

Theses of Doctoral Dissertation

Views in the Periodical “Hungarian Foreign Policy” between 1920  
and 1929

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## I. Aim of the dissertation and outline of the theme

My personal interest in the theme started more than a decade ago. The reason for this was the fact that in the second half of the nineties of the last century historians restarted to more thoroughly explore the period between the two world wars that is generally summed up with the expression revisionist policy / propaganda. Of course, the theme had been present both in the researches of historians and in public discursions even before the change of political systems, however, in my opinion, the conditions of the objective exploration and examination of the revisionist endeavours were given only after the above-mentioned period. It has always been problematical that the judgement of the examined period has conveyed very serious ideological and political undertones even until recently. Fortunately, these ideological, political and frequently emotional implications are less characteristic of those historians who have tried to find more and more exhaustive answers to our questions about the Horthy era primarily since the eighties. These questions may be either the governor's role in the formation of the Hungarian foreign policy, the democratic and authoritarian attributes of István Bethlen's policy of consolidation or the evaluation of Gyula Gömbös' fascist attempts.

I must mention here that the writer whose works are the most closely connected to my theme is Miklós Zeidler who has published essentially important writings on such themes as the foreign politics of the era between the two world wars, revisionism, irredentism and the connected cult since 1997. These works served both as an inspiration and as the most important professional starting point for my thesis. As regards my closely understood theme, it is not my function to give detailed account and analysis of the events of the foreign affairs taking place in the period in question. In my thesis I intend to provide space for this only to the extent that helps highlight the efforts and philosophy of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society and that makes it easier to examine the analysed periodical, the Hungarian Foreign Policy.

Thanks to the exploring and interpreting work of historians, it has become possible for readers interested in the theme to study the relevant themes of the period in several ways. They can study the document-resource collections provided with commentaries and can receive detailed information from historical writings written from several points of view but having common basic attributes. However, in my opinion, - and this is a basic standpoint for a historian - there are loads of further researchable elements among the pages of the related period of Hungarian history. It is naturally true, since, on one hand, the exploration process of the past is a never ending activity and, on the other hand, each historian views historical problems from a different point of view: his or her own opinion, knowledge and interest specify the direction of his or her researches.

In addition to the above-mentioned themes, I believe that there are two other fields of research in the period between the two world wars the exploration of which still requires a great deal of professional work. One field is the analysis of the press products and media of the period. Although a few summarizing works have been published in this theme, the exploration of those key organs that had opinion forming force on the readers or radio listeners is by no means complete. My opinion is that the analytic exploration of the relevant issues of the key dailies and periodicals published in the capital and the investigation of the programmes of the Hungarian Radio might enrich and shade the historical picture that one can form basically through the study of the archival resources. The other field is the exploration of the activity of the various – in the terminology of the period – social organisations that – although to

various extents and with different stresses and aims - could influence the governing policy of the period. The Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society can be considered as such an organisation, which, in my opinion, played an influential role in the formation of the attitudes of the Hungarian foreign policy in certain intervals. However, in spite of the fact that this organisation operated from 1920 until the collapse after World War Two, the awareness of the existence of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society is missing not only from the wider public knowledge but also from the knowledge of history teachers. It is missing in spite of the fact that a great number of important politicians still living in our historical and social conscience (Apponyi, Bethlen, Teleki, Berzeviczy, Miksa Fenyő, Gábor Ugron) represented themselves among the members of the Society. Consequently, I believe that both thematic directions still contain a significant number of exciting fields of study for researchers.

It is not the aim of my dissertation to give a detailed analysis of the foreign affairs of the period between the two world wars (especially the examined period between 1920 and 1929). I only try to verify the below described theses that are in the centre of the closely understood theme of my dissertation. All information about the period that can be found in my work has a founding and preparatory function and assists the reader in receiving a more comprehensive picture of the results of my research. Similarly, it is not the purpose of the dissertation to explore and analyse the complete publicist activity of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society either. The work tries to give a thematic analysis of the issues of Hungarian Foreign Policy published between 1920 and 1929 bearing in mind the points of view that provide a frame for the analysis of the periodical.

The above-mentioned two further examinable fields have a crossing point in my dissertation that may contain relevant historical information both for the history of journalism and for the activity of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society. This was the starting point of my theses that form the basis of my research.

1. The Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society, which had extremely ramifying publicist activities, tried to fundamentally influence the views of the Hungarian and foreign readers of the period through their publications and periodicals first of all in the interest of the realization of the revisionist goals. In this regard it may be positioned parallel, on one hand, with the mainstream of the political-social efforts and, on the other hand, with the characteristics of the operation of the above-mentioned social organisations. However, the Society published two periodicals the problem-raising and analysing-evaluating writings of which went beyond their primary roles of simply creating and maintaining a revisionist atmosphere with a quasi social integrationist aim. For this very reason, in my view, the Foreign Policy Review and the examined Hungarian Foreign Policy were important articulatory bases of the foreign political views of the government-related circles. All alternatives of diplomatic issues and foreign affairs were published in them that could at all gain room in the thinking of the period.
2. In my opinion, Hungarian Foreign Policy was not only the foreign political replication of the thinking of the governing power, but it was a pluralistic forum as well, where there was room for the often very different opinions. Of course, it was the result of the facts that writers from the capital and from the countryside represented themselves in similar proportion and that the composition of the writers considering their profession was very diverse in itself. On the other hand, the periodical could operate as a kind of probe, launching various views that had any reality in the given political situation.

3. I focused my research on the issues of the periodical published between 1920 and 1929. The reason for this provides the background for my last thesis. The Hungarian Foreign Policy was under the control of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society from its start (May 1920) basically until 1929. After its foundation in 1927, the Revisionist League gradually took over the country-level coordination, or in some cases the direct control, of those foreign policy connected organisations, publications and events that could serve the aims of the revisionist endeavours. Hungarian Foreign Policy was not an exception to this tendency. Formally, the League appeared as the owner of the periodical only from 1930, but the readers could take in hand a Hungarian Foreign Policy significantly transformed in its structure and tone as early as at the end of 1929. As a result of this, my research focused only on the analysis of those writings that were relevant to the indicated period, highlighting and emphasizing the stresses that I consider important in connection with the thinking of the Hungarian foreign policy in the 1920s.

I supported my theses with categories created on the basis of the conclusions drawn from the results of my preliminary research. I created such categories of study into which we can classify all the writings that provide definite answers to the questions articulated in statements in my theses.

The categories providing the frame for my analysis are the following:

1. Analysis of the 1920 Versailles peace contract and the results thereof.
2. Possible ways of foreign policy orientations
3. Judgement of the revisionist policy and the role of the propaganda
4. Relations with the succession states and the issues of minorities
5. Europe and Hungary, bipolar connections

All of the above is complemented by the summary of the related issues of Foreign Policy Review.

I considered all of the articles selected in the course of my preliminary research to be classifiable in one or sometimes more of the above categories. Of course, I divided the categories into subcategories in order to be able to verify my theses by analysing them in proper depth. Where it was possible, I applied numerical data with their graphical demonstration.

## II. Outline of the applied methods, resources of the dissertation

The name of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society is familiar mainly to those readers or historians who are more deeply interested in the theme. We cannot find this social organisation either in the related chapters of history school-books or in the material of earlier written college or university lecture notes in spite of the fact that they had particularly important activities between the two world wars. As for me, however, both the Society and its quarter-century operation deserve more attention firstly because the periodicals published by them articulated the foreign political views of the political circles being close to the government, secondly because of their substantial publicist activity during the period and thirdly because the Society fulfilled a kind of diplomat training function as well. The Revisionist League founded in 1927 pushed most of the experience, memories and information connected to the Society into the background for the memory and history-writing of the decades after World War Two.

Even historians mention the Society very rarely. One basic work is Gyula Juhász' study (The History of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society between the Two World Wars) that appeared in the autograph album published on the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Domokos Kosáry in 1993 by the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Besides the above-mentioned historian who has unfortunately deceased by now Pál Pritz, Ignác Romsics and first of all Miklós Zeidler discoursed on the issue in some of their writings during the past one and a half decade.

We can receive information about the more than two decades' activities of the Society basically from three resources. Firstly, the periodicals (Foreign Policy Review, Hungarian Foreign Policy) of the Society contained articles about the various events of the social organisation, secondly, Olivér Eöttevényi's summarizing study published in 1940 (The Twenty Years of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society – April 1920 to April 1940) provides a significant amount of material and thirdly, the already mentioned study written by Gyula Juhász was also a significant resource.

When we have a look at the publication period of the studied periodical, we can see that it embraces almost the entire historical phase between the two world wars. The first issue was published on 3 May, 1920 and, apart from a longer period of standstill (1925), its issues were printed with changing periodicity until the spring of 1944. However, during this period several changes occurred in such features as the composition of the staff of editors, the owner of the periodical, the circle of supporters, the character and quality of the paper (it applies both to the form and content) and the frequency of publication.

Although the primary purpose of the Hungarian Foreign Policy was to spread information about foreign policy in the widest possible circle, in the course of my research I had to face the fact that the periodical cannot be found without missing issues even in the largest metropolitan or country libraries. The above findings led me to the conclusion that regarding the number of its copies, this periodical did not belong to those significant organs the copies of which could survive the political storms of the previous century in significant number. In all probability, the number of its readers was similarly low as that of its twin publication, the Foreign Policy Review. This above-mentioned unfortunate shortage of copies has proved to be true for the aggregate stock of all libraries having significant collections. In the resource-seeking phase of my research first I studied the collection of the University and State Library in Debrecen. I practically found copies in Debrecen only from the years after 1926, not

regarding one or two exceptions. Only 5 copies can be found from the previous years. Of course, I continued my research in the libraries of the other two universities (Szeged, Pécs) that can come into consideration from the point of view of the examined periodical. However, according to their catalogues, the Hungarian Foreign Policy cannot be found in their collections at all. In the next phase of my research I examined the relevant stock of all libraries in Budapest that have nationwide collecting region. In the Library of the Hungarian Parliament I found a few copies only from some years in extremely bad condition (practically not suitable for research). The Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Library of the Lóránt Eötvös University of Sciences preserved some copies of the examined periodical only from the second half of the twenties. I found a similar situation in the Ervin Szabó Library of the Capital. Of course, I obtained the best result in the National Széchenyi Library where I found significant shortage only in the case of two years (1924-1925) from the examined period (1920-1929). However, the early issues could be found only among the museum copies that can be studied only with special permission. Summarizing the above, I could start my analysis of the Hungarian Foreign Policy on the following basis: the total number of issues for the years 1920-1923 and 1927-1929 and the majority of the issues of the years 1924 and 1926 were also at my disposal. However, all but one issue of 1925 were missing. This unfortunate lack is somewhat explained by the fact that the periodical probably could not appear for a longer period of time in the course of the year perhaps for financial reasons. However, we can support this assumption only with indirect information: the next year, Olivér Eöttevényi emphasised in one of his writings that the Society struggled with financial problems and that the number of supporters was very low both in the capital and in the country. The exact starting and closing dates of the pause is not known as a result of the not known number of the missing issues and the limited collections of the libraries, nevertheless, we assume that it was the case during a longer part of the indicated year.

### III. Thesis-like listing of the results

Fortunately, a remarkable number of extremely important historical studies appeared in the last two decades about the foreign affairs between the two world wars and about the nature of the discussions taking place in the period. These studies, which are used up in this work as well, brought to the surface the main characteristic features of the Hungarian foreign policy and diplomatic operations of the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, they gave either complete or partial pictures of the life of several influential politicians of the age (e.g. Pál Teleki, István Bethlen, Gyula Gömbös, Miklós Kozma). The published collection of documents makes it significantly easier to study the age, to create a base for the researches and to form the historical view of university students.

However, in my opinion, the exploration of the background processes taking place in the political life (including the press products) of the age still contains tasks for the interested historians since behind the official governmental and party-controlled documents there had always been a medium where the thoughts later transformed into declarations, legal rules or principles were created and formed.

As a result of the above, the extended purpose of the present dissertation is the description of a small segment of the period between the two world wars from a somewhat new aspect. Of course, in the course of my research I used up all the results already published by other historians that are in either direct or indirect connection with my theme. In my study I try to introduce the related studies written on the Hungarian foreign policy, the ways of thinking about foreign policy and, of course, first of all, on the events of the diplomatic history of the 1920s. I draw attention to the most significant problems of the thoughts of the Hungarian foreign policy, to the very complicated issue of minorities, to the press relations of the age and, last but not least, to the most characteristic features of the revisionist efforts.

In the interest of my aim I tried to support my theses described in the introduction through the analysis of the articles of Hungarian Foreign Policy. Out of the several thousand writings published between 1920 and 1929 I have chosen those several hundred articles, studies and reflections that can be classified into my previously determined categories and the contents of which proved to be really informative for my purposes. It meant some considerable difficulties during the examination of the periodical - and it became clear only in the investigative phase of the research - that the limits of the accessibility of the issues of the Hungarian Foreign Politics were more significant than I had thought on the basis of my preliminary sample-taking activity. Furthermore, archival materials related to the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society as the owner of the periodical have survived in a rather low number. The documents found in the Manuscript Collection of the Széchényi Library only partly compensated for the shortage of resources experienced in the National Archives of Hungary. As a result of the above, my analysis could rely only on two resources in several cases. Besides the studies of historians and resource collections related to the period and to my theme, I could support my work partly with contemporary publications connected to any of the examined issues and partly with information about the paper and the Foreign Affairs Society found in the periodical itself.

Summing up the above, the aim of my dissertation was to examine the verifiability of the theses described in the introduction. The summary of these theses are the following:

- ~ The Hungarian Foreign Policy was really a pluralistic articulatory basis of the thinking of politicians, publicists and other intellectuals being close to the Hungarian governing circles.
- ~ Furthermore, the periodical operated as a kind of probe, that is, it launched views from time to time that were not completely identical with the mainstream of the foreign political thinking but in times of uncertainty, when the government hesitated what steps to take, the reactions in the periodical (disputes about the theme, letters from the readers) could provide possible answers to the given situation.
- ~ Following the events of 1927 (Italian-Hungarian contract, Rothermere-action, foundation of the Revisionist League), the periodical changed style, design and, in several cases, attitude in spite of the fact that it retained part of its staff of writers.

1. Before verifying the first thesis, I must make it clear that I agree with the opinion of those historians who say that the control of the Hungarian foreign policy of the twenties was basically in István Bethlen's hand. During his prime-ministership his ministers of foreign affairs could only be considered as high ranking officials. As a consequence of this, we cannot speak about pluralism in connection with the theoretical and practical control of foreign politics because Hungarian policy-making was primarily determined by the prime minister's ideas and strategies. However, in the background there was an intellectual base – in our case the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society - the members of which consisted partly of the active participants of the Hungarian pre-war political life and partly of those representatives of the public life who got into influential position after the collapse following World War One.

This diverse composition of the organization naturally involved divergence of ideas originating from their different order of values, descent and past, which can be clearly detected on the pages of the periodical as well. When examining the orientation of foreign politics, we can equally find thoughts of despair, excited search for alliances and restrained reckoning even at the start. This understandable duality also indicates the possibility of publishing different opinions. This duality of facing realities and pressures and the policy-making I usually complement with the attribute “emotional” remained present in the periodical even in the later years. Sometimes the editorial staff allowed these differences to be transformed into public disputes. A good example for this statement is the Bulgarian dispute, in the course of which a powerful discursion was taking place between Sándor Bonkáló and Péter Móricz for several weeks.

When examining the orientation of the periodical, we can find a full range of ideas on the formation of two-side relations even from the start. It is best exemplified by the fact that in the first year the refusal and acceptance of the French orientation were both present in the paper. Similarly, the normalisation of Hungary's relations with the neighbouring countries was viewed with different stresses and tones almost through the entire period. We can find similarly different thoughts regarding Hungary's relations with the League of Nations and the method of realising the revisionist ideas.

It is important to note, however, that this pluralist and multicolour opinion-making nature of the periodical became much more restrained after the changes occurring in 1927. What is more, the attitude of the Revisionist League left its mark on the intellectual diversity of the periodical to such an extent that this feature practically disappeared from the paper after 1929.

2. The verification of the probing function of the paper does not seem to be such an easy task as it is necessary to examine all the reactions to the individual articles in order to be able to measure this function objectively. The examinable reactions include the writings of the standard press products, government documents and first of all, the responses given to the articles in the studied periodical itself. However – as I have already mentioned – I did not get closer to the answer after studying either the related documents of the Ministry of Foreign Politics or the issues of the government-controlled Budapest News. As a result of the above, I could rely only on the issues of the Hungarian Foreign Policy when forming my ideas about the theses.

In the course of my research I did not find unambiguous proof for the assumption that “launching” certain topics and ideas in the paper would have been a well-founded intent of the editorial staff. That fact supports this refutation stressed, that this thesis can be true in the connection of ‘Külügyi Szemle’, the Society’s other high-level political journal reappearing between 1920-25 and from 1929.

However, in some cases I could indirectly presume the existence of such intents since, for example, the emphatic appearance of turanism was very different from the average views and attitude of the periodical. Nevertheless, after a little more than a year – and it is also an indirect proof – the theme disappeared from the repertoire of the periodical. For the sake of the truth, it must be added that the years after World War Two were more favourable for turanism than the Bethlen era consolidating from the centre of the twenties. The criticism of the practical Hungarian foreign politics written by Kálmán Szombathy, a previous chief editor of the periodical, can be considered as a similar case. Although no direct response appeared in the periodical to the article, the ideas described in it had some consequences since the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society put all elements of the outlined strategy into practice. In the course of my research, the demonstration of my hypothesis that Szombathy’s writing was not only an isolated action of an editor but it was aimed to draw the attention of the intellectual public interested in foreign politics and for the political elite, was also unsuccessful.

3. The change in the style of the periodical is connected to two independent foreign policy events and the results thereof. The Italian-Hungarian contract and the Rothermere action provided the basic tone for the year 1927. As a result of the expansion of the scope of foreign affairs, both the government (revisionist speeches of Bethlen) and the government-related organisations (the foundation of the Revisionist League) activated themselves. The League, basically acting as a movement but considering itself as an interest-protecting organisation, took over the control of the previously isolated revisionist attempts. Furthermore, it took the leading role in the Hungarian Foreign Politics by 1929/30. The signs of this change of control can be easily detected in the paper from 1927/28 in the following ways:

- ~ Writings on revisionism became frequent,
- ~ The circle of writers narrowed down and changed,
- ~ Longer analysing writings appeared,
- ~ World political news and analyses were pushed into the background.

Finally, by 1930 the periodical got completely under the control of the League and thus provided room for a more complete service of the revisionist movement.

As a summary of the above – after the study of the periodical on the basis of the above points of view - we can make the following statements:

- ~ The operation of the Hungarian Foreign Policy in the 1920s was a good example for the fact that there was a government-related social organisation (Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society) and an organ thereof (Hungarian Foreign Policy) that provided possibility and room for the appearance of different ideas about Hungarian foreign policy irrespectively of the actual decisions made by the leaders of Hungarian foreign policy, principally by Bethlen.
- ~ Presumably the statement is not supported that part of the published articles and studies appeared with the aim of “testing” the ideas and thoughts relating to Hungarian foreign policy on their not too wide reading public.
- ~ The foundation of the Revisionist League resulted in a decisive change in the life of the periodical since a less pluralistic and less voluntarist attitude was started by a somewhat transformed staff of writers and editors.

Studies published in connection with the theme of my dissertation

1. Magyarország 1919-1920-ban Paikert Alajos szemével. In.: Társadalomtudományi tanulmányok I. (szerk.: Konyáriné Loós Andrea – Szerepi Sándor), DE-HPFK, 2008. Hajdúböszörmény. (172-180.p.)
2. Az 1920-as évek revíziós propagandájának értékvilága. In.: XII. Apáczai Napok – A reneszánsz értékei, az értékek reneszánsza, Győr. 2008. (678-684.p.)
3. A 'MAGYAR KÜLPOLITIKA' mint a Magyar Külügyi Társaság meghatározó periodikája. In.: Társadalomtudományi tanulmányok Galenos Alapítvány, 2010. Debrecen (11-26.p.)
4. A kisebbségi kérdés a Magyar Külpolitika folyóiratban 1920-1929 között. Debreceni Disputa 2010/04. (59-64.p.)
5. A magyar külpolitika '20-as évekbeli lehetőségeinek kormány közeli megfogalmazásai a Magyar Külpolitika c. folyóiratban. DE-GYFK, 2010. Hajdúböszörmény. (8-29.p.)