungarian nation is millennial, it has an undivided (and in the national canon also undeniable) history as the leading nationality of the Carpathian Basin. Nation and state have self-evidently been central actors, which – depending on the perspective and spirit of the time – may be subjected to collective guilt, heroism or victimhood. Collective memory and collective historiography have been and remain the cornerstones of the Hungarian nationalism, used to legitimize the sense of national exceptionalism. These politicized trains of historical thought in relation to the interwar years persist, especially within the popular historiography that ranges from the (late) Socialist discourse of guilt and judgement to the (neo-) Rightist attempts at victimization and intentional whitewashing.<sup>102</sup> Even as the Hungarian mainstream academic historiography, used in this study and examined below, is in general of high quality and has in most cases been able to avoid direct political interference,<sup>103</sup> it cannot always completely evade a layer of politicization embedded in the nature of the historiographical tradition.

The approaches found in the existing scholarly literature can be roughly divided into two. Of these, the first is biographical, focusing on the leading politicians and their careers.<sup>104</sup> Another perspective is structural, following the political movements and institutions or the broader lines of policymaking in the era, often dividing the analysis precisely along the lines of social, economic, foreign etc. policies.<sup>105</sup> What is characteristic in the division is that the two approaches rarely merge. In biographical studies, the emphasis is on the personal agency and personal networks of the person in question, while in the structural works, individuals appear mainly as holders of political office, with little space devoted to their active politicking. This study contributes to bridging this gap: the analysis of the active use of political rhetoric reveals how the political agents – both leading individuals and rank-and-file parliamentarians – attempted to apply the underlying code of political language and interpret it to their own ends; to create and shape political and discursive space within the boundaries of the system. Nation-building as the key perspective is also a choice resulting in the gap in the existing research; the concepts of nation and nationalism are in many respects seen as self-evident, with little interest in their actual formulation and application; and whereas Balázs Trencsényi, perhaps the foremost historian of concepts in Hungary, has analysed the language of nation-building in a comparative East European context, his study remains at a cultural and intellectual level.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See e.g. Csernok 2014 and Kovács 2010, respectively.

<sup>103</sup> See, however, “Milliárdokkal dobálózva írná újra a történelmet a Kormány”, HVG, 20.1.2014, [http://hvg.hu/itthon/20140120\\_kutatointezetek\\_kormany\\_milliardok](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20140120_kutatointezetek_kormany_milliardok) (24.4.2019).

<sup>104</sup> See e.g. Turbucz 2014; Romsics 1995; Vonyó 2014.

<sup>105</sup> See e.g. Boros & Szabó 2008; Hanebrink 2006; Paksa 2013; Püski 2006.

<sup>106</sup> Trencsényi 2013.

The foundations of the series of two revolutions and a counterrevolution were laid with the defeat of the Central Powers in the autumn of 1918. Charles, the last Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, ceased to exercise his royal prerogatives,<sup>107</sup> leaving parts of the Empire in a power vacuum. In October 1918 a pacifist and democratic revolution, the so-called Aster Revolution (*Őszirózas forradalom*), took place in Hungary. It established the Hungarian People's Republic (*Magyar Népköztársaság*), in which the Liberal aristocrat Mihály Károlyi served as Prime Minister and later as President. The Károlyi government had little room to manoeuvre, pressed by the victorious powers and the successor states as well as the domestic opposition from Right and Left. In the face of mounting pressure, Károlyi was ready to cede power to Social Democrats. These, however, chose to ally with the Communists, who carried out a revolution or a takeover in March 1919, founding the Hungarian Soviet Republic (*Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*).<sup>108</sup> As the president of the first republic, Károlyi is one of the central subjects of controversy in historiography and history politics. Depending on the interpretation, his role ranges from that of an unfortunate idealist to that of an active Communist collaborator. The contradiction culminates in the question whether Károlyi was aware that by surrendering the key government offices to Social Democrats, he practically gave the Communists a free hand to carry out the takeover. While the general consensus in academic historiography is that his attempt to rely on Social Democrats in order to gather support from the Western Social Democrats and Soviet Russia was a miscalculated last-minute attempt to survive a crisis caused by international pressure,<sup>109</sup> the politicized popular history of the 2010s tends to portray purely and simply as a traitor.<sup>110</sup>

The short-lived Soviet Republic collapsed in late July 1919, under pressure from the Entente and the successor states. The pre-war conservative elites returned to power with the support of the radical Right paramilitary organizations,<sup>111</sup> which had been founded in late 1918 in response to the defeat in the World War and the domestic revolution, born of the culture of defeat and appreciation of violence.<sup>112</sup> There was no direct confrontation between the Red and the White Armies that could be classified as civil war in Hungary, but both Red and White detachments perpetrated terror and committed political murders. In November 1919, the Hungarian National Army (*Nemzeti Hadsereg*), usually referred to as the White Army, marched to Budapest, with Commander Miklós Horthy issuing a dire warning to 'Revolutionary Budapest' and all the Hungarians who had abandoned their allegiance to the nation.<sup>113</sup> The speech,

<sup>107</sup> Formally, the Eckartsau proclamation did not include abdication, a technical detail which Charles made use of in 1921 in his attempts to regain the Hungarian throne. Békés 2009, 215–215; Gerwarth 2017, 111.

<sup>108</sup> Romsics 1999, 89, 99.

<sup>109</sup> Kontler 1999, 333–334; Zeidler 2009, 24.

<sup>110</sup> See Nyysönen 2017, 111–112.

<sup>111</sup> Of these, the Association of Awakening Hungarians (*Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete, ÉME*) and the Hungarian National Defence Association (*Magyar Országos Véderő Egylet, MOVE*) were the most prominent and were able to wield political influence in the coming years. Deák 1996, 81; Romsics 1999, 96.

<sup>112</sup> Gerwarth 2013, 83–84; Turbucz 2014, 77–79.

<sup>113</sup> Horthy 1955, 142–144; Turbucz 2014, 81–82



easily interpreted as an example of Horthy's authoritarian approach, was also an example of calculated doubletalk applied in a contingent situation. At that point, Horthy had already begun negotiations with the Entente powers over attaining international recognition of the emerging counterrevolutionary government and, in return, acknowledged that he would not strive to build military regime. The speech was thus a symbolic and rhetorical display of power intended for domestic audiences.<sup>114</sup>

The counterrevolution was brought to its official goal in March 1920, as Hungary was again declared a kingdom, in which Horthy was appointed Regent. That was also an exceptional choice, yet comprehensible in the context of the prevailing political uncertainty as well as the domestic and international preconditions. The Entente actively opposed any attempts at a Habsburg restoration, but had given their support to Horthy. At the same time, the conservative parties needed his assistance in creating stability in the midst of the post-war and post-revolutionary crisis, whereas the emerging radical Right saw him as their hero and the guarantor of the continuation of counterrevolutionary policy.<sup>115</sup> Horthy himself deliberately chose to meet all the expectations, at least rhetorically; he could appear both as a loyal officer of the Empire towards the pro-Habsburg legitimists and as an ardent military leader of the new Hungary towards the radical Right. At the same time, he engaged in politically realist cooperation with the future prime ministers Teleki and Bethlen, who would shape the Hungarian polity in the years to come.<sup>116</sup>

The revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence in Hungary, like many other events during and after the World War, from the Finnish Civil War to the Armenian Genocide, has been given varying explanations. In the historiography of the Socialist era the narrative was that of an ideological class war, in which the counterrevolutionary Right persecuted the Socialists.<sup>117</sup> Earlier Western studies have referred to the brutalizing impact of the World War, especially among the demobilized soldiers. More recent research for its part emphasizes the culture of defeat, prominent in states that had been on the losing side in the war. This was connected to the era of paramilitary activity, which in itself obscured the distinction between soldiers and civilians, thus lowering the threshold of summary violence. The same paramilitary detachments were attractive collaborators to the emerging states in need of allies in their struggle against internal enemies.<sup>118</sup> The counterrevolution has also been ideologized under the umbrella concepts of 'szegedism', after the White Army headquarters town of Szeged. However, at that time and also later, the counterrevolutionaries were a loose conglomerate of pre-war aristocrats, upper bourgeoisie, war veterans and the emerging radical Right, for whom the common denominator was their opposition to Communism.<sup>119</sup> Against this background, the particularly

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<sup>114</sup> Turbucz 2014, 80–82.

<sup>115</sup> Turbucz 2014, 86–88.

<sup>116</sup> Turbucz 2014, 93–95.

<sup>117</sup> See Püski 2002, 207–208.

<sup>118</sup> Bodo 2006, 122; Gerwarth 2013, 83; Gerwarth 2017, 122.

<sup>119</sup> Kontler 1999, 337; Romsics 1995, 182.

critical interpretations, such as Paul A. Hanebrink's views that 'szegedism' was a systematic ideology of ethnic cleansing,<sup>120</sup> remain questionable. Such hasty interpretations also demonstrate the slight tendency of non-Hungarian scholars to sometimes contemplate interwar Hungary through its assumed political backwardness and the stereotypical 'operetta' nature of the Central European conservative polity, using somewhat pejorative conceptualizations in their descriptions.<sup>121</sup>

Within the mostly critical historiographical consensus, the counterrevolutionary violence has also gained its apologists. According to the mitigating interpretations, in 1918–19 the simultaneous demobilization of the army, economic and political isolation, a spirit of defeat and foreign occupation together contributed to an atmosphere in which the political leaders could not guarantee adequate security and prosperity for the people, but interest groups organized themselves on their own authority and eventually turned against each other. According to the narrative, the Red and White detachments that perpetrated the most savage acts of terror were never under the control of their political leaders, and the Entente forces can be held partially responsible for allowing the terror to take place in territories (at least nominally) occupied by them.<sup>122</sup> Even Krisztián Ungváry, one of the most vocal critics of the politics of the interwar era, is somewhat inclined to treat the early counterrevolutionary radicalism as sort of collateral damage of the post-war confusion and national trauma, while attributing the more repressive policies to the governments of the 1930s.<sup>123</sup>

In this study the revolutionary years 1918–19 and the differing narratives and interpretations of them are significant in their own right, as the legitimization of the interwar policy was fundamentally based on the counterrevolutionary discourse, momentarily mitigated by the rhetoric of consolidation. The rhetorical tools involved in it were denial of the legitimacy of the First Republic and the Soviet Republic and the narrative connecting these two in a causal relationship in order to discredit not only the Social Democratic but also the Liberal opposition. In the counterrevolutionary narrative, the revolutions constituted an historical break, after which the pre-war Conservative elite proclaimed an historical mission to seize power and restore Hungary's internal order and international authority.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, the Conservative government had to define its relationship to the counterrevolutionary violence and especially to its perpetrators, the volunteer detachments, which were rapidly becoming bothersome in relation to both the domestic political hierarchy and Hungary's international reputation.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Hanebrink 2006, 86–87.

<sup>121</sup> See e.g. Sakmyster 1994 IX–X; Hanebrink 2006, 111.

<sup>122</sup> Kontler 1999, 331; cf. Gerwarth 2013, 84, 95.

<sup>123</sup> Ungváry 2013, 18.

<sup>124</sup> See e.g. István Bethlen's speech 18.2.1919, Bethlen 2000, 112–114; Horthy 1955, 127–132.

<sup>125</sup> Sakmyster 1994, 22–23.

The counterrevolutionary political structure, especially in non-Hungarian historiography, has been associated with the person of Horthy and the regime has been seen as a dictatorship under his direct rule.<sup>126</sup> However, Horthy's personal participation in politics was intermittent, and most of the time he played a ceremonial role comparable of that of a modern-day constitutional monarch.<sup>127</sup> For example, Zsuzsanna Boros produces a clarifying explanation; while Horthy possessed true and broad prerogatives, those were scarcely invoked in daily politics; his authority lay in his *potential* and *symbolic* power.<sup>128</sup> In practice it can be formulated that the Regent could not issue orders without the government's consent, but on the contrary, could effectively hinder the government from pursuing any actions without *his* consent.<sup>129</sup> As Dávid Turbucz argues, Horthy assumed his position as a result of a conscious political campaign and in close cooperation with István Bethlen, where the Regent recognized the limits of his political expertise and voluntarily delegated the management of daily politics to the trusted Prime Minister. This interpretation challenges not only the cult-inspired visions of Horthy as the national saviour sent by destiny, but also the generic criticism that judges him as a military dictator.<sup>130</sup>

The actual question of democracy and authoritarianism should rather address the restrictive suffrage, the parliamentary supremacy of the single government party and the central role of Prime Ministers, on whose use of political power there were but few parliamentary constraints, and, as we shall see, constantly endeavoured to rhetorically undermine the remaining prerogatives of the Parliament.<sup>131</sup> Unlike in the other states created in the interwar era, in Hungary there never was serious constitutional debate; the elite relied on the selective application of the political tradition of the Dualist era.<sup>132</sup> The elitist and conservative structure, which claimed to honour the concept of constitution and the millennial roots of the Hungarian constitutionalism,<sup>133</sup> perceived no need to base its legitimation on modern parliamentarism. Although the government usually respected the parliamentary procedure, in certain instances it resorted to ruling by executive decrees.<sup>134</sup> A concrete example was the Suffrage Decree of 1922, which annulled the Suffrage Act of 1919 that had notably extended the franchise. The decree was only later codified as law by the parliament elected under it.<sup>135</sup> Particularly relevant to this study are the rhetorical acts of elitist redescription of the concept of democracy, which legitimized the limitations of public participation in politics, as well as the language used to construct the nation, in both its exclusive and inclusive meaning. For example, the reform policy under Prime Minister István Bethlen and the consolidation discourse

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<sup>126</sup> See e.g. Anderson 2007, 158.

<sup>127</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 297–298; Turbucz 2014, 119–120.

<sup>128</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 297–298.

<sup>129</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 299, 306.

<sup>130</sup> Turbucz 2014, 88–91, 115–119.

<sup>131</sup> Kontler 1999, 349–350; Romsics 1995, 181.

<sup>132</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 292; Püski 2006, 273.

<sup>133</sup> Püski 2006, 22.

<sup>134</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 293.

<sup>135</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 237.

embedded in it<sup>136</sup> must be seen from the perspective of contemporary argumentation, without an attempt to find traces in it of 'conservative liberalism'.<sup>137</sup>

One background factor that contributed to the pro-governmental bias in the political structure was the unorganized nature of parties. Most of the parties were loose interest groups, organized after the model of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century elitist club-parties; this was true not only of the Unity Party and its closest allies, but also of the various parties of the liberal opposition. It also meant that political life was fundamentally Budapest-centred. Leaders like Bethlen were able to act in the name of their parties and simultaneously play off different cliques against each other to secure their positions.<sup>138</sup> The Social Democrats were an exception as they had a broad voter base and local organization capable of mobilizing the masses.<sup>139</sup> One central manifestation of the authoritarian policies of the government was its operation against mass organization. In extreme cases the government resorted to active political de-mobilization as a tool for maintaining control over the people; when István Dénes launched an election campaign in 1926 with a radical agrarian-socialist programme, the government's response was unusually severe. Local authorities obstructed him from giving speeches and at the same time intimidated his potential voters. Eventually, on the day of the election, as many as 2500 known supporters of Dénes were rounded up and held in custody until the polling stations closed.<sup>140</sup> According to Boros, what the government was alarmed about was not the possible loss of a single seat but the unprecedented political mobilization of smallholders behind a radical movement.<sup>141</sup>

Studies on the interwar Hungarian Parliament as a political arena are relatively rare. In the Hungarian historiography and the scholarly conception of politics the significance of the parliamentary debate of the era is minor. According to the dominant interpretation, the fact that Parliament had no concrete power over the government meant that the political debate there was 'mere rhetoric' without true political relevance, whereas 'real' decisions were made elsewhere.<sup>142</sup> In the international perspective, the same argument has been used to challenge the importance of parliamentary debate in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian systems, and along with it, the analytical feasibility of studying them.<sup>143</sup> On the contrary, this study looks at Parliament as *the* arena for debate and permissible criticism, in which the language is able to reveal the means of policy-making and the construction of government legitimacy as well as the opposition's attempts to challenge them.<sup>144</sup> Accordingly, the work of Zsuzsanna Boros provides a detailed analysis of parliamentary activity and the complex relationship between democracy, parliamentarism and

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<sup>136</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 198.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Romsics 1995, 182; Romsics 1999, 190.

<sup>138</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 176; 183–184; Püski 2006, 258; Romsics 1995, 199.

<sup>139</sup> This was also true of the Extreme Right parties of the 1930s. Boros & Szabó 2008, 191.

<sup>140</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 264–265.

<sup>141</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 265.

<sup>142</sup> See e.g. Kontler 1999, 350; Romsics 1995, 265.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Palonen 2010.

<sup>144</sup> See also Püski 2006, 268.

authoritarianism in the interwar era. However, it actually focuses heavily on the structural level, party organizations and their power relations.<sup>145</sup> In the many turns of Hungarian domestic and foreign policy, the analysis of political language contributes to revealing the nature of the political culture; the extent of parliamentary polyphony, competing ideologies, contestations over concepts and interpretations and passionate debate. This challenges the one-sided interpretations of the political structure and opens up new interpretations of what is actually meant by present-day references to the 'Horthy era' or its political agents.

One cannot consider the interwar Hungarian political discourse without including the all-encompassing nature of the Treaty of Trianon and the subsequent revisionism. With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, the former national minorities of the Empire were able to implement the principles of national self-determination with the support of the Entente and at the expense of the former mother country.<sup>146</sup> Hungary was invited to the Paris Peace Conference only in late 1919, after the political order in the country had been restored. By that time, the territorial demands of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia had been realized, which was presented to Hungary as a *fait accompli*. The Treaty of Trianon, undersigned on 4 June 1920, required Hungary to cede roughly two thirds of its pre-war territory and population, including three million ethnic Hungarians.<sup>147</sup> The socio-political trauma of Trianon affected interwar Hungary both politically and psychologically.<sup>148</sup> The revision of the treaty was not only the key objective of foreign policy, but also a general motif, appearing as an undeniable argument in various debates, even with less relevance to the matter itself. Through this, Trianon also became a rhetorical tool of nation-building. The language of revision acquired ritualistic features: 'Trianon' was a curse, 'No! No! Never!' (*Nem! Nem! Soha!*) and 'Everything back!' (*Mindent vissza!*) were the key rallying cries, and the revisionist poem Hungarian Credo (*Magyar hiszekegy*), ending with the verse 'I believe in the Hungarian resurrection!' (*Hiszek Magyarország feltámadásában!*)<sup>149</sup>, combined the historical, political and religious yearning for justice.<sup>150</sup> In the Hungarian experience, the ultimate injustice had to be rectified; the world had to be made to understand Hungary's intolerable situation. A settlement on territorial changes had to be reached with the neighbouring countries through international arbitration in the League of Nations, otherwise the lost territories were to be regained by armed forces.<sup>151</sup>

The victimization discourse still echoes in the contemporary Hungarian historiography. Revision policy itself is generally condemned, considering its

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<sup>145</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 180–185.

<sup>146</sup> Vares & Vares 2019, 166.

<sup>147</sup> Romsics 1999, 86–87.

<sup>148</sup> Romsics 1999, 81.

<sup>149</sup> Written by Elemerné Papp-Váry, who won with it a patriotic writing contest in 1920. See Vonyo 2002.

<sup>150</sup> Zeidler 2007, 181–182.

<sup>151</sup> See e.g. István Bethlen's speech on 4.3.1928, Bethlen 2000, 240–251.

desperation, aggression and the tragic end it had, but most studies do not forget to mention the reality of the injustice of Trianon, the lack of understanding on the part of the Great Powers and the constant antagonism of the Little Entente. Altogether, the tragedy narrative runs deep in the Hungarian historical mindset and even affects the analytical historiographical approach.<sup>152</sup> Even Miklós Zeidler, the leading scholar of revision policy and critic of the 'rigid nationalism' that Trianon has produced in the Hungarian foreign political discourse,<sup>153</sup> has emphasized the role of the global trauma caused by the World War in the background of the peace treaty: the war had caused a shocked feeling of revenge among the peoples, which compelled the Entente politicians to demand severe punishment of the defeated states. Thus, Hungary's part was that of an unlucky target of collateral damage in the inter-European process of revenge, where the western governments needed to assure their respective nations that "the guilty losers would pay for all the suffering and all the damages caused by the war."<sup>154</sup> László Kontler, in a similar mitigating tone, points out that the force behind the revision policy was not some 'inherent' Hungarian national chauvinism, but primarily the experience of injustice that was renewed by the Little Entente states' anti-Hungarian policy and repression of their Hungarian minorities.<sup>155</sup>

The question of revision policy reverts to the profound moral issue of responsibility. As we know, the ultimate result was Hungary's alignment with the Axis in the Second World War and the eventual defeat that brought to an end the regime created in 1920 and has profoundly influenced its posthumous reputation.<sup>156</sup> The explanations of Hungary's road to war have shifted throughout the years and continue to do so; was Hungary on an 'inescapable track' (*kényszerpálya*),<sup>157</sup> that is, without any real choice in its foreign policy but to follow international power fluctuations; or, did it have room to manoeuvre (*mozgástér*), which would lay greater responsibility on the Hungarian governments?<sup>158</sup> The question of foreign political choices and their intentionality is one of those to which this study can, for its part, provide an answer; when analysing the language used in the foreign policy debates of Parliament, the conceptualization of revision as a national mission and the importance attached to it by the government, we can deduce that the choices were made in consciousness of the risks and intentionally suppressing the criticism and warnings presented by the opposition. Thus close analysis of parliamentary debate can also serve as a basic research effort, providing contextual information concerning the contentious issues of historiography and revealing the contemporary uses of language that had a lasting effect on policy and also wide-ranging repercussions.

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152 Zeidler 2007, 29–30.

153 Zeidler 2007, X–XV.

154 Zeidler 2007, 15.

155 Kontler 1999, 325–326.

156 Zeidler 2002, 162–163.

157 The concept of 'inescapable track' is rather similar to the Finnish historico-political concept of 'driftwood theory' (*ajopuuteoria*) as a mitigating explanation for how Finland ended up as an ally of Germany in 1941. See e.g. Jokisipilä 2007.

158 Ránki 1983, cf. Zeidler 2002.

## 2 COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY STATE, EXCLUSIVE NATION

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shall analyse the debates concerning nation-building and state-building, beginning immediately after the resumption of parliamentary work in early 1920. The analysis concentrates on two interrelated questions: how the post-war, post-revolutionary Hungarian nation was essentially being constructed by rhetorically excluding the unwanted and dubious elements in society, most notably the Socialists and the Jews, and in parallel, how the state structure and counterrevolutionary regime was constructed and legitimized rhetorically, leaning on the abovementioned exclusive conceptualization of the nation.

As the contemporary epithet implies, the legitimacy of the counterrevolutionary (*ellenforradalmi*) regime was contingent upon the repudiation of the legitimacy of the revolutionary governments of 1918–19. The revolutionary years, first the unstable phase of the Károlyi government and then the arbitrary rule of the Communists, coupled with the Red Terror, were a traumatizing experience for the old elite, socially, culturally and politically. They had seen their traditional and established position vanish overnight, to be replaced by “the blind rule of the mute masses.”<sup>159</sup> According to the established counterrevolutionary narrative, the weak Károlyi, contributing to Hungary’s defeat in the World War and acquiescing to the demands of the victors that ensured the mutilation of the Historical Hungary, then voluntarily ceded power to the Communists, who in turn ruled by sheer terror, ruining what was left of Hungarian dignity and ensuring the country’s unfavourable position in the Peace Conference.

The narrative concentrated on the Red Terror, the summary executions and the desecration of everything the old elite held sacred, including the Parliament

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<sup>159</sup> “...nyers tömegeknek vak uralmá[t].” István Bethlen’s inaugural address in 1921, Bethlen 2000, 121.

itself.<sup>160</sup> The outrage also had a personal dimension; for example Horthy's mansion in Kenderes had been sacked and his family threatened by the local Red Guards, whereas Bethlen and his family had been forced to flee from the agitated mob.<sup>161</sup> Against this background of utter immorality and recklessness, the establishment's response was to call for severe retribution. As the White Army marched to Budapest on 16 November 1919, Horthy held a widely publicized speech, in which he denounced Budapest, equating it with the immoral and internationalist urban proletariat and their revolutionary fervour:

"This city has betrayed its millennial history, this city has torn down the Holy Crown and the National Flag and dressed itself in red rags."<sup>162</sup>

Horthy's call for loyalty to the nation contributed to the rise of the White terror, the imprisonment, torture and execution of thousands of people accused of participating in the revolutions. Already at that time the terror also had an anti-Semitic element, as the stereotype of a Communist included Jewish identity, and led to summary executions of Hungarian Jews and village-level pogroms.<sup>163</sup> As this chapter shows, the counterrevolutionary atmosphere immediately pervaded the parliamentary discourse in the early 1920s, when the prevalent rhetoric was used to antagonize, vilify and incarcerate those deemed responsible for the revolutions, and at the same time to justify the White Terror and protect its perpetrators, who had purportedly acted out of a patriotic sense of justice and moral outrage.<sup>164</sup> Ultimately, the most radical demands for ethnic or ideological cleansing did not materialize in the political decrees (save for the *Numerus Clausus*, see below), as the government acted pragmatically, being required also to secure its position in relation to the working class and the Jewish entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the hardening parliamentary language created and upheld an atmosphere of exceptionality and insecurity, which legitimized the upsurges of repression whenever the need arose.

This chapter analyses four cases of the construction, legitimization and perpetuation of the exclusive conceptualization of the Hungarian nation as the cornerstone of the counterrevolutionary state. The first subchapter discusses in detail the immediate restoration of the state order in early 1920, at the first sessions of the National Assembly after the revolutionary turmoil. There, the concept of constitutionalism was reinterpreted as comprising 'the ancient Hungarian form of government', where the organic conceptualization of nation was elevated over the 'purely formal' values of democracy and

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<sup>160</sup> The memory of even more concrete desecration, lynchings of priests, monks and nuns during the Red Terror, persisted as readily applicable reminder of the immorality of the Communists. Hanebrink 2006, 73–74.

<sup>161</sup> Horthy 1955, 131–135; Romsics 1995, 85; Sakmyster 1994, 16.

<sup>162</sup> "Ez a város megtagadta ezeréves történelmét, ez a város porba rántotta a szent koronát, meg a nemzet színeit és vörös rongyokba öltözött." Miklós Horthy's speech in Budapest, 16.11.1919, Romsics 2000, 118.

<sup>163</sup> Kontler 1999, 339; Romsics 1999, 110; Sakmyster 1994, 30; Bodo 2006; Bodo 2010.

<sup>164</sup> Bodo 2010, 705.



parliamentarism.<sup>165</sup> Thus, the rhetorical legitimization of the interwar authoritarian regime and its downplaying and suppression of parliamentary culture, were consciously constructed from the very beginning of parliamentary life.

The second subchapter concerns the *Numerus Clausus* legislation of 1920, which embodied the anti-Semitic element of the exclusive nation-building. The law imposed ethnic quotas for university enrolment, with the explicit aim of limiting the influence of the Jews in Hungarian society. The debate and arguments used in it reveal the manifold discourse of Hungarian anti-Semitism and exclusive nation-building; how the Jews were rhetorically constructed as the others of the nation and their traditional integration into Hungarian society denied. In order to achieve this, Jews were presented as an homogenous socio-cultural community, which in turn was ethnicized to underline its otherness. Moreover, the differences in argumentation between the conservatives, liberals and the radical Right reveal the emerging cleavages of the parliamentary composition, which ultimately benefitted the government, enabling it to exercise a 'golden mean' policy between the opposing camps of liberals and the extreme Right.

The third case concerns a debate held in 1923 on the treatment of the inmates in the Zalaegerség internment camp. The inmates, interned for various reasons mostly based on their background as suspected revolutionaries or foreign spies, were deemed by the opposition have been unjustly detained and mistreated without trial. During the debate, the opposing discourses of counterrevolutionary exclusive nationalism and Social Democratic discourse on human and civil rights as well as their criticism of government, clashed in a direct rhetorical confrontation. What makes the debate interesting and worth more detailed analysis is that it was an exception to the government-controlled parliamentary agenda setting, where the government usually had both the initiative and the administrative tools to control the debate, limiting the discursive space of the opposition. In this case, however, the opposition actively promoted an unwelcome issue, forcing the government onto the defensive, to reveal its prevailing, unyieldingly punitive counterrevolutionary attitude towards the former revolutionaries, supported by *ad hoc* -argumentation, thus exposing the strict limitations of the 'consolidative' stance of the Bethlen government towards its opposition.

As a comparative endnote, the final chapter recerts to the case of the *Numerus Clausus*. In 1928, the legislation was amended in order to appease the mounting international criticism of the ethnic discrimination by softening the anti-Semitic tone of the legislation. In practice, the wording of the law replaced the concepts of race and nationality with less explicit terms relating to social background. The parliamentary process enabled a much more tolerant and polyphonic debate to showcase the Hungarian tolerance and compliance with

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<sup>165</sup> A similar conservative conceptualization of an organic *Volksgemeinschaft* over the 'Western' conceptualization of politically active citizenry was central in the German post-war discourse. Ihalainen 2017, 436-438.

international standards. Still, the practical results enabled the continued discrimination against and perpetuation of the exclusive, racializing and anti-integration sentiment towards Jews. As with the third subchapter, the contents and arguments of the debate bring about the limits of the politics of consolidation.

## 2.2 State-building from the ashes. “Restoration of constitutional life” debate in 1920

### 2.2.1 From Calvary towards resurrection

“I, Miklós Horthy de Nagybánya, the Regent-elect of Hungary, swear in the name of the living God to remain faithful to Hungary, to adhere to its laws, its good old and accepted traditions, and to ensure that others will adhere to them; to defend its independence and territory, to exercise the regency in the spirit of the constitution, in accordance with the National Assembly with a ministerial responsibility and to do everything I rightfully can in the benefit of the nation and its glory. In this, so help me God!”<sup>166</sup>

When Admiral Miklós Horthy took the oath of office as the recently elected Regent of Hungary on 1 March 1920, the wording of the oath – its form borrowed from the former royal oaths – was itself indicative to the political atmosphere of the time and the preceding debates. The newly created office of Regent was a combination of the monarchic traditions and – to a more limited extent – the demands of the post-war constitutional reorganization. The defeat in the World War, the loss of greatness and the revolutionary years had shaken the old elite’s perception of the world. As parliamentary life resumed after the revolutionary hiatus in early 1920, the cornerstones of the counterrevolutionary nation-building and state-building were thus drawn from the past, in an attempt to amend and mitigate the tumult of the preceding years. Contrary to the modern constitutional debates in post-war Europe,<sup>167</sup> the Hungarian thought, reflected in the text of the oath, put the historical and organic concepts of ‘old and accepted traditions’ and ‘spirit of the constitution’ above actual parliamentary and constitutional formulations.

The debate on the primal state-building resolution, the so-called *Law concerning the restoration of constitutional life and the provisional organization of the authority of the Head of State*,<sup>168</sup> shows how the traumatic, personalized experiences

<sup>166</sup> “En, nagybányai Horthy Miklós, Magyarország megválasztott kormányzója, esküszöm az élő Istenre, hogy Magyarországhoz hí leszek, törvényeit, régi jó és helybenhagyott szokásait megtartom és másokkal is megtartatom, függetlenségét és területét megvédem, kormányzói tisztemet az alkotmány értelmében a Nemzetgyűléssel egyetértésben a felelős ministerium útján gyakorlom és mindent megteszek, amit az ország javára és dicsőségére igazságosan megtehetek. Isten engem úgy segítjen!” Miklós Horthy, 1.3.1920, NN I/1920, 106.

<sup>167</sup> See Ihalainen 2017.

<sup>168</sup> “Törvény az alkotmányos élet helyreállításáról és az államfői hatalom ideiglenes rendezéséről”, Law I/1920, NI I/1920, 3–8.

of the revolutions, as well as the spirit of retribution that had provoked the White Terror, inspired and legitimized the brief legislation that laid the foundations for the interwar conceptualizations of Hungary, the Hungarian nation and Hungarian nationalism. The intendedly provisional law and the power structure described in it would in fact endure until the end of the Second World War.

“As the Hungarian Nation’s Road to Calvary has reached this point, I salute the newly elected National Assembly, and the work we have begun in the name of God. Our nation has gone through terrible ordeals in the past years and in the past months. At this moment we must take the first step to rescue our nearly doomed nation from the verge of a gaping grave.”<sup>169</sup>

The first post-revolutionary session of the Hungarian National Assembly was opened on 16 February 1920, with grave words from the Prime Minister *ad interim* Károly Huszár.<sup>170</sup> Hungary, identified with Christ himself, had been saved from total destruction at the last possible moment, but its Road to Calvary was still far from reaching resurrection.<sup>171</sup> Huszár went on to list the reasons for Hungary’s degradation and its loss of historical greatness:

“Over the decades the systematically prepared internal putrefaction, with the propaganda which infiltrated us from abroad, created delusions that broke our strength. The false hopes of peace, the demagoguery disguised in the alluring form of national catchwords - they upset the internal order of this state, they destroyed the authority without which the nation and the state cannot exist. Wasteful management completely ruined the economic situation of the country. Following the weakening of the bourgeois elements, the nation shifted constantly to the left, and at the last moment, as a consequence of a deliberate betrayal, the nation was all but faced with destruction.”<sup>172</sup>

The counterrevolutionary explanation of guilt began in the pre-war liberal governments, which were discredited by connecting them with concepts such as

<sup>169</sup> “A magyar nemzet kálváriajárásának ezen a stációján üdvözlöm az újonnan megválasztott Nemzetgyűlést és Isten nevében megkezdjük munkálkodásunkat. Borzalmas eseményeken ment keresztül a mi nemzetünk a legutóbbi években és az utolsó hónapokban. Ebben a pillanatban az első lépést tesszük, hogy a felénk tátongó sír széléről visszarántuk a már-már pusztulásnak menő nemzetet.” Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 3.

<sup>170</sup> A politician of Christian Socialist background, Károly Huszár (1882–1941) had ascended to the premiership as a successor to István Friedrich in November 1919, in the process of constructing a more stable and internationally recognized coalition government. Huszár’s personal experiences of the Red Terror contributed to his austere counterrevolutionary rhetoric. MÉL: Huszár, Károly; Vidor 1922, 66–68.

<sup>171</sup> Calvary (Golgotha) was an established metaphor in the Hungarian mindset combining religious, historical and nationalist symbolism. Originally, the Hungarian nation had reached its Calvary at Mohács in 1526, whereas in the interwar era the referred place of mourning was moved to Trianon. Hanebrink 2006, 111–112; Nyssönen 1999, 44; Zeidler 2007, 187.

<sup>172</sup> “Évtizedeken át szisztematikusan előkészített belső rothasztás, kívülről érvényesülő propaganda, téveszméknek bontó ereje, békének csalfa reménye, nemzeti jelszavaknak csábító büverejébe burkolt demagógia felborították ennek az államnak belső rendjét; lerombolták a tekintélyeket, amelyek nélkül nemzet és állam fenn nem állhat; könnyelmű gazdálkodásukkal teljesen tönkretették az ország anyagi helyzetét. A polgári elemeknek gyengesége folyta a órától-óra folyton balfelé tolódott a nemzet és a végső pillanatban egy tudatos árulásnak következtében a nemzet csaknem a pusztulás elé került.” Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 3.

‘delusion’, ‘demagoguery’ and ‘mismanagement’. All this contributed to the narrative according to which the Liberals had but paved way for the Socialist takeover, not only in 1918–19 but already decades before that.<sup>173</sup> Still, the revolutions at the end of the war were the prime sources of Hungary’s downfall; in the Hungarian version of the German *Dolchstosslegende*,<sup>174</sup> the revolutions were the last straw that caused the collapse of the war effort; without these, much of the Greater Hungary could have been saved.<sup>175</sup> Thus the cornerstones of the counterrevolutionary state-building and nation-building were set, based on the denunciation and exclusion of the readily identified ‘un-Hungarian’ social groups.

Liberal Member Gábor Ugron<sup>176</sup> rose to defend liberalism in principle, but agreed that the concept had since been taken over by irresponsible forces:

“In our domestic policy the governments since 1867 slipped away from the liberalism of Gábor Bethlen, Lajos Kossuth and Ferenc Deák, and chose a false liberalism, and it is that very false liberalism that caused everything that followed.”<sup>177</sup>

Ugron did not accept the role of the sole scapegoat, and wanted to share the responsibility for the catastrophes with broader economic and societal forces. His rhetoric was also a part of the underlying conservatism present in the Hungarian liberal tradition, as it did indeed value parliamentarism and separation of powers but remained nationalist and societally elitist. By appealing to those tendencies and renouncing the Károlyi government, the post-war liberals attempted to legitimize their existence and regain some of their credibility.<sup>178</sup> Ugron’s redescription of the concept of ‘true’ liberalism connected it to the canonized Hungarian liberal statesmen, whose positive memory was undeniable, and attempted to disconnect himself from the ‘false’ revolutionary liberalism – and thus also from the responsibility. For the counterrevolutionary majority of the House, this was unacceptable; a response to Ugron by Zoltán Meskó of the radical Right showed that it was simple enough to present easily identifiable culprits – “Your voters!”<sup>179</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 3.

<sup>174</sup> Gerwarth 2017, 108, 124; Leonhard 2014, 880, 916; Romsics 2001, 22.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. István Bethlen’s speech on the memory of István Tisza in 1926, Bethlen 2000, 238. Leonhard remarks that similar narratives of homefront failing the war effort were commonplace in several countries in various phases of the war. Leonhard 2014, 630, 665.

<sup>176</sup> Wartime Minister of the Interior, lawyer Gábor Ugron (1880–1960) was an example of a pre-war Liberal politician, for whom Liberalism and Hungarian patriotism could be reconciled, and who also was ready to defend that position. MÉL: Ugron, Gábor; Vidor 1921, 153–154.

<sup>177</sup> “A belpolitikában a hatvanhetes kormányzatok lecsúsztak a Bethlen Gáborok, a Kossuth Lajosok és Deák Ferencek liberalizmusáról, és meghonosítottak egy álliberalizmust, amely álliberalizmusnak részben az eredménye mindaz, ami bekövetkezett.”, Gábor Ugron, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 68. Cf. Leonhard 2001, 366–368.

<sup>178</sup> Nagy 2002, 66; Püski 2006, 6–7; Vares & Vares 2019, 74–76.

<sup>179</sup> “Az önök választói!” Zoltán Meskó, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 68.

In an opposite attempt at redescription, György Szmerecsányi<sup>180</sup> used the occasion to remind the House of his earlier warnings about liberalism, which had now been vindicated:

“For two decades we were telling you that the false liberal direction, which has for four decades, at the expense of the Christian people and the national feeling, masterfully cultivated a foreign, destructive, international elements with all corruptive tools and weapons, resulting in the defeat of the nation, the national catastrophe and indeed a total annihilation.”<sup>181</sup>

Rhetorically building the continuity of corruption over decades, Szmerecsányi argued there was no distinction between ‘true’ or ‘false’ liberalism, as the ideology itself was depraved. The civil rights, which the liberals had cherished, had since lost the justification for their existence, as they had been abused for the revolutions.

“In this House, on these benches, when the question about the freedom of the press arose ... I was always among the first to rise in its defence and raise my voice on its behalf. But I apologize, the abuse of freedom of the press, which was one of the reasons of the national catastrophe, can no longer be tolerated, and it should be officially considered how the printing and publication of every destructive, internationalist paper under freemasonic direction – which only aims at poisoning the mind of the nation – can be prevented once and for all.”<sup>182</sup>

Speaking of his personal experience of and personal disillusionment with liberalism, Szmerecsányi thus demonstrated the rhetorical construction of *conditional liberty*; that civil rights were no more fundamental, they had to be suspended due to their abuse, and could only be returned after thorough consideration and upon the assurance that they would never again be used for

<sup>180</sup> Lawyer György Szmerecsányi (1876–1932) was elected to Parliament in 1905 on a Liberal ticket, but soon defected to the Catholic People’s Party (*Katolikus Néppárt*) and remained a proponent of political Catholicism ever since. As a member of the counterrevolutionary movement, he was involved in the plundering of the Soviet Republic’s legation in Vienna in 1919. After the revolution, he was briefly the chairman of the radical right ÉME, but later resigned due to his Habsburg legitimism. MÉL: Szmerecsányi, György; Vidor 1921, 142–143.

<sup>181</sup> “Két évtizeden keresztül hirdettük, hogy az az álliberális irány, amely négy évtized alatt a keresztény nép és a nemzeti eszme rovására egy idegen, destruktív, nemzetközi elemet a korrupció minden eszközével és fegyverével mesterségesen nagyra növesztett, végeredményben a nemzet bukását, a nemzet katasztrófáját és úgyszólván teljes megsemmisülését fogja okozni.” György Szmerecsányi, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 26. This argument was precisely in line with *The Three Generations* (Három nemzedék) by Gyula Sekfű, an influential narrative on recent history published in 1920, according to which the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had been an era of spurious liberalism that had constantly undermined Hungarian national sentiment and allowed the traditional Hungarian values to decline for the benefit of foreign influence. See Szekfű 1920.

<sup>182</sup> “Ebben a házban ezekről a padokról, amikor a sajtószabadságról volt szó ... mindig egyike voltam az elsőnek, aki annak védelmére keltem és érte szót emeltem. De bocsánatot kérek, a sajtószabadsággal való az a visszaélés, amely egyik oka volt az ország katasztrófájának, tovább nem tűrhető és intézményesen gondoskodni kell arról, hogy minden destruktív, internacionális és szabadkőmives irányú sajtónak – amely csak a nemzet lelkének megmérgezésére szolgál – megjelenése, nyomása nálunk egzszermindenkorra akadályoztassék.” György Szmerecsányi, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 28.

agitation. The definition of the enemy was also symptomatic of the era: the concepts of ‘internationalism’ and ‘freemasonry’ were vague enough to be connected at will with any dubious groups and most often used to denote Socialists and Jews.<sup>183</sup>

Herein lay the central antagonizing discourse that became emphasized and repeated countless times: even though liberalism had a lot to answer for, it was Socialism which was still more wrong and totally intolerable. The Socialists had dented everything the conservatives held sacred. Religious and nationalist conceptions of sanctity were thus actively intermingled to demonstrate the wretchedness of the Soviet Republic:

“On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, from this very same lectern, the president of the so-called Soviet Republic ... said that their class regime could only be created if the old one is terminated and all the old organs demolished. He literally said: ‘We shall banish the millennial constitution forever and, by so doing, bring satisfaction to the hearts of millions and millions of proletarians.’ Such disgraceful words have not been uttered ever in any nation’s Parliament ... and we shall cleanse this House and this Hall of such disgrace ... As their first deed they proclaimed the annihilation and destruction of everything that is Christian and Hungarian in this country. This House itself was turned into a shameful torture chamber ... where the finest sons of the nation were tortured to death just for being self-respecting patriots, Hungarians and Christians ... May they now rest in peace in their graves, as the following generations must never forget their names.<sup>184</sup>

Referring to the threat to the ‘millennial constitution’, one of the core concepts of conservative self-understanding, Huszár concretized how utterly un-Hungarian the Communists had been. The argument also brought the infamy of the Communist regime to very tangible levels, to the floor of the House, also linking the dismay to the personal experiences the Members had from the revolutionary years. With it, the martyrdom of parliamentarians, especially the former Prime Minister István Tisza, became one of the cornerstones of the counterrevolutionary liturgy.<sup>185</sup> Cleansing of the House had also concrete

<sup>183</sup> See e.g. Sluga 2013, 42–44.

<sup>184</sup> “Ebből az elnöki székéből június 15-én az úgynevezett Tanácsköztársaságnak az elnöke ... azt mondta, hogy az ő osztályuralmuk csak akkor jöhet létre, ha a régit megszüntetik, ha a réginek minden szervét elpusztítják. Szó szerint mondta; ‘Ezeresztendő alkotmányt teszünk sirba örökre s ezzel eleget teszünk millió és millió proletár szívének.’ Szégyenteljesebb szavak nem hangzottak el még egyetlen egy nemzetnek képviselőházában sem ... és le kell mosnunk erről a Házzal és erről a teremről azt a gyalázatot ... Mint első jelenség mutatkozott mindannak kiirtása és elpusztítása ebben az országban, ami keresztény és ami magyar. Ez a Ház maga szégyenteljes kinzókamrává változott ... ahol hazánknek legjobb fiait halálra kínozták csak azért, mert önérzetes honpolgárok, magyarok és keresztények voltak ... Pihenjenek nyugodtan sírjaikban, az utánuk jövő nemzedék neveiket elfelejteni soha sem fogja.” Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 3–4. On the complementary and entangled roles of religion and nationalism, see e.g. Anderson 2007, 45–47.

<sup>185</sup> István Rakovszky, 18.2.1920, NN I/1920, 16. Wartime Prime Minister István Tisza, largely held responsible for Hungary’s entry in the World War, was murdered by demobilized soldiers on 31 October 1918, shortly after the armistice. The martyrdom of Tisza in the hands of revolutionary mob became one of the core counterrevolutionary narratives. Cartledge 2006, 260–262, 301–302, 319.

implications, including the White Terror in its entirety and ranging to the Social Democrats' (forced) withdrawal from the 1920 elections.<sup>186</sup>

In order to deny any legitimacy of the revolutionaries, the Socialists were presented as originating from narrow circles and secret societies, never supported by the broader public:

"They [the Socialist intelligentsia] did not speak in the name of the millions in the Hungarian working class, but in the name of secret societies and the small numbers of conspirators ... we can tell you here in this National Assembly that the majority of the Hungarian working class held completely aloof from that, and it was only those, from the intelligentsia, who now after the collapse of Hungary, fled the country they had left in ruins, and who still conspire against their fatherland from abroad."<sup>187</sup>

Here became apparent both strands of the post-war political reconstruction discourse, namely counterrevolution and consolidation, illuminating how they complemented each other with the same explicit goal of maintaining the old order. The Hungarian working class was given a conditional amnesty, when the 'real' culprits could be identified in politically more acceptable and more easily excluded groups. Yet, to make things straight, this did not hinder the government from raising collective suspicion against the working class for their inclination towards Socialism from time to time, when politically necessary. "No one who committed such heinous crimes against the nation, can go unpunished, and every one shall be counted, for every deed, from the first moments to the present."<sup>188</sup> Suspects could be found everywhere, including schools, where teachers had allegedly spread Communist agenda.<sup>189</sup>

The anti-Semitic agenda also became more obvious as the debate went on. By using consecutive, more and less suggestive appellations for the revolutionaries, including "vandals", "jailbirds", "dregs of society" and finally "a degenerate race",<sup>190</sup> Huszár directed the House's attention to the desired and designated scapegoats, and was rewarded with responses such as "Jewish trash!

<sup>186</sup> The Social Democrats were partly boycotting the election, partly discouraged from participating. Turbucz 2014, 70–71; Varga 2005, 91–92.

<sup>187</sup> "Nem a magyar munkásosztály milliói nevében, hanem titkos társaságoknak és kevés számú összeesküvők cinkostársaságának nevében beszéltek ők ... itt ezen a Nemzetgyűlésen elmondhatjuk, hogy a magyar munkásságnak nagy többsége teljesen távol állott ettől és ez csak azoknak a lelki világából származott, akik most az összeomlás után itthagyták romokban heverő hazájukat s a külföldön még ma is konspirálnak hazájuk ellen." Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 4.

<sup>188</sup> "Senki büntetlenül nem maradhat, aki ezt a nagy bűnt a nemzet ellen elkövette és mindenki számolni tartozik minden cselekedetéért, amit az első pillanattól mindmáig tett." Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 5.

<sup>189</sup> Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 5.

<sup>190</sup> "... rombolók, börtöntöltelékeknek, a társadalom szemetét ... Egy dégénéralt világfaj...", Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 4. Dehumanizing and denationalizing the enemy, creating the negative stereotype of 'wandering Jews' or 'internationalist Bolsheviks' was a central part of the counterrevolutionary rhetoric and the legitimization of the retribution. See Gerwarth 2017, 139, 143.

Galicians!"<sup>191</sup>, to which Huszár in turn answered with a rather weak disclaimer: "Not only them, but those who were, they all deserve the name of trash."<sup>192</sup>

Finally, Huszár's narrative of suffering reached its climax by presenting a barrage of the most gruesome images of the counterrevolutionary iconography about the atrocities of the Soviet Republic, and then, the redemption in the form of the National Army and Miklós Horthy:

"And just when it was no longer allowed to openly fly the national tricolour flag in Hungary, when it was not allowed to praise God freely, when there was a real persecution of Christians going on in the country, when prisons were full and the innocent hostages were being mentally tortured by constant death threats, when Szamuely's Death Train rushed around the Hungarian Plain and Transdanubia, when the Lenin Boys held every bourgeois family of Budapest in desperate agitation, when the dictates echoed even in the smallest of villages, just then the brave and resolute Hungarian men, officers and civilians alike, arose and stood against that current. Thanks and glory be to the National Army and its Commander."<sup>193</sup>

In the politicization of history, concepts such as "millennial Hungary" and "ancient constitution"<sup>194</sup> were used to present the basis and the normal: the nation that had existed, prospered, secured its position and fought for it. Millennial Hungary referred to the mediaeval kingdom of St. Stephen, which was in turn directly equated with the pre-WWI Greater Hungary.<sup>195</sup> In addition, the ancient role of Hungary as the eastern bulwark of the West and of Christendom, which had always withstood the onslaught of the East, was redescribed to Hungary's heroic role in repelling the Communist threat:<sup>196</sup>

<sup>191</sup> "Zsidősöpredék! Galíciaiak!" Anonymous interruptions from the House, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 4.

<sup>192</sup> "Nem csak azok voltak, de akik voltak, azok mind megérdemlik a söpredék nevet." Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 4.

<sup>193</sup> "És mikor nem volt többé szabad Magyarországon nemzetiszínű zászlót kitűzni, mikor nem volt többé szabad Istent szabadon dicsérni, mikor valóságos keresztényüldözés volt ebben az országban, mikor tele voltak a börtönök és ártatlan túszokat halálos félelmek között lelkileg kegyetlenül kínoztak, mikor Szamuelynek a halálvonata száguldott végig a magyar rónán és a Dunántúlon, mikor a Lenini fiúk Budapestnek minden polgári családját kétségbeesett izgalomban tartották, mikor a direktóriumok garázdálkodtak az utolsó faluban is, akkor összeállottak bátor és elszánt magyar férfiak, tiszték és polgári emberek és szembeszálltak ezzel az áramlattal. Hála és dicsőség a nemzeti hadseregnek és fővezérének." Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 5. A comrade-in-arms of Béla Kun, Tibor Szamuely (1890–1919) held numerous posts during the Soviet Republic, including the Deputy People's Commissar of War and Head of the Military Tribunal of the Red Army. Szamuely was known for his uncompromising radicalism and ruthlessness in the face of counterrevolutionaries. He was the leader of a paramilitary detachment dubbed the 'Lenin Boys', who, travelling on an armoured train ('the Death Train'), committed some of the most infamous acts of Red Terror. By 1920, narratives of these had already been incorporated in the counterrevolutionary language as examples of the complete wretchedness of the Reds and as legitimation of the retribution. MÉL: Szamuely, Tibor; see also Turbucz 2014, 74–75.

<sup>194</sup> "... ezeréves Magyarország", "ősi alkotmány", Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 5.

<sup>195</sup> Despite the numerous breaks in the statehood or territorial integrity. See e.g. Cartledge 2006.

<sup>196</sup> This kind of rhetoric was also part of the post-war transnational discourse; in their respective nation-building processes also Finland and Poland were eager to appropriate the same role. Vares & Vares 2019, 123, 255.



“We, Hungarians, have always been those at whom the Asian shockwave has stricken first and it was our circulation, our national life and common thought, which the Asian spiritual plague first infected. As so many times before, again the Hungarian nation with its Christian morals and defiant resistance has broken the onslaught of the spiritual current that was endangering the whole of Europe.”<sup>197</sup>

The counterrevolutionary nationalism could also easily be directed against dubious foreign powers that had – or might have – supported and encouraged the revolutionaries:

“Not only the mental aberrations, not only the anarchistic immorality and sick perversion were the sources of what happened, but also foreign money, foreign thought and foreign aims. Béla Kun himself wrote in one of his letters: ‘I am not ashamed but proud of that in this struggle the German Spartacists also supported us. I am not ashamed to acknowledge the support received in Roubles, but proud that Radek and I have been worthy of their trust and shall continue to be so.’ They tried to break down the internal order of this nation with foreign money, and the source of that foreign money knew well what it was trying to accomplish.”<sup>198</sup>

Among them, Soviet Russia was the natural and obvious culprit, but the same suspicion could actively also be directed at Hungary’s neighbours, such as Romania, with which Hungary had the on-going border dispute and which was accused of harbouring the expelled Hungarian Socialists.<sup>199</sup>

Huszár also gave a temporal dimension to the environment of the parliamentary work, emphasizing that it should keep in pace with the ever-quickenning tempo of world history. Therefore the House should not let petty disagreements or formal impediments slow it down, but take the needed resolutions in the spirit of patriotic duty.

“The wheel of world history now rotates more quickly, and the parliaments and assemblies have to adapt to it in their work. The legislature which cannot keep pace with history is not suitable for this time. Therefore we should resolve all our problems without lasting debates, taking into account all the sacred interests of the nation, with the tempo, wisdom and intrepidity, which the foreign and domestic political situation correspondingly demands.”<sup>200</sup>

<sup>197</sup> “Mi, magyarok, voltunk megint azok, akiken ez az ázsiai hullám először átcsapott és ez az ázsiai szellemi pestis először a mi vérkeringésünket, a mi nemzeti életünk közgondolkodását inficiálta. Amint azonban a múltban már annyiszor, most újból az egész európai civilizációt veszélyeztető ez a szellemi áramlat a magyar nemzetnek keresztény erkölcsén és a nemzetnek dacos magyar ellenállásán tört meg.” Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 5.

<sup>198</sup> “Nemcsak a szellemi eltévelyedések és nemcsak anarchisztikus erkölcstelenség és beteges perverzítás volt a forrása annak, ami történt, hanem ezenkívül idegen pénz, idegen gondolat és idegen célok is. Maga Kun Béla írta egyik levelében: ‘Nem szégyenlem, de büszke vagyok rá, hogy ebben a küzdelemben a német spartakusok is támogattak bennünket. Nem szégyelem ezt a rubelben kifejezett támogatást megköszönni, de büszke vagyok arra, hogy Radek és én szolgáltunk leginkább az ő bizalmukra és rá is fogok ezentúl is szolgálni.’ Külföldi pénzzel próbálták itt ennek a nemzetnek belső rendjét megbontani, és az a külföldi pénzbefolyás tudta, hogy mit akar itt ezzel elérni.” Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 5.

<sup>199</sup> Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 86–87.

<sup>200</sup> “A világtörténelem kereke most gyorsabban forog, s a parlamentek és a népképviselők munkájának is ehhez kell alkalmazkodnia. Az a törvényhozás, amely nem tud lépést tartani a históriával, nem méltó az időhöz. Nekünk tehát

Huszár made use of the transnational modernization in the conceptualization of parliamentary life,<sup>201</sup> but redescribed it as a need for patriotic consensus. The chosen course demanded joint ‘constructive’ action:

“...we should unite all the constructive forces and push away from the nation’s path everyone who now, whether for individual or party political reasons, puts obstacles in the path of national reorganization in foreign and domestic policy.”<sup>202</sup>

Huszár’s parallel returned to where he had begun; the menace of petty politicking, which had rendered the political system impotent and vulnerable in the pre-war decades. Indicative of the new parliamentary culture he wanted to bring about, he presented a normative ultimatum to all members of parliament to either support the chosen direction or be frozen out.

The newly elected Speaker István Rakovszky,<sup>203</sup> too, outlined the policy of reconstruction based on consensus, where differences were to be set aside in the interests of the nation, and positioned himself as the guardian of such procedure.<sup>204</sup> Rakovszky also underlined the importance of civilized debate between government and opposition, and warned against any kind of unparliamentary oppression:

“It is never allowed to be forgotten that the House Rules contain, along with the instructions to ensure the uninterrupted flow of the debate, another instruction, and it is that to defend the opposition against the potential excesses of the majority, as the minority is an integral part of Parliament, without the opposition there cannot develop a healthy parliamentary life. The opposition is an opponent, but not an enemy.”<sup>205</sup>

As honest as Rakovszky himself was in protecting the House Rules and the fair treatment of the opposition, in the long run the promise turned out to be arguable

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mindezeket a problémákat hosszas viták nélkül, a nemzet minden szent érdekének figyelembevételével, azzal a gyorsasággal, bölcseséggel és elszántsággal kell elhatározni, amint azt a kül- és belpolitikai helyzet egyaránt parancsolja.” Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 6.

<sup>201</sup> Ihalainen 2017, 13.

<sup>202</sup> “... fogjanak össze az összes konstruktív erők, és távolítsanak el a nemzet útjából mindenkit, aki most akár egyéni, akár pártszempontból akadályokat gördít annak a gondolatnak az útjába, hogy ez a nemzet külpolitikailag és belpolitikailag mint újjászervezendő ....” Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 7.

<sup>203</sup> Christian Nationalist politician István Rakovszky (1858–1931) had parliamentary experience from the pre-war years, having served as vice-speaker already in 1905–1910. As the Speaker he closely observed the House Rules and equal and impartial freedom of speech, which brought him into conflict with the government that deemed him too lenient towards the opposition, and eventually led to his resignation from his post in 1921. During the return attempts of King Charles, he chose active legitimism and accepted a position in the short-lived counter-government under Charles. The failure of the royal *putsch* in October 1921 positioned him on the fringe of the legitimist opposition with little political influence left. Lengyel & Vidor 2022, 149–152; MÉL: Rakovszky, István.

<sup>204</sup> István Rakovszky, 18.2.1920, NN I/1920, 14.

<sup>205</sup> “Sohasem szabad elfelednie, hogy a házszabályoknak azon rendeltetésén kívül, hogy a tanácskozás zavartalan lefolyását biztosítsák, egy másik rendeltetésük is van, és ez az, hogy az ellenzéknek a többség esetleges túlkapásai ellen megvédjék, mert a kisebbség is a parlamentnek integráns része, ellenzék nélkül egészséges parlamentáris élet nem fejlődhet ki. Az ellenzék ellenfél, de nem ellenség.” István Rakovszky, Speaker of the National Assembly, 18.2.1920, NN I/1920, 14.

at best. Even though the parliamentary debate remained polyphonic throughout the interwar era, the parliamentary procedure and the prerogative of the Speaker were repeatedly used to silence and obstruct the opposition.

The speeches of Huszár and Rakovszky, in their dual nature as patriotic rituals and state-building proclamations, epitomized the ideals that had already been in the making during the counterrevolutionary campaign. Hungary should choose nationalism over internationalism, Christianity over godless Socialism – not to mention Christianity as a distinction from Jewry – and draw essence from its original and vital agrarian class and millennial heritage. Parliament was seen especially by Huszár as an arena of petty politicking, which jeopardized the efficiency of government and the unity of the nation, as it had done before the war, and therefore Parliament and parliamentary life should be subordinated to the vague concept of ‘national progress’, then redescribed by the government to suit whatever needs.

## 2.2.2 Redescriptions of constitutionalism

Béla Turi,<sup>206</sup> presenting the Restoration Bill, continued the narrative of tragedy, now as a legitimation for the Restoration Bill:

“Not only is the greatness of the national misfortune brought upon us without parallel, but also the constitutional situation we are in ... we stand among the ruins of our territorial integrity, the life of the nation, but also of our constitution”<sup>207</sup>

Turi’s temporal and legal conceptualization of politics stated that the constitutional order had ceased with the stepping down of the King and the dissolution of the bicameral Parliament in November 1918. Thus, by definition, no subsequent government had been constitutional: “the flow of constitutional life was broken and terminated”<sup>208</sup> The complete delegitimization of the revolutionary governments in turn legitimized bringing the constitutional models almost entirely from the past, as no reforms of the revolutionary era needed to be taken into account.

However, even when the liberal reforms were delegitimized, the broader suffrage – an unwanted state of affairs for the old elite *an sich* – was on that very moment turned into a proof of the government’s broad mandate: the present, unicameral National Assembly was the best suited in history to give a new direction to the country and fulfil the will of the nation.<sup>209</sup> Naturally, in their rhetoric, that nation was the organic and exclusive one, which had already

<sup>206</sup> In the position of priest, Member of Parliament and journalist on various Catholic newspapers, Béla Turi (1875–1936) was influential in putting political Catholicism in the service of counterrevolutionary nation-building. MÉL: Turi, Béla, Vidor 1921, 152–153.

<sup>207</sup> “... nemcsak a ránk szakadt nemzeti szerencsétlenség nagysága példátlan, hanem ezeréves történelmünkben példa nélkül áll az az alkotmányjogi helyzet is, amelyben vagyunk ... nemcsak területi integritásunk, nemzeti létünk, de voltaképpen alkotmányunk romjai között járunk.” Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 51.

<sup>208</sup> Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 52.

<sup>209</sup> Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 54.

delegated its will to the present counterrevolutionary House to complete the post-war and post-revolutionary normalization without veering towards the dangerous paths of Liberalism. That occasion was also a point where it was necessary to emphasize the democratic nature of the counterrevolutionary regime in order to parry the international criticism of Hungary: "We stand against all dictatorships, as representatives of a healthy democracy, built on moral basis."<sup>210</sup> - 'moral basis' being the rhetorical backdoor that was subsequently used to redescribe and subordinate democracy.

In his speech, Turi attempted to combine and harmonize the two contradictory currents of the counterrevolutionary state-building. On the one hand, the political normalization required broad national consensus and avoiding any party-political strife; on the other hand, the choice of the concept of constitutionalism and constitutional life as the lodestars of the restoration inevitably included parliamentarism. Thus the very concept of constitution was effectively *retro-described* along the lines of the early-modern political thought:<sup>211</sup>

"The form is not important here. I am asking you whether the spirit of the modern constitution lies in its institutions and its written form, or would it not be the spirit, which lies in the living reality of the constitution, in the organic constitutional life of the nation? The constitution is a living organism, which, just like every organism, is able to use its inner laws to create for itself those institutions for which it has need."<sup>212</sup>

This argument was at the core of the depoliticizing tendency, as the concept of constitution was rhetorically separated from its modern conceptualization and returned to the pre-modern, organic form, where it would not need the ordinary institutions but to create them - if and when needed. Bishop Ottokár Prohászka<sup>213</sup> also concurred with the special nature of the Hungarian constitution, Hungarian national spirit and the present situation, where Hungary did not have the need or even possibility to model its constitution on Western Europe, but had to stand firm on the national policy, as it was the only way out of the crisis.<sup>214</sup>

<sup>210</sup> "Mi minden diktatúrával szemben egy egészséges, erkölcsi alapon nyugvó demokrácia nak a képviselői vagyunk." Károly Huszár, 16.2.1920, NN I/1920, 4. Constructing democracy and opposing dictatorship was the necessary rhetorical lodestar in the post-war constitutional debates in the countries striving for domestic legitimacy and international recognition, such as Germany and Finland. See e.g. Ihalainen 2017, 432-436.

<sup>211</sup> See Ihalainen 2009a, Ihalainen 2009b.

<sup>212</sup> "A forma itt nem fontos. En azt kérdezem, hogy ha a modern alkotmányosságnak ez a szelleme ott, ahol arra intézmények vannak, ahol arra írott alkotmány van: csak ott nem volna ez az alkotmányosságnak a szelleme, ahol az alkotmány élő valóság, ahol az alkotmány voltaképpen a nemzetnek organikus élete? Az alkotmány élő organizmus, amely, mint minden organizmus, a maga belső törvényei alapján meg tudja teremteni magának azokat a szerveket, amelyekre életében szüksége van." Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 54.

<sup>213</sup> Ottokár Prohászka (1858-1927), bishop of Székesfehérvár, originally a modernist Catholic and Christian Socialist reform politician, chose a more decidedly nationalist position during the counterrevolutionary years and was until his death one of the central proponents of the Christian National thought. Hanebrink 2006, 92; MÉL: Prohászka, Ottokár; Vidor 1921, 108-109.

<sup>214</sup> Ottokár Prohászka, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 65.

Radical, first-term Members such as Gyula Zakány<sup>215</sup> and László Budaváry<sup>216</sup> also used the occasion to present an even more overtly Christian-national action plan. As the Christian nation had at last got on its feet, it indeed had right to concentrate on the well-being of its kin – at the expense of the minorities, especially the Jews.<sup>217</sup> Budaváry presented the often-applied stereotype of wandering Jews, so-called Galicians, who had arrived in Hungary with the other (and more legitimate) refugees after the war, and were now earning fortunes at the expense of the poor Hungarians.<sup>218</sup> This was then generalized to apply to all Hungarian Jews, and was presented simply as a justification for confiscating their property.<sup>219</sup> They also had their say about the parliamentary work, the pace of which must be accelerated, the peacetime formalities abandoned and the legislation put into effect immediately.<sup>220</sup> Their radical voices represented a rising force in Hungarian politics, an upcoming divide between the conservatives and the radical Right, which in the 1930s would turn into an intense conflict over political power.<sup>221</sup>

Huszár, in turn, promised that the government would speed up the legislation, and there would be no question whether the House would have enough work, but whether it should have the will to accomplish it.<sup>222</sup> Again, the ideal of a parliamentary procedure did not include lengthy speeches and debates, but the “wise, useful, forceful decision-making that the whole country expects from us.”<sup>223</sup> The Members were presented with a mandate from and responsibility to the whole nation, where no partisanship or individualism was allowed:

“... without partisanship, every party and every Member, equally from the Right and the Left, should only act and speak in this House in accordance with the interest of the fatherland and the nation, and the interests of every individual and every party should be put aside in relation to them.”<sup>224</sup>

<sup>215</sup> Having served as a field chaplain during the World War, Gyula Zakány (b. 1889) joined the ÉME early and participated in the counterrevolutionary campaign, being already then known for his radical Right orientation and anti-Semitism. Vidor 1921, 165–166.

<sup>216</sup> László Budaváry (b. 1889), Christian Nationalist politician, teacher of religion and war veteran, also concentrated in the ‘Jewish question’ during his political career. Vidor 1921, 79.

<sup>217</sup> László Budaváry, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 35.

<sup>218</sup> László Budaváry, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 34–35. See also Gerwarth 2017, 145; Hanebrink 2006, 57. However, the demographics of refugee movement to Hungary in the immediate post-war years reveal that the discourse of ‘wandering Jews’ was unfounded: nearly all refugees settling in Hungary were ethnic Hungarians from the ceded territories. As a result of Trianon, the percentage of Jews in the Hungarian population increased only slightly, from 5,1 to 5,9 per cent, and those staying in Hungary were still the most integrated ones. Romsics 1999, 58; Ungváry 2013, 27, 31; Zeidler 2007, 45.

<sup>219</sup> László Budaváry, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 34–35.

<sup>220</sup> Gyula Zakány, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 33–34; László Budaváry, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 35.

<sup>221</sup> See e.g. Püski 2006, 70–80, 265–270; Romsics 1995, 322–342.

<sup>222</sup> Károly Huszár, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 31.

<sup>223</sup> “... bölcs, üdvös, erélyes határozatokat vár tőlünk az egész ország.” Károly Huszár, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 31.

<sup>224</sup> “... pártkülönbség nélkül, jobbról és balról egyaránt minden párt és minden képviselő csak azt tegye és azt mondja ebben a teremben, ami a hazának és a nemzet

Gábor Ugron, however, as the sole liberal voice raised in the debate, argued that one could not choose partial democracy or only select those parts one pleases, but must accept democracy and constitutionalism in their entirety. He also opposed the current of the Hungarian *Sonderweg* of constitutionalism, instead invoking the widely accepted argument of Hungary as the bulwark of western civilization, and argued that it should even now embrace the western model of constitutional reform.<sup>225</sup> His voice was all but silenced by the counterrevolutionary consensus. As the Restoration Bill was passed with an overwhelming majority, the ‘return to constitutional life’ in the newly elected Parliament did indeed point out the quasi-democratic nature of interwar Hungary, where the rhetorical construction of national unity was used to diminish the role of political pluralism.

### 2.2.3 The firm hand of the Regent

Redescribing and reinterpreting the “ancient Hungarian constitution”,<sup>226</sup> Béla Turi argued that the monarchical power in Hungary had always been based on the nation, and not even the hereditary monarchy of the Habsburg era could negate that.<sup>227</sup> Therefore, the nation also had a right to choose the Head of State, as the throne had been left empty.<sup>228</sup> Moreover, the Holy Crown of St. Stephen was the epitome of the national will and the source of any monarch’s power, fundamentally independent of the person of the ruler:<sup>229</sup> “The Holy Crown is the expression of the state power, which has roots in the Nation, and is bestowed upon the king only through the act of coronation.”<sup>230</sup> The Crown bound together nation and realm: it represented every Hungarian, and, what is even more important, it stood for territorial integrity – thus it was presented as the legitimation of Greater Hungary and its reinstatement, in a contingent political situation, where many Hungarians still believed their cause would prevail in the negotiations for post-war borders.<sup>231</sup>

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egyetemes érdekének áll szolgálatában, és minden egyéni és minden részleges pártérdek háttérbe szoruljon ezzel szemben.” Károly Huszár, 23.2.1920, NN I/1920, 31.

<sup>225</sup> Gábor Ugron, NN I/1920, 27.2.1920, 70. It must, however, be noted that for Ugron, too, ‘western constitutionalism’ was not irreconcilable with Hungarian nationalism, defiance of the Entente plans of Hungary’s borders, or Hungary’s leading role in Central Europe. In a comparative perspective, it was commonplace to use the ‘western ideals’ or ‘western model’ as catchwords in the post-war state-building debates, yet give them profoundly vernacular content when applied to domestic traditions and history; see Ihalainen 2017, 20, 29, 66.

<sup>226</sup> “... ősi magyar alkotmány”, Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 53.

<sup>227</sup> Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 53.

<sup>228</sup> Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 53.

<sup>229</sup> Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 53.

<sup>230</sup> “Á szent korona annak a köz hatalomnak a kifejezője, amely a nemzetben bírja a gyökerét és a királyra, a királyi hatalomra is csak a korona útján, a koronázás által a nemzettől ruháztatik át.” Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 53.

<sup>231</sup> Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 53. Turi utilized the ‘tenet of the Holy Crown’ (*Szent Korona -tan*), stemming from mediaeval times and invoked since then to justify Hungarian rule over Greater Hungary and the indivisibility of the realm. Nyysönen 2001, 156–165.

Gyula Andrásy,<sup>232</sup> in turn, linked the value of the Crown to the memory of the revolutions and very concretely to the dismemberment of Greater Hungary; in abandoning the Crown, the revolutionaries had given the successor states freedom to break their oaths of loyalty to Hungary. The nations that had once been loyal to the Crown acknowledged no obligations towards revolutionary Hungary and went on to occupy parts of its territory.<sup>233</sup> Andrásy's argumentation stemmed from his Habsburg legitimism and included a veiled criticism of Turi; as Hungary had abandoned its rightful King, so also was the authority of the Crown now null and void.

For Rezső Rupert,<sup>234</sup> an agrarian nationalist and anti-Habsburg with a liberal approach, the Holy Crown was an important safeguard of constitutionalism: it was a link between nation and ruler, which guaranteed that the will of the people would be exercised through the ruler.<sup>235</sup> As an illuminating example of the tendency to apply the same central concepts and values for differing aims, Rupert thus applied the universal respect for the Crown to support his arguments against authoritarianism and for constitutionalism.

Active contemplation on the position of the monarch may in hindsight appear strange, but arguments on this abounded in the early 1920s, when it actually appeared feasible to elect a new King.<sup>236</sup> At that moment, however, no King could be crowned and therefore the Restoration Bill included the provision to elect a Regent. The debate took place at a moment when it was already clear that Admiral Horthy was the only viable option for the position.<sup>237</sup> The Members debated on the matter, trying not to mention the name of the Regent-to-be, and used historico-political arguments to make it obvious that a regency was at that moment the right choice.<sup>238</sup>

History politics were also invoked in defining the prerogatives of the Regent: indeed, their definition began with those of the King, with few

<sup>232</sup> Count Gyula Andrásy (1860–1929), son of the reformist politician and 1848 veteran Gyula Andrásy (1823–1890), himself a veteran Member of Parliament since 1885 and multiple minister, Christian nationalist and Habsburg legitimist. In 1921, along with Rakovszky, he sided with King Charles in his return attempts, which moved him to the opposition ranks for the rest of his life. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 6–12; MÉL: Andrásy, Gyula; Vidor 1921, 2–6.

<sup>233</sup> Gyula Andrásy, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 72.

<sup>234</sup> Lawyer and journalist Rezső Rupert (1880–1961) was a supporter of the ideals of the 1918 revolution but was driven into exile during the Soviet Republic. He continued to support liberal politics and criticize the authoritarian policies of the government and demand civil rights during the counterrevolutionary era. A member of the Smallholder party until 1921, then a member of the Liberal opposition. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 159–161; MÉL: Rupert, Rezső; Vidor 1921, 119.

<sup>235</sup> Rezső Rupert, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 58–59. This argument again echoes the transnational discourses over the future political development in the post-war Europe; for example, a similar idea of a 'refined' constitutional monarchy, with the ruler remaining as a consolidating factor, was also prevalent in the German debates on the form the state should assume during the transitional period at the end of the World War. Ihalainen 2017, 53, 329, 403, 434–435; Leonhard 2014, 890, 893; Vares & Vares 2019, 40–41.

<sup>236</sup> Ormos 2006, 65–66; Turbucz 2014, 106–107

<sup>237</sup> Horthy had, through preliminary negotiations and extra-parliamentary pressure secured the outcome of the election. Püski 2006, 17–19; Turbucz 2014, 88–92.

<sup>238</sup> See e.g. Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 56.

restrictions; the Regent should not have right to bestow titles of nobility, nor to appoint bishops, and could only grant general amnesty in accordance with Parliament.<sup>239</sup> Effectively, however, the Regent was given a strong position, close to that of a constitutional monarch, a resolution partly based on preceding negotiations between the government and Horthy; even though Horthy himself had earlier abandoned any visions of military dictatorship offered to him by the radical counterrevolutionaries, he wanted to retain the *symbolic* and *potential* power to be exercised in a state of emergency.<sup>240</sup>

One of the strongest prerogatives ascribed to the Regent was the right to dissolve Parliament. Turi defended it, once again with an interesting redescription of democracy and constitution: the Regent should have the power to act in cases where Parliament had abandoned constitutionalism.<sup>241</sup> The idea and the very conceptualization of a constitution as a patriotic Hungarian tradition was thus deemed higher and more authoritative than any actual political procedures.

Andrássy was another in favour of a strong Regent. According to him, it was not merely the person of the Regent, who might jeopardize constitutional progress, but Parliament and partisanship therein, as shown by the example of pre-war political stalemates.<sup>242</sup> In such a case, if the absolute majority in Parliament resorted to arbitrary means, the only instrument the opposition would have at its disposal would be obstruction, crippling the parliamentary activity, which was not a better choice. Therefore, the Regent should always enjoy the right to dissolve Parliament.<sup>243</sup> This right, argued Andrássy, could never lead to dictatorship by the Regent, as it returned the choice to the nation, the real and sovereign source of power.<sup>244</sup>

Prohászka concurred, stating that at least he was not afraid of granting extensive powers to the Regent. He pointed out that lack of leadership might be as dangerous to the nation as absolutism.<sup>245</sup>

“I am not afraid of the strong hand. We are in need of a strong hand, not a fist that strikes, but a strong hand, which has a firm grasp and secures our progress in the chosen direction.”<sup>246</sup>

Concrete definitions of the strong hands of the Regent were – not coincidentally – almost identical to those on the pro-Horthy posters distributed to the streets of

<sup>239</sup> Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 56.

<sup>240</sup> Turbucz 2014, 85–86, 90–92, 117–119.

<sup>241</sup> Béla Turi, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 57.

<sup>242</sup> Gyula Andrássy, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 73. Ironically, Andrássy himself had been a textbook example of the ‘pre-war petty politicking’, including parliamentary obstruction and party defections, but at the moment not personally touched by the critique, as he was an ardent supporter of the counterrevolution. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 6–12; Vidor 1921, 2–6.

<sup>243</sup> Gyula Andrássy, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 74.

<sup>244</sup> Gyula Andrássy, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 74–75.

<sup>245</sup> Ottokár Prohászka, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 64.

<sup>246</sup> “Nem félünk az erős kéztől. Nekünk erős kéz kell, de nem ököl, amely lecsap, hanem erős kéz, amely a gyepőt tartsa és a haladásnak biztos irányát biztosítsa. Nekünk ilyen erős kéz kell.” Ottokár Prohászka, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 64.



Budapest, which depicted two hands at the helm of a ship's wheel (see Figure 1 below).<sup>247</sup> For Prohászka, too, the identity of the Regent was clear from the start and he contributed to constructing and reinforcing the image, where the status of Regent and the person of Horthy were merged.<sup>248</sup>



Figure 1. Pro-Horthy poster (Manno Miltiades, 1919, republished in Turbucz 2014).

The debate was closed by Prime Minister Huszár, reiterating his faith in the Regency and the Regent:

“But because at this moment it can be seen that the unquestionable vast majority of the National Assembly wants a guarantee ... a guarantee that one person's will should not be directed against the will of the people: I can assure you. I believe that whoever becomes Regent, his constitutional sentiment and his superior patriotism will ensure that this nation retains its certain, democratic right to a vote of no-confidence.”<sup>249</sup>

Establishing a Regency entailed a great deal political manoeuvring on behalf of the interim government. It had to create a solution that would suit most supporters of the counterrevolutionary regime under construction, ranging from the Legitimist aristocracy to the radical Right and even to the smallholders with Liberal leanings such as Rupert. The lowest common denominator was found on the historico-political redescriptions of Hungary's ‘ancient constitutionalism’

<sup>247</sup> There exists that conceptual peculiarity in the Hungarian language that the word *kormány* in addition to meaning ‘government’, refers to a ‘steering wheel’ and thus the word for ‘regent’, *kormányzó*, is quite literally ‘the man at the helm’. Nyssönen 1999, 33.

<sup>248</sup> Ottokár Prohászka, 26.2.1920, NN I/1920, 64–65. On the pro-Horthy propaganda, see Turbucz 2014, 88.

<sup>249</sup> “De miután ebben a pillanatban azt kell látni, hogy a Nemzetgyűlésnek kétségbevonhatatlan túlnyomó nagy többsége ebben az időben garanciát akar ... garanciát arra nézve, hogy egy embernek az akarata az egész nemzetnek akaratával szembe ne helyezkedhessen: számolok e ténnyel. En azt hiszem, bárki lesz az a kormányzó, az ő alkotmányos érzülete és az ő kiváló nagy hazafisága be fogja látni azt, hogy ennek a nemzetnek bizonyos demokratikus bizalmatlansághoz joga van ...” Károly Huszár, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 79.

– the vague idea of the unity of the nation and the ruler through the Holy Crown  
 – without the need to elaborate on the more discrete forms of that constitutionalism. As was typical of the post-war nation-building processes,<sup>250</sup> the historicized and mythical conceptualization of the nation and its past was applied to create legitimacy for the emerging regime.

#### 2.2.4 A mock constitution

The debate on the Restoration Bill and the establishment of Regency was carried out in the explicit intention of their provisional nature. The decrees and political commitments included the assumption that they were to be revoked or revised in due time, as the expected normalization of state organs proceeded.<sup>251</sup> The Regency was established for only as long as a true national King could be crowned, and the broad prerogative given to the Regent was linked to its anticipated short duration.<sup>252</sup> However, at the same time, Horthy himself demanded and received broader prerogatives.<sup>253</sup> Symbolically, a mere two weeks later, on 15 March, the next Prime Minister Sándor Simonyi-Semadam swore his oath of office *to* Horthy.<sup>254</sup>

To anyone who suspected that the government and the Regent were planning to reign indefinitely on the strength of provisional decrees, Huszár answered with an elevated sentiment on the popular sovereignty:

“The nation is strong enough to expunge any organ which would attempt to rule in its name for twenty years without again asking the people’s opinion ... All of our work, every resolution and every action are only directed towards the goal of bringing the nation to a point where a final constitution can be created, with which we could as soon as possible return to our ancient constitutional order in its entirety.”<sup>255</sup>

Despite these noble words, the Law I/1920 did indeed turn out to be what could justifiably be called *a mock constitution*. It borrowed most of its content from the pre-war constitutional order, with minor modifications to stay on par with the post-war situation. The political structure it established was quite sincerely meant to be provisional; however, the checks and balances the law established were vague, as the debates reveal, and did not withstand the test of time. As early as 1922, Prime Minister István Bethlen created the Unity Party, which would then hold an absolute majority – with the help of a rigged electoral law – until the outbreak of the Second World War.

<sup>250</sup> See Vares & Vares 2019, 19.

<sup>251</sup> See e.g. Károly Huszár, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 78.

<sup>252</sup> Károly Huszár, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 78.

<sup>253</sup> Turbucz 2014, 90–92.

<sup>254</sup> Püski 2006, 16.

<sup>255</sup> “A nemzet elég erős volna ahhoz, hogy elsöpörje azt a testületet, mely húsz évig akarna itt az ő nevében intézkedni anélkül, hogy újból meg ne kérdeztessék a nép ... Mi egész működésünket, minden határozatunkat és minden cselekvésünket csak arra akarjuk irányítani, hogy ezt a nemzetet mielőbb abba a helyzetbe hozzuk, hogy az a végleges alkotmány megteremtésével és az abból folyó konzekvenciával mielőbb visszatérhessen ősi alkotmányának teljességéhez.” Károly Huszár, 27.2.1920, NN I/1920, 78.

The newly constructed regime was already put to the test in 1921, as the former King Charles made his two attempts to regain the Hungarian throne. During the second return attempt in October, royal counter-government gathered around Charles challenged the legitimacy of Bethlen and Horthy, culminating in an armed conflict between regular forces and Habsburg loyalists on the outskirts of Budapest.<sup>256</sup> At that point the government made use of Entente fears of a Habsburg restoration to reinforce its own legitimacy. Charles was arrested, placed in the custody of Entente representatives and exiled to Madeira, where he died the following year. Hungary was also forced to pass the act of dethronement of the House of Habsburg. At the same time, Bethlen was able to shift the base of support of his regime from the legitimist aristocracy to the more nationally-oriented gentry and smallholders.<sup>257</sup> That process is commonly seen as the beginning of the Bethlen consolidation. Yet, as appears below, the government still had at its disposal the rhetoric about a state of emergency and the fight against internal enemies, to be invoked when the need arose.

Through the successful suppression of the King's return attempts, Horthy established his position for the following decades. That also helped him to establish his authority within the army; the most influential officers of the White Army, such as Gyula Ostenburg, Anton Lehár and Pál Prónay had by then acted independently and challenged Horthy on military matters. As they had now sided with the King, they could be justly dismissed and their *Freikorps*-style detachments dissolved. As many of the said officers had also been notable perpetrators of the White Terror, the sensitive topic could more easily be sidelined as the culprits no longer held official positions.<sup>258</sup>

The quasi-monarchical position suited Horthy well; he could remain Regent indefinitely, with no need to pass the Crown to anybody, as no plausible claimant was in sight, nor to claim it for himself (even though that was more or less openly suggested). Even though the Regent was denied the right to grant titles of ennoblement, he could instead confer comparable distinctions, such as the new Hungarian Orders of *Vitézi Rend* and *Magyar Érdemrend*. The former was awarded to veterans of the counterrevolutionary campaign, the latter for civil achievements; both of them served the purpose of connecting the heroes of post-war Hungary to the person of the Regent with ties of loyalty. The originally provisional Regent of Hungary became instead the guarantor of continuity and social stability, who rarely resorted to his broad prerogatives and mostly remained a ceremonial head of state, who entrusted the daily running of politics to Bethlen for the following ten years.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Turbucz 2014, 105–106.

<sup>257</sup> Cartledge 2006, 352; Sakmyster 1994, 91–121.

<sup>258</sup> Püski 2006, 20; Sakmyster 1994, 70; Turbucz 2014, 96.

<sup>259</sup> Püski 2006, 19; Romsics 1999, 187; Sakmyster 1994, 57, 124; Turbucz 2014, 117–119.

## 2.3 Redescribing the nation. The *Numerus Clausus* law of 1920<sup>260</sup>

### 2.3.1 For the nation, against ‘over-representation’

Even after establishing the counterrevolutionary regime and Regency, the government continued its campaign against its perceived internal enemies in order to legitimize its leadership over the Hungarian nation through exclusive conceptualizations of Hungarian patriotism and Hungarian identity. As seen before, one of the main tools of that nation-building was anti-Semitism, which was operationalized and institutionalized through the *Numerus Clausus* law of 1920. The law, officially the “Law concerning the rules of enrolment in establishments of higher education”,<sup>261</sup> was debated in the National Assembly between 2 and 22 September 1920. As its name suggests, the law was ostensibly intended to limit the numbers of students admitted to universities in order to prevent overcrowding, which indeed was a real phenomenon; the universities had to adapt to the intake of demobilized soldiers, while simultaneously the universities in the ceded territories changed their language of tuition according to their new national affiliation and their Hungarian-language functions were hastily relocated to Hungary.<sup>262</sup>

However, the nature of the law was remarkably changed when, during the parliamentary reading, Nándor Bernolák,<sup>263</sup> representing the right wing of the Christian National party and supported among others by Ottokar Prohászka, proposed an amendment to the *Numerus Clausus* bill,<sup>264</sup> according to which there should be quotas for “particular races and nationalities”<sup>265</sup> in universities: the share of a national group among the university students should not exceed the proportion of the said group in the population as a whole.<sup>266</sup> Also present were vaguely worded qualifications of “loyalty towards the nation” and “trustworthiness.”<sup>267</sup> No single wording explicitly mentioned Jews, but in the parliamentary debate, anti-Semitism was open and apparent.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>260</sup> This chapter has earlier been published as a part of Häkkinen 2018. Reproduced with the approval of John Benjamins Publishing / Journal of Language and Politics.

<sup>261</sup> “Törvény a felsőoktatási intézményekbe való beiratkozás szabályairól”, Law XXV/1920, Romsics 2000, 157–158.

<sup>262</sup> Hanebrink 2006, 82.

<sup>263</sup> A professor of law and the former Rector of the University of Debrecen, Nándor Bernolák (1880–1951) had endured imprisonment at the hands of the Communists as well as the Romanian occupation forces. He was elected to Parliament in 1920 on the Christian National ticket and later served briefly as the Minister of Labour and Welfare. MÉL: Bernolák, Nándor; Vidor 1920, 21–22.

<sup>264</sup> Nándor Bernolák, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 184. See also Nagy 2012, 60.

<sup>265</sup> “... egyes népfajok és nemzetiségek”, §3, Lax XXV/1920, Romsics 2000, 158.

<sup>266</sup> §3, Law XXV/1920. Romsics 2000, 157–158. The reactionary conservatism in the education policy of the interwar era also included an attempt to limit women’s access to higher education. See Papp & Sipos 2017, 99–100.

<sup>267</sup> “Nemzethűség”; “megbízhatóság”, §1, Law XXV/1920, Romsics 2000, 157.

<sup>268</sup> Even as the quotas were set for “all races and nationalities”, the law and its execution had the most effect on Jews. Kovács 2012, 28.

Ferenc Usetty,<sup>269</sup> the secretary of the Committee for Education and Finance, who introduced the bill, began his argument in a counterrevolutionary tone by reminding the House of the past revolutions and the intolerable Treaty of Trianon, after which the Hungarian nation was in desperate need of thorough reforms in order to survive. In particular, it could no longer support graduate unemployment, a group that was demeaningly labelled “the intellectual proletariat”<sup>270</sup> – thus connecting it with the negative memory of the revolutions.<sup>271</sup> Later speakers further reinforced this connection, directly accusing the said group of inciting the revolutions – and pointing out that suspiciously many of its members were Jews.<sup>272</sup>

Usetty continued with the rationalizing argument that no university could maintain high academic standards with the present overtly large intake of students, thus limitations were a necessity. As stated above, overcrowding was a genuine problem in Hungarian academia, but Usetty directly connected it to the Jewish question by presenting statistics that showed Jews to be causing this overcrowding in growing numbers – thus introducing the argument of *over-representation*: how could Jews form the majority of university students when they were only a minority in the population?<sup>273</sup> He concluded his speech by emphasizing the need for original, pure and Christian Hungarian identity:

“...only such persons may be the [future] leaders of the Hungarian nation, whose traditional Hungarian identity and Christian worldview remain unquestioned.”<sup>274</sup>

István Haller,<sup>275</sup> the Minister of Education and Church Affairs, then continued with a call for intellectuals who would embrace the Hungarian tradition, not emulate foreign models. Thus the education system was to be reformed to foster a completely new kind of patriotic *intelligentsia* who would embrace their obligation towards the nation – not the former kind of liberals, who were

<sup>269</sup> Ferenc Usetty (b. 1878), teacher, war veteran, principal of the Ferenc József high school, education politician. Vidor 1921, 154–155.

<sup>270</sup> “...szellemi proletariátus...” Ferenc Usetty, 2.9.1920, NN V/1920, 148.

<sup>271</sup> Ferenc Usetty, 2.9.1920, NN V/1920, 148.

<sup>272</sup> See e.g. Nándor Bernolák, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 185–186; Károly Schandl, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 335.

<sup>273</sup> Ferenc Usetty, 2.9.1920, NN V/1920, 149; cf. Kovács 2012, 34. Various statistics of over-representation, tailored to suit the political purpose, were presented repeatedly during the debate. See e.g. Nándor Bernolák, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 184–185; Károly Schandl, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920 337–338.

<sup>274</sup> “...csak oly emberek lehetnek majd a magyar nemzet vezetői, akiknek tradicionális magyarságához és keresztény világfelfogásához kétség nem fér.” Ferenc Usetty, 2.9.1920, NN V/1920, 149. The concept of *magyarság* is hard to translate directly; it is part of the organic parlance of nationhood, yet reaches even further than the concept of ‘Hungarian nation’, encompassing the Hungarian spheres of culture, language and ethnicity. In this study it is alternately rendered either ‘Hungarian identity’, ‘all Hungarians’ or ‘everything Hungarian’, depending on the context.

<sup>275</sup> Originally a student of theology, István Haller (1880–1964) abandoned a clerical career in favour of Christian Socialist politics. During the Soviet Republic, Haller endured six weeks of imprisonment. Minister in all early counterrevolutionary governments of 1919–20 (Friedrich, Huszár, Simonyi-Semadam and Teleki) and the main drafter of the *Numerus Clausus* bill. MÉL: Haller, István; Vidor 1921, 57–58.

demonstrably inclined towards revolution.<sup>276</sup> In keeping with the early counterrevolutionary discourse,<sup>277</sup> Haller attacked the concept of liberalism, arguing that the liberal politics of the past decades had brought Hungary to a state of collapse; he reminded the House of the great liberal statesmen as Ferenc Deák and József Eötvös, but also argued that even those men had actually been more Hungarian patriots than actual liberals.

“... if they had foreseen that the liberalism they had initiated was later distorted, twisted from its true form, deformed and expropriated, and that it would cast the Hungarian nation into the depths of national despair ... they would not have chosen that way.”<sup>278</sup>

In a direct continuation to the anti-liberal discourse heard in the constitutional debate earlier the same year, Haller rhetorically disconnected the historical liberal statesmen from the ideology of liberalism, which since their days had become detrimental to the nation. This was virtually a pre-emptive argument against any defence of liberalism based on the canonized historical figures.<sup>279</sup> Instead of nostalgia for the lost cause of liberalism, Haller argued, Hungarians should not be afraid of accusations of being reactionary; such accusations were mere tools of foreign powers that had already undermined Hungary with the ideology of liberalism and did not want to see it gaining strength through a national spirit.<sup>280</sup>

A strong redescription of the concept of liberalism<sup>281</sup> again applied the conceptualization of *liberty as conditional*: people should be granted civil liberties only to the extent that they do not become harmful to the nation. A similar redescription was proposed for the concept of academic freedom; it must not mean liberty to engage in radical agitation in universities, but liberty to conduct objective and valuable studies and to participate in the national reconstruction.<sup>282</sup>

Even those Members, who still dared to argue in favour of moderate liberalism agreed with such redescriptions and were ready to make concessions to the anti-Semitic sentiment. They accepted in principle the argument of over-representation but called for more thorough reforms in education than merely

<sup>276</sup> István Haller, 2.9.1920, NN V/1920, 150–151. On the contemporary uses and contents of the concept of ‘intelligentsia’, see Mazsu 1997.

<sup>277</sup> See Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>278</sup> “...ha ők előre látták volna, hogy az a liberalizmus, amelyet ők kezdeményeztek, amelyet később elferdítettek, valódiságából kiforgattak, eltorzítottak és hivatlanul kisajátítottak, a magyar nemzetet a nemzetietlenségnek milyen stációjához fogja vezetni ... nem indultak volna meg ezen az utón.” István Haller, 2.9.1920, NN V/1920, 159. See also Károly Schandl, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 340–341.

<sup>279</sup> See e.g. Gábor Ugron in Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>280</sup> István Haller, 2.9.1920, NN V/1920, 159; Dezső Szűcz, 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 379.

<sup>281</sup> On the conservative redescriptions on liberalism in European comparison, see e.g. Leonhard 2001, 231, 414–415, 542.

<sup>282</sup> Miksa Herrmann, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 353; Balázs Szabó, 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 359, 364. In the contemporary discourse, other civil rights were described as conditional quite similarly. See e.g. István Bethlen’s inauguration address in 1921, Bethlen 2000, 121.

punishing Jewry.<sup>283</sup> Another argument they were able to invoke against the law was socio-political; the limitations in university enrolment would eventually turn against the children of poorer Christian families, not the wealthy Jews, who could always send their children to foreign universities. This argument was an ingenious ploy in political contingency: it implied that the law had an unwritten, expected outcome of discrimination against the Jews, but that it also had an unwritten *and* unexpected consequence that would befall the poverty-stricken Hungarians.<sup>284</sup> Even these moderate arguments were met with un-parliamentary and extra-parliamentary harassment, showing the harsh counterrevolutionary atmosphere prevailing in the House. Speeches in favour of equality were constantly heckled and interrupted.<sup>285</sup> Gábor Ugron even complained that his house had been vandalized the day following his speech.<sup>286</sup> This was received with sarcastic remarks by other Members – showing that the harsh counterrevolutionary atmosphere had indeed little sympathy for the liberal opposition, however meagre its mitigation efforts might be.

### 2.3.2 “There is no such thing as a Hungarian Jew!” The denial of integration

The concepts of race and assimilation<sup>287</sup> were pivotal in the debates. Firstly, the assimilation of Jews into Hungarian society in centuries past was deemed to have either totally failed or at least to be incomplete.<sup>288</sup> The concepts of race, nationality and religion were deliberately obscured to rhetorically construct the irrevocable otherness of Jews; even a Jew whose family had lived in Hungary for centuries, or a Jew who had converted to Christianity still possessed the negative non-Hungarian ‘racial’ traits.<sup>289</sup> To support this, Minister Haller quoted several Jewish authors who had argued against assimilation and in favour of Zionism to demonstrate that even if some individual Jews wanted to live as Hungarians, the great majority of them was congenitally against this.<sup>290</sup> An even more straightforward attitude towards the race question was illustrated by an interjection by Vidor Dinich,<sup>291</sup> a representative of the emerging radical Right: “There is no such thing as a Hungarian Jew!”<sup>292</sup>

<sup>283</sup> See e.g. Gábor Ugron 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 362–363; Rezső Rupert, 18.9.1920, NN V/1920, 412–417.

<sup>284</sup> Rezső Rupert, 18.9.1920, NN V/1920, 421–422.

<sup>285</sup> See e.g. György Vasadi-Balogh, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 177–179; Gábor Ugron 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 366.

<sup>286</sup> Gábor Ugron, 18.9.1920, NN V/1920, 382–383.

<sup>287</sup> One might also use the term integration, which in fact was well-developed in Hungary, but the contemporary discourse not only preferred the concept of assimilation but also actively denied it. See Lendvai 2012, 56; Ungváry 2013, 14.

<sup>288</sup> Károly Schandl, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 340; Ottokár Prohászka 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 347–348.

<sup>289</sup> Dezső Szűcz, 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 378. See also Gyáni 2017, 155–156; Gyurgyák 2012, 17–18.

<sup>290</sup> István Haller, 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 470–471.

<sup>291</sup> An example of a parliamentary newcomer with radical views, Vidor Dinich (b. 1887) was a veteran of the World War and an organizer of the counterrevolutionary movement, who had won his seat with the upsurge of the radical Right. Vidor 1921, 35–36.

<sup>292</sup> “Olyan nics: magyar zsidó!” Vidor Dinich, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 342.

The races were pitted against each other, but not necessarily hierarchically. Jews were even described to possess positive racial features such as a tendency to show solidarity and render assistance towards their kin, a high level of literacy and respect for education. However, these were turned against them, because they created an unfair position when compared to Hungarians. This had resulted in capital flowing from the traditional, aristocratic Hungarian elites to commerce-oriented Jews in the past decades.<sup>293</sup> Moreover, their leading role in commerce and economy was presented as an abuse of Christian Hungarians, who actually conducted the menial work, as Jews only gathered in the profits.<sup>294</sup> The popular, stereotypical image of a plutocratic Jew, linked to such clandestine and unpatriotic organizations as the Freemasons, accumulating wealth and influence through unfair means, was thus again applied and embraced in the Hungarian discourse.<sup>295</sup>

That being said, the Jewish over-representation was simultaneously represented as a weakness on the part of the Hungarian race, which had let the leading role slip through its fingers. In the contemporary rhetoric, the law was a just measure to defend the ailing Hungarian race and restore it to its former glory.<sup>296</sup> In such an atmosphere the quotas were easily introduced, but rhetorically mitigated on the basis of *equality as proportional*: the quotas were presented as technically neutral, so seemingly there was to be neither inordinate discrimination against nor favouring of Jews.<sup>297</sup> Race, nation and society were all decidedly organic concepts that might sustain wounds or suffer illnesses that had to be treated. This led to a question whether laws like the *Numerus Clausus* were treating the actual illness or merely its symptoms. Many accepted that the social problems were more profound, but also accepted that for the time being, *Numerus Clausus* would serve to provide temporary relief.<sup>298</sup>

Another argument used against the Jews and to prove their otherness from the Hungarian nation was connecting them to the memory of the World War. Those Members in particular who had served in the army and could thus speak from a position of credibility, created the caricatural image of Jews as cowardly and unpatriotic, lurking on the home front and amassing fortunes at the expense of the suffering Hungary.<sup>299</sup> Such rhetoric also represented a complete reverse of the 'no conscription without representation' arguments used in suffrage debates in Western European legislatures around the end of the World War;<sup>300</sup> as it was (ostensibly) proved that Jews had not fulfilled their duty at the front, it was

<sup>293</sup> István Mílotay, 18.9.1920, NN V/1920, 393.

<sup>294</sup> Miksa Herrmann, 16.9.1920, 355; Vidor Dinich 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 358; István Haller 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 467.

<sup>295</sup> István Mílotay, 18.9.1920, NN V/1920, 394–396; István Haller, 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 464. See also Hanebrink 2006, 42–43.

<sup>296</sup> Nándor Bernólak, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 189; Károly Schandl 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 337–338, 340; Ottokar Prohaszka 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 346–347; Gyula Gömbös 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 371.

<sup>297</sup> Nándor Bernólak, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 184.

<sup>298</sup> Sándor Giesswein, 18.9.1920, 387–388; István Haller 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 465.

<sup>299</sup> Nándor Bernólak, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 185; Vidor Dinich, 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 358.

<sup>300</sup> Ihalainen 2017, 214.



legitimate to limit their rights in favour of 'true' Hungarians, who were rhetorically constructed as inherently patriotic.<sup>301</sup>

Christianity was applied in the Hungarian political discourse as a concept uniting the nation and excluding its others, especially the Jews. On this basis, it has even been argued that the anti-Semitic policies were actually based on a long tradition of religious persecution.<sup>302</sup> However, in practice Christianity meant little more than a universal epithet to nationalism.<sup>303</sup> Even Bishop Ottokár Prohászka, a well-known orator of political Catholicism and an avid supporter of the legislation, did not base his endorsement of *Numerus Clausus* on religious motives, but on contemporary politics; not on Jews' historical or theological otherness but on their pernicious influence in contemporary Hungarian society.<sup>304</sup> This verifies the role of Christianity as a catchword and the role of the *Numerus Clausus*; they were both tools of deliberate nation-building, applied to reinforce the national sentiment by appealing to the recent hardships and excluding the undesirable groups.

### 2.3.3 The anti-Semitic aspect of exclusive nation-building

The discourse on *Numerus Clausus* was clearly a child of the counterrevolutionary political thought and its exclusive nationalism constructed against enemy figures. It embodied the fears projected by both the loss of Greater Hungary and the revolutionary years; the existence of the Hungarian nation and the physical Hungary were both at stake, and the state of emergency necessitated swift action in the interests of national unity. The loathing towards revolutionaries in general was operationalized in the negative umbrella concepts of 'intellectual proletariat' and 'revolutionary liberals', the Jews being the embodiment of both. Obviously, it became acceptable to use the tools of 'legitimate self-defence' of the Hungarian nation against them.<sup>305</sup>

The few liberal- and equality-minded Members were pushed aside by repeated interruptions,<sup>306</sup> as most of the House was occupied by counterrevolutionaries, conservatives or the radical Right.<sup>307</sup> The tumultuous debate on *Numerus Clausus* was also an example of the recently established parliamentary culture, which did not live up to the promises of harmonious

<sup>301</sup> Selective statistics were again used to this end. See e.g. Ottokár Prohászka 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 350; Gyula Gömbös 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 374; István Haller 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 469. Cf. Sakmyster 2006, 161.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. Hanebrink 2006, 90–93, 105–107.

<sup>303</sup> With few exceptions, see Dezső Szűcz, 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 378; Émil Kovács 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 453.

<sup>304</sup> Ottokár Prohászka, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 343–350. Theologically, Prohászka was actually a modernist and a reformist, working on the reconciliation of the Church and the people; yet this reformism was partly based on the construction of enemies of the faith, ie. the Jews. Hanebrink 2006, 35–36.

<sup>305</sup> See also Hanebrink 2006, 86.

<sup>306</sup> See e.g. Sándor Pető, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 190–195; Pál Sándor, 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 459–462; Ernő Bródy, 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 476–478.

<sup>307</sup> Hubai 2001, 21–24.

debate and mutual respect.<sup>308</sup> Interruptions were common, Members were allowed to speak off the subject,<sup>309</sup> and in some instances, even the Speaker of Parliament was not completely aware of the procedure.<sup>310</sup>

The debate was also symptomatic to the counterrevolutionary transition in state-building and the emergent ideological cleavages between the parliamentary groups. The government also sought simultaneously to secure its legitimacy from the recently established radical Right by appealing to anti-Semitic sentiment, and to dissociate itself from the radicals. Thus the governmental side relied more on rationalist and quasi-tolerant arguments, emphasizing their 'objective' stance on the matter; that the law did not pursue anti-Semitism but, on the contrary, offered all races and nationalities 'equal' treatment.<sup>311</sup> Even after uttering bitter comments about the role of the Jews in the revolutions, Members could return to arguing that the legislation only sought to mete out justice and actually prevent violent anti-Semitism in society.<sup>312</sup>

More radical MPs, organizing under the idea of race defence (*fajvédelem*), went so far to oppose the *Numerus Clausus* bill, as for them it was too weak a measure.<sup>313</sup> Their leader, Gyula Gömbös,<sup>314</sup> the future Prime Minister of Hungary, despite personally accepting the bill, demanded measures to defend the purity and strength of the ancient Hungarian race, which the nation had lost due to unhealthy Western and Jewish influence.<sup>315</sup> This was the core of the radical Right political thought, its simultaneous endorsement of and challenge to the counterrevolutionary regime: by constructing even more exclusive conceptualization of the nation, the manifold right-wing groups introduced new political concepts centred around the Hungarian race and the Hungarian national spirit into the Hungarian discourse, demanding that the government take them into account.<sup>316</sup> They represented a new political culture,

<sup>308</sup> Cf. István Rakovszky in Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>309</sup> See e.g. Lajos Szádeczky, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 173–175.

<sup>310</sup> See e.g. debate on 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 481.

<sup>311</sup> Nándor Bernólak, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 188, Károly Schandl, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920 336–339.

<sup>312</sup> See e.g. Miksa Herrmann, 16.9.1920, NN V/1920, 355–356; Károly Ereky 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 463. Such arguments were generally contrived, as outbursts of anti-Semitic violence occurred throughout the interwar era. Ladányi 2012, 84, 87, 100.

<sup>313</sup> Vidor Dinich, 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 357–358.

<sup>314</sup> An officer and a war veteran, Gyula Gömbös (1886–1936) was one of the core organizers of the counterrevolutionary movement and Horthy's close ally during and after the counterrevolutionary campaign. A member of the Smallholder Party in the first counterrevolutionary parliament. Gömbös had a leading role in repelling the return attempts of King Charles and in organizing armed resistance. As a founding member of the MOVE and a prominent leader of the radical Right, his popularity with the conservative government varied throughout the 1920s. After Bethlen's downfall, he gained the premiership in 1932 and reorganized the government party according to the Fascist model, but his success remained limited and at the time of his death in 1936 his popularity was already on the wane. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 69–73; MÉL: Gömbös, Gyula; Vidor 1921, 54–55.

<sup>315</sup> Gyula Gömbös, 17.9.1920, NN V/1920, 374–375. For the radical right, not only the Jews but also the German-speaking Hungarians, dubbed 'svábs', were an archetype of a foreign race that had infiltrated the Hungarian nation and was exploiting it. Ungváry 2013, 258–265.

<sup>316</sup> Ormos 2006, 96.

distinguishing itself not only from liberalism but also from aristocratic elitism and Habsburg legitimism. On the other hand, the government was also able to make use of them and their radical rhetoric as an example of unwanted extremism and defend its own policy by presenting it as the 'golden mean'. For many conservatives, the *Numerus Clausus* bill remained controversial, and a significant number of prominent Members, including Teleki, Bethlen, Apponyi and Klebelsberg chose not to be present during the vote. However, they were in no a position to challenge the precarious power balance of the House by opposing it openly; even if uneasy, anti-Semitism was also for them the lesser evil in creating and maintaining national cohesion.<sup>317</sup>

## 2.4 "Hunger is a subjective feeling" – The debate on the conditions of political prisoners, 1923

### 2.4.1 Warm barracks and clean clothes?

By the year 1923, the tone of the parliamentary debate concerning the counterrevolutionary state-building and nation-building had changed remarkably. The Social Democrats, after gaining representation in Parliament in the elections of 1922,<sup>318</sup> had taken over the main opposition position from the liberals, and boldly used the space given to them to question the legitimacy of the government and its rhetorical foundations. With little actual leverage against the government supermajority, they made use of parliamentary questions to voice their arguments. This was exemplified by an exceptionally heated debate over the conditions of political prisoners, which clearly demonstrated the limits of the so-called consolidation discourse, or the willingness of the government to treat the opposition as a legitimate party in the parliamentary debate.

Whereas the Bethlen-Peyer pact of 1921 had included the provision that political prisoners were to be gradually released and the internment camps disbanded,<sup>319</sup> the situation had hardly improved by December 1922, when János Esztergályos<sup>320</sup> presented a disquieting report on his visit to the Zalaegerség internment camp. He reported encountering prisoners interned arbitrarily, including Jews who were clearly imprisoned on anti-Semitic grounds, and appalling conditions, including extensive malnourishment, which had forced the inmates to resort to eating a dog in order to survive.<sup>321</sup> The report instantly gave rise to concern about the conditions, and in February 1923 a parliamentary

<sup>317</sup> Nagy 2012, 60–61.

<sup>318</sup> Hubai 2001, 34; Ormos 2006, 90.

<sup>319</sup> Ormos 2006, 86–87.

<sup>320</sup> A Social Democrat with a trade union background and experience of the internal labour movement, János Esztergályos (1873–1941) was one of those Social Democrats who were able to return to political life in the 1920s, not having been compromised by holding a leading position during the Soviet Republic. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 59–60; MÉL: Esztergályos, János.

<sup>321</sup> János Esztergályos, 21.2.1923, NN X/1922, 54, 56, 58.

delegation was about to inspect the camp. At the question hour on 21 February 1923, the day before the excursion, Esztergályos returned to the topic with pre-emptive criticism; he stated sarcastically that the delegates would no doubt find that everything was in order and that the camp was a veritable sanatorium, as the officials most probably would have superficially improved the conditions for the time being.<sup>322</sup> Esztergályos actually urged the delegation not to visit the camp at all, not to accept the showcase orchestrated for them.<sup>323</sup> With this line of argumentation, he wanted to pre-emptively claim for the opposition the discursive space concerning the conditions of the political prisoners and to warn against the whitewashing of the situation.

The follow-up on the matter was seen at the question hour on 7 March, after the parliamentary delegation had returned from Zalaegerség. Tactically, the question hour was opened by the government party Member Kálman Éhn,<sup>324</sup> who produced an undisguised planted question,<sup>325</sup> destined to clear the government's name against accusations raised by Esztergályos. To begin with, he argued, the inspection of the internment camp had been open to all Members of Parliament, and the press had also been invited, so no accusations of pro-government bias were valid.<sup>326</sup> Éhn's rhetorical strategy was from the outset to construct a rationalized and quasi-impartial narrative on the conditions. This included a considered choice of words in describing the camp. For example, he did not forget to mention that the camp was situated "on a healthy hilly terrain,"<sup>327</sup> to which Social Democrat Emil Pikler<sup>328</sup> immediately quipped: "A sanatorium indeed!"<sup>329</sup>, reminding the House of Esztergályos' earlier warnings and questioning Éhn's reliability. Éhn continued the favourable wording about clean and well-heated barracks<sup>330</sup>, which was in turn met with continuous cries of distrust from the Left.<sup>331</sup> Frustrated, Éhn turned the continuous criticism into victimization, retorting: "Is it a problem, too, if I tell good things about it? Am I only allowed to tell bad things about the Zalaegerség camp?"<sup>332</sup> and continued his positive evaluation: the inmates he had interviewed had not complained about cold, so the former accusations of freezing conditions had been utterly

<sup>322</sup> János Esztergályos, 21.2.1923, NN X/1922, 54, 59.

<sup>323</sup> János Esztergályos, 21.2.1923, NN X/1922, 54.

<sup>324</sup> Kálman Éhn (b. 1864), a physician and a member of the Unity Party. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 60.

<sup>325</sup> The term planted question is used here to mean a parliamentary question presented by a member of the government party to the government itself, in order to highlight the government stance on the matter, create a favourable narrative or to bring up an issue that a government minister officially cannot. On the practice, see Roitto 2015, 109–110.

<sup>326</sup> Kálman Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 296–297.

<sup>327</sup> "... egészséges dombvidéken," Kálman Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 297.

<sup>328</sup> Like Esztergályos, Emil Pikler (b. 1872) was an experienced trade unionist and veteran Social Democrat, who had travelled widely around Europe and the United States. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 143–144.

<sup>329</sup> "Szanatórium!" Emil Pikler, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 297.

<sup>330</sup> Kálman Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 297.

<sup>331</sup> NN X/1922, 297.

<sup>332</sup> "Az is baj, ha jót mondok róla? Csak rosszat szabad a zalaegerszegi táborról mondani?" Kálman Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

wrong. The description of a snowstorm on the day of the inspection helped in creating this impression: in the midst of such harsh weather, had the barracks been poorly built, it surely would have been cold.<sup>333</sup> And even if there had been momentary shortages and rationing of coal for heating, that had been a concern in the whole area, schools and homes included, and could thus not be seen as a failing in the internment camp.<sup>334</sup> The relativization of problems continued, as Éhn mentioned that besides the internment camp there was also a refugee camp, where conditions were clearly worse than those of the internees. This was to portray the political prisoners as enjoying more comfort than the “honest workmen.”<sup>335</sup> The argument evoked exactly the expected outcome, as Jenő Szabóky<sup>336</sup> of the radical Right cried: “We have to exchange them for the Communists!”<sup>337</sup>

Éhn’s apology was met with a sarcastic exchange between Social Democrats Ede Hébelt<sup>338</sup> and Ferenc Szeder:<sup>339</sup> “How can a doctor say such things!”<sup>340</sup> “Because he was a Freemason!”<sup>341</sup> That is, in questioning Éhn’s ethics they ironically referred to the accusatory label of ‘Freemason’ usually applied by the government against Jews.<sup>342</sup> Now they used the opportunity to pay back the conspiracy accusations piled upon the Left.

Unmoved, Éhn continued with the demographic distribution of the inmates. As he revealed that around 20 per cent of them were Jews,<sup>343</sup> it produced the quite self-evident irony from the opposition: “Where is the *Numerus Clausus* now?”<sup>344</sup> Also, when the societal status of most inmates was that of agrarian labourers or industrial workers, it provoked János Vanczák<sup>345</sup> to ask whether there was no nobility.<sup>346</sup> Éhn promptly answered that there was indeed one

333 Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

334 Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

335 “... becsületes munkásbemberek,” Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

336 Jenő Szabóky (b. 1881), a veteran of the World War and the counterrevolutionary campaign. Member of the radical right wing of the Unity Party. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 174–175.

337 “Ki kell cserélni! A kommunistákat kell odatenni!” Jenő Szabóky, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

338 Lawyer Ede Hébelt (1879–1961), member of the Social Democrats since 1905, leader of the Workers’ College during the Soviet Republic, expelled from all offices after the counterrevolution. In the 1920s, he appeared as a *pro bono* defence lawyer in the trials of the Communists. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 86–87; MÉL: Hébelt, Ede.

339 Ferenc Szeder (1881–1952), an agricultural labourer and trade union organizer, a veteran of the World War and the Hungarian Red Army. Leading member of the Social Democrats. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 176–177; MÉL: Szeder, Ferenc.

340 “Hogy beszélhet egy orvos ilyet!” Ede Hébelt, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

341 “Azért, mert szabadkőműves volt!” Szeder Ferenc, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

342 See Chapter 2.3.2. and Hanebrink 2006, 42–43.

343 Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

344 “Hol van a numerus clausus?” Richárd Reischl, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 298.

345 A journalist and trade union leader, János Vanczák (1870–1932) had been a member of the Social Democratic Party since 1897. During the Soviet Republic he rose to a leading position on the Administrative Committee of the Labour Unions. Editor of the party paper *Népszava* 1920–1926. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 189–190; MÉL: Vanczák, János.

346 János Vanczák, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 299.

Count,<sup>347</sup> whereupon Esztergályos immediately retorted: “Now the democracy is complete!”<sup>348</sup> Despite being on the receiving end of constant criticism, Éhn went on to challenge the earlier accusations presented by Esztergályos by paraphrasing his earlier description:

“Mr. Esztergályos told us that in the camp there is a large crowd of people wandering around half-frozen, half-naked, without shirts and undergarments, with only rags for trousers ... walking around begging for a piece of bread.”<sup>349</sup>

Whereas Éhn, in turn, had met well-fed and clothed inmates in warm housing. Károly Peyer<sup>350</sup> remarked he had visited a Potemkin village.<sup>351</sup> Éhn was compelled to admit that the inmates had been given new clothing just before the delegation’s arrival, but, in a considered act of credulity, dismissed that as a mere coincidence.<sup>352</sup> He went on to present the menu of the camp day by day, trying to prove that there was no shortage of food for the inmates.<sup>353</sup> Peyer, still disgruntled, cried: “Who believes that, it is a lie! Cabaret! Who believes that!”<sup>354</sup> whereupon Minister of the Interior Iván Rakovszky<sup>355</sup> retorted: “Honest people do believe it, only an agitator does not!”<sup>356</sup>, again as a rhetorical attempt to disqualify the Social Democrats from the parliamentary debate. Éhn, maintaining his rationalizing tone, defended his listing of material conditions by the need to rebut the outrageous attacks made by Esztergályos.<sup>357</sup>

At this point, the Speaker of Parliament, Károly Huszár, reminded the protesting Left that the question hour was dedicated specifically to the parliamentary control of the government, but that at the moment the Members themselves were making it impossible to adhere to that constitutional right by their repeated interruptions.<sup>358</sup> This could be seen as an intentional rhetorical strategy on behalf of the government: playing by the rules, appealing to the procedures and the ideals of parliamentarism, and then presenting the

<sup>347</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 299.

<sup>348</sup> “A demokrácia teljes!” János Esztergályos, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 299.

<sup>349</sup> “Azt mondta Esztergályos képviselő úr, hogy félig megfagyott, mezítelen emberek nagy tömege járkál a táborban ing és alsóruha nélkül, csak egy rongyos nadrágban ... járnak az emberek össze-vissza és kérve-könyörögve koldulnak egy darab kenyérért.” Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 299.

<sup>350</sup> Right-wing Social Democrat and trade union leader Károly Peyer (1881–1956) contributed to the counterrevolutionary transition, being a minister in the governments of Peidl, Friedrich and Huszár in 1919–20. In 1921, he concluded the pact with Bethlen that allowed the Social Democrats to return to political life. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 142–143; MÉL: Peyer, Károly.

<sup>351</sup> Károly Peyer, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 299.

<sup>352</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 299.

<sup>353</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 300.

<sup>354</sup> “Ki hiszi ezt el, hazugság ez! Kabaré! Ki hiszi el!” Károly Peyer, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 300.

<sup>355</sup> Counterrevolutionary politician and a veteran of the World War Iván Rakovszky (1885–1960) served as the Minister of the Interior between 1922 and 1926, tasked with the reorganization of the police. He would accept a ministerial post again during the German occupation in 1944. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 152–153; MÉL: Rakovszky, Iván.

<sup>356</sup> “Becsületes ember elhiszi ezt, csak a népbolondítók nem hiszik el!” Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 300.

<sup>357</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 300.

<sup>358</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 300.

opposition as uncooperative and unparliamentary. The concept of freedom of parliamentary speech was defined as equal opportunities for all parties, but now it was the Left who were continuously breaking it.<sup>359</sup>

In order to maintain the illusion of his impartial position, Éhn, was ready to make a single concession to the criticism: the food rations of those inmates who refused to work were reduced. Still, this could be explained away by the argument that the recalcitrant prisoners basically caused the harm to themselves.<sup>360</sup> At the time, nourishment problems were nationwide, and Éhn's argument presented it as self-evidently just to cut the rations off the stubborn political prisoners, again contrasted with the ailing masses. Still, Éhn believed the problem would soon be solved by adding nutrients to the food rations, and thereby accusations for malnourishment would be rendered null and void.<sup>361</sup>

Concerning the medical care of the prisoners, Éhn was able to make use of his professional credibility as a doctor, including his personal experience of crisis conditions as the head of military hospital during the World War,<sup>362</sup> and present a barrage of numerical data to demonstrate the adequacy of the medical conditions.<sup>363</sup> In knowing the strength of his position in this matter, he was able to resort to irony: "What a miracle it is that all those distressed patients mentioned by the Member [Esztergályos] had all been healed."<sup>364</sup> With statistics of the death rate on the camp he emphasized that it was lower than that of a similar-sized village, and he himself would "very much like to find such a well-equipped hospital in every municipality."<sup>365</sup> As Esztergályos had reported about an inmate who had died as a result of maltreatment, Éhn could use the official data available to him to show that Esztergályos had totally misunderstood the case, beginning with the name of the deceased, and that the actual cause of death had been a fight between two inmates over theft.<sup>366</sup> In this vein, by meticulously presenting official data, Éhn was able piece by piece to undermine the former accusations. Referring to the incorrectly remembered name of the dead prisoner was another form of demonstrating the unreliability of Esztergályos as a witness.

Finally, Éhn came to the most appalling part of Esztergályos' narrative: that of the two prisoners who had been forced to eat a dog to avoid starvation. Éhn explained this away by using the interrogations of the two inmates, who had confessed that they had indeed caught and eaten a dog – yet not out of hunger but out of habit!<sup>367</sup> After such a blunt rebuttal, Éhn felt confident that the House, the Social Democrats excluded, were ready to believe that

<sup>359</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 302.

<sup>360</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 301.

<sup>361</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 301.

<sup>362</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 303.

<sup>363</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 303.

<sup>364</sup> "Csodálatos az is, hogy a képviselő úr által említett dühöngő betegek mind meggyógyultak," Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 303.

<sup>365</sup> "... én szeretném, ha Magyarország minden járásában volna ilyen jól berendezett kórház." Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 304.

<sup>366</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 305.

<sup>367</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 306.

“... from the healthcare point of view – I emphasize I’m not speaking about politics, but the healthcare point of view ... such appalling conditions, which my fellow Member Esztergályos presented as the shame of the nation here in Parliament, are not to be found in Zalaegerség.”<sup>368</sup>

Éhn was thus certain that the accusations had been intentional slander of the Hungarian state and the Hungarian nation, only meant for the foreign countries as tools to attack Hungary.<sup>369</sup> Therefore, Éhn dared to throw Esztergályos’ question back at him:

“I’m asking the same as my fellow member Esztergályos: Where is the Christian love, where is the Christian morale ... where is the charity, where is the truth, where is the patriotism?”<sup>370</sup>

Towards the end of Éhn’s speech, it seemed that the matter had been completely turned around. Éhn was able to appeal to his own integrity as a parliamentarian and a doctor, being ready to listen to the opposition without interruption, even if disagreeing with them.<sup>371</sup> He could invoke the concepts of respectability and parliamentary procedure, and finally accuse the opposition of irresponsible and unpatriotic agitation.<sup>372</sup> What began as a technical explanation of the conditions in the internment camp was simultaneously transformed into a rhetorical discreditation of the opposition. One by one, Éhn had rhetorically deconstructed the main arguments presented by the Social Democrats and attempted to prove them groundless: “Therefore I consider the accusations presented by the honourable Mr. Esztergályos in his interpellation to be nothing but agitation.”<sup>373</sup> As Éhn himself was able to bring the latest eyewitness observations to the House, he disproved the claims based on Esztergályos’ earlier visit to the internment camp. As for the criticism about superficial improvement of the conditions for the parliamentary delegation, Éhn could dryly retort: “I’m telling you what I saw ... I’m stating facts.”<sup>374</sup>

To sum up his argument, Éhn stated that he was not a proponent of internment of political prisoners, but believed it to be a necessary evil, which could be dispensed with when proper consolidation was achieved.<sup>375</sup> Using a typical organic metaphor, he reminded that the state was obliged to protect the population against infectious diseases, imposing quarantines if necessary, and

<sup>368</sup> “... az egészségi szempontból – megjegyzem nem politikumból beszélek, hanem egészségi szempontból ... Zalaegerszegen nincsenek azok az irtózatok állapotok, amelyeket Esztergályos képviselőtársam az ország szégyenére itt a parlamentben elmondott.” Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 306.

<sup>369</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 306.

<sup>370</sup> “Én is azt kérdelem, amit Esztergályos képviselőtársam: Hol itt a keresztény szeretet, hol itt a keresztényi morál ... hol itt a felebaráti szeretet, hol az igazság, hol a hazafiasság?” Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 306.

<sup>371</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 307.

<sup>372</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 307.

<sup>373</sup> “Épen azért, az Esztergályos János t. képviselő ur interpellációjában felhozott ezek a vádak szerintem nem mások, mint egyszerű hangulatkeltés.” Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 302.

<sup>374</sup> “Én azt mondom el, amit én láttam ... Én csak a tényállást mondom el.” Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 303.

<sup>375</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 307.



such was the case with ideological infections as well.<sup>376</sup> As a conclusion, Éhn presented his actual, meagre question to the Minister of the Interior, asking for relatively simple concessions, namely adding nutrients to food and facilitating the release of women and children from the camp. He also suggested converting the camp into a working colony, which would make it easier to integrate the inmates into society.<sup>377</sup> During Éhn's speech, criticism of the government for the harsh conditions in which political prisoners were held – and the fact that political prisoners existed at all – was rhetorically turned into a legitimization of government proceedings by the meticulous data Éhn presented as a witness, finally making a lame planted question out of it.

#### 2.4.2 The moral viewpoint at the core of the criticism

However, Éhn's attempt to sweep the matter under the carpet did not convince the House, as other members of the delegation expressed their concern about the conditions. One of them, the Christian Socialist József Szabó,<sup>378</sup> was quick to remark that Éhn had only paid attention to certain discrete material details, such as nourishment, clothing and medical care. Szabó himself claimed to approach the matter from a moral point of view, thus trying to rhetorically crush the favourable arguments of Éhn:

“When I was there, I inspected the internment camp from this viewpoint, and already at the beginning of my question I can honestly state that I formed an impression that the only thing this internment camp is good for is impairing Hungary's reputation.”<sup>379</sup>

At this point in the debate the tables were turned concerning the dynamics of the parliamentary debate. The government party was forced to take a defensive position and was provoked into causing repeated interruptions in the same way the Social Democrats did during Éhn's speech. Szabó could provoke the House by directing several inconvenient questions towards the government, such as, how could it be that some officers of the Red Army easily acquired official positions in counterrevolutionary Hungary, while others still remained in internment for the same actions.<sup>380</sup> He questioned the legitimacy of political sentences by recounting the experiences of the prisoners he had interviewed: one

<sup>376</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 308.

<sup>377</sup> Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 308.

<sup>378</sup> A politician of modest origins, József Szabó (b. 1889) was a war veteran, long-standing member in the Christian Socialist movement and a former member of the ÉME. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 172-173

<sup>379</sup> “Én ebből a szempontból vizsgáltam az internálótábort, amikor ott voltam, és már interpellációm elhangzása előtt őszintén megmondom, hogy bennem kialakult az a felfogás, hogy ez az internálótábor csak arra alkalmas, hogy az ország hírnevét rontsa.” József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 309.

<sup>380</sup> József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 309-310. Paradoxically, the Hungarian Red Army appealed to many officers of the Austro-Hungarian army, as it seemed to take on the defence of Hungary's borders. After the fall of the Soviet Republic, many of the same officers were admitted to the Royal Hungarian army without reprisal. Kontler 1999, 338.

had been arrested for carrying a banned issue of *Népszava*,<sup>381</sup> the other for singing *The Internationale* aloud. Szabó thus wondered if he himself should be imprisoned, as he had the same issues of *Népszava* at home.<sup>382</sup> A mere accusation of spying had resulted in two years internment without trial.<sup>383</sup> Szabó went on, enumerating petty crimes, which were general around the country, yet deemed political when used for the repression of designated individuals. Workers had been rounded up when returning from their workplaces and, when unable to produce identification papers on the spot, brought into the camp as vagrants.<sup>384</sup> One inmate, in turn, had been sentenced for repeated forgery of official documents.

“It is a serious thing to perpetrate, for example, repeated forgery of official documents, and such a person should indeed be strictly dealt with. I asked him: what were those documents that you forged? He confessed that they were leave passes during his military service. [We are speaking of] leave passes as official documents!”<sup>385</sup>

This made Szabó ridicule the whole system, as he confessed openly that he, along with his comrades, had forged leave passes during his military service.<sup>386</sup> In doing this, Szabó attempted to connect his justification to the honourable memory of the war veterans, implying that either a myriad of veterans deserved the same sentence, or the verdicts were selective and politically motivated.

In the same vein as Éhn, Szabó presented a barrage of data, this time the personal experiences of the prisoners, in order to undermine the legitimacy of the political internment as an institution. Quite naturally, Minister Rakovszky dismissed his claims as spurious, originating from the inherently dishonest prisoners: “You believed all that! One must not be so naïve!”<sup>387</sup> In defence of his position, Szabó reminded the House that he was politically further from the Social Democrats than from the government, thus untouched by political bias.<sup>388</sup> Rather, he only appealed to the universal concept of humanity:

“Therefore I believe I can remain truly objective in this matter. I do not speak as a politician or as a doctor, but as a human being. I look at these conditions as a human being, and as a human being I have arrived at the conclusion that this system must be changed, that the internment camps must be closed, dismantled, the inmates brought

<sup>381</sup> The Social Democratic Party paper *Népszava* was under pressure and harassment during the early 1920s. Most notably, the journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó were murdered on February 1920 by Gyula Ostenburg’s detachment, in one of the most despised acts of the White Terror that caused uproar both in Hungary and internationally. Sakmyster 1994, 53–54.

<sup>382</sup> József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 310.

<sup>383</sup> József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 310.

<sup>384</sup> József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 310.

<sup>385</sup> “Az súlyos dolog, ha valakit többszörösen megbüntetnek pl. okirathamisításért és az ilyen emberrel tényleg szigorúan kellene eljárni. Érdeklődtem tőle: mik voltak azok az okiratok, amelyeket maga hamisított? Kísült, hogy a katonaságnál Urloabscheint hamisított. Urloabschein mint okirat!” József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 311.

<sup>386</sup> József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 311.

<sup>387</sup> “Mindent elhisznek! Nem kell ilyen naivnak lenni!” Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 311.

<sup>388</sup> József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 311.

to court, the foreign nationals repatriated and those convicted for petty crimes committed a long time ago, released and given back their civil rights.”<sup>389</sup>

Szabó’s speech as an act was thus an attempt to completely reframe and redescribe Éhn’s speech. Having participated in the same inspection, both offered competing interpretations of the camp. Szabó attempted to win over the House by appealing to the general opinion of the delegation: nearly every one of them had demanded either severe reorganization of the camp or its complete dismantling. Therefore, the House should not be satisfied with Éhn’s technical interpretation but also listen to the dissenting voices.<sup>390</sup>

The nature of the delegation itself also came under rhetorical contestation: at first Éhn had tried to forestall accusations of pro-government bias by stating that the delegation was open to all Members. Szabó in turn clung to this argument: if the majority of the multiparty delegation demanded the closing of the internment camp, then the critical voices deserved to be heard. However, Minister Rakovszky made another reinterpretation, turning the multiparty nature against the delegation; as it was not an officially appointed commission, it had ultimately no authority in the House.<sup>391</sup> When the government saw the opposition could not be appeased by favourable statistical data, it immediately resorted to technically invalidating the critical voices within the delegation.

At that point Esztergályos was allowed to return to the topic on the procedural basis of rectifying misinterpretations Éhn had presented concerning his arguments.<sup>392</sup> He used the opportunity to contradict Éhn’s observations with those of his own; instead of well-built barracks, he had encountered cells with damp earth floors; instead of enviable healthcare, he had met inmates beaten up by the guards; and no one would eat a dog for any other reason than extreme hunger.<sup>393</sup> Esztergályos even tried to raise suspicions and direct attention away from the Social Democrats by hinting that some inmates had been sentenced for their connections with far-right machinations led by Pál Prónay.<sup>394</sup> At this point, Speaker Huszár stopped Esztergályos, reminding him that the House Rules only allowed him to rectify misinterpretations, not to introduce further arguments.<sup>395</sup>

<sup>389</sup> “Épen azért azt hiszem, hogy én ebben a kérdésben igazán tárgyilagos tudok maradni. Belőlem sem a politikus, sem az orvos nem beszél, belőlem csak az ember beszél. Én mint ember nézem az állapotokat, és mint emberben alakult ki bennem az a felfogás, hogy ezen a rendszeren változtatni kell, hogy ezt az internálótábort meg kell szüntetni, fel kell oszlatni, a bűnösöket bíróság elé kell állítani, az idegen alattvalókat vissza kell küldeni hazájukba ... azokat az embereket, akik valamikor régen valami apró bűnt elkövettek, szabaddá kell helyezni és vissza kell adni békés polgári foglalkozásuknak.” József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 312.

<sup>390</sup> József Szabó, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 312.

<sup>391</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 313.

<sup>392</sup> Esztergályos made use of the House Rules, which allowed a Member an extra impromptu speech if he wanted to defend himself against unfair accusations or misinterpretation of his words. See e.g. Kontler 1999, 350.

<sup>393</sup> János Esztergályos, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 334.

<sup>394</sup> János Esztergályos, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 334. Pál Prónay (1874–c. 1945) was one of the main perpetrators of the White Terror, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s his name was linked to several rumours of far-right chicanery. Gerwarth 2012, 94–65; MÉL: Prónay, Pál; Paksa 2013, 54, 253; Sakmyster 1994, 28, 60.

<sup>395</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 334.

Unmoved by the remark, Estergályos continued to press the point, repeating the fact that the inmates had received their clothes only the day before the delegation's visit, and that many of them feared they would be taken away afterwards.<sup>396</sup> Moreover, Estergályos had heard that the prisoners' food rations had been increased for the very day of the inspection.<sup>397</sup> This made Minister Rakovszky lose his temper again, shouting repeatedly: "It is a lie! They get the same every day! Every day the same rations!"<sup>398</sup> Estergályos pressed on by hinting at bribery among the camp officials; a story circulated among the inmates "... that those who could pay 25 000 crowns to a certain lawyer in Diószeg, would be released from the camp..."<sup>399</sup> Speaker Huszár repeatedly objected to what he saw as Estergályos' abuse of the parliamentary procedure, and finally had him removed from the lectern.<sup>400</sup> The episode illuminates the limited nature of parliamentarism, however cherished as a concept: the question hour was not meant to be a serious challenge to the government, and when the questioning of the official narrative went too far, the official procedure and the House Rules were used to silence Estergályos.

### 2.4.3 The limits of parliamentarism

Finally, after repeated interjections and interruptions, Minister of the Interior Rakovszky appeared to answer the accusations. The beginning of his speech was marked by repeated cries of "Dissolve it!",<sup>401</sup> which required the Speaker declare a five-minute recess. This gave Rakovszky again the rhetorical opportunity to rely on the House Rules, arguing that if the Members of the opposition wanted to exercise their parliamentary control of the government, they should at least allow the minister responsible to give an answer.<sup>402</sup> He also used the heated and lasting debate as a pretext for limiting his answer to a bare minimum:

"I would have liked to deal with the matter of the internment camp thoroughly and in detail, yet given the late hour and especially the fact that the atmosphere of the House is not actually conducive to assessing the matter objectively, I shall try to keep my words as brief as possible."<sup>403</sup>

Thus the parliamentary culture and parliamentary control of the government were treated as conditional, subject to the mood of the House; in case the

<sup>396</sup> János Estergályos, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 334.

<sup>397</sup> János Estergályos, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 334.

<sup>398</sup> "Ez hazugság! Mindennap ugyanazt kapják. Mindennap ugyanazt az adagot kapják!" Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 334.

<sup>399</sup> "... hogy az internálótáborból szabadulnak emberek, akik 25.000 koronát tudnak egy Diószegi ügyvédnek fizetni..." János Estergályos, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 335.

<sup>400</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 335–336.

<sup>401</sup> "Feloszlatni!" NN X/1922, 338.

<sup>402</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 339–340.

<sup>403</sup> "Szerettem volna részletesen és hosszasan foglalkozni az internálótábor kérdésével, tekintettel azonban arra, hogy az idő igen messzire előrehaladt, tekintettel továbbá arra, hogy a Ház hangulata valóban nem alkalmas arra, hogy objektíve intéztük el azt a kérdést, igyekezni fogok mondandóimat rendkívül rövidre fogni." Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 340.

Members were not co-operative enough vis-a-vis the government, the minister was not bound to answering them.<sup>404</sup> As the minister responsible for answering the parliamentary questions, Rakovszky also made use of his ministerial authority, declaring that he “must judge the matter seriously and objectively, cleansed of tendentious approaches, claims being used for agitation propaganda,”<sup>405</sup> in an attempt to discredit all the preceding criticism and declare that he himself possessed the objective truth.

Returning to the technical legitimacy of the inspection, he again emphasized that the delegation had been a voluntary and self-imposed venture of certain Members interested in the conditions of the internment camp, but by no means an official commission of inquiry, which would have been entitled to make demands or official propositions concerning the matter. As for now, certain Members had overstepped their mandates and tried to appear as official inspectors, most probably to promote themselves.<sup>406</sup> As the government had already determined the correct policy concerning the matter, the opposition could not have any acceptable arguments or universal interests concerning it, but merely petty private interests of individual members, who were thus excluded from the sphere of politically competent persons. The only mandate of the delegation had been to verify the former accusations presented by Esztergályos, and through the words of Éhn, it had successfully and objectively rebutted them.<sup>407</sup> Thus, Rakovszky considered the matter closed – the accusations had been proven wrong, and by repeating them, the Left only undermined their own credibility.<sup>408</sup>

Whereas Esztergályos had formerly claimed that some of the inmates were mentally ill, Rakovszky presented a written confession of a certain inmate who had feigned mental illness in order to gain better treatment, but had then been promptly diagnosed and exposed.<sup>409</sup> It was convenient for Rakovszky to use such individual rebuttals of opposition claims to portray the critics as naïve, prone to believe every tale of woe evinced by the inmates, who, as selfish and impenitent criminals, seized every opportunity to arouse sympathy in order to gain personal benefit.

<sup>404</sup> Refusal of parliamentary discussion as a tool of delegitimizing of the opposition has not disappeared from Hungarian political culture. In December 2017, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán refused to answer a question concerning the government’s questionable conduct in internal security and instead used his turn to wish the House a Merry Christmas. See HVG 11.12.2017 [http://hvg.hu/itthon/20171211\\_Orbant\\_nemzetbiztonsagi\\_kockazatrol\\_kerdeztek\\_azt\\_valaszolta\\_boldog\\_karacsonyt](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20171211_Orbant_nemzetbiztonsagi_kockazatrol_kerdeztek_azt_valaszolta_boldog_karacsonyt); 444.hu 11.12.2017, <https://444.hu/2017/12/11/pharaon-tiborc-z-orban-tokeletes-valasszal-uszta-meg-a-felkerdezest> (24.4.2019).

<sup>405</sup> “... ezt a kérdést a tendenciózus beállításoktól, az agitációs propaganda céljaira használható állításoktól megtisztítva, objektíven és komolyan ítéljük meg.” Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 340.

<sup>406</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 340.

<sup>407</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 340.

<sup>408</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 340.

<sup>409</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 341.

"I brought this case up in detail because I presume my honourable colleague Esztergályos has been unsuspecting, and because I wanted to demonstrate how naïve it would be, if someone were to appear in the Zalaegerszeg internment camp, interrogate the internees and to take everything they say at face value without checking whether those statements were true or not."<sup>410</sup>

To the accusations of superficial improvement of the conditions, he had a similar answer; whereas the opposition believed that winter clothing had only been distributed to the inmates for the duration of the delegation's visit, he presented a document according to which a large shipment of winter clothing had been sent to the camp already in November and duly distributed to the inmates.<sup>411</sup> As Estergályos had reportedly met prisoners without proper clothing, Rakovszky retorted with an ironic twist:

"Immediately after Mr. Esztergályos had made such an accusation, the officials organized an inspection which revealed that a large group of inmates had stripped and hidden their clothes under their beds and pallets for the duration of the Member's visit, where they were found afterwards."<sup>412</sup>

Thus, Rakovszky again turned the very issue against Esztergályos; there had indeed been distortion of the facts, but not on behalf of the officials, but by the inmates themselves, who had successfully deceived a gullible Social Democrat to gain sympathy.<sup>413</sup> He continued to present examples of the actual ineptitude of the delegation, of Members who had believed any fable crafted by the inmates:

"My honourable fellow Member Miklós Fogrács was so conscientious that he went to great trouble ... to find the family members of a certain inmate, who had complained about the miseries of his family, but to his astonishment, was compelled to find that the man in question had no family at all, neither wife nor children."<sup>414</sup>

As the opposition again began crying "Dissolve it!" in reaction to Rakovszky's revelations, it can be deduced that his rhetorical strategy had gained momentary success; he had been able to thoroughly refute the opposition's claims one by one,

<sup>410</sup> "Ezt az esetet azért hoztam elő részletesebben, mert Esztergályos t. képviselőtársamról jóhiszeműséget tétélezek fel, és ezzel is dokumentálni akartam azt, mekkora naivitás, ha valaki megjelenik a zalaegerszegi internálótáborban, ott kikérdezi az egyes internáltakat, és mindazt, amit azok neki elmondanak, készpénznek veszi, anélkül, hogy meggyőződne, vajjon ezek az állítások megfelelnek-e a valóságnak vagy nem." Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 341.

<sup>411</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 341.

<sup>412</sup> "Azonnal, mihelyt Esztergályos János képviselő ur részéről ez a vád felmerült, megindult a vizsgálat és megállapítást nyert, hogy az internáltaknak igen nagy csoportja a képviselő ur látogatása alkalmával a ruháit és a bakancsát az ágyak, a szalmazsákok alá dugta el s ott a ruhák meg is találtak." Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 342.

<sup>413</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 342.

<sup>414</sup> "Fogrács Miklós t. képviselőtársam volt olyan lelkiismeretes, vette magának a fáradságot ... azonnal felkereste ezeknek az internáltaknak családtagjait, és csodálatosképen kénytelen volt megállapítani, hogy olyan internáltaknak, akik családjuk nyomoráról panaszkodtak, családjuk egyáltalán nincs, se feleségük, se gyermekük nincs." Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 344.

whereas the Left could only resort to chanting interjections.<sup>415</sup> Rakovszky, who had previously lost his temper in the face of the accusations, was now in a reverse position to keep calm and ask for acceptance for an ‘impartial and objective’ interpretation of the matter.<sup>416</sup> Naturally, the debate had already become quite disconnected from the actual conditions of the internment camp. The government had at its disposal the official data and documents, which it used to the full, whereas the criticism of the opposition was based on the interviews with the inmates, who could always be deemed unreliable and self-interested.

Esztergályos once more tried to win over the mood of House by making a strong transnational and trans-ideological statement: “[political] internment only exists in Soviet Russia!”<sup>417</sup> Drawing a parallel with the Hungarian counterrevolutionary government and its ideological archenemy was an attempt to question the Hungarian self-understanding as a part of the civilized West. Moreover, the statement revealed the bounds of the Hungarian Social Democrats’ political allegiance; since the Social Democrats had officially cut their ties with the Communists, Esztergályos was also able to appear as a Hungarian patriot against the ‘eastern’ uncivilized oppression and arbitrary internment.

As regards the calls to close the internment camp, Rakovszky dryly noted that it was “a completely different matter.”<sup>418</sup> The present debate concerned only the “so-called inspection”<sup>419</sup> of the conditions at the camp, on which the House had by now been given a thorough statement and a rebuttal of the outrageous accusations. In case certain members wanted to propose the closing of the camp, they were entitled to propose such motion but were reminded that the government still was responsible for the security of the country.<sup>420</sup> The message was clear – those interned in Zalaegerség were there for a very good reason, and if left roam free would severely compromise national security. The political prisoners were treated as a homogenous group, characterized by socially unacceptable behaviour, violence and unreliability – the latter being proven by their successful deception of the opposition representatives.

When arguments had arisen against the very practice of the internment of political prisoners, which allegedly was uncivilized and not in use in other parts of Europe, Rakovszky could merely refer to Tihamer Erődi-Harrach,<sup>421</sup> a legal expert, who had clearly indicated that similar practices were in force in France,

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<sup>415</sup> NN X/1922, 342.

<sup>416</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 342.

<sup>417</sup> “Csak Szovjetországban van internálás!” János Esztergályos, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 342.

<sup>418</sup> “... egészen különálló kérdés,” Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 342.

<sup>419</sup> “... hogy úgy mondjam – vizsgálattal,” Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 342.

<sup>420</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 342.

<sup>421</sup> Lawyer and legal scholar Tihamer Erődi-Harrach (b. 1885) was a legal expert employed by the Hungarian government to study the criminal law and punitive codes in Western Europe for the Hungarian prison reform. Member of the Unity Party parliamentary caucus since 1922. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 59.

Belgium and Norway, to name a few countries.<sup>422</sup> At the moment Erődi-Harrach was the most experienced scholar of comparative criminal law and using his testimony had professional authority that Rakovszky could interpret as an 'objective' state of affairs. Thus criticism could again be returned to the opposition:

"The more the honourable Members repeat such statements, the more I need to assure them that our practices are not some outrageous exceptional measures, but that the Members themselves have based their statements on a great amount of recklessness, without thoroughly studying the matter ... and referring to foreign legislation with unbelievable certainty without - as it seems - truly understanding it."<sup>423</sup>

The transnational argumentation based on the precarious issue of Hungary's international credibility was thus nullified; the only danger to that credibility was the opposition itself, pressing unfounded accusations about a completely legal practice.

Where the most concrete and outrageous claim about the conditions in the camp had been the case of eating a dog, Rakovszky naturally handed it back to the opposition with a tragicomic tone.<sup>424</sup> As Kálman Éhn had already proved, nutrition was adequate and therefore there was no risk of dying of hunger, nor any need to catch dogs for food. If the inmates' hunger was insatiable by normal means, that was no longer the problem of the officials:

"Hunger is a subjective feeling ... Absolutely no one can demand that - during the miserable state of the nation - the inmates of a detention facility are handed all the provisions to comply with their subjective feelings."<sup>425</sup>

Rakovszky had a simple solution to the problem of nourishment: work in the camp should be made obligatory, and in turn the inmates would generate revenue, with which they could also get better provisions. The camp would be also less dependent on government funding and less likely to suffer from acute shortages.<sup>426</sup>

Speaking of those inmates who were interned for an indefinite period for spying, Rakovszky reminded that those were actually Romanian citizens and the Hungarian government would willingly have repatriated them to Romania if only the Romanian authorities had accepted them.<sup>427</sup> This argument again

<sup>422</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 343; Tihamer Erődi-Harrach, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 329-331.

<sup>423</sup> "A képviselő urak mennél többet hangoztatják ezeket az állításaikat, annál inkább fogják bebizonyítani azt, hogy nem minálunk vannak valami felháborító különös intézkedések, hanem a képviselő urak csodálatos vakmerőséggel kockáztatnak meg állításokat az illető kérdés alapos tanulmányozása nélkül ... és hihetetlen bizottsággal citálnak olyan külföldi törvényhozásokból, amelyeket, úgy látszik, nem ismernek." Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 343.

<sup>424</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 343.

<sup>425</sup> "Az éhség egy szubjektív érzés ... Abszolúte senki nem követelheti azt, hogy az ország mai nyomorúságos állapota mellett letartóztatási intézményben az emberek olyan táplálkozást kapjanak, amely szubjektív érzésüknek felel meg." Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 343-344.

<sup>426</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 346.

<sup>427</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 344.



provoked a response, which was characteristic of the multi-dimensional and transnational play on the motives of nationality, ethnicity and revisionism; in crying: "So, you renounce Transylvania!"<sup>428</sup> Esztergályos suggested that if Rakovszky defined those Romanian Hungarians as merely Romanians, he had effectively accepted the ceding of Transylvania to Romania – which naturally went against the official revision policy of the government.

Towards the end of his speech, Rakovszky also returned to the case of the refugees who since the end of the war had been arriving in Hungary in large numbers. As there were at the same time numerous Hungarian refugees arriving from the lost territories, the Hungarian state was not able to withstand such an influx of foreigners, who needed to be repatriated to their homelands.<sup>429</sup> However, as the officials of the respective states had been reluctant to accept the repatriations, a camp had been established at Zalaegerség, where the conditions were not as good as the Hungarian state would have wanted to provide.<sup>430</sup> Mention of the foreign refugees provoked a telling interruption: "There is room for them in Palestine!"<sup>431</sup> The prevalent anti-Semitic spirit again classified foreign refugees as 'Galicians', Jewish fortune-seekers who wanted to benefit from Hungary.<sup>432</sup> The government benefitted from such outcries that fostered the mood of insecurity and suspicion, which could then be directed against designated enemies whenever necessary.

To conclude his speech, Rakovszky again attempted to rhetorically legitimize the very need for correctional facilities, now with a mitigating tone. The inmates were, quite naturally, unhappy with the situation, but they were there justly and legally. One could discuss the practical form of their incarceration, and he was ready to concede that the present one was not what the government desired, either, but the development of the facilities must not mean the outright dismantling of the camp.<sup>433</sup> As much as the government, likewise, wanted to see that happen, the menace of the revolutionaries left them with no option:

"... And there is a need for it, because as a result of the war and the peace that so severely burdens the state, there still exists such discontent that can be instigated and agitated with demagogy and argumentation, which can only be prevented, not by interning everyone, but those, who seek to bring about new revolutions, rebellions, upheavals."<sup>434</sup>

428 "Szóval ön lemond Erdélyről!" János Esztergályos, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 344.

429 Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 347.

430 Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 347.

431 "Palesztinában van még hely!" Jenő Szabóky, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 347.

432 Hanebrink 2006, 57; Zeidler 2007, 45.

433 Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 345.

434 "... és szükség van rá azért, mert a háború és az országra olyan súlyosan nehezedő béke következtében még mindig van demagógiával, hangoskodással fokozható és elmérgesíthető olyan elégedetlenség, amely ellen csak akkor tudunk védekezni, nem hogyha mindenkit beinternálunk, hanem ha azok, akik újabb forradalmakat, újabb lázadásokat, újabb felfordulásokat akarnának létrehozni." Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 345.

As he considered he had successfully rebutted the criticism, Rakovszky was able to offer a more inclusive tone in the spirit of consolidation: as soon as social stability was reached, the political internment could eventually be discontinued. The success of the governmental policy was demonstrated by the already declining number of political prisoners.<sup>435</sup> He reminded the House that the government wanted to have the internees' moral reasoning corrected by honest work and give them an opportunity to participate in the rebuilding of Hungary.<sup>436</sup> The discourse was thus brought back to the conceptualization of the Hungarian nation and the question of who had a right to be called a Hungarian; despite the provisions of the Bethlen-Peyer pact, the government still preferred to exclude the political prisoners from the nation for their alleged sins, be they Communism or spying for a foreign power. Rakovszky was only ready to readmit them to the nation case by case and on condition that they redeemed themselves through patriotic work. And, essentially, all this remained a prospect for the time when 'a proper consolidation' was reached – consolidation itself was being used as a catchword to signify the better future – when and if the government was given proper peace to implement its policy. The rhetorical play on conditionality and insecurity linked to nation-building helped to maintain the state of emergency in the face of the internal and external enemies.

#### 2.4.4 The intersecting rhetorical strategies

The debate on political internment was interesting in many ways. It stands out from the mass of the parliamentary material due to the heated exchange of words between the opposition and the government over the latter's exclusive conceptualization of the nation and the ongoing struggle against its designated internal enemies. Therefore the dynamics of this particular question have been reproduced here in detail. The conditions of the internment camp became an object of constant rhetorical redescription and redefinition, and the members repeatedly attempted to undermine each other's credibility by presenting the instance from competitive viewpoints. Both parties attempted to use positions of expertise to support their causes: for the opposition it was the unvarnished firsthand experience of the conditions, brought before the House in the raw. The government, in turn, relied on the authority of Éhn as a doctor and Erődi-Harrach as a legal expert to testify that the conditions were adequate and the practice of internment in line with international standards.

In the first phase of the debate, Kálmán Éhn, working on behalf of the government, based his argument on the listing of material conditions that could be considered adequate, in an attempt to dispell the Social Democrats' criticism.

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<sup>435</sup> Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 345.

<sup>436</sup> "De nemcsak azt akarjuk, hogy az internáltak ne töltsék ott tétlenül az időt, hanem arra is törekszünk, hogy munkával legyenek ellátva és hogy bizonyos fokú erkölcsi nevelésben részesüljenek, mert hiszen nem az a törekvésünk, hogy büntessük őket, hanem az, hogy visszaadjuk őket a társadalomnak, mint morális, megjavított, dologra, ránevelt egyéneket." Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 347.

Even though the opposition vociferously disagreed with the arguments, Éhn initially succeeded in distracting the debate from the matter of political internment *an sich* to the level of material details. Éhn also chose to endure the barrage of heated interjections, turning them into a discourse of victimization; he was merely presenting an impartial account in response to the questions raised: "I am only referring to those things because Mr. Esztergályos has introduced them, and if its allowed to present such accusations here, then it should also be allowed to present a defence."<sup>437</sup> In such a victimization discourse, even the Speaker appealed to the inviolable right to speak in Parliament, cleverly applying the same ideal the opposition used to demand the vindication of their rights.<sup>438</sup> In turn, when the opposition was given the word, it was Minister Rakovszky's turn to be provoked into interruptions. Thus mutual provocation and being provoked can be seen as characteristic of the debate. In such a situation the government side had the upper hand, as it could exploit the House Rules to silence the opposition.

During his own concluding speech, Rakovszky was nevertheless able to keep calm and return to the quasi-rationalizing argumentation, knowing that the opposition was in no position to make amends. Due to his position, he could at the same time appeal to the ideal of the parliamentary culture, but actively dismiss any forms of actual parliamentary control or criticism of the government. This was exemplified by the dual interpretation of the delegation to Zalaegerség: at first, the government attempted to use the findings of Éhn to treat the matter as closed, but as criticism and challenges against these intensified, Rakovszky began to back off, appealed to technicalities in delegitimizing the delegation and then proceeded to discredit the critical Members one by one. When the opposition appealed to modern conceptualizations of the rule of law and applied transnational comparisons, even equating Hungary with the Soviet Union, Rakovszky in turn resorted to irony and direct personal attacks.

Thus the question of political internment became an important example of the limits of the consolidation discourse in at least two ways; first, it showed that there were still individuals excluded from the nation through political internment, and little actual will to rehabilitate them or even bring them to court, and who only through patriotic work of reconstruction might regain their place among the Hungarians - if and when the government allowed it. Secondly, despite the Bethlen-Peyer pact and the Social Democrats' re-entry into Parliament, they were not treated as political equals, but still rhetorically antagonized, distrusted and delegitimized in the debate whenever they ventured to take any political initiative and use the momentum of the House for a goal ideologically unacceptable to the government.

Despite the government's attempt to suppress the discussion, the 'completely different matter' of closing down the Zalaegerség internment camp

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<sup>437</sup> "Én ezekre csak azért hivatkozom, mert Esztergályos képviselő ur hozta fel ezeket és ha szabad a vádat itt elmondani, akkor talán szabad a védelemnek is elhangzani."  
Kálmán Éhn, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 304.

<sup>438</sup> László Almásy, Speaker of the National Assembly, 7.3.1923, NN X/1922, 299.

remained on the agenda, and against mounting criticism from not only the Social Democratic party but also from the Christian Socialists and the churches, the camp was closed at the end of 1924.<sup>439</sup> Coincidentally, after the opposition had suspected an amelioration of the conditions in the camp and ironically called the place 'a sanatorium', it was indeed converted into a sanatorium for tubercular patients.<sup>440</sup>

## 2.5 The heyday of consolidation? The amendment to the *Numerus Clausus*, 1928<sup>441</sup>

### 2.5.1 Making a virtue of necessity

In the early 1920s, international goodwill towards Hungary had been scarce due to the White Terror and by no means reduced by the *Numerus Clausus* legislation. At the same time, *Numerus Clausus* had been introduced reciprocally in Romania, where Hungarians had been placed under similar restrictions regarding university entrance. The Romanian Hungarians already in 1922 had appealed to the Hungarian Parliament to repeal the legislation.<sup>442</sup> By the year 1928 the recent developments in foreign policy, especially Hungary's entry into the League of Nations, the Treaty of Friendship with Italy and, to a lesser extent, Lord Rothermere's *Justice for Hungary* campaign in Britain, had created confidence within the Hungarian political atmosphere; Hungarian matters had received positive attention in Europe and crisis measures could be mitigated, if even with rhetorical concessions.<sup>443</sup> Hungary still nurtured hopes for a revision of the Trianon Treaty through international moderation and wanted to avoid negative attention from the League of Nations.<sup>444</sup>

Amidst domestic pressure and international expectations, after repeated calls for amendment from the Hungarian liberals and the liberal circles of the Unity Party, as well as numerous postponements on handling the matter on behalf of the government,<sup>445</sup> István Bethlen and Kunó Klebelsberg<sup>446</sup> finally made

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<sup>439</sup> Romsics 2017, 196.

<sup>440</sup> "Fogolytábor a város szélén - Zalaegerszeg körzetében hadifogolytábor létesítendő 20000 hadifogoly részére." ZAOL - a Zala megyei hírportal, 28.8.2015, <https://www.zaol.hu/hetvege/fogolytabor-a-varos-szelen-1722277/> (24.4.2019).

<sup>441</sup> This chapter has earlier been published as a part of Häkkinen 2018. Reproduced with the permission of John Benjamins Publishing / Journal of Language and Politics.

<sup>442</sup> Kovács 2012, 31; Diószegi 2009, 70-71.

<sup>443</sup> Also, the Hungarian economy enjoyed growth during the mid-20s as a result of steady prices for agricultural produce. This enabled the government to relax the emergency measures, of which anti-Semitism was a part. Ungváry 2013, 127.

<sup>444</sup> Ladányi 2012, 80-82, 85.

<sup>445</sup> Ladányi 2012, 72-73.

<sup>446</sup> A lawyer with a prominent career in civil administration, Count Kunó Klebelsberg (1875-1932) was a close ally of Bethlen in constructing the Unity Party and Bethlen's choice for the post of Minister of the Interior in 1921 and Minister of Education and Church Affairs since 1922. During his term as Minister of the Interior he drafted the modification to the electoral law that allowed restrictions in suffrage in the 1922

a virtue out of necessity, introducing the amendment to *Numerus Clausus* law. The timing of the amendment also involved an internal political dimension; whereas in 1920 the moderate conservatives, albeit reluctant to support the legislation, had not been confident enough to disrupt the balance of the House by open opposition, Bethlen's success in the 1926 elections had reinforced the government's position in relation to the radical Right, which made it easier to pass the amendment. Even the Jewish bourgeoisie had a role to play in the domestic political and economic stabilization, and one reason for proposing the amendment was actually to help them co-operate with their business partners in Western Europe, who otherwise might have boycotted Hungary. That is, to help to attract investments from the same international Jewish capitalists whom the governments were rhetorically fighting.<sup>447</sup>

The brief modification of the *Numerus Clausus*, debated in the Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament between 2 and 28 February 1928, removed the explicit quotas of race and nationality from university enrolment and replaced them with an instruction to take into account the applicant's societal background. It stipulated that care should be taken to ensure that children of veterans and war orphans were granted study places in adequate numbers, and that children of different societal groups should be admitted in relation to the proportion of the said group in the population as a whole.<sup>448</sup> In principle the law abolished the ethnicity-based discrimination that had attracted negative attention internationally, but in practice replaced it with vague wording that still allowed universities to use 'national fidelity' as an entrance requirement, i.e. to exclude people of dubious background (ethnic or class-based). The interest of the government was still to limit the number of Jewish students, but also to avoid international condemnation for racial discrimination. This unspoken intention was widely known among the Hungarian political and academic elite.<sup>449</sup>

As mentioned above, the Hungarian urge for international credibility and support for its revision project was an integral part of the debates. The public arguments for modification stemmed from the international sphere: as the equally exclusive nation-building processes in the successor states had resulted in ethnic discrimination against their Hungarian minorities, Hungarians realized they were not in a position to challenge their neighbours' legislation in the

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elections. He also worked to limit the influence of the radical nationalist organizations, which brought scorn upon him from the extreme Right. Cultural policy under Klebelsberg followed the consolidation discourse, with the aim of raising the level of education among the rural population. At the same time, his project of positive propaganda for Hungary was implemented by founding Hungarian institutes abroad and publishing information in foreign languages. Klebelsberg, himself a scion of a Hungarian branch of an aristocratic family of German origin, was not personally partisan regarding the exclusive conceptualization of the Hungarian identity, yet he put himself at the service of Hungarian nation-building and was ready to appear as an apologist of the *Numerus Clausus* in international fora such as the League of Nations. Deák 1992, 1051; Kontler 1999, 356–357; Ladányi 2012, 75–78; Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 208–209; MÉL: Klebelsberg, Kunó.

<sup>447</sup> Kovács 2012, 32

<sup>448</sup> Law XIV / 1928. Romsics 2000, 234–235.

<sup>449</sup> Kovács 2012, 52–53.

international fora as long as the known case of discriminatory *Numerus Clausus* existed.<sup>450</sup> This followed the established narrative about Hungary as the sole victim of the fervent, anti-Hungarian nationalism of its neighbours.<sup>451</sup> For this case, Elemér Farkas<sup>452</sup> rearticulated the defence of the nation as an integrating and culture-building policy, leaving the concepts of discrimination and segregation to the neighbouring countries:

“The bill that lies in front of us deals with the issue ... which has given our enemies ... a constant pretext to defame us and to attempt to legitimize their treaty-breaking actions against their own national minorities.

...

This government and this parliament erect schools and intends to equip the nation with the armor of culture, starting from the fact that such armour is more resistant to the bullet and the sword.”<sup>453</sup>

National unity was now being constructed against unjust accusations from abroad and mitigating the antagonism between the ‘true Hungarians’ and their internal enemies. The inclusive discourse implied that in Hungary everyone was allowed – and expected – to participate in nation-building, regardless of class, nationality or religion.<sup>454</sup>

The discourse of objectivity was also connected to the redefinition of impartiality: the government wanted to distance itself from political extremes, of which the Left demanded the complete abolition of *Numerus Clausus*, the radical Right even stricter measures for race defence. In that rhetoric, only the government possessed the wisdom to pursue moderate reforms.<sup>455</sup> Kunó Klebelsberg, as the minister responsible, assured the House that government would maintain constitutionalism and, through the modification, end the unconstitutional discrimination towards Jews.<sup>456</sup>

<sup>450</sup> Elemér Farkas, 9.2.1928, KN VIII/1927, 438. See also Diószegi 2009, 69–72.

<sup>451</sup> More openly articulated by István Bethlen in his speech in Debrecen 4.3.1928. Bethlen 2000, 240–251.

<sup>452</sup> Social scientist and former ministerial counsellor in the Ministry of Defence Elemér Farkas (b. 1886) was a member of the Unity Party caucus since 1926. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 91.

<sup>453</sup> “Előttünk fekszik egy törvényjavaslat, amely azzal a kérdéssel foglalkozik ... amely külföldi ellenségeinknél ... folytonos alkalmat adotta mi megrágalmazásunkra és saját nemzeti kisebbségeik ellen el követett békeszerződésellenes eljárásuk igazolásának megkísérlésére ... Ez a kormány és ez a parlament iskolákat emel és a kultúra páncéljával akarja felvértezni ezt a nemzetet, abból kiindulva, hogy ezen a páncélon keresztül sokkal nehezebben fog majd a golyó és a kard.” Elemér Farkas, 9.2.1928, KN VIII/1927, 438.

<sup>454</sup> Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Education and Church Affairs, 23.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 200.

<sup>455</sup> Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Education and Church Affairs, 23.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 197, 201; cf. István Bethlen’s speech in memory of István Széchenyi, Bethlen 2000, 138–142.

<sup>456</sup> Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Education and Church Affairs, 10.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 12.

Moderate reformism and international climate were also present in the speeches of the liberal opposition. Pál Hegymegi-Kiss<sup>457</sup> reminded the House that Hungary should lean neither towards Soviet Bolshevism nor to Italian Fascism, but to build equality by abolishing all restrictions. He also reminded the House of the international goodwill towards Hungary, especially in Great Britain,<sup>458</sup> which should be fostered by rejecting all accusations of discrimination; therefore the law on university enrolment should be based only on individual abilities.<sup>459</sup> The argument was followed by critical evaluation of the results of the *Numerus Clausus*: as estimated by the liberal opposition in 1920, the law had mostly affected poorer Christian Hungarians, whereas Jewish students had moved to foreign universities.<sup>460</sup> As the debate on the amendment was intended to be the showcase of the Hungarian rebuttal of discrimination, Hegymegi-Kiss made use of the tolerant atmosphere of the House, leaning on the ideals of consolidation and arguing for the total abolition of the *Numerus Clausus*, and moreover, received not insults but applause.<sup>461</sup> This kind of equality discourse was totally unheard of when compared to the bitter antagonistic discourse of 1920; at that time Hegymegi-Kiss would not have been allowed to finish a similar speech at all.<sup>462</sup> During the debates of 1928, interruptions were kept to a minimum and also observed much more strictly by the Speaker than in 1920.<sup>463</sup>

Alongside the Liberals, the Social Democrats also questioned the government's conditional conceptualization of equality. In her speech, Anna Kéthly<sup>464</sup> approached the *Numerus Clausus* from a class perspective, without racial or nationalist terminology. She stated that the law was merely a safeguard of the old elites, aimed to restrict societal mobility. She also paid attention to the vague wording, which in practice allowed for arbitrary discrimination. Another argument was temporal: as of 1928, those applying to universities had been under 10 years old during the revolutions; if the wording of national fidelity remained in the law, it was clearly aimed to judge children by the actions of their

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<sup>457</sup> Pál Hegymegi-Kiss (1885–1950), son of a reformed bishop, had a long career in civil administration before being elected to Parliament in 1922. Member of the liberal opposition. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 135–136; MÉL: Kiss, Pál, Hegymegi Kiss.

<sup>458</sup> See e.g. Romsics 1999, 193.

<sup>459</sup> Pál Hegymegi-Kiss, 2.2.1928. KN VIII/1927, 440–442.

<sup>460</sup> Pál Hegymegi-Kiss, 2.2.1928. KN VIII/1927, 442–444. Already by the mid-1920s it turned out that the gap in university enrolment resulting from the rejection of Jews was not filled by Christian Hungarians and many university courses were below the expected strength. This was one of the premises of amending the law. Kovács 2012, 34–35.

<sup>461</sup> Pál Hegymegi-Kiss, 2.2.1928. KN VIII/1927, 441.

<sup>462</sup> Cf. Sándor Pető, 3.9.1920, NN V/1920, 190–195; Pál Sándor 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 459–462; Ernő Bródy 21.9.1920, NN V/1920, 476–478.

<sup>463</sup> Cf. Marcell Baracs, 10.2.1928 KN IX/1927, 6–12.

<sup>464</sup> Prominent social politician Anna Kéthly (1889–1976) belonged to the leadership of the Social Democratic Party and to the parliamentary caucus from 1922 until 1948, when she was dismissed as rightist during the Communist takeover. After Margit Schlachta, Kéthly was the second woman to be elected to the Hungarian Parliament, and during the 1928 session she was the only female Member. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 168–169; MÉL: Kéthly, Anna.

parents and thus maintained class distinctions, regardless of the kind words about consolidation.<sup>465</sup>

Those supporting the government's proposal denied that any means of social or ethnic discrimination remained. Making deliberate use of the 'golden mean' argument, they pointed out that when racial and nationality quotas were abolished, no accusation of anti-Semitism *nor* of philo-Semitism was valid; thereafter the *Numerus Clausus* in its reformed form was an objective tool of the consolidation policy, nothing else.<sup>466</sup> Klebelsberg concluded the argument by stating that limitations on university enrolment as such were still needed due to the distress of Hungary, but no longer through ethnic discrimination:

"At the moment they suffer for of being Jews. In the future they will only suffer because they are Hungarians, sons of this post-Trianon Hungary. They have to understand that we are obliged to share a smaller loaf of bread between us, and that no one may be given a bigger piece than to others."<sup>467</sup>

In contrast to the original debate on *Numerus Clausus* in 1920, Klebelsberg turned the classification of Jews upside down. Those who had been un-patriotic and dubious members of a distinct race, were now conceptualized as Hungarians, yet they should not expect too many concessions on that basis, as the distress of the nation remained dire.

The race-defenders still raised their voices demanding the continuation of the ethnic quotas. But even their rhetoric had incorporated appeasing tones. Predictably, Gyula Gömbös opposed the modification, stating that the Jews indeed were culturally and racially distinct from Hungarians, but then contented himself with asking whether Jews could not just be proud of their ethnic heritage. He also admitted that even though the *Numerus Clausus* was a strict measure, it was always meant to be a temporary one.<sup>468</sup> Gömbös reiterated his endorsement of national values and racial defence, but treated them as subordinate to the 'strength and prosperity' of the Hungarian nation, which, he admitted, would also prevail under the amended conditions.<sup>469</sup> This conciliatory tone mirrored his obligatory mitigation of the antagonism between race defenders and conservatives: Gömbös had nominally returned to the Unity Party and was obliged to curb his personal ambitions for power for a while.<sup>470</sup> One can thus also take the view that at that moment, the radical Right was mostly doing the government a favour by presenting the expected extremist point of view, from

<sup>465</sup> Anna Kéthly, 10.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 13–18.

<sup>466</sup> See e.g. Sándor Szabó, 14.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 27–30; Gábor Jánossy, 14.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 40–41.

<sup>467</sup> "Most szenvednek azért, mert zsidók, akkor szenvedni fognak csak azért, mert magyar emberek, mert ennek a trianoni Magyarországnak fiai. Értsék meg, hogy kisebb kenyeret vagyunk kénytelenek egymás között megosztani és értsék meg, hogy nagyobb darabot ebből a kis kenyérből senkinek sem lehet adni." Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Education and Church Affairs, 23.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 202.

<sup>468</sup> Gyula Gömbös, 23.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 185.

<sup>469</sup> Gyula Gömbös, 23.2.1928, KN IX/1927, 186.

<sup>470</sup> Romsics 1995, 215; Sakmyster 2006, 164–165; Vonyó 2014, 146–147.



which the government could then duly resign in the publication of its newly-found policy of tolerance.

### 2.5.2 The pitfalls of a 'gentlemanly' anti-Semitism

Despite the notable difference in rhetoric between the first and second debate on the *Numerus Clausus*, the fact remained that successive governments were ready to use anti-Semitic sentiment as a tool of nation-building should the need arise. The image of Jews' otherness and the denial of their assimilation into the Hungarian nation were the principal arguments behind these measures. On that basis, the legitimization for restrictions of the *Numerus Clausus* type rested on the quasi-rational arguments of *proportional equality* and *conditional liberty*. Once initiated, the anti-Semitic discrimination was mitigated, at least rhetorically, but in practice never reversed. Even while the wording of the amendment of 1928 appeared non-racial, Jewish enrolment in universities was still restricted and their share of intake was only very slowly increased in the late 1920s and early 1930s, before taking another downturn when new restrictions were imposed in the late 1930s.<sup>471</sup> Moreover, it has to be noted that Judaism was racialized specifically through the *Numerus Clausus*; its implementation in Hungarian academia, in the very attempt to identify and reject Jewish applicants, moved the concept of Jew away from self-proclaimed definition through religion and towards an externally defined definition through ethnicity.<sup>472</sup>

It must be born in mind that the Hungarian nation-building debates included various forms of anti-Semitic discourses and arguments which can be distinguished from each other. Firstly, the post-revolutionary discourse equated Jews with the utterly traumatizing revolutions and thus sought to minimize their role in counterrevolutionary Hungarian society. Secondly, the conservative and consolidating discourse did not see any harm in Jewish individuals but wanted to end their 'over-representation' in a more or less gentlemanly way and even sought approval from Jews themselves. As Prime Minister Bethlen put it:

"I admit that there currently exists a Jewish question in the country, but its solution is that in the economic field we can live without them, or indeed with them. It's also in their own interests, because the moment they are no longer indispensable, harmony will return."<sup>473</sup>

Amidst such patronizing words, the rhetorical construction of otherness remained, and was eagerly reapplied in the late 1930s, when the political shift to the right and the allegiance towards National Socialist Germany prompted Hungary to implement strict legislation with the explicit aim of limiting

<sup>471</sup> Kovács 2012, 48, 53; Ungváry 2013, 22.

<sup>472</sup> Kovács 2012, 30.

<sup>473</sup> "Elismerem, hogy jelenleg van zsidókérdés az országban, de ennek megoldása az, hogy gazdasági téren azok lehessünk nélkülük is, amik velük együtt vagyunk. Ez önék is érdekük, mert abban a percben, amint nem lesznek nélkülözhetetlenek; abban a percben az összhang itt helyre fog allni." István Bethlen's inauguration address in 1921, Bethlen 2000, 124. See also Romsics 1995, 191–193.

percentages of Jews in certain professions.<sup>474</sup> During the debates on the later Jewish laws, the very same arguments invoked already in 1920 were reinstated without question: the Jews were and continued to be the conspiring revolutionaries, the cowards of the World War and the plutocratic exploiters of poor Hungarians.<sup>475</sup>

Most clearly, the diverse nature and diverse motives of Hungarian anti-Semitism are embodied in the change of the concept of *őrségváltás*, the 'change of the guard'. For the reactionary conservative elite this meant some vague, yet peaceful process, whereby Hungarian Jewry would voluntarily renounce its economic influence in favour of the Christian middle class.<sup>476</sup> They nurtured this idea of gentlemanly anti-Semitism even in the late 1930s, when a totally new breed of extreme Right had taken over the anti-Semitic discourse; for them, *őrségváltás* came to imply the Final Solution.<sup>477</sup>

The 'Jewish question' as a rhetorical construct was one of the cornerstones in the exclusive nation-building discourse in the interwar era. The very discourse aimed at constructing Jews' otherness and widening the social divides emerging in the pre-war era,<sup>478</sup> when, as Bethlen put it: "... trade, business and the financial sector ended up in such hands, which were not – and perhaps are not today either – committed to the national sentiment as would have been right and desirable."<sup>479</sup> Motivated by both symbolic nationalism and an economic need to take over businesses from the Jewish bourgeoisie and transfer them to the newly-educated rural Hungarians, institutionalized anti-Semitism remained an inseparable part of the Hungarian conceptualization of nation.<sup>480</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusions. Conditional virtues

The counterrevolutionary nation-building retained its exclusive nature throughout the era. The revolutions of 1918–19 were the cornerstone of the rhetorical legitimization of government policies, and the exclusion of those deemed responsible for them from the conceptualization of the Hungarian nation was enforced through legislation. As witnessed in the forms of argumentation, the revolutions provided an endless supply of negative examples and experiences which could then be arbitrarily connected to any number of opponents, who were thus excluded from the circle of patriotic Hungarians and competent politicians. The further rationalization of the reasons for certain

<sup>474</sup> Ungváry 2013, 184–186.

<sup>475</sup> See e.g. Gábor Balogh 5.5.1938, KN XVIII/1935, 299–303.

<sup>476</sup> Lendvai 2012, 60; Püski 2006, 59; Turbucz 2014, 168, 189; Ungváry 2013, 125.

<sup>477</sup> Halmesvirta 2013; Sípos 2002, 101; Turbucz 2014, 194–195.

<sup>478</sup> Romsics 1999, 45, 57–59.

<sup>479</sup> "... A kereskedelem, a vállalkozás, a pénzügy olyanok kezébe került, akik a nemzet érzésével nem voltak stalán ma sincsenek még úgy összeforrva, mint ahogy az helyes és kívánatos volna ..." István Bethlen's inaugural address, 1921, Bethlen 2000, 119.

<sup>480</sup> Ungváry 2013, 132, 151–158. For a comparative account of the use of anti-Semitism as a tool of nation-building in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romania, see Matikainen 2006, 43–57.

groups' unreliability, be it ethnic, political, societal or religious, was actively obscured and intermingled, thus resulting in slurs such as 'internationalist', 'Galician' or 'Freemason', which entered the political language and could be readily applied whenever needed to deride any of the groups to which they referred.

Another important and recurring form of delegitimizing the revolutions was to declare them to have been the work of narrow clandestine societies, thus unsupported by the Hungarian people, in the name of which the Socialists organized and acted. Thus the Hungarian workers could be granted amnesty, again in a conditional sense; if they relinquished Communism and admitted that they had been led astray by their leaders, they would not be punished for it. This created the basis of the uneasy yet effective truce between the state and the urban proletariat; as the workers refrained from open political organization, they were rewarded by a steady increase in real wages and improvements in the labour legislation throughout the interwar era.<sup>481</sup>

Religious rhetoric had a natural role in the conservative language, including the identification of Hungary with Christ on the Via Dolorosa, short of the long-expected resurrection. Still, religious arguments and metaphors can be considered as having mostly superficial and instrumental value in the exclusive nation-building, where Christianity first and foremost meant a distinction from Socialism and Judaism, the designated antagonists of the regime. Hungary's role as the bulwark of Christendom was also applied as a reminder of its historical mission to fend off the eastern menace, this time identified as Socialism. Christian symbolism was thus mostly a mere general attribute of conservative nationalism, with few actual theological motives. When, in contrast, the opposition attempted to use the ideals of charity and clemency as arguments against oppression, it was met with distrust and dislike, and the argument was quickly thrown back at them with the implication that 'immoral' or 'godless' Socialists were unfit even to use such exalted words.

This reveals the parliamentary dimension of the exclusive rhetoric: the Social Democrats were never accepted as equal partners in the parliamentary debate, but constantly heckled and antagonized. The limits of parliamentarism and parliamentary freedom of speech were reached when the opposition ventured too far in questioning the government narrative, and parliamentary procedure was easily applied to limit speeches. The government's relationship to the radical Right was twofold: they were unwanted radicals, from which the mainstream conservatives wanted to distance themselves and limit their influence. However, at the same time, the radical Right provided the predictable point of reference – the 'other extreme' compared to the Left, which allowed the government to legitimize its own position as the 'golden mean'. It should nevertheless be remembered that the government was ready to apply the racial terminology brought about by the radical Right and to integrate it into the language of exclusive nationalism.

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<sup>481</sup> Romsics 1999, 160, 165; Ungváry 2013, 127–128.

The government's counterrevolutionary rhetorical strategy included treating the fundamental tenets of democracy and parliamentarism as conditional and subordinate to the ongoing state of emergency. Civil rights, democracy, constitution, parliamentarism, equality and academic freedom were each given the same redescription: they were not fundamental values of a functioning society, but something superfluous – a luxury that the Hungarian nation could not afford at that moment.<sup>482</sup> The post-war constitutional debate, which had led to profound changes in many European countries, was also minimized at the very beginning of the parliamentary work. The rhetoric valued constitutionalism as a sign of the millennial existence of the Hungarian state, but rendered it a vague concept, linked to the historico-politically defined traditions and the organic conceptualization of nation and the exercise of its will. Thus the concepts of democracy and parliamentarism remained subordinate to national tradition and patriotic spirit, to which the government appealed in its authoritarian direction of politics.<sup>483</sup> The Regent Horthy, although scarcely appearing in person in the daily politics, became the guarantor of this power structure and the policy of containment of unwanted forces.

The sole exception to the abovementioned harsh counterrevolutionary language was the benevolent discourse on the amendment of the *Numerus Clausus* in 1928, yet the reason for that can be traced to its showcase role in the Hungarian effort to convince foreign audiences, especially the League of Nations and the Little Entente, that the government actively distanced itself from ethnic discrimination. In this instance, the dissenting opinions of the opposition were likewise tolerated for the very same reason. However, the triumph of inclusive consolidation was brief, and the antagonizing and excluding discourse persisted, intensifying again in the 1930s as a result of the government party's gradual shift to the right.

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<sup>482</sup> On similar formulations in Estonia in the interwar years, see Leukumaa-Autto 2018, 12.

<sup>483</sup> As Ihalainen notes, even in the more reform-minded constitutional debates in the post-war era, such as the Weimar Republic, the concept of parliamentarism was intentionally left vague to allow for restrictive interpretations. Ihalainen 2017, 451–454.

## 3 A NATION BUILT ON HISTORY

### 3.1 Introduction

History has played an important part in Hungarian nation-building and national self-understanding and indeed continues to do so.<sup>484</sup> Dramatic years such as 896, 1526, 1848–1849<sup>485</sup> and 1918–1920 (and later also 1956<sup>486</sup>) have themselves become pivotal memory constructions, repeatedly applied in political language to connect the past with the present and to be used as models for contemporary politics.<sup>487</sup> During the numerous regime changes in Hungary, the successive political systems have legitimized their positions by a conscious history policy, aimed at delegitimizing the preceding system and representing the current one as a natural successor in the grand national narrative.<sup>488</sup> Similarly, the memory of canonized national heroes such as István Széchenyi and Lajos Kossuth and the cults constructed around them have been repeatedly invoked throughout the various phases of Hungary's political history; in the interwar era, during state Socialism and the post-Socialist governments alike, each with appropriate redescriptions to suit to the prevailing ideology.<sup>489</sup>

In the interwar era, the historical and cultural constructions of the past were promptly aligned with the counterrevolutionary polity. In line with the international currents in historiography, great statesmen and the construction of a national history were mainstream in the Hungarian historiography. Especially during Klebelsberg's term as Minister of Culture, academic historiography was supported and encouraged as a considered tool for educating a new generation

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<sup>484</sup> See e.g. Gerő 2004, Gyáni 2016, Halmesvirta 2011, Nyyssönen 2017.

<sup>485</sup> The years of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian basin, the Battle of Mohács and the Revolution and War of Independence, respectively.

<sup>486</sup> The year of the Hungarian Uprising.

<sup>487</sup> Gyáni 2011, 22; Nyyssönen 1999, 23.

<sup>488</sup> Anderson 2007, 267–268; Földes 2005, 14.

<sup>489</sup> Brubaker & Feischmidt 2002, 710–715; Gyáni 2011, 23; Nyyssönen 1999, 12–15, 50–51. Deák 1992, 1050–1055, 1060; Welker 2011, 44–47.

of professional historians conscious of national history. At the same time, liberal and modernist ‘deviations’ of the pre-war era were resolutely sidelined. The idealized thought on objective reconstruction of the past contributed to an atmosphere where history could even be canonized by politically codifying an appropriate interpretation.<sup>490</sup>

An example of the intermingling of historiographical scholarship and political commitment was the book *Three Generations (Három nemzedék)* by Gyula Székfű, a renowned professional historian who contributed to interwar history politics by producing a narrative of the recent past as an era of missed opportunities and years of negligence that had led Hungary into political, economic and social inactivity and inability to defend itself, which then resulted in the catastrophe of the World War.<sup>491</sup> Another significant vein of the nationalist history culture of the era was the *népi*<sup>492</sup> movement, originating in literature; the most notable *népi* authors such as Gyula Illyés and Dezső Szabó were also able to exert influence over historiography, cultural policy and the general attitude towards the nature of the nation. Their political ideas did not always correspond to government policy, as they demanded thorough land reform, opposed the aristocratic rule and pointed out the social inequality in the rural areas. Nevertheless, the *népiek* contributed to the exclusive nation-building as they promoted the idea of the true and original Hungarian identity stemming from the countryside, as opposed to the urban profiteering, liberalism and internationalism, once again embodied by Jews.<sup>493</sup>

Thus one can concur with István Déák that both academia and influential literary circles “readily turned to the past to warn, to exult, and to prophesy.”<sup>494</sup> History was too important for the regime to go unnoticed; on the contrary, the memory of heroes and of the glorious past was from the beginning one of the cornerstones of the counterrevolutionary nation-building and state-building. The government consciously reinterpreted the Reform Era, the 1848 Revolution as well as the more recent past of the World War to suit the narrative of a beaten yet defiant Hungarian nation, which will eventually emerge victorious amidst the international tumult by honouring its past heroes – and by applying a selective

<sup>490</sup> Romsics 2011, 167–168, 247–251, 268–269, 286. It might be also noted that if one accepts the denomination of ‘eastern nationalism’, it usually includes major emphasis on the national history as a tool of exclusive nation-building. Deák 1992, 1042; Halmesvirta 2018, 28–29.

<sup>491</sup> Romsics 1999, 107; Székfű 1920. See also Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>492</sup> *Népi* is usually translated as ‘populist’ (e.g. Cartledge 2006, 381–382; Trencsényi 2013, 93–94), which, however, carries misleading political connotations to the present-day reader. As the movement emphasized the originality of rural Hungary, one might rather translate it ‘folksy’.

<sup>493</sup> Dobos & Lahdelma 2002, 67–77; Hanebrink 2006, 125–126; Kontler 1999, 336; Püski 2006, 253–254; Romsics 2011, 293–299; Trencsényi 2013, 88–89, 93–94; Ungváry 2013, 18. In the 1930s, however, the *népi* movement evolved along two divergent trajectories, of which the one adhered to nationalist lines as described above but the other inclined more profoundly towards the political Left and served as a rallying point of leftist thinkers such as István Bibó. See e.g. Gyurgyák 2009, 449–451; Halmesvirta 2017, 24–27.

<sup>494</sup> Deák 1992, 1041.

and tactically redescribed choice of their means.<sup>495</sup> In this chapter the historico-political discourse is analysed in four different parliamentary debates that demonstrate the importance and usability of the past, but also its debatable and constructed nature.

The first case concerns the memorial bill concerning those who fell in the World War, whose memory was to be preserved and canonized in the form of a memorial day. Through it, the government attempted to redescribe the Hungarian war effort as honourable and heroic, despite the fact that the Hungarians had had no independent role in the Austro-Hungarian army and that the war itself ended in disaster causing the disintegration of historical Hungary. Even as no one in the House questioned the basis of Hungarian military virtue, the parliamentary debate evolved into a conflict over the conceptualizations of the war and of heroism, including arguments evinced equally from the recent battlefield experiences and the classics of military history. It also led to a dispute over the nature of Hungarian prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, who were described either as heroes forgotten by the state, or as traitors who had deliberately defected to the Communist side, thus reopening the discourse of exclusive nationalism and the question of who was entitled to be called Hungarian.

The second and the third cases deal respectively with the memorial bills of István Széchenyi in 1925 and those of Kossuth Lajos and the 1848 revolution in 1927. In these, the figures of Széchenyi and Kossuth were subjected to competing redescrptions and reinterpretations; whereas the government attempted to create conservative reformist interpretations of them, the opposition challenged the construction and pointed out the liberal content of their ideals. As mentioned above, the statesmen themselves or their historical significance were never questioned; the dispute was over the meaning given to them. In the conservative narrative the nation was constructed through them; both were intrinsically harbingers of the Hungarian national mission, sent by destiny or Divine Providence, and the government was presented as the successor of the very same national mission, the continuation of which would lead the nation to prosperity, whereas every deviation from it had led to a national catastrophe.

In comparison, the last case gives some idea of the heated debate on the Sándor Petőfi memorial bill in 1923, which, in contrast to previous bills, came to nothing, as one pejorative interjection led the discussion astray and forced the House to abandon the reading. It is thus a most interesting example of the precarious state of the Hungarian parliamentary debate and especially of the sensitive nature of certain historico-political issues; how an individual comment hinting at an unacceptable interpretation was able to bring down a canonization attempt. It showed that Petőfi was too radical a character to be subjected to the similar conservative redescrptions and reinterpretations performed on the former two.

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<sup>495</sup> In due process, the multinational and multi-dimensional conflicts such as the European revolutions of 1848 or the First World War were consciously given exceptionally national interpretations. See Anderson 2007, 273–274.

The bills themselves appeared rather meagre – even banal, as pointed out already by contemporary critics – but in all the cases, the interpretations of history *were deemed important enough to be enshrined in law*. Moreover, as we shall see, they came along with the explicit intention of monumentalizing the past, creating statues and repeatedly calling for the creation of a ‘national pantheon’. As noted by Koselleck, erecting a monument is a political act of controlling the memory of the past; a monument designates the heroes or the legitimate victims, raising them to an exemplary role and identifying their ideals or ordeals with those of the present-day sponsors of the monument.<sup>496</sup> The Hungarian monuments erected in the interwar era served this explicit purpose, also in their appearance; they were classical and deferential in relation to their subjects, with little critical discussion over their form or significance, let alone any hint of irony or openness towards competing interpretations.<sup>497</sup> Codification of the past itself, coupled with the state-led nature of commemoration and monumentalization, make the cases a prime example of intentional political use of history in nation-building.

## 3.2 For the Dead or for the Living? Canonizing the memorial day of the fallen, 1924

### 3.2.1 The controversial war effort redescribed

The Austro-Hungarian war effort during the First World War remained a complicated issue in post-war Hungary. On the one hand, Hungary’s whole participation in the war was seen as involuntary and unnecessary; Hungarian foreign policy had been in the hands of the Austrian government and the Emperor, and Hungary had had little say in strategic questions. Moreover, being a belligerent on the losing side had caused the outrageous Treaty of Trianon imposed upon Hungary in 1920.<sup>498</sup> Still, at the level of history politics, the memory of the Hungarian military culture and military virtue had to be preserved and renewed in order to use them as rallying points of the nation. Thus the political level of the war and the level of heroism on the battlefield were rhetorically detached from each other, and the latter chosen as the exclusive policy concerning the official remembrance of the war.

In this vein, in January 1924, Parliament was presented with the bill concerning the memory of those who fell in the World War:

“With deep love and gratitude, the Hungarian nation commemorates those heroic sons who gave their lives for their fatherland in the fierce battles during the World War 1914–1918, bringing glory and fame to all Hungarians. As a sign of the neverending gratitude and as a constant reminder for future generations, the nation shall

<sup>496</sup> Koselleck 2002, 287–288.

<sup>497</sup> Cf. Koselleck 2002, 314–315.

<sup>498</sup> Bertényi 2002; Förster 2014, 113–116; Galántai 2000, 99–103. See also István Bethlen’s speech on the memory of István Tisza in 1926, Bethlen 2000, 235.



commemorate the last Sunday of May every year as a national remembrance day. This day shall be known as 'the Memorial Day of Heroes', dedicated to the memory of the fallen heroes."<sup>499</sup>

The disconnect between war policy and battlefield heroism was emphasized in the text of the bill, where the fallen had expressly served *the Hungarian nation* and contributed to its glory, apart from the fact that they had fought in the ranks of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. The virtues of the Hungarian soldiers – “ardent patriotism, self-denial coupled with readiness for self-sacrifice, unequalled sense of duty”<sup>500</sup> – were inherently *national* virtues, independent of the flag under which they had served. The commemoration of such military virtues was important for post-war and post-Trianon Hungary, where the size of the army was severely limited and the bulk of it disbanded,<sup>501</sup> in order despite this to preserve patriotic military rituals and make them visible to the greater public. In addition, it constructed and renewed the idea of the World War as an honourable war, and that the performance of the Hungarian troops at the front had been satisfactory and they had fulfilled their obligations in relation to the whole Central Powers war effort. Moreover, their heroic deeds were now turned into symbolic models for the nation:

“The ‘Memorial Day of Heroes’ is intended to celebrate those Hungarian soldiers, whose memory needs to be preserved for the future, whose heroic bravery made possible and resulted in an unequalled display of intrepidity by the Hungarian troops in a whole series of battles. Those heroes, their names and their units, are carved in golden letters in the bloody pages of history, and day by day the rays of glorious light shall shine brighter and brighter for the past and the future.”<sup>502</sup>

The sacrifices of blood (*véráldozatok*) shed by the fallen demanded remembrance on the part of the Hungarian state, and as the prospects for material compensation were meagre, this was now accomplished by including their

<sup>499</sup> “A magyar nemzet mélyszéges szeretettel és hálával emlékezik meg azokról a hős fiairól, akik az 1914–1918. évi világháború alatt a hazáért vívott súlyos küzdelmekben a magyarságnak dicsőséget és hírnevet szerezve életüket feláldozták. A nemzet soha el nem múló hálája jeléül és a jövő nemzedékek állandó okulására minden esztendő május hónapjának utolsó vasárnapját nemzeti ünneppé avatja. Ezt az ünnepnapot, mint a ‘Hősök emlékünnepét’ mindenkor a hősi halottak emlékének kell szentelni.” Bill concerning the celebration of the memory of the fallen during the World War, 1914–1918, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 324.

<sup>500</sup> “... lángoló hazaszeretetének, önmegtagadással párosult önfeláldozásának, párját ritkító kötelességtudásának,” Justification annex for the bill No. 356, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 325.

<sup>501</sup> The fifth chapter of the Treaty of Trianon limited the size of the Hungarian standing army to 35 000 regulars, banned universal conscription and prohibited the possession of armoured vehicles and fighter aircraft. Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 81; Romsics 1999, 123–124.

<sup>502</sup> “A ‘Hősök emlékünnepé’ azokat a magyar katonákat kívánja megünnepelni, azoknak az emlékét óhajtja a jövő számára megörökíteni, akiknek hősiességük és bátorságuk tette lehetővé és eredményezte a magyar csapatok által példátlanul álló halálmegvetéssel megvívott diadalmas harcok egész sorozatát, azokat a hősokeket, akiknek neve, – azokat a csapatokat, amelyeknek haditettei aranybetűkkel vannak megörökítve a történelem véres lapjain és napnál fényesebben ragyogják be a dicsőség fény sugarával a multat és a jövőt.” Justification annex for the bill No. 356, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 325.

eternal memory in the official history policy.<sup>503</sup> The day chosen for the commemoration – the last Sunday of May – was also linked to the domestic church politics as a tool of nation-building; it was declared necessary to dedicate a separate day of mourning along with the Catholic tradition of All Hallows, as the Association of Hungarian Reformed Priests had made an official petition for a separate memorial day.<sup>504</sup> Even though the majority of Hungarians were Catholics, the Calvinist Reformed Church was deemed to be of significant importance to the nation as the ‘inherently patriotic’ and ‘true’ Hungarian church, which had sided with Hungary in its historical struggles for freedom, whereas the Catholic Church had traditionally supported the Austrian Empire.<sup>505</sup> Despite the interwar idea of inclusion and consensus between the Christian churches (and as a means of disassociating itself from Jews), the bill on the memorial day chose to look favourably on the Calvinist expectations.<sup>506</sup>

In relation to war history, the day was explicitly chosen not to coincide with the anniversary of any specific battle:

“It would not be appropriate to choose the day after a certain battle, because the Hungarian troops – unlike the armies of the other Central Powers – never fought in a single body. Raising the deeds of a certain larger contingent above those of others would not be possible and even if it were, such a choice would offend the self-respect of the troops belonging to other units.”<sup>507</sup>

The fact that the Hungarian troops had not formed independent units, nor actually distinguished themselves in the battles, was thus turned into a proclamation of collective strength, equality and inclusion, symbolically uniting Hungarians from all fronts and units. This was a conscious choice for inclusive nation-building, yet, as we shall see, the veterans also became objects of scrutiny as to who was a genuine Hungarian deserving the honour.

The temporal positioning of the memorial day was justified somewhat practically, if not to say banally: as the school year would be drawing to a close, but the final exams would not have yet begun, it would be possible for the students to participate; and as the spring work in the countryside would already be done, this would not prevent the agrarian population from participating in the commemoration ceremonies.<sup>508</sup> In addition, flowers placed on graves and memorials would last well in the early summer, and there would not be such a risk of bad weather to spoil the celebrations, as would be the case in early spring

<sup>503</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 356, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 325.

<sup>504</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 356, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 326.

<sup>505</sup> Hanebrink 2006, 17–30.

<sup>506</sup> On the longer history of Protestant churches as vehicles of nationalism and nation-building, see Ihalainen 2005.

<sup>507</sup> “Valamely haditettnek a napját választani ismét nem volna célszerű, mert más egységes hadseregekkel ellentétben, a magyar csapatok a világháború során egységesen sehohsem küzdöttek. Egyes nagyobb egységek haditényének kiemelése a többi közül, éppen ezért igazságosan nem lehetséges és ezért ily napnak megválasztása a nem érintett egységek csapatainak önérzetét joggal bántaná.”

<sup>508</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 356, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 326.

<sup>508</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 356, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 326.

or late autumn.<sup>509</sup> Finally, it was specifically mentioned that the memorial day would be named the 'Memorial day of Heroes' instead of the more prosaic 'day of heroes', which would lower its prestige to the level of 'day of birds', 'day of trees', 'day of children' and such.<sup>510</sup> The thoroughly practical reasoning behind the bill demonstrated the very deliberate politicization of history and construction of collective memory; commemoration was meant to reach the masses and bring them together in appropriate, state-sponsored and state-organized celebrations, even taking favourable weather into account.<sup>511</sup>

Such was the bill on which the debate opened on 4 April 1924. Despite its self-proclaimed historical importance – or then because of it – the House was not too excited about the discussion; there were so few members present that the quorum of the session had to be checked in the course of the debate.<sup>512</sup> The presenting official Ernő Moser<sup>513</sup> opened the discussion with a ceremonial lament to the fallen, who had been sent to die on foreign battlegrounds all over Europe:

"Maybe we cannot even tell the number of those unfortunate sons and brothers, who lie in eternal sleep in the north, in the south, in the west and in the east, in deep forests and in rocky lands, for answering the call of duty, when their fatherland, the millennial Hungary, sent them to war in defence of its integrity."<sup>514</sup>

Through the discourse of geography and the millennial Hungary, Moser tied the human losses of the war to the territorial losses of Trianon, leading to the conclusion that Hungary's total losses were unprecedented in history.<sup>515</sup> Especially harrowing was the paradox that in the end, the Hungarian nation did not fight in its own interests "but sent its loyal sons to battle, to fire and to distress, in the name of foreign interests,"<sup>516</sup> and was by contrast unable to defend what it held most dear. Despite having almost admitted that the Hungarian heroes had died in vain, Moser quickly turned to emphasize that their role as heroes of the nation and the debt of honour towards them remained. Only by not forgetting the fallen heroes would the Hungarian nation win the right "to remain

<sup>509</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 356, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 326.

<sup>510</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 356, 9.1.1924, NI 356/VIII/1922, 326.

<sup>511</sup> The construction of memorial days, the organization of their events by government and their changing uses is not a unique phenomenon in Hungarian history politics as it continues to this day. See e.g. Nyysönen 2008; Nyysönen 2017; Welker 2011.

<sup>512</sup> NN XXII/1922, 242.

<sup>513</sup> Lawyer Ernő Moser (b. 1886) enlisted as a volunteer during the World War and served as an officer in the military police on the eastern front. As the secretary-general of the Smallholder Party he was instrumental in securing the smallholders' election victory in the 1920 elections; after the party merger in 1922 he became a member of the Unity Party caucus. Lengyel & Vidor 2012, 125–126.

<sup>514</sup> "Talán ki se mondhatjuk a számát azon szerencsétlen vértest véreinknek, akik északon, délen, nyugaton és keleten, síkságokon, mély erdőkben és sziklahasadékokban alusszák örök álmukat azért, mert kötelességüket teljesítették, mikor a haza, az ezeréves Magyarország integritása érdekében harcba szólította őket." Ernő Moser, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 241.

<sup>515</sup> Ernő Moser, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 241.

<sup>516</sup> "... idegen érdekekért küldötte harcba, tűzbe és vészbe hú fiait." Ernő Moser, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 241. On the conceptualization of a 'heroic defeat' in memory construction, see Koselleck 2002, 295–298.

a nation.”<sup>517</sup> Through proper commemoration, the bitter defeat was rhetorically turned into a binding obligation to further the conservative nation-building process.

Quite ironically, the codification of the memorial day meant making a virtue out of necessity, compensating the scarcity of economic support to veterans, widows and orphans with a symbolic deed. Moser could not deny the reality, but mitigated it with fair promises:

“We cannot say that we are able to provide the widows and orphans of the fallen heroes or the disabled soldiers with allowances that would enable them to make ends meet in the midst of the present dire economic conditions, but the government struggles year after year to improve their material conditions. Thus a second rise to the allowances shall already be awarded this year and a third in the near future.”<sup>518</sup>

In addition, the spirit of militarism, concrete hopes for revision and rearmament, behind the memorial day were clearly articulated by Moser:

“It is not enough that there are memorial plaques in the villages, a column or a statue here or there dedicated to the memory of the said village’s fallen heroes; it is not enough that the people of the villages and towns commemorate their heroes by themselves; it is necessary to bring together in a memorial day every single member of the whole nation, everyone in the wide fatherland who feels Hungarian, who believes in the national resurrection, who is mindful of our national history and national heroes ... Let this commemoration be the day of remembrance as well as of high hopes for the future. On this day, let us learn to respect those Hungarian heroes who sacrificed their blood, their lives, their health and bodies for the fatherland when needed. On this day, let us find spiritual power and confidence from their example and on this very day, the Memorial Day of Heroes, let us take the sacred oath: cometh the time that fatherland calls to its defence, we shall answer and do our duty.”<sup>519</sup>

Boldly and clearly, the whole nation was being built on the memory of the sacrifices, linked to the ideal of the true Hungarian identity, the conditions of which included a reverence for the glorious past and the heroes. Commemoration of war was also needed to construct and maintain the

<sup>517</sup> “... hogy nemzet maradjon,” Ernő Moser, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 241.

<sup>518</sup> “Nem mondhatjuk ugyan azt, hogy olyan ellátást tudunk biztosítani a hősök özvegyeinek, árváinak, vagy rokkant katonáinak, amelyből ők a mai súlyos gazdasági viszonyok között életüket fenntartani képesek lennének, de ki kell jelentenem, hogy a kormány időről-időre igyekszik súlyos anyagi helyzetéhez mérten javítani helyzetükön. Hiszen már az idén is másodszor s a legközelebbi időben harmadszor fogja illetveiket felemelni.” Ernő Moser, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 241.

<sup>519</sup> “Nem elég az, hogy a falvakban itt is, ott is egy-egy emléktábla, egy-egy oszlop, vagy egy-egy szobor hirdesse a falu hősi halottainak emlékezetét; nem elég az, hogy a falu és a városok közönségre csak magabazártan ünnepelje meg a maga hőseit, de szükséges, hogy az egész nemzet minden egyes tagja, mindenki széles e hazában, aki magyarnak érzi magát aki hisz a nemzeti feltámadásban, aki tud gondolni nemzeti múltunkra és nemzeti hőseinkre, egy ünnepnap keretén belül egyesüljön ... Ez az ünnep legyen az emlékezés és a jövő jóreménységének ünnepe. Ezen az ünnepen tanuljuk megbecsülni azon magyar hősöket, akik vérüket, életüket, egészséget és testüket áldozatul adták a hazának, amikor kellett. Ez ünnepen merítsünk lelki erőt és öntudatot ezeknek példájából és tegyünk szent fogadalmat e napon, a hősök emlékünnepe, hogy majd ha kell, ha itt lesz az ideje még valamikor, hogy a haza szent védelmére netán a haza hívni fog, mi is ott leszünk és tudni fogjuk mi is kötelességünket.” Ernő Moser, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 241.

revisionist agenda; the conviction that those sacrifices had not been in vain, and that the future would bring a remedy in the form of resurrection (*feltámadás*) – the central concept of the revisionist rhetoric. Less than subtly, Moser hinted at the possibility that the fatherland would once more call its sons to arms; the militarization of society through nationalist organizations with paramilitary tendencies such as the *Vitézi Rend*, *Turul* and *Levente* were tools for circumventing the military restrictions of the Trianon Treaty.<sup>520</sup>

“A nation that forgets its fallen heroes doesn’t deserve to live.”<sup>521</sup> Moser’s repeated organic-nationalist rhetoric strove to bind the nation to the memory of the fallen and to create a historical obligation to redeem their sacrifices by working towards unification, reconstruction, and eventually, revision. The nation was expected to “find itself in spirit”<sup>522</sup> after the war and the revolutionary years, to return to its patriotic work of national reconstruction in the name of the heroes. Naturally, this argumentation was both inclusive and exclusive, in defining the right and justified historical struggles on which to rely, and simultaneously suppressing the alternative or competing memories and interpretations – including questioning the necessity of those very sacrifices.

### 3.2.2 Widows, orphans and war profiteers

Béla Fábíán,<sup>523</sup> a Liberal Democrat, a war veteran and a POW activist, took up the argument after Moser. He gladly accepted the bill but added that he would like to see it include honouring the living heroes, the invalids as well as the widows and orphans.<sup>524</sup> He also wanted to pay attention to more concrete means of compensation to the living, and especially the repatriation costs of those still in captivity in the Soviet Union:

“The situation in this respect is that if a prisoner of war is not able to pay the border crossing fee of 260 gold roubles per person and cannot produce an official passport with photograph issued by the Hungarian authorities, they won’t even now be able to return home to Hungary.”<sup>525</sup>

<sup>520</sup> Kerepeszki 2014, 64, 69.

<sup>521</sup> “... nem érdemli meg az életet az a nemzet, amely nemzeti hőseiről megfeledkezik.” Ernő Moser, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 242.

<sup>522</sup> “... megtalálja önmagát lelkiekben.” Ernő Moser, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 242.

<sup>523</sup> Liberal politician Béla Fábíán (1889–1966) served on the Eastern front during the World War, was captured in 1915 and incarcerated in Russian POW camps until 1918. Drawing on his experiences of the Russian Revolution, he campaigned against the Hungarian Communists and was imprisoned again in Hungary during the Soviet Republic. In Parliament he remained an active advocate of the POWs’ cause. During the German occupation of Hungary in 1944 he was again arrested and sent to a concentration camp. He did not return to Hungary after the Second World War but emigrated to the United States and became one of the leaders of the Hungarian emigré community. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 62–63; MÉL: Fábíán, Béla.

<sup>524</sup> Béla Fábíán, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 242.

<sup>525</sup> “A helyzet e tekintetben az, hogy ha a hadifoglyok nem tudnak lefizetni 260 aranyrubelt határátlépési díj fejében, és nem tudnak felmutatni magyar útlevelet, amelyet a magyar hatóságok fényképpel állítottak ki, akkor még mindig nem jöhetnek haza Magyarországba.” Béla Fábíán, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 242.

In mentioning this, Fábíán touched on a sensitive issue which had multiple dimensions; Hungary's strained relationship with the Soviet Union and the abandonment of prisoners of war even years after the end of the war. It was also criticism directed at the counterrevolutionary policy, in which the men remaining in Russia, who had inevitably been drawn into the Russian Revolution, were intrinsically suspicious.<sup>526</sup> By making deliberate reference to this controversial topic, Fábíán wanted to emphasize that the status of a hero was not contingent upon a heroic death, but that those living and still suffering in captivity were also heroes, and to commemorate only the fallen would be to ignore to the sacrifices of the living.<sup>527</sup>

With regard to material support, Fábíán mentioned that those who had been decorated during the war had been promised a monthly allowance, ranging from 7½ to 30 crowns, depending on the decoration. Fábíán urged that the payments of those allowances, discontinued after the war, should be resumed.<sup>528</sup> The strife between the government and the opposition was thus not centred around the concept of military virtue, the acknowledgement of Hungarian sacrifices, or the patriotic-nationalist sentiment of the bill, but on the more concrete contents, such as the care for the surviving veterans. In response to Fábíán's exhortations, Imre Csontos<sup>529</sup> tried to convince the House that the government would, in due time, grant material help to the war invalids.<sup>530</sup> This feeble defence was countered by two sharp rejoinders from the radical Right:

"We would like to see some results!"<sup>531</sup>

"Go to the Grand Boulevard to see the beggars! That's the result!"<sup>532</sup>

The radical Right quickly joined the Liberal critique in an attempt to gain rhetorical possession of veteran matters. Csontos was caught off-guard by these interjections and started to enumerate practical and economic excuses why this had not yet happened.<sup>533</sup> The symbolic remembrance in the form of memorial day legislation was thus a rhetorical resort of the government – a "moral obligation"<sup>534</sup> of remembrance and reverence, which was then described symbolically as greater than that of concrete financial support. These excuses did not satisfy the opposition: "And meanwhile the widows and orphans of the said heroes starve to death in Hungary!"<sup>535</sup>

<sup>526</sup> See Bessel 2014, 141; Jones 2014, 288–289.

<sup>527</sup> Béla Fábíán, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 242.

<sup>528</sup> Béla Fábíán, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 242–243.

<sup>529</sup> Imre Csontos (b. 1860), smallholder member of the Unity Party. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 45–46.

<sup>530</sup> Imre Csontos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 243.

<sup>531</sup> "De legalább valami eredményt látnánk!" Zoltán Horváth, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 243.

<sup>532</sup> "A körúton nézze meg a koldusokat! Ez az eredmény!" Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 243.

<sup>533</sup> Imre Csontos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 243.

<sup>534</sup> "...erkölcsi kötelessége," Imre Csontos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 243.

<sup>535</sup> "Közben a hősök árvái és özvegyei éhenpusztulnak Magyarországon." Ferenc Reisinger, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 243.

István Lendvai<sup>536</sup> of the radical Right welcomed the bill in a dry mood: “This is the first bill which I have not opposed, but endorsed, since I took my seat in Parliament.”<sup>537</sup> This naturally did not prevent him from criticizing the government for being lax about the legislation and disrespectful towards the very occasion of the reading; the Minister of Defence was not even present. Lendvai went on to ask ironically, whether, instead of monuments to unknown soldiers, there should be a bust in honour of an unknown Minister.<sup>538</sup> To this, Speaker Károly Huszár was obliged to remind him that the Minister was absent due to illness, and objected to the use of such an unjust argument.<sup>539</sup> Even though the matter of commemoration legislation in itself enjoyed almost unanimous support and was considered not especially important, the debate shows how it was eventually turned into a challenge to the government’s credibility, to which the government once again reacted by using the administrative powers to keep the opposition under control.

Lendvai continued with Fábíán’s argument of material needs: “It is not enough if we erect stones to the fallen, if at the same time we do not give bread to the living.”<sup>540</sup> It was futile from the government to fall back on economic pretexts for not supporting the invalids, as that was a mere matter of priority, and it was a shame that the invalids were not of the upmost importance. Lendvai took up Moser’s argument of the whole nation being bound to the honour of heroes and used it to ask, why, then, was not everything done for their benefit.<sup>541</sup> Through this challenge, his critique was widened to extend to the entire regime, which claimed to be patriotic, but valued luxury and lifestyle above everything else, and was not ready to spare a certain amount of crowns to help the veterans and bring the prisoners home. If such a situation persisted, the memorial day would become a mere dead letter and a shame on the government.<sup>542</sup> To reinforce his position, Lendvai angrily distanced himself from any partisan agenda, but emphasized that he was acting as an independent patriot, reminding the House that the matter of the veterans was not, or at least it should not be, a matter of partisanship, but a matter of national honour.<sup>543</sup> This was welcomed by supportive interjections from the radical Right.<sup>544</sup> In its redescription of

<sup>536</sup> Journalist and poet István Lendvai (1888–1945) embraced radical nationalism after the World War and was a well-known publicist of radical counterrevolutionary ideas. A member of the Race Defender caucus that had split from the Unity Party. Representative of the Hungarian radical Right, Lendvai was critical of the growing German influence in Hungary during the Second World War and was eventually arrested by the Arrow Cross and died in prison in 1945. MÉL: Lendvai, István, Lehner.

<sup>537</sup> “Mióta e nemzetgyűlés padsoraiban helyet foglalok, ez az első törvényjavaslat, amelynek nem ellene, hanem mellette iratkoztam fel.” István Lendvai, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 243.

<sup>538</sup> István Lendvai, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 244.

<sup>539</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 244.

<sup>540</sup> “Nem elég, ha köveket állítunk ... a halottaknak, ugyanakkor pedig az élőknek nem adnuk kenyeret.” István Lendvai, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 244.

<sup>541</sup> István Lendvai, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 244.

<sup>542</sup> István Lendvai, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 244.

<sup>543</sup> István Lendvai, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 244.

<sup>544</sup> Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 244.

patriotism and patriotic duties, Lendvai's speech was an example of the rhetorical strategies of the radical Right during the Bethlen regime; it had to justify its existence by being more nationalist than the nationalist government, and the veterans' cause afforded a welcome opportunity. Demanding action and concrete concessions instead – or in addition to – words and symbols, Lendvai was able to create political space by appealing to the same irrefutable values the government used. He also dared to challenge the official, cautious narrative of the war effort, admitting the paradox that “they died in order to save the nation, but even their honourable self-sacrifice could not help the war ending in such a national catastrophe, in the midst of which we are still living.”<sup>545</sup> The war narrative, however unfortunate, was rhetorically detached from the elevated status of the fallen, which remained unquestioned.

Zoltán Meskó<sup>546</sup> joined Lendvai in the rightist interpretation of the matter. According to him, material aid to the suffering widows and orphans would enable them to be proud of the sacrifices their fathers and husbands had made, instead of suffering the consequences without support from the ungrateful state.<sup>547</sup>

“I believe that those heroes of ours, at rest in Volhynia,<sup>548</sup> in Serbia, in France or by the Piave ... can only rest in peace when the livelihoods of their children and widows are secured, but not if we merely erect memorial statues to them.”<sup>549</sup>

Against the idealist, even transcendent motivation presented by the government, Meskó did not hesitate to tie the willingness of sacrifice to the welfare provided by the state. Moreover, he connected the material discourse to one of the favourite subjects of the radical Right, the war profiteers.<sup>550</sup> The fortunes made during the war, at the expense of the fighting nation, should be confiscated and used to support the widows and orphans. Meskó went as far as to officially demand such an amendment to the bill.<sup>551</sup>

<sup>545</sup> “... elpusztultak azért, hogy ezt a nemzetet megmentésék, és akik nem tehetnek arról, hogy az ő dicsőséges önfeláldozásuknak az a nemzeti katasztrófa lett a vége, amelynek napjait ma is éljük.” István Lendvai, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 243.

<sup>546</sup> An officer and a former member of the pre-war Independence Party, Zoltán Meskó (1883–1959) joined the counterrevolutionary movement in 1919. In the post-war years he belonged to the agrarian populist wing of the Smallholder party and nominally remained a member of the Unity Party caucus, yet his radical tendencies were on the rise; in 1932 he founded the Hungarian National Socialist Peasants' and Workers' Party. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 123–124; MÉL: Meskó, Zoltán.

<sup>547</sup> Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 246.

<sup>548</sup> An area in present-day Ukraine.

<sup>549</sup> “Azt hiszem, hogy a mi hőseink, akik Volhyniában, Szerbiában. Franciaországban, vagy pedig a Piave mellett nyugszanak és ott porlik a csontjuk, csak akkor fognak tudni nyugodtan pihenni, ha nem emjékszobrot kapnak tőlünk, hanem gyermekeiknek és özvegyeiknek megélhetése biztosítva van.” Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 246. Debate over the role of widows and orphans in the war memory construction was a transnational phenomenon. Koselleck 2002, 304.

<sup>550</sup> Gerwarth 2013, 101; Silvennoinen, Tikka & Roselius 2016; see also the debate on Jewish profiteers in Chapter 2.3.

<sup>551</sup> Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 246.



Christian Socialist József Csik<sup>552</sup> followed Meskó in the criticism towards a mere symbolic remembrance while the widows and orphans still suffered. Despite this, he was ready to accept the bill, with necessary reservations.<sup>553</sup> The argument concerning war profiteers also appealed to him:

“How could those heroes rest in peace in their graves if they saw that their orphans and widows are forced to manage in their lives on a miserable sum of 5000–6000 crowns,<sup>554</sup> and at the same time see that there has appeared a new propertied class, which now enjoys the bloody gold earned during the war, while they are deprived and suffer.”<sup>555</sup>

In the name of societal justice and in fulfilment of the nation’s duty to the heroes, Csik concurred with Meskó’s proposal to confiscate war profiteers’ fortunes to be used for the welfare of the widows and orphans of the fallen.<sup>556</sup> If, he argued, abroad up to 80 percent of war profits could have been confiscated by the state, then why that could not be done in Hungary?<sup>557</sup> “The new propertied class of war profiteers’ was – again – a less subtle reference to the Jews and a recurrent rhetorical tool of the radical Right, easily accepted by the public in the post-war and counterrevolutionary anti-Semitist atmosphere. However, the populist rhetoric was not enough to change the course of the legislation, as the government did not want to upset the Hungarian business magnates, its economic co-operators who happened to be the very same war profiteers.<sup>558</sup>

### 3.2.3 Reinterpretations of patriotism

On the other side of the House, Liberal member Rezső Rupert welcomed the bill with the argument that the fallen deserved this last gesture from the state, and that would be duly delivered in the form of the memorial day. His endorsement of the memory of the fallen however included an attempt to reinterpret the concepts of patriotism and sacrifice, a challenge to the extreme Right, which had attempted to capture the concepts for themselves:

“Everywhere we only hear nice words, everywhere people are only talking about patriotism, national sentiment, defence of race and so on, but again we see that no one, no one is ready to hasten to the aid of the fatherland, far from the readiness for such a sacrifice, which the heroes, the fallen Hungarians, rendered their fatherland.”<sup>559</sup>

<sup>552</sup> József Csik (1891–1964), Catholic priest and a member of the Christian Socialist Party caucus. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 44; MÉL: Csik, József.

<sup>553</sup> József Csik, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>554</sup> In the early 1920s, the Hungarian crown (*korona*) was highly inflatory.

<sup>555</sup> “Hogyan pihenhetnének ezek a hősök nyugodtan sirjaikban, mikor látják, hogy az ő árváik, özvegyeik nyomorult havi 5 – 6000 koronából kénytelenek tengetni életüket, és látják ezt akkor, amikor egy új vagyonos osztály alakult ki, amikor azok, akik a háborúban szerezték véres aranyukat, jólétben dúskálnak, míg ők nyomorognak és szenvednek.” József Csik, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

<sup>556</sup> József Csik, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

<sup>557</sup> József Csik, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251–252.

<sup>558</sup> Gyáni 2004, 328–329; Kovács 2012, 32.

<sup>559</sup> “Mindenütt csak szép szavakat hallunk, mindenütt hazaszeretetről, nemzeti érzésről, fajvédelemről és miegyébről beszélnek az emberek, de mégis azt látjuk, hogy senki,

In contrast, patriotism could also mean peaceful and progressive sacrifices; Rupert brought in the canonized example of István Széchenyi, who had lived and died for the progress of the Hungarian nation.<sup>560</sup> Despite this, he did not completely distance himself from the nationalist reverence of military virtue, as for him the importance of the commemoration lay also in the signal that “we should also be ready to render the ultimate sacrifice.”<sup>561</sup> Keeping the memory of the heroes alive, “at least on one day, one celebration every year”<sup>562</sup> was the least a nation could do to retain its honour and renew the mindset of readiness for sacrifices. Such military virtues, rising from the whole nation, formed the basis and prerequisite of the strength of an army and a nation’s survival:

“In every era, it is more important than the military cult itself, because a military cult itself is futile, if people need to be conscripted or bribed to join an army, because the real army is always the nation itself, its hundreds of thousands, millions. The real army is indeed the national spirit, which, if it exists, if it is ready for battle, if it is strong enough to attract people to do their finest, even to lay down their lives for the fatherland, then it represents the real national strength, the real national army. If it does not exist, if there is no such spirit in the nation, in its sons called to battle, then all drill and discipline, every step and instruction is in vain, for such an army cannot achieve its objectives and the fate of such a nation is sealed.”<sup>563</sup>

In this reasoning, the debt of honour towards both the fallen and the living was the price to be paid in order to retain that patriotic spirit within the nation and, ultimately, ensure Hungary’s existence.<sup>564</sup> Rupert’s use of profoundly patriotic and militarist rhetoric illustrated the rather tight spot in which the liberal opposition found itself; as the counterrevolutionary discourse had repeatedly blamed liberals and liberalism for the revolutions,<sup>565</sup> he needed to create credibility anew by anchoring his arguments to patriotic sentiment. On that basis, he could only make certain rhetorical adjustments and reinterpretations to endorse the inclusive form of nation-building over mere military values. On the other hand, Rupert’s position on the matter was not only rhetorical strategy, but

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de senki sem hajlandó a haza segítségére sietni csak távolról is megközelítő áldozattal, mint amelyet a hősök, az elesett magyarok hoztak a hazáért.” Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 245.

<sup>560</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 245.

<sup>561</sup> “... mi is készek legyünk a legnagyobb áldozatra.” Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 245.

<sup>562</sup> “... legalább egy napon, legalább egy ünnepen minden esztendőben.” Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 245.

<sup>563</sup> “Ez fontosabb, mint minden korszaknak a maga militáris kultusza, mert hiábavaló a millitáris kultusz, hiábavaló, ha embereket soroznak vagy zsoldba fogadnak, ha felállítanak egy hadsereget, mert az igazi hadsereg mindig maga a nemzet, annak százazrei, millió. Az igazi hadsereg tulajdonképpen a nemzeti lelkiület, amely, ha megvan, ha harcrakész, ha elég erős, hogy az embereket a legszebbre: a hazáért való meghalásra is rábuzdítsa, akkor képviseli az igazi nemzeti erőt, az igazi nemzeti hadsereget. Ha ez nincsen meg, ha ilyen lélek nincs a nemzetben, annak harcra szólított fiaiban, akkor hiábavaló minden drill, minden fegyelem, minden lépés és minden ügyesség, az a hadsereg nem ér el célokat és annak a nemzetnek sorsa meg van pecsételve.” Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 245.

<sup>564</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 245.

<sup>565</sup> See Chapter 2.2.

also an example of what broad and universal values nationalism and patriotism actually were in the contemporary Hungarian political thought.<sup>566</sup>

Another liberal, József Pakots,<sup>567</sup> tried to downplay the militarist atmosphere by referring to the World War and its consequences through the conceptualization of the war first and foremost as a tragedy unparalleled in history.<sup>568</sup> For him, the occasion of the memorial legislation would have needed a more formal and honourable atmosphere, but at the moment there were neither Prime Minister nor other ministers present to pay their respects to the fallen.<sup>569</sup> For him, this was suggestive of the artificial role of the commemoration, as the deeds of the government did not correspond with the highflown wording of the bill. Returning to Fábíán's proposition concerning the allowances linked to military decorations, he in principle concurred, but proclaimed that the sums were badly inflationary and paying them would be just as empty a gesture as the whole memorial day. Therefore, he proposed an amendment that the allowances should be adjusted against inflation.<sup>570</sup>

As a counter-example to the insignificant bill, he introduced a transnational argument about the practice in France, where military commemorations were accorded proper respect and remained prominent in relation to daily politics:

"I just want to remind the House that, for example, in France not a Sunday passes without the unveiling a monument to heroes. At such unveiling ceremonies, the Prime Minister is always present, and his every word on such occasions conveys an important message with regard to the national existence. The French government ties its policy to it and from it gains the moral strength to direct its politics, and whatever one's opinion of French policy may be, it is undeniable that such a great moral strength emanates from the national self-sacrifice that those heroes rendered."<sup>571</sup>

Pakots attempted to reinforce his argument by advising the Hungarian government about how to make proper use of the politics of history. He implied that the Hungarian mournful, tragic and melancholy way of paying respects was similar to the tragic and resigned position of the country itself. Such an implication was then used to criticize the rhetoric and symbolism of victimization, which, as a self-realizing discourse, could not lead a nation to

<sup>566</sup> Also internationally, the political situation during and after the World War gave rise to nationalist thought among the Liberal parties. See Ihalainen 2017, 84, 130, 299–300, 319, 518–520.

<sup>567</sup> Prominent journalist and novelist József Pakots (1877–1933), member of the Liberal Democrat caucus. Lengyel & Viodr 1922, 134–135; MÉL: Pakots, József.

<sup>568</sup> József Pakots, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 246.

<sup>569</sup> József Pakots, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 246.

<sup>570</sup> József Pakots, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 247.

<sup>571</sup> "Csak emlékeztetni kívánok arra, hogy pl. Franciaországban nem múlik el vasárnap, hogy egy-egy hősi emléket fel ne avatnának. Ezek az avatási ünnepségeken az ottani kormányzat elnöke megjelenik és minden ott elmondott beszéde fontos kinyilatkoztatás a nemzeti élet szempontjából. Ide köti a maga politikáját a francia kormány, innen nyeri az erkölcsi erőt a maga politikájának irányítására, és bármilyen legyen is a felfogás a francia kormányzati politikáról, annyi kétségtelen, hogy olyan nagy erkölcsi erő rejlik abban a nemzeti önfeláldozásban, amelyet ezek a hősök tanúsítottak." József Pakots, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 247. Here, Pakots refers to the clear instrumental value of war memorials, of which the Hungarians should also take heed. Koselleck 2002, 291.

success. In criticizing the Hungarian tragedy narrative, he was also brave enough to venture into the territory of military history, discussing the relationship between the remembrance and the actual events of the war – thus challenging the cautious wording of the bill that the commemoration was not tied to any specific battle. Taking the Battle of Limanova (Limanowa, in present-day Poland) as an example, he wondered why the Hungarians were not ready to pay their respects to Hungarian heroism and strategic skill on the battlefield, why it was left for German historians to write about them. It should be a duty of the Hungarian army to honour its distinguished officers and men through positive commemoration,<sup>572</sup> but as for now, even Italians, the former enemies, were more eager to speak of Hungarian heroes with dignity.<sup>573</sup> For Pakots, the memory of the fallen was an equally important tool for rebuilding the nation; not through tragedy and loss, but through the memory of heroism and the sanctity of sacrifice. That sacrifice left the nation with an obligation, but also Parliament and government, and, judging from the poor turnout in the House, these obligations were not taken seriously.<sup>574</sup> He let the examples and metaphors speak for themselves in showing the feeble calibre of the government.

Andor Barthos<sup>575</sup> retorted that the meagre representation of the government did not put the opposition in a position to criticize the government, as it was indeed the opposition which had, by politicizing the issue, downplayed the commemoration more than anyone else. The fact that the parties were not able to accept the bill in harmony was in itself a disgrace to the cause, and if only the parties had agreed beforehand to honour the bill and refrain from politicizing the issue, surely the ministers would have honoured the occasion with their presence.<sup>576</sup> That such a hypothetical argument was valid in the debate shows the extent of the distaste for politicking on or the politicization of ‘undisputed’ issues and dissent within the parliament to the government, and how easily it resorted to the rhetoric of depoliticization. Barthos went on to remind the House that memorial legislation was necessary in order to raise the patriotic mood from the abject level to which it had fallen as a consequence of the war and the revolutions:

“We must not forget that after the World War the Hungarian mentality showed certain despair ... Therefore, the national spirit lacked consciousness for a long time, it did not care how it is a matter of great importance and a moral value to look at the past, feel pride in the past, even a pride that comes with pain, gives confidence in the future.”<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> József Pakots, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 247.

<sup>573</sup> József Pakots, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 247.

<sup>574</sup> József Pakots, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 247–248.

<sup>575</sup> Andor Barthos (b. 1865), former secretary at the Ministry of Transportation, industrialist and a member of the Unity Party caucus. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 23–24.

<sup>576</sup> Andor Barthos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 250.

<sup>577</sup> “Nem szabad azt elfelejtenünk, hogy a világháború után a magyar léleknek bizonyos elcsüggedése mutatkozott ... Hosszú ideig tehát a nemzeti lélek öntudathoz nem jutott, nem gondolkozott arról, hogy micsoda erkölcsi érték és nagyfontosságú dolog az, ha a múltra visszatekint, érzi a múltnak büszkeségét, bár fájdalmas büszkeségét, a jövőre pedig bizalmat merit.” Andor Barthos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 250.

Thus, one of the main arguments for the commemoration of the World War was to downplay the ‘unhistorical’ experience of the revolutionary years, when the national sentiment had reached rock bottom. The counterrevolutionary policy included erasing the history of the revolution and reaching out for a more favourable past.<sup>578</sup> For the Conservatives, this was motivation and argument enough to ignore the Liberal criticism.

However, Barthos was able to support Pakots in the ‘valid’ military historical argument, namely the memory of the Battle of Limanova, where the Hungarian hussars had shown their heroism to the whole world:<sup>579</sup>

“For what was Limanova? It was, my honourable gentlemen, the Hungarian Thermopylae. I remember the feeling of desperation when we heard the news of the [Russian] declaration: ‘Lemberg is ours!’ It depressed every one of us and cast us down, as even we believed for a long time that the view often put forward by the foreign press, that the [Russian] steamroller shall sweep everything before it, shall become reality. And what happened? In Limanova, the Hungarian hussars, the Royal Hungarian army, performed miracles, such a miracle that made the impossible possible, when they stopped the steamroller on its tracks.”<sup>580</sup>

Drawing on the classical narrative of Thermopylae, Barthos was able to construct a similar tale of heroism. From the highest officers to the rank and file, Hungarians had done their duty in the battle, and moreover, “showed the entire world that the Hungarian nation, respecting its allegiance to treaties, had produced soldiers who are worthy of the respect of the entire world, a deed acknowledged by every unbiased person, even by our enemies.”<sup>581</sup> Here Barthos carefully manoeuvred around the Hungarian tragedy of being forced to fight for foreign causes, and turned it into a tribute to Hungarian steadfastness. Despite the ultimate defeat in the war, in distinguishing itself on the battlefield, the Hungarian nation was created anew in the virtues of loyalty and bravery. Apace

<sup>578</sup> See also István Bethlen’s inaugural address 1921, Bethlen 2000, 117.

<sup>579</sup> In the autumn of 1914, the Central Powers advancing in the Eastern front were forced into retreat by a front-wide Russian counterattack dubbed the ‘Russian steamroller.’ In December, the Austro-Hungarian forces took a stand at Limanova and were eventually able to halt the Russian advance towards the south, which might have endangered the Hungarian heartland. Galántai 2000, 204, 212; “Limanova – magyar győzelem.” A Nagy Háború írásban és képen, 30.11.2011, [http://nagyhaboru.blog.hu/2011/11/30/limanova\\_magyar\\_gyozelem](http://nagyhaboru.blog.hu/2011/11/30/limanova_magyar_gyozelem) (24.4.2019).

<sup>580</sup> “Mert mi volt Limanova? Ez volt, igen t. uraim, a magyar Thermopylae. Én emlékszem arra a kétségbeejtő benyomásra, amikor ilyen szövegezésben adtak nekünk hírt: ‘Lemberg még a mienk!’ Mindnyájunkat deprimált, leverte ez a hír és hosszú ideig magunk is elhittük, hogy a külföldi sajtóban unos-untalan hirdetett az a körülmény, hogy megindul a gőzhenger és végigseper, be fog következni. És mi történt? Limanovánál a magyar huszárok, a m. kir. honvédség csodát művelt, azt a csodát, hogy a lehetetlent tette lehetővé, amikor megállította útjában a gőzhengert.” Andor Barthos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 250–251. The loss of Lemberg (Lviv in present-day Ukraine) in autumn 1914 symbolized the extent of the Russian breakthrough in Galicia and the catastrophic collapse of the Austro-Hungarian front. Relief could only be achieved with the Gorlice-Tarnów offensive in spring 1915, and only with massive German support. Galántai 2000, 204–205, 250–253.

<sup>581</sup> “... megmutatta az egész világnak, hogy az a magyar nemzet, amely a szövetségi hűségéhez becsülettel kitart, olyan katonákat állított elő, hogy méltán megérdemli az egész világ tiszteletét és kell, hogy ezt minden elfogulatlan ember, még ha ellenségünk is, elismerje.” Andor Barthos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

with the opposition narrative, Ferenc Klárik tried to interrupt this exalted speech with an ironic interjection: “the widows and orphans of those heroes are still hungry!”<sup>582</sup> to which Barthos only briefly remarked that he would not let provocations disrupt “the beautiful mood in his spirit”<sup>583</sup>

Barthos pointed out that he, with his acquaintances and supporters from various fields, had pleaded to designate the anniversary of the Battle of Limanova, 11 December, as the national day of remembrance. That would have included special emphasis on the widows and orphans of those who fell at Limanova, as well as a monument built on soil brought from the battlefield.<sup>584</sup> They had once held a memorial service on the anniversary, with representatives from the government, Parliament and officers present, but the veterans themselves had not been there, unwilling to politicize the memory. Therefore the plan had been abandoned, as it seemed to cause more dissent than cohesion among the veterans.<sup>585</sup> Still, Barthos went on with a plea to include the memorial day of Limanova in the legislation. He appealed directly to Prime Minister Bethlen, his patriotism and reverence for history, to add a reference to Limanova, even in an administrative way.<sup>586</sup>

Barthos concluded his speech with a quote from Lajos Kossuth, as an amalgamation of Hungarian political historiography based on tragedy and recuperation: “There is a cross in the Hungarian coat of arms. It is the symbol of martyrdom, but at the same time, a symbol of resurrection.”<sup>587</sup> Barthos and Pakots attempted to turn the memory of the World War towards the positive remembrance of Hungarian achievement. Arguing against the decision not to address the memorial day after an individual battle, they found the symbolic value of the Battle of Limanova as proof of Hungarian military valour was the suitable point of reference. The choice was understandable, as Limanova was one of the rather rare examples of Austro-Hungarian success on the battlefield, and could thus be turned into a positive symbol of nation-building.<sup>588</sup>

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582 “Éhezik a hős özvegye és árvája!” Ferenc Klárik, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

583 “... lelkem szép hangulatát.” Andor Barthos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

584 Andor Barthos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

585 Andor Barthos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

586 Andor Barthos, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

587 “A magyar címerben ott van a kereszt. Ez a martirium jelképe, de egyúttal a feltámadás jelképe is.” Andor Barthos, quoting Lajos Kossuth, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 251.

588 Another such example was naturally the Battle of Otranto in 1917, where Miklós Horthy distinguished himself as naval commander and which was thereafter commonly used to build and maintain his heroic figure (see Turbucz 2014, 51). One might ask whether the government was reluctant to name another Hungarian military success specifically in order to preserve the Regent’s supreme position among the Hungarian war heroes.

### 3.2.4 Heroes or traitors? Redescribing the POWs

Sándor Szabó,<sup>589</sup> himself a war veteran and a former prisoner of war, brought his personal reminiscence from the battlefield to the House in beautiful words:

“The bill that lay in front of us is one of remembrance, and it should be dedicated to remembrance. Discussing it brings to my mind those memories, which have followed me from the battlefield up until this House. In front of me, I can see my comrades-in-arms rushing forward, their faces red with enthusiasm, those who had followed the flag even unto death without thinking, but with the assurance that they gave their sacrifice for their beloved fatherland.”<sup>590</sup>

In contrast to that pure, apolitical atmosphere of battle, defined by nothing but the love for fatherland, Szabó looked with disdain all the petty party political strife that created in the House, even concerning this bill, on which the unity of the parties should be unquestioned.<sup>591</sup> Using the wounds of the injured or the mourning of the widows as a pretext for criticizing the government was “sacrilegious”<sup>592</sup> distortion of the memory. Szabó’s rhetoric was in line with the post-war veteran discourse, which valued the war experience, the *esprit de corps* and the sanctity of violence above the disappointing civilian pettiness, and was in itself a central catalyst in the post-1918 peace crisis and the paramilitary violence around Europe.<sup>593</sup>

Szabó also returned to Fábíán’s argument concerning the prisoners of war in the Soviet Union. As a member of the delegation working in co-operation with the International Red Cross, he was able to announce that the question had at last been resolved; an agreement had been reached between the governments of Hungary and the Soviet Union, allowing Hungarians to return, and only the internal conditions and the vast distances of Russia had so far hampered its fulfilment.<sup>594</sup> Contrary to the earlier accusations of negligence, the Hungarian government was committed to bringing their brethren home at any price:

“Bringing them home at the expense of the state has been a heavy burden on the budget, yet we saw such a burden as our patriotic duty, and it was thanks to their heroic behaviour and perseverance in their national thought, to which we fulfilled this obligation.”<sup>595</sup>

<sup>589</sup> Lawyer and a decorated war veteran Sándor Szabó (b. 1887) spent the years 1915–1918 as a POW in Russia. A member of the Unity Party caucus. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 173.

<sup>590</sup> “Az előttünk fekvő törvényjavaslat az emlékezeté: az emlékezésnek van szánva. E törvényjavaslat tárgyalásánál bennem is felmerülnek azok a reminiszcenciák amelyek a harctérről kísérték engem ide a törvényhozás házáig. Feltűnnek előttem a rohanó, a lelkesedéssel, kipirult arccal előretörő bajtársaim, akik követték a zászlót a halálba meggondolás nélkül, de abban a tudatban, hogy szeretett hazájukért hozzák az áldozatot.” Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 248.

<sup>591</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 248.

<sup>592</sup> “... szentségtörő”, Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 248.

<sup>593</sup> Gentile 2013, 125, 134; Gerwarth 2013, 83–84; Gerwarth 2017, 122–123.

<sup>594</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 248.

<sup>595</sup> “Ez az államköltségen való hazahozatal az ország kiadásait nagymértékben megterhelte, azonban ezt a terhet viselni hazafias kötelezettségünknek tartottuk és az ő hősiességüknek és a nemzeti gondolathoz való kitartásuknak mintegy

However, and herein lay Szabó's main argument, many of the Hungarian POWs met by Hungarian and Red Cross officials, had officially announced that they had acquired Russian citizenship and were not going to return to Hungary.<sup>596</sup> Using data provided by the Parliament's prisoner of war office, Szabó stated that of those several thousand Hungarians who had ended up in Russia as POWs and still remained there, most were so-called suspicious individuals:<sup>597</sup>

"Some of these people had been members of the Red Army, some had been leaders of the communist agitation schools, and some are still serving in the Soviet armed forces and have placed themselves at the service of an ideology which is directed against the Hungarian national sentiment."<sup>598</sup>

The issue of repatriating the remaining Hungarian POWs from the Soviet Union was thus transformed from a debt of honour to a matter of internal security. At least, the Hungarian state should no longer pay for it.<sup>599</sup> As a consequence, the home and foreign offices had established a procedure according to which POWs wanting to return to Hungary were subjected to a thorough scrutiny of their backgrounds and present ideology, which included questioning of relatives and neighbours and an account of their pre-war activities. Only on the basis of such examination, and supported by reliable witnesses, could the Minister of Foreign Affairs, at his discretion, grant the repatriation permit, "provided that the person in question is not expected to commit any delinquency against the interests of the Hungarian state or the Hungarian national sentiment."<sup>600</sup> The multi-layered procedure involved in granting repatriation and rehabilitation was symptomatic of the counterrevolutionary mood of suspicion; a person who had once been declared a revolutionary or anything close to it, was virtually unable to clear his name in the eyes of the officials.<sup>601</sup>

In an instant, Szabó had diminished the esteem and symbolic value of the POWs. From unjust detainees they were transformed into a collective group of Communist sympathizers and likely traitors. Most of those who had remained in the Soviet Union had not done so under duress but had been seduced by the Red ideology and were not worthy of patriotic remembrance.<sup>602</sup> As a former prisoner

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velejárója volt, hogy viselnünk kellett ezeket a kötelezettségeket." Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 248.

<sup>596</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 248.

<sup>597</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 249.

<sup>598</sup> "Ezek az emberek részben tagjai voltak a vörös hadseregnek, részben vezetői voltak bolsevista kiképző iskolának, részben pedig ma is a szovjet tényleges katonai szolgálatában állnak, és így abból a meggondolásból indulnak ki, hogy vétettek a magyar állameszme ellen." Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 249.

<sup>599</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 249.

<sup>600</sup> "... hogy az állameszme és Magyarország érdeke ellen az illető előreláthatólag nem fog semmifele deliktumot elkövetni," Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 249–250.

<sup>601</sup> The same applied to domestic political internees, see Chapter 2.3.

<sup>602</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 248. Accusations of Communists using the released POWs as revolutionary instigators was a common trope within the European post-war counterrevolutionary discourse. It had some substance, however, as many of the continental Communist leaders, including Béla Kun, had indeed acquired their revolutionary ideology while in Russian captivity. Gerwarth 2017, 40, 130, 132.



of war himself, Szabó could convincingly present first-hand knowledge of the conditions in Russia as well as official data concerning the repatriation procedure. Even as Meskó declared that many of the POWs remaining “are honourable patriots, who remained Hungarian despite their suffering there, not going over to the Reds”<sup>603</sup>, Szabó retorted that all POWs with a real commitment to Hungary had been given the chance to return, and that those remaining were not worth the effort. The only Hungarians forcibly detained in the Soviet Union were hostages of the Soviet government, which was trying to exchange them for Hungarian Communists serving their sentences in Hungary. Despite the unfavourable deal, the Hungarian government was willing to comply. If the communist-infected Hungarians wanted to find their happiness in Russia, so be it.<sup>604</sup>

Béla Fábián, still ready to defend the name of the POWs, interrupted by expressing the belief that if the government refused to pay their repatriation costs, the corresponding sum could be raised from private benefactors within a week.<sup>605</sup> Szabó ironically answered: “The honourable colleague is free to try”,<sup>606</sup> implying that only the Communists themselves – or the Hungarian Social Democrats – would have any interest in that, and they in turn were not wealthy enough.<sup>607</sup> Therefore, Szabó concluded his argument, the matter of the fallen and that of the POWs were fundamentally distinct. The fallen were those whom the nation unconditionally honoured for their sacrifice, the POWs were an issue the state had to deal with.<sup>608</sup> The opposition rhetoric about the widows, orphans and invalids he deemed mere opportunism, a way to attack the government, without any real commitment to their cause.<sup>609</sup> That reminded him of the Communist propaganda, abuse of the invalids and their tragedies for political ends; the unfortunate individuals did not need that kind of support, which was tantamount to rubbing salt in their wounds.<sup>610</sup>

Seeing the opportunity, Gyula Petrovác<sup>611</sup> joined Szabó in attacking the Socialists. He interpreted the silence of the Social Democrats as proof that they did not share the patriotic values of the Hungarian nation:

<sup>603</sup> “... becsületes hazafiak ezek, akik szenvedtek és kint is magyarok maradtak, akik nem pártoltak át a vörösökhöz,” Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 246.

<sup>604</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 249.

<sup>605</sup> Béla Fábián, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 249.

<sup>606</sup> “Tessék megpróbálni, t. képviselőtársam”, Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 249.

<sup>607</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 249.

<sup>608</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 250.

<sup>609</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 250.

<sup>610</sup> Sándor Szabó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 250.

<sup>611</sup> Civil engineer Gyula Petrovác (b. 1877), member of the right-wing Christian Economic and Social Party (*Keresztény Gazdasági és Szociális Párt*). Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 228–229.

“...the silence on their part emphasizes the fact that they are unable to join us in patriotic sentiment and even on this occasion they disassociate themselves from the national community.”<sup>612</sup>

In the level of argumentation, this was again an example of nation-building through exclusion; that participating in the commemoration of the fallen was a required act of proving ‘real Hungarian patriotism’, and failing to do so proof of an unpatriotic disposition. However, at this point the liberal opposition could apply the same rhetorical tools as the conservatives had used against them, as Petróvacz’s argument was met with interpellations for “deglorifier of the celebration”<sup>613</sup> and calling him “a demagogue and a swindler”.<sup>614</sup> In his defence, Petrovác commented that he, too, in principle was opposed to politicizing the matter,<sup>615</sup> but as politicking had already appeared in the form of protests and interjections, he chose to state his view and also endorse the amendments proposed by Pakots and Meskó.<sup>616</sup>

### 3.2.5 Not too solemn a session

Minister of Justice Pál Pesthy<sup>617</sup> appeared to conclude the debate. Acknowledging the opposition, he affirmed that the government would take the matter of widows and orphans into consideration in due time and due fashion, but simultaneously criticized the parties for voicing their partisan arguments in the celebratory discussion as there would have been more appropriate opportunities for this.<sup>618</sup> In the name of unity and harmony towards the exalted commemoration, he asked the Members to retract their amendment motions, and if the Members would not comply, pleaded with the House to dismiss them.<sup>619</sup> He remarked that Meskó’s motion concerning the taxation of war profits was obsolete, as the matter had been already included in an earlier budgetary bill.<sup>620</sup> Concerning the prisoners of war, he rhetorically played off the arguments of Meskó and Szabó against each other. In espousing Szabó’s view he could demonstrate Meskó’s inexperience in the matter and nullify his argument.<sup>621</sup> He commented sympathetically on Pakots’ plea for the reintroduction of compensation for military distinction, but repeated the excuse that however honourable a gesture this may be, the matter was tied to the state budget and

<sup>612</sup> “Ismétlem, e párt némasága hangsúlyozottan mondja ki azt, hogy hazafiségben sem tudnak összefogni velünk és hogy ilyen alkalommal is szeparálják magukat a nemzet egyetemes közösségétől.” Gyula Petrovác, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>613</sup> “Ünneprontó!” Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>614</sup> “Demagóg! Szélhámos!” Ferenc Reisinger, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>615</sup> Gyula Petrovác, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>616</sup> Gyula Petrovác, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>617</sup> The lawyer Pál Pesthy (1873–1952) was a relative newcomer in state politics, as he had been elected to Parliament in 1922 and had only risen to the ministerial post less than a month earlier in March 1924. Lengyel & Vidór 1922; MÉL: Pesthy, Pál.

<sup>618</sup> Pál Pesthy, Minister of Justice, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>619</sup> Pál Pesthy, Minister of Justice, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>620</sup> Pál Pesthy, Minister of Justice, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>621</sup> Pál Pesthy, Minister of Justice, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

could not be resolved on the spot, and therefore asked Pakots, too, to retract his motion.<sup>622</sup>

As a member of the government, Pesthy had several rhetorical tools at his disposal for controlling the House and depoliticizing the issue. The two-pole opposition, where the Liberal and radical Right groups were not willing to support each other, was effectively used to persuade the Liberals to ultimately support the bill and its modest content in relation to the endorsement of military virtue. Naturally, the most often repeated argument – and the one that also most easily gained the support of the House – was that emphasizing that the ceremonial occasion should not be disturbed by petty party politics:

“To conclude, I would once again like to ask the honourable Members to honour the exalted mood of this celebratory session and to retract the amendment motions they have proposed.”<sup>623</sup>

Meskó interrupted, protesting loudly against Pesthy’s accusations and refused to retract his amendment motion only because of the vague suggestion that the matter might have been settled in other legislation.<sup>624</sup> The Speaker Huszár instantly reprimanded him for his interruption, remarking that at that point in the debate, Meskó only had the right to either retract his motion or continue pressing it, but not to make further comments on the matter.<sup>625</sup> Meskó immediately appealed to the right to defend oneself against unfair accusations and to explain misinterpretations, declaring that he had been accused of deglorifying the celebration, which he had not.<sup>626</sup>

“I’m going to explain why this is not deglorification. My words have been misunderstood and I have the right to correct that. My objective was to state that the real deglorification is only erecting statues, placing memorial plaques while refusing to take care of the poor orphans and widows. Altogether, I cannot comprehend why we should not charge the war profits. The blood of the Hungarian fathers was not shed in the war so that their orphans would not be cared for, and our sons were not sent to the numerous battlefields so that their dependents would not be cared for.”<sup>627</sup>

During this exchange, the Speaker made use of the House Rules, trying to limit Meskó’s right to speak, whereas Meskó in turn invoked the same rules, appealing

<sup>622</sup> Pál Pesthy, Minister of Justice, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>623</sup> “Befejezésül még egyszer kérem, hogy ez ünnepélyes ülés emelkedett hangulatára való tekintettel méltóztassanak a határozati javaslatokat tett képviselő urak határozati javaslataikat visszavonni.” Pál Pesthy, Minister of Justice, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>624</sup> Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252.

<sup>625</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 252–253.

<sup>626</sup> Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

<sup>627</sup> “Azt akarom megindokolni, hogy miért nem vagyok ünneprontó. Félreértették a szavaimat s azt van jogom helyreigazítani. Nekem az volt a célom, hogy kifejtsem, hogy az igazi ünneprontó az, aki csak szobrokat emel, aki csak emléktáblákat helyez el és nem gondoskodik a szegény árvákról és özvegyekről. Egyáltalában nem tudom megérteni, hogy miért ne bántsuk a háborús vagyont. Nem azért folyt a magyar apák vére a háborúban, hogy árváikról ne gondoskodjunk, és nem azért küzdöttek fiaink a különböző harctereken, hogy hozzátartozóikról ne gondoskodjunk.” Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

to the right to defend himself against accusations, and was thus able to repeat his argument in a condensed form.

Due to the heated atmosphere, the next intervention came from Prime Minister Bethlen himself, who had hastened to appear in the House in an attempt to tackle the last-minute disturbance and guide the bill to the desired goal. First, he repeated Pesthy's argument that the taxation of war profits had already been included in the bill concerning budgetary equality, hinting that Meskó had probably not read the bill as he continued to push his own overlapping motion.<sup>628</sup> He thus suggested that if Meskó were a proponent of such taxation, he only needed to promptly vote for the budgetary bill.<sup>629</sup> Meskó could not tolerate the irony and interrupted again, shouting: "But [the budgetary bill] is not for the invalids! The object is not designated! ... The government itself is deglorifying the celebration!"<sup>630</sup> and was again reprimanded by the Speaker. Pesthy joined Bethlen, asking all the members to "eliminate this wretched discord",<sup>631</sup> bring the celebratory bill to the goal and "to remain united in spirit in the exalted atmosphere in which it was conceived."<sup>632</sup>

Pakots for his part answered the minister and politely refused to retract his amendment proposal:

"To my greatest regret I cannot retract [the motion], because I cannot act against my conscience. The honourable Minister of Justice said that in principle he agrees with me. I welcome his words with deep gratitude, as I am certain that is the case."<sup>633</sup>

Pakots was able to put the minister in a tight spot, as Pesthy was unable to deny the rightful pleas for justice and thus forced to make rhetorical concessions.

The debate ended with a vote. First, the original bill was accepted unequivocally, then the amendment motions proposed by Meskó and Pakots were rejected. However, concerning Pakots' motion, the vote was close. Even though the Speaker hastily judged the number of votes cast for Pakots (by standing up) to be a minority, the opposition immediately demanded a recount, to which the Speaker bluntly answered: "I already declared the result! The majority could be clearly determined"<sup>634</sup> As in former cases, when the government was driven onto the defensive in parliamentary debates, administrative measures were applied and exploited to close the matter as soon as possible and curb the discussion that had veered in an unfavourable direction.

<sup>628</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

<sup>629</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

<sup>630</sup> "De nem a rokkantak javára! A cél nincs megjelölve! ... A kormány rontja az ünnepet!" Zoltán Meskó, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

<sup>631</sup> "... hogy ezt a csekély disszonanciát is elimináljuk", Pál Pesthy, Minister of Justice, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

<sup>632</sup> "... és legyünk lelkileg egyek abban az emelkedett hangulatban, amely megnyilvánult." Pál Pesthy, Minister of Justice, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

<sup>633</sup> "Legnagyobb sajnálatomra nem vonhatom vissza, mert lelkiismeretem ellen nem cselekedhetem. A t. igazságügyminister ur azt mondotta, hogy érzésben teljesen együtt van velem. Én ezt hálásan és köszönettel fogadom, meg is vagyok győződve arról, hogy ez így van." József Pakots, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

<sup>634</sup> "Már kimondtam a határozatot! Teljesen megállapítható volt a többség!" Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 253.

In the detailed debate on the text of the law, Liberal Member Rezső Rupert came to the government's aid to save the occasion from completely losing its celebratory tone, and reformulated the wording of the law to be more elevated, "a little bit of Gospel."<sup>635</sup> By emphasizing the concepts of honour and respect, Rupert worded his support for the bill in exchange for being allowed to make it a modicum more conciliatory and avoiding the radical nationalist and militarist content. After having seen where the radical Right's challenge of the bill had led, Minister Pesthy gratefully accepted Rupert's motion, which subsequently was also passed by the House.<sup>636</sup>

The conceptualization of honour, sacrifice and military virtue are universal tools of nation-building, as one can see the very same arguments used in the post-war politicization of history in other parts of the world.<sup>637</sup> In the same vein, the post-war Hungarian nation had to be constructed anew after the break-up of Austria-Hungary, but at the same time retain as many elements as possible from their glorious history. Hungarian military virtue was one of the main characteristics in this selective construction of a favourable history, and the sacrifices of the World War were to be a firm testimonial to it. Thus they needed to be immortalized in the form of legislation and collective commemoration. Being forced to fight under foreign leadership and for foreign objectives also relieved the troops from responsibility concerning strategic and tactical errors or the topic of battlefield brutality. Naturally, the ideal of a heroic Hungarian soldier, whose glory remained untarnished by the flag under which he had fought, did not extend to those who had served in the Red Army or even defected to the Soviet Union during imprisonment. Hence the veterans' issue also related to the exclusive side of nation-building.

Despite its unfavourable outcome, and partially precise because of it, the history politics of the First World War provided a useful opportunity for the Hungarian government; the victimization discourse it had created, along with Trianon, became one of the cornerstones of Hungarian nation-building. However, the government, which had drafted the bill for this very purpose, was caught off-guard by the opposition, especially the radical Right, which demanded even stronger emphasis on military virtue, and was thus able to use the modest content of the bill to challenge the credibility of the government with regard to the defence of the nation. During the debate, the liberals, represented especially by Rezső Rupert, came to the government's aid against the radical right, by presenting much more eloquent justification and wording for the bill than the government had originally been able to do. The Liberals were eager to

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<sup>635</sup> "... egy kis evangélium", Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 254.

<sup>636</sup> NN XXII/1922, 254.

<sup>637</sup> For example, the Anzac tradition, which strongly implies that the sacrifice given by Australian and New Zealand troops in the World War and namely in the Gallipoli landings, also helped to bring about the respective nations. In line with the Hungarian narrative, the combination of victimhood and heroism, fighting on a foreign front among a foreign army, the Australian commemoration of Anzac has continued uninterrupted up to the present day. Sarkamo 2018.

prove their patriotic sentiment and loyalty and used the occasion for that purpose.

Thus, once again, the fairly simple subject of commemoration was turned into a rhetorical and conceptual issue, where the opposing parties saw the opportunity to use the broadly accepted concepts and arguments of nationalism and patriotism to their own ends. The concept of 'deglorification of the celebration' (*ünneprontás*) was used equally by all sides to attack their opponents for not honouring the occasion sufficiently. In the rhetoric of the government this meant politicking on the matter and questioning its motives, for the opposition, in turn, the meagre content of the commemoration bill. Altogether, the veterans' issue brought to the surface the competing conceptualizations of nation and patriotism. The sensitive issue of prisoners of war in particular illuminated the prevailing counterrevolutionary thought, which wanted to rhetorically detach those remaining in Russia from the Hungarian nation and judge them as lost to Communism.

### 3.3 The teachings of the Greatest Hungarian. Codifying the memory of István Széchenyi, 1925

#### 3.3.1 The counterrevolutionary Széchenyi

The economic and political theorist, philanthropist and politician Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860) was the initiator of the Hungarian Reform Era and benefactor behind many societal and infrastructure reforms in Hungary. For his role in Hungary's national awakening, he was given the title 'The Greatest Hungarian' by Lajos Kossuth. Towards the end of his life, Széchenyi became disillusioned and disappointed with Hungarian nationalism, which had culminated in the Revolution of 1848, the failure of which led him to spend the rest of his life in self-imposed isolation, and eventually to commit suicide.<sup>638</sup> Széchenyi's moderate reformism and anti-revolutionary sentiment made him a suitable object of commemoration for the Bethlen government that based its policy in extremely careful reformism and renouncing even conceptually everything radical or revolutionary.<sup>639</sup>

1925 marked the centenary of the beginning of István Széchenyi's public activity on behalf of the Hungarian nation, thus considered the beginning of the Reform Era, counted from his speech in the Pozsony (Bratislava) Diet on 3 November 1825 and the founding of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Therefore, the government drafted a bill concerning the codification of Széchenyi's memory. In the bill, Széchenyi's public activity was considered a cornerstone of the Hungarian nation-building:

<sup>638</sup> Dobos & Lahdelma 2002, 162–163; MÉL: Széchenyi, István, gróf.

<sup>639</sup> See also István Bethlen's speech on the memory of István Széchenyi in 1928, Bethlen 2000, 138–142.

“Through his public work, of which the long row of his achievements is a testimony, Széchenyi earned the thorough gratitude of the nation.”<sup>640</sup>

The “unforgettable epithet of his name, “<sup>641</sup> The Greatest Hungarian, was also enshrined in law. The bill stated that Széchenyi’s activity coincided with the reopening of the Hungarian Diet of 1825 after a long hiatus – drawing from the positive interpretation of the Hungarian parliamentary tradition when the narrative suited the government.<sup>642</sup> It also noted that at the time of Széchenyi’s death, the constitutional position of Hungary – that of being under Austrian rule – had prevented paying proper tribute to him.<sup>643</sup> The centenary presented another opportunity for immortalizing his memory. In declaring this, the bill demonstrated the fairly typical Hungarian content of history politics, namely the use of historical time. Anniversaries have been and continue to be constructed, redefined and contested to suit contemporary political use.<sup>644</sup> The centenary was also to be celebrated by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which had invited Parliament to hold a commemorative session on its premises on 3 November.<sup>645</sup> This kind of reciprocal involvement of state organs in national celebrations further enhanced their historico-political significance.

In its memorandum concerning the bill, the Legislative Committee expressed its wholehearted support, and moreover, added significant praise of Széchenyi to emphasize his significance to Hungarian nation-building.<sup>646</sup> The memorandum as a narrative began with a passage about Széchenyi’s appearance at the darkest hour of Hungary’s existence as a nation and how he was single-handedly able to raise the nation from the night:

“Like a marvellous comet in the dark sky, he appeared in the era of great stagnation, economic depression and cultural backwardness of the political horizon of the fatherland. His appearance brought a new orientation, evoking a complete transformation in the social, cultural and economic fields. With his titanic spirit and indomitable willpower he showed the nation the only true, only real and only viable way.”<sup>647</sup>

<sup>640</sup> “Széchenyi István gróf közéleti munkásságával, melyet alkotásainak nagy sora hirdet, a nemzet háláját teljes mértékben kiérdemelte.” Bill on the law concerning the memory of István Széchenyi, 27.10.1925, NI 956/XVI/1922, 307.

<sup>641</sup> “Nevének el nem múlható emlékezete”, Bill on the law concerning the memory of István Széchenyi, 27.10.1925, NI 956/XVI/1922, 307.

<sup>642</sup> Cf. Chapter 2.2.3.

<sup>643</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 956, 27.10.1925, NI 956/XVI/1922, 308.

<sup>644</sup> An example of politicization of time on grand scale was the millennial anniversary of the Hungarians’ conquest of the Carpathian Basin in 896 AD. The political need for national celebration at the end of the 19th century affected historiography, which promptly pinpointed the year 896 to fit with the celebrations of 1896. A more recent example was the the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hungarian Uprising in 2006, which was used by the then-opposition Fidesz to delegitimize the incumbent Socialist government, being an important step towards their landslide victory in 2010. Gerő 2004, 181–184; Nyssönen 2017, 77–78, 179–180.

<sup>645</sup> Béla Scitovszky, Speaker of the National Assembly, 30.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 261.

<sup>646</sup> Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 325–327.

<sup>647</sup> “Mint egy hatalmas üstökös a sötét égboltozaton, úgy jelent meg a nagy tespedés, gazdasági pangás, kulturális elmaradottság korában Hazánk politikai horizontján,

At the very beginning, Széchenyi was articulated as a divine or epoch-making force and the guiding light of the nation. At the concrete level of politics, the narrative continued, he had overcome insurmountable hardships against the reactionary politics of the Habsburg era and still emerged victorious, achieving the long-awaited reforms.<sup>648</sup> In the field of the politicization of history, Széchenyi's fight against reaction and in favour of courageous reforms was reformulated to suit the contemporary politics; the negative concepts of stagnation and reaction were externalized to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Habsburg repression, the recent parallel of which were the pre-war politics and the revolutionary years, and Széchenyi's teachings for the present day reduced to considered and careful reformism.

The narrative continued with another peculiar element of Hungarian history politics, the role of the concrete environment, the visible monuments to the past. As the memorandum directly addressed the Members: one only needed to look out of the windows of the Houses of Parliament to see Széchenyi's great achievements: the Chain Bridge over the Danube named after him, the tunnel through the Castle Hill and the active shipping on the Danube. From the immediate surroundings, the scope of Széchenyi's deeds was then widened to include the channel of the Iron Gates and the regulation of the Tisza river; in mentioning these geographical points of reference, the memory of Széchenyi was self-evidently connected with the memory of Greater Hungary; Széchenyi's deeds had proven fruitful for all the nationalities of the Carpathian Basin.<sup>649</sup>

Another passage linked Széchenyi's role in making Hungary internationally known and ultimately gaining acceptance as a "member of enlightened European nations."<sup>650</sup> For, as the memorandum argued quoting Széchenyi's own text *The People of the East*,<sup>651</sup> the Hungarian nation was a heterogeneous descendant of the undeveloped Asian tribal life, with its noble yet destructive savagery, dreaded in the civilized parts of the world, and now obliged to "sober up from its destructive intoxication and rise to respectability."<sup>652</sup> The narrative was cleverly constructed to combine the two conflicting cornerstones of the Hungarian national mythos; the historical sentiment of Hungarians originating in the eastern warrior nations<sup>653</sup> and the

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megjelenésével új irányt adva, teljes átalakulást idézve elő gazdasági, szociális és kulturális téren, hatalmas génijének törhetetlen akaraterejével mutatva meg nemzete számára az egyedül helyes, egyedül igaz és egyedül célravezető utat." Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 325.

<sup>648</sup> Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 326–327.

<sup>649</sup> Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 326.

<sup>650</sup> "... az európai kultúrnépek sorában." Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 327.

<sup>651</sup> *A Kelet népe*, 1841.

<sup>652</sup> "... a romboló ittasságnak nagylelkűségre kell tisztulni, fölemelkedni." Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 327.

<sup>653</sup> The great eastern peoples, the Turks and Huns, have often been seen as a compelling alternative to trace the Hungarian heritage back to. The same applies to today's



tendency to present Hungary as an integral part of the West.<sup>654</sup> Széchenyi was historico-politically invoked to reconcile the two, to emphasize Hungarians' exceptionalism and uniqueness among the nations of Europe and in words and deeds present them as worthy of acknowledgement.<sup>655</sup> "Herein lay Széchenyi's true greatness, which makes him not only the greatest reformer, but also The Greatest Hungarian."<sup>656</sup> Finally, the memory of Széchenyi was brought back to the present day, as a model for the post-war and post-revolutionary reconstruction, and especially one that could be accepted by everyone with a true Hungarian patriotic spirit "without any distinctions between classes or political parties."<sup>657</sup>

When the debate on the bill opened on 4 November, a day after the centenary celebration held at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, István Rubinek,<sup>658</sup> presenting the bill on behalf of the Legislative Committee, began his speech by expressing his conviction that his task of arguing for the bill was extraordinarily easy, as "the bill brings contentment to the hearts of all people who feel themselves Hungarian,"<sup>659</sup> thus making a binding conceptualization, where honouring Széchenyi was equated with being Hungarian and that any other option was incomprehensible – thus simultaneously applying the inclusive and exclusive conceptualizations of the nation. Therefore, he continued, he could not think of any questions or protests except "*debuisset iam pridem*"<sup>660</sup> – that it should have been done already a long time ago. Moreover, he emphasized that the bill was not meant to proclaim Széchenyi's greatness, a thing self-evident in itself, but to demonstrate the nation's gratitude to him.<sup>661</sup>

More broadly, Rubinek spoke about the concept of a 'national pantheon', a concrete form of remembrance of the great sons of the nation, with comparisons between Hungary and the more pronounced forms of monumentalization, such as in France, Great Britain, Italy and Germany. Remarking that Hungary at present could not erect such monuments, he however argued that Hungary should neither envy the Great Powers, for the neverending gratitude of the Hungarian nation was "more durable than marble, more valuable than cold

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nationality discourse, where spurious theories are put on use in the (extreme) nationalist circles. See Deák 1992, 1043; Nyysönen 2017, 81; Trencsényi 2013, 102.

<sup>654</sup> See also Trencsényi 2013, 83–84.

<sup>655</sup> Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 327.

<sup>656</sup> "Ebben rejlik Széchenyi igazi nagysága, amely őt a legnagyobb reformátor elnevezés mellett a legnagyobb magyarrá is teszi." Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 327.

<sup>657</sup> "... osztály- és pártkülönbség nélkül ..." Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 956, 30.10.1925, NI 961/XVI/1922, 327.

<sup>658</sup> An agrarian politician from Upper Hungary, István Rubinek (1886–1938) was also a founding member of the Széchenyi Society. Member of Parliament since 1920, first in the Smallholder Party and subsequently in the Unity Party. MÉL: Rubinek, István; Vidor 1921, 118.

<sup>659</sup> "... a törvényjavaslat megegyedéssel tölti el minden magyarul érző ember szívét", István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 311.

<sup>660</sup> István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 311.

<sup>661</sup> István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 311.

granite”,<sup>662</sup> thus turning the Hungarian “pantheon of hearts”<sup>663</sup> into a more passionate and true form of remembrance than the foreign ever could be. The argument was perhaps necessary to underline the dire economic situation of Hungary, but in a longer perspective it appeared peculiar, as before that and thereafter Hungary has done more than its fair share in the monumentalization of history.<sup>664</sup>

Rubinek made an interesting rhetorical attempt to combine Széchenyi’s lament for Hungarian backwardness with an idea of dormant greatness, which he helped to bring about. Rubinek also reminded the House that Széchenyi’s ideas of reform and enlightenment were not based on a straightforward emulaton of foreign models:

“And it is a wonderful thing, which displays his true greatness, that he, who had acquired his erudition and cultural sophistication abroad, did not strive to simply transplant that foreign, western culture on us, to dress our national characteristics in foreign robes, but desired to create an independent national culture, using what is good in foreign models, applying it to domestic coniditons, to strengthen racial virtues and particularities ... He promoted cultural development, but let it be our own, national culture.”<sup>665</sup>

Such an interpretation was extremely important during the era of post-war reconstruction, when the national identity was being built on Hungary’s uniqueness and solitude in the face of ignorant world powers, and when the Hungarian application of the western ideals of constitutionalism, democracy and equality was at best limited. Another reference suited to contemporary consumption was the narrative of how Széchenyi had criticized the lack of national unity in Hungarian political thought and petty bickering within it.<sup>666</sup> Also, Széchenyi’s discourse on democracy and equality had had their gentlemanly limits that suited the present government well. Whereas Széchenyi had stood against serfdom and the feudal system and promoted public awareness and education, he had nevertheless always believed in the aristocracy’s natural leading role in society, as exemplified in the foundation of

<sup>662</sup> “... márványnál maradandóbb ... hideg gránitkockáinál becsebb ...” István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 311.

<sup>663</sup> “... szívének Pantheonja ...” István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 311.

<sup>664</sup> The most outspoken realization of a ‘national pantheon’ is quite evidently the Millennium monument on the Heroes’ Square in Budapest, unveiled in 1906 and since then reinterpreted for various historico-political ends; during the Soviet Republic of 1919, the kings’ statues were shrouded in red veils, and in 1955, the then Socialist regime decided to replace the statues of several ‘reactionary’ Habsburg rulers with those of Hungarian revolutionary leaders whose role could be given a positive interpretation in Socialist historiography. Gerő 2004, 215–232; Nyssönen 2017, 86–90.

<sup>665</sup> “És csodálatos dolog s ez mutatja be előttünk igazi nagyságában, ő, aki műveltségét, nagy kultúráját külföldön szerezte, nem törekszik ezen nyugati, idegen kultúra egyszerű átültetésére, nemzeti sajátosságainknak idegen köntösbe való öltöztetésével, hanem önálló nemzeti kultúrát óhajt teremteni, felhasználni az idegenből, ami jó, a hazai viszonyokhoz alkalmazva, a faji érények, sajátosságok erősítésére ... Kulturális fejlődést hirdet, de ez a kultúra saját, nemzeti kultúra legyen.” István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 312.

<sup>666</sup> István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 312.

the National Casino, meant for Hungarian gentlemen to co-operate for the benefit of the nation.<sup>667</sup>

Rubinek pointed out that Széchenyi's reforms had also proved beneficial to those societal groups that had previously taken a stand against him. Such an example showed how Széchenyi was being used as a tool of conscious variation between the inclusive and exclusive forms of Hungarian nation-building; inclusive Hungarian identity was what characterized Széchenyi and his memory, was applied to nation-building, but naturally under the umbrella label of 'true Hungarian identity', from which certain groups could be and had been excluded.<sup>668</sup> Especially useful in the latter was the interpretation of Széchenyi as anti-revolutionary and anti-radical, a believer in moderate reformism and legalism:

"His programme included a societal division of labour, equality of political rights and in that connection, the liberation of serfs. He did not want his programme to be realized through violence, in a revolutionary way: Széchenyi was a believer in natural development. As Count Gyla Andrassy very aptly puts it in his work written about Széchenyi: 'Széchenyi wanted to progress slowly towards his goals, for Nature knows no leaps, it can only gradually approach perfection. The nation had slowly declined, only slowly could it rise again.'"<sup>669</sup>

This picture of a conservative nationalist Széchenyi, constructed by selective quotations and anachronistic reinterpretations, was exactly what the government wanted to achieve through the memorial legislation. Gyula Székfű's book *Three Generations* contributed to the conservative redescription of Széchenyi, its arguments being frequently invoked in the debates.<sup>670</sup> Széchenyi's reformism, the very object of the centenary commemoration, was represented always subordinate to his "love of the Hungarian race, unfaltering trust in the nation's mission and future ... and whenever he spoke of culture, it was the real Hungarian national culture."<sup>671</sup>

### 3.3.2 The many interpretations of Széchenyi

It seemed, however, as if the government had taken a consciously twofold approach to the argument. After Rubinek had taken the most conservative position on Széchenyi's memory, Prime Minister Bethlen then tried to

<sup>667</sup> István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 312.

<sup>668</sup> István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 313.

<sup>669</sup> "Programmja a közös teherviselés, szabad vallásgyakorlat, a politikai jogok egyenlősége s ezzel kapcsolatban a jobbágyság felszabadítása ... Programmját nem erőszakos módon, forradalmi utón óhajtja megvalósítani: Széchenyi a természetes fejlődés híve. Miként Andrassy Gyula gróf állapítja meg igen helyesen Széchenyiről írott munkájában: 'Széchenyi célja felé lassan akart haladni, mert a természet nem ismer ugrást, csak fokozatosan lehet a tökélyt megközelíteni. Lassan hanyatlott a nemzet, csak lassan emelkedhetik újra.'" István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 313.

<sup>670</sup> See Székfű 1920, 21–59.

<sup>671</sup> "... izzó fajszeretete, törhetetlen hite nemzetének hivatottságában és jövőjében ... s amidőn kultúráját hirdetett, az igazi magyar nemzeti kultúra volt." István Rubinek, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 313.

operationalize his consolidationary discourse by appealing to the opposition's more liberal sentiment. After declaring how much he resented empty phrases and political catchwords, he honoured Széchenyi with a working-class, even Socialist Realist metaphor:

"Therefore I do not want to quote or eulogize István Széchenyi, but I would like to see that in the same way as the working class, when honouring the funeral of a labour leader, paying their respects by holding a five minutes' silence, laying aside their tools for five minutes in every workplace in the country, quietly dedicating the moment to the memory of their departed leader; in such a way we should silence this workroom of the often confrontational Hungarian political life, and dedicate the five minutes solely to the memory of Széchenyi ... let us always be mindful that we are the representatives of one nation, let us always be aware that we, as representatives of one nation, should work exclusively for the benefit of the fatherland. Let us dedicate these five minutes to the memory of Széchenyi, with the pledge that we shall act accordingly for Hungary in its present difficult position."<sup>672</sup>

Bethlen was able to use his eloquence and rhetorical skill in relation to the preceding speaker; whereas Rubinek's speech was a very traditional celebratory act aimed at the conservative audience, Bethlen quite consciously, even ironically, distanced himself from it and surprisingly used leftist iconography to emphasize Széchenyi's appeal to all social classes. In doing this, he approached the figure of Széchenyi from a different direction, gaining appeal and applause from the leftist opposition, but pursuing the same goal, namely bringing Széchenyi to represent the moderate, careful, anti-revolutionary and nationalist policy.

This became evident he continued by stating that Széchenyi could not be judged solely by his concrete achievements in founding the Academy of Sciences, inspiring the construction of the Chain Bridge or channeling the Danube at the Iron Gate; not even by his defence of equality and constitutionalism, but first and foremost by his unquestionably Hungarian identity: "[he] was neither democrat nor reactionary, neither *kuruc* nor *labanc*, neither liberal nor conservative; he was alone and purely Hungarian."<sup>673</sup> This depoliticizing interpretation of Széchenyi,

<sup>672</sup> "En tehát nem idézni és nem parentálni kívánom Széchenyi Istvánt, hanem azt szeretném, hogy úgy, mint a munkásosztály akkor, amikor egy munkásvezér temetésénél annak emlékét szenteli meg azzal, hogy öt percre az egész országban elnémítja a munkaműhelyeket, félreteszi a kalapácsokat és tisztán az elnémult vezér emlékének szenteli azt az öt percet, mi is öt percre ennek a harcos magyar politikai életnek a műhelyét csendesítsük el és ezt az öt percet kizárólag Széchenyi emlékének szenteljük ... legyünk azonban mindenkor tudatában annak, hogy egy nemzetnek vagyunk a képviselői, legyünk mindenkor tudatában annak, hogy mi, egy nemzet képviselői kizárólag a haza érdekében dolgozhatunk. És szenteljük Széchenyi emlékének ezt az öt percet avval a fogadalommal, hogy ennek megfelelően kívánunk Magyarországot jelenlegi nehéz helyzetében is cselekedni." István Bethlen, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 314.

<sup>673</sup> "... nem volt sem demokrata, sem reakcionárius, nem volt sem *kuruc*, sem *labanc*, sem liberális, sem konzervatív ; ő egyedül és kizárólag magyar volt." István Bethlen, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 314. The concepts of *kuruc* and *labanc*, ranging back to the rebellions of Imre Thököly and Ferenc Rákóczi in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, used to denominate Hungarian patriots and Habsburg collaborators, respectively, had since then been used as (somewhat pejorative) denominations of 'Hungaro-centric' and 'western' approaches of the Hungarian national thought. By applying them in this context, Bethlen attempted to construct the ideal of Széchenyi's wisdom that

which Bethlen would also later make use of,<sup>674</sup> was at the core of Széchenyi's application in his nation-building policy. By equating The Greatest Hungarian with the Hungarian nation, he used the probably least disputed figure in Hungarian history<sup>675</sup> to define his ideals of policy: everyone could – and should – strive to be like Széchenyi, especially in the present times of hardship, when all the petty differences should be set aside in the name of the nation and its internal and external security and well-being.<sup>676</sup> The negative examples Bethlen presented, the two greatest national catastrophes – the defeat in the War of Independence in 1849 and the Treaty of Trianon – were both results of forgetting Széchenyi's ideals.<sup>677</sup> The memory of these catastrophes was then turned into an obligation to follow Széchenyi – on the road of purposeful reformism, in the best interests of the nation.

Béla Herczegh,<sup>678</sup> in turn, took the classical conservative position, linking Széchenyi's memory to the established Hungarian tragedy narrative – that of Széchenyi seeing his prophetic vision come absolutely true in the failure of the 1848 revolution<sup>679</sup> – and culminating in the parallel that “only more Hungarian than his life was his death, for the tragedy of his death was the most Hungarian thing.”<sup>680</sup> Herczegh redescribed the bitterness of the revolutionary years into a unifying narrative, where the figures of Széchenyi and Kossuth, opponents over the choice between conformism and revolution, were rhetorically reconciled:

“The old opponents are opponents no more, and the present generation, which now faces an even more terrible catastrophe, has long been aware that the two greatest men of all the great men on those great times, Széchenyi and Kossuth, even when they progressed on different paths, strove for the same goal: to bring happiness to their poor nation.”<sup>681</sup>

The temporal distance since the revolutionary years helped to soften the narrative into the desired form, “as the voice of his devotees as well as his critics is silenced forever,”<sup>682</sup> only now allowing Széchenyi's deeds to be seen in all their true greatness. Instead of the failures of the revolution, Széchenyi's true example

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overcomes such internal divisions in the interest of the nation. See e.g. Deák 1992, 1047, 1052; Romsics 2011, 294.

<sup>674</sup> István Bethlen's speech in memory of István Széchenyi in 1928, Bethlen 2000, 138–142.

<sup>675</sup> Save for St. Stephen, whose memory also had a role in political argumentation. See Chapter 4.4.

<sup>676</sup> István Bethlen, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 315.

<sup>677</sup> István Bethlen, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 315.

<sup>678</sup> Béla Herczegh (1874–1934), a lawyer with a background in local administration, member of the Unity Party. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 85–86; Névpon: Herczegh Béla.

<sup>679</sup> Béla Herczegh, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 315.

<sup>680</sup> “...akinek életénél csak halála volt magyarabb, mert halálának tragikumája volt a legmagyarabb.” Béla Herczegh, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 315.

<sup>681</sup> “A régi ellenfelek nem ellenfelek többé és ez a mai nemzedék, amely most még szörnyűségesebb katasztrófa osztályosa, régen tudja azt, hogy a nagy idők nagy embereinek két legnagyobbja, Széchenyi és Kossuth, ha más utakon haladtak is, ugyanegy cél felé igyekeztek: boldoggá tenni szegény nemzetüket.” Béla Herczegh, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 316.

<sup>682</sup> “...és midőn már örökre elhalkult a dicsérők és gáncsolók szava.” Béla Herczegh, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 315.

was retrieved from the reform era, his skill of raising the defeated nation from the ashes:

“Because after a century we again have need for Széchenyi’s spirit, his soul, his teachings and example, that he with his great contemporaries a century ago evoked the Hungarian strength of spirit and the spirit of the Hungarian strength, and whose teachings even after a century reach us like a distant but clear bell, penetrating all the noise, all the disturbance of times and all the man-made borders.”<sup>683</sup>

Again, Széchenyi appeared as a divine power, transcending the borders of time and space. The reference to ‘man-made borders’ was applied to maintain the conceptualization of Greater Hungary as the natural homeland of the Hungarian nation, for which Széchenyi worked.

Rezső Rupert joined in the admiration of Széchenyi, yet turned the tone towards a more liberal interpretation of his deeds:

“István Széchenyi struggled for the true Hungary, for being able to live independently, freely and constitutionally, fought for all Hungarians without exception, fought for civil and human rights.”<sup>684</sup>

From that inclusive interpretation of Széchenian virtues he continued to apply Széchenyi’s words and ideals to contemporary Hungary in a critical tone. Széchenyi had not fought for a country where freedom of speech, press and assembly were curtailed, not for a nation, where Hungarians were not free citizens, but for a “civilized and enlightened country.”<sup>685</sup> In that conceptual distinction, Rupert rhetorically denied Hungary the status of ‘civilization’, a fundamental part of the nationalist discourse. Moreover, he remarked that such constitutional freedom had long ago been achieved throughout the West, save for the dictatorships, further alienating Hungary from its ideal affiliates.<sup>686</sup> In contrast, he used Széchenyi’s ideals to define the true Hungary, the ideal, for which the official Hungary should strive, not oppose its forthcoming.<sup>687</sup> In making the distinction between ‘official Hungary’ and ‘real Hungary’, he hinted that the present government was more like the repressive Habsburg state, remote from Széchenyi’s ideals and from the ‘real’ self-evident, underlying, freedom-loving Hungarian nation. According to Rupert, Széchenyi, too, had turned his back on the official Hungary that had shown no sympathy for his reforms, and

<sup>683</sup> “...mert egy évszázad után is szüksége van Széchenyi lelkére, szellemére, tanítására és példájára, aki egy évszázad előtt nagy kortársaival együtt keltette fel a magyar érzés erejét és a magyar erő érzését és akinek tanítása egy évszázad után is úgy száll felérik, mint a távoli tiszta harangszó, áttörve minden érdek zaján, minden idő borulatán és minden, emberek által vont határokon.” Béla Herczegh, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 315.

<sup>684</sup> “Széchenyi István a valódi Magyarországért küzdött, azért, amelyet függetlennek, szabadnak, alkotmányos keretek között élőnek akart tudni és küzdött minden magyarért kivétel nélkül, küzdött a polgári és az emberi egyenlőségért.” Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 316.

<sup>685</sup> “...civilizált, művelt állam”, Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>686</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>687</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

embraced the real Hungary, all the people, within whom lies the real Hungarian identity, power and hope for the future.<sup>688</sup>

Thus, Rupert retorted, he welcomed the celebration of Széchenyi's memory, but the more appropriate commemoration of his phenomenal stature would be to codify in law the very achievements to which he had dedicated his life, now "as nothing else stands in the way of the realization of those achievements but the interests of those who cling to their power."<sup>689</sup> If Hungary really wanted to honour Széchenyi, his liberal ideals should be realized:

"Let there be Széchenyi-style civil rights and equality before the law, Széchenyi-style freedom of conscience, Széchenyi-style civil independence and the right to civil self-esteem, let there be equal division of labour, let finally come the state of equal rights and let there be a constitutional nation, living in a truly free society."<sup>690</sup>

The achievement of Széchenyi's goals only depended on the parliamentary majority and "really, on you, honourable Prime Minister."<sup>691</sup> In such a direct address to the government, Rupert attempted to catch the positive momentum linked to Széchenyi and use it to empower opposition policy. If the government was still unwilling to facilitate such of freedoms within Hungary, it was also not fit to celebrate his memory.<sup>692</sup>

In reference to Rubinek saying that Hungary had gone through two catastrophes for forgetting Széchenyi's words, Rupert reinterpreted the narrative:

"As Széchenyi himself also conceded, it seemed that freedom could only be won by blood, and even Széchenyi in 1848–1849 momentarily thought that we were rushing towards destruction, we can now see in historical perspective that we were on the right path, Széchenyi's path, for he was one of those who defined the path to 1848–49. From the historical perspective we can deduce that the catastrophe was not futile, because from it sprang the national life and future."<sup>693</sup>

Again, Rupert challenged the conservative narrative that had defined Széchenyi as everything but a revolutionary, and instead declared that Hungarian liberty

<sup>688</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>689</sup> "... amikor ezeknek az eredményeknek megvalósulása elé már semmi gát nem tornyosodik, csupán a hatalomféltség érdeke." Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>690</sup> "... legyen meg a Széchenyi-féle polgári szabadság és jogegyenlőség, a Széchenyi-féle lelkiismereti szabadság, a Széchenyi-féle polgári függetlenség és a polgári önértéknek a joga, legyen meg az egyenlő teherviselés, jöjjön el végre az egyenlő jogoknak az országa és legyen meg az alkotmányos és valóban a szabadság intézményeiben élő nemzet." Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>691</sup> "... ez tényleg öntől, igen t. miniszterelnök úrtól ..." Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>692</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>693</sup> "Hiszen Széchenyi maga is azt vallotta, hogy a szabadságot, úgy látszik, nem lehet mással, mint vérrel megváltani és ha Széchenyi 1848–49-ben pillanatnyilag talán azt hitte is, hogy a romlásba rohantunk, most, a történelem távlatából láthatjuk, hogy helyes utón jártunk, Széchenyi útján jártunk, hiszen ő is egyike volt azoknak, akik kijelölték az utat 1848–49-ig. A történelem távlatából megállapíthatjuk, hogy a katasztrófa nem volt hiábavaló, mert ebből a nemzet élete, jövődjé fakadt." Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

had been worth fighting for and would be so again. He agreed with the conceptualization of 1849 as a catastrophe *an sich*, but also reinterpreted it as the beginning of a new era.

Rupert also opposed the argument about the World War and Trianon as the second instance when Hungary allegedly had lost sight of Széchenyi's teachings, as at that time the real Hungary still did not exist; instead of a state of 20 million Hungarians working in unison, the Hungary of 1914 was a state under the arbitrary rule of the few, who acted against the interests of the nation.<sup>694</sup> In conceptualizing and antagonizing the arbitrary rule of the few, Rupert challenged the rhetoric of externalizing the responsibility for the war to the Habsburg Empire, but laid it equally on the war policy of the 'official Hungary'.<sup>695</sup> Until then, Rupert had been allowed to speak quite freely, but his critical interpretation of the World War and Hungary's part in it raised some interjections.<sup>696</sup>

After refuting the preceding conservative arguments, Rupert's critical redescription of Széchenyi culminated in questioning the very day chosen to celebrate the centenary, claiming that Széchenyi's real reform work had begun on 12 October rather than on 3 November, as he then chose to speak Hungarian in the overwhelmingly Latin-language Diet, that is, he chose to rely on the people instead of the state and its bureaucracy.<sup>697</sup> With this speech act, Rupert again actively contested the ownership of Széchenyi's memory. On the same basis he wondered why the official Hungary, manifest in the remembrance bill, had not paid attention to Széchenyi's role as a supporter and defender of the Hungarian language.<sup>698</sup> Instead of the "nondescript grey bill,"<sup>699</sup> Rupert proposed his own rewording of the commemoration bill, with emphasis on Széchenyi's work on behalf of the Hungarian language and Hungarian people, with eloquent passages and praise, constructed to appear in contrast to the rather plainly and bureaucratically worded government bill.<sup>700</sup> Even though Rupert had until then not been subjected to the usual rigorous discipline of the House Rules, at that point Speaker Tibor Zsitvay hastily rejected the proposal as it had not been circulated in advance nor offered as an alternative.<sup>701</sup>

<sup>694</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>695</sup> On the role of the opposition to war policy as a legitimization for the 1918–19 revolutions, see Bertényi 2002.

<sup>696</sup> NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>697</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 317.

<sup>698</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 318. Honouring the Hungarian language itself was one means of exclusive nation-building. During the Dualist era, Hungary had been the dominant language of the Kingdom of Hungary, yet in constant interaction with the minority languages as well with the official languages of the Empire, German and Latin, whereas post-war Hungary could be conceptualized as homogenous and monolingual. Conversely, grassroots opposition to the imperial languages in Bohemia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century gave rise to Slavic linguistic nationalism, which then helped to bring about the conceptualization of a Czech nation and the incorporation of fellow Slovaks as in the Czechoslovak state. See Anderson 2007, 118–119, 133; Pernau 2012, 9; Vares & Vares 2019, 54–55, 94–95.

<sup>699</sup> "... a semmitmondó szürke javaslat ..." Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 318.

<sup>700</sup> Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 318.

<sup>701</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the National Assembly, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 318.



Emboldened by Rupert's appearance, Social Democrat Dániel Várnai<sup>702</sup> offered his own reinterpretation of Széchenyi, reminding the House that in his own time Széchenyi had been loathed by his aristocratic peers for his alleged betrayal of his caste – as represented in their saying “everything would be all right if only the plague of Széchenyi did not spread.”<sup>703</sup> Várnai thus concretized the reactionary aristocrats' will to defend their own positions at all cost even against the interests of the Hungarian nation – whereas Széchenyi was a careful, progressive reformist, whose tragedy was that his reforms inevitably led the nation onto the road to revolution.<sup>704</sup> Várnai reminded the House that Széchenyi was indeed a decidedly conservative politician, who should not be mistaken for any kind of revolutionary, thus downplaying Bethlen's earlier attempt to create a more favourable image of Széchenyi to appeal to the Left.<sup>705</sup> Nevertheless, he would at any time choose Széchenyi's conservatism over the reactionary politics of the present day. And, as a progressive Social Democrat, he hinted that opening up to democratic reforms would protect the state against revolutionary upheaval.

“I'm saying: open the windows to the European spirit, for the great wind of democracy, keep them open until there is no danger that the whirlwind of political and societal convulsions would cut down the columns that are holding up the state.”<sup>706</sup>

As the contestation over Széchenyi's memory had come to this, even more members joined the debate, each attempting to discredit the preceding Member and offering their own interpretations. Andor Szakács<sup>707</sup> did indeed feel obliged to apologize on behalf of earlier speakers for having made “such a great historical memory”<sup>708</sup> of Széchenyi a vehicle for their own political ambitions. Himself, as a member of the Kossuth-party, he took a conciliatory approach, explaining how Kossuth and Széchenyi were, at least no longer, opposites, but complementary to each other in Hungarian patriotism.<sup>709</sup>

<sup>702</sup> Journalist and author Dániel Várnai (1881–1962) was a war veteran and a former prisoner of war. During his term in Parliament he continued as editor of the Social Democrat Party paper *Népszava*. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 191–192; MÉL: Várnai, Dániel.

<sup>703</sup> “... minden jó volna Magyarországon, csak Széchenyi pestise ne terjedne.” Dániel Várnai, quoting an anti-Széchenyi proverb, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 319.

<sup>704</sup> Dániel Várnai, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 319.

<sup>705</sup> Dániel Várnai, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 319.

<sup>706</sup> “Én is azt mondom: kinyitni az ablakokat az európai szellem, a demokrácia nagy légáramlásai előtt, kinyitni addig, amíg a politikai és társadalmi konvulziók főrgetege az államtartó oszlopaival együtt ki nem vágja.” Dániel Várnai, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 320.

<sup>707</sup> Journalist Andor Szakács (1877–1942), a former member of the counterrevolutionary movement and the press secretary of the Friedrich government, was a member of the opposition 48's Smallholder Party (*48-as kisgazda-földműves és polgári part*), colloquially known as the Kossuth Party, clinging to the ideals of 1848. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 175–176; MÉL: Szakács, Andor.

<sup>708</sup> “... ilyen nagy történelmi emlék ...” Andor Szakács, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 320.

<sup>709</sup> Andor Szakács, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 320.

“What István Széchenyi began in his intellectual and spiritual life, Lajos Kossuth strove to fulfil in practical life, by constitutional and legal means. Lajos Kossuth is not to blame for it having led to the War of Independence, nor was it his intention.”<sup>710</sup>

The rhetorical reconciliation between Széchenyi and Kossuth was an important argument for Szakács, who wanted to defend Kossuth against unfavourable comparison with Széchenyi. Therefore Sakács joined the former speakers in emphasizing that the revolutionary years had not been a tragedy in vain or an annihilation of Széchenyi’s ideals, but rather a delayed success for them. At that time, no negotiation with the Habsburg Emperor would have succeeded, however much Széchenyi had believed in it. On the contrary, without the demonstration of national spirit, force and willingness to sacrifice in 1848, the Hungarians would never have achieved the Compromise of 1867.<sup>711</sup> In order to prove the need for reconciliation between the memories of Kossuth and Széchenyi, Szakács presented a later letter by Széchenyi, who blamed himself for rejecting Kossuth and condemned any further division of the national spirit.<sup>712</sup>

In the midst of the discussion, József Östör<sup>713</sup> fell back on the usual conservative argument that the best commemoration of Széchenyi’s memory would have been the passing of the bill without petty political debate.<sup>714</sup> However, this was met with interjections against suppressing the debate and for a more active parliamentary culture, implying that the debating culture had indeed gained some freedom since the beginning of the decade. As Östör nevertheless chose to speak, he concurred with Rupert: that the present bill was very brief, dry and laconic, not honouring the spirit of Széchenyi.<sup>715</sup> At minimum, he demanded adding the epithet “The Greatest Hungarian” to the title of the law, which was subsequently accepted by the House.<sup>716</sup>

The multi-dimensional debate and argumentation reveals precisely the pivotal figure of Széchenyi, around which every political orientation attempted to construct its own narrative of the ‘national interest’ and the proper model for the future Hungary. However dissenting the interpretations were, no one dared to question the importance and greatness of Széchenyi himself – save for Várnai, who, also very cautiously, reminded the House that Széchenyi had not actually been an ideal role model for the Left, yet they would any time choose Széchenyi’s moderate reformism over the prevalent conscious reactionary policy.

<sup>710</sup> “Amit Széchenyi István a lelki és szellemi életben megindított, azt Kossuth Lajos a gyakorlati életben akarta alkotmányos, törvényes eszközökkel megvalósítani. Hogy ez a szabadságharchoz vezetett az nem Kossuth Lajos bűne, nem Kossuth Lajos akarata volt.” Andor Sakács, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 320.

<sup>711</sup> Andor Sakács, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 320.

<sup>712</sup> Andor Sakács, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 320.

<sup>713</sup> A lawyer from Sopron, József Östör (1875–1949) was one of the activists who campaigned for Sopron remaining a part of Hungary in 1918–21. A member of the Unity Party. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 134; MÉL: Östör, József.

<sup>714</sup> József Östör, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 321.

<sup>715</sup> József Östör, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 321.

<sup>716</sup> NN XXXV/1922, 321.

### 3.3.3 A quantum of Széchenyi

At the end of the debate, Rezső Rupert repeated his plea to include more of Széchenyi's life and achievements in the law, for the sake of historiographical justice. With an ironic reference, he remarked that he himself did not want the credit for this:

"For there surely are such prominent stylists in the House, who are able to find more appropriate words, as I only wish the text to be fair and solemn to immortalize the memory of the great Széchenyi in a slightly more dignified language than is in the bill."<sup>717</sup>

Rupert's argumentation was based – among other things – on Széchenyi's role as the advocate and developer of the Hungarian language. Therefore the beauty of the language should also be apparent in the legislation. As his proposals for changing the wording were turned down one after another,<sup>718</sup> Sándor Propper<sup>719</sup> commented: "The Hungarian language has been debased."<sup>720</sup> Prime Minister Bethlen gave a brief answer to Rupert, continuing the minimalist style of his earlier speech and concluded that a statement without additional verbiage indeed honoured Széchenyi more than with it.<sup>721</sup> The case offers an interesting comparison to the memorial bill of the fallen; in that case, Rupert similarly proposed a reformulation, which was cordially welcomed by the government, as on that occasion it served the government's interests of curtailing the influence of the radical Right.<sup>722</sup> In the case of the Széchenyi bill, Rupert's reformulation veered in the dangerous direction of liberal reinterpretations of Széchenyi, which, if allowed to be included in the law, would have opened up the historico-political field towards using Széchenyi's memory as a tool of opposition policy.

After Bethlen's concluding remarks, ambiguity ensued about whether more comments were allowed or not. Speaker Zsitvay reasoned that as no one had asked for a turn to speak, he had already closed the debate proper and *only after it* given the Prime Minister a closing comment. To those still calling to have their comments heard, he dryly answered: "To my greatest regret, according to the House Rules I am not empowered to give the honoured Member an opportunity to speak afterwards."<sup>723</sup> Again, the House Rules and the ambiguity of the

<sup>717</sup> "Hiszen a Háznak vannak igen kiváló stilsztái, akik lehet, hogy még szerencsésebb szöveget tudnak találni s én csak azt szeretném nagyon, hogyha a szöveg szép és tényleg ünnepélyes lenne, hogy annak a nagy Széchenyinek emlékét valahogyan kissé méltóbb nyelven örökítsük meg, mint ahogy az a javaslatban történik." Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 321.

<sup>718</sup> NN XXXV/1922, 322.

<sup>719</sup> A carpenter turned trade unionist and journalist, Sándor Propper (1877–1956) was a veteran Social Democrat who had resigned from his post in the party leadership during the Soviet Republic and was therefore able to continue in political life in the 1920s. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 146; MÉL: Propper, Sándor.

<sup>720</sup> "A magyar nyelv kiforgattatik." Sándor Propper, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 323.

<sup>721</sup> István Bethlen, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 322.

<sup>722</sup> See Chapter 3.2.5.

<sup>723</sup> "Legnagyobb sajnálatomra nem áll módomban a ház szabályszerű keretek között a képviselő urnák alkalmat adni arra, hogy utólagosan felszólalhasson." Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the National Assembly, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 322.

parliamentary procedure were exploited by the government; the Prime Minister was given a chance to have the last word, technically outside the debate so that no one after him could challenge him any more.

To sum up, all speakers used Széchenyi quotes selectively to applied them in a desired way in the present political situation. Széchenyi's figure and words were also alternatively mystified and demystified, as if the speakers had difficulties grasping his historical influence and ended up with equally glorifying but practically varying narratives.<sup>724</sup> The politicians opposing each other manoeuvred within a rather narrow margin, using similar, equally appealing concepts and metaphors linked to Széchenyi. All claimed to represent the 'true' teachings of Széchenyi that were going to benefit the Hungarian nation, and when the opposing party expressed dissonance, it anchored that, too, on the basic tenets of Hungarian identity. This shows that despite the deep ideological differences between the parties and despite the counterrevolutionary atmosphere of the majority of the House, Hungarian nationalism and reverence for its historical heroes remained at bottom an undeniable value, even for the Social Democrats. Moreover, the opposition did not in any way criticize or deny the basic nature of the bill, namely that of politicizing history and establishing one legally defined interpretation of Széchenyi, but played along, only trying to make the interpretation more favourable to themselves. On the other hand, the government sensed this and wanted to limit the content of the law to the bare minimum in order to prevent any Széchenyi-based opposition policies from emerging.

It turned out that Széchenyi, in his universally accepted greatness, was an ubiquitous figure to be used in the politicization of history. With his many writings and speeches from different periods and his changing conceptions of reform and revolution, every politician was able to indentify him with any kind of policy. This can be seen also in subsequent political historiography, as Széchenyi's name and his figure as a national symbol has been used in both Socialist and post-Socialist Hungary.<sup>725</sup>

### **3.4 Canonizing Lajos Kossuth and the Revolution of 1848, 1927**

#### **3.4.1 The contemporary uses for Kossuth in 1927**

The Hungarian era of national awakening and the long-standing disillusion with Austrian rule had culminated in the revolution of 1848, as a part of the transnational revolutionary wave of 1848. On 15 March the Hungarian reformists had published their 12-point programme concerning constitutionalism, civil rights and Hungarian autonomy within the Austrian Empire. Protests in Budapest had rapidly led to the overthrow of the Austrian officials and the

<sup>724</sup> See e.g. Béla Herczegh, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 316.

<sup>725</sup> Gerő 2004, 71-72.

establishment of an independent, Hungarian parliamentary government under Lajos Batthyany, with both Lajos Kossuth and István Széchenyi serving in ministerial positions. Of these, Kossuth represented the most radical and liberal ideals on political progress, constitutionalism and independence. In Hungarian historiography and history culture, the revolutionary spirit came to be personified in him. The revolutionaries were initially successful, as the Austrian Empire, having been caught off-guard with the European revolutions and on the brink of dissolution, was forced to comply with the demands of the Hungarians. However, after his ascension to the throne the young Emperor Francis Joseph revoked the concessions, which led to the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848–49. Eventually Austria, with the assistance of Russia, was able to subdue the Hungarians. Of the revolutionary leaders, Batthyany and 13 Hungarian generals were executed, Széchenyi suffered a mental breakdown and Kossuth ended up spending the rest of his life in exile.<sup>726</sup> The revolution gradually became one of the cornerstones of Hungarian nationalist historiography and Kossuth its central cult figure, himself contributing to its construction by his spirited publicity and publication activity abroad.<sup>727</sup>

Whereas the István Széchenyi commemoration bill in 1925 had brought about historico-political contestations over the nature and necessity of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and especially the relationship between Széchenyi and Kossuth and their roles in it, in 1927 the government considered that the time was ripe to commemorate the latter more openly. The bill drafted under Klebelsberg's ministry began by rhetorically connecting the revolutionary era to the contemporary peril the nation was facing. Unlike the former historico-political commemoration bills with somewhat laconic and vague wording, it did include passages about constitutionalism, civil liberties and equality, which in 1848 had shown the way of the future for the millennial nation.<sup>728</sup> The bill designated the 15 March, the anniversary of the revolution, a national holiday:

“The spirit of that day enabled the epoch-making legislative changes, which extended the constitutional rights to all societal classes of the nation ... Let the commemoration of the anniversary of our national renewal, the glorious tradition of that day, bring faith, hope and strength for a better future.”<sup>729</sup>

In the justification annex of the bill, the government stated that 1848 meant more to the Hungarian nation than just the immediate event. Namely, it carried the undying Hungarian notion of freedom and represented the idea of national revival through hardship. Therefore the anniversary was to be elevated to a

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<sup>726</sup> Cartledge 2006, 198–228.

<sup>727</sup> Fischer 2007, 8–12.

<sup>728</sup> Bill concerning the declaration of 15 March as a national holiday, 18.10.1927, NI 268/VI/1927, 83.

<sup>729</sup> “E nap szellemében valósultak meg azok a korszakot jelentő törvényhozási alkotások, amelyek az alkotmányos jogokat a nemzet minden osztályára kiterjesztették ... Abból a célból, hogy nemzeti megújulásunk évfordulóján e nap dicső hagyományából is egy jobb kor bekövetkezéséhez hitet, reményt és erőt merítsünk.” Bill concerning the declaration of 15 March as a national holiday, 18.10.1927, NI 268/VI/1927, 83.

commemoration equal to that of St. Stephen,<sup>730</sup> and 15 March was given special meaning as the day of Hungarian constitutionalism.<sup>731</sup>

In connection with the 15 March bill, a proposal was also drafted on the commemoration of Kossuth, as “the ardent apostole of constitutional freedom, equality before the law and the Hungarian truth, unbending in his faith.”<sup>732</sup> The justification annex stated that there had long been a desire to codify Kossuth’s memory in the legislation. At the present moment the government had deemed the time to be right to answer the call. More concretely, the time was right, as the nation was preparing to honour Kossuth by unveiling a monument – which had long been in preparation – in the square in front of the Parliament Building, which was simultaneously renamed the Kossuth Square (*Kossuth tér*).<sup>733</sup>

For both concrete – as the construction of the Kossuth monument had been delayed – and tactical reasons, the commemorations of Széchenyi and Kossuth were considered separately. Széchenyi had deliberately been presented as a nonpolitical figure and distanced from the revolution, whereas Kossuth was inevitably linked to it. Thus, in drafting the bill, the government needed to create a careful narrative of the revolution and interpretation of Kossuth to suit the contemporary politics. The laudatory epithets ascribed to Kossuth were quite in line with those of Széchenyi.<sup>734</sup> Moreover, Kossuth was named as the one “who elevated the ideals of national independence and self-determination as the lodestar of all Hungarian aspirations. His words were the strongest incentive to achieving constitutional freedom and equality before the law, and he did his utmost to have them institutionally established and secured.”<sup>735</sup> Kossuth was portrayed as the natural successor to Széchenyi, having politically fulfilled the progressive national ideals that Széchenyi had defined, in a deliberate attempt to downplay their sometimes bitter political disagreements.

Kossuth was also rhetorically connected to contemporary Hungarian foreign policy and its efforts to gain international renown. As stated in the annex, “even in exile he remained the greatest and most loyal citizen of his fatherland,”<sup>736</sup> holding high the Hungarian ideals and making them known around the world. He had always believed in the future of the Hungarian nation

<sup>730</sup> St. Stephen’s Day, 20 August, had and still has a special role in the intertwined nationalist-religious thought. Even during State Socialism, the commemoration was not discontinued, but was appropriated as the day of the Constitution of 1948. Hanebrink 2006, 111, 227.

<sup>731</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 268, 18.10.1927, NI 268/V/1927, 84.

<sup>732</sup> “... az alkotmányos szabadság, a jogegyenlőség és a magyar igazság lánglelkű, törhetetlen hitű apostola iránt”, Bill concerning the immortal memory and merit of Lajos Kossuth, 24.10.1927, NI 293/VI/1927, 304.

<sup>733</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 293, 24.10.1927, NI 293/VI/1927, 305. See also Gönczi 2007, 137.

<sup>734</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 293, 24.10.1927, NI 293/VI/1927, 305–306.

<sup>735</sup> “... aki a nemzeti függetlenség és öncélúság gondolatát tűzte ki minden magyar törekvés vezercsillágául. Az ő szavai serkentettek a legerősebben az alkotmányos szabadság és jogegyenlőség kivívására s ő tett legtöbbet ezeknek intézményes megteremtésére és biztosítására.” Justification annex for the bill No. 293, 24.10.1927, NI 293/VI/1927, 305.

<sup>736</sup> “És hontalanságában, is leghívebb és legnagyobb polgára maradt hazájának.” Justification annex for the bill No. 293, 24.10.1927, NI 293/VI/1927, 305.

and “in one eternal divine justice”<sup>737</sup> – where, consciously paraphrasing the revisionist poem *Hungarian Credo*, the narrative connected Kossuth’s life and times with the contemporary revisionist goals, also dependent on how Hungary’s international credibility was constructed and applied.

The Legislative and Administrative Committees of Parliament issued their joint memorandum on the 15 March and Kossuth bills soon after their first reading. The only critique by the Committees was in pointing out that the commemoration of the 1848 revolution had already been codified on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1898, so the bill at hand should have taken this into account and clearly stated it was to replace the former, as the present bill at last was “in accordance with the true national sentiment.”<sup>738</sup> Like with the other commemorative bills, the Committees suggested an accelerated procedure in order to emphasize their national importance. In this case the need was also dictated by necessity, as the unveiling of the Kossuth statue was less than two weeks away.<sup>739</sup>

### 3.4.2 The careful construction of Kossuth as a model patriot

The debate on the combined bills opened in the House of Representatives on 7 November 1927. Speaker Endre Puky<sup>740</sup> recalled that the Kossuth monument had been unveiled the previous day with due ceremony, in the presence of delegates from all over the enlightened world, thus reiterating Kossuth’s importance for contemporary Hungarian foreign policy.<sup>741</sup> He also chose to give a brief speech of his own to describe Kossuth as an historical figure and his importance to the present day. Importantly, he stated that he believed he could do so without violating the impartiality of the position of Speaker. With this proclamation he tried to rhetorically define the direction of the debate; as if it were self-evident that patriotic and historico-political reminiscence was shared by all members and thus detached from any political divisions.<sup>742</sup>

In line with earlier debates, he began his argument with a lament on the very moment of the celebration:

“Who would not have felt the perpetual tragedy of our millennial history even beneath the shining light of yesterday’s celebration, in the very fact that the Hungarian nation was able to fulfil its great debt of honour to Lajos Kossuth only 33 years after his death,

<sup>737</sup> “... egy Isteni örök igazságban”, Justification annex for the bill No. 293, 24.10.1927, NI 293/VI/1927, 305.

<sup>738</sup> “... a nemzet igazi közérzésének megfelelően”, Joint memorandum of the Legislative and Administrative Committees concerning the bills Nos. 268 and 293, 26.10.1927, KI 296/VI/1927, 326.

<sup>739</sup> Joint memorandum of the Legislative and Administrative Committees concerning the bills Nos. 268 and 293, 26.10.1927, KI 296/VI/1927, 326.

<sup>740</sup> A renowned local governor (*ispán*) from Upper Hungary, Endre Puky (1871–1940) had had to abandon his post in Kassa (Kosice) after the Treaty of Trianon. He was elected to Parliament in the Unity Party ticket in 1924 and rose to the position of Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1926. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 242–244; MÉL: Puky, Endre.

<sup>741</sup> Endre Puky, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 223.

<sup>742</sup> Endre Puky, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 223.

and having done that not in the great, united and undivided Hungary in which he believed, but in the capital of Hungary which had been mutilated to one-third of its size by the most ruthless injustice in world history."<sup>743</sup>

When Puky chose to bring contemporary politics, namely Trianon, to the foreground, he explicated the very nature and historico-political need for the commemoration bills; more than ever, they were now intended for contemporary, revisionist use. This was in connection with the even bolder revisionist discourse in which the official Hungary had admitted its frustration at international mediation in the revision matter and chosen to develop bilateral relations with other revisionist states, as exemplified by the drafting of the treaty of friendship and co-operation with Italy.<sup>744</sup> Moreover, the commemoration bills proclaimed the debt of honour the nation, the state and the legislation itself had towards Kossuth and the revolution, now in need of redemption through a vigorous nationalist policy.<sup>745</sup>

In another historico-political parallel, paraphrasing Kossuth's own words, Puky emphasized that the question of justice for Hungary was pivotal to the whole European system:

"The Hungarian question has an historical basis, a legal basis, a geographic, demographic, political, even a mathematical basis, and this question is tied to the freedom and balance of power in Europe ... This question shall demand a place for itself among the European controversies as long as it is not solved in a lawful and just way."<sup>746</sup>

The anachronistic projection of Kossuth's words into the present day revealed the extent to which the government wanted to exploit his memory in the revision policy. It also meant bringing about one central historico-political argument of Hungarian exceptionalism in Europe throughout the ages: just as the security of mediaeval Christendom had depended on Hungary as its eastern bulwark, the balance of power in post-war Europe depended on a stable and strong Hungary which, only if given its full sovereignty, would be able keep the volatile political situation in East Central Europe in equilibrium.<sup>747</sup> Naturally, from the Hungarian perspective, the European Powers' failure to comprehend this remained the greatest of injustices. By the use of parallels between past and present, Puky

<sup>743</sup> "Ki ne érezte volna a tegnapi ünnep ragyogó fénye fölött borongani ezer éves történelmünk állandó tragikumát, már magában abban a tényben is, hogy a Kossuth Lajos emléke iránti nagy tartozását csak 33 évvel halála után róhatta le a magyar nemzet s nem is az ő bálványának: a nagy, egységes és csorbítatlan magyar hazának, hanem a világtörténelem legkegyetlenebb igazságtalanságával har madara csonkitott Magyarországnak fővárosában.", Endre Puky, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 223.

<sup>744</sup> See Zeidler 2007, 103; also see Chapter 4.5.

<sup>745</sup> Endre Puky, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 223.

<sup>746</sup> "A magyar kérdésnek történelmi alapja is van, jogi alapja is van, földrajzi, népességi, politikai, számtani alapja is van s e kérdés Európa szabadságának, Európa hatalmi súlyegyenének érdekeivel kapcsolatos ... E kérdés helyet fog magának követelni Európa függő kérdései között mindaddig, míg jog és igazság szerint meg nem oldatik." Endre Puky, Speaker of the House of Representatives, paraphrasing Lajos Kossuth, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 223.

<sup>747</sup> See e.g. Lendvai 2012, 116.



rhetorically evoked the spirit of Kossuth to give council to the present-day House in order to bring the historico-political bill to its goal. He also called for due respect for Kossuth's memory, clearly expressing his expectation for a debate free of controversy – as a lesson learned in earlier historico-political debates.<sup>748</sup> Paying attention to the unveiling ceremony of the Kossuth monument the day before, where certain opposition parties had felt they had been treated unfairly in paying respects and laying wreaths on the monument, he promptly apologized for the incident, as the political elite now wanted to redescribe the memory of Kossuth in the spirit of consolidation and to avoid uproar.<sup>749</sup>

István Rubinek joined the historico-political reinterpretations, giving 15 March an epithet “the day of the revival of Hungary's liberty.”<sup>750</sup> The phrase was carefully worded to imply that the Hungarian nation was not born or created on that day, as it was organic and millennial – but was freed from foreign oppression and earned the place history had promised it among the nations of Europe; the nation was being constructed not only by its past deeds but through its ‘historical mission’, timeless and perpetual, promising eventual prosperity in the future.<sup>751</sup> At the same time rhetorical play on historical time enabled the creation of overlapping and complementary ‘days of origin’ for the nation.<sup>752</sup> Rubinek also paid attention to the Austrian oppression that had continued until the recent past: “For decades, this national holiday, one of the greatest, was denied to Hungarians. Only in the depths of their hearts did they carry the flame of unyielding patriotism, never to yield in its belief in a national resurrection.”<sup>753</sup> Now, as the anniversary law had, once and for all, placed the commemoration on the appropriate date, 15 March, it was also a time to honour Kossuth, the inseparable bearer of the 1848 ideals,<sup>754</sup> who “has never been more timely than today, as the nation, in the hour of its peril, turns to his teachings, immortal in their value and validity, drawing from them faith in its historical mission, strength in survival and hope of future greatness.”<sup>755</sup>

Rubinek went through Kossuth's life and times, culminating in the revolutionary years. He traced the transnational currents of 1848 back to the French Revolution: “... in his footsteps, the sacred ideals of liberty, fraternity and

<sup>748</sup> Endre Puky, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 224.

<sup>749</sup> Endre Puky, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 224.

<sup>750</sup> “... a magyar szabadság újjászületésének napját ...” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 224.

<sup>751</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 224.

<sup>752</sup> This idea survives to this day. At present, Hungary has three national holidays: 15 March as the day of the 1848 revolution, 20 August as the day of St. Stephen and 23 October as the day of the 1956 revolution.

<sup>753</sup> “A magyarság ezen egyik legnagyobb nemzeti ünnepét évtizedeken keresztül tilos volt megülni, s csak a szívek mélyén égett a nemzet feltámadásában törhetetlenül bizó magyar hazafiaknál a honszeretet lángja.” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 224.

<sup>754</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 224.

<sup>755</sup> “... soha sem volt időszerűbb, mint ma, amidőn a nemzet balsorsában az ő halhatatlan értékű és érvényű tanításaihoz tért vissza, azokból merít hitet történelmi hivatottságához, erőt fenntartásához és reményt jövő nagyságához.” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 225.

equality flourished from soil trampled by centuries of oppression.”<sup>756</sup> In making use of revolutionary concepts, Rubinek carefully manipulated them to suit contemporary historiography: Kossuth’s revolution was directed against absolutism and oppression, and for the liberty of the Hungarian nation.<sup>757</sup> Therefore 15 March was given a transnational and transtemporal meaning in the freedom-loving nation’s unyielding opposition to tyrants – Rubinek was ready to go as far as to invoke the classical narrative of Caesar’s death when reminding the House that the date appropriately coincided with the Ides of March.<sup>758</sup>

When the reformism of 1848 had been met with repression and violence, Kossuth had only been elevated in his position, knowing that the Hungarian nation should stand its ground in order not to be forgotten by history.<sup>759</sup> This interpretation made the War of Independence necessary and inevitable, more than the careful words uttered around and about Széchenyi two years earlier. Regarding the war itself, Rubinek reminded the House that Kossuth’s Hungary could not be defeated by the Habsburg Empire alone, but only with the help of Russia, the epitome of oppression and reaction, and at present, as the origin of the Communist threat, a re-applicable enemy figure.<sup>760</sup> And as Kossuth had chosen exile, he had not done it to save his own life but to serve the cause of Hungary abroad.<sup>761</sup> Thus, his great heritage lay in Hungary’s international reputation, which should be nurtured; Rubinek pointed out how Kossuth had received a warm welcome as an envoy of “the Hungarian truth”<sup>762</sup> especially in Great Britain and the United States,<sup>763</sup> as another parallel to the present day and the high hopes the government held about international support for its agenda.<sup>764</sup>

Rubinek also explained the reason to Kossuth’s appeal; that Kossuth’s ideals applied to both peasants, for freeing them from serfdom, and aristocrats, for igniting the flame of Hungarian patriotism, of which others had barely dared to speak. Moreover, “the whole nation respected him, seeing him as the incarnation of the sacred ideals of Hungarian national self-determination, independence, national spirit, strength and self-esteem.”<sup>765</sup> In a more concrete manner, Kossuth was credited with the creation of the “first Hungarian [parliamentarily] responsible government”<sup>766</sup> along with proportional representation, freedom of the press and freedom of religion.<sup>767</sup> He was seen as

<sup>756</sup> “... nyomában a szabadság, egyenlőség és testvériség szent eszméinek virágai fakadnak az évszázados elnyomatás szikkadt talajából.” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 225.

<sup>757</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 225.

<sup>758</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 225.

<sup>759</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 226.

<sup>760</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 226.

<sup>761</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 226.

<sup>762</sup> “... magyar igazság ...” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 226.

<sup>763</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 226; see also Aladár Erdélyi, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 229.

<sup>764</sup> See Chapter 4.4.

<sup>765</sup> “... az egész nemzet tisztelettel övezi, mert őbenne látja inkarnálva a magyar nemzeti öncélúság, függetlenség, a nemzeti akarat, erő és önérzet szent eszméit.” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 227.

<sup>766</sup> “... az első magyar felelős ministerium.” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 225.

<sup>767</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 225.

the creator of “modern, democratic Hungary,”<sup>768</sup> the continuation of which the government claimed itself to be, actively ignoring the shortcomings in the very same societal questions; ‘freedom’ was given the narrow conceptualization as freedom from foreign oppression and ‘democracy’ and ‘parliamentary government’ equated with the technical functioning of the constitutional organs.<sup>769</sup>

Rubinek finalized Kossuth’s canonization by returning to the topic of the present-day catastrophe: “we should recognize the eternal truth of Kossuth’s teachings and turn towards his great intellectual achievements. In our present misfortune, again, only his teachings give us hope and strengthen our belief in the calling of the nation and in the future resurrection.”<sup>770</sup> Kossuth’s possible faults and mistakes were whitewashed and shed away with the strong belief that “his deeds stand any objective trial in historical perspective and before the court of history.”<sup>771</sup> His greatness was constructed in comparison with the other canonized historical figures, as Árpád, Matthias Corvinus or Miklós Zrínyi, yet he was rhetorically elevated even higher than them in his greatest achievement in consolidating the Hungarian national spirit.<sup>772</sup>

Aladár Erdélyi<sup>773</sup> continued the rhetoric of recontextualizing Kossuth to contemporary needs. He positioned Kossuth in the centuries-old tragedy narrative of Hungary, the dark ages of the four hundred years since the defeat of Mohács, where Kossuth and Kossuth alone was able to show the way from the darkness into the light<sup>774</sup> – unwittingly reiterating the same definition that had been applied to Széchenyi two years earlier.<sup>775</sup> Despite the pleas for a dignified debate and avoidance of party politics, Erdélyi could not resist the temptation to rail at the Social Democrats for their recent attempts to capture Kossuth’s memory for themselves:

“Kossuth did not fight for classes! Kossuth did not propagate the rule of one class over others, but rather a national unity and national greatness, the kind of national greatness with which he wanted to embrace and bless both the poorest of workers and the great lords of palaces and estates. This programme, for which we also campaign, is about fulfilling the spirit of Kossuth, only by other means and other words.”<sup>776</sup>

<sup>768</sup> “... a modern, demokratikus Magyarország ...” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 227.

<sup>769</sup> See Chapter 2 on the deliberatively narrow redcriptions of these ideals.

<sup>770</sup> “... megismerjük Kossuth tanításainak örök igazságát s visszatérünk az ő nagy szellemi alkotásaihoz. Mai balsorsunkban ismét csak az ő tanításai nyújtanak reményt s erősítik a hitet a nemzet hivatottságában s jövő feltámadásában.” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 227.

<sup>771</sup> “... működése a történelem távlatában és annak ítélőszéke előtt megbír minden objektív bírálatot!” István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 227.

<sup>772</sup> István Rubinek, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 227–228.

<sup>773</sup> Large landowner, lawyer and war veteran Aladár Erdélyi (1880–1949) was a Unity Party Member of Parliament since 1922, specializing in agrarian policy. In 1931 he resigned from the government party and joined the agrarian populist Smallholder party. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 83–84; MÉL: Erdélyi, Aladár.

<sup>774</sup> Aladár Erdélyi, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 228.

<sup>775</sup> See Chapter 3.3.1.

<sup>776</sup> “Kossuth nem osztályokért küzdött! Kossuth nem az osztályuralmat hirdette, hanem igenis a nemzeti egységet és a nemzeti nagyságot, és a nemzeti nagysággal kívánta

Erdélyi thus wanted to create a historical arc that would reach from Kossuth's era to the present day and result in an interpretation suitable for the Bethlen consolidation discourse. Predictably, the direct operationalization of Kossuth in the contemporary politics and against the opposition resulted in challenging interruptions.<sup>777</sup> Unmoved, Erdélyi went on also to connect Kossuth's role boldly to the present-day foreign policy: whereas Hungary was being accused of irredentism and oppression against the neighbouring peoples, it should be kept in mind that Kossuth had championed liberty for all the oppressed peoples of the Habsburg Empire, liberating the Romanian and Slovakian peasants from serfdom.<sup>778</sup> Thus, in reinvoking Kossuth's memory, the official Hungary wanted to gain from history the most positive ideals to proclaim abroad, but to thoroughly and pre-emptively reject all attempts to legitimize more liberal or leftist policies in his name.

### 3.4.3 The revolutionary Kossuth. Opposition redescription attempts

For independent opposition member Béla Kun<sup>779</sup> clinging to the ideals of 1848, Kossuth was a vehicle for all parties to reach consensus on patriotic obligations. Even those who opposed the government policies could, in reminiscing about him, find the shared notion of Hungarian identity and seek common ground for the future.<sup>780</sup> Kun's statement was again an example of the opposition's rhetorical predicament; as demonstrated before, it could only gain political room to manoeuvre by connecting itself with the values shared by the government and then subtly steering their rhetorical redescription towards individual aims. This line of action was demonstrated by Kun, as he went on to discuss the application of Kossuth's teachings to the present day. Kun mentioned the ideals of democracy and freedom of the press and – with a hint of irony – appealed to the discourse of consolidation, within which there should be no obstacles to realizing them:

“Thank God, there already exists such consolidation in this country which, in the spirit of Lajos Kossuth, allows for more democracy than the present state, allows for more guarantees for the exercise of the real freedom of the press and constitutional civil rights.”<sup>781</sup>

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egyformán felruházni és boldogítani a legszegényebb munkást s a paloták és birtokok hatalmas urát. Ez a Program, amelyet mi is kívánunk, csak más eszközökkel és más jelszavakkal Kossuth szellemében szolgálni.” Aladár Erdélyi, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 229.

<sup>777</sup> KN VI/1927, 229.

<sup>778</sup> Aladár Erdélyi, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 229.

<sup>779</sup> Lawyer and journalist Béla Kun (1878–1949) had been a member of the pre-war parliament 1910–1918 representing the 48's. Re-elected in 1922 as independent opposition member. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 185–186; MÉL: Kun, Béla. Not to be confused with the Communist revolutionary Béla Kun (1886–1939).

<sup>780</sup> Béla Kun, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 229.

<sup>781</sup> “Hiszen van ebben az országban – hála Istennek – annyi konszolidáció, hogy az, elbir a mainál több demokráciát, sőt Kossuth Lajoshoz híven, az ő szellemében elbirja az igazi sajtószabadságot, és elbirja az alkotmányos polgári jogok gyakorolhatásának többi biztosítékait is!” Béla Kun, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 230.

One can again see how the concept of consolidation was being used in the contemporary rhetoric in a positive yet vague sense, in the belief that it was a progress that would eventually enable civil development. And as the government had in the bill approved the use of the concepts of constitutionalism and civil rights, the liberal opposition made the most of it, trying to redescribe and renegotiate their content. In the enactment of the Kossuth law, 15 March and the unveiling of the Kossuth monument, Kun reminded the House that the state had also atoned for the injustice, indifference and self-censorship professed before, such as the prohibition of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 1898.<sup>782</sup>

Social Democrat Dániel Várnai continued the daring redescrptions of Kossuth. According to his Kossuth narrative, in 1849 Hungary had been the only nation able to resist Habsburg oppression; “when the Habsburg sword had already triumphed everywhere in Europe, Hungary still took up arms,”<sup>783</sup> emerging as the champion of the freedom of all nations, not only itself. In this situation, Kossuth, who in his programme had never advocated revolution, accepted it as his last option and patriotic duty: “There were many – and the millions of the people stood behind them – who, when forced, complied with their manly sense of responsibility and honour, took up arms and chose the road of revolution. Kossuth did not want the revolution either, but he undertook it.”<sup>784</sup> Várnai thus redescrbed revolution against oppression as a patriotic duty, supported by the great mass of Hungarians, in an attempt to make it also one of the inherent Hungarian virtues.

Várnai for his part reminded the House how many Hungarian aristocrats had eagerly joined the Habsburgs after the failed revolution and even encouraged repression and austerity against Hungary. According to that narrative challenging the government version, Kossuth had not only been engaged in a war against foreign oppressors, but also against the aristocrats who had turned against their own nation.<sup>785</sup> His exile did not diminish his significance but revealed it to the whole world:

“We know that Lajos Kossuth was allowed to appear in the Capitol in Washington. Emperors and kings have not had the privilege to appear and speak in the hall of the American people’s parliament. A poor persecuted Hungarian, and through him, the whole oppressed people had this great honour.”<sup>786</sup>

<sup>782</sup> Béla Kun, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 229.

<sup>783</sup> “... amikor a habsburgi kard már mindenütt győzött Európában, még fegyverben állott ellene Magyarország.” Dániel Várnai, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 230.

<sup>784</sup> “De van sok – és mögöttük népmilliók állanak – aki ha rákényszerítik, férfias felelősségérzettel és becsülettel raadása meg a forradalmi megoldások fegyverét. Kossuth sem akarta a forradalmat, de vállalta.” Dániel Várnai, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 230.

<sup>785</sup> Dániel Várnai, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 231.

<sup>786</sup> “Tudjuk, Washingtonban a Kapitoliumban jelenhetett meg Kossuth Lajos. Császár oknak, király oknak nem jutott még az a megtiszteltetés, hogy az amerikai nép törvényhozásának fórumán megjelenhessenek és felszólalhassanak. Egy szegény, a zsarnokságtól üldözött magyarnak és rajta keresztül elnyomott népének jutott ez a nagy megtiszteltetés.” Dániel Várnai, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 231.

Kossuth's reception in the United States – the epitome of freedom in the world – was seen to highlight the Hungarian cause and the cause of democracy throughout Europe. Kossuth thus became the harbinger of democracy on behalf of all oppressed nationalities under Habsburg rule, as the only one who had been able to resist them on the battlefield.<sup>787</sup> As a corollary to this narrative, Várnai urged the present government not only to cherish Kossuth's memory, but to realize his ideals.<sup>788</sup> The historico-political argument of then nation's debt to Kossuth was thus turned into a demand for democratic reforms in the rearticulated 'real' spirit of Kossuth, in which the nation stood as one man.<sup>789</sup>

Liberal member Pál Hegymegi-Kiss opposed Várnai's Socialist interpretation, arguing in line with the government that the 1848 revolution had not been based on a class war but on the contrary, on unified Hungarian resistance to foreign oppression.<sup>790</sup> However, neither did he refrain from applying Kossuth's memory to contemporary politics, but argued that under Kossuth's leadership and staying loyal to his ideals, Hungary would never have faced the tribulations of Trianon, as he would not have allowed Hungary to become a pawn of the Great Powers.<sup>791</sup> Hegymegi-Kiss also brought back a memory from the day before, the unveiling of the Kossuth monument. For him, the greatest moment was not the speeches at the monument by the elite, but that after the ceremony "thousands and hundreds of thousands of people appeared on the streets of Budapest spontaneously, without a command, summoned by no one but the spirit of Kossuth."<sup>792</sup> In the politicization of the concrete environment, Hegymegyei-Kiss made Kossuth's spirit roam through the streets of Budapest, carried by ordinary citizens, demonstrating the unity between the nation and its guiding light.

At that point in the debate, Social Democrat István Farkas<sup>793</sup> was not satisfied with the courteous remembrance and began enumerating the shortcomings of the government in relationship to Kossuth's ideals:

"Where is the freedom of the press, where is the freedom of assembly, where is the independent judiciary, where is popular sovereignty, where are the great thoughts about the equal distribution of land? Serfdom has been abolished, but even now the agricultural population of this country remain outcast, downtrodden people. Where are those great thoughts, and where especially is the solution to the dynastic question?"

<sup>787</sup> Dániel Várnai, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 231. Quite naturally, Várnai did not extend this definition to the post-war Wilsonian ideal of national self-determination, which had led to the dissolution of the historic Hungary. There stood the limit of internationalism, even for a Social Democrat.

<sup>788</sup> Dániel Várnai, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 231.

<sup>789</sup> Dániel Várnai, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 232.

<sup>790</sup> Pál Hegymegi-Kiss, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 232.

<sup>791</sup> Pál Hegymegi-Kiss, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 232.

<sup>792</sup> "... a népek ezrei és százazrei jöttek minden parancsszó nélkül, senki sem hívta őket, csak Kossuth Lajos szelleme." Pál Hegymegi-Kiss, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 232.

<sup>793</sup> A shoemaker and a veteran member of the workers' movement, István Farkas (1869–1944) was a Social Democratic member of parliament as of 1922. He was known for his vocal opposition to the government and was frequently reprimanded on the basis of the House Rules. He was arrested by the Germans in 1944 and died in a concentration camp. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 94–95; MÉL: Farkas, István.

Where is the republic, the republic of Kossuth? Why it has been sold, betrayed, not realized?"<sup>794</sup>

Whereas the concepts of freedom, democracy and civil rights were used by the government as vague catchwords, Farkas presented the concrete content they should have and without which they were nothing but empty propaganda, exploited with blatant disregard to their true meaning. He went on to demand a new constitution, including a republican form of government, universal and equal suffrage and a secret ballot, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, amnesty for political crimes and an extension of land reform.<sup>795</sup> In opposition to the historico-political application of Kossuth, Farkas attempted to give a completely different interpretation of him and leave none of his teachings for the government to exploit.

Géza Malasits<sup>796</sup> delved even deeper into the history of Hungarian revolutions and tragical uprisings, to György Dózsa's peasant rebellion of 1514, the revolt of István Bocskai in 1605 and that of Pál Wesselenyi in 1673, Ferenc Rákóczi's war of independence until 1711 and Ignác Martinovics' revolt in 1795.<sup>797</sup> All of these, he argued, had failed because of their nature as class wars, uprisings against the Hungarian elites who always had the upper hand in suppressing them, but the 1848 revolution had been evoked by the people for once united and directed only against the Habsburgs. Malasits' redescription of historical events thus attempted to reverse the conservative accusations against the Left; the Social Democrats were not mongering class war, but Hungarian history was undeniably full of it, namely, that waged by aristocrats against the people.<sup>798</sup> Even the acclaimed Reform Era had been "nothing more than an attempt to reflect Western capitalism in this capitalistically backward country."<sup>799</sup>

Malasits went on to question the millennial Hungarian constitution, one of the fundamental ideals of the post-war nation-building,<sup>800</sup> stating that historically the constitution had been a mere empty letter against the wills of emperors and

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<sup>794</sup> "Hol van a sajtószabadság, hol van az egyesülési jog, hol van az esküdtszék, hol van a népfelség, hol vannak a nagy gondolatok, hol van a föld igazságos megosztása? Felszabadították a jobbágyságot, de most száműzött, nagy, ütött vert nép ebben az országban a szegény mezőgazdasági népesség. Hol vannak ezek a nagy gondolatok, és hol van elsősorban a mindezek csúcspontján, élén álló dinasztikai kérdés megoldása? Hol van a köztársaság, hol van Kossuth köztársasága? Miért adták el, miért árulták el, miért nem valósították meg?" István Farkas, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 233.

<sup>795</sup> István Farkas, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 234.

<sup>796</sup> Another veteran Social Democrat and trade union activist, Géza Malasits (1874–1948) was elected to Parliament in 1924, belonging to the moderate faction of the party along with Károly Peyer. Like many other Social Democrats, Malasits had travelled widely around Europe; his studies in the Working Men's College in London and participation in workers' conferences made him well networked within the international workers' movement. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 197; MÉL: Malasits, Géza.

<sup>797</sup> Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 235.

<sup>798</sup> Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 235.

<sup>799</sup> "... semmi egyéb, mint a nyugati kapitalizmusnak ebben a kapitalisztikusan hátramaradt országban való visszatükröződése." Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 235.

<sup>800</sup> See Chapter 2.2.

kings. In return for accepting such a mock consitutionalism, the kings had given the Hungarian aristocracy *carte blanche* to exploit their underlings.<sup>801</sup> And, Malasits argued, the Hungarian aristocracy had eagerly complied, desiring nothing else but to retain their traditional positions, wanting Hungary to remain as reactionary and backward as it was. Rewording a famous phrase from the revolutionary era, 'we shall not be a colony' (*nem leszünk gyarmat*), Malasits concluded that such had indeed been the case: "this country was a colony of Austria, and was mostly because its own sons did not allow its civic development."<sup>802</sup> Moreover, in 1867 the Hungarian aristocracy had again allied with the Habsburgs to retain their positions until 1918, and to avoid the reforms that would truly liberate the Hungarians. Instead of the respected narrative of the Compromise, Malasits concluded that "in 1867 the capitalist class, the ruling class, reconciled with the Habsburgs",<sup>803</sup> thus betraying the ideals of Kossuth and the 1848.

"The honourable colleague who proposed the bill told us how Kossuth was imprisoned by absolutism. That is a mistake, honourable proposer! Kossuth was sentenced to imprisonment by the constitutional Hungarian court, the same constitutional court which, after 1867, judged and sentenced every Agrarian-Socialist movement."<sup>804</sup>

Recontextualizing and reinterpreting the famed turning points of Hungarian history, Malasits demonstrated how the Hungarian elite had never reached the level of Kossuth in giving the people a voice, and how that had been the real cause of the great national catastrophes: "... this country has two Calvaries, the first was Mohács, the second is Trianon. Both are the result of common causes: the oppression, the prevention of land distribution, the curtailment of all extension of civil rights."<sup>805</sup> The post-war governments had done nothing to improve the situation and the matter of class warfare "still remains, and it is futile to speak of a united Hungary, futile to talk that the Hungarian people should stay united and express their Hungarian unity during the hard times they are experiencing today. I also call for a Hungarian unity, but in the words of Petőfi: Home is where justice is, and the people do not have justice."<sup>806</sup> Malasits rewrote

<sup>801</sup> Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 236.

<sup>802</sup> "... ez az ország gyarmata Ausztriának és főképen azért gyarmata, mert fiai sem akarják annak polgári haladását." Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 236.

<sup>803</sup> "1867-ben megbékült a kapitalista osztály, az uralmon levő osztály a Habsburgokkal." Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 237.

<sup>804</sup> "Az előadó ur azt mondta, hogy Kossuthot az abszolutizmus vetette börtönbe. Ez tévedés, igen t. előadó ur! Kossuthot az alkotmányos magyar bíróság ítélte börtönbüntetésre és ugyanaz az alkotmányos bíróság 1867 után minden agrár-szocialista mozgalomban bíraskodott és ítélkezett." Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 237.

<sup>805</sup> "... két kálváriája van ennek az országnak, az egyik Mohács, a másik Trianon. Mind a két kálváriának közös az eredője, közös okai vannak: az elnyomatás, a földhözjutásnak megakadályozása, a jogok kiterjesztésének meggátlása." Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 237.

<sup>806</sup> "... tovább is itt marad és hiába beszélnek egységes Magyarországról, hiába beszélnek arról, hogy ebben a szomorú időben, amelyet a magyar nép ma átél, egységesen kell állást foglalni és minden kérdésben a magyar egységet kell megmutatni. Én is azt mondom, hogy meg kell mutatni a magyar egységet, de ahogy



and renounced the official narrative of Hungarian history – being subjected to foreign repression from Mohács to Trianon – to being a class struggle between the landless and the aristocrats, the latter always eagerly collaborating with foreign powers to retain their position and dominance over the people. Until the basic civil rights were restored and the land question solved, the government was not worthy to celebrate the memory of the War of Independence.

All in all, the historico-political contextualizations of Kossuth ranged from complete, even violent breaks with the nationalist narrative to faithful repetitions of the liturgy.<sup>807</sup> Within the rhetorical polyphony of the House, both had their respective audiences with little interaction between them. What is interesting is that such outbursts from the Left were tolerated – no parliamentary procedure was applied to break that barrage, no heckling or interruptions disturbed it. The relative strength of the government – and the extent of consolidation – was demonstrated by the fact that the provocative acts were not silenced, but simply ignored. At that very moment, the Social Democratic opposition was allowed to vent its dissatisfaction in the parliament quite freely as it posed no real challenge to conservative policy.

István Haller, the former minister of culture and the chief architect of the *Numerus Clausus*, still expressed his dismay that some people had chosen to politicize the memory of Kossuth and use the exalted celebratory occasion of the legislation to pursue their contemporary political goals.<sup>808</sup> Radical Right leader Gyula Gömbös concurred, promising he would not lower himself to engage in such deglorification.<sup>809</sup> However, for him and the Race Defenders, Kossuth was naturally the harbinger of the inner force within the Hungarian race, “a great, historical, chosen race, for the race that has such a sons [as Kossuth], is not destined for slavery, but mastery.”<sup>810</sup> In the radical Right redescription of the narrative Kossuth’s role was to demonstrate what the Hungarian nation was capable of, even after centuries of foreign oppression; not accepting the role of victim but breaking free, if necessary by force of arms.<sup>811</sup> This parable was in turn quite easily applicable to the contemporary policy, in which the nation was to gather strength before rising again to demand its rightful place in the world.

Finally, István Bethlen rose to close the debate. Using his traditional rhetoric against catchwords and party politics, he dryly commented that Kossuth’s memory was far too great to be mingled with petty politics and that he had no intention of participating in such a debate but only to distance himself – and the figure of Kossuth – from it:

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Petőfi megírta; Haza ott van, ahol jog van és a népnek nincs joga.” Géza Malasits, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 238.

<sup>807</sup> On the latter, see e.g. József Pakots, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 238.

<sup>808</sup> István Haller, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 238.

<sup>809</sup> Gyula Gömbös, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 239.

<sup>810</sup> “... egy nagy történelmi, elhivatott fajta, mert az a faj, amelynek ilyen fiai vannak, az nem rabszolgaságra, hanem uralkodásra rendeltetett.” Gyula Gömbös, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 239.

<sup>811</sup> Gyula Gömbös, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 239.

“To this I only want to say one thing in general, and it is that Lajos Kossuth doesn’t deserve to have his greatness used as a vehicle of misunderstood and unjustly generalized critique of certain social classes, neither of misinterpretation and generalization of historical events.”<sup>812</sup>

To distance himself from the politicization of the event, Bethlen drew a temporally more distant, more honourable and less disputable historical parallel:

“The national epoch, national heroism [of 1848] may have only one peer in world history, and that is the Greek nation’s fight for freedom against the overwhelming Persian onslaught in antiquity, over which youth has felt enthusiasm for two millennia, from which this [Hungarian] youth had learned the fundamentals of patriotism and will to render sacrifice for the common good.”<sup>813</sup>

Drawing on the same source as those who found a ‘Hungarian Thermopylae’ in the World War,<sup>814</sup> Bethlen evoked the historical parallel, which was simultaneously directly comprehensible to the political elite with classical education and had a politically salient meaning in constructing the Hungarian self-image as that of an ancient, honourable and western nation, ready to fight the tyranny of the east. Bethlen continued the militant rhetoric: “For one thing, we can be proud that we achieved our freedom in armed fight, not through hypocrisy or betrayal ... for only that kind of freedom a nation has secured by blood is of lasting kind; even if it is momentarily lost, it can always be regained.”<sup>815</sup> Bethlen gave martyrdom and violent history a meaning within the national mission embedded in its tragic yet great past. Simultaneously, his narrative once again included a sarcastic remark about the Trianon and the successor states, whose independence, from a Hungarian nationalist perspective, had indeed been gained through ‘betrayal’ of the unity of the Dual Monarchy and the ‘hypocrisy’ of the Entente.

Bethlen emphasized Kossuth’s importance in foreign politics, in bringing Hungary in among the civilized nations. And now, all the civilized world rejoiced in the commemoration with Hungary, with delegates from the United Kingdom, United States and Poland present in the celebration. Special attention was paid to a delegation from Italy that had arrived to celebrate the two nations’ historical ties and their shared love of freedom.<sup>816</sup> Here, the commemoration was

<sup>812</sup> “Ezekre csak általánosságban egyet kívánok megjegyezni és ez az, hogy Kossuth Lajosnak nincs szüksége arra, hogy az ő nagyságát egyes társadalmi osztályokkal szemben felhozott és helytelenül általánosított kritikával vagy a történelmi események félremagyarázásával és általánosításával akarjuk emelni és fokozni.” István Bethlen, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 240.

<sup>813</sup> “Ehhez a nagy nemzeti epopeához fogható, hozzá mérhető nemzeti hősköltemény talán csak egy van a világtörténelemben: akis görög nemzetnek szabadságharca az ókorban a perzsa túlerővel szemben amely felett kétezer éven keresztül lelkesedett a serdülő ifjúság amelytől kétezer év óta tanult ez az ifjúság hazafiságot, áldozatkésztséget a közért.” István Bethlen, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 240.

<sup>814</sup> See Chapter 3.2.3.

<sup>815</sup> “Az egyik az: büszkék lehetünk arra, hogy ezt a szabadsásrunkat mi nem árulás, nem képmutatás útján, hanem fegyverrel küzdöttük ki ... az a függetlenség, amelyet vérell vívott ki egy nemzet, az tartós lesz és az, ha elveszett is, mindig visszaszerezhető.” István Bethlen, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 240–241.

<sup>816</sup> István Bethlen, 7.11.1927, KN VI/1927, 241.

again tied to contemporary foreign policy, as Hungary wanted to reinforce its recently established cordial ties with Italy, of which it had great expectations for support in international politics.<sup>817</sup>

The authoritative presence of Bethlen was used intentionally as a tool to conclude the discussion and refute the challenging interpretations presented by the opposition. The Social Democrats had interpreted Hungary's long history of tragic uprisings as proof of continued social injustice and used Kossuth and 1848 as the sole flaw in the fabric, and proper respect for them demanded the abolition of the same injustice and backwardness practiced by the government. Instead, Bethlen rhetorically depoliticized the issue, and seeing that the use of Hungarian history had been turned into a challenge, brought in the legitimation from classical antiquity, raising the level of abstraction to the universal values of patriotism and willingness to make sacrifices, distanced as much as possible from the actual events. In conclusion, the commemoration bills of Kossuth and 1848 were duly passed in their original form and the proposed amendments with Liberal or Social Democratic redescriptive tones rejected.<sup>818</sup>

#### 3.4.4 The counterrevolutionary Kossuth. The commemoration bill in the Upper House

After passing the House of Representatives, the commemoration bills were debated in the Upper House two weeks later, on 25 November. Here, the nature of debate was markedly different and, quite naturally, more conservative than in the lower house. Speaker of the Upper House Gyula Wlassics<sup>819</sup> wanted to combine the memory of Széchenyi, Kossuth and Deák into one coherent narrative of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian spirit, which the three had served equally despite their occasional differences:<sup>820</sup>

“Without the awakening work of Széchenyi there would never have been Kossuth, without Kossuth no Deák and without Deák not the half century which brought new life and vigour to the Hungarian race, aroused such cultural and economic development, which had perhaps never been seen in another nation's history after such catastrophe and oppression.”<sup>821</sup>

Emphasis was thus given to the peaceful achievements of the said statesmen, and the revolutionary tone downplayed even more than in the speeches of the Lower

<sup>817</sup> See Chapter 4.5.

<sup>818</sup> KN VI/1927, 241.

<sup>819</sup> Pre-war liberal politician, multiple minister and long-term Member of Parliament, Baron Gyula Wlassics (1852–1937) was appointed to the Upper House by virtue of his position as the president of the Supreme Administrative Court. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 374–375; MÉL: Wlassics, Gyula, báró.

<sup>820</sup> Gyula Wlassics, Speaker of the Upper House, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 4.

<sup>821</sup> “Széchenyi új életre ébresztő munkája nélkül nincs Kossuth, Kossuth nélkül nincs Deák és Deák nélkül nincs az a félszázad, mely az új életre kelésnek, a magyar faj életképességének, kulturális és gazdasági fellendülésének oly jelét mutatta, melyhez hasonló emelkedő ritmust annyi elnyomatás, annyi balsors után, mely a mi hazánkat érte, talán egyetlen nemzet története sem mutat fel.” Gyula Wlassics, Speaker of the Upper House, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 4.

House conservatives. The reconstruction after 1867 was presented as the long-term positive result of the 1848 revolution, the era of prosperity and national success, against which the present 'independence' was nothing more than a pale image:

"... the terrible disintegration of the lands of St Stephen's Crown, forcing millions of our brethren under foreign rule, is a complete opposite to that independence which the sovereign Hungarian state justly expects in order to fulfil its historical mission. The Hungarian national vigour, the Hungarian national resurrection may not rest."<sup>822</sup>

In contrast to the Social Democrats of the Lower House, Wlassics moved the emphasis more and more away from 1848 and towards 1867, the peaceful reconciliation as the source of progress. His speech also served the interests of the legitimist aristocracy, to whom the Dualist era was the foremost object of nostalgia.<sup>823</sup>

The discourse of the Upper House had a more explicitly depoliticizing tone than that of the Lower House. The distanced attitude which surfaced concerning the commemoration bills, exemplified by Elemer Simontsits,<sup>824</sup> reflected the notion of an imperative mandate; that the nation had obliged the Houses to do its will in honouring its great past and the Houses could not even think of denying the call.<sup>825</sup> The thought was naturally a useful tool of rationalizing the historico-political objectives of the government: the will of the nation was realized through canonization of the past, and through proper canonization, the nationalist narrative of the past was further reinforced. Simontsits also posed the rhetorical question why the Houses had to spend time on commemorative legislation, as there were possibly more pressing questions to be addressed. Answering himself, he argued that the national self-esteem, the prerequisite of national resurrection, depended on the appreciation of history. The present misfortune did not obstruct but on the contrary demanded the commemoration of the greatest moments of Hungarian history.<sup>826</sup> The legislation was needed in order to do justice to the patriotic virtues and the historical meaning embedded in 15 March and the figure of Kossuth.<sup>827</sup> The argument was at the core of conservative history politics: history was thoroughly codified, explicating its instrumental value and the expectations placed on it.

<sup>822</sup> "...Szent István koronája területének rettenetes szétmarcangolása, véreink millióinak idegen uralom alá hajtása ellentéte annak a függetlenségnek, melyet a magyar állam öncélúsága a betöltött és betöltendő történeti hivatásának teljesítésében joggal megkívánhat. A magyar nemzeti energia, a magyar nemzeti feltámadás ebben meg nem nyugodhatik." Gyula Wlassics, Speaker of the Upper House, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 5.

<sup>823</sup> See Romsics 2006.

<sup>824</sup> A pre-war Member of Parliament and a former counsellor to King Charles, Elemer Simontsits (b.1869) was made a Lifetime Member of the Upper House by the Regent in 1927. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 541.

<sup>825</sup> Elemér Simontsits, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 5.

<sup>826</sup> Elemér Simontsits, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 6.

<sup>827</sup> Elemér Simontsits, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 6.

Bishop Gyula Glattfelder<sup>828</sup> further disassociated the events of 1848 from revolutionary content; he reminded the House that 1848 was unique in not being a class war, not meant to brutally overthrow the old elites, but to join hands with all social classes in pursuit of national freedom. Paraphrasing Malasits's earlier argument, he completely reversed the Social Democratic historical narrative and placed the memory of the revolution in the service of the conservative legitimization.<sup>829</sup> For his part, Glattfelder was also eager to redescribe the Catholic church's role in 1848: even though the church had historically been the cornerstone of the old regime, in the new era of constitutionalism and civil rights, the church had immediately been ready to "serve the cause of the new generation, new Hungary, with great joy and flourishing hope."<sup>830</sup> Such reciprocal redescrptions of the past were a sign that the elites allied with the government were ready to prove their loyalty by making rhetorical concessions to the politicization of the past in their desire to maintain the conservative status quo.

Aladár Széchenyi<sup>831</sup> joined the discourse of conservative redescription with the explicit definition that "... the events of 1848 cannot be called a revolution. The fight was nothing but a legitimate fight of self-defence."<sup>832</sup> Moreover, relying on selective quotations from Kossuth, he argued that Kossuth was never an advocate of revolution or violence, but a proponent of peaceful reformism.<sup>833</sup> He admitted that the contemporary elites had momentarily disregarded Kossuth's ideas, "but later recognized and acknowledged his sincerity."<sup>834</sup> Rhetorically playing with historical time, Széchenyi absolved the aristocracy from responsibility for their part in the post-revolutionary oppression and created a convenient narrative of incorporating Kossuth's ideas to the Hungarian nationalist mainstream.

Albert Berzeviczky<sup>835</sup> went even further in the reconciliatory tone. He pointed out that members of the house of Habsburg were present at that very

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<sup>828</sup> The Catholic bishop of Csanád Gyula Glattfelder (1874–1943), was a member of the Upper House by virtue of his episcopal position. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932 347–348; MÉL: Glattfelder, Gyula.

<sup>829</sup> Gyula Glattfelder, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 6.

<sup>830</sup> "... nagyobb örömmel és lobogó reménységgel szolgálta az új nemzedék, az új Magyarország ügyét." Gyula Glattfelder, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 6.

<sup>831</sup> Pre-war liberal politician and Member of Parliament, Count Aladár Széchenyi (1862–1936) was appointed to the Upper House as a representative of the upper aristocracy. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 396.

<sup>832</sup> "... nem lehet az 1848. évi eseményeket forradalomnak nevezni. Ez a harc nem volt egyéb, mint jogos önvédelmi harc." Aladár Széchenyi, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 7.

<sup>833</sup> Aladár Széchenyi, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 7.

<sup>834</sup> "... de később belátták és elismerték Kossuth Lajos igazát." Aladár Széchenyi, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 7.

<sup>835</sup> Historian Albert Berzeviczky (1853–1936) was a prominent pre-war politician, former Minister of Culture and long-term Member of Parliament. Politically he shifted from liberalism to conservatism during the 1910s and was eventually one of the chief architects of post-war counterrevolutionary cultural policy. As president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences since 1905, he was appointed to the Upper house ex officio. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 470–473; MÉL: Berzeviczky, Albert.

moment,<sup>836</sup> celebrating the memory of Kossuth together with the Hungarians and had laid their wreaths on the Kossuth monument. This, Berzeviczky argued, was proof of how far the gracious history had progressed from the ‘ill-fated’ declaration of independence in 1849.<sup>837</sup> Moreover, he reinterpreted Kossuth as a loyal monarchist in principle, who had only been forced to declare Hungary’s independence from the Empire after Francis Joseph had ‘regrettably’ annulled the Hungarian constitution. Thus Kossuth never wanted the separation from the throne but the throne had forcibly driven Hungary onto the path of separatism.<sup>838</sup> The absurd-sounding legitimist redescription of Kossuth exemplified how broad the spectrum of political discourses around him was and how varying interpretations were accepted by the parties. Yet it also showed how they all were tempted to make rhetorical concessions towards the government’s established history policy.

As with the Lower House, here, too, Prime Minister Bethlen rose to conclude the debate. He began his speech by describing what a sensitive issue Kossuth had been over the years. Kossuth’s burial in Hungary in 1894 had presented an opportunity for positive commemoration of him and of the memory of 1848, and the proclamation of 15 March as a national holiday had been demanded already then.<sup>839</sup> However, in 1898, the memorial day was set for 11 April, with the political rationale that Emperor Francis Joseph, who had personally ordered the repression of the revolution, would not have accepted a direct reference to it. At last, the need for self-censorship was over and the time was ripe for the proper commemoration that the glorious history deserved.<sup>840</sup> Bethlen also explained the present, post-war commemoration as a reconciliation between the pre-war ‘48 and ‘67 parties, of which the former had represented opposition to the Habsburgs and the latter a more pragmatist and conciliatory approach. Now, as the political constellations had totally and abruptly changed as a result of the World War and the revolutions, the former members of both camps, now mostly under the same flag, were able and expected to work for the new Hungary.<sup>841</sup>

Like Wlassichs, Bethlen rhetorically constructed Kossuth’s career in the context of the Reform era in the beginning and the Compromise in conclusion, in agreement with Széchenyi, Deák and József Eötvös, thus actively undermining the revolutionary content of Kossuth’s figure. Even though Kossuth’s public role had included his part in the War of Independence and his unyielding opposition to Habsburg oppression in exile, these were outweighed by his fundamental

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<sup>836</sup> The archdukes of the Hungarian branch of the house of Habsburg had permanent seats in the Upper House. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 339–344.

<sup>837</sup> Albert Berzeviczky, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 8.

<sup>838</sup> Albert Berzeviczky, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 8.

<sup>839</sup> Reinterment has been and still is a pivotal historico-political tool for re-evaluating the memory of those who during their lifetime or at the time of their death had been in disfavour. In the recent past, reinterments have been performed for Imre Nagy (1896–1958) in 1989 and for Miklós Horthy (1868–1957) in 1993. Nyysönen 2017, 128; 156–157.

<sup>840</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 10.

<sup>841</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 11.

reformism, as Bethlen noted, and he must not be judged by any one feature alone.<sup>842</sup>

“While abroad, Kossuth was able to rally the nations to the Hungarian cause by his prophetic and apostolic words, and through that, lend a helping hand to the passive resistance led by Ferenc Deák in Hungary, which ultimately led to the Compromise of 1867.”<sup>843</sup>

Thus Kossuth was again rhetorically reconciled with the revolutionaries and the reformists who, according to Bethlen’s narrative, had actually worked together for the sake of Hungary and achieved their objective in 1867. To conclude the conservative redescriptions presented in and accepted by the Upper House, Bethlen was able to disregard the opposing interpretations of those who were all too eager to see Kossuth as a liberal or even Socialist revolutionary:

“Excuse me, but such retrospective historical hindsight puts Kossuth in a totally improper light. For he, indeed, lived during the practically most naïve idealism of a liberal era, when he, too, believed absolutely in the infallibility of liberal thought, the ideas of which were prevalent at that time.”<sup>844</sup>

For Bethlen, Kossuth’s liberalism was a product of the era and distinguishable from his real significance, which was unyielding Hungarian patriotism. Kossuth had believed in liberalism, as he saw it could bring improvement for Hungary, whereas the contemporary liberalism was merely abused by individuals in their lust for power.<sup>845</sup> With such words Bethlen rhetorically disconnected the present-day Socialists and liberals from Kossuth’s memory and made them undeserving of it.<sup>846</sup>

Finally, Bethlen returned to the triumvirate of Széchenyi, Kossuth and Deák, extending the memorial legislation to include them all, holding up the favourable sides of each one as a model for the present day:

“There is no need to position the great men of that era against each other. Surely, the names of Széchenyi, Deák, Eötvös and Kossuth are common treasures of the nation, and the nation should revere their memories equally. In today’s hard times the nation needs the leadership of both Ferenc Deák’s wisdom, István Széchenyi’s great sense of

<sup>842</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 11.

<sup>843</sup> “Kossuth Lajos a külföldön prófétaí és apostoli szavával nemzeteket tudott a magyar ügy mellett felvonultatni és ezáltal segítőkezet nyújtott annak a passzív ellenállásnak, amelynek Deák Ferenc volt az országban vezetője, és amely végeredményben az 1867-iki kiegyezéshez vezetett.” István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 11.

<sup>844</sup> “Bocsánatot kérek, ez a retrospektív történelmi visszapillantás teljesen téves világitásba állítja be Kossuth Lajos személyét. Mert ő, igenis, a liberális korszaknak úgyszólván naiv ideális szakában élt, amikor feltétlenül bizott azon szabadságeszmék csálhatatlanságában, amely eszmék az akkori koron uralkodtak.” István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 11.

<sup>845</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 11.

<sup>846</sup> The same argument, disconnecting 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian liberalism from the contemporary liberalism, had already been used in other instances of counterrevolutionary legitimization. See Chapters 2.2. and 2.3.

realism and organizational skill, and the devout spirit of Lajos Kossuth, for only together are these three features able to save the nation in the present peril."<sup>847</sup>

This debate also revealed Bethlen's rhetorical versatility; whereas he could appear dry, even sarcastic in the Lower House in the presence of the opposition, in the Upper House he had to adapt to the conservatism of the old regime, which exceeded even his own. The aristocracy and senior Catholic clergy were known for their legitimism, fidelity towards the Habsburgs, and Bethlen had to sustain an eloquent and conciliatory tone to accommodate the commemoration of the Hungarian Revolution. He did this by conveniently constructing the nation top-down, led by the enlightened statesmen who were destined to fulfil their roles in the national mission.

### 3.4.5 Kossuth reformed

Kossuth, as the ubiquitous and (self-proclaimed) messianic figurehead of the nation,<sup>848</sup> was too important to the government to be ignored in the post-war nation-building process. As the nation had been denied the official commemoration of their hero throughout the Habsburg era, the counterrevolutionary government was virtually compelled to honour him whereas the opportunity arose. Yet the commemoration of Kossuth and of the 1848 revolution was not a straightforward one for the government to deal with. Kossuth's nation-building work was of undeniable renown, yet his revolutionary ideals remained sensitive subjects for the government. Again, well aware of the universal appreciation of the concepts of constitutionalism, democracy and parliamentary government, the government redescribed and reinterpreted them favourably; despite the shortcomings in suffrage and the electoral system, Hungary had functional democratic institutions, and as the government enjoyed an ample majority in Parliament, it was naturally a parliamentary one, and could thus claim to honour Kossuth's legacy.<sup>849</sup>

It was equally easy to externalize the negative concepts of tyranny and oppression to the Austrian Empire, an entity that had conveniently ceased to exist. Even the Catholic clergy and Legitimist aristocracy could be united behind the bill, as the content of 1848 and Kossuth's figure were duly stripped of their revolutionary tone. Kossuth's importance as a representative of Hungary in international fora was projected to the present day and to the revisionist

<sup>847</sup> "Nincs szükség arra, hogy az akkori kor nagyjait egymással párhuzamba helyezzük. Hiszen Széchenyi, Deák, Eötvös, Kossuth Lajos nevei ma a nemzet közkinccse s emléküket egyformán kell, hogy áldja a nemzet. A mai nehéz időkben nekünk arra van szükségünk, hogy ezt a nemzetet Deák Ferenc bölcsesége, Széchenyi Istvánnak a realitások iránt tanúsított nagy érzéke és szervező képessége s Kossuth Lajosnak lángelke vezesse, mert csak együttvéve ez a három tulajdonság mentheti meg a nemzetet a mai nehéz időkben." István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 25.11.1927, FN II/1927, 11.

<sup>848</sup> See Gerő 2007, 174–180.

<sup>849</sup> On the development of the concept of parliamentary government see Ihalainen, Ilie & Palonen 2016, 8–11; Palonen 2016, 237–238; on the contemporary pseudo-parliamentary exploitation of the concept see Burkhadt 2016, 184; Ilie & Ornatowski 2016, 198.



discourse, where the use of the concept 'Hungarian truth' was one pivotal factor in the Hungarian victimization discourse in international matters: if only the world powers were able to see the international situation as Hungarians did, then and again, they would obviously acknowledge Hungary's entitlement to its rightful place in European politics. Kossuth, it was pointed out, had been an ardent supporter of Hungarian independence, and moreover, of Hungarian sovereignty over Historic Hungary and its indivisibility. This was well suited to the present revision narrative, as Kossuth was made the champion of Greater Hungary and Hungarian exceptionalism, its natural leading role in East Central Europe.

The debate on the memorial bill can also be interpreted as one of the symbolic elements of the inclusive nation-building discourse, along with the amendment to the *Numerus Clausus* the following year;<sup>850</sup> in both, the principles of liberty and equality were held up as inherent virtues of the freedom-loving Hungarian nation – as if the present government had never restricted them – but neither included any concrete interest in implementing them. As the bill itself was ceremonial, the debate, however confrontational, was allowed to continue without resorting to points of order to curtail the opposition's freedom of speech. When no critical policy resolutions were at stake, the hegemonic government could allow itself the luxury of relative tolerance towards dissenting voices: the opposition might have its say in Parliament, especially concerning a bill of little concrete importance, on a subject that was generally accepted. A completely different attitude was seen in relation to more serious points in counterrevolutionary and revisionist policy.<sup>851</sup>

All parties agreed that Kossuth's memory was invaluable, right and honourable, and conversely were eager to argue that the opposing camp had no right to apply it in their propaganda. Another common argument was that of the greatness of 1848 as a moment of national unity as opposed the former uprisings and their nature as class wars. From this definition, the narratives again diverged: for the Social Democrats, the aftermath of 1848 once again demonstrated the elites' will to join forces with the reactionary foreign power even at the expense of their fatherland, whereas the conservatives perceived the Compromise of 1867 as the positive aftermath of 1848 and the source of the prosperity that followed. This also helped to reconcile the ideals of constitutionalism with the mainstream conservative narrative: even when the constitutional development had benefitted 'all social classes of the nation', the government narrative made it essentially a top-down process, where Kossuth, redescribed as a moderate reformist, joined forces with other canonized statesmen, most notably Széchenyi and Deák, together creating prospects for the 1867 Compromise. Kossuth empowered the Hungarian nation, the narrative went, essentially not by pitting the classes against each other but by uniting them in the fight for freedom.

In the speeches of the conservatives, Kossuth gradually became a careful reformist, canonized alongside Széchenyi and Deák; but at the same time the

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<sup>850</sup> See Chapter 2.5.

<sup>851</sup> See Chapters 2.4. and 4.5.

incarnation of the Hungarian national spirit, its defiance and willingness of sacrifice. The nation carefully constructed around that image was meant to put aside his inconvenient revolutionary activities, as it was subordinate to the grand narrative of an historical mission; to embrace nationalism, Hungarian sovereignty, the belief in Greater Hungary and its eventual reinstatement.<sup>852</sup>

### 3.5 When history does not come up to the expectations. The curious case of the Sándor Petőfi memorial bill of 1922

In 1922, even before the commemoration laws of István Széchenyi and Lajos Kossuth, a similar bill was proposed to the memory of Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849), another historical figure inextricably linked to the revolution of 1848 and the historico-political discourse on Hungary's liberty; the co-author of the 12-point programme and author of the revolutionary poem *Nemzeti Dal*, the publication of which contributed to the uprising in Budapest. The image of Petőfi reciting the poem on 15 March on the steps of the National Museum in Budapest – an image which does not concur with reality; on that day he did indeed deliver a speech on the steps but did not read the poem – became a part of the iconography of the revolution. A man of modest, ethnically Slovak origins,<sup>853</sup> Petőfi had first-hand experience of rural poverty, which fuelled his radical revolutionary attitude. This made him increasingly critical of the moderate and elitist nature of the revolution, which consequently weakened his influence in relation to the revolutionary government. Disappointed, Petőfi chose to volunteer for the Hungarian army in the War of Independence and disappeared, presumed dead, in the Battle of Segesvár in 1849. His cult as an ardent revolutionary and martyr to the Hungarian cause was established soon after his death.<sup>854</sup> Still, due to his radicalism, his historico-political value remained debatable; in the early 1900s the Social Democrats already used him as a competing historico-political rallying figure instead of the heroes canonized by the conservative historiography.<sup>855</sup>

Perhaps that is why, as an exception to the government-driven history politics, the Petőfi commemoration bill was proposed as a private member's bill. György Petrovics<sup>856</sup> wanted to honour the upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Petőfi's birth by calling for commemorative legislation and the erection of a statue to him

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<sup>852</sup> The rhetorical ambivalence behind Kossuth, however, was not wholly tamed. During the Second World War, the anti-German opposition rallied under his name, and only a few years later the emerging Socialist regime would put the memory of 1848 to service of the novel nation-building, eventually also accepting the ubiquitous (albeit dubiously bourgeois) Kossuth to be a part of the redescribed national canon. Gerő 2007, 185–190.

<sup>853</sup> Born Alexander Petrovics, Petőfi magyarized his name in 1842. MÉL: Petőfi, Sándor.

<sup>854</sup> Cartledge 2006, 198–200; MÉL: Petőfi, Sándor.

<sup>855</sup> Romsics 1999, 60.

<sup>856</sup> Lawyer and former mayor of Makó in southeastern Hungary, György Petrovics (1878–1950) was a member of the Unity Party caucus. Not related to Petőfi-Petrovics. Vidor 1921, 142.

“to the Hungarian national Pantheon, which shall be established in due time.”<sup>857</sup> According to Petrovics, Petőfi had been “not only the most influential and immortal poet, but also prophet and martyr in the most perilous and most momentous hour in the Hungarian history.”<sup>858</sup> In response to Petrovics’ motion, several days later the Ministry of Culture drafted a brief bill in memory of Petőfi, “who put his poetic flame at the service of Hungarian national thought and, in his life and death, gave his eternal example of patriotism that was ready to render every sacrifice.”<sup>859</sup> The bill was debated in the National Assembly on 22 December, 1922.

However, even before the bill was officially presented, the theme was taken up by Zoltán Meskó of the radical Right. He made Petőfi’s memory a tool of the nostalgia for Greater Hungary: he reminded the House how the name and patriotism of Petőfi were honoured not only within the “mutilated Hungary,”<sup>860</sup> but also in the “parts seized by Serbs and Vallachs and other swindlers.”<sup>861</sup> By referring to Hungary’s neighbours not by the names of their own states but by using the traditional names of the ethnicities, Meskó wanted to downplay their nation-building and the legitimacy of the successor states. As was typical of the populist rhetoric of the radical Right, Meskó emphasized that he appeared apolitical in relation to the matter, “not as a member of a party, but as an individual, who has had the chance honour to be a representative of the poet’s home town on the 100th anniversary of his birth.”<sup>862</sup> From that coincidence, Meskó went on to argue that particularly Petőfi’s birthplace of Kiskőrös had not been given proper attention despite the upcoming centenary celebrations. He emphasized that “we are talking about a town that is Slovak in language but Hungarian in spirit,”<sup>863</sup> which had been neglected, for example, in talks concerning the placement of Petőfi’s statue. Meskó’s Greater Hungarian nationalism was again represented by his belief that the nationalities, such as Slovaks in this matter, as natural underlings of the Greater Hungary, would still bear allegiance first and foremost to Hungary.<sup>864</sup>

<sup>857</sup> “...az idővel létesítendő magyar nemzeti Pantheonban.” Individual Motion concerning the memory of Sándor Petőfi, 6.12.1922, NI 108/III/1922, 363. The discussion of a national pantheon continued in the context of Széchenyi, see chapter 3.3.1.

<sup>858</sup> “Nemzetünk történelme egyik legválságosabb és legfenségesebb korszakának volt ő nemcsak hatalmas és halhatatlanná vált költője, hanem prófétája és vértanuja is.” Individual Motion concerning the memory of Sándor Petőfi, 6.12.1922, NI 108/III/1922, 363.

<sup>859</sup> “... aki költői lángelméjét a magyar nemzeti gondolat szolgálatába állította, életével és halálával pedig örök időre szóló példáját adta a minden áldozatra kész hazaszeretnek.” Bill concerning the memory of Sándor Petőfi, 22.12.1922, NI 148/IV/1922, 213.

<sup>860</sup> “... csonka Magyarországon”, Zoltán Meskó, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 323.

<sup>861</sup> “... a rácok, az oláhok és a cselákok által elrabolt részeken.” Zoltán Meskó, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 323.

<sup>862</sup> “... nem mint egy pártnak tagja, hanem mint olyan ember, akit az a véletlen szerencse ért, hogy a költő születésének századik évfordulóján képviselhetem az ő szülőfaluját.” Zoltán Meskó, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 323.

<sup>863</sup> “Egy tótajku, de magyarérzésű község lakosságáról van szó ...” Zoltán Meskó, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 323.

<sup>864</sup> Zoltán Meskó, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 323.

With the official reading of the bill,<sup>865</sup> the government hastened to give a more suitable interpretation of Petőfi's memory. Speaking on behalf of the bill, the former Prime Minister and the present Speaker of the Parliament, Károly Huszár,<sup>866</sup> emphasized Petőfi's role and importance not only as a Hungarian patriot but also as an internationally respected poet:

"... the celebration of this memory brings us together with the civilized world, also those countries, from which we have lately been hearing only the words of a victorious power, unable to detach itself from the war mentality."<sup>867</sup>

Petőfi thus became a vehicle of both reuniting Hungary with the civilized west and mitigating the war trauma, here attributed only to the foreign powers in their continuous hostility towards Hungary. Despite him writing in a "brotherless and isolated language,"<sup>868</sup> Petőfi's lines had found their way into the hearts of millions, and through him, the history of Hungarian patriotism and the millennial struggle for existence became comprehensible to foreigners.<sup>869</sup> Moreover, his physical presence on the battlefields of the War of Independence had made him the visual epitome of a Hungarian freedom fighter: "Every beat of his great heart, unrivalled in sincerity, adorned his cheeks with youthful blood."<sup>870</sup>

As with Kossuth, the government needed to downplay Petőfi's revolutionary ideology and reinterpret his role to suit the era of counterrevolutionary politics.<sup>871</sup> And like Kossuth, Petőfi was described as an ambassador for Hungary's cause, whose poetry still was able to convert foreigners to be sympathetic to Hungary. Despite being a revolutionary soul in a revolutionary era, Huszár reminded the House, Petőfi had remained faithful to God and, especially, loyal to Hungary and the honour of the Hungarian nation.<sup>872</sup> Huszár's redescription attempted to distance Petőfi as far as possible from the 20<sup>th</sup>-century revolutionaries, who were fundamentally defined as godless and unpatriotic.

"In the fateful hour Divine Providence gave him to us, to light the road of patriotic duties with the flame of his spirit, and to strike the faithless, the doubtful and the

<sup>865</sup> Kunó Klebelsberg, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 338.

<sup>866</sup> Huszár obviously did not see that his position prevented him from taking part in the legislative process, cf. Chapter 3.4.2.

<sup>867</sup> "... ez az emlék a velünk ünneplő együttérzést a művelt külföld olyan országaiban is, amelyekből az utóbbi időkben csak a háborús mentalitásából kibontakozni nem tudó győztes hatalom részvétlen szava hangzott felénk." Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>868</sup> "... egy elszigetelten álló, tesvértelen nemzet nyelvén" Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>869</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>870</sup> "Őszinteségében páratlan nagy szíve minden dobbanását ennek az ifjúi vérével megpecsételt érzésnek rendelte alá." Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>871</sup> In hindsight, one might contemplate that Petőfi, known for such uncompromising words as his poem *Hang the Kings!* (*Akasszátok fel a királyokat!* from 1848) was from the outset an exceptionally unrewarding object for counterrevolutionary reinterpretation.

<sup>872</sup> Károly Huszár, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

indifferent with the lightning bolts of his anger, those, who do not have the faith or confidence in the historical mission of the nation, nor willingness to work for it."<sup>873</sup>

Again, Huszár went to great lengths to redescribe Petőfi as a patriotic prophet serving the historic mission of the nation, more counterrevolutionary than a revolutionary figure, upholding national unity and chastising the infidels.<sup>874</sup> The counterrevolutionary Petőfi was rhetorically reincarnated on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth to lead the nation again through the era of misfortune, inspiring Hungarians to unyielding patriotism and indefatigable work for the fatherland: "Shame on those who shirk, honour to those who work!"<sup>875</sup>

The counterrevolutionary redescription of Petőfi turned out to be too much, as the House was quickly reminded of an opposite interpretation: liberal opposition Member József Cserti<sup>876</sup> interrupted Huszár's oration with a cry: "Long live the spirit of Petőfi, long live the Hungarian People's Republic!"<sup>877</sup> Tumult ensued. Cserti was repeatedly assailed by the Right with cries of "Shame on you!"<sup>878</sup> "Pig!"<sup>879</sup> "Comedian!"<sup>880</sup> and the usual "Deglorifier of celebration!"<sup>881</sup> The disorder exemplified how sensitive the matter of history politics really was in the early years of the counterrevolutionary era. Key historical events and figures, cornerstones of nation-building, were reinterpreted favourably, but could not always be incorporated into a flawless narrative. Therefore there was space for opposing interpretations and criticism, which were treated as dangerously dissident in the very sensitive process. Cserti, as a liberal opposition Member, was clearly being ironic towards this kind of counterrevolutionary reinterpretation of Petőfi. However, in the counterrevolutionary atmosphere, such irony was unacceptable, and Cserti was accused of being "Mihály Károlyi's henchman!"<sup>882</sup> and "Béla Kun's Henchman!"<sup>883</sup> Speaker Huszár was also offended that a member dared to utter the words 'people's republic' in the House.<sup>884</sup> The argument, based on the premise of the sanctity of the House, was a direct continuation of the earlier spatial argumentation concerning the House

<sup>873</sup> "Sorsdöntő időkben adta őt a Gondviselés nekünk, hogy lánglelke fényével a haza iránti nagy kötelességek útjait világítsa be s haragjának villámaival sújtsa a kishitűeket, a kétkedőket, a közönyösöket, akiknek lelkében nem él munkára serkentő akarat, hit és bizalom e nemzet történelmi küldetése iránt." Károly Huszár, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>874</sup> Not unlike Horthy, who in 1919 had accused the Hungarians of forgetting their national pride and succumbing to the temptation of Communism. See Horthy's speech on Gellért tér on 16 November 1916. Romsics 2000, 118–119.

<sup>875</sup> "Szégyen reá, ki lomhán vesztegel, dicsőség arra, aki dolgozik!" Károly Huszár, quoting Sándor Petőfi, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>876</sup> Teacher József Cserti (b. 1887) was a former member of the Smallholder Party who, at the formation of the Unity Party in 1922 chose not to follow the new formation but joined the liberal opposition party under Károly Rassay. Vidor 1921, 44.

<sup>877</sup> "Éljen Petőfi szelleme! Éljen a magyar népköztársaság!" József Cserti, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>878</sup> "Szégyen!" Albert Kaas (Unity Party), 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>879</sup> "Disznó!" Endre Podmaniczky (Unity Party), 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>880</sup> "Komédiás!" Viktor Széchenyi (Unity Party), 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>881</sup> "Ünneprontó!" Jenő Karafiath (Unity Party), 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>882</sup> "Károlyi Mihály bérence!" Jenő Karafiath, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 340.

<sup>883</sup> "Kun Béla bérence!" Gedeon Raday (Unity Party), 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 340.

<sup>884</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 340.

floor, once polluted by the socialists and then cleansed.<sup>885</sup> The mere mention of the radical and left-leaning content of Petőfi's revolutionary spirit was thus unacceptable; on the contrary, the parliament should honour his commitment to his nation and never again let the House become an arena of un-Hungarian agitation.<sup>886</sup>

Social Democrat István Farkas was the only one to raise his voice in defence of Cserti through the modern definition of the freedom of speech, which should allow even controversial comments:

"We do not cause a revolution by speaking out our thoughts here in the National Assembly, but by suppressing free expression, making such manifestations impossible."<sup>887</sup>

In such a heated atmosphere he was frequently interrupted by Tibor Eckhardt<sup>888</sup> shouting: "Only in a constitutional sense! Let's not cause revolution altogether!"<sup>889</sup> – reflecting the nationalist view that freedom of speech was conditional and always subject to the maintenance of the political system. Only after some disturbance was Farkas allowed to conclude his argument:

"I believe that the spirit of Petőfi, the thought of the great genius, would also accept what my fellow Member József Cserti said and if that were the case, then we must not overlook the memory of that Hungarian genius by taking offence at it."<sup>890</sup>

Farkas duly attempted to turn Petőfi's memory to the defence of Cserti, but in the counterrevolutionary discourse, where only the narrow nationalist interpretation of Petőfi was valid, the attempt was futile. After Farkas' speech, the debate was hastily closed and discontinued.

The case of the Petőfi commemoration bill was a brief and curious affair, yet extremely interesting as regards the rhetorical struggle over interpretations of the past. It also showed that the aggressive counterrevolutionary discourse had not been tamed (and would never fully be), even though it was able to acquire more

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<sup>885</sup> See Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>886</sup> Károly Huszár, Speaker of the National Assembly, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 339.

<sup>887</sup> "Forradalmat nem azzal csinálunk, ha itt a nemzetgyűlésen gondolatainknak hangot adunk, hanem azzal csinálunk, ha a szabad véleménynyilvánítást elfojtjuk, ha az ilyen megnyilatkozásokat lehetetlenné tesszük." István Farkas, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 340.

<sup>888</sup> Tibor Eckhardt (1888–1972) was one of the central figures in the post-war radical Right and simultaneously representative of the diverse nature of the movement. An ardent propagandist for the counterrevolutionary movement and a founding member of ÉME in the 1920s, Eckhardt turned to agrarian populism in the 1930s. He remained a supporter of Gömbös and his policy until 1935, when his opposition to the German influence in Hungary caused him to ally with the conservatives and emigrate to the United States in 1940. At the time of the debate he was a right-wing Member of the Unity Party. MÉL: Eckhardt, Tibor; Vidor 1921, 53–54.

<sup>889</sup> "Csak alkotmányos felfogásnak! Forradalmat nem csinálunk még egyszer!" Tibor Eckhardt, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 340.

<sup>890</sup> "Én azt hiszem, Petőfi szellemébe, ennek a nagy géniének gondolkodásába belefért az is, amit itt Cserti József képviselőtársam mondott és ha ez belefért, akkor ne becsüljük le ennek a magyar géniének emlékét azzal, hogy ezért felzúduljanak." István Farkas, 22.12.1922, NN VII/1922, 340.

conciliatory tones when needed to showcase the government's tolerance in certain situations. Commemoration of Petőfi resurfaced in 1925 in the form of another private Member's bill, proposing legislation to honour the 1848 revolution, Kossuth Lajos and Sándor Petőfi. As seen in the previous chapters, the first two eventually resulted in government-backed legislation in 1927, but the Petőfi proposal was quietly dropped, presumably because of the realization that his relentless revolutionary figure could never be credibly redescribed to suit the conservative historiography.

### **3.6 Conclusions. In the name of the heroes, against deglorification**

History politics had a decisive significance in the counterrevolutionary nation-building. The consecutive commemoration bills reflected a conscious policy, in which the official codification of the past was applied in the nationalist nation-building and unashamedly projected onto the contemporary political situation. The main rhetorical element in the construction of the politicized historiography of the cases described was that the heroes and martyrs, namely Széchenyi, Kossuth and the fallen of the World War, had all played their parts in the great national mission, progressing through repeated hardship towards a brighter future. According to the conservative narrative, the canonized figures of the past were assigned to this mission by destiny or Divine Providence, in principle infallible and always appearing in the right place at the right time. At the meta-level of historiography, this meant denying political contingency and preemptively blocking any competing interpretations and challenges to their cults.

The present nation was indebted to them and obliged to follow in the path they had demarcated; namely, to stand for national unity, to believe in Hungary's progress, avoiding dissensus that had led to the greatest of tragedies, and to free Hungary from the constraints that world politics had once again imposed upon it. Inclusive and exclusive nation-building were thus applied simultaneously and complementarily in order to present the 'true' ideals of patriotic heroes and to exclude those who did not comply with that interpretation or did not fit the preferred narrative. For example, when conceptualizing the fallen of the World War as 'heroes', the definition was denied to the living, especially the prisoners of war remaining in the Soviet Union, who were rhetorically transformed from patriotic Hungarian soldiers to disloyal Communist defectors.

In all cases, the opposition attempted to challenge the conservative mainstream offering divergent interpretations, especially in connection with Széchenyi, Kossuth and the 1848 Revolution. Against this, the government relied on distancing and depoliticizing rhetoric, repeatedly calling for unanimous acceptance as a sign of honouring the past. Therefore, the dispute over interpretations often culminated in the accusation of 'deglorification of the celebration' (*ünneprontás*), levelled equally by the government and the opposition

against each other. Any subjectively improper interpretation could be considered as deglorification by the opposing side. This was a by-product of the already canonized nature of the past; most arguments were anchored on the unquestionable nature of the great statesmen, whom few dared to challenge directly. Thus, even though the Members were ready to accept the very bills in question, they used the opportunity for individual argumentation around the matter thereby creating political space, using the universally endorsed matter and ideologically accepted argumentation and turning them to serve their own individual ends. This in turn led to the narrow room for rhetorical manoeuvring, in which all sides claimed to be the true heirs of their legacy, and that the opposing side was undeserving of their memory, hence, deglorification.

The more recent past of the World War was also an object of similar selective interpretations, but with the notable difference that the debate came also to concern living people, namely veterans, invalids and prisoners of war as well as war widows and war orphans. The many veterans present in the House were not ready to allow the government to dictate the content of the commemoration and offered challenging interpretations from their own positions of credibility and firsthand experience. Even then, the challenges presented were not uniform, had all their own points of reference and preferred forms of commemoration, which the government could pit against each other, and thus exploit the contradicting arguments in dismissing them.

In the cases of history politics, one can also see the incoherence of the opposition, which the government readily made use of; as the Liberals, the Social Democrats and the radical Right all needed to distinguish themselves from each other and were reluctant to co-operate, the government was able to play them off against each other in the establishment of its preferred interpretations of the past. The government could in selective cases accept individual arguments of certain opposition parties, as was done when Rezső Rupert's rewording of the World War memorial bill was adopted in order to tackle the rhetorical challenge presented by the radical Right. However, when Rupert similarly offered a reformulation of the István Széchenyi commemoration bill the following year, he was overridden as his services were not needed by the government; on the contrary, it was possible that his reformulation might have allowed more rhetorical space for the opposition, the possibility of which was promptly denied. These small nuances in parliamentary debate also show the content and the limited extent of the consolidation discourse; the government was only inclined to grant discursive space for the opposition in situations where it did not endanger the prevalent policy. If merely hinted in that direction, as in the cases of the prisoners of war or Sándor Petőfi, the government would hastily revert to its policy of exclusion, containment and procedural limitation of discursive space.

Narratives of the past are by definition tempting objects of politicized application, as the human psyche is prone to find parallels with individual experiences and learned narratives – experiences tend to take the form of a formerly learned narrative, opening up an opportunity of its political use. The



multi-layered relationship to the past can also be interpreted in the Koselleckian terms of *Aufschreiben*, *Abschreiben* (or *Fortschreiben*) and *Umschreiben* (writing down, repeating, rewriting): the first form is given by the contemporaries in order to preserve the memory, the repetition of it continues in subsequent generations to support the primary narrative and the politically defined structures it supports, until possibilities open up for new and competing interpretations.<sup>891</sup> Of the cases analysed, the commemoration of the fallen falls in the category of *Aufschreiben*, as the memory of the recent past – the World War – was constructed as a considered strategy of remembrance in order to reconstruct the post-war Hungarian nation. The cases of Széchenyi and Kossuth are clear examples of *Abschreiben*, when contemplated from the government side, but encountering competing interpretations, or individual acts of *Umschreiben*. Finally, the case of Petőfi presents a situation, in which the conservative narrative of *Abschreiben* is deemed dangerously unstable, as a mere ironic interjection, which carried within a completely different set of valuations and interpretations of him, sufficed to have the whole debate closed in the midst of unparliamentary conduct and desperate attempts to maintain order on the part of the government. History, as seen, is serious business.

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<sup>891</sup> Koselleck 1989, 663–664; on the uses in the Hungarian context, see Nyysönen 1999, 34–35.

## 4 THROUGH REVISION TO RESURRECTION. THE ROLE OF FOREIGN POLICY IN NATION-BUILDING

### 4.1 Introduction

As with history politics, foreign policy played a significant role in the interwar Hungarian nation-building and state-building, both symbolically and practically. The post-war Hungarian nation, exclusive nationalism and the conceptualization of the national mission were largely built on the socio-political trauma of the Trianon Peace Treaty<sup>892</sup> and the manifold forms of Hungarian revisionism – operationalized in culture, propaganda, state and civil commemoration and even in folklore.<sup>893</sup> Still, state and government were the primary actors and organs in the creation, adaptation and implementation of the revisionist discourse, and therefore it is necessary to study the foreign political debate of the parliament, as it both constructed and followed the lines of political language then used to consider the foreign political questions.

However, in addition to the direct and obvious revisionist discourse, the foreign political debate was also inextricably linked to domestic discourses about inclusive and exclusive nationalism. The nation constructed through the revisionist discourse was the ancient and indivisible Hungarian nation that

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<sup>892</sup> To speak of a socio-political trauma is justified, as the losses of Trianon affected the majority of the population in one way or another, including population transfers from the ceded territories and wide-ranging demographic changes in consequence of these. The atmosphere of insecurity engendered by Trianon also gave rise to manifold cultural explanations and a search for scapegoats both domestically and internationally. Gradually, both the events of Trianon and the lost territories assumed a metaphorical significance. See e.g. Ablonczy 2002, 133, 159; Ablonczy 2010; Gyarmati 1999, 201; Vares & Vares 2019, 168, 176.

<sup>893</sup> See e.g. Apponyi 1921. Especially during Kunó Klebelsberg's tenure as Minister of Culture (1922–1931) the Hungarian government funded numerous projects, including the founding of Hungarian institutes and libraries abroad as well as publications in English, French and German, intended to exert cultural influence on the international opinion of Hungary. Deák 1992, 1051; Kontler 1999, 356–357.

transcended the borders imposed by the Trianon, and the Hungarian conservatives not only spoke in the name of the cross-border Hungarians but also actively used their position as an argument in their policy-making. The awaited fulfilment of the great national mission, the resurrection of the troubled nation, was equated with the concrete revision goals and restoring the lands of the Hungarian brethren to the homeland.

As we can see, in all instances of foreign political decision-making, the debate was also extended to concern domestic issues. Even as the subject matter was unilaterally welcomed (as with the case of the Sopron commemoration bill) or detested (as with the ratification of the Trianon Treaty), the members found domestic implications concerning especially the revolutions and responsibility for the Hungarian ordeals. In the latter part of the 1920s, the role and appearance of the parliamentary opposition grew, and concerning the debates on Hungary's accession to the League of Nations, and especially the Treaty of Friendship with Italy, differences of opinion between government and opposition opened up much more prominently. From this perspective, the foreign political debates can also be analysed as matters of nation-building, as they included heated debates over concepts such as guilt and responsibility, patriotism, nationalism and internationalism as well as revolution, counterrevolution and consolidation.

From the very conceptual level – applying the classical conceptualization of foreign policy as confidential, opposed to the principle of publicity – the government wanted to keep the foreign political decision-making to as small and restrictive circles as possible. During his premiership, István Bethlen was the undisputed *primus motor* of foreign policy, even though most of the time another loyal politician nominally held the Foreign Affairs portfolio. No major decisions were taken without the consent of the Regent, who, despite his somewhat reclusive role regarding day-to-day politics, kept himself informed on the proceedings and had the last word in important matters. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the House Committee for Foreign Affairs were compliant intermediators in the formulation and operationalization of the high-level decisions, as well as presenting them to Parliament for legitimization.<sup>894</sup>

Despite this and despite the virtually non-existent chances of resisting the government supermajority in the implementation of the decisions prescribed, the opposition always found ways to rhetorically challenge the government and offer competing solutions. As seen before, the contestation centred around the core concepts of Hungarian identity and Hungary's place in the world throughout history. The cases for this chapter have been chosen specifically because they exemplify how Parliament was utilized as *the* arena for challenging the predetermined narrative presented by the government. From those challenges we can see that the contemporary Parliament was very well aware of the options Hungary had in its foreign political inclination in the interwar era. The revisionist policy was conducted in full awareness of the alternatives and of the risks, but when they manifested during the Second World War, the politicians and also historiography resorted to the conceptualization of Hungarian foreign

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<sup>894</sup> Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 95–96, 102–108.

policy as an ‘inescapable track’ (*kényszerpálya*), according to which Hungary had no independent choice over its foreign political decisions in the interwar era. A closer look at the parliamentary debate thus challenges the latter explanation.

This chapter analyses four distinct cases in the parliamentary debate on Hungarian foreign policy from 1920 to 1927. The obvious starting point is the ratification of the Peace Treaty of Trianon in late 1920, when the House was forced to rationalize the impossible; that it should approve the surrender of two thirds of the territory and population of pre-war Greater Hungary into the hands of the successor states, which were considered culturally inferior and ill-deposed towards Hungary. In that very debate we can already identify the different strains of the revisionist discourse that reappeared in different forms throughout the interwar period; the unyielding defiance, demonstrated especially by the radical Right, and the mitigating reliance on future improvement rationalized by the conservative government. In fact, these would complement each other in justifying the decisions of the near future, in which the revision was pursued opportunistically, either through international mediation or through clandestine activism.

This conscious ambiguity was operationalized in the second case, the referendum organized in the city of Sopron and its immediate environs in late 1921, the first success of the revision attempt, and the only one achieved by legal means and international mediation,<sup>895</sup> but not without the considerable support of paramilitary activism. As the citizens had chosen the area to remain part of Hungary, the government drafted a commemoration bill, where the title of *Civitas Fidelissima* was officially bestowed upon the city of Sopron. The triumphant achievement was broadly interpreted as the first success of the revision policy, soon to be followed by others. Nevertheless, the debate on the memorial bill brought about the familiar contestations between the government and the opposition over inclusive and exclusive Hungarian identity, such as the rhetorical proprietorship of the concept of patriotism.

The third case concerns Hungary’s entry into the League of Nations in 1923. Here, again, the rhetorical rationalization of the dubious choice – aligning with the body that was seen by many as a mere tool of the victorious powers safeguarding the status quo, and wilfully accepting the Covenant that had originally been imposed to Hungary as a part of the detested Trianon Treaty in order to safeguard it – reveals how the various rhetorical strategies were employed to make the decision look favourable and further foster the revision hopes. There the domestic political strife between the government and the Social Democratic opposition was also projected onto the foreign political discourse, resulting in contestation over concepts of representation, equality and ultimately of Hungary’s dignity in the eyes of the world.<sup>896</sup>

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<sup>895</sup> The Vienna Resolutions of 1938 and 1940 that returned significant parts of Czechoslovak and Romanian territory to Hungary were generated under Axis pressure in the immediate context of the Second World War.

<sup>896</sup> Comparatively, in the post-war national debates about the League of Nations, the interconnected prospects for domestic and international democratization were actively applied transnationally to legitimize the accession to the League for nations

As with the case of Sopron, the last case, the ratification of the Treaty of Friendship signed with Italy in 1927, was interpreted as a major foreign political breakthrough, a way out of international isolation, a new beginning for a successful revision policy and an opening for profitable trade connections. This was in turn questioned by the opposition, which interpreted a treaty with the Fascist state as dangerous from both domestic and foreign political viewpoints; that Hungary was taking steps not only towards sympathising but also emulating Fascism and, moreover, becoming Italy's pawn in the aggressive power game in Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. Again, the debate, which involved dissenting conceptualizations of the international situation and competing representations of foreign political expertise, demonstrated both the political polyphony within the Parliament and the government's low tolerance of dissenting voices, eventually curtailed by abusing the House Rules.

## 4.2 The overarching Trianon, 1920

### 4.2.1 Conceptualizing the unspeakable

The Peace Treaty of Trianon (1920), which concluded the First World War, stripped Hungary of its former grandeur. The ruling nation of the eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy was reduced to one third of its former territory and population, becoming surrounded by its former dependencies, the successor states now hostile towards Hungary. Thus Trianon instantly became a central concept of nation-building through victimization and shared ordeals, encompassing the whole Hungarian tragedy narrative in one word, its weight comparable only to that of another historical defeat, the battle of Mohács in 1526.<sup>897</sup> Its political uses were ubiquitous – not only in the foreign policy discourse, but also in the internal counterrevolutionary 'normalization', where revision was coupled with the goal of restoring order in the country and revitalizing the Hungarian nation. Many elements of the Trianon Treaty, its preparation and implementation as well as the manifold forms of Hungarian revisionism have already been thoroughly studied, including the cultural commemorations of the losses, as well as the manifold revision attempts during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>898</sup> This chapter analyses the starting point of the trauma and the construction of revisionism from the parliamentary perspective, namely the brief but dramatic debate on the ratification of the treaty in the Hungarian

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that equally doubted its practical significance, eg. Finland, Sweden and Germany. For them it was also a matter of considered choice for the 'western' multinational polity – both arguments also raised in the Hungarian debates. See Ihalainen 2018.

<sup>897</sup> In Mohács the Ottomans led by Suleiman the Magnificent defeated the Hungarian army led by King Louis II and eventually conquered most of mediaeval Greater Hungary, ending its existence as a sovereign power. Cartledge 2006, 78–79.

<sup>898</sup> See e.g. Ablonczy 2010; Romsics 2003; Száraz 2011; Zeidler 2007.

National Assembly in November 1920. At that time the outcome of the treaty was already all too evident, and Parliament had very little say in the matter, yet both the government and the opposition used the opportunity to present their unyielding opposition to the treaty. At the level of argumentation, the utter humiliation was processed with various rhetorical strategies, including victimization, mitigation and defiance.

As with other post-war developments, in the reception of the peace treaty Hungary was not operating as a purely national case, but was acutely aware of transnational currents. The German outrage over the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 was applied equally in nationalist agitation in the context of drafting the Weimar Constitution; Germany turned politically inwards, having lost its faith in the 'western' system. The conceptualization of the 'shameful peace' fuelled the bitter nationalism that would help the National Socialists to power fifteen years later. Simultaneously, the Austrians were disheartened as the treaty of Saint-Germain treated Austria not as a successor state but as a defeated power. Thus, in all the Central Powers, the reception of the peace treaties culminated in a sense of disappointment and injustice, moreover, the feeling of having been betrayed by the Wilsonian ideals, which were now applied only to the successor states, at the expense of the defeated. Overall, the austerity of the victors led to pervasive distrust towards the West, western values and the foreign policy of the Entente; the central powers sensed that they had the intimate knowledge of the precarious situation in the East Central Europe, which the West had ignored and thus revealed its own failure to grasp continental matters. Still, the Hungarian case of Trianon stands out; from the beginning it was consciously applied as a tool of the counterrevolutionary nation-building; that Hungary was constantly under existential threat, against which survival could only be guaranteed through relentless nationalism and national unity, coupled with the binding duty of revisionism.<sup>899</sup>

The former Prime Minister and the future Speaker of the National Assembly, Károly Huszár, at that moment serving as chairman of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, began the presentation of the memorandum concerning the ratification bill with a revealing passage: "I have the *misfortune* to present the memorandum of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, concerning the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty ..."<sup>900</sup> At the onset, he stated clearly that there existed no rational arguments for the bill, but that external pressure had made it mandatory in the interests of national survival.<sup>901</sup> The National Assembly was rhetorically rendered helpless in the face of such overwhelming hardship, with no option but to grudgingly ratify the treaty.<sup>902</sup> Huszár ended his address in due ceremonial manner, by reciting the already famous revisionist poem *Hungarian Credo*:

<sup>899</sup> Ihalainen 2017, 444–445; Konrad 2014, 618–624.

<sup>900</sup> "Van szerencsétlenségem bejelenteni a külügyi bizottságnak a jelentését a trianoni szerződés becikkelyezéséről szóló törvényjavaslat tárgyába ..." Károly Huszár, 10.11.1920, NN VI/1920, 442. Emphasis VH.

<sup>901</sup> Károly Huszár, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 4.

<sup>902</sup> Károly Huszár, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 4; József Jármy, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

"I believe in one God,  
I believe in one Fatherland.  
I believe in one divine justice,  
I believe in Hungarian Resurrection!"<sup>903</sup>

In response to which the whole House stood up and answered: "We believe!"<sup>904</sup>

Such religious-nationalist ceremonialism underlined the Hungarian dualist attitude of victimization coupled with defiance, and its overwhelming support in the counterrevolutionary Parliament. In a similar vein, the treaty and its causes were conceptualized not only through direct references to "gross injustice"<sup>905</sup> and "violent imposition of foreign interests upon us,"<sup>906</sup> but also with more timeless and distanced notions such as "act of destiny"<sup>907</sup> and "sorrowful fate of our fatherland."<sup>908</sup> In so doing, the parliamentarians were effectively placing Trianon among the national canon of historical tragedies – where it would become the prime example, comparable only to the defeat at Mohács.

Another manifestation of the victimization argument was contesting Hungary's guilt of for its participation in the First World War. The Hungarian rationalization was that as Hungary had had no independent foreign policy within the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, it had been unable to prevent the declaration of war, and was thus undeserving of the form of punishment the Trianon Treaty inflicted. This kind of argument was presented by Aladár Balla, speaking as the chairman of the Legislative Committee:

"For me the situation is twice as hard, as in the past my political conviction was always against that groundless and unnecessary war. I always wholeheartedly opposed the war that preceded the present catastrophe."<sup>909</sup>

Especially bitter was the fact that Hungary had never lost the war in the field against those nations now profiting from its defeat; Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia had just happened to be on the winning side at the end of the war.<sup>910</sup> Now it seemed they had received a *carte blanche* from the Entente to exploit Hungary.<sup>911</sup> The reading of the ratification bill formed a ceremonial model for the successive nation-building bills; they all opened with a lament on the hardship imposed on Hungary by a cruel destiny and a relentless West, thus reciprocally

<sup>903</sup> "Hiszek egy Istenben, / Hiszek egy hazában. / Hiszek egy isteni örök igazságban, / Hiszek Magyarország feltámadásában!" Károly Huszár, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>904</sup> "A Nemzetgyűlés tagjai felállva kiáltják: Hiszünk!", 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>905</sup> "... égbekiáltó igazságtalanság ..." Károly Huszár, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 4.

<sup>906</sup> "... idegen akaratok reánk való erőszakolása ..." Károly Huszár, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 4.

<sup>907</sup> "... a sors döntése ..." Aladár Balla, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>908</sup> "... hazánknak szomorú sorsa ..." József Jármay, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>909</sup> "Kétszeresen nehéz a helyzet reám nézve, mert az én politikai multam és meggyőződéseim mindig az ok- és szükségnélküli háború ellen foglalt állást. A mostani katasztrófát előidéző nagy háborút is egész lelkemből mindig elleneztem." Aladár Balla, 13.5.1920, NN VII/1920, 5. See also István Bethlen's speech on the memory of István Tisza in 1926, Bethlen 2000, 233–239.

<sup>910</sup> Kunó Klebelsberg, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 10.

<sup>911</sup> Jenő Czettler, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 10.

drawing legitimization from the experience of Trianon and maintaining and renewing the spirit of revisionism.

#### 4.2.2 Unyielding nationalism and organic unity

István Friedrich, another former Prime Minister,<sup>912</sup> took the argument instead to more tangible levels and towards the recent developments in domestic politics. According to Friedrich, at the time of the fall of the Soviet Republic in 1919, the counterrevolutionary Hungary would have had the opportunity to convince the Entente of its national strength and reliability, enabling it to retain its territorial integrity against the outrageous demands of the successor states.<sup>913</sup> Instead, the Hungarian discourse had revolved only around domestic matters and petty power games; “the nation was drugged from within with such great pompous vanity.”<sup>914</sup> Now, a full year later, nothing had been achieved and the price to pay was at hand. Friedrich sharply attacked the past governments, which had not fulfilled their duty of reconstruction and reclamation of Hungary’s power. As a radical counterrevolutionary, he believed he had been on the right path during his brief tenure as Prime Minister, but after having to cede power to his ‘lesser’ competitors, had been obliged to witness the dissipation of the momentum of the counterrevolutionary movement in petty politics, while the prospects of the restoration of Hungary’s international authority and internal order faded.<sup>915</sup> For Friedrich, the peace treaty was not the unconditional dictate as it was understood by the majority, but an “Entente bluff”,<sup>916</sup> along with the ideals of pacifism, the right of self-determination and especially the League of Nations; all empty notions aimed to divert the small nations from the fact they were being manipulated by the Great Powers. Thus Hungary was not defeated, but misguided and betrayed, and should not yield in the face of international pressure.<sup>917</sup>

Friedrich went on to argue that the present House was not even legitimate to ratify the treaty, as it represented only the population of the mutilated Hungary, not the greater Hungarian nation.<sup>918</sup> The House could not unilaterally

<sup>912</sup> Originally a left-wing liberal and a supporter of Mihály Károlyi, István Friedrich (1883–1951) swapped sides and emerged as a counterrevolutionary leader after the fall of the Soviet Republic in 1919, ousted the interim government of Social Democrat Gyula Peidl, forming a short-lived government of his own, and thus eventually, albeit unwillingly, helped the conservatives back to power. By the time of the debate, he had already parted ways with the counterrevolutionary government he had himself helped to establish. As an opposition Member he was a controversial politician with few allies, eventually shifting towards the far Right. Balogh 1976; MÉL: Friedrich, István; Vidor 1921, 48–49.

<sup>913</sup> István Friedrich, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>914</sup> “... nagy ünnepélyes külsőségekkel narkotizálták a nemzetet befelé ...” István Friedrich, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>915</sup> István Friedrich, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>916</sup> “...entente-blöff ...” István Friedrich, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>917</sup> István Friedrich, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5.

<sup>918</sup> István Friedrich, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5. Friedrich was again appealing to a transnational argument; in the European context, political play on parliamentary mandate and the rhetorical denial of it constituted a tool for conservative and authoritarian politicians to limit the parliamentarization of politics, especially foreign



allow the people of the occupied territories be cut off from the nation, conceptualized as organic and indivisible. Also, in rhetorically dismissing the provisional constitutional settlement of March 1920, Friedrich delegitimized the authority of the present Parliament and Government to ratify the treaty; with the King in exile and the Upper House dissolved, there were no legitimate constitutional organs that could be trusted with such a fundamental decision.<sup>919</sup> Friedrich made use of his position as an ignored visionary to the full. He still believed that, if given enough time and support, his government could have negotiated a more favourable treaty for Hungary. As this did not come to pass, he vented his anger both on his former counterrevolutionary comrades and the western powers, feeling betrayed by both.

Duke Lajos Windischgrätz<sup>920</sup> appealed to the Hungarian basic tenet of national dignity and pride, which should also include allegiance to international treaties. Ergo, in ratifying the peace treaty, government and parliament would be vested with full responsibility for its implementation. Windischgrätz sharply criticized those who viewed the ratification as a mere necessary evil, a formality that could later be revised.<sup>921</sup> Windischgrätz's metaphor of the treaty as "a death sentence of our millennial constitution and independence"<sup>922</sup> signalled the general dismay at the terms of the peace treaty, and conversely the binding national mission of reconstructing Hungary. Windischgrätz was keen to remind the House of the separate peace plans drafted in negotiations led by him with the Entente in 1918 and how much better terms they would have achieved.<sup>923</sup> References to such a possibility revealed how unclear the state of international relations was to some members of the Hungarian elite, and how profound was their wishful thinking of a just treaty. From that position, the utter victimization was instantaneously turned into defiant revisionism, where no sacrifice was too great:

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policy and the constitutional reforms, during the World War and in the post-war era. See Ihalainen 2017, 93, 123, 214

<sup>919</sup> István Friedrich, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 5. Cf. Chapter 2.2.

<sup>920</sup> A member of a Habsburg loyalist aristocratic family, Duke Lajos Windischgrätz (1882–1963) led an adventurous life; when serving in the Austro-Hungarian Embassy in Russia, he volunteered to participate the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–05. After returning to Hungary he became a member of the pre-war Upper House per peerage and rose to prominent positions in the dualist era administration, including service as a counsellor of King Charles. Towards the end of the World War he conducted negotiations for a separate peace with Entente representatives; he saw that Karolyi's revolution of 1918 negated all these attempts and since then looked upon Karolyi as a traitor. In 1920 he entered the counterrevolutionary Parliament as a Member of the legitimist Right. He would continue his adventurous career, being involved in the Franc forgery scandal in 1925 and ending up as an agent of the Gestapo in the late 1930s and during the Second World War. MÉL: Windischgrätz, Lajos, herceg, Windischgraetz, Windisch-Graetz, Windisch-Grätz; Vidor 1921, 163–164.

<sup>921</sup> Lajos Windischgrätz, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 6.

<sup>922</sup> "... ezeréves alkotmányunk, függetlenségünk halálos ítéleté ..." Lajos Windischgrätz, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 6.

<sup>923</sup> Lajos Windischgrätz, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 6–7.

“As long as one single square metre of soil which belongs inside the ancient Hungarian borders remains in foreign hands, as long there shall be neither order nor peace in Europe ...”<sup>924</sup>

Interestingly, both Friedrich and Windischgrätz referred to their personal experiences and own efforts for a more just peace, efforts that had come to nothing. In a pre-emptive rebuttal of any potential accusations of failure, both chose to prove their patriotism by appearing rhetorically defiant and uncompromising towards the treaty, the contemporary politicians trying to tackle the matter and in general towards the post-war European order and Entente as its guarantor. However, at the same time their arguments were also in opposition against each other's, revealing the many and complex divides that had already emerged within the ostensibly united counterrevolutionary Parliament; even when the basic mood was that of revisionism and nationalism, all Members interpreted and operationalized them from their own perspectives, where personal background, experiences of war and of the revolutionary years, as well as individual world view were more decisive factors than any party allegiance. Still, both Friedrich and Windischgrätz served the emerging revisionist policy by providing the radical point of reference, constructing and normalizing the discourse of unyielding defiance, which legitimized the revisionist activism for the following decades. The government, although officially distancing itself from the most adventurous activists, made use of them in the construction of the longer line of foreign policy; the official and covert sides of revisionist policy intersected on occasions where the government approved clandestine activism, such as the case of the forgery of French Francs in 1925, a project in which Windischgrätz, coincidentally, had a leading role.<sup>925</sup>

Another vein of sharp criticism of the treaty was delivered in the form of ethno-cultural argumentation by Members from the ceded territories, namely Győző Dvorcsák<sup>926</sup> from Upper Hungary (ceded to Czechoslovakia), Albin Lingauer<sup>927</sup> from Western Hungary (ceded to Austria) and Miklós Kutkafálvay<sup>928</sup>

<sup>924</sup> “Addig, amíg egy négyszög méter föld, mely ősi magyar határainkon belül fekszik, nem lesz a kezünkben, addig Európában rend és csend nem lesz”, Lajos Windischgrätz, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 7; see also István Friedrich, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 6.

<sup>925</sup> Ablonczy 2005; Ormos 2006, 107.

<sup>926</sup> A Slovakian Hungarian historian and publicist, Győző Dvorcsák (b. 1878) was a key producer of pro-Hungarian propaganda among the Slovaks of Upper Hungary before the World War; in 1918 he founded a Slovakian-Hungarian *Rada* that opposed the formation of the Czechoslovakian state and was therefore expelled from the country. After that he travelled widely in an attempt to gain international publicity for Slovaks' 'natural' affiliation with Hungary. An independent Member of Parliament elected on the votes of the refugees from Upper Hungary. Vidor 1921, 38–39.

<sup>927</sup> A war veteran and war invalid, Albin Lingauer (1877–1962) was an early activist of the counterrevolutionary movement, a Habsburg legitimist and a comrade-in-arms of Colonel Lejár. A right-wing Member of the Christian National Party caucus. MÉL: Lingauer, Albin, Lékay-Lingauer; Vidor 1921, 85–86.

<sup>928</sup> A Greek Catholic politician from Ungvár (Užhorod, present-day Ukraine) Miklós Kutkafálvay (b. 1882) served in 1918 as a provincial governor (*főispán*) of Bereg County in Ruthenia, rallying the populace behind the cause of unification with Hungary at the time the area was claimed by Czechoslovakia, Ukraine and Soviet Russia. After

from Ruthenia (ceded to Czechoslovakia, at present part of Ukraine). Claiming to represent the ethnic minorities, they all argued against breaking the 'millennial' organic unity of Greater Hungary and insisted that the nationalities' 'true' loyalty was always to Hungary.<sup>929</sup> Again, the Hungarian nation was constructed as the natural ethno-cultural unit that had the minority nationalities under its benevolent patronage, against the 'imperialistic' tendencies expressed by the successor states.

For Dvorcsák, Slovakian history was inseparable from Hungarian history; Slovaks had sided with Hungarians since time immemorial. Thus no Slovak could think of betraying Hungary and taking part of its dismemberment:<sup>930</sup>

"We will take no part in Hungary's burial, only in its resurrection, which will be a terrible hour for all those who dug Hungary's grave."<sup>931</sup>

As Upper Hungary was one of the territories with most Hungarian population, its secession was particularly outrageous in the post-Trianon atmosphere, and the House was eager to hear aggressive formulations that promised its eventual reclamation – a feat achieved in 1938. Dvorcsák's rhetoric of organic nationalism attempted to reverse the contemporary Czechoslovakian nation-building, legitimized among others through the pro-Czech and anti-Hungarian sentiment Dvorcsák had been combatting during the last years of the World War. His argumentation can also be interpreted as a personal demonstration of loyalty towards Hungary, a necessary step to retain his credibility despite being a 'foreigner' in the midst of rising xenophobic nationalism.

Lingauer concurred with Dvorcsák in presenting the idealized multi-national unity of Greater Hungary:

"The Germans, Wends,<sup>932</sup> Slovaks and Croats of Western Hungary are Hungarians in their hearts; they still want to remain the loyal sons of the Hungarian Fatherland. They expect nothing else from us, but that we would respect their native languages and national characteristics; they expect nothing else but a fraternal, equal treatment and

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being forced to leave the county ceded to Czechoslovakia, he was appointed by the Hungarian government as secretary for Ruthen affairs in order to continue the pro-Hungarian propaganda in the area. Vidor 1921, 84–84.

<sup>929</sup> See e.g. Miklós Kutkafálvy, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 9.

<sup>930</sup> Győző Dvorcsák, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 7. There was some truth in this; in the insecure post-war atmosphere, many Slovaks remained unconvinced of the stability of the Czechoslovak state and were not ready to relinquish their traditional cultural, political and economic ties to Hungary. Czech nationalism, in turn, treated Slovaks with a certain amount of condescension, a need to guide them away from the 'unhealthy' Hungarian influence. Slovak discontent regarding this provoked many to side with the Hungarians at least at the level of mutual sympathy against the emerging Czech rule. Hungarian anti-Trianon propaganda naturally exploited this spirit and attempted to instigate Slovak separatism. Nurmi 1999, 72–77, 130–134; Vares & Vares 2019, 94–95.

<sup>931</sup> "Nem akarunk résztvenni Magyarország temetésén, majd csak a feltámadásán, amely rettenetes lészen mindazoknak, akik Magyarország sirját megásták." Győző Dvorcsák, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 7.

<sup>932</sup> The name 'Wend', a loan word from German, has in different times referred to several Western Slavic peoples. In this context, it was used to refer to Slovenes living in the former Greater Hungarian territory. A Magyar nyelv értelmező szótára: VEND. See also Hobsbawm 1994, 68.

understanding; they expect no special privileges, only to be treated just as we treat our Hungarian brethren."<sup>933</sup>

He also presented one central topic in the Hungarian victimization discourse, that of being unjustly plundered not only by former dependencies but also by Austria, the partner in the Dual Monarchy and the real belligerent that had drawn Hungary with it into the turmoil of the World War. If Austria really would accept the undeserved cession of Western Hungary, it would align itself with the enemies of Hungary.<sup>934</sup> Another Member from Western Hungary, the future Minister of Culture Kunó Klebelsberg, responded to the accusation with his usual conciliatory tone, in an attempt to build understanding between the two defeated nations, which should not turn against, nor try to exploit each other.<sup>935</sup>

Kutkafálvy then went on to outline the Ruthenian stance – or, to be more precise, what he rhetorically constructed as being the genuine representation of the Ruthenian people – on the peace treaty and ceding of territory. For him, it was Czechoslovak imperialism that had unjustly manipulated the ethnicity figures in order to claim Ruthenia from Hungary. In his reading of the Peace Treaties of Trianon and Saint-Germain, they should have granted autonomy for the Ruthenians, a promise now betrayed by Czechoslovakia.<sup>936</sup>

All Members from the ceded territories based their arguments the same rhetorical elements. For them, the partition of Hungary meant the breaking of a multicultural, yet organic unity of the Greater Hungarian nation. Thus the post-war peace treaties fell heavily not only on Hungarians, but also on the former minorities, who were portrayed as loyal subjects of the Kingdom of Hungary, now facing the perils of shattered unity, *despite* being able to live in nation-states of their own. This form of argumentation greatly idealized the Hungaro-centric nationality politics of Greater Hungary, where minorities actually had little representation or autonomy.<sup>937</sup> Conversely, the argumentation vilified the successor states, especially Czechoslovakia, which were fulfilling their imperialist and expansionist aims by right of Entente goodwill. As before, the Hungaro-centric discourse rendered the nation-building of the successor states contrived and self-defeating; the artificial states of Czechoslovakia, Austria or Yugoslavia would not stand the test of time and would eventually witness the reunification of the organic unit – willingly or not. This kind of rhetoric preceded and normalized the continuous calls for border revision, and when the time came in the late 1930s, there was no questioning their legitimacy, as it was after all merely a rectification of past mistakes at the expense of the failed states.

<sup>933</sup> "Nyugat-Magyarország németéi, vendjei, tótjai, horvátjai magyar szívvel éreznek; hú fiaik kivannak lenni ezután is a magyar hazának. Nem kivannak tőlünk egyebet, csak azt, hogy anyanyelvüket, faji érzékenységüket respektáljuk; nem kivannak tőlünk mást, mint testvéries, egyenlő elbánást, megértést; nem kivannak külön privilégiumokat, csak azt akarják, hogy épen úgy kezeljük őket, mint ahogyan kezeljük a faj magyar testvéreket." Albin Lingauer, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 8.

<sup>934</sup> Albin Lingauer, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 8.

<sup>935</sup> Kunó Klebelsberg, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 10.

<sup>936</sup> Miklós Kutkafálvy, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 8-9.

<sup>937</sup> See e.g. Vares & Vares 2019. 52.

The representatives of the minorities quite naturally placed special emphasis on the concept of national self-determination,<sup>938</sup> one of the leading Wilsonian ideals, which Hungary repeatedly made use of in the vindication of its rights.<sup>939</sup> As the successor states had not granted the Hungarian-minded minorities that right, they had revealed their own chauvinistic nationalism and hypocrisy concerning the idea. Conversely, self-determination was also the central argument against the ratification: as the population of the ceded territories had never given the Hungarian Parliament a mandate to abandon them, they would continue to oppose the ratification of the peace treaty. The least that could be done in justice to the population would be a referendum on annexation.<sup>940</sup> Referendum was indeed one of the favourite concepts in the mitigation of the Trianon trauma in Hungarian policy. Such wishful thinking was aired in connection with all the territories ceded in the treaty, yet only applied once in 1921 concerning the town of Sopron and its immediate environs in Western Hungary.<sup>941</sup>

The multitude of arguments and remarks in the context of the Treaty of Trianon also reveals the ubiquitous content attributed to the concept of Trianon, subsequently reapplied time and again in domestic and foreign political discourse. From the very outset, Trianon was thus consciously constructed to be not only a political discourse in itself but also a nexus of diverse counterrevolutionary discourses that could use it for equally diverse purposes.

### 4.2.3 Government credibility at stake

Delivering the last speech in the debate, Prime Minister Pál Teleki<sup>942</sup> defended the ratification with a very personal and dramatic speech. He began by repeating the narrative of how Hungary had laid down her arms in the belief she would be treated with dignity by the victors but had been betrayed. Instead of justice, Hungary had received undeservedly harsh punishment.<sup>943</sup> He reminded the House of all the work he and other leading politicians had done during the tumultuous moments of defeat to ensure that the Hungarian position in the peace

<sup>938</sup> Unlike István Friedrich, see above.

<sup>939</sup> See Romsics 1995, 88–89; Zeidler 2007, 78.

<sup>940</sup> See e.g. Albin Lingauer, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 8; Kunó Klebelsberg, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 10; Jenő Czettler, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 10–11.

<sup>941</sup> See Chapter 4.3.

<sup>942</sup> The renowned geographer Pál Teleki (1879–1941) rose to political prominence as a member of the early counterrevolutionary governments. He was, along with István Bethlen, the chief architect of Hungary's post-war political structure and especially her foreign policy. As Minister of Foreign Affairs he had been part of the Hungarian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, in the vain attempt to convince the Entente to make concessions for Hungary. He served as Prime minister from June 1920 to April 1921, when he resigned in favour of Bethlen in the aftermath of the return attempt of King Charles. He continued to promote the revision of Trianon nationally and internationally throughout the interwar era, also through his scientific activity, and served in many official positions. He was again called to form a government in 1939 (see below). MÉL: Teleki, Pál; Vidor 1921, 147–149.

<sup>943</sup> Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 11.

negotiations was as good as possible.<sup>944</sup> However, as they travelled to the Paris peace conference, Teleki was already certain their requests would not be met. Thus they were no more working for temporal success, but for Hungarian dignity “before the tribunal of history.”<sup>945</sup> Hungary stood there helpless and sincere, no longer expecting anything, not even remorse; according to Teleki, they saw that the whole peace process was directed against Germany along with all its allies, and nothing could stop it or steer it away from its targets.<sup>946</sup> In the end, “we received the most brutal of all peace treaties.”<sup>947</sup>

At this point of the speech the House again witnessed a dramatic performance symbolic of the spirit of the day. Before Teleki’s address, a number of Members had left the chamber in a protest at the ratification. They gathered in the Main Hall of the Parliament Building and signed a declaration of protest, after which they began to sing the *Himnusz*, the Hungarian National Anthem.<sup>948</sup> Upon hearing the singing, Teleki interrupted his speech and the Members still present in the House stood up and joined in the singing, not wanting to appear unpatriotic in the face of the protesters despite their readiness to ratify the treaty.<sup>949</sup> What had begun as a protest was thus effectively transformed into a patriotic ritual, which, combined with Teleki’s eloquence in vindication of Hungary’s rights, again reinforced the place of Trianon among the other historical tragedies and victimization narratives of Hungary, upon which the post-war nation was constructed, and conversely, the national mission that would one day lead the nation to the deserved triumph.

From the victimization narrative Teleki turned to mitigation efforts. Since the signing of the treaty on 4 June, many things had happened, some of which might later turn to Hungary’s advantage. Teleki’s argument for the ratification was based upon Hungary’s dire need to establish international credibility. This was also projected into domestic politics and directed to the House: as long as Parliament continued to ponder and disagree on the matter, Hungary could not become a trustworthy state and would not be able to achieve even the smallest of concessions.<sup>950</sup> Teleki also pointed out that Hungary’s internal problems were directly comparable to the inter-European post-war turmoil: the same kind of political unrest occurred not only in Germany, but also within the victorious states, Italy, France and Britain.<sup>951</sup> That was also Hungary’s chance to turn the

<sup>944</sup> Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 11.

<sup>945</sup> “... a történelem ítélőszéke elé ...” Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 11.

<sup>946</sup> Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 11.

<sup>947</sup> “Megkaptuk a békeszerződések legkegyetlenebbikét.” Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 11.

<sup>948</sup> Zeidler 2009, 52–53.

<sup>949</sup> NN VII/1920, 13.11.1920, 11. The verses are not explicitly reproduced in the protocols, but most probably they at least contain the following parts of the *Himnusz* (Ferenc Kölcsey, 1823): “*Bal sors akit régen tép, / Hozz rá víg esztendő, / Megbűnhődte már e nép / A múltat s jövődőt!*” Literal English translation: “Long torn by ill fate / Bring upon it a time of relief / This nation has suffered for all sins / Of the past and of the future!” Source of the translation: Körössi 2003.

<sup>950</sup> Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 12.

<sup>951</sup> Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 12. See also Gerwarth & Horne 2013; Gerwarth 2017; Ihalainen 2017.

tide: by restoring internal order, Hungary would appear as a credible companion – and that would, in one way or another, open the way for future revision negotiations. Such appeals to the beneficial international currents, however implausible, were absolutely necessary rhetorical backdoors to rationalize the impossible and to convince the House that the matter was not entirely settled – and never would.

Teleki identified himself closely with the peace treaty; as a geographer, he had participated in the drafting of the treaty,<sup>952</sup> as Foreign Minister he had signed it. Now, as Prime Minister, he was going to empty the bitter cup and propose the ratification of the treaty. Teleki therefore asked the House to begin an indictment process against himself for his part in the Trianon Treaty, thus assuming the role of a scapegoat.<sup>953</sup> By putting his personal position and honour at stake, and by directly offering himself as a sacrifice, he rallied the House behind himself.<sup>954</sup> Minister of Justice Vilmos Pál Tomcsányi<sup>955</sup> came to his aid immediately by stating that if Teleki were to be prosecuted, so should the whole government.<sup>956</sup> The position was further reinforced, as Teleki also offered the resignation of his government to the Regent, who immediately refused it on the basis that the ratification itself could not be blamed on the government, and that the government was needed to ensure the restoration and maintenance of order in Hungary.<sup>957</sup>

However, Teleki stated that the question of ratification should not be interpreted as a vote of confidence for the government, but as a matter of conscience for each and every one; he could not deny the former speakers their arguments but appealed to them to think once more. Hungary could not do anything to change the circumstances, nor could it reverse the history of past years to right the wrongs, but it could work for the future, restore internal order and reclaim its place among the trusted and honourable nations.<sup>958</sup>

The parliamentary debate ended with ratification of the Trianon Treaty, not unanimously but widely accepted as a pressing necessity. Despite their varied rhetorical strategies, all Members for and against the ratification made one thing

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<sup>952</sup> Already in 1918 Teleki had produced the carefully crafted map of the nationalities of Greater Hungary, designed to create the impression that Hungarians were indeed the dominant ethnicity in the Carpathian basin. Romsics 2001, 162–163.

<sup>953</sup> Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 14.

<sup>954</sup> Teleki's offer of self-sacrifice can naturally be seen as a mere rhetorical tool, but knowing his ultimate fate, one can also say that he was indeed serious about his political responsibility. In April 1941 Teleki, then serving his second term as Prime Minister, assumed responsibility for Hungary's entry into the Second World War on the side of the Axis in the gravest possible way by committing suicide. MÉL: Teleki, Pál; Romsics 1999, 203.

<sup>955</sup> A member of the upper aristocracy and a lawyer with international education, Vilmos Pál Tomcsányi (1880–1959) had had a prominent career in the Ministry of Justice since 1906. He was elected to the post-war National Assembly as a member of the Smallholder Party in 1920 and served as Minister of Justice 1920–1922, being responsible for the construction of the legal basis for the interwar political system. He would serve as the governor of the reannexed Ruthenia in 1942–44. MÉL: Tomcsányi, Vilmos Pál; Vidor 1921, 150–151.

<sup>956</sup> Vilmos Pál Tomcsányi, Minister of Justice, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 14.

<sup>957</sup> Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 15.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 18.

<sup>958</sup> Pál Teleki, Prime Minister, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 14.

clear: Hungary would never yield, the matter was not settled for anyone as long as their brethren remained under foreign occupation. For them, the revisionist policy was a natural reaction to the unjust treaty, and the mindset offered no constraints for correcting – or avenging – the wrongs. As Miklós Fogrács<sup>959</sup> worded his conviction at the end of the debate:

“I only have a couple of words for them – and I believe and assure you that those behind these walls, behind these coercive so-called demarcation lines, shall also hear them – that we all promise we shall never, never, even for one minute, forget them, and we shall not rest until we bring them back to us. In this, God help us!”<sup>960</sup>

Where the Right-wing Members of the House spontaneously pronounced, standing: “God help us!”<sup>961</sup>

The parliamentary debate on the Treaty of Trianon touched the manifold and profound issues the Treaty implied for the Hungarians. At the same time, the debate filled its role in incorporating the trauma of Trianon into the post-war nation-building, namely, constructing the nation through victimization and the insurmountable injustice, the rectification of which was now included in the national mission. The organic and millennial Hungarian nation was conceptualized as the natural ethno-cultural unit of the Carpathian basin, encompassing the loyal subjects of Slovakian and Ruthenian ethnicity. This was another legitimization of the revision policy that followed.

### 4.3 The Making of “Civitas Fidelissima”, 1922

#### 4.3.1 The Sopron crisis, the referendum and the commemoration bill

In December 1921, as the only major exception to the Trianon Peace Treaty, the Conference of Ambassadors following the implementation of the peace treaties allowed a referendum to take place in the city of Sopron and its immediate environs concerning whether the area should rejoin Hungary or be ceded to Austria as the treaty originally determined. The referendum was the result of a long-term civil and paramilitary crisis between the two defeated states, with transnational undertones, and ultimately mediated by the Great Powers. Of all the territorial losses in Trianon, Hungary was perhaps most disgruntled about

<sup>959</sup> A self-educated smallholder who had earned his position through long-term commitment to local administration, Miklós Forgrács (b. 1879) was elected to Parliament in 1920 as a member of the Smallholder Party. Vidor 1921, 48.

<sup>960</sup> “Csak az az egy pár szavam van hozzájuk, – s hiszem és vallom, hogy ezek ezeken a falakon és az úgynevezett kényszerítő demarkációs vonalakon is túl fognak hangzani – hogy mi mindannyian megígérjük, hogy róluk soha, de soha, egy percig sem felejtezzük meg és meg nem nyugszunk addig, amíg őket hozzánk vissza nem csatoljuk. Az Isten minket ugy segítjen!” Miklós Forgrács, 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 11.

<sup>961</sup> “A Nemzetgyűlés jobboldalon ülő tagjai felállva kiáltják: Isten ugy segítjen!” 13.11.1920, NN VII/1920, 11.



the loss of Western Hungary, considered an integral part of the Hungarian heartland. In summer 1921, during the transfer of authority from Hungary to Austria imposed by the treaties, Hungary had resorted to armed resistance, mostly conducted by irregular detachments of right-wing officers as the government could be thus exonerated of responsibility for breaching the peace terms.<sup>962</sup> During the crisis, Italy intervened as a mediator in an attempt to support Hungary's reconstruction, to create prospects for future co-operation and to deny Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia the opportunity to use the prolonged dispute to further undermine Hungary's international position, which would have upset the regional balance of power. In the Venice protocols of 13 October 1921, Hungary agreed to cede most of Western Hungary (Burgenland) and was in return granted a referendum concerning the Sopron area. The referendum was held on 14–16 December, and a clear majority supported remaining within Hungary.<sup>963</sup>

As the first anniversary of the referendum drew near in late 1922, the memory of the referendum, its success and the patriotism it had expressed was brought to the notice of Parliament in order to be codified into a commemoration law.<sup>964</sup> In line with the idealization of multi-ethnic Greater Hungary, the commemoration bill declared that the people of the Sopron area had "demonstrated their loyalty towards the millennial Hungarian nation without language or race differences."<sup>965</sup> Thus the law was drafted to honour their 'loyalty towards the state' (*államhűség*), which should give hope of a brighter future for the Hungarian nation.<sup>966</sup> The conceptualization of nation in these passages was inclusive, stating that differences in language or race were not incompatible with Hungarian identity, as both Germans and Hungarians, Protestants and Catholics alike, had apparently voted for remaining Hungarian. Thus, on the individual level, the very act of casting a vote, a demonstration of loyalty towards the Hungarian state, was deemed more important than ethnic or religious background. This was quite in line with the ambiguous discourse on inclusive and exclusive nationalism, in which the others of the nation, namely the Socialists and Jews, were collectively accused of being un-Hungarian and they could only prove their patriotism and regain their right to Hungarian identity through individual demonstrations of loyalty.<sup>967</sup>

According to the bill, the city of Sopron was to be entitled "*civitas fidelissima*"<sup>968</sup> and a monument erected to the memory of the referendum on an

<sup>962</sup> In a similar fashion to the White terror during the counterrevolutionary campaign. See e.g. Turbucz 2014, 77–80.

<sup>963</sup> Romsics 1995, 158–159; Vares 2008, 12, 74–75, 230–232, 247.

<sup>964</sup> Bill concerning the memory of the Sopron plebiscite, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 355.

<sup>965</sup> "... nyelvi és faji különbség nélkül az ezeréves magyar államhoz való tántoríthatatlan hűségéről tett bizonyosságot." Bill concerning the memory of the Sopron plebiscite, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 355.

<sup>966</sup> Bill concerning the memory of the Sopron plebiscite, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 355.

<sup>967</sup> See Chapters 2.3. and 2.4.

<sup>968</sup> As an interesting sidenote, the first draft of the bill included a proper Hungarian translation ("*azaz 'igen hű város'*", "*that is, 'a most loyal city'*"), but in its memorandum the Legislative Committee remarked that a translation was not exactly necessary. Despite the construction of national identity being centred on the Hungarian

appropriate site in Sopron, funded partly by a national collection and partly from the state budget.<sup>969</sup> Gathering the budget for the monument from all over Hungary was a pre-calculated, collective and symbolic act of remembrance and reverence, in which every citizen could be involved; as the bill explicitly stated that it would bring the memory of Sopron to the level of every town and every individual throughout the country.<sup>970</sup> The boundaries of state-controlled commemoration and spontaneous civil activity were thus readily and intentionally blurred.<sup>971</sup>

As the justification annex of the bill stated, the symbolic value of the referendum was greater than the territorial gain: in it the “enlightened population, in the free expression of their will, confirmed beyond doubt that the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon, which mutilated our country, are unjust.”<sup>972</sup> There, the concept of ‘enlightened population’ was used to stress the inclusion of those who voted for remaining with Hungary, and as a result, those who voted against it were rhetorically excluded from the Hungarian nation. The actual result had been clearly but not overwhelmingly in favour of Hungary, but nevertheless the legislators consciously chose to use the term ‘beyond doubt’, so as to demonstrate the broad and general appeal of Hungarian patriotism as the lodestar of further revision attempts. The bill also explicitly interpreted that the votes had been cast concerning not only Sopron itself, but also the whole Treaty of Trianon and its requirements: once again paraphrasing the *Hungarian Credo*, the bill announced how the result had “reinforced the hope of an eventual triumph of divine justice in all sons of the Hungarian fatherland.”<sup>973</sup>

Even though the contemporary debate aimed at restricting suffrage and downplaying ordinary people’s role as active citizens, in the case of Sopron the ‘free will’ of the citizens was emphasized as it enhanced the legitimacy of the favourable outcome. Concepts of ‘free will’ and of “free royal city”<sup>974</sup> were brought in and operationalized as examples of the Hungarian historico-political self-understanding of ancient constitutionalism and love of freedom, even at times when the provisions of such constitutionalism were meagre at best.<sup>975</sup>

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language, the political elite still considered proficiency in Latin to be a natural part of gentlemanly education. Bill concerning the memory of the Sopron plebiscite, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 355; Memorandum of the Legislative Committee concerning the bill No. 106, 1.12.1922, NI 112/IV/1922, 46.

<sup>969</sup> Bill concerning the memory of the Sopron plebiscite, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 355.

<sup>970</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 106, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 356.

<sup>971</sup> See also Chapter 3.2.1.

<sup>972</sup> “... érdekelt lakosság akaratának szabad megnyilvánulása kétségbevonhatatlanul beigazolta, hogy a trianoni békeszerződésnek országunk területét megcsonkító rendelkezései igazságtalanok.” Justification annex for the bill No. 106, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 356.

<sup>973</sup> “... a magyar haza minden fiában megerősítette ... az isteni igazság örök diadalába vetett reménységet.” Bill concerning the memory of the Sopron plebiscite, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 355.

<sup>974</sup> “Szabad király város”, Bill concerning the memory of the Sopron plebiscite, 1.12.1922, NI 106/III/1922, 355.

<sup>975</sup> See Chapters 2.2.3 and 3.4.2.

### 4.3.2 Rituals of reminiscence

When the debate concerning the bill opened on 7 December 1922, Zsigmond Hadházy,<sup>976</sup> as the proposer of the bill, began with the already ritualistic lament of the past grievances:

“Let me briefly remind [the House] of the painful fact that according to the injustice of Trianon, the city of Sopron and its environs were condemned to the sorrowful destiny of being torn from the body of Hungary and attached to the adjacent Austria.”<sup>977</sup>

Naturally, no one in the House needed to be actually reminded of the state of affairs, but the opening lament was used consciously as a tool to set the tone of the debate.

From the lament the narrative was turned into a success story, as the “indefatigable work”<sup>978</sup> of the Hungarian government had resulted in an agreement with Austria and moreover, approval from the Great Powers about the referendum in Sopron, and finally reached the climax as the populace vowed their perpetual allegiance as a part of the Hungarian body.<sup>979</sup> Hungary and the Hungarian nation were again given uncontested organic conceptualizations: the parts that had been violently torn from it and unnaturally attached to another body, had now been returned to the rightful owner and mended. The process that had actually begun with paramilitary violence and concluded through multi-national bargaining was thus described and legitimized as the restoration of the ‘natural’ state.

Through the restoration narrative, Hadházy further elaborated the significance of the referendum in the revision hopes:

“Although the Hungarian nation did not for a moment have doubts as to what would be the decision of the city of Sopron, but besides this great expression of fidelity, the nation cannot remain silent ... because the resilience of the population of Sopron and the surrounding area had struck the first blow against the Trianon Peace Treaty.”<sup>980</sup>

Within the same speech act, Hadházy first praised the population of Sopron for their self-evident patriotism, but then moved to the central symbolic value of the referendum as the first blow against the Trianon Treaty. Other members then duly reiterated such a view.<sup>981</sup>

<sup>976</sup> Lawyer and banker Zsigmond Hadházy (b. 1876) had been elected to Parliament in 1920 as a Member of the Smallholder Party and again in 1922 as a Member of the Unity Party. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 76.

<sup>977</sup> “... élénken méltóztatnak még emlékezni arra a fájdalmas tényre, amely szerint a trianoni béke igazságtalansága Sopron városát és környékét arra a szomorú sorsra ítélte, hogy Magyarország testétől elszakíttassék és a szomszédos Ausztriához csatoltassék.” Zsigmond Hadházy, 7.12.1922, NN 67/VI/1922, 205.

<sup>978</sup> “...szívós munkálkodása”, Zsigmond Hadházy, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 205.

<sup>979</sup> Zsigmond Hadházy, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 205.

<sup>980</sup> “Jóllehet a magyar nemzet egy percig sem lehetett kétségben afelől, hogy Sopron városa mit fog határozni, mégis a hűség megnyilatkozásának e nagyszerű ténye mellett a nemzet nem mehet el minden szó nélkül ... mert Sopron város és környéke lakosságának eme magatartása ütötte az első rést a trianoni békeszerződésen.” Zsigmond Hadházy, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 205.

<sup>981</sup> See e.g. József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 206.

Sopronite Member József Östör, in his response, was quick to endorse the bill, and continued to stress its importance. He deemed the case of Sopron to be of such importance that he should not resort to “empty patriotic phrases”<sup>982</sup> which would be mere tautologies; instead, he wanted to thank both the people of Sopron for making their distress known and the government for making use of the favourable moment in the international sphere.<sup>983</sup> This can be interpreted as less-than-subtle acknowledgement of the paramilitary actions of the Hungarian *Freikorps* that finally led to the need for an international settlement.<sup>984</sup> The attitude demonstrates that, despite the rhetoric of a just and legal campaign against the Trianon, even official Hungary was from early on ready to rely on clandestine action to achieve revision goals.<sup>985</sup>

Östör went on to enumerate the specific results of the referendum.<sup>986</sup> He pointed out that even in villages inhabited by German speakers, most votes were cast in favour of Hungary.<sup>987</sup> The result of German speakers voting for Hungary was then translated according to the abovementioned concept of ‘loyalty towards the state’, making it inclusive not only of Hungarians, but of other nations as well. This argument strove to give a favourable position to Hungary as the natural fatherland for different nationalities, against the usual accusation of Hungaro-centric chauvinism, which had been the main argument for the partition of Greater Hungary in Trianon.<sup>988</sup> However, despite the favourable results, the grief persisted; as the new borders had been drawn tightly around Sopron, it had lost the natural *Hinterland* surrounding it and also its historical trade connections to Vienna. Therefore, the government should be ready to return the favour of loyalty towards the people of Sopron with continued financial support from Hungary in compensation for the losses.<sup>989</sup> In his plea for support, Östör also raised the matter of the inclusion of the Germans who remained loyal to Hungary. Good government should also mean support for those Germans who had chosen to integrate into Hungarian society.<sup>990</sup>

Östör also evoked the memory of István Széchenyi, for his hometown and burial place Nagycenk had stood out in the referendum with its nearly 100-percent vote for Hungary. Östör recalled his fears from the autumn of 1921, at the height of the Sopron crisis.

“... when we were already thinking that all was lost, when we were leaving the last service in Sopron's beautiful gothic church of St. Michael, many of us thought that perhaps even the terrible prediction of István Széchenyi, the Greatest Hungarian,

<sup>982</sup> “... puffogó hazafias frázisokat”, József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 205.

<sup>983</sup> József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 206.

<sup>984</sup> Vares 2008, 230–234.

<sup>985</sup> Zeidler 2007, 66–67; Zeidler 2013, 181.

<sup>986</sup> Of the 27 000 franchise, turnout rate was 89,5%, of whom ca. 60% voted for remaining in Hungary, 35% for annexation to Austria. Vares 2008, 266–267; Zeidler 2007, 81.

<sup>987</sup> However, there were equally such villages, which were predominantly pro-Austrian, but their relative weight in the referendum was small – the result was dominated by the city of Sopron with around 70% of the enfranchised population.

<sup>988</sup> József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 206.

<sup>989</sup> József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 207.

<sup>990</sup> József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 207.

might come true, as can be read from his memoirs [reads]: ‘I frequently ask myself, where shall my ashes rest? In my fatherland or abroad? We often thought that we had come to the point that Nagycenk, where Széchenyi’s ashes lie, would be foreign land, and the prediction of the Greatest Hungarian would indeed become a reality.’<sup>991</sup>

At that precarious moment, Östör believed, “the spirit of Széchenyi descended upon us”<sup>992</sup> and gave the Hungarians “the patriotic flame and cold passion”<sup>993</sup> to stand up for their homeland. As a historically canonized figure, Széchenyi was often invoked to epitomize ‘true Hungarian’ identity and thought,<sup>994</sup> but the parable of Östör went even further, giving Széchenyi a divine form, a patriotic spirit guiding the nation.<sup>995</sup>

In the introduction of the bill, Hadházy and Östör served the government goals by defining the guidelines for the debate. Hadházy opened the discourse of the broader and symbolical implications of the Sopron referendum in the revisionist policy, whereas Östör quite tangibly reminded the House of the Sopron crisis and the steadfast patriotism demonstrated by the population as worthy of commemoration. Both speeches included the natural and self-evident conceptualization of the Hungarian nation as organic and indivisible – including the German-speaking underlings who had proved their loyalty in the referendum – and reinforcing that conceptualization as normative, legitimizing the conduct of the Sopron crisis and obliging the House to uphold the spirit of revision.

### 4.3.3 Multi-layered experiences, questions of responsibility and merit

A layer of direct experiences and the multi-layered nature of political discourse was brought to the debate by Östör and taken up by Christian Socialist József Csik, another Member from Sopron. Therefore he chose to express his stance towards the bill “not through the critical spectacles of a historian, nor with the voice of an opposition politician, but through the national sentiment and national spirit.”<sup>996</sup> As usual, he began with a lament on the losses: how it was

<sup>991</sup> “... amidőn már-már azt hittük, hogy minden veszve van, amidőn az utolsó hálaadó istentiszteletről, Sopron gyönyörű gótikus Szent Mihály templomából távoztunk, sokan azt gondoltuk, hogy a legnagyobb magyar jósnak, Széchenyi Istvánnak talán még az a szörnyű jóslása is valóra válik, amelyet emlékirataiban olvashatunk [olvassa]: ‘Hol fognak az én hamvaim pihenni, kérdezem gyakran. Hazámban-e vagy külföldön?’ Gyakran gondoltuk akkor, hogy vájjon odáig jutottunk már, hogy Nagycenk, ahol Széchenyi hamvai porladnak, külföld lesz, és csakugyan valóra fog válni a legnagyobb magyar jósnak jóslása.” József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 207.

<sup>992</sup> “Széchenyi szelleme lebegett felettünk”, József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 207.

<sup>993</sup> “...az a hazafias tűz, az a hideg szenvedély”, József Östör, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 207.

<sup>994</sup> See Chapter 3.3.

<sup>995</sup> The very same politicization of the intertwined memories of Széchenyi, Nagycenk and the Sopron referendum was reapplied by István Bethlen in his speech in 1928. Then, Bethlen equated the loss of Nagycenk to foreign rule with the desecration of Széchenyi’s grave, which was averted as the ‘Most loyal town’ in its expression of patriotism, saved the memory of ‘the Greatest Hungarian.’ István Bethlen’s speech in Nagycenk on 13.10.1928. Bethlen 2000, 138.

<sup>996</sup> “Nem a történettudós kritikus szemüvegén, nem is az ellenzéki politikának górcsővén át [akarom szemlélni ezt a törvényjavaslatot,] hanem a nemzeti érzés és hangulat szemüvegén keresztül.” József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 208.

unimaginable to any Hungarian that the crown jewels of the Fatherland would really be torn away from it.<sup>997</sup> With the lament, Csik turned the attention to the revolutions, without which the ordeal would not have happened. He cited a counterargument from Turkey, where “The example of Kemal Pasha and the [Young] Turks is a vivid testimony to what a nation's self-consciousness and resistance is capable of even against the Great Powers of the world.”<sup>998</sup> In the context of the dissolution of old empires at the end of the World War, Csik implied that the Young Turks had been able to raise and preserve the national sentiment and so also the integrity of their country. Thus, if instead of the liberal and anti-nationalist sentiment of 1918, a similar patriotic spirit had prevailed in Hungary, even the Trianon could have been averted. This included an implicit comparison: at that perilous moment, Hungary had yet to wait for their national saviour figure to appear – in the form of Miklós Horthy and only in late 1919, when such a national salvation was no longer possible.

Csik's mixture of wishful thinking and search for scapegoats was typical of the counterrevolutionary thought and its failure to comprehend the international situation, already exemplified in the ratification of the Trianon Treaty. It was also rationalized through the temporal conceptualization of ‘a break in the national tradition’: as the traditional rule of the old elite had been in cessation from the revolution in 1918 until the return of the White Army in 1919, which coincided with Hungary's greatest territorial losses, the blame for the losses could comfortably be ascribed to the Liberal and Socialist governments, which, according to the narrative of constant and complete disloyalty, had been all too eager to surrender Hungarian lands under foreign rule.<sup>999</sup> The counterrevolutionary discourse was thus able to disassociate the old elites and the pre-war politicians from the responsibility and to maintain the ideals that the partitioning of historic Hungary could have been prevented had they themselves been in charge.<sup>1000</sup> In response to such rhetoric, Gyula Peidl, the former Social Democratic prime minister of 1919,<sup>1001</sup> hastened to interrupt, accusing Csik of

<sup>997</sup> József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 208.

<sup>998</sup> “Kemál pasának és a törököknek példája élénk bizonyság arra nézve, hogy egy nemzetnek öntudata, ellenállása mire képes még a világ hatalmasságaival szemben is.” József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 208.

<sup>999</sup> In the counterrevolutionary rhetoric, Mihály Károlyi's pacifism and avoidance of international conflict was turned into deliberate collaboration with foreign powers; subsequently, the Soviet Republic was equally blamed for the losses, even though the Hungarian Red Army had indeed defended Hungary's borders against the invading Romanian and Czech armies. Kontler 1999, 338; Zeidler 2007, 10.

<sup>1000</sup> See also Chapter 4.2.2.

<sup>1001</sup> A trade unionist and a member of the Social Democrat leadership since 1909, Gyula Peidl (1873–1943) had in 1919 opposed the alliance of Social Democrats with the Communists and refused to accept a political position during the Communist rule. After the fall of the Soviet Republic, Peidl gained short-lived premiership (1–6 August 1919) before being ousted by István Friedrich. Peidl led the reorganization of the Social Democratic Party in the early 1920s and, along with Károly Peyer, was instrumental in building the limited truce with the conservatives. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 138–139; MÉL: Peidl, Gyula.

provocation, as he justifiably felt that he personally and the Social Democrats collectively were once again made culprits.<sup>1002</sup>

Csik continued by enumerating the lost historical territories of Hungary one by one: Erdély (Transylvania), Bánát and Felvidék (Upper Hungary), yet stopped at the Western Hungary, allegedly the scene of the greatest misfortune. According to his conceptualization, the former territories had always been separate from the Hungarian heartland in a certain way, and their loss, however terrible, could at least be comprehended. Yet, Western Hungary was more; it was an inseparable part of Hungary, never before conceptualized as something that could be detached. Therefore its loss, especially to Austria, the former ruler and co-belligerent, was such incomprehensible injustice. Here Csik, despite his deeply patriotic sentiment, made an extremely interesting conceptual distinction. He conceded, albeit reluctantly, that the territories ceded to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania had historically been more like Hungarian dependencies and not equal parts of the fatherland as Western Hungary had been.<sup>1003</sup> The subsequent rhetorical concessions to the Trianon were usually crafted along this line; that the Hungarian elite could consider accepting the loss of certain ethnically non-Hungarian areas, but in contrast would never cease to long for the restitution of the parts that belonged 'historically and naturally' to the Hungarian heartland. Even though Csik, as a Sopronite, conceptualized this argument as concerning Western Hungary in particular, in fact the same reasoning of a 'natural and inseparable connection' could also be applied to other parts, such as Transylvania.

For Csik, the referendum of Sopron should mean that there the unwavering Hungarian patriotic spirit set the example to follow in reuniting the country and the nation, conceptualized through its historical mission:

"...the general elevation and upsurge of national sentiment, which had filled the hearts of all Hungarians after the example of Sopron, should bring us the certain hope that everything is not yet lost in the country; that the time might well come when we shall be able to bring the country back to its whole and undivided form; that what history and Divine Providence have ordained for the Hungarians shall be ours again."<sup>1004</sup>

Referendum was and should still be preferred as the just and internationally recognized means of settling the border disputes: "the referendum has fulfilled the legal rights and just aspirations of Hungary, and if they really talk about the right of self-determination of the nations, they should allow those to truly have it."<sup>1005</sup> This kind of argumentation was one of the cornerstones of the legalist

<sup>1002</sup> Gyla Peidl, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 208.

<sup>1003</sup> József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 208.

<sup>1004</sup> "... az az általános fellendülése és fellángolása a nemzeti érzésnek, amely a soproni példa után az ország magyarjainak szívét betöltötte, nyújthat biztos reménységet nekünk arra nézve, hogy még nincs minden elveszve ebben az országban; hogy még jöhet idő, amikor ezt az országot ismét vissza tudjuk szerezni a maga egészében és épségében; hogy az, amit a történelem, az isteni Gondviselés szabott ki a magyarnak, ismét a miénk lesz." József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1005</sup> "... a népszavazás Magyarország jogos igazságait és jogos aspirációit teljesítette és ha a népek önrendelkezési jogáról beszélnek, akkor engedjék is meg, hogy tényleg

strain of Hungarian revisionism; as the Wilsonian ideal of national self-determination had been used to legitimize the independence of the successor states, the Hungarian nationalist discourse continuously and desperately tried to apply it to defend pro-Hungarian cases.<sup>1006</sup> Echoing the narrative of benevolent pro-Hungarian sentiment of the peoples in neighbouring countries, Csik proclaimed it as self-evident that if only the population of Felvidék, Bánát or Transylvania were granted the same choice, they also would prefer to honour their “millennial connection”<sup>1007</sup> with Hungary. Thus the monument to the Sopron referendum should also be an inspiration for and commemoration of “our brethren living in the ceded territories, who despair under a foreign yoke”<sup>1008</sup> that their hope endures and Hungary will remember them. This rhetoric and conceptualization also reveal the paradoxical coexistence of the inclusive and exclusive discourses of nation and nationalism: even as the ‘foreign rule’ of the successor states was conceptualized as unjust and anti-Hungarian, the ethnically non-Hungarian populations were still believed to long for the Hungarian community. At the practical level of politics, the Hungarian nation was, however, conceptualized as homogenous and monolingual, the idealization of the multi-ethnic community being little more than an instrument for legitimizing the revision.

The spirit of utter injustice and humiliation concerning the loss of Western Hungary was illustrated by Csik in his narrative of the Austrian officials’ arrival in Sopron to transfer the administration from Hungary to Austria: how the citizens “in their offended self-esteem and in their rightful indignation”<sup>1009</sup> only with effort could refrain from resorting to violence against the foreign occupiers – another rhetorical legitimization of the subsequent paramilitary action.<sup>1010</sup> Csik also had dire words for the potential critics of the bill: “there may even be those here in the House of Representatives, to whose faces this commemoration may perhaps bring a derisive smile,”<sup>1011</sup> but those individuals would be unable to grasp the gravity of the situation in the field. The people of Sopron had risked their lives for their homeland and in doing so, “guarded the honour, respect and recognition on behalf of every Hungarian citizen.”<sup>1012</sup> The commemoration bill was thus needed, particularly for those that are worth it, and Hungarians should not question their role, nor ask who or what contributed most to the effort, but

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önnönmaguk rendelkezhessenek maguk fölül.” József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1006</sup> Zeidler 2007, 78–79. On the transnational significance of the concept of referendum in post-war Europe, see Hobsbawm 1994, 148.

<sup>1007</sup> “... az ezeréves kapcsolat”, József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1008</sup> “... a megszállt területeken élő testvéreinknek is, akik ... idegen rabiga alatt szenvednek...” József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1009</sup> “... megsértett önérzetükben és jogos felháborodásukban ...” József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 208.

<sup>1010</sup> József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 208.

<sup>1011</sup> “... képviselőházban is lehetnek olyanok, akiknek talán gúnyos mosolyt varázsol arcukra ennek az elnevezésnek említése ...” József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1012</sup> “... minden magyar ember részéről tiszteletet, becsülést és elismerést érdemelnek.” József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.



join the reminiscence with a humble mind.<sup>1013</sup> In this narrative, Csik elevated the people of Sopron to the role of foremost Hungarian patriots and models for the nation; he also continued the ostensibly inclusive discourse about universal patriotism devoid of ethnic distinctions.

This inclusive rhetoric was eagerly picked up by Gyula Peidl of the Social Democrats. He made the point that the favourable result concerning Sopron had been achieved largely by local Social Democrats, and that in the parliamentary election following Sopron's return to Hungary, the city had elected a Social Democrat to the National Assembly.<sup>1014</sup> Peidl was thus able to make use of the moment, originally conceived of as a patriotic ceremony, to turn the discourse and give it an interpretation favourable to his party and political background. This was not well received by the mainly counterrevolutionary House, as exemplified by Sándor Propper's interjection: "Deglorification of the celebration!"<sup>1015</sup> Undisturbed, Peidl went on to laud the Social Democrats' role in the rebuilding of Hungary. He stated that referendum had always been the Social Democrats' primary choice for correcting the injustices of Trianon, even at times when the Right-wing nationalists had called it treachery. Equally, the democratic reforms the Social Democrats were now demanding in the name of the people were still called treachery but should likewise turn out to be beneficial for Hungary.<sup>1016</sup> Thus, the instance was used by the Social Democrats to seize an argument put forward by the government and turn it into opposition rhetoric. And, as usual, the conservatives' uproar was guaranteed.

After briefly commenting that the Social Democrats would, nevertheless, support the commemoration bill, Peidl then hastened to respond the accusations of Csik concerning the revolutionary years and the responsibility for the territorial losses. Using the usual parlance of debates concerning commemorative legislation, he remarked he would have preferred if the bill to have been passed without petty political controversies, but as Csik had begun by presenting such insults, he was obliged to retort. Here, Peidl also appealed to the prevailing conservative discourses about the need for consensus and avoidance of politicking on matters with national significance. According to Peidl, it would be a falsification of history to claim that the Trianon would not have taken place without the revolution of 1918. The mutilation of Hungary was caused by the World War, nothing else.<sup>1017</sup> In so saying, Peidl denied responsibility for Trianon and passed it on collectively to everyone involved in the war policy, which implicitly pointed towards the government of István Tisza, but also the pre-war and wartime political elite, many of whom had now returned to leading positions.<sup>1018</sup> Peidl presented a competing interpretation of guilt and

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<sup>1013</sup> József Csik, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1014</sup> Gyula Peidl, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1015</sup> "Ünneprontás!" Sándor Propper, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1016</sup> Gyula Peidl, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209–210.

<sup>1017</sup> Gyula Peidl, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1018</sup> This argument has since been applied in the history politics of Socialist Hungary, where the losses were attributed to the reactionary monarchy and the subsequent weak bourgeois governments. Aczél & Cohen 1984, 16–19; Vakkuri 1986, 30.

responsibility and made use of it in his defence. However, as the Trianon was an equally dreadful affair, Peidl could not actually express any complacency on the subject matter, but closed his address with mitigating fatalism: "History cannot be changed."<sup>1019</sup>

#### 4.3.4 A breakthrough from the confines of Trianon?

The debate was closed by Prime Minister Bethlen, who used his personal authority to pacify the inconvenient turn the debate had taken:

"I shall not go into debating those controversial questions that came up at the last minute. I believe that we are here on this day for a celebration and such a celebration should be performed undisturbed and without any controversy."<sup>1020</sup>

It is actually ironic how the governmental argument of 'undisturbed celebration' was reiterated by Bethlen in order to undermine the opposition's participation *in the same form* which Peidl had used only moments earlier to create space for his argument. The Prime Minister's authority and the House Rules that granted him the right to give the last speech in the debate unchallenged allowed such double standards of rhetoric. The rhetoric ostensibly used to preserve the dignity of parliamentary procedure was actually applied to silence the opposition.

When touching on the symbolical value of the Sopron case, Bethlen articulated a redescription of the idea of the Trianon Treaty. According to him, it had been based on the erroneous assumption that all non-Hungarian nationalities had been inherently anti-Hungarian, pursued secession from Greater Hungary and would be willing to be annexed by the adjacent states. This sentiment, Bethlen claimed, had never had broad appeal among the diverse peoples of Greater Hungary, "but was greatly nourished and cultivated abroad by those who had placed themselves at the service of foreign imperialist goals."<sup>1021</sup> Hungary had done everything to correct the fallacy and to demand a just part in the making of the post-war system, but in vain: the 'foreign imperialists' and their collaborators in the successor state governments had prevailed. But finally, the Sopron referendum had achieved the very goal of showing the whole world that the moral basis of the Trianon Treaty was null and void,<sup>1022</sup> as loyalty towards Hungary was not determined by ethnicity alone. That was the true achievement to be celebrated, and from now on, Hungary would have every right to expect the same in other ceded territories.<sup>1023</sup> Bethlen also reminded the House that the referendum had been held in conditions unfavourable to Hungary; that the Austrian side had had much more leverage to

<sup>1019</sup> "A történelmet megváltoztatni nem lehet." Gyula Peidl, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 209.

<sup>1020</sup> "Nem fogok azoknak a kontroverz kérdéseknek megvitatásába belemenni, amelyek az utolsó percben itt felmerültek. Azt hiszem, hogy a mai napon ünnepet ülünk és ezt az ünnepet zavartalanul, minden kontroverziától menten kell megülnünk." István Bethlen, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 210.

<sup>1021</sup> "...de nagyra növeltek és szítottak a külföldön azok, akik a külföldi imperialista célok szolgálatába szegődtek", István Bethlen, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 210.

<sup>1022</sup> István Bethlen, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 210.

<sup>1023</sup> István Bethlen, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 210.

appeal to their kin in the Sopron area than Hungary could ever have had, and despite this, the result had favoured Hungary. This was truly a reason for a celebration of a small nation's ability to show its moral stature, if and when given the chance.<sup>1024</sup>

Again, Bethlen's rhetoric was based on his utter delegitimization of the state-building of the successor states: the émigré politicians such as Tomáš Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, who during the war had worked in conjunction with the Entente in order to secure independence for their nations and consequently formed the government in the new Czechoslovakia,<sup>1025</sup> were reduced to mere agents of foreign imperialism. When the organic and natural unity of Greater Hungary was conceptualized as the only 'natural' and viable option, all other constellations were rendered artificial and unviable.<sup>1026</sup>

The stance of the conservative Members, confirmed by Bethlen, was based on moral judgement: as the referendum had demonstrated that the extent of Hungarian patriotism was not limited by ethnic boundaries, even less by any arbitrarily drawn borders, Hungary now had a moral right and responsibility to demand referenda in all ceded territories.

*"A nation, whose sons do not know to revere the Sacrifice of Christ, is not worthy of giving their sons for sacrifice. We could not surrender the treasures of Sopron and its environs. We have been transformed into a miserable, mutilated and poor country. But still we have one thing to give, and it was the warmth of the Hungarian hearts. With this bill we will pass a palm branch to the town of Sopron, as testimony that its patriotism was stronger than the violence of Trianon."*<sup>1027</sup>

Finally, the archetypical Christian metaphors to describe Hungary's suffering, sacrifice and expected resurrection, were brought in to conclude the whole symbolical canonization of the Sopron referendum and its official commemoration.

During the negotiations prior to the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, the Hungarian delegation had attempted to save what was left of Greater Hungary by demanding referenda be held in the territories that the peace treaty ceded to adjacent countries, but in vain.<sup>1028</sup> The fact that the only referendum was organized in an area of a mere 257 square kilometres with around 38 000 inhabitants did not prevent the Hungarian government from cherishing it as a great achievement. In the post-war atmosphere, the government wanted to

<sup>1024</sup> István Bethlen, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 210. Actually, there was widespread criticism of the conditions of the referendum equally on both sides. For example, after the unfavourable result Austria accused Hungary of threatening and disenfranchising German-speaking voters. Vares 2008, 267–268; Zeidler 2007, 81.

<sup>1025</sup> See Vares & Vares 2019, 146–148.

<sup>1026</sup> See also Romsics 1995, 312.

<sup>1027</sup> "Egy nemzet, amely fiai Önfeláldozásával szemben hálát mutatni nem tud, nem érdemes arra, hogy fiai önfeláldozást gyakoroljanak vele szemben. Mi Sopron városának és környékének kincseket nem adhatunk. Mi egy nyomorult, megcsönkített, szegény országgá váltunk. De egyet igenis adhatunk, és ez: magyar szívünknek melegsége. Ezzel a törvényjavaslattal egy pálmaágot nyújtunk át Sopron városának, annak bizonyosságául, hogy az ő hazafisága erősebb volt, mint a trianoni szerződésnek az erőszaka." István Bethlen, 7.12.1922, NN VI/1922, 210.

<sup>1028</sup> Romsics 2003, 172, 176.

believe and to spread the belief that all opportunities were still open and that the Sopron referendum was a symbolic breakthrough challenging the Trianon Treaty and achieving revision by legitimate means.

The defiant words about delegitimizing the Treaty of Trianon and the governments of the successor states, as well as the pleas for further referenda on the precious areas of Félvidék, Bánát and Erdély, were rhetoric for domestic consumption. Even though the Bethlen government at that moment had few expectations regarding the fulfilment of the radical revisionist aims, it was politically necessary to honour the trauma of the losses and maintain the hopes for a favourable future. At the same time, the defiant language of revision became normalized in the Hungarian parliamentary and public discourse, being readily applicable to legitimize diverse political ends.

In addition to its immediate foreign political implications, the Sopron commemoration law contributed to the Hungarian politicization of history in nation-building explained to detail in Chapter 3; the memory of the Sopron referendum was deemed crucial in the post-war nation-building, codified into a law and concretized in the form of a monument.<sup>1029</sup> The contemporary political needs dictated the tone and the form of reminiscence of the (recent) past.

#### **4.4 In search of international support. The League of Nations accession debate, 1923**

##### **4.4.1 Hungary and the League: High hopes and original defects**

As seen in the previous chapters, the Hungarian revisionist foreign policy strove to achieve its goals by any means available, alternating between legalist reliance on the international treaty system and unscrupulous opportunism. The discourse on Hungary's accession to the League of Nations ostensibly represented the former, but also reflected the political thought that legitimized the latter.

The General Assembly of the League of Nations granted Hungary accession on 18 September 1922.<sup>1030</sup> The Hungarian National Assembly debated the ratification of the accession in 30–31 January 1923. This section analyses the ratification debate in relation to its practical and symbolic value in Hungarian foreign policy, as well as the interplay of foreign political discourse with the core conceptualizations of nation and national identity.<sup>1031</sup> In this case, it is apparent that international co-operation and its possibilities were consciously projected to suit Hungarian expectations and the former narratives of revision as national mission. The expectations towards the accession were brought to a tangible level in the arguments used: what opportunities the broader arena might offer for

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<sup>1029</sup> See also Zeidler 2007, 188.

<sup>1030</sup> Bill concerning Hungary's accession to the League of Nations, 16.11.1922, NI 84/III/1922, 30.

<sup>1031</sup> For a more structural analysis on Hungary's relationship to the League, see Zeidler 2013.

Hungary; how the hostility of successor states could be countered through international co-operation and the indifferent Great Powers won over to Hungary's cause; and eventually, what kind of concrete support for the revision policy could be summoned through the League.

At that moment, the Bethlen government endorsed a moderate foreign political discourse which put its hopes in the international co-operation the League represented and attempted to curtail overenthusiastic revisionist activism. Therefore even the right-wing participants in the discussion were obliged to support Hungary's accession.<sup>1032</sup> Still, many Members felt compelled to discuss both the advantages and disadvantages, as they had to legitimize their position as supporters of Hungary's accession to an organization which carried the brand of Great Power interests of safeguarding the peace treaties. Moreover, delegates of the Social Democrats and the Conservative government engaged in a debate over the concepts of peace and internationalism, their Socialist or non-Socialist nature, and the projection of international politics in Hungarian domestic affairs and vice versa.

Indeed, for Hungarian nationalist political thought, the League of Nations was not an exactly favourable institution. It was very clearly linked to the humiliating memory of Trianon – as the Covenant of the League of Nations was incorporated in the peace treaty – and in the prevalent nationalist atmosphere seen as a vehicle of Entente domination over small nations. Therefore it was no wonder that Ernő Moser, secretary of the Committee for Foreign Affairs and proposer of the accession bill, began his portrayal of the League rather frankly:

“But what is the League of Nations today? Nothing but an interest group of the victorious Great Powers, with little vocation to secure world peace.”<sup>1033</sup>

The Social Democrats were likewise none too fond of the League in its original form; in his turn, Gyula Peidl worded his concern for it as an instrument of the Great Powers in accomplishing their political goals through international pressure and thus averting the risk of direct confrontation.<sup>1034</sup> This was in line with the transnational Social Democratic opposition to the ‘bourgeois’ and ‘militarist’ nature of the League, which was, however, subsequently mitigated with its positive prospects of international parliamentarism.<sup>1035</sup>

Moser also explained how the formation of the League had taken place during the last months of the World War, when the confrontation between the Entente and the Central Powers had been at its worst. The only thing the defeated

<sup>1032</sup> Interestingly, the Hungarian government, usually sensitive to any limitations of national sovereignty, did not oppose the accession as a transfer of authority from nation-state to international organ. On the contrary, the argument went that by transferring the management of foreign political questions to the international forum Hungary had only to gain. On the question of sovereignty in the broader European discourse, see Ihalainen 2018, 8–9.

<sup>1033</sup> “De mi ma a népszövetség? Semmi más, mint a győzőhatalmaknak az érdekképviselője, amely kevésbé van hivatva a világbékét biztosítani.” Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 207.

<sup>1034</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 208.

<sup>1035</sup> Ihalainen 2018, 18–19.

powers had wanted was a just peace, whereas the victors had shaped the peace treaties and the League according to their lack of mercy. This narrative included President Wilson being forced to withdraw, one after another, “the most important demands, which would indeed have secured the understanding between the nations, would have secured that finally the peoples and nations would have found the long-awaited just peace.”<sup>1036</sup> As before, the Hungarians attempted to appropriate the positive value of the Wilsonian ideals – formerly used in the justification of the birth of the successor states and the disintegration of Greater Hungary – and to redescribe them in a form that would include justice for Hungary.

Moser went on with the duplicitous policy of the western powers:

“Today they expect us to give up everything that is dear to us. They expect us to tear from our hearts the yearning for Felvidék [Upper Hungary], Erdély [Transylvania], Bánát and Western Hungary. That is what is expected of us ... by the French, who themselves nourished revanchist sentiments over Elsass-Lothringen for years ... I’m very surprised that the same France has now devoted itself to the cause of the Little Entente; the very same nation, which – as I said – not long ago was the epitome of national chauvinism.”<sup>1037</sup>

Why, then, should Hungary join an organization, which at first sight offers nothing in exchange for the heavy budgetary burden?<sup>1038</sup> The motivation, stated by the Hungarian government in the accession bill, started with a reference to the timelessness in the idea of the League:

“After every greater war, such voices have spoken most strongly. Nearly with one voice they have stated that the terrors of war would be best avoided if the civilized nations would together form a great international organization.”<sup>1039</sup>

Peidl concurred that the notion of an international organization was as old as nation states themselves, but that yearning after such organizations had regularly been halted by “powerful, militarist and well-equipped states, who above all trusted in their own power, preparedness and their capability to use that power

<sup>1036</sup> “... a legfontosabb követeléseit, amelyek tényleg biztosították volna a népek között a megértést, biztosították volna azt, hogy végre a népek, a nemzetek megkapják a régóta sóvárgott igazságos békét.” Ernő Moser, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 224–225.

<sup>1037</sup> “Azt kívánják ma tőlünk, hogy mondjunk le mindarról, ami nekünk kedves. Azt kívánják, hogy öljük ki a vágyat szívünkéből a Felvidék, Erdély, Bánát és a nyugati részek után. Kívánja ezt ... azok a franciák, akik a reváns eszméjének, Elzász-Lotharingia visszaszerzése eszméjének éltek évtizedeken keresztül és ezt az eszmét táplálták ... Nagyon csodálkozom, hogy éppen Franciaország adja magát ehhez a kísértentenek; az a nemzet, amely – mint mondtam – a múltban, nem is olyan régen, a nemzeti sovinizmusnak jelképe, mintaképe volt.” Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 207.

<sup>1038</sup> Hungary’s part of the annual budget of the League amounted up to 110 000 gold Francs. Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 207.

<sup>1039</sup> “Minden nagyobb háború után erőteljesebben jutottak kifejezésre ezek a hangok. Csaknem egyöntetű a nézet, hogy a háború réme leginkább az által volna elkerülhető, ha az összes kultúrállam ok egy nagy nemzetközi érdekszövetséget alkotnának.” Justification annex for the bill No. 84, 16.11.1922, NI 84/III/1922, 30.

to fulfil their claims against any opponents.”<sup>1040</sup> However, for him, it was the First World War that brought down even the strongest military nations “whom one could scarcely believe to be defeated in battle.”<sup>1041</sup> Thus, Peidl interpreted the defeat of Germany as a sobering signal for a new instability of *any* great power – in which case even the present Great Powers could not merely rely on themselves, but also needed the support of the League of Nations. Peidl’s redescription changed the nature of the League from Entente domination towards multilateral support; this was the part of the legitimization on which the parties could agree.

The government also referred to the general need to exert influence through participation, concerning “virtually all important matters.”<sup>1042</sup> Hungary had to be within the main forum where crucial matters were discussed and decided, otherwise the decisions would be made “concerning us, without us.”<sup>1043</sup> A great deal of attention was paid to the Covenant of the League of Nations itself, as well as the amendments to it, which were ratified by Parliament along with accession. There, the government paid attention to the semi-constitutional character of the Covenant: it was binding on all Member States, yet the power to initiate amendments had originally been in the hands of the Executive Council. Any amendments needed both a three-fourths majority in the General Assembly and unanimity in the Council to pass.<sup>1044</sup> The same objections through constitutional arguments were raised by other Members: decision-making based on unanimous vote was contrary to parliamentary democracy.<sup>1045</sup> The political play on Council veto, a well-known original defect that remains in the present-day United Nations Security Council, was also sharply predicted.<sup>1046</sup> The prerogatives of the Council also came in for criticism on the basis of international equality. The Covenant described sanctions on states acting against it, yet it was in the hands of the Council to determine whether a violation had occurred and which sanctions were applicable.<sup>1047</sup> The Hungarian discourse again applied the core concepts of constitutionalism and parliamentarism in a context that could prove beneficial for Hungary and offered a vehicle for criticizing the League for the same misgivings of which Hungary had been accused.

The cautious general attitude was best reflected in the address of Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs Géza Daruváry;<sup>1048</sup> he began by saying that when

<sup>1040</sup> “... az erőseken, a katonailag kiképezett, kiépített és felszerelt államokon, amelyek biztak a saját erejükben, a szervezettségükben és abban, hogy a saját akaratukat rá tudják erőszakolni a velük vitába szálló ellenfeleikre.” Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 208.

<sup>1041</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 208.

<sup>1042</sup> “... úgyszólván minden nemzetközi jelentőségű ...” Justification annex for the bill No. 84, 16.11.1922, NI 84/III/1922, 31.

<sup>1043</sup> “... róluk, nélkülük ...” Justification annex for the bill No. 84, 16.11.1922, NI 84/III/1922, 32.

<sup>1044</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 83, 16.11.1922, NI 83/III/1922, 26.

<sup>1045</sup> Cf. Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 208.

<sup>1046</sup> Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 212.

<sup>1047</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 83, 16.11.1922, NI 83/III/1922, 25.

<sup>1048</sup> Career diplomat and former counsellor to Emperor Francis Joseph, Géza Daruváry (1866–1934) was recalled from retirement to serve as the Minister of Justice and

no speaker before him had opposed the bill, he did not consider himself obliged to address both the advantages and disadvantages of accession, but nevertheless proceeded to do exactly that.<sup>1049</sup> For example, Daruváry ironically referred to Hungary's relationship to the idea of disarmament: as the Treaty of Trianon had already reduced the Hungarian armed forces "to the lowest point consistent with national safety"<sup>1050</sup> – and even beyond – Hungary was already a front runner in the development and only expected the victors to follow it.<sup>1051</sup>

Christian Socialist Sándor Giesswein<sup>1052</sup> concurred with the criticism of the biased understanding of disarmament. The present state of affairs reminded him of the era of feudalism, where only noblemen were allowed to carry arms to discipline their serfs:

"And so it is also today – there are the nobles of Europe, the victorious nations, who are armed to the teeth, and there are the serfs of the European community, among whom we belong, who are forced to lay down their arms."<sup>1053</sup>

Even Giesswein, a left-leaning theologian and a prominent pacifist, thus expressed the underlying Hungarian nationalism in his argumentation for universal justice through the projection of past into present: Hungary was undeserving of the ordeal imposed on it by the victors; their ostensibly egalitarian acts mere safeguards of the established order.

Albert Apponyi,<sup>1054</sup> the Grand Old Man of Hungarian foreign policy and the head of the Hungarian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, rationalized the ambiguous question with a combination of idealism and realism. To the minister's ironic statement he added that the current state of affairs in the

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Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Bethlen government 1922–1924. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 207–208; MÉL: Daruváry, Géza.

<sup>1049</sup> Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 218.

<sup>1050</sup> "... a legalacsonyabb fokig, mely az állam biztonságával megegyeztethető", Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 218. Daruváry paraphrases the Article 8 of the Covenant.

<sup>1051</sup> Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 218.

<sup>1052</sup> Liberal Catholic theologian, Prelate Sándor Giesswein (1856–1923) had been a theorist of the Christian peace movement during the World War and a member of the revolutionary National Assembly of 1918. He was elected to Parliament in 1920 as a Member of the Christian Socialist Economic Party (*Keresztény Szociális Gazdasági Párt*) and was until his death a prominent liberal voice among Christian political circles. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 69; MÉL: Giesswein, Sándor.

<sup>1053</sup> "... úgy van most is, vannak Európában nemes nemzetek, a háború győztesei, amelyek nyakig fegyverkeznek, és vannak az európai népközösségnek jobbágjai, amilyenek mi is vagyunk, akiknek le kellett tenniök a fegyvert." Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 212.

<sup>1054</sup> Count Albert Apponyi (1846–1933) had behind him a political career spanning more than half a century. In the pre-war years he had already campaigned for the integrity of Greater Hungary and Hungary's leading role in relation to the minority nationalities. Apponyi was the leader of the Hungarian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1920, a steadfast opponent of the Trianon Treaty and an advocate of Hungary's cause abroad. From 1923 until his death he served as the head of the Hungarian delegation to the League of Nations. At the time of the debate he was a widely respected expert on foreign policy, yet somewhat sidelined from the domestic policy due to his unfaltering Habsburg legitimism. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 12–21; MÉL: Apponyi, Albert, gróf.



disarmament process was nothing but “one of the greatest crimes of contemporary Europe, a systematic sabotage of the [disarmament] question.”<sup>1055</sup> The Covenant had not been intended to create a state of affairs where half of the European states had been rendered incapable of even maintaining internal order, whereas the armament of the other half exceeded even the pre-war level.<sup>1056</sup> According to him, this situation was based on a mistaken belief in good and evil, as if certain nations were completely trustworthy and others completely unreliable. He refuted this with a quasi-theological argument: that every human was fallible, and that the present state of affairs only created temptations for the victors to exploit the defeated.<sup>1057</sup> Therefore it was not misguided national pride, but a moral obligation to oppose such a development.<sup>1058</sup> Appónyi spoke from the position of the most highly respected foreign policy expert and a profoundly morally committed member of the old elite. His concluding speech on these matters was listened to with caution by the House, without any interruptions except applause from all parties.<sup>1059</sup>

The many reservations – which did not turn into actual objections – to membership had a dual role. They represented both the uncertainty of the Hungarian position in the creation of the new world order and the rhetoric of defiance towards any further foreign oppression of Hungary. National pride necessitated the use of such language to match the discourse of revision as a national mission with accession to the League. After their rejoinders to that rhetorical instrument, all discussants then turned to the more favourable sides of the League and positive prospects for Hungary’s role.

#### 4.4.2 Towards a more equal League

To counterbalance their own arguments about Entente domination, the Members then described their belief in progress towards a more equal League. Minister Daruváry, replying to Moser’s harsh statement on the nature of the League, saw hope of progress:

“During the brief existence of the League of Nations, we have to admit that the direction of its progress and its positive achievements point in a direction of progress that generally corresponds with its universal spirit.”<sup>1060</sup>

Even though Daruváry conceded the leading role of the victorious powers in the League, he argued that the progress was in general towards the inclusion of all nations and their equal representation. Therefore the League might

<sup>1055</sup> “...az új európai érának egyik legnagyobb botránya, ennek a kérdésnek rendszeres szabotálása”, Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 228.

<sup>1056</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 228.

<sup>1057</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 229.

<sup>1058</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 229.

<sup>1059</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 228.

<sup>1060</sup> “... rövid fennállásának ideje alatt milyen irányban haladt és milyen pozitív eredményeket ért el, azt kell mondanunk, hogy az az irány, amelyben haladt, egészben véve megfelel a nemzetek szövetsége univerzális jellegének.” Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 219.

eventually fulfil the expectations of its ideal role.<sup>1061</sup> This discourse was parallel to the interests of the leading powers, especially Britain, to broaden the membership basis of the League to also include the neutral, defeated and new states in order to ‘educate’ them in the concept of international mediation and conflict avoidance.<sup>1062</sup>

The Hungarians were eager to demonstrate that the fruits of the positive progress were already to be seen. A resolution had been made in favour of a defeated country – namely Austria – which has “opened a way towards the rehabilitation of that country, which shares our catastrophes and misgivings.”<sup>1063</sup> Moreover, the League had in 1921 reached a successful arbitration in a border dispute, namely that over the Åland Islands situated between Finland and Sweden.<sup>1064</sup> It was especially tempting for the Hungarians to hear that the islands were ceded to Finland partly on the basis of their *historical* belonging to the Grand Duchy of Finland since 1809 – as a sign that border corrections based on conceptions of historical unity of the realm were not completely infeasible.<sup>1065</sup> Even though Daruváry warned that Hungary could not expect too much of the League, at least too soon, and had to adapt to the many difficulties of international co-operation, he nevertheless made the glimmer of hope very explicit:

“On the other hand, however, one clearly sees that the direction the League of Nations is in accordance with its high goals and, as a consequence, its moral weight is on the rise. Therefore Hungary, which struggles for its legitimate demands only with the pure weapon of truth, can, I believe, look upon the operation of the League with confidence.”<sup>1066</sup>

The hope for positive progress was at the centre of argumentation for other discussants. Even though Moser had at first declared the League to be a vehicle of Great Power domination, he then pointed out how the current activity rested more and more on the shoulders of the non-aligned countries that had been able to seize the initiative. Among these, Latin America and Scandinavia were mentioned especially as positive examples.<sup>1067</sup> For Moser, the dismantling of the old constellations would mean that the atmosphere of hate and fear would also

<sup>1061</sup> Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 219.

<sup>1062</sup> Ihalainen 2018, 4–5.

<sup>1063</sup> “... utat nyitott ennek a szerencsétlenségünkben és balsorsunkban részes országnak talpraállítására ...” Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 219.

<sup>1064</sup> Géza Daruváry, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 219. Interestingly, it had been exactly the hopes for the resolution of the Åland dispute that had constituted arguments for League accession in Finland and Sweden in 1919–1920. Ihalainen 2018, 16.

<sup>1065</sup> Vares & Vares 2019, 33, 180–182.

<sup>1066</sup> “Másrészt azonban világosan látja, hogy az az irány, amelyet a nemzetek szövetsége vett, megfelel magas céljainak s ennek folytán erkölcsi súlya növekedőben van. Ezért Magyarország, amely a maga jogos követeléseit az igazság nyílt fegyvereivel akarja kivívni, azt hiszem, bizalommal tekinthet a nemzetek szövetségének működésére.” Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 219.

<sup>1067</sup> Ernő Moser, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 225.

dissipate and a real spirit of peace would emerge.<sup>1068</sup> Naturally, that would be to Hungary's advantage:

“There is hope that the more we distance ourselves from the war, the closer we become to the time ... when the world will look at the injustices committed by the victorious powers towards the defeated through the peace dictates, and then shall come the time of revision”<sup>1069</sup>

The primary hope was that the membership of the League would expand to include more non-aligned members, which could then look at matters ‘objectively’ and thus enhance the League’s character of ‘impartial’ mediation.<sup>1070</sup> Especially now, an amendment to the Covenant increased the number of non-permanent members of the Executive Council from four to six, which could better counterbalance the permanent members (comprising the Entente powers). Especially as the two most recent non-permanent members, Sweden and Uruguay, were “completely objective,”<sup>1071</sup> this held out hope that some day the majority would no longer be in the hands of old powers and their *vae victis* – policy.<sup>1072</sup> Concepts of objectivity and impartiality were quite clearly operationalized as approaches that might become favourable to Hungary. Thus, only the states that had not been involved in the power struggles in Central Europe were deemed ‘objective’ and ‘impartial’ and still likely to be won over to the side of the ‘Hungarian truth’.

Peidl, too, underlined the importance of the non-permanent members, which were democratically elected by the General Assembly, and thus reinforced the parliamentary procedure in the international decision-making.<sup>1073</sup> Apponyi also perceived concrete progress in the present amendments to the Covenant. They were proof of the possibility that the League could become better and more impartial. More and more non-aligned nations had expressed initiatives, and even better, the Great Powers had been responsive to that. Therefore, independent opinions within the League were possible, and it had the potential to evolve into a truly impartial and equal forum. That, Apponyi claimed, was the way to a real state of peace.<sup>1074</sup>

Daruváry summed up the Hungarian position vis-à-vis to the League by a complete redescription of the relationship between victors and vanquished; Hungary’s duty, instead of pursuing provincial nationalism, was “that we shall safeguard our legal interests and justice in co-operation with other civilized

<sup>1068</sup> Ernő Moser, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 226.

<sup>1069</sup> “Minden reménység megvan arra, hogy minél jobban távolodunk a háborútól, annál jobban közeledünk ahhoz az időhöz, amikor a világ szemei fel fognak nyilni, amikor a világ be fogja látni azokat az igazságtalanságokat, amelyeket a győző hatalmak békediktátumaiban a legyőzöttekkel szemben elkövettek, és akkor eljön a revízió ideje.” Ernő Moser, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 226.

<sup>1070</sup> Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 208.

<sup>1071</sup> “... teljesen objektív ...” Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 208.

<sup>1072</sup> Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 208.

<sup>1073</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 210.

<sup>1074</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 227.

nations.”<sup>1075</sup> Thus, in joining the League Hungary did not submit itself to Entente domination, but only regained its historical position among the ‘civilized’ nations – a position, which has deep roots in the Hungarian national identity. Again, the Hungarian conservatives played upon the nation’s historical and spatial orientation as a prominent member of the ‘west’ but simultaneously felt able to choose which ‘western’ ideals to apply and when.<sup>1076</sup>

Peidl agreed with the argument of imperfection and hope for progress despite the present situation. He also introduced the more profound realist stance that there were no alternatives to League membership if Hungary ever wanted to obtain any justice.<sup>1077</sup> Contrary to the hopes awoken by the government, he warned against any wishful thinking about direct support for Hungary. Also, referring to the ideas of radical revisionism, he warned that any machinations that might undermine the negotiation processes Hungary wanted to advance in the League would only ultimately be to the detriment of Hungary.<sup>1078</sup> Giesswein echoed Peidl with almost identical words: the League was far from perfect, but it was the only thing there was.<sup>1079</sup> Quoting Lord Robert Cecil, one of the architects of the League, Giesswein asked, whether “this terrible war had to come so that the peoples could understand that the nations are as unable to live in isolation from each other as individuals are”<sup>1080</sup> – rationalizing the existence of the League as the new norm. He also attached great importance to the potential for positive progress; where the more cautious discussants were concerned with the slow progress, Giesswein underlined that the mere existence of any progress was a positive sign.<sup>1081</sup>

In joining the League, Hungary would be involved in completely new processes of multi-lateral co-operation. Giesswein reminded the House that not everyone might be satisfied in the new internationalism – a concept easily associated with Socialism<sup>1082</sup> – but actually the nature of the Hungarian state had been international since the beginning of its history:

“The first one in Hungary to step on the path of internationalism was Saint Stephen, and by doing that he made it possible for the Hungarian nation ... to become a part of European civilization.”<sup>1083</sup>

<sup>1075</sup> “...hogy mi jogos érdekeink és igazságaink megvédését az összes kulturnemzetekkel való együttműködésben kívánjuk megvalósítani.” Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 218.

<sup>1076</sup> See also Trencsényi 2013, 83–84.

<sup>1077</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 210.

<sup>1078</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 211.

<sup>1079</sup> Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 211.

<sup>1080</sup> “...ennek a borzalmas háborúnak kellett közbejönnie, hogy a népek megértsék, hogy a nemzetek épügy nem képesek a többiektől, izolálva, elszigetelten megélni, mint ahogy nem képesek erre az egyének.” Sándor Giesswein, paraphrasing Lord Robert Cecil, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 212.

<sup>1081</sup> Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 211.

<sup>1082</sup> On the careful use of the concept of internationalism in relation to the League of Nations for the very same reason, see Ihalainen 2018, 10; Sluga 2013, 41–45.

<sup>1083</sup> “Az, aki Magyarországon először lépett a nemzetköziség talajára, Szent István volt, s ezáltal tette lehetővé, hogy a magyar nemzet ... beléphetett az európai civilizáció

We can again see how canonized historical examples were applied in a contentious manner in the Hungarian discourse: whereas the memory of St. Stephen and his realm heralded the idea of revision and the indivisibility of Greater Hungary for the conservatives, the liberal redescription called on his memory for the defence of tolerance, multiculturalism and internationalism. For this, they invoked St. Stephen's *Admonitiones*, a scripture of regal virtues addressed by the king to his heir, in which he called for tolerance of foreigners and integration of diverse people to the benefit of the realm.<sup>1084</sup> By paraphrasing such a document, one of the cornerstones of the Hungarian national mythos, Giesswein could convincingly argue that internationalism does not weaken, but indeed strengthens a nation.<sup>1085</sup>

Appónyi, taking again the moralist position, warned that those opposing accession to the League having no faith in its ability to solve international problems were themselves a part of the old order.<sup>1086</sup> The impossibility of total disarmament must not be an obstacle to working for peace, just as the existence of diseases was not an obstacle to doctors, the existence of ignorance to teachers, or the existence of sinfulness to priests. Within that rationalizing argument he even drew a parallel from a mathematics lesson in his youth: a geometric series converges infinitely towards certain number, without ever reaching it. For the young Appónyi that seemed like a logical paradox, for the mature Appónyi it became the metaphor of all human progress: even though perfection could never be attained, progress could always be made.<sup>1087</sup> It was thus Hungary's obligation to hasten, not slow down that progress.<sup>1088</sup> Finally, he summed up the prospects of international morality in preventing future wars. Even though the present security guarantees of the League did not seem very effective, they had a stronger significance in a moral sense.

"But there is, gentlemen, the great moral guarantee, the possibility of setting moral forces in motion, which must not be underestimated. Those so-called political realists, who question the validity or power of moral sentiments ... are actually not political realists, for those moral sentiments are indeed very real matters, and I'm astonished that even after the examples of the World War some might question them."<sup>1089</sup>

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közösségébe." Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 211. Cf. Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 213.

<sup>1084</sup> *Admonitiones*, VI.

<sup>1085</sup> Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 212.

<sup>1086</sup> This statement can be read with a hint of historic irony: in many ways, Apponyi himself was 'part of the old order'; his parlance on Hungary's cultural superiority vis-à-vis the successor states had done little to arouse sympathy for Hungary in the Paris Peace Conference. While he had earlier in his career steadfastly opposed the self-determination of the then minority nationalities, his late adoption of Wilsonian ideals as political catchwords at a moment when they could be turned to Hungary's advantage was likewise not exactly convincing. See e.g. Zeidler 2007, 22-24.

<sup>1087</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 227.

<sup>1088</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 226.

<sup>1089</sup> "De itt van, uraim, az a nagy erkölcsi garancia, az erkölcsi erők mozgásba hozatalának lehetősége, amelyeket ne méltóztassék lekicsinyelni. Azok az úgynevezett reális politikusok, akik az erkölcsi tényezők hatályosságát és erejét kétségbe vonják ... épenséggel nem reálpolitikusok, mert ezek az erkölcsi tényezők

He interpreted the examples of the World War such that especially Britain's and the United States' entry to war had mostly been determined by moral factors; those powers had had no reason to interfere in the continental war, except for their moral sentiments of loyalty towards allies or the will to defend democracy.<sup>1090</sup> Thus, moral sentiments did indeed have a place in international politics, especially in a pre-emptive way:

"Without any doubt the small or great powers now think twice before undertaking such a venture which would be condemned by the whole of the civilized world"<sup>1091</sup>

Nearly all the speeches progressed in the same way: after criticism, attention was drawn to positive signs. Whereas the usual arguments against and for the League – its nature as the tool of the victors to impose their will on the vanquished, and on the other hand, the prospects of evolution into an impartial system that also benefitted the small nations – were usually represented by opposing parties in other European accession debates,<sup>1092</sup> in Hungary the need for rhetorical manoeuvring resulted in the Members of the government party presenting both arguments within the same speech, weighing them against one another and ending up in favour of the latter with a conciliatory tone. The unyielding language of revision and defiance towards the Trianon had already become such a fundamental part of the foreign political discourse that it had to be taken as the premise of the accession debate, applying exactly the former argument before moving to a rationalization through the latter.

Every Member executed their own rhetorical manoeuvres to reconcile accession with Hungarian nationalism. Many conservatives, who indeed were 'part of the old order', found a progressive modernist in themselves when presenting the prospects – however meagre – of the future of the League and its role in the implementation of revision. In contrast, Peidl and Giesswein, as the Social Democratic and liberal voices in the debate, made use of the House's newly-found interest in international co-operation, reinterpreting the nation as inherently internationalist since the days of St. Stephen. The lowest common denominator between the camps was found, again, at the core of Hungarian national identity: belonging to the 'west' as the natural historical and political alignment, which would be reinforced by joining the League.

Interestingly, the choice of arguments put forward by both government and opposition reveal that Hungary followed closely the transnational argumentation for the League, originating especially in Britain, nurturing the idea of 'universal democratization.'<sup>1093</sup> For the Hungarians, belief in British 'fair

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igenis nagyon is reális dolgok és csodálom, hogy épen a világháború tanulságai után ezt kétségbe lehet vonni." Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 228.

<sup>1090</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 228.

<sup>1091</sup> "... minden kételyen felül áll, hogy a kis- és nagyhatalmak kétszer is meggondolják, vájjon olyan vállalkozásba bocsátkozzanak-e, amelyet az egész műveit világ közvéleménye elítél." Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 228.

<sup>1092</sup> Ihalainen 2018, 10–13.

<sup>1093</sup> Ihalainen 2018, 4–6.

play' in international matters,<sup>1094</sup> the support Hungary had received by British emissaries in the construction of the counterrevolutionary regime and the subtle sympathy for Hungary since then<sup>1095</sup> encouraged accepting those arguments in the hope they might lead to more direct support from the old benefactor.

#### 4.4.3 Revision in the centre

The main motivation for accession was still remote from the more or less theoretical pondering on the role or nature of the League. It was Article 19 of the Covenant, which, as the Hungarians believed, would sooner or later open the way for revision of the Trianon Treaty:<sup>1096</sup>

"The Assembly may from time to time advise the reconsideration by Members of the League of treaties which have become inapplicable and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world."<sup>1097</sup>

Apponyi declared that he himself had earlier been opposed to accession when the Covenant included no option for discussing revision. However, after the latest amendments, the Covenant allowed exactly that. For Apponyi – and most Hungarians regardless of political stance – this was an essential moral and rhetorical back door; however slight the chances might be, it justified accession.<sup>1098</sup> He went on to underline that accession to the League did not mean uncritical acceptance of the Trianon Treaty, but, on the contrary, a possibility to rectify the injustices peacefully and through negotiation.<sup>1099</sup> He reported presenting this view directly to the representatives of the Entente powers, who had accepted it as a basis for co-operation:

"Finally, the gentlemen praised my sincerity and expressed their delight that our co-operation shall be based on truth, not on mutual dishonesty."<sup>1100</sup>

It must be emphasized that even though no concessions were immediately foreseen, and the Entente representatives had not actually promised anything, Apponyi could not speak in any other way. The socio-political trauma of the Trianon and the pervasive spirit of revision made it imperative for a politician to seize and elaborate any opportunity, however slight.

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<sup>1094</sup> Zeidler 2007, 84.

<sup>1095</sup> This was, however, mostly caused by economic competition with France in East Central Europe; whereas France had specifically supported Czechoslovakia, Britain wanted to counterbalance its regional influence by maintaining closer contacts with Hungary. Gyarmati 1999, 201; Orde 1980, 484–488.

<sup>1096</sup> Justification annex for the bill No. 84, 16.11.1922, NI 84/III/1922, 31–32.

<sup>1097</sup> Article 19 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

<sup>1098</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 229–230.

<sup>1099</sup> For the German attitude towards the League as a possibility to overcome the restraints of Versailles, see Ihalainen 2018, 5.

<sup>1100</sup> "A vége az volt, hogy az urak köszönetet mondtak őszinteségemért és örömüknek adtak kifejezést, hogy együttműködésünk végre az igazságnak, nem pedig a kölcsönös félrevezetésnek alapjára helyezték." Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 230.

Appónyi went on to assure the House that revision would sooner or later find its way onto the League of Nations agenda. His urging for patience was based on a conceptualization of time in international politics: Hungary must have a finger on the pulse of the ever-accelerating tempo of world history, waiting for the right moment – which might come sooner than expected – when Hungary would finally get its voice heard on the matter.<sup>1101</sup>

Another argument for accession was inextricably linked to the trauma of Trianon. The League monitored the enforcement of the minority protection treaties,<sup>1102</sup> and in that field Hungary had a lot to gain. As a fully-fledged member, Hungary would be able to highlight the injustices Hungarians suffered on territories ceded to neighbouring countries.<sup>1103</sup> Minister Daruváry also widened the scope of the problem, arguing that the Hungarian case was only an example of the multitude of minority questions,<sup>1104</sup> upon whose solution the stability and security of Central Europe depended.

“The question of minority protection is not only a main point of our policy, but also, in my opinion, a main problem relevant to the whole of Central Europe, because as long as there is no satisfactory answer to that question, there shall be no settling of souls, no friendly relations between the nations and peoples. Fundamentally, no real peace can be achieved without it, and therefore any step forward on the matter is a step towards European consolidation.”<sup>1105</sup>

Hungarian politicians, quite naturally, wanted to present themselves as visionary statesmen capable of solving not only the problems immediately linked to Hungary, but also of offering solutions for the stability of the whole of Europe.<sup>1106</sup>

At the same time, Moser remarked, the main adversaries of Hungary, the “so-called successor states”<sup>1107</sup> still aimed at undermining Hungarian progress and finalizing the mutilation started in the Treaty of Trianon. Therefore the Little Entente had every reason to resist any initiative for peaceful consolidation.<sup>1108</sup> At the time they were abusing all prerogatives granted to them by the Treaty of

<sup>1101</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 230. Apponyi formulated the temporal dimension of politics with almost identical words as Károly Huszár in 1920 (see Chapter 2.2.1.). Both arguments concerned Hungary’s need to be able to react to sudden changes in international sphere; a pre-emptive legitimization of exceptional measures in exceptional times.

<sup>1102</sup> Articles 54–66 of the Treaty of Trianon. On the minority protection treaties, see Galántai 1992; Zeidler 2007, 34.

<sup>1103</sup> Memorandum of the Committee for Foreign Affairs concerning the bill No. 84, 16.1.1923, NI 159/III/1922, 289; Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 229.

<sup>1104</sup> For a comparative view of East Central European minority questions, see e.g. Borsody 1988; Matikainen 2006.

<sup>1105</sup> “A kisebbségek védelmének kérdése nemcsak a mi politikánk egyik sarkalatos pontja, hanem nézetem szerint egész Középeurópa politikájának tulajdonképpen centrális problémája, mert addig, amíg ez a kérdés kielégítő megoldást nem nyer, a lelkek megnyugvása, a nemzeteknek és államoknak a barátságos érintkezése és voltaképpen az igazi béke megteremtése nem lehetséges, és minden lépés, amely ezen a téren történik, az európai konszolidáció felé való lépés.” Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 219.

<sup>1106</sup> Romsics 1995, 73, 218.

<sup>1107</sup> “... u. n. utódállamok ...” Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 207.

<sup>1108</sup> Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 207.



Trianon and ignoring the few articles that might ensure justice for Hungary.<sup>1109</sup> The need to bring the injustices to light was thus presented as an argument on behalf of accession: even if it yielded no immediate benefits, it would at least give Hungary a forum to promote its goals and expose the injustices of its neighbours.<sup>1110</sup> When the Little Entente had threatened to make public any border incidents and disputes with Hungary, Daruváry responded with ironic praise; any publicity, any international negotiation could not be worse for Hungary: “because ... we shall fight with the pure weapon of truth and as a consequence, we do not want to avoid European publicity, but to pursue it!”<sup>1111</sup> Moreover, the arbitration procedures in the case of impending war<sup>1112</sup> would be an asset for Hungary. The coup attempt of the former Habsburg King Charles, which had provoked an ultimatum from the Little Entente, could have been resolved more peacefully if Hungary had been a member of the League that time, and would not have granted the Little Entente once more a pretext for humiliating Hungary.<sup>1113</sup>

Until now, the members of the Little Entente, as close allies of France, had had a greater say in international matters and had indeed abused that prominent position to downplay Hungary.<sup>1114</sup> By contrast, accession to the League was seen as a possibility for Hungary to break free from the strained atmosphere of East Central Europe and to obtain justice in the clear, impartial atmosphere of the wider world. This argument was further reinforced by the potential of positive lobbying within the League; the better the foreign countries learned to know Hungary and its noble cause, the more easily would their common opinions turn in favour of bringing justice to it.<sup>1115</sup> Hungary should also team up with the other defeated states to promote the common cause of a just peace.<sup>1116</sup> Here, again, one can see the constant interplay between the profound moral reasoning and opportunistic realism in Hungarian revisionist thought.

Quite a lot of attention was paid to the matter of disarmament, discussed both theoretically and more in detail with relevance to Hungary. Apponyi again directed his argument against the neighbouring countries, which had repeatedly accused Hungary of being a military threat, even though the Hungarian army had already been reduced to a mere 35 000 men, whereas the adjacent countries combined had 500 000. This was presented as one more opportunistic and anti-Hungarian discourse upheld by the Little Entente.<sup>1117</sup> Moreover, the arms control commissions, set up earlier by the Entente, and more recently by the League of Nations, were an ongoing violation of Hungarian sovereignty.<sup>1118</sup> The

<sup>1109</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 230.

<sup>1110</sup> Ernő Moser, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 207.

<sup>1111</sup> “... mert ... mi az igazság tiszta fegyvereivel küzdünk és ennek folytán az európai közvéleményt nemhogy kerülnők, hanem egyenesen keressük.” Géza Daruváry, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 232.

<sup>1112</sup> Articles 13 and 15 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

<sup>1113</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 228.

<sup>1114</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 230–231.

<sup>1115</sup> Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 219.

<sup>1116</sup> Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 218.

<sup>1117</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 231.

<sup>1118</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 231.

disarmament procedures could – according to Apponyi’s rhetoric – be made more favourable to Hungary through accession to the League. He had considered the overlapping articles of the Treaty of Trianon<sup>1119</sup> and the Covenant of the League of Nations<sup>1120</sup> and come to the conclusion that after accession the military limitation articles of the Trianon Treaty would no longer be unconditional, when Hungary, as member of the League, could reopen the disarmament question concerning itself.<sup>1121</sup> Naturally, Apponyi noted, the most probable reaction on the part of the League would be to admit no amendments to Hungary’s limitations. Still, he could not resist leaving some room for wishful thinking: “It might be so, but not necessarily so.”<sup>1122</sup>

Especially in the pursuit of creating and maintaining this atmosphere of openness and understanding, which could then result in sympathy for Hungary, Hungary itself must not upset the precarious state of peace: the better Hungary represented its high moral standards, refraining from any attempts to defy the treaties, the stronger its position would be, despite any negative propaganda.<sup>1123</sup> Minister Daruváry complemented Apponyi’s statement with emphasis on Hungary’s growing independence from Little Entente sanctions and pointing out that the control commissions had already decided certain matters in favour of Hungary, and along with that, the credibility of the repeated accusations by the Little Entente was on the wane.<sup>1124</sup>

The revision hopes were formulated along many possible lines, all of which could be advanced within the League. Of these, the more realistic ones were the easing of international financial and military control over Hungary, which was officially discontinued already in 1926–27. However, the interpretations of the minority protection treaties rarely benefitted Hungary due to continuous French support to the successor states.<sup>1125</sup> The question of border revision was even further from the agenda, which resulted in Hungary turning its back on the League and eventually seeking support from Italy and later Germany.

#### 4.4.4 International and national consolidation in the making

The question of accession once again brought to the surface the deep rift between the conservative government and the opposition. The international examples and arguments were projected onto the context of Hungarian domestic policy. Despite agreeing with the government on the accession question, Peidl linked his argument more to the internationalist conceptualization of peace than to

<sup>1119</sup> Articles 100–143 of the Treaty of Trianon.

<sup>1120</sup> Article 8 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

<sup>1121</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 229.

<sup>1122</sup> “Ez lehet, de nem szükségképen következik be.” Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 229. In the long run, this argument was less wishful thinking than one might assume. When Hungary unilaterally began rearmament in the late 1920s, the League of Nations did not officially intervene, as it considered the Hungarian rearmament to be legitimate self-defence. Zeidler 2007, 31–32.

<sup>1123</sup> Albert Apponyi, NN IX/1922, 31.1.1923, 231.

<sup>1124</sup> Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 231–232.

<sup>1125</sup> Zeidler 2007, 34, 92.

Hungarian national interests. He reminded the House that the Social Democrats had been active in the peace movement long before the World War, a process which only failed when “the war-mongering ruling classes managed to present the reasons for starting the war so as to be able to deceive the workers around the world.”<sup>1126</sup> His own apology for Hungarian Social Democrats supporting the war effort was the fact the war had first and foremost been waged against the most reactionary of all rulers, the Russian Tsar.<sup>1127</sup> To the narrative he added the post-war Social Democrats’ international effort for a just peace settlement and protection of minorities, thus demonstrating that they had been not only in accordance with the idealism of the Hungarian government, but also ahead of it.<sup>1128</sup>

In the Hungarian case, Peidl drew a parallel between the violence on the front lines and the post-war counterrevolutionary violence – the latter was a direct descendant of the former, and the greatest suffering in both was laid on the working class.<sup>1129</sup> Accordingly, the era of peaceful, mutually respectful consolidation was to be found both in the international relations and in the internal politics of Hungary.<sup>1130</sup> Hungary had to stop seeing enemies – external and internal ones – all around it.<sup>1131</sup> For Peidl, the reforms in domestic and foreign policy were inseparable:

“...if this approach towards the working people within the country will come to fruition ... we should reform our domestic policy the same way: then the way will be open for building friendship in a democratic way in our foreign policy, too. That is the way by which we can ensure the rectification of the injustice committed against us.”<sup>1132</sup>

Sándor Giesswein, speaking in the context of Christian pacifism, went on to criticize the prevalent policy of ‘Christian Nationalism’, which disregarded the concept of internationalism, even though universalism was among the founding principles of Christendom and the idea of international justice was first presented by the Catholic Francisco de Vitoria and codified by the Protestant Hugo Grotius, whereas the so-called *Realpolitik* was based on cynicism, chauvinism and ‘pagan’

<sup>1126</sup> “... a háborút akaró uralkodó osztályoknak sikerült a háború megindításának okait annyira elleplezni, hogy ez a világon sokfelé megtévesztőleg hatott a munkásokra.” Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 209. On the appeal of the World War on the workers, see Hobsbawm 1994, 136–137.

<sup>1127</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 209.

<sup>1128</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 209–210.

<sup>1129</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 210. Cf. Gerwarth 2013, 83–85.

<sup>1130</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 210.

<sup>1131</sup> Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 211.

<sup>1132</sup> “... ha sikerül ezt a felfogást az országban belül is a dolgozó néppel szemben érvényre juttatni ... ha az említett mentalitást sikerült így át alakítanunk belpolitikai szempontból: akkor nyitva áll az útja annak, hogy külpolitikailag is demokratikus utón barátokat szerezzünk magunknak. Ez az út biztosítja azután azt, hogy a velünk szemben elkövetett igazságtalanságot helyre tudjuk hozni.” Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 211. This was in line with the transnational Social Democratic discourse; in Germany, Sweden and Finland calls for domestic democratization and parliamentarization of foreign policy went hand in hand with hopes for reforming international politics in democratic spirit. Ihalainen 2017, 244–246, 279, 360, 384, 400, 497.

Macchiavellianism.<sup>1133</sup> Now it was the duty of all nations, both the arrogant Great Powers as well as the nationalist Hungary, to abandon Macchiavellianism and work together in co-operation as civilized nations to fulfil the idea of the League of Nations.<sup>1134</sup> Giesswein again applied the irrefutable arguments of Christianity, civilization and Europeanism on behalf of Hungarian reformism. But national pride, reformulated and redescribed, also had its part in the motivation for international co-operation:

“I trust that the Hungarian people, which has several times freed itself from the shackles of absolutism, still has the love of freedom in their hearts, and now it will shake off the shackles of reactionism and step proudly into the League of Nations in order to work together with other European peoples for liberty and progress.”<sup>1135</sup>

The command over the concept of peace then caused friction between the Left and the Right, as Vilmos Lers<sup>1136</sup> felt obliged to intervene in the debate – even though he had nothing to say directly related to the accession question – to counterbalance “the Socialist monopolization of the concept of peace”<sup>1137</sup> to serve their domestic political interests.<sup>1138</sup> For Lers, leftist international pacifism was a wolf in sheep’s clothing – as at any moment there might “emerge the great war cry ... ‘Workers of the world, unite!’”<sup>1139</sup> For him, it was delusional to believe that world peace could be achieved through a Socialist programme.<sup>1140</sup> On the contrary, the government had good reason to be proud of its restraint, not succumbing to the passions of the masses, but carrying out the necessary measures to stabilize the situation. Accession to the League was thus a rational step in the coherent government policy of consolidation, which the Social Democrats only wanted to make appear suspicious and reactionary.<sup>1141</sup> This consolidation – and it alone – included Hungarian self-esteem and reliance on

<sup>1133</sup> Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 212. Here Giesswein also appealed to the intentional construction of consensus between the Catholic and Protestant churches – formerly opposed to each other in the Hungarian discourse, but now brought together in the universal spirit of Christian nation-building (see Chapter 2). See also Hanebrink 2006, 40–41, 115–120.

<sup>1134</sup> Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 212. This was again in line with the British discourse on the League as a vehicle of worldwide ‘enlightenment’ in the spirit of democracy. Ihalainen 2018, 6.

<sup>1135</sup> “En bízom abban, hogy a magyar népben, amely már többször lerázta magáról az abszolutizmus rabláncait, igazán él a szabadság szeretete, és ha most a reakció béklyókat rak nemzet akarata le fogja ezeket rázni és méltóképen oda fog állani a népek szövetségébe, hogy együtt dolgozzék Európa többi népeivel a haladásért és a szabadságért.” Sándor Giesswein, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 213.

<sup>1136</sup> Economist, diplomat and expert in international law, Vilmos Lers (1869–1923) had a prominent career in state administration and for his services was ennobled with the rank of Baron in 1915. A member of the Hungarian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. Elected to Parliament in 1922 on the Unity Party ticket. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 113–114; MÉL: Lers Vilmos, baró.

<sup>1137</sup> “... a béke eszméjét monopoliumszerűleg a szociáldemokraták kezében.” Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 213.

<sup>1138</sup> Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 213.

<sup>1139</sup> “... előbukkan a nagy jelszó ... világ proletárjai egysüljetek!” Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 216.

<sup>1140</sup> Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 216.

<sup>1141</sup> Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 216.

legitimacy, which would finally lead to the amendment of the injustices of Trianon.<sup>1142</sup>

During Lers' speech, the debate again heated up, causing interruptions and heckling between Left and Right – including references to the Red as well as the White terror in post-war Hungary, to noble ideas and ignoble means.<sup>1143</sup> The dynamics of the debate reflected the ongoing and unbridgeable ideological and discursive rift between the Conservatives and the Social Democrats – even though there was no disagreement on the present matter, even slight differences in argumentation could lead to a situation where the sore points of domestic policy and the recent past were drawn into the debate.<sup>1144</sup> The Speaker had to repeatedly remind the House of correct procedure, to an extent which tells something about the heated atmosphere:

“I am obliged to remind the honourable Member that the matter in question is Hungary's accession to the League of Nations.”<sup>1145</sup>

Whereas Peidl criticized the government for its “Hungarian upper-class mentality”<sup>1146</sup> with its feudalist arrogance and lack of solidarity, Lers responded by condemning the application of such antagonistic concepts as class struggle – a concept, which by its mere existence clearly revealed the limits of the so-called pacifism of the Left.<sup>1147</sup> He continued that the great ideals of the French Revolution – liberty, fraternity and equality – had only led to chaos and anarchy when applied directly, whereas Hungary had always been at its best as a late adopter and moderate reformer. That was no reason to accuse Hungary of reactionism.<sup>1148</sup> Here, Lers tried to use the historical argument of Hungary as a model of successful reformism, but was repeatedly interrupted by leftists, who reminded him of the numerous injustices committed by the Hungarian elites towards the people throughout the ages.<sup>1149</sup> István Dénes<sup>1150</sup> gave a separate response: to claim that Hungary had been moderate in its adopting of the ideals of the French Revolution was a “falsification of history, it did not take place. Those, who indeed have adopted the ideals of the French Revolution in Hungary, have repeatedly been forcibly expelled from the country by the great Hungarian

<sup>1142</sup> Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 216.

<sup>1143</sup> 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 214–215.

<sup>1144</sup> 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 217.

<sup>1145</sup> “Kénytelen vagyok a képviselő urat arra figyelmeztetni, hogy Magyarországnak a nemzetek szövetségébe való felvétele van napirenden.” László Almásy, Speaker of the National Assembly, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 217.

<sup>1146</sup> “... magyar uri mentalitás ...” Gyula Peidl, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 211.

<sup>1147</sup> Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 213–214.

<sup>1148</sup> Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 215. The negative interpretation of 1789 and its connotations of radicalism and secularism as the model for the post-war revolutions was repeatedly applied by the counterrevolutionary Right throughout Europe. See Gerwarth 2017, 141; Hanebrink 2006, 64–65; Vares & Vares 2019, 256.

<sup>1149</sup> 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 215.

<sup>1150</sup> Lawyer and economist from Transylvania, István Dénes (1889–1963) was the founder and only parliamentary representative of the Hungarian Workers' Party (*Magyar Munkáspárt*), concentrating on the land reform question. Due to his demagogical rhetoric he was also accused of being an *agent provocateur* working for government goals. Lengyel & Vidor 1922, 50; MÉL: Dénes, István.

landowners.”<sup>1151</sup> To which Lers replied: “Széchenyi himself was one of them!”<sup>1152</sup> using the canonized figure of István Széchenyi as the archetypical enlightened reformist, who still never resorted to revolutionary activism.<sup>1153</sup>

Like Apponyi, Lers also relied on the argument of historical temporality and patience to wait for the right moment (*kairos*); after the major historic ordeals of the Hungarian nation, such as the Battle of Mohács, the fall of Rákóczi or the fall of the revolution of 1848–49 it had taken decades, even centuries, for the wounds of the nation to heal and to build consolidation anew, “so how can we expect, after the immense, world-shattering war, to immediately find solutions in our foreign and domestic policy to satisfy all?”<sup>1154</sup> He also cited a transnational example to support his argument for ‘conservative internationalism’: when the American states could base their co-operation on mutual respect instead of dividing the continent into winners and losers, Europe and Hungary should likewise set aside such pettiness, division and accusations. In saying this, he tried to conquer the idea of cross-border solidarity from the Left, and at the same time made the wry remark that the ongoing interruptions to his speech clearly demonstrated where the solidarity of the Left ended.<sup>1155</sup>

For Dénes, the sins of the Hungarian nobility, “the Hungarian landowners, who were and still are the lords of Hungary”<sup>1156</sup> were inescapable, and the contemporary situation was hardly different. From this, he drew a parallel to foreign policy and the present matter:

“When we want to bring the Hungarian people to the League of Nations, we have to watch ourselves not to let in only the Hungarian government, which is distant from the Hungarian people, but the very people itself.”<sup>1157</sup>

Here, the call for the democratization and parliamentarization of foreign policy was articulated at its clearest – but to deaf ears, as the government clung tightly onto its monopoly of foreign policy.<sup>1158</sup>

At this point it becomes apparent that the debate had evolved (or degenerated) to the level of a contestation over the core conceptualizations of the Hungarian nation and national identity. The government wanted to make use of

1151 “Ez a történelemnek a meghamisítása, mert nem áll. Azokat, akik a francia forradalom eszméit akceptálták Magyarországon, a magyar nagybirtokosok mindenkor kiüldözték az országból.” István Dénes, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 217.

1152 “Széchenyi maga is az volt!” Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 217.

1153 See Chapter 3.3.

1154 “...akkor hogyan várhatjuk egy óriási, világrendítő háború után, hogy mindenki rövidesen eltalálja a megfelelő irányt belpolitikai és külpolitikai téren?” Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 215.

1155 Vilmos Lers, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 215.

1156 “...a magyar nagybirtokosok, akik urak voltak és urak ma is Magyarországon...” István Dénes, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 217.

1157 “... amikor a népszövetségbe akarjuk bevinni a magyar népet, vigyázni kell arra, hogy ebbe a népszövetségbe ne a magyar kormány kerüljön be, amely távol áll a magyar néptől, hanem igenis bekerüljön a magyar nép.” István Dénes, 30.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 218. This argument was at the core of the transnational Social Democratic discourse that linked domestic and international parliamentarization. See Ihalainen 2018, 4, 17.

1158 Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 107.

Hungary's putative past, its natural belonging to the 'west' since the Middle Ages and its role as the nation that had been able to withstand the temptation of revolution arising in 1789, but applied it in a model reformist way throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1159</sup> Now, the argument continued, Hungary was again fulfilling its unrewarding national mission: even when downtrodden and mutilated, it was showing the world a way to settle the numerous inter-European post-war disputes through international co-operation – and should eventually have its voice heard and be rewarded. The opposition, in turn, attempted to reinterpret the same fundamental tenets of Hungarian nationalism in the defence of their own policy – applying the 'western' identity in defence of the need for domestic reforms and interpreting international co-operation and the prospects of revision through the need for mutual understanding and shared interests instead of the zero-sum game of international leverage the government suggested. This debate also brought to fore the limited content and the instrumental value of the consolidation discourse: when the Social Democrats attempted to give it an internationalist interpretation, including the parliamentarization of foreign policy and the democratic settlement of international affairs, the government conservatives hastened to deny such allegations, making the usual accusations of Social Democrats as thinly-disguised revolutionaries, and to return the rhetorical ownership of the concept of consolidation – and the possibility to keep it vague enough to give it whatever content the current political situation necessitated – to the government. Accordingly, the concept of peace was constructed in two ways: for the Social Democrats it was a matter of internationalism, for the conservatives of patriotism.<sup>1160</sup>

#### 4.4.5 Nurturing the many hopes

In his concluding speech, Minister Daruváry formulated the concept of Hungary's international credibility quite one-sidedly in relation to domestic policy:

"In this country there shall be only one foreign policy, and that is the foreign policy of the government. The government is entirely confident that in this relation it can rely on every party in the National Assembly."<sup>1161</sup>

<sup>1159</sup> On the conservative redescription of the 1848 revolution, see Chapter 3.4.

<sup>1160</sup> Still, we must remember that for the underlying Hungarian nationalism that characterized even the Social Democrats, Communist internationalism or renouncing revision was out of the question. The difference of opinion was constructed rather on the conceptual level and domestic political projections. This was in line with the East Central European polity, where the Social Democratic parties to some extent went along with the nationalist undercurrent within the antagonistic foreign political atmosphere. Evans 2007, 219–221; Zeidler 2007, 74; Vares & Vares 2019, 74–76, 82. For the counter-example of radical leftist opposition to the League in Sweden and Finland, see Ihalainen 2018, 6–8, 15–18.

<sup>1161</sup> "...ebben az országban csak egy külpolitika van és ez a magyar kormány külpolitikája. És teljesen bizik a kormány abban, hogy e tekintetben a nemzetgyűlés minden pártjára számíthat." Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign affairs, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 232. The opposition was not entitled to foreign political

Such language, typical of the limited and confidential conceptualization of foreign policy, was not, however, directed only at the leftist calls for parliamentarization, but equally at the radical Right, inclined towards violent revisionism, which the Government could not risk at that moment.<sup>1162</sup> At present, the patriotic duty of Hungarians was that “we do absolutely not provoke anyone.”<sup>1163</sup> The Bethlen government was determined to curb any one-sided revision attempts – but only for the time being and until more favourable opportunities emerged.<sup>1164</sup> As noted earlier, accession to the League was only one aspect of the ambivalent foreign policy that encompassed both legalism and opportunism. However much Hungary wanted to identify itself with the former and only accuse its neighbours of the latter, the highflown rhetoric about ‘the pure weapon of truth’ did not actually prevent Hungary from engaging in risky ventures from time to time, such as the forgery of French Francs in 1925 or arms-smuggling in 1928.<sup>1165</sup> The official foreign policy promptly distanced itself from the machinations, claiming them to be merely the work of irresponsible individuals, and assured the League of Nations that an official inquiry would be opened to investigate any misdemeanour.<sup>1166</sup>

As regards the nature of political language, the League of Nations accession debate applied the inclusive and ‘consolidatory’ tones that the government had at its disposal when necessary, this time applying them in foreign policy discourse: the idea of consolidation of the international order within the League was given the positive interpretation of a ‘truly impartial’ forum that would eventually render assistance to Hungary. This was typical of the government discourse that attempted to appropriate national and transnational concepts and to give them a limited interpretation that legitimized the prevailing policy. This also applied to the post-war reformist spirit: despite the consciously limited interpretation of the constitutional reform when applied in the construction of the counterrevolutionary regime, the government was eager to use the same concepts of constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy now, as they could be applied to justify Hungary’s accession to the League and the hopes it carried. The former critics of western parliamentarism had found something progressive in themselves and were now placing their hopes on international parliamentarism.<sup>1167</sup>

The very idea of international co-operation within the League of Nations was applied on many rhetorical dimensions. All discussants viewed it as the inevitable and necessary progression of international relations after the World

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representation, as the government upheld the limited conceptualization and denied all calls for parliamentarization. Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 107. In other countries, too, the idea of the parliamentarization of foreign policy clashed with the government’s will to safeguard its ‘reliable’ line of foreign policy against possible intrusions of ‘extremist’ opposition. See Ihalainen 2018, 14.

<sup>1162</sup> See e.g. Püski 2006, 211; Sakmyster 1994, 22–23.

<sup>1163</sup> “...senkit egyáltalán nem provokálunk”, Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 232.

<sup>1164</sup> See Zeidler 2007, 69–70.

<sup>1165</sup> Romsics 1995, 209, 229.

<sup>1166</sup> Zeidler 2013, 181.

<sup>1167</sup> See Chapter 2.2.; cf. Ihalainen 2018, 9–10.



War had demonstrated the failures of earlier systems. Even though several Members warned against too high hopes, the general mood was positive: after years of Entente domination in international relations, any opening towards the wider world could at least do no harm to Hungary. The universal nature of the League was clearly seen a particular asset, a projection of Hungarian expectations to global sphere, where more and more nations, without further prejudice towards Hungary, could be convinced through positive lobbying. For the opposition, the democratic and parliamentary spirit of the League also served as a model to conduct a more just domestic policy. The latter interpretation, however, was promptly rejected by the government.

The government conceptualized international politics and international co-operation as a zero-sum game between the politico-spatial constellations, among which Hungary needed to manoeuvre and which could be pitted against each other for Hungary's benefit: whereas the immediate Central European region had so far been dominated by the malevolent Little Entente, the League of Nations offered a new, potentially 'impartial and objective' forum in which Hungary could disseminate 'the Hungarian truth' among the non-aligned states and eventually gain enough international support to supersede the successor states' narrative as the prime perspective on East Central Europe. Thus the politicians anticipated that the Great Powers guarding the peace treaties would also eventually become favourably disposed towards Hungary and agree on the need for border revision according to the Hungarian visionary understanding of justice. Aware of the international, especially British arguments favouring the League of Nations, the Hungarians were eager to show Britain their amenability to co-operation, as they still looked upon the country as Hungary's benefactor. From the British rhetoric of multi-lateral co-operation which would prove beneficial for Hungary it was but a small step to assume that the United Kingdom would render concrete support to the revision process when the time was ripe.

Putting their hopes on international support thus meant little to the improvement of direct relations with the neighbouring states. Despite the hopeful comments by Apponyi and Daruváry,<sup>1168</sup> the language was mainly based on the use of the Little Entente as an adversary figure. This was in line with the government discourse of consolidation, for its part based on the projection of Hungary being surrounded by enemies and the need to break through that blockade to achieve revision. Accession to the League was one tool in the broader revision discourse, and when it did not come to fruition, others were applied without question. As can be seen in the following chapter, the alliance with Italy in 1927 was legitimized through the same conscious ambiguity: when Hungary was unable to claim justice in the legal forum, the only way left to achieve revision was the support of the Fascist state.<sup>1169</sup>

The Hungarian debate was also symptomatic in the broader rhetorical construction of the League's international significance. The national parliaments,

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<sup>1168</sup> Albert Apponyi, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 231; Géza Daruváry, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs, 31.1.1923, NN IX/1922, 231-232.

<sup>1169</sup> See e.g. Romsics 1995, 310.

while debating accession to the League, explicitly declared what they expected of it and what instrumental uses it might have. Hungarian scepticism towards the League can thus be considered as a part of the contemporary discursive process, which simultaneously reflected and created the prevailing conception of the 'Failure of the League.'

## 4.5 A way out of isolation? The Treaty of Friendship with Italy, 1927

### 4.5.1 Crafting a new world order, once again

Despite the constant antagonism with the Little Entente in the 1920s, Hungary had periodically made separate efforts to improve its relationship with each of its neighbours. The years 1926–27 in particular had witnessed a rapprochement between Hungary and Yugoslavia. However, Italy, as Yugoslavia's constant rival in the struggle for mastery of the Adriatic, offered Hungary a competing bilateral treaty in order to undermine Yugoslavian influence. The Hungarian government, calculating that however beneficial a treaty with Yugoslavia might be, it would not dissolve the Little Entente, quickly accepted the Italian offer.<sup>1170</sup> The treaty of "enduring peace and eternal friendship"<sup>1171</sup> between Hungary and Italy was ceremoniously signed by István Bethlen and Benito Mussolini in Rome on 5 April 1927.<sup>1172</sup>

The content of the treaty itself was largely technical, concerning arbitration between the two states, resorting to diplomatic means in case of disagreements, and when needed, also international arbitration through the International Court of Justice.<sup>1173</sup> However, in the preparation of the treaty, Bethlen and Mussolini had also acknowledged that the two states had mutual political interests and agreed to consult each other on future decisions concerning those interests.<sup>1174</sup> Although not included in the text of the treaty, this 'secret clause' became the most important content of the treaty from the Hungarian perspective as it was readily interpreted as Italy's support for Hungarian foreign policy and especially for revision.

This attitude was clearly already apparent in the justification annex of the ratification bill, which stated that after the war and Trianon, Italy and Hungary had "quickly and with pleasure restored the traditionally good relationship that

<sup>1170</sup> Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 146–147; Zeidler 2009, 103–104.

<sup>1171</sup> "...állandó béke és örökös barátság", Bill concerning the ratification of the Treaty of Friendship, KI 134/IV/1927, 316.

<sup>1172</sup> Officially: Agreement of friendship, conciliatory process and arbitration between Hungary and Italy / *Barátsági, békéltető eljárási és választott bírósági szerződés Magyarország és Olaszország között*. Bill concerning the ratification of the Treaty of Friendship, KI 134/IV/1927, 315.

<sup>1173</sup> Bill concerning the ratification of the Treaty of Friendship, KI 134/IV/1927, 316.

<sup>1174</sup> Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 155–156; Zeidler 2009, 103.

had been established in the pre-war years,<sup>1175</sup> and that Italy had already rendered assistance to Hungary in international fora concerning the hardships of the post-war era.<sup>1176</sup> The treaty in question was thus seen as an official reinforcement of the relationship that had already proved fruitful for Hungary. In its memorandum, the Committee for Foreign Affairs took an even more straightforward position towards the treaty, with the firm belief that re-establishing ties with Italy would greatly improve the prospects of breaking Hungary's post-war foreign political isolation.<sup>1177</sup>

The ratification of the treaty was debated on the House of Representatives – the Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament after the parliamentary reform of 1926 – on 15 May 1927. József Illés<sup>1178</sup> opened the debate by presenting the ratification bill on behalf of the Committee for Foreign Affairs. At the very beginning of his speech he hinted that the treaty had both legal content and more profound political implications, both of which he went on to present.<sup>1179</sup> From the legal point of view, he pointed out, the World War had brought destruction not only on the field of battle, but also in the field of international law.<sup>1180</sup> Still, the sense of justice was not defeated, but remained “indelibly carved in the soul of every human being – whatever state or nation they belong to”<sup>1181</sup> – even the intolerable peace dictates had not been able to expunge it. On the contrary, the international treaty system and international justice were being re-established specifically through the co-operation between the defeated and the victorious powers, as was the case of Hungary and Italy.<sup>1182</sup> The generalization of local solutions was typical argumentation in the Hungaro-centrist discourse: that Hungary was indeed showing an example to the world by promoting international arbitration where power politics had failed:

“Since the war a host of completely new international disputes has emerged, and the number of disputed issues has increased extraordinarily. This has also justified the need to establish committees of conciliation and elected courts as soon as possible, if we do not want all states to remain in constant dispute, hostility and struggle against each other.”<sup>1183</sup>

1175 “... örvendetes módon hamarosan helyreállt a háborút megelőző időben kialakult hagyományos jó viszony.” Justification annex for the bill No. 134, KI 134/IV/1927, 322.

1176 Justification annex for the bill No. 134, KI 134/IV/1927, 322. On the former support of Italy, see especially the case of Sopron, Chapter 4.3.

1177 Memorandum of the Committee for Foreign Affairs concerning the bill No. 134, KI 136/IV/1927, 326.

1178 A conservative scholar of legal history, József Illés (1871–1944) had sat in the pre-war Parliament in 1913–1918 and was elected again in 1922 on the Unity Party ticket. He had been a member of the Hungarian Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference and had also represented Hungary in various instances on the interpretation of minority rights. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 150–151; MÉL: Illés, József.

1179 József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 226.

<sup>1180</sup> József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 226.

1181 “... kitörülhetetlenül van beleírva mindenkinek – bármely országhoz vagy nemzethez tartozzék – a lelkébe.” József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 226.

1182 József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 226.

1183 “A háború után a nemzetközi vitás kérdéseknek egészen új tömege állott elő, a vitás kérdések rendkívüli módon megszorodtak. Ez is indokolja, hogy szükséges volt a

Thus Hungary had the model for peaceful progress in post-war Europe, a model that had already been introduced in the Hungaro-Austrian treaty of 1923 and was now achieving results in other parts of Europe as well.<sup>1184</sup> According to Illés, the International Court of Justice was exactly what Hungary had envisaged as the mediator in international disputes.<sup>1185</sup> In so saying, he expanded the Hungarian hopes for a more equitable post-war system to apply to all international relations.<sup>1186</sup> The same arguments used in the League of Nations accession debate in 1923 were thus reapplied, yet with a bolder tone; Hungary still possessed the keys to the successful resolutions of general European issues, but as the international parliamentary cooperation through the League so cherished in 1923 had proven fruitless, the leading role of settling the injustices was now handed over to the defeated states themselves.<sup>1187</sup>

From the glorious redescription of Hungary's role in building a peaceful world order, Illés moved on to the more acute and concrete political significance of the treaty. He reminded the House that the treaty concerned not only international arbitration, but also loyalty and friendship between the two nations – which he praised as a natural state of affairs, which had lasted for centuries and which only the World War had briefly and abruptly interrupted.<sup>1188</sup> What was even more important, the restoration of such an important connection was a clear sign that Hungary's isolation was being relieved: “The significance is that Hungary will slowly regain its place among the nations and peoples to which it is entitled.”<sup>1189</sup>

Illés' praise for Italy was also indicative of Hungary's changing foreign policy orientation. With the treaty, Illés argued, Italy now was on par with – or already above – Britain,<sup>1190</sup> to which Hungary had traditionally looked as its benefactor in international fora since the early 1920s.<sup>1191</sup> He also needed to explain

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békéltető bizottságok, a választott bíróságok intézményét minél jobban kiépíteni, hacsak nem akarták az összes államok, hogy állandó harcban, állandó ellenségeskedésben és vitákban álljanak egymással.” József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 226.

<sup>1184</sup> József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 226–227.

<sup>1185</sup> The newly found idea of international arbitration can also be read as an ironic comment on the minority protection treaties that had failed to meet Hungary's expectations (cf. Chapter 4.4.3). See also Gerwarth 2017, 219.

<sup>1186</sup> József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 227.

<sup>1187</sup> Hungary's expectations of 'impartial and objective' debate within the League, presented in the previous chapter, had achieved little success; on the contrary, the General Assembly of the League had from the outset served as a forum for the expression of accusations towards Hungary, for example for discrimination against Jews in the *Numerus Clausus* legislation, eventually forcing Hungary to amend it (see Chapter 2.5.). The only League of Nations resolution that had explicitly favoured Hungary concerned the reimbursements for Hungarian property confiscated by the Romanian state; yet, even this outcome was rendered void, as Romania used all possible excuses to limit the reparations to a minimum and to procrastinate their payment. Zeidler 2013, 187.

<sup>1188</sup> József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 227.

<sup>1189</sup> “Ennek jelentősége, hogy Magyarország lassanként elfoglalja azt a helyet a nemzetek és népek társaságában, mely őt megilleti.” József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 227.

<sup>1190</sup> József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 227.

<sup>1191</sup> See Chapter 4.4.

away the fears of any aggressive interpretation of the treaty – on the contrary, Hungary was taking an exemplary role in building world peace.<sup>1192</sup>

“The mutilated Hungary must also find its place in the present situation, and that place is best found by making as many friends as possible.”<sup>1193</sup>

Rhetorically, Illés had thus foreshadowed the hopes of Hungary’s growing international role and prominence, the very hopes that fuelled the whole interwar foreign policy based on revision. He nevertheless maintained the necessary rhetorical caution by reverting at the last moment to the clauses on friendship. He finished his speech with due praise for Bethlen’s successful long-term foreign policy, which bode well for the future.<sup>1194</sup> Domestic and foreign policy discourses were thus once again intertwined, as Bethlen was given the role of guarantor of favourable progress in both.<sup>1195</sup> In comparison to the League of Nations accession debate, the formulations of Hungary’s place in the world still included its allegedly visionary role in the making of the post-war order, but had since 1923 incorporated bolder tones: when multi-lateral co-operation had yielded negligible results, the national mission was now more frankly interpreted as breaking out of the international isolation with the support of a beneficial Great Power. And whereas the British support to Hungary had after all been limited, Italy as its substitute signalled its readiness for more concrete commitment. Now the time was ripe for the expression of more daring and optimistic revision plans, legitimized through suitable redescrptions of the nation, national history and international politics.

#### 4.5.2 Power ambitions or sincere mutual respect? Redescrbing Italy’s role

In response to the favourable presentation of the treaty, independent member Lajos Beck<sup>1196</sup> directed harsh criticism towards the Prime Minister, the alleged guarantor of Hungary’s cunning foreign policy. Whereas Illés had praised Bethlen for his bold initiative in seeking the treaty with Mussolini, Beck reverted to its irresponsibility; Bethlen had signed the treaty with Mussolini without securing parliamentary consensus of approval beforehand.<sup>1197</sup> In his rewording of the idea of parliamentarization of foreign policy, Beck denied Bethlen the

<sup>1192</sup> József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 227.

<sup>1193</sup> “Csonka Magyarországnak meg kell találnia helyét ebben a helyzetben is és ezt a helyet legjobban megtalálja úgy, hogyha minél több barátot szerez magának.” József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 227.

<sup>1194</sup> József Illés, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 227.

<sup>1195</sup> See also István Bethlen’s speech in Debrecen in 1928, where Bethlen himself took that role. Bethlen 2000, 240–251.

<sup>1196</sup> Economist Lajos Beck (1876–1952) had been a Member of Parliament since 1905 until 1918. At the end of the World War he was a supporter of Károlyi but parted ways with him before the revolution of 1918. After the fall of the Soviet Republic, Beck worked for the counterrevolutionary transition, acting as an arbitrator between Peidl and Friedrich. He returned to Parliament in 1922 as an independent Member, respected by the government for his financial expertise. Balogh 1976, 277–280; Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 31–32; MÉL: Beck, Lajos.

<sup>1197</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228.

mandate to sign treaties in the name of the Hungarian nation.<sup>1198</sup> To justify this approach, he played rhetorically on the organic conceptualization of the nation, the will of which could not be delegated to a single individual, not even the Prime Minister. When the legitimization of government was based on the same organic and depoliticizing conceptualizations, Beck attempted to turn them against it. Judging from the reactions of the House, Beck's rhetorical hair-splitting was approved by neither government nor opposition.<sup>1199</sup> In response, he declared that he was an independent and nonpartisan member and thus free to criticize whomever he deemed fit.<sup>1200</sup>

From criticizing the moral basis of the treaty, Beck then moved to openly articulate the revisionist expectations put on the treaty:

"Trianon has broken our vigour and the Little Entente has been created in order to perpetuate this impossible situation. Despite all discrepancies and objections, we must admit this treaty has one unquestionable advantage: that it will help us to break out of our isolation. By rapprochement with a world power we have demonstrated that we are willing and able to play an active role in world politics again."<sup>1201</sup>

However, he immediately questioned the long-term feasibility of such a policy. Dissenting from the official discourse, which frequently made use of metaphors of Hungary being besieged by the Little Entente, he reformulated the relationship towards reconciliation and co-operation. Hungary's classic antagonist, Czechoslovakia, had already hinted that the small states of East Central Europe must find common ground as they would sooner or later be confronted by the European Powers which were already building alliances in order to divide the continent in their respective spheres of interest.<sup>1202</sup> Apart from the Czechs, even "our old acquaintance and once the old enemy of everything Hungarian"<sup>1203</sup> R.W. Seton-Watson, the British scholar known for his antipathy towards Hungary, had also mitigated his stance on the matter in an article published in the *Slavonic Review*. There, he had divided the development of the Little Entente into three phases; the first had been offensive against Hungary's immediate post-war aggression, the second defensive against the further revision attempts, but the time might be ripe to move on to the third phase, where reconciliation with Hungary would be possible and profitable for all parties.<sup>1204</sup>

Supported by these encouraging gestures from former archenemies, Beck argued that the prospects for co-operation with them greatly outweighed what

<sup>1198</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228.

<sup>1199</sup> 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228.

<sup>1200</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228.

<sup>1201</sup> "Trianon a mi életerőnket széjjelvágta, a kisentente pedig azért alakult, hogy perperetnálja ezt a lehetetlen állapotot. Ennek a szerződésnek, minden kifogásunk és ellenmondásunk ellenére is egy kétségtelen előnyét konstatálnunk kell: hogy mi ezzel a mi izolált álláspontunkból kilépve. Egy világhatalomhoz való közeledésünkkel dokumentáltuk azt, hogy újra aktív szerepet kívánunk és fogunk játszani a világpolitikában." Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228.

<sup>1202</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228.

<sup>1203</sup> "... régi ismerősünk és magyarságnak hajdani régi ellensége ..." Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228.

<sup>1204</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228. For the article Beck is referring to, see Seton-Watson 1927.

could be gained from the treaty with Italy. He made use of the interwar political contingency, the continued uncertainty of European affairs, where Hungary, choosing its alliances carefully, might be in a position to tip the balance for a constructive progress in East Central Europe. Instead, the government seemed more eager to return to what he perceived as the policy of alliances and secret diplomacy, which would eventually draw the states into mutually hostile blocks and most likely into a new war, as it had done in 1914.<sup>1205</sup> Rhetorically, he thus presented these policies as mutually exclusive alternatives and asked whether Hungary was ready to invest in long-term stabilization or continue its adventurous foreign policy with militarist undertones.<sup>1206</sup> According to this dualistic narrative, Italy was the real menace, aspiring to disrupt the co-operation between the small states of East Central Europe and the Balkans in order to gain control of the Eastern Mediterranean, through a secret agreement with France and Great Britain.<sup>1207</sup> To illustrate these schemes, Beck quoted the British publisher Lord Rothermere<sup>1208</sup> – “whose relationship with Chamberlain is well-known”<sup>1209</sup> – who had called Britain to voluntarily cede its mandates in the Near East for Italy, in order to “provide these countries with civilization and culture and open them up towards European culture.”<sup>1210</sup> Though exaggerating Rothermere’s relationship with the then Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain, Beck held up the initiative as evidence of behind-the-scenes power play between the Great Powers at the expense of the smaller states. In such a situation, Beck concluded, Hungary should continue to be extremely cautious in its foreign policy, avoiding any inescapable pacts with any of the Great Powers. Despite the thorough criticism, he ultimately chose to support the ratification bill because it nevertheless paved the way for Hungary to return to the forum of international politics.<sup>1211</sup>

What makes the argument exceptionally interesting is the fact that only a few weeks after the debate, on 21 June 1927, the very same Lord Rothermere would embark on another foreign political initiative, namely his famous press campaign for ‘Hungary’s place in the sun’, embracing most of the Hungarian arguments for border revision, instantaneously making him a household name in Hungary. As Zeidler remarks that Rothermere was encouraged in his campaign by Mussolini, we can also view the campaign in the immediate context of the treaty with Italy, as an attempt to revoke the kind of arguments voiced by

<sup>1205</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 229.

<sup>1206</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 228–229.

<sup>1207</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 229.

<sup>1208</sup> Harold Sidney Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere (1868–1940) was the leading newspaper publisher in Britain in the interwar era, owner of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, through which he also communicated his political views. “Harold Sidney Harmsworth, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Rothermere”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Harold-Sydney-Harmsworth-1st-Viscount-Rothermere> (24.4.2019).

<sup>1209</sup> “... akinek Chamberlain-hez való viszonya köztudomású ...” Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 229.

<sup>1210</sup> “...ezeket az országokat civilizációval, kultúrával ellássa és az európai kultúra számára megnyissa ...” Lajos Beck, quoting Lord Rothermere, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 229.

<sup>1211</sup> Lajos Beck, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 230.

Beck, to give Hungary the impression that the revision ideas enjoyed extensive support and that Hungary could still rely on both Britain and Italy.<sup>1212</sup>

In his reply, József Östör turned Beck's criticism into a sign of strength of the government: seemingly, the opposition could only produce criticism that ended up supporting the bill.<sup>1213</sup> Dismissing the most critical tones, he was thus able to return to the revisionist justification of the treaty: giving a ray of hope to those Hungarians who had been deprived of their ancient homeland and now suffered under foreign rule.<sup>1214</sup> Östör, again making use of his background in Sopron, reminded the House of the Sopron referendum of 1920, the symbolic value of the return of István Széchenyi's resting place to the homeland and now connected the feat to the present matter by referring to Italy's support in the negotiations that led to the referendum.<sup>1215</sup> Clearly, Östör was able to bring his personal background and experiences into the parliamentary discourse, and also to use the multi-layered history politics, combining canonized history (in the form of Széchenyi)<sup>1216</sup> with the recent past (the case of Sopron)<sup>1217</sup> to reinforce his argument. This kind of rhetoric appealed to the undeniable patriotic sentiment and produced universal applause from all over the House.<sup>1218</sup> It was thus easy for Östör to formulate his support to the treaty as a moral duty in the name of all Sopronites:

“... I feel that I must do my duty and not only hide behind the rigid vote on the matter, but my duty is to appear with all the sincerity of a Hungarian heart here, in front of the public opinion of the whole country – I can say this in the name of the entire population of the referendum territory, with whom we have gone through hardship – to express my gratitude to Italy and together with it, give my support to the ratification of this bill.”<sup>1219</sup>

In due conservative fashion, Östör made use of the organic connection between himself and his constituency and his imperative mandate from it. The depoliticization discourse used by the government had found its way into his negative interpretation of voting, as politics of national and importance should be conducted in a due organic patriotic spirit instead of the ‘rigid’ act of voting among self-interested individuals.<sup>1220</sup>

<sup>1212</sup> Rothermere's campaign met with a vigorous reaction in Hungary and Rothermere himself was lauded a hero. Even when official Hungary saw that the campaign had little potential to generate concrete concessions, it was nevertheless exploited to the full in domestic and international propaganda. Zeidler 2007, 104–108.

<sup>1213</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 230.

<sup>1214</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 230–231.

<sup>1215</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

<sup>1216</sup> See Chapter 3.3

<sup>1217</sup> See Chapter 4.2.

<sup>1218</sup> 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

<sup>1219</sup> “... úgy érzem, hogy kötelességet teljesítek és nem bújhatok el egyedül a szavazás rideg igénye mögé, hanem kötelességem a magyar szív őszinteségével idejönni, az ország egész közvéleménye előtt, – mondhatom az egész népszavazási terület nevében, amelynek nehéz időit ott végigéltük – hálámat kifejezni Olaszország iránt és együttal e javaslat elfogadása tekintetében felsorakoztatni.” József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

<sup>1220</sup> On the transnational anti-parliamentary arguments of the interwar era, presented by Carl Schmitt among others, see Buchstein 2002, 108.



Even after such a sentimental outburst, Östör quickly returned to denounce the role of emotions in politics, “for there is nothing more miserable than doing politics based on emotions.”<sup>1221</sup> This condemnation was naturally directed towards the Social Democratic opposition, which he expected to intervene in the matter against the ratification. Östör’s argument was a pre-emptive judgement against the opposition, whose arguments would obviously be emotional, shaky and disconnected from the noble and confidential sphere of foreign policy.<sup>1222</sup> In questions of profound importance to the revision policy, the lack of trust between the government and the opposition remained unbridgeable, again showing the limits of the consolidation discourse. The argument also concerned the special role of foreign policy, allegedly calm and logical, devoid of ideological hot-headedness, conducted by enlightened statesmen without the intervention of parliamentary opposition. To exemplify this, Östör reminded the House how both Britain and Italy had been able to establish trade relations with the Soviet Union despite their ideological antagonism.<sup>1223</sup> The argument, however, backfired as the opposition could react by pointing at the double standards of Hungarian foreign policy: the government that was now promoting ‘dispassionate’ and ‘depoliticized’ co-operation with Fascist Italy had in 1924 turned down a trade treaty with the Soviet Union, exactly on the grounds of ideological hostility.<sup>1224</sup>

Again, the mention of rhetorical double standards did not form a serious challenge, as Östör continued unmoved that the justification of the treaty with Italy should be calmly and carefully considered from “historical, political and economic” viewpoints.<sup>1225</sup> However, he did not want to return to the “school examples”<sup>1226</sup> of the historical connection between Hungary and Italy, but to rely on more recent and striking examples: that Italy, as the only victorious power of the World War, had already during the armistice negotiations in the autumn of 1918 had been ready to guarantee the historical borders of Hungary, but had been turned down by the Károlyi government. Östör thus made use of a rhetorical connection; to commend Italy that had indeed shown more concern for Hungary than the Károlyi government, the role of which as a traitor of Hungary was further reinforced:

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1221 “... mert nincs szerencsétlenebb valami, mint érzelmi alapokon politikát csinálni.” József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

1222 József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

1223 József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

1224 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231. Hungary and the Soviet Union had negotiated a trade treaty in 1924, which was however criticized by the conservatives and the radical Right in Parliament and finally vetoed by Horthy due to his staunch anti-Communism. Romsics 1995, 220–221; Turbucz 2014, 116–117; Zeidler 2007, 87.

1225 “... történetileg, politikailag és gazdaságilag ...” József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

1226 “... iskolapéldák ...” József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

“Yes, those, too, were Hungarian individuals, or at least they were born Hungarians, even though they did not behave like Hungarians; everyone knows it was the Károlyi government, but I shall not return to its role, as I want to keep my speech brief.”<sup>1227</sup>

Using the established narrative of Greater Hungary’s downfall, Östör moved to the darkest hours of the revolutionary years, when an Italian had demonstrated greater devotion to Hungary than the Hungarians themselves:

“Who was the man, who in those terrific times honestly and bravely stood out to defend the tortured Hungarians ... here in Budapest? He was an Italian, Lieutenant Colonel Romanelli. It was he who, after the counterrevolution of 24 June, saved the lives of the Hungarian youth who had been ordered to be hanged on lampposts. It was he who saved those glorious sons of the nation who had been condemned to be shot in the head by Béla Kun on the steps of the Parliament Building. As Colonel Romanelli, with only a handful of his men left behind, risked his life in standing up for the Hungarian kin, I wonder why he, as an exemplary Italian, hasn’t earned the everlasting gratitude of the Hungarian national spirit.”<sup>1228</sup>

Östör’s narrative played on the most painful memories of the revolution: torture, summary executions and the desecration of the Parliament itself – and contrasted them with the fact that an Italian, as an example of his kin, had shown his loyalty to Hungary. From that reminiscence, he moved to the Sopron referendum, “the first nail in the coffin, in which we once shall bury the Treaty of Trianon.”<sup>1229</sup> The referendum was allowed by the Venice protocols, drafted under the protection and with the benevolent support of Italy.<sup>1230</sup> Drawing on these recent experiences, each one representing a culmination point in the Hungarian salvation narrative

<sup>1227</sup> “Igen, azok is magyar emberek voltak, legalábbis magyaroknak születtek, ha nem is viselték magukat magyarul; mindenki tudja, hogy a Károlyi-kormány volt, de ennek szerepére nem akarok kitérni, mert beszédemet rövidebbre akarom fogni.” József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231.

<sup>1228</sup> “Ki volt az, aki itt Budapesten ... azokban a rettenetes időkben a megkínzott és meggyötört magyar emberek védelmében őszintén és bátran kiállt? Olasz ember volt ez: Romanelli alezredes. Ő volt az, aki a június 24-iki ellenforradalom után megmentette azokat az ifjú életkeket, amelyeknek lámpavason való kioltását határozták el és megmentette az ország kiválóságai és kitűnőségei közül azokat, akik pedig arra voltak ítélve, hogy a parlament lépcsőzetén lövesse őket fejbe Kun Béla. Amikor Romanelli ezredes alig néhány emberével, magára hagyatva itt, a magyar vérért kiállt és exponálta magát, azt kérdezem, hogy nem írta-e bele a magyar néplélekbe és a magyar hálába örök időkre nevét, mint olasz ember.” József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231. On 24 June 1919, officers and cadets of the Ludovika Military Academy had risen in mutiny against the Soviet Republic but were overpowered and subsequently sentenced to death as counterrevolutionaries. Colonel Guido Romanelli (1876–1973), the head of the Italian Military Mission to Hungary and at that moment the highest-ranking Entente official in Budapest, intervened on his own authority, threatening the Soviet Republic with Entente reprisal if the death sentences were carried out. The Hungarian Communists rightly suspected that Romanelli did not have the backing of the Italian government, nor of the Entente, but were in no position to call the bluff, and agreed to put the executions on hold, eventually repealing them. Soon, exaggerated narratives of the incident surfaced – that Romanelli had personally held Béla Kun at gunpoint until the cadets were released. These were then put to political use, as Östör’s statement demonstrates. Szabó 2005.

<sup>1229</sup> “... az első szög ... abban a koporsóban, amelybe ... a trianoni békét egyszer bele fektetni fogják.” József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231–232.

<sup>1230</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 231–232; see Vares 2008, 236–237, 247.

from downfall to resurrection, he rhetorically asked, who else than Italy could Hungary trust in its struggle for existence, security and a better future. Even during the Franc scandal in 1925, when Hungary's oldest ally, Austria, had turned its back on Hungary and joined the international accusations against the government, Italy had remained loyal and supportive.<sup>1231</sup>

Italian goodwill towards Hungary was personified in Mussolini, himself the guarantor of further mutual assistance and co-operation, just as Bethlen was the personal guarantor of Hungarian stability. Östör put special emphasis on the statement issued by Mussolini in 1925 – that Hungary had not been guilty in the World War.<sup>1232</sup> For the Hungarian revisionist discourse that was an opening of extreme importance; as Prime Minister Bethlen had already defined that if Hungary could be proven guiltless, it obviously was undeserving of all the chastisement in the form of the Treaty of Trianon.<sup>1233</sup> And now, for the first time ever, such a statement had been given a foreign head of state:

"From time to time, we have heard very sympathetic statements from all countries of the world, from Lord Newton to Senator De Monzie, but have not heard such from any statesman in a responsible position – save for Benito Mussolini."<sup>1234</sup>

Moreover, Mussolini had also promised that the mutual Hungarian-Italian sympathy would come to concrete fruition, from which Hungary had much to await, the treaty in question being merely the first step.<sup>1235</sup> As was typical of the revisionist atmosphere, Östör thus voiced his hopes for more concrete forms of co-operation; this indeed came to fruition the same year when Italy commenced the clandestine sale of arms to Hungary.<sup>1236</sup> He concluded the political justification by stating that there was no conflict of interest between Hungary and Italy, on the contrary, Hungary could not expect a more fortunate treaty with any state. Social Democrat István Farkas interrupted, questioning the partnership with Fascist Italy in the spirit of the parliamentarization of foreign policy: "Those [treaties] should not be made with dictators, but with peoples!"<sup>1237</sup>

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<sup>1231</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 232. In December 1925, a Hungarian diplomat had been arrested in the Netherlands for the attempted use of a forged 1000 Franc banknote. It was subsequently revealed that the Hungarian government had been co-operating with German military circles and the domestic extreme Right in large-scale forgery of Francs on the premises of a state office. Government involvement was evident and the domestic opposition and international critics expected the fall of the Bethlen government. However, both Britain and Italy again hastened to support Bethlen, expressing their view that the fall of the government would lead Hungary into dangerous disorder, and thus muzzled the international criticism and calls for reprisal. Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 157.

<sup>1232</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 232.

<sup>1233</sup> See István Bethlen's speech on the memory of István Tisza in 1926, Bethlen 2000, 235.

<sup>1234</sup> "Hallottunk mi a külföldről idevonatkozólag nagyon szimpatikus nyilatkozatokat Lord Newtontól kezdve De Monzie szenátorig; minden országban, de egyetlen egy felelős állásban lévő államférfiutó, kivéve Benito Mussolinit, ezt nem hallottuk." József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 232.

<sup>1235</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 232.

<sup>1236</sup> Ormos 2006, 111-112.

<sup>1237</sup> "Amelyeket nem diktárokkal, hanem a néppel kötnek!" István Farkas, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 232. See Ihalainen 2018, 4, 17.

Östör finalized his argumentation with economic reasoning. Hungary was dependent on the export of its agricultural produce, especially grain, wine and livestock. The traditional trade partners of those goods, Austria and Czechoslovakia, were at present hostile towards Hungary and therefore unreliable as trade partners,<sup>1238</sup> whereas exports to Italy would perfectly offset the losses. Even when Östör acknowledged Hungary's dependence on agricultural exports, the only problem he saw in it were the hostile neighbours, not the structural reasons. He thus saw it a natural choice to remedy the problem with a political treaty with Italy. What he failed or declined to see was the leverage such trade partnership granted to Italy, which then later, in the 1930s, used it as a tool of political pressure along with Germany.<sup>1239</sup> For Östör, it was merely appropriate to compensate the treatment received from the Little Entente with political collusion comparable to theirs.<sup>1240</sup> Even though he warned the audience not to cherish too high hopes of a boost to trade with the Italian support, he at the same time hinted at the possibility of Hungarian overseas trade flowing through the port of Fiume (Rijeka), recently restored to Italy.<sup>1241</sup> Rhetorically, the obligatory caution was turned into its very opposite.

Östör concluded his speech with the habitual liturgy. Thanks to the statesmanship of Prime Minister Bethlen, Hungary had been able to recover its traditional ties with Italy and fulfil the rapprochement process in the form of a fruitful treaty.<sup>1242</sup> What Hungary needed was tranquil and stable domestic politics, with which it could seek to regain its place in the international politics:

“As a counsellor to a French King said a long time ago: when Your Majesty conducts good domestic policy, then the foreign policy will also be in order. In today's circumstances we might invert that, as we are surely in a situation in which the prerequisite to a peaceful, functional domestic policy is that we are able to create peace and security for ourselves in foreign policy.”<sup>1243</sup>

The government-led consolidation discourse was thus operationalized for the relationship of foreign and domestic policy: the government should be given peace to pursue visionary foreign policy that would benefit the whole nation and, eventually, promote domestic stability and national consolidation. Bethlen was rhetorically elevated to be the guarantor of both, and if either side of his successful development was compromised by the domestic opposition, the other would likewise fall. The treaty was thus incorporated into the very construction of national development and the national mission, which left no room for domestic dissent.

<sup>1238</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 232.

<sup>1239</sup> Romsics 1999, 139–142.

<sup>1240</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1241</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1242</sup> József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1243</sup> “Amint régen egy francia királynak egy jó tanácsadója azt ajánlotta, csináljon Felséged jó belpolitikát, akkor majd lesz jó külpolitika is, a mai viszonyok között ezt meg lehet fordítani, mert hiszen mi legalább abban a helyzetben vagyunk, hogy itt egy nyugodt, dolgozó belső politika előfeltétele az, hogy külpolitikailag nyugalmat és biztonságot teremtsünk a magunk számára.” József Östör, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

### 4.5.3 The limits of parliamentary speech

In his rejoinder to Östör, Social Democrat Dániel Várnai stuck to the very argument used against his party, insisting that the Social Democrats were not those to resort to emotional politicking.<sup>1244</sup> Instead, he attempted to rhetorically capture the concept of political realism – the bitter experience of the World War had shown that the nation should safeguard its existence, future and prosperity with a realistic approach to foreign policy – and sentimentality had no place in it.<sup>1245</sup> The accusation of sentimentalism was thrown back at the government itself, whereas Várnai wanted to prove that the Social Democrats were Hungarian patriots as well, able to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the treaty *sine ira et studio* for the benefit of the nation.<sup>1246</sup>

Várnai also circumvented the responsibility for the Trianon, which the government had once again eagerly laid upon the Social Democrats. The Social Democrats, he reminded the House, demanded justice, peace and equality, and thus were as outraged as everyone else by the intolerable dictates, welcoming any possibility of settling them by lawful means, and would therefore welcome any treaty based on the mutual understanding between free nations and governments that fulfilled the will of their peoples.<sup>1247</sup> Naturally, this rhetorical redescription of freedom excluded Mussolini's Italy, at the moment the most repressive authoritarian state in Europe, from eligibility as a political partner. Speaking in the name of millions of Hungarians, as Várnai argued, he condemned the viability of the treaty.<sup>1248</sup>

Várnai's argumentation against dictatorship raised the usual interjections among the ranks of the conservatives, reminding the Social Democrats of their own pursuit of dictatorship during the revolutionary years, giving a free hand to the Communist hangmen.<sup>1249</sup> This can be seen as another example of the prevailing double standards used to legitimize the actions of the government in Parliament: the Conservative members always had at the ready examples of Socialist crimes during the revolutionary years, and those could be repeatedly applied as counterarguments to the opposition, whenever needed and even without direct relevance to the subject matter.

Unmoved by the interruption, Várnai continued his rhetorical deconstruction of the treaty. To him, the core symbolical value of the treaty did not lie in the relief for Hungary, but in the legitimization of the Fascist state – hinting that by binding itself in such far-reaching political commitment Hungary was all too eager to proceed in the same direction: “What kind of interests led [the government] to take the first step towards Italian Fascism by signing a treaty of friendship with it?”<sup>1250</sup> Mór Rothenstein, concurring with Várnai's criticism,

<sup>1244</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1245</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1246</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1247</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233; cf. Áczel & Cohen 1984, 17–19.

<sup>1248</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1249</sup> Sándor Propper; István Viczián; Géza Malasits, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1250</sup> “Miféle érdekek vezették, hogy kifelé, az olasz fasizmns felé tegye meg az első lépést és ezzel kössön barátsági szerződést?” Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

commented that it was symptomatic that the House broke into applause whenever Mussolini's name was heard.<sup>1251</sup>

Várnai completely dismissed the argument that co-operation with Italy would help Hungary to break out of international isolation. On the contrary, engaging in a political game of chess on the European map would only cause the Little Entente to tighten its grip.<sup>1252</sup> What was the treaty good for, Várnai asked, if it brought Hungary one so-called friend but at the same time aroused the indignation of several enemies?<sup>1253</sup> What Hungary should strive for was peace and harmony among the states of East Central Europe and the Balkans, only then could Hungarian interests be fulfilled.<sup>1254</sup> The treaty in question would not lead to *détente* in the international sphere, but instead raise even more suspicion against Hungary.<sup>1255</sup> Várnai's argument was thus the complete reverse of the government's foreign political thinking and an attempt to redefine political realism.

Instead of entering a treaty with "a politically infested government,"<sup>1256</sup> Hungary should quarantine it as other progressive nations did. Várnai applied the same organic metaphors of statehood and ideology as the conservatives, only replacing the infestation of Socialism with that of Fascism.<sup>1257</sup> The definition provoked disciplinary action from the Speaker, who warned against Várnai from using such a derogatory expression of the legitimate government of a friendly state.<sup>1258</sup> Still unmoved, Várnai continued that Hungary should join the European condemnation of Fascism.<sup>1259</sup> The Speaker immediately repeated the demand for Várnai to behave himself or face the consequences:

"I am calling the Member to order again. Either the Member deigns to honour the parliamentary conduct and the House Rules, or I shall be obliged to confront him with more serious means."<sup>1260</sup>

Here we can again see the strategy of containment in political language: the concept of parliamentary dignity and the House Rules were applied to pressure an individual member to engage in self-censorship, or the dissident could be removed from the lectern by exploiting the same rules and legitimizing this with the same limited conceptualization of 'parliamentary conduct'. Várnai's bitter response showed the transparency of the practice:

<sup>1251</sup> Mór Rothenstein, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233.

<sup>1252</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 233–234.

<sup>1253</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

<sup>1254</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

<sup>1255</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

<sup>1256</sup> "... egy politikailag fertőzött kormányhoz," Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

<sup>1257</sup> See Chapters 4.3 and 4.4.

<sup>1258</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

<sup>1259</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

<sup>1260</sup> "A képviselő urat másodízben is rendreutasítom. Méltóztassék a parlamenti illemhez és a házszabályokhoz alkalmazkodni, különben kénytelen lennék a képviselő úrral szemben erősebb eszközökkel eljárni." Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

“I just merely point out that elsewhere it would be difficult to be martyred for such mild and fair epithets, but here I believe it to be easy.”<sup>1261</sup>

Emboldened, Várnai directly challenged Bethlen’s position as the guarantor of Hungarian policy and its expected benefits. Recalling the statement the prime minister had given in 1925, that foreign and domestic policies were independent of each other, Várnai concluded that this treaty had finally verified the falsehood of such a statement: only domestic policy had prevented the trade treaty with the Soviet Union in 1924 and only domestic policy had led to the eager embracing of Fascism.<sup>1262</sup> All the niceties of mutual history and traditional contacts only served to obscure the fact:

“Once we could marvel at Italy, its great historical past, the beauty of its art and the genius that had created it – they excited the imaginations of us, living far away from that beautiful country. Once, during the darkest night of the nation, in the barbarism of servitude, we still had the pleasure to look at Italy, the land of light and freedom. That was long ago, but what is Italy like today?”<sup>1263</sup>

Várnai thus challenged the historico-political justification of the treaty, appealing to the memory of 1848 and demanding that if the Hungarian government still honoured the ideals of freedom, it must admit that the days of Garibaldi were long gone and the present Italy was the complete reverse of those ideals. Speaker Zsitvay intervened again, asking Várnai not to digress from the subject, nor to meddle in the internal affairs of a foreign country.<sup>1264</sup> Sándor Propper protested that Várnai’s remarks were relevant in relation to the matter,<sup>1265</sup> to which Zsitvay bluntly answered that it was he who decided what was relevant,<sup>1266</sup> demonstrating again, how tight the government wanted to hold the strings of the debate, when a crucial matter was at stake.

Várnai went on with irony about Bethlen’s praises for the great achievements of the Fascist state.<sup>1267</sup> He himself had also followed the development of the Fascist state since the march to Rome and seen nothing but political murders, forced emigration and the rise of dictatorship without parallel.<sup>1268</sup> Such a government, he argued, was clearly illegitimate and undeserving of any international recognition, nor could it provide any lasting support for Hungary.<sup>1269</sup> The Speaker warned Várnai one last time not to

<sup>1261</sup> “Csak azt kívánom megjegyezni, hogy másutt enyhe és igazságos jelzőkkel nagyon nehéz volna mártírnak lenni; itt könnyű, azt elhiszem.” Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

<sup>1262</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234.

<sup>1263</sup> “Valamikor vággyal tekintettünk Itália felé, egy nagy történelmi múlt, a művészet szépségei és a művészi teremtő zseni izgatta a mi képzeletünket, mint akik itt álltunk távol ettől a szép országtól. Valamikor a népek éjszakájából, a szolgaság barbárságából szinte jólesett odatekinteni Itáliára, a fény és a szabadság Itáliájára. Ez volt régen. De mi van most Olaszországban?” Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 234–235.

<sup>1264</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1265</sup> Sándor Propper, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1266</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1267</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1268</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1269</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

intervene in the domestic affairs of a friendly foreign state. All the time he relied on the content of the House Rules, which allowed a member's speech to be terminated if it repeatedly strayed from the subject.<sup>1270</sup> Such clauses were eagerly applied against the opposition, rarely towards the faltering parables of the conservative members. Várnai did not avoid such offence as accusing Bethlen of dishonesty in the House; whereas Bethlen had justified the treaty through the mutual interests of Hungary and Italy and equal benefits for both parties, Várnai interpreted on the contrary:

“... it happened that Mussolini - with due diplomacy, I must admit - succeeded in binding Hungary with the strings of Italian imperialism and capitalism, succeeded in binding the Anglo-Italian capitalist block, so that we have now become a colony not only of British capitalism but also of Italian capital.”<sup>1271</sup>

Who knows, Várnai asked, how far the obligations of allegiance to Italy extended? Was Hungary to be used in the future as a deployment area for the Italian army in an attack on Yugoslavia?<sup>1272</sup> If Yugoslavia were to interpret the treaty as a hazard, that would annul any hopes for using Fiume harbour for Hungarian exports, as suggested by Östör, since transportation to and from it was dependent on Yugoslavian transit permits.<sup>1273</sup> The very same trade opportunities Hungary had expected to gain by the treaty were dependent on Italian-Yugoslavian relations; and now, Várnai argued, Hungary had virtually surrendered the control of its foreign trade to Italy, which had no interest in improving its relationship with Yugoslavia; that was a question of the dominance of the Adriatic, where neither of them would give any ground. Hungary was faced with two mutually exclusive allies, and only had one opportunity to back off from the Italian alignment and turn towards the Balkan states.<sup>1274</sup>

After rightly suspecting that Italy's motivation for the treaty was first and foremost its power struggle with Yugoslavia, not genuine goodwill towards Hungary, Várnai then ventured to make allegations of complex international machinations. Such schemes, presented by both Várnai and Lajos Beck, mirrored the post-war foreign political atmosphere of contingency and insecurity, which, independently of party allegiance, was based on expectations of imminent changes in European geopolitics - wherein lay both Hungary's highest hopes according to the Conservatives and its direst perils according to the Social Democrats.<sup>1275</sup>

<sup>1270</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1271</sup> “... az történt, hogy Mussolininek – elismerem, ügyes diplomáciával – Magyarországot is sikerült odakapcsolnia az olasz imperialista kapitalista uszályhoz, sikerült odakapcsolnia az angol-olasz kapitalista blokkhoz, úgyhogy már nemcsak az angol kapitalizmusnak, hanem az olasz tőkének is gyarmatává lettünk.” Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1272</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1273</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

<sup>1274</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

<sup>1275</sup> See e.g. Romsics 1995, 223–225.



According to Várnai, the Prime Minister had either been misled by Mussolini or had himself misled Parliament about the nature of Fascism and its fundamental unreliability:

“Anyone who assesses Fascism that way is unaware of the true nature of Fascism. Fascism prepares for war, plans war, it is a threat to the state of peace. Even the leader and head speculator of Fascism, his excellency Mussolini himself, does not deny it.”<sup>1276</sup>

Cleverly using quotes from Bethlen and Mussolini,<sup>1277</sup> Várnai attempted to reveal their mutual inconsistency and unreliability and thus gain credibility for his own warning voice.

“It is a blatant and turbid modern Bonapartism, which is in constant need of war and military success in order to survive. That Italy is expanding, or exploding, means in plain Hungarian that Italy either expands or Fascism falls. Thus, Fascism must choose between downfall and war, and of these it will rather choose war.”<sup>1278</sup>

Várnai had been able to give an accurate farsighted picture of the economic and political mechanisms behind the Fascist regime, even though the ultimate choice between war and demise would only occur ten years later.<sup>1279</sup>

Again, the dynamics of the House appeared noteworthy. Unity Party Member Márton Éri repeatedly interrupted Várnai<sup>1280</sup> and Social Democrat Imre Szabó called him on to sit down and let Várnai speak.<sup>1281</sup> However, only Szabó was reprimanded by the Speaker for the disturbance.<sup>1282</sup> As Várnai’s accusations repeatedly questioned the very fundamentals of Hungarian foreign policy, the House Rules and the unparliamentary conduct of the government party Members were used even more consciously as a tool for curtailing the opposition’s room for rhetorical manoeuvre.

The recent change in the attitude towards Italy was also ridiculed by Várnai; the discourse of long-standing friendship between Hungary and Italy had quickly replaced the bitter discourse of 1915, when Italy was portrayed as nothing but a persistent traitor and a prostitute:

“Has she – that is to say Italy – not betrayed everyone, to which it had been indebted? Did she not betray the Hungarian legionnaires in 1859 and its alliance with France in

<sup>1276</sup> “Aki így ítéli meg az olasz fasizmust, az nem akarja meglátni a fasizmus lényegét. A fasizmus háborúra készül, háborúra szervezkedik, a fasizmus veszedelme a békének. És ezt maga a fasizmus vezére és kispéculálója, Mussolini őexcellenciája sem tagadja.” Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

<sup>1277</sup> Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

<sup>1278</sup> “Egy újkori zavaros és nagyzó bonapartizmus ez, amelynek háborúra, katonai sikerekre van szüksége, hogy fenmaradjon. Az, hogy Olaszország terjeszkedik vagy explodál, magyarra lefordítva azt jelenti, hogy Olaszország terjeszkedik, vagy a fasizmus fordul fel. A háború és az elmúlás között kell tehát a fasizmusnak választania, s a fasizmus inkább a háborút választja.” Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

<sup>1279</sup> Hägg 2010, 272–276, 285–288.

<sup>1280</sup> Márton Éri, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

<sup>1281</sup> Imre Szabó, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

<sup>1282</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

1871? Pity on all those, who had shed their blood for Italy; for a man pays to a *demimonde*, but does not risk his life for her.”<sup>1283</sup>

Várnai’s ironic use of a quotation from the war years again led to a reprimand; the Speaker warned Várnai to refrain from citing texts with which he himself did not concur (sic!)<sup>1284</sup> – in a very symptomatic attempt to exclude irony from parliamentary language. This led to an absurd interrogation, the Speaker repeatedly asking whether Várnai meant what he said or not.<sup>1285</sup> The opposition members, who intervened on Várnai’s behalf, crying “Violence towards the freedom of speech!”<sup>1286</sup> and “This is not a trial!”<sup>1287</sup> were bluntly reprimanded by the Speaker.<sup>1288</sup> When finally given the opportunity to speak, Várnai answered that he needed to press the point of the danger of chauvinism:

“My answer, which Mr. Speaker so eagerly demands, is this: even today, we have to defend the Italian people against such bitter and passionate outbursts – as we Social Democrats did already then – to defend the people, who did not want war, but were the victims of the demagoguery of the warmongers.”<sup>1289</sup>

Várnai reminded the House that during the World War, Hungary had fought against the very same warmongers, Mussolini and D’Annunzio, with whom it was now negotiating a treaty of friendship. Moreover, time after time, ordinary people in both countries fell victim of political machinations.<sup>1290</sup>

“I repeat: you are so keen to forget, honourable gentlemen, to forget the bloodshed, to forget Mussolini’s past and also to forget your own oaths. Now, you are certainly going to vote for this treaty ... But those of you who do, do not forget one thing; do not forget that there is a greater moral power than that of written laws: the spirit of the masses, the will of the masses, their sound moral reasoning, discernment and judgement.”<sup>1291</sup>

1283 “Hát nem árulta el – tudniillik Olaszország – mindazokat, akiknek valamit köszönhetett? Nem hagyta-e cserben a magyar legionistákat 1859-ben s a francia szövetséget 1871-ben? Sirassuk meg igazán azokat, akik közülünk Itáliáért véreztek; a demimonde-ot megfizeti az ember, de nem verekszik érte.” Dániel Várnai, quoting count Zichy in 1915, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

1284 Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

1285 Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

1286 “A szólásszabadság erőszaka!” Lajos Kabók, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236.

1287 “Ez nem törvényszéki tárgyalás!” Sándor Propper, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

1288 Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 236–237.

1289 “Az elnök ur által, annyira megkívánt válaszom a következő: Ezek ellen a keserű és szenvedélyes kitöréseik ellen meg kell védenünk most is – mint ahogy mi, szociáldemokraták megvédtük akkor is – azt az olasz népet, amely nem akarta a háborút, hanem áldozata volt a háborús uszítók demagógiájának.” Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

1290 Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

1291 “Ismétlem, önök nagyon könnyen felejtenek t. uraim, elfelejtik a vér hullását, elfelejtik Mussolini múltját és elfelejtik saját fogadalmaikat is. Egészen bizonyos, hogy meg fogják szavazni ezt a szerződést ... De akik megszavazzák, valamit ne felejtessenek el; ne felejtsek el azt, hogy az írott törvényeknél van egy sokkal nagyobb erkölcsi hatalom: a néptömegek hangulata, a néptömegek akarata, egészséges erkölcsi érzése, mérlegelése és ítélete.” Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

Várnai's final plea for consideration and warning of Mussolini's intrigues triggered a further spontaneous exchange of interruptions between the parties. As Sándor Propper retorted to the Right: "You might as well wear black shirts",<sup>1292</sup> Lajos Szapáry duly answered: "Rather black than red!"<sup>1293</sup> The conservatives also questioned Várnai's right to speak on behalf of the Hungarian people<sup>1294</sup> as the rightist organic conceptualization of the nation clashed with the Socialist discourse of popular empowerment. Appealing to the latter, Várnai declared that if asked directly and honestly, the Hungarian people would never accept a deal with "oppressors, dictators, who desecrate the law."<sup>1295</sup>

This turned out to be the last straw, and the Speaker thereby commanded Várnai to step down from the lectern and raised an official disciplinary action against him – to the acclaim of the Right and the dismay of the Left.<sup>1296</sup> Immediately he called a vote on the ratification, first implemented orally, but as the general unrest made the result ambiguous, by a division of the House, which finally led to the long-awaited approval of the treaty.<sup>1297</sup>

After the vote, Prime Minister Bethlen appeared, as usual, to conclude the discussion and settle any outstanding issues. However, this time even his authority was not enough to calm down the agitated atmosphere.<sup>1298</sup> The exchange of shouts between the Left and the Right continued, interrupting his speech several times and required another intervention by the Speaker.<sup>1299</sup> When Bethlen was finally given a chance to speak, he was unusually agitated in contrast to his usual dry mood, using exceptionally harsh language to demolish Várnai's arguments, his defamation of Mussolini and his false reliance on the Hungarian people as completely ignorant and un-Hungarian. In his desire to inflict a rhetorical blow on Várnai, Bethlen seemingly forgot the constraints which the organic conceptualization of nationhood imposed upon the political language, veering into a rhetorical mishap that caused him *himself* to be reprimanded by the Speaker. While Bethlen metaphorically claimed that Várnai "did not have one drop of Hungarian blood in his veins,"<sup>1300</sup> speaker Zsitvay, in an equally unusual move, was compelled to step in, asking Bethlen not to suggest that a Member of the Hungarian Parliament was not an ethnic Hungarian.<sup>1301</sup> One might ask whether Zsitvay inadvertently took a metaphorical utterance literally, or if he intentionally chose to steer the agitated Prime Minister in a more moderate rhetorical direction. Either way, Zsitvay's intervention offered Bethlen a much

<sup>1292</sup> "Felvehetik a fekete inget!" Sándor Propper, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

<sup>1293</sup> "Inkább, mint a vöröset!" Lajos Szapáry, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

<sup>1294</sup> Samu Barabás; Endre Podmaniczky, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

<sup>1295</sup> "...elnyomók, jogtiprók, diktátorok ..." Dániel Várnai, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

<sup>1296</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

<sup>1297</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

<sup>1298</sup> Bethlen's image had already been tarnished by the Franc scandal in 1925, which had given the opposition a just reason to attack him. Ormos 2006, 107.

<sup>1299</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237–238; Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237–238.

<sup>1300</sup> "... ereiben egy csepp magyar vér nincs ..." István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

<sup>1301</sup> Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 237.

needed exit to retract the accusation and proceed with more carefully chosen words.<sup>1302</sup>

Bethlen recounted Östör's accusation that the Social Democrats would link the matter to emotions, an accusation that he now saw realized and their erroneous belief in the popular support for their agenda demonstrated the extent to which they had lost touch with reality.<sup>1303</sup> He then continued to Várnai's opposition to entering into a treaty with a dictator, and turned it into a usual counter-accusation fuelled by the revolutionary narrative: where had the conscience of the Social Democrats been in 1918, when they had eagerly and unashamedly declared their allegiance to Lenin?<sup>1304</sup> Everyone knew, he continued bitterly, that the Social Democrats' opposition to the treaty stemmed from their personal distaste for Mussolini, who had once himself been a Socialist but then had seen the folly of that ideology and begun to work for the Italian nation.<sup>1305</sup> This conclusion allowed Bethlen to waste no more time on the petty protestation and instead to present the long line of the Hungarian foreign policy, of which the treaty was an inseparable part and an indisputable achievement.<sup>1306</sup>

According to the established canon, Bethlen began the narrative from the humiliation of Trianon:

"We all know what a state this country was in. We know we were a completely isolated, mutilated country that had lost its natural borders, completely disarmed, economically ruined. The victors had formed a united front, from which we could expect nothing but commands, or at the best, indifference."<sup>1307</sup>

From that low point, Bethlen presented the success story of how his government had raised the nation up through internal consolidation and economic reconstruction. He recounted his induction to the premiership at the time of the royalist coup attempts, when he clearly saw that the nation should unite its forces in order to gain foreign political leverage.<sup>1308</sup> As expected, when Hungary had been able to prove its capacity for recuperation, the international community had responded favourably with accession to the League of Nations and the granting of reconstruction loans.<sup>1309</sup> Bethlen connected the narrative to the present matter, the most supportive nations, to which Hungary felt the greatest gratitude, had always been Britain and Italy.<sup>1310</sup>

<sup>1302</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 238.

<sup>1303</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 238.

<sup>1304</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 238.

<sup>1305</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 238.

<sup>1306</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 238.

<sup>1307</sup> "Mindenki tudja, milyen állapotban volt akkor az ország. Tudjuk, hogy teljesen izolálva állottunk itt, egy megcsonkított ország voltunk természetes határok nélkül, teljesen lefegyverezve, gazdaságilag tönkretéve; velünk szemben a győzők egységes táborot formáltak, úgyhogy mást, mint parancsszót, részükről nem tapasztalhattunk, legfeljebb közönyösséget." István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239.

<sup>1308</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239. See also Bethlen's inaugural address in 1921, Bethlen 2000, 116–133.

<sup>1309</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239.

<sup>1310</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239.

As Hungary had recently been freed from the international control of its economic and military affairs, it was in a position to pursue an active, sovereign and peaceful foreign policy, in which the treaty with Italy was a notable and logical step.<sup>1311</sup> Through this interpretation of Hungary's foreign policy, Bethlen dismissed the opposition accusations that the treaty with Italy would lead to hostility towards the Little Entente, merely by remarking that Hungary strove to establish normal and friendly relations with its neighbours, only expecting them to act accordingly.<sup>1312</sup> Thus the problem was transferred to the Little Entente and disconnected from the case of Italy. Whereas Illés and Östör had openly cherished the favourable implications of the treaty, Bethlen, after facing extensive criticism, firmly denied that the 'secret clause' existed at all:

"This treaty has been seen to include secret intentions or secret agreements. If so, please show that treaty to me, too. This treaty is not an alliance which would oblige Hungary or Italy to act in a specific way in concrete situations ... All those allegations which have been attached to this treaty that it was directed against this or that state, are completely trumped up."<sup>1313</sup>

Bethlen conceded having mentioned the opportunities for trade through Fiume, but stated that he had only demonstrated the possibilities and was ready to admit they were subject to approval by both Italy and Yugoslavia.<sup>1314</sup> Having thus denied any concrete outcomes of the treaty, he was cautious enough not to bring up the revision goals in this instance, only rejoicing over the end of Hungary's international isolation in a general manner.<sup>1315</sup> By the end of his speech, Bethlen had succeeded in persuading his audience to accept his success story interpretation of his foreign policy, earning general applause from all parties.<sup>1316</sup>

As with the case of political prisoners (Chapter 2.4.), the debate on the treaty with Italy exemplified the most passionate confrontational style of debate between government and opposition, and the dynamics of the debate are therefore reproduced in detail; whereas in the former foreign political cases there had been consensus on the subject matter and only contestation on the implications and interpretations between the parties, this time the House was profoundly divided over the matter of allegiance to Italy and the nature of the Fascist state. Whereas the government attempted to incorporate the treaty in the grand national narrative of resurrection, the opposition sharply criticized the

<sup>1311</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239.

<sup>1312</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239.

<sup>1313</sup> "E mögött a szerződés mögött is titkos intenciókat, titkos megállapodásokat kerestek és firtattak. Méltóztassék azonban megnézni ezt a szerződést. Ez nem szövetségi szerződés, amely Magyarországot vagy Olaszországot adott, konkrét esetben konkrét feladatok megoldására kötelezné ... Mindazok a kombinációk, amelyek ehhez a szerződéshez fűződnek az irányban, hogy ez a szerződés bizonyos éllel bírna egy másik, vagy egy harmadik állammal szemben, teljesen légből kapottak." István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239. In so saying, Bethlen resorted to technical hair-splitting; as stated above, the agreement on mutual interests was not included in the treaty but in a confidential exchange of notes between the Prime Ministers. Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 155.

<sup>1314</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239.

<sup>1315</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239–240.

<sup>1316</sup> 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 239–240.

pursuit of revision at the cost of legitimizing the Fascist dictatorship. The organic and depoliticizing conceptualization of nation and national mission was likewise confronted by the Social Democrats' call for popular sovereignty and parliamentarization of foreign policy. Whereas some of the former cases had been of lesser importance and therefore the atmosphere in the House had been more accepting of criticism, this time the matter at stake was a foreign political achievement on a grand scale, and the government would not allow dissent from the opposition to compromise it. The House Rules were abused most flagrantly in an attempt to suppress the criticism. Even the Prime Minister had a hard time rallying the House behind the treaty but was finally able to achieve his goal – by using the most banal rhetorical tools to attack the Social Democrats and their inescapable revolutionary sins, thus personally demonstrating where the discourse of consolidation ended and containment began.

#### 4.5.4 Grasping the historical moment – the favourable discourse of the Upper House

In the exalted atmosphere of the Upper House, the treaty was treated with more dignity. Dezső Csánki<sup>1317</sup> declared that he, as a historian, perhaps had the right to explain the historical roots of Hungary's age-old attachment to Italy, in which the recent treaty was a natural step.<sup>1318</sup> Invoking historical examples from the age of Árpáds to the days of Kossuth, Csánki presented Italy as the traditional and cordial partner to Hungary throughout the ages, and moreover, the supporter of and sympathizer with Hungary's equally old fight for freedom and national existence.<sup>1319</sup>

“These and many other golden threads are woven into the fabric of the old and new Italian-Hungarian friendship ... We, who now look at the marvellous deeds in the pages of history and look at our inevitable recuperation from the latest and greatest misfortune, shall only honour those who saw a way out of it and led us to it.”<sup>1320</sup>

With due historico-political canonization Csánki incorporated Italy's fraternal role into the grand national narrative and linked the treaty at hand to it as natural evolution, not forgetting to praise the statesmanship of Bethlen and Mussolini, who had shown the way to a common future.

<sup>1317</sup> Historian and archivist Dezső Csánki (1857–1933), director general of the National Archives and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was nominated to the Upper House by virtue of his academic position. In close co-operation with Klebelsberg, Csánki contributed to the nationalist cultural policy through his studies of the age of Hungarian greatness. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 478–480; MÉL: Csánki, Dezső.

<sup>1318</sup> Dezső Csánki, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 131.

<sup>1319</sup> Dezső Csánki, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 131–132.

<sup>1320</sup> “Ilyen és még sok más régi aranyes szál fonódik az újabb olasz-magyar baráti viszony szövődékébe ... Nekünk, akik a történelem lapjainak csodálatos életét vizsgáljuk s legújabb nagy balsorsunkból ez utón való kétségtelen kiemelkedésünket saemlélljük, csak dicsérrünk kell azokat, akik ezt a kivezető utat meglátták és arra bennünket rávezetnek.” Dezső Csánki, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 132.

József Szterényi,<sup>1321</sup> too, saw the treaty as a natural step forward, although in the context of the more recent development of Hungarian foreign policy. He recounted that the Hungarian government had step by step regained the sovereignty of the state, escaping from the international isolation: it had already gained the approval and support of Britain – and not only the Conservative but also the Labour governments<sup>1322</sup> – and gained membership of the League of Nations, even though the latter had shown little sympathy for Hungary. Now, in Italy, Hungary had found one certain ally among the Great Powers of Europe.<sup>1323</sup> Szterényi emphasized that this was indeed a feat, as the Hungarian Foreign Service had been built up from scratch since the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy.<sup>1324</sup> To accomplish in the preparation of a treaty of such importance now proved that the Hungarian diplomatic corps, working with the support of the nation and striving for justice, had met and exceeded expectations.<sup>1325</sup>

As the opposition was virtually non-existent in the Upper House, Szterényi could easily dismiss all reservations about the nature of the Italian government and concur with Csánki's interpretation of historical harmonization.<sup>1326</sup> He was also able to handle the foreign political implications of the treaty more casually:

“Hungary's interest is a strong Italy on the Adriatic, Italy's interest a strong Hungary here in the valley of the Danube. This dual interest forms the basis of this treaty ... assuming that we can expect it to last, it would form a basis for a policy which will sufficiently serve Hungary's interests in the future.”<sup>1327</sup>

Again, the argument stemmed from the ‘natural’ environment to which the respective nations were entitled. The historico-organic conceptualization of nationhood also delineated the *Lebensraum* they deserved. Szterényi contrasted this mutual understanding between Hungary and Italy with the patronizing attitude of the other European powers. The French press had just claimed that Hungary should at last settle for its position and begin to build co-operation with the Little Entente. In Britain, David Lloyd George had warned Parliament of the reactionary nationalism in Eastern Europe and specifically in Hungary. The same Lloyd George, Szterényi reminded his audience, who during the Paris Peace Conference in 1920 had been astonished by the enormous losses imposed on

<sup>1321</sup> Baron József Szterényi (1861–1941) was an economist, who had been tasked with the modernization of Hungarian industry in the pre-war decades and reached the position of Minister of Commerce by 1918. After the revolutionary years, he was again elected to Parliament in 1920 and nominated to the Upper House by the Regent in 1926. Even as a nonpartisan Member, he was respected by the government for his economic and foreign political expertise. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 546–549; MÉL: Szterényi, József, báró, Stern.

<sup>1322</sup> Romsics 1995, 117–118, 201.

<sup>1323</sup> József Szterényi, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 132–133.

<sup>1324</sup> See also Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 99–100.

<sup>1325</sup> József Szterényi, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 133.

<sup>1326</sup> József Szterényi, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 133.

<sup>1327</sup> “Magyarországnak érdeke egy: erős Olaszország az Adriánál, Olaszország érdeke egy erős Magyarország itt a Duna völgyében. Ez a kettős érdek adja meg alapját ennek a szerződésnek ... vájjon lehet-e számítani ennek maradandó voltára, alapítható-e erre oly politika, amely Magyarország érdekeit a jövőben kellőleg ki is elégíti.” József Szterényi, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 133.

Hungary, now condemned the legitimate defence of the Hungarian kin separated from their homeland by the very same treaty.<sup>1328</sup> In contrast to the arrogance of the West, Italy was thus rhetorically constructed to be the sole reliable ally, with whom it was only natural to revitalize the historical connection.<sup>1329</sup>

From an economic point of view, Szterényi raised the menace of a European trade war, especially between the agrarian and industrial economies. Speaking from his long-standing position of expertise in economic matters, Szterényi presented a nationalist interpretation of international trade: the industrial economies attempted to maximize their trade surplus by establishing import tariffs for agricultural produce, which in turn meant considerable repression of the agricultural economies, like Hungary, who were thus forced to seek out new trade partners – including Italy, where the demand for agricultural produce was steady and the expected balance of trade more favourable to Hungary.<sup>1330</sup> Returning to the question of Fiume, Szterényi reminded the Upper House that with the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, the trading port had lost its economic *Hinterland*, the area that produced the merchandise, and Hungary was ready to take up that part.<sup>1331</sup> Szterényi, like Östör, thus opposed the economic colonization of Hungary by the Western Powers, but was eager to accept the same role in relation to Italy, as long as the terms were slightly more favourable to Hungary.

In his turn, Róbert Zselenszki<sup>1332</sup> praised Mussolini as a most trustworthy statesman – one, who had broken the unhealthy influence of the Freemasons and, moreover, disciplined the Socialists, put an end to their social experiments and returned the ownership of land and enterprises into the hands of their legitimate owners.<sup>1333</sup> As Zselenszki spoke through his personal background as a former magnate who had lost his property due to Trianon, he chose to praise Mussolini for reversing the ‘unhealthy experimenatations’ that had emerged during the post-war tumult and for eventually restoring the old order. Moreover, Mussolini had put the state officials to productive work and planned to limit the secret ballot, “the source of most trouble in a parliamentary country.”<sup>1334</sup> Zselenszki’s admiration for Mussolini was so overwhelming as to border on irony, yet in his bitterness towards the post-war changes he was indeed serious in his admiration of the Fascist government and his freely expressed opinion that Hungary should

<sup>1328</sup> József Szterényi, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 134.

<sup>1329</sup> József Szterényi, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 134.

<sup>1330</sup> József Szterényi, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 135.

<sup>1331</sup> József Szterényi, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 135.

<sup>1332</sup> Count Róbert Zselenszki (1850–1939) was a pre-war landowner magnate and Member of Parliament who was especially active in the agrarian question, which for him meant securing the rights of the large landowners and opposing land reform. Due to Trianon, Zselenszki lost most of his land holdings in present-day Romania but remained a leading figure in the landowners’ association (Hungarian National Economic Association / *Országos Magyar Gazdasági Egyesület*). He was nominated to the Upper House by virtue of his peerage. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 1932, 400–401; MÉL: Zselénszky, Róbert, gróf, Zelanka-Zelénski.

<sup>1333</sup> Róbert Zselenszki, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 135.

<sup>1334</sup> “... egy parlamentáris országban a legtöbb baj kútforrása.” Róbert Zselenszki, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 135.



follow the same path. This did not raise intense objections, although the following speakers János Hadik<sup>1335</sup> and Pál Eszterházy<sup>1336</sup> pointed out that Hungary was not, and did not wish to become, a dictatorship, even if that form of government suited “the Latin peoples.”<sup>1337</sup> Nevertheless, both hastened to support the ratification of the treaty and, to make their stance certain, warned against the menace of international Communism.<sup>1338</sup>

Bethlen, giving the concluding speech in the Upper House as well, did not need to defend the treaty as there was no opposition to it, but was able to merely echo the favourable arguments presented by the members. He also enumerated those Italian virtues that had not yet been mentioned: that Italy had shown its goodwill towards Hungary already during the Paris Peace conference by opposing the plans for a ‘Slav Corridor’ between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia along the western border of Hungary,<sup>1339</sup> and that Italy had already been on par with Britain in providing economic support in the early 1920s.<sup>1340</sup> Concurring with Csánki, Bethlen incorporated Hungary’s encounters with Italy in both distant and recent past in Hungary’s national mission: the opportunity the treaty in question presented was but a culmination of this narrative and as such beyond question.

Bethlen went on to emphasize that even though he had cherished the more active foreign policy Hungary was now conducting, it was still definitely peaceful policy of seeking friends in the international arena and was not directed against any other state in the surrounding area. On the contrary: as the market for Hungarian exports in the West was diminishing, Hungary was in need of trade connections with Eastern Europe, a situation in which the use of Fiume harbour and thus a good relationship with Yugoslavia was vital. Romania, in turn, had already concluded an agreement with Italy, so Hungaro-Italian co-operation did not threaten it in any way.<sup>1341</sup> He even redescribed the relationship with Hungary and the Little Entente in a positive way specifically through the treaty: as Hungary had now gained international acceptance, maybe the Little Entente would also be able to see Hungary’s potential as a viable partner, not only as an aggressor.<sup>1342</sup>

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<sup>1335</sup> Count János Hadik (1863–1933) was a prominent pre-war politician, who in October 1918 had been the Habsburgs’ choice for the premiership, but lost the position to Mihály Károlyi. In the 1920s, Hadik was a moderate reformist leader of several trade and agricultural organizations. He was a Member of the Upper House by virtue of his peerage. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor 390–391; MÉL: Hadik, János, gróf.

<sup>1336</sup> Count Pál Eszterházy (b. 1861) was a dualist era career diplomat, a Member of the Upper House by virtue of his peerage. Kun, Lengyel & Vidor, 389.

<sup>1337</sup> “... a latin népeknek”, Pál Eszterházy, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 137.

<sup>1338</sup> János Hadik, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 136; Pál Eszterházy, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 137.

<sup>1339</sup> Zeidler 2007, 7. The reason for supporting Hungary was indeed Italy’s longing for a more decisive position in European politics and, conversely, its endeavours to constrain the influence of other states, especially Austria, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Hungary in the middle of them was a conscious choice as a vehicle of Italian power projection. See e.g. Vares 2008, 74–75.

<sup>1340</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 138.

<sup>1341</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 138.

<sup>1342</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 139.

“This treaty is not a treaty of alliance, it is a treaty of friendship, which does not impose concrete obligations on the two partners but assesses at a general level our attitudes towards each other and towards those matters in which we see mutual interests. Therefore, this treaty fits completely into the policy of peace that the Hungarian government has pursued in the past and is also going to pursue in the future. This treaty is not directed against any third state.”<sup>1343</sup>

Having been subject to obstruction in the Lower House, Bethlen chose the Upper House as his preferred arena to easily allay any suspicions presented against the treaty.<sup>1344</sup> He also used the occasion to repeat his firm condemnation of the Social Democratic opposition. Whereas János Hadik had in a carefully mitigating tone formulated that the Social Democrats had actually already renounced Communism,<sup>1345</sup> Bethlen responded by stating that both ideologues nevertheless sought to bring an end to private ownership. The only difference lay in the means; whereas the Communists were ready to use violence to bring about revolution, the Social Democrats abused the civil liberties of a democratic society to reach same goals.<sup>1346</sup>

“I have already voiced my concern about the matter, I have the impression that civil society does not understand its own good when flirting with an ideology whose goal is in any case identical to that of Communism.”<sup>1347</sup>

Therefore the structures of democracy needed to be ‘corrected’ in order to prevent a Socialist takeover.<sup>1348</sup> One can thus see that the questioning of such an important milestone in his foreign policy as the treaty was, provoked Bethlen into an uncompromising rhetorical attack against the opposition, re-applying the counterrevolutionary antagonizing rhetoric, where the parliamentary opposition was interpreted as a threat to the social order and a justification of continuous ‘fine-tuning’ of democracy.

#### 4.5.5 Collusion in the name of the nation

All in all the treaty of friendship between Italy and Hungary can with justification be called a change in orientation in Hungarian foreign policy, especially in relation to its expected and articulated long-term repercussions.<sup>1349</sup> The choice of

<sup>1343</sup> “Ez a szerződés nem szövetségi szerződés, ez barátsági szerződés, amely nem konkrét kötelezettségeket ró a két félre, hanem általában írja elő maguktartását egymással szemben és azokban a kérdésekben, amelyekben közösséget látnak. Ez a szerződés tehát beleillik teljes mértékben abba a békepolitikába, amelyet a magyar kormány is folytatott a múltban és szándéka folytatni a jövőben is. Ennek a szerződésnek nincs éle semmiféle harmadik állammal szemben.” István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 138.

<sup>1344</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 138.

<sup>1345</sup> János Hadik, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 137.

<sup>1346</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 139.

<sup>1347</sup> “Már most én evvel a megállapítással szemben azt mondtam, hogy benyomásom az, hogy a polgári társadalom a maga érdekeit nem jól fogja fel és koketteriát folytat egy olyan tannal, amely végcéljaiban mindenesetre odavezet, ahová a kommunizmus.” István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 139.

<sup>1348</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister, 2.6.1927, FN I/1927, 139.

<sup>1349</sup> Cf. Fülöp & Sipos, who date the change to the early 1930s, the era of the Gömbös’ government and its tightening of ties to Italy and Germany. The debate of 1927,

wording in the contemporary discourse revealed how the symbolic meaning of the treaty was extended to be far greater than its actual content. The dual role was not only acknowledged but also embraced: the hope that Hungary would gain advantage in foreign trade and leverage in international relations, especially considering revision issues, in return for foreign political commitment. The proponents of the treaty perceived only the benefits of such a deal and firmly refuted the opposition's accusations about how far the demands of such a commitment would eventually extend. Even with reservations – expressed by both moderate conservatives like Lajos Beck and Social Democrats like Dániel Várnai – regarding Italy's quest for power and using Hungary as a vehicle in these aspirations, the government, fuelled by the spirit of revision, still eagerly swallowed the bait: at last Hungary was about to reclaim its rightful place in world politics by forming a common block with an enviable world power.

Even when the treaty was an obvious departure from the discourse that valued multi-lateral co-operation – present in the League of Nations accession debate – it was still conceptualized by the government as an exemplary act of restructuring and reconstruction of the world order, aimed at peaceful coexistence and equality between nations. Within the same debate, the government Members could apply the public content of the treaty to cherish its peaceful nature as an example for other nations to emulate – and simultaneously hint at its implicit and symbolic nature as a source of support in the revision project. As in the case of the League of Nations accession debate, the government and opposition conceptualizations of international order and international politics clashed in this debate, too; whereas the opposition argued for the need – and prospects better than before – for friendly ties with the successor states, the government mostly maintained the conceptualization of Hungary being besieged and isolated by the Little Entente, a political and economic blockade that was about to be finally broken. Even when applying the necessary mitigating rhetoric of peaceful coexistence with neighbours, Bethlen formulated this in terms of the treaty itself: only by securing the support of Italy would Hungary appear as an internationally credible nation and be able to engage in relationships with its neighbours on an equal footing. Moreover, the calls for co-operation with neighbours presented by Britain and France were now interpreted as mere propaganda intended to undermine Hungary – the extent of the support from the Western Powers had already been considered to be limited at best, and the newly emboldened Hungary had no more motivation to rely on them.

Italy's benevolence towards Hungary, past and present, was constructed as a historical kinship that tied the national missions of both nations together. Suitable interpretations of common history easily overlooked momentary ruptures such as the World War, and made the treaty a historical necessity, a culmination of a natural progression. Hungary positioned itself alongside Italy

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however, shows how the treaty was explicitly considered in relation to the revision question and expectations of Italy's comprehensive support. Thus the foreign policy of Gömbös, albeit ideologically more radically oriented, was in content mostly a continuation of what Bethlen had begun. Fülöp & Sipos 1998, 161–175

through a shared history and shared organic conceptualizations of nation: both Italy and Hungary were defined as the dominant nations of their respective spatial environments – the Mediterranean and the Carpathian Basin – with a ‘natural’ right to govern them. In the government parlance, Mussolini was elevated to the position of Hungary's greatest benefactor and sympathizer, who was in due conservative fashion canonized as one patron saint of the national mission. Bethlen and Mussolini were portrayed as visionary statesmen, whom destiny had brought together to crown the development, and who stood as the guarantors of the mutually beneficial deal.

For the Social Democratic opposition, the situation was, quite naturally, completely the opposite. The figure of Mussolini also served as a rallying point for their criticism and the main reason for their unyielding opposition to the treaty: a dictator without peer, a warmonger and an opportunist, to whom Hungary could not trust its foreign political orientation and should not be legitimizing the Fascist state. Bethlen parried the criticism with due irony, retorting that the Socialists only loathed Mussolini as a traitor to their ideology, for he had changed sides from internationalism to nationalism – and that indeed was the alignment Hungary wanted to support. The Social Democrats repeatedly attempted to redescribe the concepts of national interest and national mission – and to prove that these meant anything but collusion with Italy. Also appealing to the concepts of peace and stability, they rhetorically asked whether Hungary possessed the wisdom to safeguard them against aggressive nationalism and secret diplomacy – which Fascist Italy and the treaty in question represented.

The questioning of the government's judgement in the foreign political discourse also had the domestic implication of questioning the very legitimacy of the government itself. The blunt criticism of the treaty that was considered the greatest success of post-war foreign policy, led to harsh chastisement of the opposition by the government Members. The core concept of parliamentarism was redescribed by the government as the imperative mandate given by the nation towards Parliament to implement the national mission of revision. This fundamentally excluded debate and dissent, which were considered detrimental to the conservative ideal of national unity: subsequently, the usual counterrevolutionary slurs of revolutionaries and Communist sympathizers, even when totally unrelated to the subject matter, were levelled against the Social Democratic opposition in an attempt to exclude them from any foreign political expertise or judgement. They were supported by the Speaker, who exploited the House Rules in order to curtail the criticism of the opposition, culminating in the official indictment of Várnai for ‘unparliamentary conduct’. Even Prime Minister Bethlen became agitated and delivered a contemptuous address to the critics of the treaty, repeating his judgement in the Upper House, where the opposition was practically non-existent. In so doing, he explicitly set the limits of the discourse of consolidation, replaced by that of containment when an important achievement was at stake.

The grim reaction to the presentation of the unfavourable sides of the treaty implied that the government still valued above all the prospects of revision,

however meagre or however distant. Against this background, we can also challenge the post-war rationalization of Hungary's 'inescapable track' (*kényserpályá*) leading to the Second World War; as the contemporary negative implications of Hungary's growing dependence of the Fascist state were actively silenced, the government was not in a position to plead ignorance when the risks were realized in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Thus, it would be misleading to argue that there were distinct 'anglophile' and 'pro-German' orientations in the Hungarian political elite, when the government, including Bethlen himself, operated in a constantly evolving foreign political climate. From the outset they were ready to seek sympathy and support from all directions, even believing that the orientations could eventually be reconciled without provoking either side.<sup>1350</sup> Hungary's economic and foreign political dependence on the Axis was a result of long-standing and conscious collusion, fuelled by unending expectations of revision.

#### 4.6 Conclusions. Revision as a national mission

The grand narrative of Hungarian foreign policy was that of injustice, from the humiliation of Trianon and throughout the years of mistreatment at the hands of the successor states and lack of sympathy from the Great Powers. According to that narrative, Hungary was constantly alone, misunderstood and surrounded by enemies. As a result, the foreign political development of Hungary was conceptualized as a national mission and historical calling – that the millennial nation, after having reached its nadir in Trianon, was destined to rise from the ashes and break out of the international isolation enforced by the treaty. According to the narrative, the nation would eventually achieve 'resurrection', if not in the form of the full reclamation of Greater Hungary, at least in favourable border settlements with the successor states, safeguarding the Hungarian population and increasing Hungary's foreign political role and credibility in the international arena. This conceptualization conveniently justified the pursuit of revision by all means available, ranging from paramilitary activity (as in the case of Sopron) to multilateral co-operation (as in the case of the League of Nations) and finally to far-reaching plans based on bilateral Great Power support (as in the case of the Treaty of Friendship with Italy).

In order to legitimize the revisionist policy in relation to the adjacent countries, the conceptualizations of collective and individual, political and organic nationhood, nationality and loyalty were consciously obscured to create favourable conceptualizations of the situation. As Hungary yearned to regain the lost territories inhabited by Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians and Germans alike, the premise was that all of them equally yearned to regain the unity of the greater Hungarian fatherland. By contrast, the nation-building and state-building of the respective successor states was repeatedly questioned and they were regarded as culturally inferior and only seeking justification for their existence through anti-

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<sup>1350</sup> Cf. Hanebrink 2006, 140; Kontler 1999, 367; Romsics 1996, 109.

Hungarian chauvinism; against this background, the foreign accusations of Hungarian 'irredentism' were repeatedly interpreted as hypocritical and unjust. In Hungarian self-understanding, Hungary was still the main cohesive force in the Carpathian Basin, and even if it had been deprived of its 'natural right' to rule the former dependencies, it still possessed solutions to local and global issues.

The consciously ambiguous attitude of the government in relation to the revision goals was transmitted to the political language. When the Hungarian government presented its various revision goals and the possibilities of gaining concessions from one source or another, they also constantly argued that they were presenting universal models for solving the contemporary tensions in interwar politics. Whereas the conservative elite had rebuked the concepts of constitutionalism and parliamentarism in the domestic discourse and disdained the concept of national self-determination when it was used to legitimize the partitioning of Greater Hungary, they eagerly appropriated the same concepts when they could be given redescriptions favourable to Hungary. This included the constant rhetorical play of victimization and accusations of hypocrisy: whereas the partitioning of Hungary in Trianon had been based on Wilsonian ideals (or, as the narrative went, on their blatant exploitation by the successor states), Hungary blamed the international community for indifference in those cases when the said ideals could have favoured Hungary. The hopes placed in the League of Nations were based on the conceptualization of the League as a parliamentary and constitutional forum,<sup>1351</sup> where Hungary could win over supporters to the 'Hungarian truth'. And when the idea of national self-determination was projected onto the repeated calls for referenda in the ceded territories, it also became a concept nurtured in the legalist strain of revisionism.

The use of the core concepts of nation was an integral part of the government-opposition debate throughout the cases, but also changed over time. The ratification of the Treaty of Trianon was debated in the contingent post-revolutionary transition period, when the interpretations of nationhood, national existence and national dignity were constructed and contested by the diverse strains of counterrevolutionary political thought. At that phase, the government needed to negotiate the calls for even more radical revisionism presented by the radical Right and uncompromising conservative circles. Whereas the government had quite soon realized that the popular contemporary call for 'everything back!' (*Mindent Vissza!*) could not be achieved, several counterrevolutionary politicians still nurtured hopes of a sudden change in international politics and, moreover, were keen to remind others that the whole ordeal of Trianon could have been prevented if the negotiations had been trusted to truly patriotic statesmen, i.e. themselves. The government was not in a position to actively deny such manifestations of 'true' patriotism, but in general used more pragmatic language in relation to the revision question.

In the latter cases, the government side was better disciplined under the umbrella of the Unity Party, whereas the role of the main opposition party had been picked up by the Social Democrats. As demonstrated, the Left likewise did

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<sup>1351</sup> Which the League did not consider itself to be, see Ihalainen 2018, 20–21.

not renounce Hungarian nationalism and the need for border revision but attempted to achieve the revision goals through more moderate means. The cases concerning the Sopron commemoration law and Hungary's accession to the League of Nations demonstrate how the Social Democrats appealed to the redescriptions of the concepts of patriotism and national interest, and engaged in a contest over their rhetorical ownership. The government responded by readily applying the counterrevolutionary narrative, having an array of negative examples to be used to prove the lack of patriotism of the Social Democrats, for example reminding the audience that the years 1918–19 had been the moment when 'so much could have been saved', if the 'internationalist revolutionaries' had not broken the united will of the nation.

That said, in certain cases the foreign policy discourse generally allowed for more discursive space for multi-focal debate than the stricter government-led definitions in cases that touched the more sensitive points in national policy. In issues of foreign policy, the concepts were not defined solely in Hungary and through Hungarian experience and could thus be applied more plausibly by the opposition forces, as seen especially in the League of Nations accession debate; the Social Democratic and Christian Social opposition could claim to interpret the fundamentals of international relations – such as multilateralism and internationalism – just as plausibly as the Conservatives, and their positions were not as easily challenged. The Social Democratic critique also had more established grounds concerning matters of foreign policy; as official Hungary lamented the losses sustained in the World War, the Social Democrats could refer to their peace programmes already during the war, schemes that could have led to more favourable peace terms, had they not been branded as traitorous. Thus the Social Democrats attempted to convince the audience of their progressive policies that would prove beneficial for Hungary. The same applied to the latter case of the treaty with Italy; the Social Democrats could predict the dangerous extents to which allegiance to and dependence on the Fascist state might lead. This time, however, the treaty was deemed too important a foreign policy achievement to withstand any questioning, and the opposition was silenced by the Speaker with the usual counterrevolutionary policy of disqualifying rhetoric coupled with abuse of the House Rules.

The cases quite clearly demonstrate that the trauma of Trianon, constructed from the beginning as a ubiquitous example of national catastrophe, formed the core of the foreign political discourse, in both means and ends. Revision, by any means necessary, was the unquestioned motive of Hungarian foreign policy: the change in language over time merely showed the government's opportunistic and tactical attempts to adapt to the changes in international relations. That goal also defined the very narrow extent of political consolidation; even when applying the conciliatory tone of multi-lateral co-operation, but especially when emboldened by the support of Italy, the government was reluctant to answer any calls for parliamentarization of foreign policy and was always ready to resort to the procedural limitations of parliamentary speech to contain the opposition, whenever the need arose.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS: 'CONTAINMENT' OVER 'CONSOLIDATION'

As presented in the introduction, this study began as an attempt to trace the changes in political language and the rhetorical uses of power from the exclusive counterrevolutionary discourse to the inclusive policy of consolidation in the 1920s but ended up challenging the very change and the significance attached to the concept of consolidation. The empirical study of the debates rebutted the premise of attaining legitimation of the government through deliberation in plenary debate.<sup>1352</sup> On the contrary, the study reveals that the language used by the government in parliamentary debate for purposes of nation-building was fundamentally based on exclusive nationalism, while inclusive and 'consolidatory' tones remained tactical tools applied by the government to suit momentary needs, especially when it needed to showcase Hungarian tolerance of minorities to fend off international accusations of oppression in the case of amending the *Numerus Clausus* in 1928, or to express compliance with multi-lateral co-operation to legitimize accession to the League of Nations in 1923.

From the early counterrevolutionary moment of 1920 until the end of the decade, the assumed heyday of consolidation, government relied on exclusive conceptualization of nation and ability to rhetorically exclude certain unwanted groups from the nation due to their alleged, collective sins. Revolutions provided the government with an endless supply of negative examples on which it could rely in its condemnation of the opposition, even years after the events of 1918-19 and even in cases when referring to the revolutionary past was completely extraneous in relation to the matter at hand. On the other hand, the positive examples, namely the cults of national heroes were canonized in the legislation and incorporated into the grand national narrative in which Hungary time and again overcame hardship through the wisdom of these guiding lights; this was projected onto the contemporary political needs, where the government identified itself with the wisdom of Széchenyi and Kossuth, leading the nation away from the catastrophes of revolutions and Trianon. The need for national

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<sup>1352</sup> As suggested by Burkhardt 2016 and Ilie 2016.



unity in the face of peril was operationalized as contempt for dissent, which the government made use of in Parliament. Thus, any attempts on the part of the opposition at redescription of the great national past were condemned as 'deglorification'.

Revisionism was from the outset conceptualized as a national mission and thus became the prime directive of foreign policy to which the resolutions were subordinated. The trauma of Trianon was intentionally constructed from an early stage to serve as legitimization for any revisionist plans, in whatever form they might appear. The foreign policy debates also reveal how inclusive nation-building was tactically exploited by the government as a tool of revisionist policy: as the millennial greater Hungarian nation – to which the revisionist discourse yearned back – naturally comprised non-Hungarian nationalities, these were presented as if desirous of remaining loyal subjects of Hungary rather than pursue nation-building of their own. However, in domestic discourse the government wanted to monopolize the revisionist discourse, applying the usual accusations of un-patriotism and revolutionary internationalism against the opposition whenever it voiced any criticism.

All in all, the debates reveal that the political elites were acutely aware of the post-war transnational discourses of parliamentarism and constitutionalism and calls for a new international order. Yet they were constantly and consciously given the most conservative and restrictive vernacular redescriptions and reinterpretations, applied to legitimize the counterrevolutionary regime and its exclusive nationalism. Constitution and parliamentarism were treated as conditional and subordinate to the grand narratives of national identity and national history. At the same time the opposition presented arguments that applied the concepts of parliamentarism and constitutionalism in the modern sense. However, they were repeatedly quelled; the government actually used and abused various forms of parliamentary and unparliamentary action in order to control and suppress the parliamentary polyphony. Procedural powers and House Rules were applied to refute actual parliamentary control over and criticism towards the government. The tone and the rhetorical boundaries of the debate did not evolve over time or change as a result of the consolidation discourse, but remained subordinate to the exclusive nation-building and its importance for the government. The rare cases in which the government wanted to showcase its tolerance were far outnumbered by those where it did not care about the finesse of the procedure but carried through its policy resolutions through *ad hoc* arguments and abuse of the parliamentary procedure; the pretexts used included the accusation that the opposition itself was violating parliamentary dignity, or the constitutional rights of the government Members. All this was done despite the fact that the heterogeneous opposition parties of the 1920s never posed a concrete challenge to the government supermajority. In a society where censorship prevailed, open and multi-lateral debate within the Parliament was the only means for the opposition parties to have their say, but even this was constantly curtailed by means of the rhetoric of exclusion and technical obstruction. When the Speaker was able to declare: "It is the Speaker

who decides what is relevant concerning the bill under negotiation”<sup>1353</sup> with the explicit intent of silencing the disquieting argumentation presented by the opposition, it reveals how little tolerance the government had for deliberative parliamentary discourse.

The position of the government further benefitted from the established structure of the parliamentary debate. Typically, a bill was presented by the chairman of the committee responsible for the matter in question, and often reinforced by a subsequent speech by the respective minister. As key actors in the debates, the chairmen of committees who presented bills were carefully chosen and loyal supporters of the government, who did their utmost to combine the present bill with the more universal legitimization of the government and contemporary policies. Rhetorically, the presentations began with a ceremonial lament over the tribulations Hungary had faced in its history and especially in recent times, in order to remind the House of its imperative mandate and historical obligation towards the nation. Opening a debate with such emphatic addresses delivered by trustees of the government enabled the rhetorical lines of the debate and the preferred forms of argumentation to be defined as an example to the supporting Members, who could choose to adhere to the predetermined lines or to add argumentation of their own. The power of the government over the political language largely depended on the depoliticization of issues, the closing of debates and the exclusion of sensitive questions of the political discourse. More often than not, either the Prime Minister or the minister responsible appeared again to deliver the closing remarks, making use of the position to actively downplay parliamentary dissent and even play off the opposition Members’ opinions against each other. In addition, the same individuals switched roles within the government and the Parliament to effectively direct the parliamentary discourse. Ministers Károly Huszár and István Rakovszky both in turn served as Speakers of the House, providing mutual support to the government from the Speaker’s lectern, applying House Rules strictly against the opposition but more leniently at the un-parliamentary conduct of the members of the government party.

The opposition was given concessions very sparingly. As the government wanted to strip the Social Democrats of any legitimacy, it was impossible to acknowledge their arguments, even at the rhetorical level. While the Social Democrats were willing and able to catch up with the core concepts of nation and turn them into arguments of the opposition, this only served to provoke the government and the Speaker into action against them, never to question the premises of the political mainstream. The Liberals and the radical Right, in turn, were occasionally approved, if and when they were ready to co-operate with the government by providing supportive or justifiable arguments in cases that eased the government’s position, and only if that suited the government-controlled discourse of nation. A telling example comes from the two historico-political

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<sup>1353</sup> “Hogy mi függ össze a tárgyalás alatt levő törvényjavaslattal, azt az elnök állapítja meg.” Tibor Zsitvay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 19.5.1927, KN IV/1927, 235.

debates; that on the memory of the fallen and that on the memory of István Széchenyi; on both the same opposition Member, Rezső Rupert, intervened to amend the wording of the bill, with the same principal motivation and content; to enhance the rhetorical esteem of the subject matter. In the case of the bill on the memory of the fallen, Rupert's rewording was accepted with gratitude, as he had proved to support the government against the critical voices of the radical Right. However, when he proposed the same kind of rewording regarding the Széchenyi commemoration bill, his amendments were turned down, as his interpretation of Széchenyi was judged precarious, too easily turned into criticism of the government.<sup>1354</sup> Throughout the 1920s the radical Right also had an instrumental role in the rhetorical legitimization of the government: in providing the expected extreme nationalist point of reference, the government could repeatedly argue against it, thus appearing to represent the 'golden mean', while simultaneously adopting the exclusive conceptualizations in its own language.

Through these results, we again encounter the question: what, if anything, did the concept of 'consolidation' mean? Being well aware that consolidation *per se* does not presuppose democracy or parliamentarism, it still should denote stabilization of the regime and solidification of its basis.<sup>1355</sup> This was not the case, either, as the government retorted to *ad hoc* solutions throughout the era both on the level of rhetoric and on the level of concrete policy resolutions. Seen through the parliamentary debate, the historiographical content given to consolidation understood either as stabilization of the political system or as unification of political forces behind the Bethlen government, was at best fragile. In the most limited meaning, Bethlen did succeed in *consolidating* the Smallholder and Christian National parties in 1922 to form the Unity Party. However, this limited extent of consolidation does not warrant naming the policy of an entire decade after it, especially when we know that the structure of the party remained a loose conglomerate, within which the factions continued their power struggles that undermined the ostensible stability. The political language of an ongoing crisis, especially with references to Trianon and the revolutionary years, remained readily applicable throughout the 1920s and after the fall of Bethlen in 1931 the

<sup>1354</sup> Compare Rezső Rupert, 4.4.1924, NN XXII/1922, 254 with Rezső Rupert, 4.11.1925, NN XXXV/1922, 321.

<sup>1355</sup> In economic matters, however, consolidation referred to the stabilization of Hungary's economy after the devastation of the World War and the loss of natural resources in the Treaty of Trianon. Seen from a purely economic perspective, Bethlen's policy might be deemed successful; Hungary's financial situation was improved with the help of the international loans acquired through the League of Nations and domestic business enjoyed a steady growth during the 1920s. This did not, however, amend the structural weaknesses, especially Hungary's dependence on the export of agricultural produce, making its economy extremely susceptible to fluctuations in world market prices. The government's solution, as explained, was conscious reliance on bilateral relations with Italy, later to be supplemented and surpassed by those with Germany. Thus the economic strain of consolidation can likewise not be interpreted to have had a lasting stabilizing effect; instead it created economic and political dependence on the future Axis powers. See Chapter 4.5. and Romsics 1995, 203, 282–283; Romsics 1999, 139–142.

aggressive counterrevolutionary, anti-Communist and anti-Semitic tones quickly re-entered the mainstream political discourse.

Finally, we can arrive at the conclusion that ‘consolidation’, in all respects, was an empty vessel, a consciously vague concept on which the government relied but which was never given concrete significance and which even less implied any kind of commitment to multiparty deliberation. Instead, the principal tool in the rhetorical use of power within the Parliament, the predominant strain of exclusive nation-building and the core epithet of the government policy in the 1920s should be called *containment*.

“CONTAINMENT

1) THE ACT, PROCESS, OR MEANS OF KEEPING SOMETHING WITHIN LIMITS

2) THE POLICY, PROCESS, OR RESULT OF PREVENTING THE EXPANSION OF A HOSTILE POWER OR IDEOLOGY”<sup>1356</sup>

The government approach consistently corresponds to both lexical meanings given to containment: it kept the internal dissent, parliamentary debate and civic empowerment within the strictly defined limits, the absolute minimum necessary to maintain the impression of a ‘functioning democracy’ and ‘constitutional life’ and did the utmost to prevent any expansion or even rhetorical legitimacy of the ideologies and social groups that were judged ‘internal enemies’, especially Social Democrats, Liberals and Jews.

What is remarkable, however, is that the concept of consolidation has been accepted in the historiography and has prevailed in a sense which it never actually attained. As exemplified by György Földes in his comparative analysis of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century regimes of Hungary:

“... when [the new power holders] managed to stay in power for a longer period, the radical trends were gradually tamed, and undertook to represent the interests of the middle social layers. That solution helped the political forces that had acquired power through violence, and/or external help maintain their political hegemony and create their legitimacy. This is what happened to the national conservative Right after 1920, and with the communists in the 1960s (...) Only two politicians, István Bethlen, and János Kádár had time enough to implement their own policies, and thus they managed to *consolidate* a disjointed society.”<sup>1357</sup>

This argument is one of the cornerstones of the consolidation discourse, here applied to the interwar era as if similar to the latter part of the Socialist era: that the regime slowly mitigated its strictest ideological content in order to broaden its supporter base and gain legitimacy. Whereas the argument might be more credible in the latter case, this study argues in detail against the former: the interwar governments did not succeed in gaining legitimacy and building societal peace as the policies were firmly based on the counterrevolutionary

<sup>1356</sup> Merriam-Webster: CONTAINMENT. Even though the latter meaning has in historiography usually been ascribed to the anti-Communist foreign policy of the United States in the Cold War era, it is equally applicable to the Hungarian case.

<sup>1357</sup> Földes 2005, 11, 13, emphasis VH.

discourse, revisionism as a form of ongoing crisis and struggle against internal and external enemies. Historiography has subsequently portrayed Bethlen as a 'conservative liberal', who skilfully manoeuvred between the arch-conservatives, the radical Right and the moderates and to build a structure of societal peace through 'national consolidation'.<sup>1358</sup> On the contrary, Bethlen was often himself the guarantor of the policy of containment; having the last word in the debates, he was able to rhetorically undermine and delegitimize the opposition, excluding it from being discerning or competent to have any part in the leadership of the nation.

Even as the conservative governments succeeded in the containment of the political opposition by abusing the parliamentary procedure in ways going as far as extra-parliamentary harassment of the opposition, the results were eventually counterproductive. In the long run, this resulted not in the reinforcement of the government's power, but on the contrary, in exposing its internal weakness. As the political legitimacy of the government was based on its procedural power in Parliament and in a biased electoral law in relation to the people, it never even strove to establish legitimacy based on popular support, as the people and mass mobilization were regarded with extreme suspicion. The construction of the *demos* was consciously rendered imperfect; instead of a politically active citizenry, the government preferred an organic and traditional conceptualization of a traditional, immutable and inherently patriotic Hungarian nation, to which the government appealed on a rhetorical level in the legitimization of policy, but which was scarcely given a say in politics. To this end, it was imperative for the government to disqualify and delegitimize all mass movements claiming to have a more direct mandate from the people. The same oppressive strategies were used to muzzle the Social Democrats, the radical Right and the agrarian populists, each in turn, both within the Parliament and outside it.

As the government consciously pursued its policy of containment, it also failed to create a lasting parliamentary legitimization for itself. Coupled with the lacking legitimacy, the structure of the Unity Party itself as a loose conglomerate of interest groups made it eventually prone to internal division.<sup>1359</sup> As a result, the basis of the Unity party government, outwardly supported by a constant supermajority, was in fact dependent on intrapersonal alliances within the narrow elite, subject to changes in preferences and relationships. The elitist structure was to suffer dire tribulations in the 1930s, the inter-European era of rising mass movements. The rise of the parties on the extreme Right was an irreversible change in political culture, even though these parties were not able to win parliamentary seats in considerable numbers before the outbreak of the Second World War, their mere existence had posed a challenge to the formerly conservative governmental party, which had reacted by veering to the right.<sup>1360</sup>

Whereas some (typically non-Hungarian) scholars see a rather straightforward evolution from the counterrevolutionary political thought of the

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<sup>1358</sup> See e.g. Romsics 2017, 188.

<sup>1359</sup> Romsics 1995, 182.

<sup>1360</sup> See e.g. Püski 2006, 266–267.

1920s to the Fascist movements of the 1930s,<sup>1361</sup> the more moderate (and more often Hungarian) analysts in turn emphasize the distinction between the Conservatives and the radical Right, the old and the new political tradition.<sup>1362</sup> The latter dichotomy has its problems as well: at a structural and rhetorical level, it relieves the conservative policy of responsibility in the radicalization of policies, even though there were always some underlying premises at the level of political language, such as the exclusive nationalism and the unconditional need for revision, which were readily applied to legitimize the radicalization. Of Bethlen's successors, Gyula Gömbös, Kálmán Darányi and Béla Imrédy all chose to combat the domestic Extreme Right by pursuing increasingly radical programmes but applied the same language of counterrevolution already evoked in the 1920s. Even when Bethlen was personally critical of the change of tones, he was no longer in a position to change direction. Ironically, his own elitist policy, which had attained legitimation by keeping popular empowerment at bay, was rendered helpless against mounting populism.

Zsuzsanna Boros and István Szabó, among others, have presented an historiographical explanation (or apology) for the rise of the Extreme Right in Hungary: it was a European-wide phenomenon, to which Hungary was no better equipped to respond than any other states in Central Europe. Even as the Conservative government might be accused of appeasement of the Extreme Right, the scholars note that the government also constantly acted against it, but that even the most distinguished conservative politicians, Horthy and Bethlen, were unable to curtail its momentum. In so arguing, they raise the rhetorical question: could the government have acted in any other way, and even if it could, would that ultimately have made any difference?<sup>1363</sup> When reflected against the findings of this study, the explanation also becomes problematic, following quite closely as it does the very contemporary arguments, which the government used to legitimize its strong position as a necessity in order to counter the threat of political 'extremes', i.e. Communism and Fascism. The counterrevolutionary language normalized the conceptualizations of extreme nationalism and so paved the way for it. Thus, a more appropriate conclusion, with reference to Levente Püski, would be to say that the interwar political structure was from the outset geared to defend itself against its internal enemies on the Left, but at the same time unable and unwilling to resist the combined pressure of the growing Extreme Right at the domestic level and National Socialist Germany in the international sphere, especially as the latter offered the fulfilment of the revision hopes that for two decades had been carefully constructed and nurtured.<sup>1364</sup>

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<sup>1361</sup> Hanebrink 2006, 85; Gerwarth 2013, 102.

<sup>1362</sup> Deák 1992, 1053; Vares 2002, 22–26.

<sup>1363</sup> Boros & Szabó 2008, 211; Szabó 2009, 303.

<sup>1364</sup> Püski 2006, 280.

## YHTEENVETO

### Vastavallankumouksesta konsolidaatioon? Kansakunnan rakentamisen kieli Unkarin parlamenttikeskusteluissa vuosina 1920–1928

#### Tutkimuskysymykset ja metodit

Itävalta-Unkarin hajotessa 1918 Unkarista tuli kaksoismonarkian seuraajavaltio vastoin tahtoaan. Tappio ensimmäisessä maailmansodassa ja sitä seurannut Trianonin rauhansopimus (1920) riisuiivat Unkarin entisestä mahtiasemastaan, ja jättivät sen toisten, Unkaria kohtaan vihamielisten seuraajavaltioiden keskelle. Samaan aikaan vuoden 1918 tasavaltalainen ja vuoden 1919 sosialistinen vallankumous olivat henkilökohtainen ja moraalinen järkytys sotaa edeltäneen ajan vallanpitäjille, joiden muodostama vastavallankumouksellinen hallitus palasi valtaan Ententen tuella syksyllä 1919.

Unkarin poliittisen eliitin reaktio suuruuden menetykseen, kansainväliseen sodanjälkeiseen epäluottamuksen ilmapiiriin ja kotimaisiin vallankumouksiin oli perustaltaan syvästi konservatiivinen. Toisin kuin muualla Euroopassa, jossa ensimmäisen maailmansodan kokemukset johtivat laajaan perustuslaki- ja äänioikeusdebattiin, Unkarissa malli haettiin menneisyydestä. Valtaosa vuosien 1918–19 tasavaltalaisista reformeista purettiin ja valtiomuoto palautettiin kuningaskunnaksi. Valtionhoitaja Miklós Horthyn mukaan nimetty aikakausi (*Horthy-korszak*) tuli jatkumaan aina toiseen maailmansotaan saakka. Poliittinen järjestelmä perustui ehdotonta enemmistövaltaa käyttävään hallituspuolueeseen (ns. Yhtenäisyyspuolue, *Egységes párt*), jonka oli kuitenkin legitimoitava päätöksensä parlamentissa. Järjestelmän sisäistä dynamiikkaa, vallankäytön ja kritiikin muotoja onkin perusteltua tutkia parlamenttidebatin kautta; aikaisempi Unkarin historian tutkimus on herkästi sivuuttanut parlamentin tutkimuskohteena, vedoten hallituksen itsevaltaiseen asemaan, mutta jättänyt huomiotta sen, mitä tietoa parlamenttidebatti voi tarjota järjestelmän vallankäytön ja vallan oikeuttamisen keinoista.

Juuri tätä näkökulmaa tutkin väitöskirjassani; analysoin kielen käyttöä Unkarin politiikassa, erityisesti parlamenttikeskusteluissa, jotka käsitelivät kansakunnan ja valtion rakentamisen teemoja 1920-luvulla. Tutkimuskysymykseni on, miten poliittisessa kielenkäytössä tuotettiin ja käytettiin kansakunnan ja kansallisen historian käsitteistöä hallituksen valta-aseman tukemiseksi ja toisaalta, millaisia vaihtoehtoja oppositio esitti ja millaisin kielellisin keinoin se kritisoi hallituksen vallankäyttöä. Alkuperäislähteinä toimivat Unkarin parlamentin täysistuntojen keskustelut, joista olen perehtynyt kansakunnan rakentamisen kannalta merkittäviin debatteihin vuosilta 1920–1928.

Metodi- ja teoriapohjaltaan tutkimus tukeutuu poliittisen kielen ja argumenttien rakentamisen analyysiin, jossa keskeistä on ymmärtää parlamentaarisen puheen kaksisuuntainen luonne sekä poliittista todellisuutta rakentavana että sitä kuvaavana tekona: puhe vetoaa olemassa oleviin, yleisön jakamiin käsityksiin ja odotuksiin ja pyrkii näiden pohjalta oikeuttamaan käytännön toimia ja linjavetoja. Tutkimus osoittaa, että poliitikot yli puoluerajojen pyrkivät tukeutumaan samoihin unkarilaisen kulttuu-

rin ja kansallisen itseymmärryksen peruskäsitteisiin, mutta tekivät niistä päivänpoliittisessa keskustelussa kilpailevia tulkintoja, joilla kukin osapuoli pyrki oikeuttamaan omaa politiikkaansa ja osoittamaan sen 'todellisen unkarilaisuuden'. Myös metodologisella tasolla tutkimus haastaa vallitsevaa maailmansotien välisen ajan Unkarin tutkimuksen perinnettä, joka on pitkälti keskittynyt henkilöhistorioihin tai rakenteellisproseduraalisiin pitkittäistutkimuksiin.

Tutkimuksen lähtöhypoteesina toimi unkarilaisen historiankirjoituksen teesi siitä, että unkarilaisella kansakunnan rakentamisella oli kaksi toisiaan täydentävää puolta, jota olen analysoinut aikalaiskäsitteiden vastavallankumous (*ellenforradalom*) ja konsolidaatio (*konsolidáció*) kautta. Näistä vastavallankumous edusti ulossulkevaa, erityisesti antikommunistista ja antisemitististä 'normalisaatiota', joka ensisijaisesti pyrki palauttamaan vallan konservatiivielitiin käsiin ja minimoimaan epäluotettavaksi katsottujen ryhmien, kuten sosialistien, liberaalien ja juutalaisten vaikutusmahdollisuudet. Vuoden 1921 jälkeinen konsolidaatio, yhtenäisyys- ja vakauspolitiikka, puolestaan edusti inklusiivisempaa kansakunnan rakentamista, joka pyrki yhdistämään kansakunnan jälleenrakennukseen – tavoitellen sovintoa myös juutalaisten ja työväestön kanssa.

Mutta mitä konsolidaatio lopulta merkitsi käytännön politiikassa, vai merkitsikö mitään? Tätä tarkastellaan seuraavissa tapausesimerkeissä, jotka koskevat kansakunnan uudelleenrakentamista vallankumousten jälkeen, historiapolitiikkaa sekä ulkopoliitiikkaa kansallisena tehtävänä.

### **Kansakunta ja sen toiset**

Unkarin parlamentin kokoontuessa ensi kerran vallankumousvuosien jälkeen helmikuussa 1920 johtavat konservatiivipoliitikot määrittelivät sen tehtävät lähimenneisyyden koettelemusten ja historiallisten esikuvien kautta. Vastavallankumouksellisessa retoriikassa vuoden 1918 liberaalidemokraattinen ja erityisesti vuoden 1919 sosialistinen vallankumous olivat vieneet tuhatvuotisen Unkarin täydellisen tuhon partaalle, ja vastavallankumouksellisten oli nyt pelastettava mitä pelastettavissa oli. Malli tähän haettiin menneisyydestä: Unkarin valtiomuoto palautettiin kuningaskunnaksi, jonka valtionhoitajaksi valittiin valkoisen armeijan komentaja, amiraali Miklós Horthy. Retorisesti tukeuduttiin myös Unkarin 'historialliseen perustuslakiin', joka kuitenkin uudelleenmääriteltiin juuri orgaanisen ja myyttisen kansakunta-ajattelun kautta, jossa parlamentarismi ja poliittinen moniäänisyys koettiin lähinnä häiriötekijäksi. Koko poliittisen järjestelmän perusta siis luotiin vastavallankumouksellisuuden ja demokratiaa vähättelevän vahvan hallitusvallan pohjalle.

Samaan aikaan sosialistit kuvattiin sekä julkisuudessa että parlamenttikeskusteluissa kunniattomina pettureina, jotka olivat turmelleet kaiken arvokkaan maassa ja aiheuttaneet historiallisen Unkarin häviön; tällainen kielenkäyttö toimi suoranaisesti selityksenä ja oikeutuksena valkoiselle terrorille. Sosialidemokraattiseen puolueeseen kohdistuneen painostuksen takia puolue päätti boikotoida vuoden 1920 vaaleja, ja vaikka se palasikin parlamenttiin jo vuoden 1922 vaaleissa, sitä ei hyväksytty legitimiiksi oppositioksi, vaan hallituspuolueen edustajien argumentit pohjautuivat lähes aina vallankumouksen ja kumouksellisten solvaamiseen. Kuvaava esimerkki tästä oli



debatti, joka käytiin parlamentin kyselytunnilla helmikuussa 1923 koskien poliittisten vankien tilannetta; kun sosialidemokraatit ja liberaalit vaativat Zalaegerségin internointileirin olojen tarkempaa tutkimusta ja ilman oikeudenkäyntiä vangittujen vapauttamista, hallituspuolueen edustajat sisäministeri etunenässä toistivat kantanaan, että vangit olivat leirillä hyvästä syystä ja että opposition syytökset vankien epäinhimillisestä kohtelusta kuvastivat tekopyhyyttä, muistaen vallankumouksen punaisen terrorin. Debatin ankaruus osoittaa, että vastavallankumouksellisella hallituksella ei ollut halua edes retoriseen sovintoon vasemmiston kanssa, eikä se sietänyt asemansa parlamentaarista valvontaa vaan turvautui tarvittaessa kurinpidollisiin toimiin parlamentissa saadakseen opposition edustajat vaiennettua.

Sisäisten vihollisten etsintä ei rajoittunut sosialisteihin, vaan erottamattomana osana vastavallankumoukselliseen retoriikkaan kuului antisemitismi; juutalaiset nähtiin epäisänmaallisina, kansakunnan ulkopuolisina, keinottelijoina ja agitaattoreina. Jälkimmäisen perusteeksi mainittiin jälleen vallankumouksen muisto ja se, että monet neuvostotasavallan johtajista olivat olleet syntyperältään juutalaisia. Tämä johti siihen, että kansakuntaa rakennettiin myös institutionalisoidun ulossulkemisen kautta: vuoden 1920 *Numerus Clausus* -lainsäädäntö asetti rajoitukset eri 'rotujen ja kansallisuuksien' osuudelle yliopisto-opiskelijoista. Käytännössä laki oli suunnattu yksinomaan juutalaisia vastaan, mikä näkyi parlamentaarisen debatin luonteessa; juutalaiset pyrittiin asettamaan kokonaisvaltaisesti unkarin kansakunnan ulkopuolelle, kiistämään heidän vuosisatainen integraationsa unkarilaiseen yhteiskuntaan ja luomalla heille sen sijaan negatiivinen, 'rodullinen' identiteetti. Näin toimiessaan konservatiivihallitus omaksui ja normalisoi äärioikeiston retorisia keinoja, vaikka pyrkiin erottautumaan oikeistoradikaaleista ja toteuttamaan – oman näkemyksensä mukaan – maltillista politiikkaa.

Vuonna 1928, kun *Numerus Clausus* -lainsäädäntöä lievennettiin kansainvälisen kritiikin seurauksena poistamalla suoranaiset viittaukset 'rotuun', hallitus puolestaan pyrki retoriikassaan korostamaan kansallista yhtenäisyyttä ja inklusiivista unkarilaisuutta. Käytännössä juutalaisten syrjintä yliopistoissa ja yhteiskunnassa kuitenkin jatkui kirjoittamattomalla päätöksellä; samoin kertaalleen omaksuttu antisemitistinen retoriikka oli aina uudelleen käyttökelpoinen väline kansallisen yhtenäisyyden vahvistamiseen viholliskuvan kautta.

Kansakuntaa ja sen toisia koskevat parlamenttikeskustelut osoittavat, että vastavallankumouksellinen ja ulossulkeva kansakunnan rakentaminen pysyi retoristen keinojen valikoimassa läpi tarkasteluajanjakson. Samoin demokratia, perustuslaillisuus, kansalaisvapaudet ja akateeminen vapaus asetettiin ehdollisiksi; ne hyväksyttiin siinä merkityksessä, joka tuki isänmaan hyväksi tehtävää työtä, kun taas niiden moniääniset (ja siten potentiaalisesti kumoukselliset) tulkinnat vaiennettiin tehokkaasti.

### **Historialle rakennettu kansakunta**

Historian merkitys unkarilaiselle identiteetille ja kansakunnan rakentamiselle on ollut kiistaton kaikkien poliittisten järjestelmien aikana. Menneisyyteen kurkottavalle vas-

tavallankumoukselliselle järjestelmälle tuhatvuotinen Unkari ja sen maineikas historia olivat itsestään selvästi hyödynnettäviä esikuvia. Myös aikakauden akateeminen ja populaari historiankirjoitus valjastettiin vahvistamaan kansallistuntoa kansallisen historiakertomuksen kautta. Historian tietoinen poliittinen käyttö tuotiin parlamenttikeskusteluihin päätettäessä muistopäivistä ja muistolainsäädännöstä.

Unkarin 1800-luvun reformikauden alullepanija István Széchenyi ja vuoden 1848 vallankumousjohtaja Lajos Kossuth olivat kanonisoituja kansallissankareita, joiden muiston ja ihanteet hallitus pyrki muokkaamaan omien tavoitteidensa mukaiseksi uudella muistolainsäädännöllä. Sekä Széchenyi että Kossuth uudelleenmääriteltiin maltillisiksi reformisteiksi, joiden työtä hallitus omalla politiikallaan jatkoi, ja joiden elämäntarinoiden vallankumoukselliset piirteet häivytettiin perusteellisesti. Näissä debateissa vasemmisto- ja liberaalioppositio pyrki jälleen toteuttamaan poliittista moniäänisyyttä esittämällä omat, suurmiesten muistoa ja opetuksia koskevat kriittiset tulkintansa, jotka olisivat velvoittaneet myös hallituksen toteuttamaan liberalismia ja parlamentarismia ihanteita. Konservatiiveille ajatus muiston moniäänisyydestä oli mahdoton ja poliittisesti vaarallinen, ja he tuomitsivat kritiikin suoranaishana 'juhlallisen muiston turmeluksena' (*űnneprontás*).

Sen sijaan vallankumousrunoilija Sándor Petőfin muistoa kunnioittava lakiesitys osoittautui jopa hallitukselle mahdottomaksi toteuttaa; Petőfin tinkimätöntä vallankumouksellisuutta ei saatu sovitettua konservatiiviseen muottiin, ja kun erään oppositioedustajan välihuuto samaisti hänet suorastaan vuoden 1918 vallankumoukseen, hänen muistonsa omiminen muuttui mahdottomaksi. Tämä toimii esimerkkinä poliittisen kielen herkkyydestä, yksittäisten käsitteiden painoarvosta keskustelun suuntaajana sekä debattien tiukasta vastakkainasettelusta, joka ei antanut sijaa opposition aloitteellisuudelle.

Kansallisen kertomuksen kannalta tärkeitä samaistumisen kohteita etsittiin myös lähihistoriasta. Ensimmäisen maailmansodan muisto oli Unkarille äärimmäisen ristiriitainen. Itävalta-Unkarin alaisuudessa taistelleet unkarilaiset eivät pystyneet pelastamaan kotimaataan tappiolta ja sen katastrofaalisilta seurauksilta. Tästä huolimatta hallitus kunnioitti sodassa kaatuneita muistopäivälainsäädännöllä, jonka retorisenä perusteena oli isänmaalle annetun uhrin kansallista yhtenäisyyttä vahvistava voima. Parlamenttidebatti käytiin tilanteessa, jossa itse kysymyksellä oli puoluerajat ylittävä kannatus takanaan, mutta erimielisyydet syntyivät muun muassa sankaruu-den ja isänmaallisuuden määritelmistä; kun oppositio muistutti esimerkiksi Neuvosto-Venäjälle jääneiden sotavankien kärsimyksistä, hallitus katsoi, että nämä olivat pikemminkin loikanneet kommunistien puolelle, eivätkä siten ansainneet sankarin määritelmää. Näin eksklusiivinen kansakunta-ajattelu tuotiin myös yleväksi tarkoitettuun muistopolitiikkaan.

Maailmansotien välinen historiapolitiikka oli siten tietoinen kansakunnan rakentamisen väline. Sen kohteiksi valikoitiin kiistattomia kansakunnan sankareita, joiden muisto uudelleenmääriteltiin tiukasti vastavallankumouksellisen narratiivin mukaisiksi; yhtenäinen kansakunta oli kerta toisensa jälkeen noussut sortajia vastaan isänmaallisten suurmiestensä johdolla, ja oli nouseva jälleen nykyisen hallituksen ohjaamana. Tähän tarkoitushakuiseen kertomukseen nähden kriittisten tulkintojen torjuminen osoittaa jälleen, kuinka tiukasti hallitus piti kansakunnan käsitteen omassa

määrittelyvallassaan ja kuinka herkästi se oli valmis sulkemaan epäilyttävät ja epäisänmaalliset tahot unkarilaisuuden ulkopuolelle.

### **Revisio kansallisena tehtävänä**

Trianonin rauhansopimus ja sen aluemenetykset – noin kaksi kolmasosaa sotaa edeltäneen Unkarin pinta-alasta – synnyttivät koko kansakunnan läpäisevän sosiopoliittisen trauman, jota hallituksen muistopolitiikka ja lukuisat kulttuuriset ilmenemismuodot vain vahvistivat. Näiden kautta rauhansopimuksen revisiosta eli menetettyjen alueiden palauttamisesta muodostui kansallinen tehtävä ja maailmansotien välisen Unkarin ulkopoliittikan ohjenuora. Jo rauhansopimuksen ratifiointidebatissa marraskuussa 1920 määriteltiin trauman poliittisen hyödyntämisen suuntaviivat, joita uusintettiin tarpeen vaatiessa kautta koko ajanjakson. Vastuu Trianonista sysättiin vallankumouksille, jolloin katkeruus menetyksiä kohtaan oli alati käyttökelpoinen keino vasemmisto-opposition syyllistämiseen.

Unkarin kansakunta määriteltiin edelleen historiallisen suur-Unkarin kautta; rajojen taakse jääneet unkarilaiset kärsivät 'luonnollisen' yksikön hajoamisesta, ja vastaavasti alueiden nykyiset vallanpitäjät Tšekkoslovakia, Romania ja Jugoslavia esitettiin keinotekoisina ja epäonnistumaan tuomittuina valtioina. Näin oikeutettiin revision toteuttaminen kaikin tarvittavin keinoin; sekä kansainvälisen yhteistyön että omavaltaisen aktivismin kautta.

Vuoden 1921 kansanäänestys Sopronin kaupungin palauttamisesta Unkarille kuvasti molempia revisiopolitiikan puolia; kansanäänestys sinänsä oli unkarilaisten retoriikassaan vaalima laillinen ja kansainvälisen yhteisön hyväksymä keino rajamuu-  
tosten saavuttamiseksi, mutta siihen oli päädytty pitkällisen kriisin ja unkarilaisen puolisolitaallisen aktivismin kautta. Parlamenttikeskustelu Sopronin kansanäänestuksen muistosta oli esimerkki debatista, jossa kaikki osapuolet yli puoluerajojen iloitsivat menestyksestä, mutta erimielisyydet syntyivät jälleen vastuun ja ansioiden määrittelystä; sosialidemokraatit kielsivät vastuunsa aluemenetyksistä ja sen sijaan pyrkivät ottamaan haltuun ansion kansainvälisen yhteistyön onnistumisista; hallitukselle tämä oli luonnollisesti mahdotonta hyväksyä.

Unkari liittyi Kansainliittoon vuonna 1923 suurin odotuksin; Kansainliiton peruskirjan katsottiin mahdollistavan rajakysymysten uudelleen avaamisen kansainvälisille neuvotteluille. Liittymissopimuksen ratifiointista käyty parlamenttidebatti on mielenkiintoinen opposition poikkeuksellisen liikkumavaran vuoksi; internationalismiin tukeutuva vasemmisto saattoi tulkita Kansainliiton luonnetta ja tehtäviä omien ihanteidensa kautta, eikä hallitus tässä tapauksessa pystynyt täysin irtisanoutumaan uuden maailmanjärjestyksen liberaaleista ihanteista, vaikka halusikin antaa niille Unkarin tapauksessa mahdollisimman konservatiivisen ja revisionistisen tulkinnan; Unkari oli vihdoin saava kansainvälisellä areenalla oikeutta, joka siltä oli 1920 evätty.

Unkarin ystävyyssopimus Italian kanssa vuonna 1927 oli sen sijaan voitto avoimelle revisiopolitiikalle. Kahdenvälisen sopimuksen sisältö oli maltillinen, mutta symbolinen merkitys selvä; Unkari oli viimein pääsemässä eroon kansainvälisesti alistetusta asemastaan saadessaan tuekseen eurooppalaisen suurvallan. Sopimuksen ra-

tifiointikeskustelussa tämän 'saavutuksen' luonteesta käytiin poikkeuksellisen intohimoinen debatti. Sosialidemokraateille liitto fasistihallituksen kanssa oli paitsi vaarallista seikkailupolitiikkaa, myös uhkaava merkki sisäpoliittisista äärioikeistosympatioista. Hallitus oli haluton kuuntelemaan kritiikkiä vuosikymmenen merkittävintä ulkopoliittista onnistumistaan kohtaan, ja oppositio pidettiin kurissa häikäilemättömällä parlamentaaraisella painostuksella. Tämä puolestaan osoittaa, että revision kansallisen tehtävän puolesta oltiin valmiit jo pitkälle menevään yhteistoimintaan Italian kanssa; hallitus myös sivuutti tietoisesti opposition varoitukset tämän yhteistyön poliittisesta hinnasta, mikä loi pohjan myöhemmälle liittosuhteelle akselivaltojen kanssa.

Koko maailmansotien välisen ajan Unkarin ulkopoliitiikan suuri kertomus perustui uhriutumiseen, käsitykseen naapurivaltioiden vihamielisyydestä ja suurvaltojen välinpitämättömyydestä. Kohdattuaan aallonpohjansa Trianonissa, tuhatvuotisen kansakunnan velvollisuus oli murtaa siihen kohdistettu kansainvälinen saarto ja otettava takaisin asemansa Karpaattien altaan mahtivaltiona. Tämä poliittisiin tarpeisiin luotu ja uusinnettu narratiivi oikeutti revision tavoittelemisen kaikin käytettävissä olevin keinoin. Opposition yritykset haastaa revisiopolitiikkaa torjuttiin turvautumalla jälleen vastavallankumoukselliseen ja ulossulkevaan retoriikkaan; asettamalla sosialistit ja liberaalit vastuuseen Trianonin menetyksistä hallitus saattoi jälleen kiistää heidän isänmaallisuutensa ja poliittisen kompetenssinsa.

### **Lopputulema: patoamista konsolidaation sijaan?**

Edellä esittämäni empiiriset tutkimustulokset haastavat lähtöoletuksen ja samalla Unkarin historian tutkimuksen valtavirran tulkintoja osoittaessaan, että konsolidaatio oli aikalaispropagandan käsite, jonka tarkoituksellinen epämääräisyys palveli hallituksen tavoitteita lupailen parempaa tulevaisuutta, mutta ilman konkreettisia pyrkimyksiä yhteiskuntarauhan, yhteiskunnallisen tasa-arvon tai parlamentaarisen demokration kehittämiseen. Todellisuudessa vastavallankumouksellinen, ulossulkeva kansakunnan rakentaminen ja siihen pohjautuva politiikka säilytti keskeisen asemansa politiikan kantavana voimana. Inklusiivista politiikan kieltä käytettiin korkeintaan taktisena keinoina tiettyjen pakon sanelemien modernisaatoratkaisujen (kuten kansainvälisen painostuksen velvoittama *Numerus Clausus* -lainsäädännön lieventäminen) oikeuttamisessa ja tarvittaessa tilapäisten liittolaisten hankkimisessa eri oppositiopuolueista. Hallituksen valta perustuikin osaltaan mahdollisuuteen määrittää 'todellinen unkarilaisuus' kerta toisensa jälkeen uudelleen, missä erityisesti historiapolitiikalla oli merkittävä osa.

Kansallisen yhtenäisyyden ihanteet eivät siis toteutuneet parlamenttidebatin tasolla, vaan siinäkin hallitus pyrki vahvistamaan asemansa ensisijaisesti rajoittamalla opposition toimintaa ja vaikutusmahdollisuuksia. Haluttomuus vuoropuheluun näkyy erityisesti parlamentin ohjesäännön ja puhemiehen valtaoikeuksien hyväksikäytössä silloin, kun kriittisiä puheenvuoroja pyrittiin rajaamaan tai historiapolitiittista keskustelua suuntaamaan hallitukselle suosiollisen narratiivin suuntaan. Tämän rinnalla parlamentarismien ja demokration käsitteiden konservatiiviset ja autoritääriset

uudelleenmäärittelyt (*paradiastole*) mahdollistivat valtarakenteen oikeuttamisen politisoidun historiankirjoituksen (esimerkiksi vuoden 1848 vallankumouksen ihanteiden uudelleenmäärittely) kautta.

Konsolidaation inklusiivinen diskurssi ei siis koskaan tullut – tai ollut edes tarkoitettu – korvaamaan vastavallankumouksen eksklusiivista diskurssia, vaan kumpikin oli harkittu konservatiivisen politiikan väline, jolla pyrittiin vakauttamaan maan olot, vahvistamaan hallituksen asema sekä puolustautumaan sisäisiksi vihollisiksi koettuja ryhmiä vastaan. Olisikin perustellumpaa puhua 'konsolidaation' sijaan vaikkapa 'patoamisesta'; ei-toivottujen voimien osallistuminen politiikkaan oli konservatiivielitille moraalinen tyrmistyksen aihe, joka haluttiin kaikin keinoin torjua. 1930-luvulla harvainvaltainen, sosialismia ja liberalismia torjumaan rakennettu järjestelmä kuitenkin osoittautui kyvyttömäksi ja haluttomaksi vastustamaan entisen vastavallankumouksen liittolaisensa – radikaalioikeiston – painostusta. Pohjimmiltaan samaan ulossulkevaan nationalismiin tukeutuva, mutta populistisia keinoja käyttävä äärioikeisto kykeni kansansuosionsa myötä haastamaan hallituksen, luomaan ja normalisoimaan entistä jyrkempää poliittista kieltä ja vaatimaan kansakunnalle uutta suuntaa – käytännössä tiiviimpää yhteistyötä kansallissosialistisen Saksan kanssa ja lopulta liittoutumista akselivaltojen kanssa historiallisen Suur-Unkarin palauttamiseksi.

Tämän tutkimuksen analyysin kohteena ollut ulossulkeva retoriikka konservatiivisen ja demokratiaa rajoittavan järjestelmän vallankäytön välineenä on relevantti piirre myös 2010-luvun Unkarin politiikassa. Oikeistohallitus rakentaa itselleen sosiologista historiapolitiikkaa ja hakee menneisyydestä oikeutusta ja esimerkkejä omalle toiminnalleen. Antiparlamentaarinen, oppositiota väheksyvä ja sen eristämiseen pyrkivä poliittinen kieli on valitettavan tuttua maailmansotien väliseltä ajalta. Menneisyydestä haettuja käsitteitä ja argumentteja tuodaan jatkuvasti nykykeskusteluun, jonka ymmärtäminen ulkopuolelta edellyttää käsitteiden ja niiden historiallisten juurien tuntemusta. Poliittisen kielen analyysin pohjalta ymmärrämme paremmin, mitä merkitsevät viittaukset 'Horthyn aikaan', ja miten maailmansotien välisen ajan käsitteet ja argumentit ovat siirtyneet tai ne on otettu osaksi nykypolitiikan diskurssia.

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