

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**The Public Life of Sámuel Bónis
Until August of 1849**

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I. The aim of the dissertation, the scope of the topic

The gradual erosion of the historical memory and remembrance is an inherent consequence of the passage of time. Nowadays, it is no longer just the wider society, but even historians of the reform era tend to mention, somewhat frequently, only a few dozen names from the ranks of the policy-making intelligentsia of the period. Primarily, the names might sound familiar today of those who were considered as the dominant authorities of the time, around whom, for some reason, a serious prestige developed. Beyond dispute, the leading politicians and the pioneer decision makers constantly have the key impact on the major processes and events, therefore, historical researches have a tendency to focus on these influential figures. However, it shall be noted that alongside with the chief characteristic persons, an army of gray eminences used to participate in the operation of the extensive system of institutions and the decision-making mechanisms. In simpler terms, political life just as public administration consist of multi-lines, and if we investigate further, it will soon become clear that in the second or third lines several persons are to find who play an important role in the operation of a system, and their varied, compelling careers worth to be explored.

Sámuel Bónis from Tolcsva is considered to be as well a supporting character whose name has vanished into oblivion, despite the fact that he used to be a nationally-recognized, prominent politician of Szabolcs County in the 19th century who was playing a significant role for decades. As the family's title of nobility indicates, the Bónis' first noble ancestry revealed is known to have appeared in Tolcsva of Zemplén County at the beginning of the 17th century, where they had paved the way by becoming successful wine producers and traders, and soon, by their growing influence, they could manage to receive the patent of nobility (armales). In the early stage of the family history, one of the grandsons of the ancestor who first gained the Coat of Arm, Ferenc Bónis became well recognized. He undertook diplomatic duties at György II Rákóczi's Court, then as an organizer of the foothill movement, he joined the Wesselényi conspiracy. His actions were followed by rejection of the Court, his assets were largely confiscated. Finally, Ferenc Bónis was executed the same day as Péter Zrínyi and Ferenc Frangepán. His only son Zsigmond Bónis rebuilt the family's reputation from the scratch, in which his marriage with Mária Váradi served as key strategy. Through him, the Bónis' could manage to access the land tenure in Szabolcs County that established the material foundations for the succeeding generations. His grandfather László Bónis, a politician of the

reform era, had already held possession of a thousand of acres, by which he worked his way up to the circles of the bene possessionati of Szabolcs, furthermore, he created the tradition of bearing office. His son - the elder Sámuel Bónis – studied at the Sárospatak Academy of Law, then as one of the chief constable of Szabolcs County he was appointed to delegate to the Diet, which began in 1825. His fellow delegate Count József Dessewffy, in his correspondence with Count Kazinczy, praised Sámuel Bónis' character, also sporadic hints implied that the family cultivated good relations with the contemporary rural intellectual literateurs. Senior Samu Bónis got involved in a minor confrontation with his delegation on the issue of imposing and collecting tax on nobles in residences of land in villein tenure, therefore he opted out for finishing his mandate in Bratislava. However, he did not retire from public life after his resignation, Bónis began to serve his county as the first sub-lieutenant in 1828. Cholera epidemic fell during his term of office, which he tried tackling with strong measures.

His son, the key character of the theses the junior Samu Bónis, had the opportunity to begin his career in the traditional manner, as he was following his father's path and became Sándor Kövy's student at the Sárospatak Academy of Law. His initial assignments at the County – thus the duty of chief of constable in the phase launched into 1832 – also sprang from his family's prestige. Having been his father a sub-lieutenant, Samu Bónis' career to develop in the office could not raise doubts. His professional career broke apart due to the flagrant renewal of staff of officers in 1836, during which the violent incidents made the young Bónis to reject cooperation with the elected magistrate. Nevertheless, he did not abandon active participation in the public life, as a judge of the Court of Appeal he used to join the general assembly, in addition, trustworthy as he was, he performed varied legislative services. In 1839, young he was at the age of 28, somewhat unexpectedly, he became one of the delagate to send to the Diet on behalf of Szabolcs County. Having arrived to Bratislava, he immediately joined the most committed oppositionists - he was fond of Deák's company and aligned with his position in most of the issues. Bónis developed close contact especially with the young fellow delegates, this way the opposition's joint background consultations and conferences provided him with accomodation on a regular basis. On returning to his County, Bónis held an extensive, nationwide network, he was regarded as a pillar of the reformers' camp. Despite the fact that he was consistently reluctant to hold the office in the County, Bónis had a greater influence on the morale of the Nagykálló conference room. However conscious he had been when preparing for the subsequent Diet, the conservative factious

group halted his expectations. The only chance for his delegation in 1843 was to be personally involved in the bribery, furthermore, in order to achieve the purposes of the nobility, Bónis had to give upon his own financial security. The second delagate to the Diet in his life brought a temporary halt in spite of the great expectations beforehand. It took much effort to amend the platform the country expected him to represent, thus initially shackled progress in his work in Bratislava, the Diet failed, as well as his fiscal position crucially deteriorated, which all led to his burnout. He chose the wrong way to find resolution, his growing addiction of gambling pushed him towards an unsustainable condition. Although, Bónis officially referred to his private life matters – the alarming deterioration in his wife’s condition when he requested for discharge from further duties as delegate - the genuine reason underlay in his financial situation that was on the verge of bankruptcy. Following the temporary crisis he found new motivation and on returning to Szabolcs, he re-joined the public life of the County. Bónis became the clear leading character of the Szabolcs opposition under the attack of the administration, and it was beyond doubt that his supporters appointed him to mandate to the forthcoming Diet as the first delegate of Szabolcs County. His third mandate to Bratislava brought the most remarkable success in his career. As the most active delagate, he became the key participant of the Lower Chamber, besides he developed a relationship of trust with Kossuth, which then made him unavoidable. After the victory of the revolution, the job opportunities presented themselves and Bónis could now select. Instead of accepting the mandate as the lord lieutenant in Szabolcs, he decided to remain in the immediate environment of the new political leadership, so he worked as department director at Deák’s Ministry of Justice. In addition, Bónis was eager to continue with the parliamentary diputes, his first duty of popular representation at the Diet was on behalf of the constituency of Tiszalök. In fact, Bónis was more pleased with the latter work. He had now made his efforts against the new opposition led by Madarász, and in the meantime he tried to prevent the further radicalisation by taking a key role in the derailment of Petőfi’s remedial plans. During the September revolution he was sent to join the army as National Assembly Commissioner. Bónis was present at the battle of Pákozd, then later at Schwechat, too. He returned to the capital city couple of days prior to surrender. Since the Diet and government fled to Debrecen, Kossuth entrusted Bónis with a highly confidential task as serious as managing the safe transport of the Holy Crown. Bónis participated in the work of the Diet in Debrecen only for a short period because his duties in Szabolcs County urged him to return, where his assignment as government commissioner was to prepare the further operations. It might not have only

been for the decline of the options, but legal continuity and reliability were relevant, as in the newly formed government Bónis Samu received a position as Secretary of State next to Vukovics. Following the deterioration of the military situation Kossuth counted on him again in the life of fire. He sent Bónis to Görgei's camp to coordinate the withdrawal in Arad. The ultimate endurance in the War of Independence Bónis left no other choice for Bónis, hoping for trustworthy guarantee of survival, but to emigrate. Yet, he failed with this plan, so he had to suffer from the bitter months of hiding in his homeland. Fortunate as he was, Bónis got into the scope of the Austrian Monarchy in the summer of 1850, by the time their very first rage had subsided. His death sentence was thus eventually commuted to ten years imprisonment, of which he finally spent seven years in captivity for the most part in Josefstadt. Having lived in a rural area for a short period of time Bónis had the opportunity to return to the forefront of national politics in 1861, the way that he was considered one of the prominent figures of legitimacy despite his past of 1848. It is not a coincidence that at the beginning of the second phase of his political career Bónis followed the previous pattern and ran for election in the constituency of Tiszalök, just like back in 1848. Although he judged the reconciliation as the means of resolution, Bónis, having known Deák for a longer term, was completely confident about the politician's best intention. The ongoing generational renewal in 1869 encouraged Bónis as well to resign from the direct political engagement and spend the last active years of his life in judicial offices. He worked for a year as the judge of the Court of Cassation, then in position of chairman of the council acting as its director from 1870 up to his death in 1879.

We believe that the nearly half a century long career schematically summoned above is sufficiently rich, full of turning points and interesting to go beyond on the limitations of short summaries of lexicon articles or parliamentary almanacs, the research shall deserve greater attention for the next generations. Bónis' first portrait was written in his life by Károly Szász and published in April 1867. His articles to the *Vasárnapi Újság* were also published by the Hungarian Parliament's memorial book edited by Albert Farkas. After that, except for the obituaries written at the time of his death, it took a quarter of a century until Pál Móricz decided to pay attention on Bónis' career when processing of the pre-history of the Liberal Party in 1892. Over the past decades authors related to Szabolcs County such as Sándor Tidrenczel and later Magdolna Láczy undertook to publish shorter portrait drafts, the latter were published in compilations edited by Béla Pálmány. In addition, college and university students tried to elaborate Bónis' career, among which we discovered three such writings in manuscripts. Regardless of all these, a truly detailed, biographical work is still absent for the

readers. The ambition to write the theses, therefore, was driven by the intention of filling a long-felt gap, as well as the author's personal ties with the territory of the historical Szabolcs County and his high interest about the local history.

II. Description of the applied methods

The basic objective was to reconstruct Samu Bónis' career as complete as possible alongside with integrating the sporadic knowledge in relation to him. During the research we faced challenging limitations regarding the historical sources. The wide range of accessible data provided a sufficient basis for a relatively voluminous job though, we rejected the reductionist approach that omits certain details supposing that a further Bónis biography is unlikely to be written in the near future. We subsequently opted for making the biography in two phases. This research reveals a microscopic, high-resolution examination on Samu Bónis' career path stretching up to 1849. However, regarding the second stage of his life, the research was narrowed to study the possible changes in his lifestyle and personality. Besides, we indicated that the detailed discussion of the career phase is considered the author's future plan since presenting the 1850's, with special regard to the years of Josefstadt, requires further comprehensive research.

In the course of our work, we were challenged by the absence of the ego-documentary that could have served as the primary sources for biographers in strive for presenting the personality. Samu Bónis did not leave a diary or memoir behind furthermore, the family archives could only facilitate the 17–18th century period of his family history. Consequently, the sources extracted by official institutions, protocols and documents of the County, reports sent by the delegates, parliamentary agendas, as well as contemporary press releases became the primary sources that served key data for the presentation of the contemporary political activities. Even if Bónis missed writing personal records, fortunately his environment produced literature that facilitated a closer, deeper, more intimate description of the lead character. His youth friend Pál Jászay served notes relating to his schooldays; his wife Erzsébet Darvas revealed the period of 1847–56, and owing to Kornél Ábrányi who provided memos on the final weeks of the War of Independence, one could gain an insight into Bónis' private space and his inner emotional life. Although the reports prepared by the parliamentary secret police cannot be regarded as significant in relation to his public activity at the Diet, they are indispensable for illuminating background events, as well as evoking Bónis' social

life and tracing back his relations. The dispersion and fragmentation of the source materials posed real challenges for us to make the protagonist sound. To achieve that, we were often forced to provide long and detailed descriptions about the current issues on the agenda or the debate situations to discuss at length. In the absence of all these, Samu Bónis' utterances could not have been interpreted, the speech mosaics alone would have led to an obscure narrative. Furthermore, speech analyses was key, since the Szabolcs County politician's expeditious statements refer to his debate style, his verbal skills and rhetoric tools, and these all could have been justified or denied only when a complete and systematic follow-up of his communication has been performed. In the wake of the the resource attributes outlined, it proved to be an obvious and at the same time necessary decision that our theses shall stick to the genre of political biography. However, there has been a new demand for the renewal and modernization of the genre in the Hungarian methodological writings for two decades now. A significant expectation has been on the rise that biographies shall not only reconstruct the public life course, but also explore how the individual became a public figure, demonstrate how the protagonist tried to shape and build his own image. In addition, the renewable biographies are to approach towards the context of social history. The elaboration of Sámuel Bónis' life story enabled us to operate with details on family - and property history, genealogy, office history, local history and even military history. It is clear that through his example it is feasible to explore the contacts, social relationships, lifestyle, marriage strategy of the contemporary rural nobility, the same way as to expose the background events of the Diets in the Reform Era. It can be concluded what typical career paths were available for the policy shaping noble elite of the Tiszavidék. Bónis' case clearly proves that to start a professional career in the County's public life, the involvement of the previous generations of the family combined with conscious education provide a solid ground base. On the contrary to that, in 1839 when Bónis was initially appointed to delegate at the age of 28, besides fortunate coincidences, his political skills proved to have been above-average. Taking a position in the direction of the County's life right after the first participation at Diet was also quite usual. However, the breakthrough towards the centre of national policy, building trust with the leaders of the emerging reform opposition, might yet be considered far less ordinary. It is apparent that the Bónis-life path provides a great ground base for the analysis of a wider micro-community milieu. These possibilities in our work were considered as additional professional benefits. To a certain extent, we tried to prove these contexts as well, but our main goal of the complete reconstruction of the career path remained in focus. Although there

was no doubt that Bónis' career path overlapped with the 19th century history at many points, we strongly argue that through a biographical work the era could be demonstrated. Beside the overlapping points of the events there used to be ramifications, too. We could not have processed the Diets of the reform era entirely, but the events of the Lower Chamber with the restrictive focus on Bónis' performances. In the same way, we cannot state that we completely passed through the political history of Szabolcs County in the reform era, because however dominant role Sámuel Bónis played in it, at the very point he received a call on duty from the jurisdiction, his work was interrupted thus we also had to suspend the further reviewing of the events taking place there.

We faced a fundamental methodological dilemma when selecting the degree of focus to what extent shall we draw a portrait that focuses directly on the agent or rather a tableau presenting the wider environment. Due to the for the most part mosaic nature of the related sources already mentioned, we followed the latter principle yet we did not wish to undertake to write long introductions on public history, considering the fact that the typical audience of such works comes mainly from professional circles.

It is a key requirement for a biography to somewhat keep the balance between the career and character presentation. The accessible resources made it possible primarily to follow each stage of the career path. However, the author shall be aware that the reader is at least as interested in the latter. Bónis in previous shorter biographical summaries appears to have been a humorous, cheerful yet family-oriented man. It might have been the reason he was considered a loveable, widely popular and sociable man even if his political speeches lacked "flowers of speech", but quite often he made waspy, ironic and rude personal remarks. We believe that we could manage to justify his basic personality traits throughout all the chapters of our theses and also we were fortunate that we did not have to struggle with serious contradictions stretching among the memories relating to him.

The most common principle of order for biographies is the chronological approach. The career path, the character development with its potential changes may be traceable and best seen when following a chronological order. We did not want to break up with this classic approach either. However, we also had to face the fact that the method could not be used exclusively. In certain cases, especially in relation to the presentation of the issues of the Diets' we had to opt for the thematic order, thus ensuring transparency. It has always been a dilemma what the author is allowed to take out from the chronology in a closer sense as well as what could be discussed in a new individual chapter. A political biography that is supposed

to outline public life activities, therefore it seems appropriate if the private life side or the family environment is presented in a separate section. Nevertheless, the latter solution requires a substantial data amount that could fill in an additional chapter that is more or less the same length as the others. Concerning Samu Bónis' case we concluded that this requirement could not be met, thus family is presented and discussed at the same chapter together with "his juvenile period".

We wrote a separate chapter, though, on the antecedents of the family and property history. Although a biography is not necessarily expected to reconstruct events centuries ahead that could only be linked directly to the subject figure, our decision can be supported by two arguments. On the one hand, in determining the contemporary self-image and consciousness, the origin, the roots were still of decisive significance. The excursion to Dévény demonstrates this well, which took place when delegates gathered for the Annual Diet of 1843 on a rainy Sunday in June. The assembly felt the urge to commemorate on Bónis' great-great-grandfather's execution of 1671, furthermore, to explore the correlating links between the centuries old - and the contemporary forms of the relations to the dynasty. On the other hand, the other reason to detail family history derives rather from pragmatic considerations. The chapter introduces so far partially unexplored and previously unpublished results, and owing to our basic principle to collect knowledge related to Bónis to the fullest possible extent, we refused to cut the family and property pre-history.

Given that our primary objective was to introduce Bónis' course of life, it became clear that we should opt for the considerably traditional genre of narration. The predominantly descriptive, event-oriented narration, however, would definitely fail without reflective, critical and argumentative comments. Although the motivation to write a biography emerges when a person's life and achievements are uniquely interesting, thus considered worth learning, we shall not associate heroism with this. Since the political portrait is not identical to hagiography, it is yet a misleading approach to exaggeratedly put the person in the centre, as well as overestimate his significance. About Samu Bónis for instance it was key to consistently seek for possible limitations that halted him, why he could not turn to be a true keynoter or pioneer leading character.

III. Theses of the dissertation and the results of the research

In line with the previous indications, the assumed political history theses to integrate as well as enrich the factual knowledge with new results in relation to Szabolcs County in the reform era. Furthermore, in accordance with Bónis' pledges, the Diet of the era can also be examined in detail. Besides discussing the debates of the Lower Chamber, we strived to evoke the social life of Bratislava at the time of the Diet and look out the informal consultations, conferences, which were of particular importance for the opposition's strategy and decision-making. Finally, Bónis' career path might also be suitable for the compilation and further enrichment of the history of the revolution and the war of independence, in particular, for the analysis of the communication between the central power and the military, owing to the Szabolcs County politician who took mandate as a government commissioner three times. In addition, we hope the theses will contribute to future analysis on the career of figures with similar social backgrounds as well as provide points of reference for comparative assays and set parallels. After presenting the summary, our key findings for each chapter are as follows:

The scene of political socialization for Sámuel Bónis was Szabolcs County of 1830's, where his formerly highly respected father who used to be the first deputy lieutenant in office had established the essential conditions for him to join the officer-corps' work. However, hardly anything do we know about the influences of the father-house on the young Bónis, the Sárospatak Academy of Law, even more the experiences gained in 1825 together with the Technical Training in Viena imply that proper education was well-considered, his father must have been devoted to raise his sons to become open-minded, intelligent and conscious men who could stand in the ranks of the Protestant Gentry elite. The intellectual superiority must have been key to the fact that the Bónis family could play at least so important role in the 19th century life of Szabolcs County as the Kállays, the Vays, or the Patay family, who were in a more advantageous position in terms of their financial situation.

Bónis' youth years unfolded from his fellow apprentice Pál Jászay's diary that served us extended factual knowledge. The light-hearted atmosphere in which the noble youths lived their life evoked. This section already reveals the image of Bónis fond of gypsy music at loud nameday celebrations while many times failed to moderate his alcohol consumption and his passion for gambling. Unfortunately, he could not tackle his passions even afterwards, which also contributed to his financial deterioration. His jocularly together with explosiveness are character features that were first described in his Law School years, but they all were

frequently justified in the latter chapters, too. Interestingly, the Szabolcs County politician's spousehood seems balanced despite that the regular profligacies caused countless unpleasant moments for Erzsébet Darvas. However her personality was not analyzed in detail, it is far beyond doubt that the determined woman of strong willpower could not have played a subservient or submitted role in their intimate relationship. In front of the outer world, however, Bónis took his education very seriously thus his wife's main obligation was to support him for the first place. In the wake of their special bond, it was no longer surprising that in her memoirs Erzsébet Darvas only wrote about her Sámuel in a voice of the deepest love, she did not hint any nuanced reference to his faults. The Jászay diary implies that the strainless lifestyle full of entertainment and social gatherings cannot exclusively be associated with Bónis, it is rather for the later historian's low-key, quiet, isolating and broody behaviour that could have been less general in the circles of the contemporary noble youths.

Although, his father, in the hope for further refinement in practising law, would have preferred his son to turn Attorney General yet, the young Bónis' career in the County began as the sub-magistrate of Dada district. István Patay, who gained authorization for the leadership of the Magistrate in 1832, well realized Bónis' competences for the latter position. Even at the time of apprentice we encountered with a young man who definitely preferred diverse tasks involving more social interaction. In relation to the aforementioned bloody renewal of officers in 1836 it must be highlighted that the events raised obstacles to further develop the official career not only for Bónis, but also for Ödön Kállay as he was directly concerned in the scandal who then lost the opportunity to make career in Szabolcs County. Otherwise, Ödön Kállay could have been Bónis' greatest rival within the new emerging political generation.

The delegate election of 1839 meant the first serious step in Samu Bónis' political career. We shall note that owing to the rescindment of the first deputy lieutenant Imre Jármy, Bónis got into a favourable position, as well as his father had achieved a highly respected reputation for the Bónis family that could also serve as guarantee for Sámuel Bónis. Nevertheless, a radical turn took place in the county's election system of delegates. So far the people of Szabolcs County had opted mostly for middle-aged or senior men who had already achieved merits in the public life of the County when interpreting their opinions in Bratislava. It had been unprecedented that a young man of his late 20s as the judge of the Court of Appeal received such confidence, especially as Bónis yet lacked relevant experience in public

life. To achieve this, the familiarity of the name Bónis on its own was insufficient, it must have been for the special performance, character and talent for politics.

In Bratislava, Samu Bónis justified that confidence. He rapidly overshadowed his senior, much experienced fellow delegate, and became the strongest advocate and the most effective messenger of Szabolcs. He immediately began to build a national network of relations. Most of the time he encountered with young delegates of the opposition, but soon Deák also recognized that he could strongly rely on Bónis among the most devoted supporters of the opposition.

Since the Diet of 1839–40, an almost uninterrupted development can be seen at Bónis' carrier path. The rhythm of the political history of the reform era was given by the national assemblies and the interim periods. In the latter phases Bónis also had to return to his County, but owing to his novatory pledges in Bratislava, he paved his way towards the national politics.

The most curious features of the Diet of 1843–44 are those powerful similarities that could be detected both in Bónis' personal life and the general public sentiment of the opposition. Following the Aloiz Eördögh led anti-tax agitation, heated by anger Bónis felt nothing could stop him to be present on a diet promising a breakthrough. Little after the campaign, in the time of his delegation, disappointment with a state of apathy took over. It would be hard to prove how Bónis' mood swings were attached to his intensifying obsession for gambling. It is unclear if he had had a slight hope for a ray of fortune that could have turned his situation or he just simply went with the flow. However, the final result is known that by the end of the winter in 1844 not only had he lost hope, but also he could no longer afford to stay in Bratislava. Furthermore, due to this condition, career opportunities were completely restricted for Bónis. He could solely expect progress from the rise of the reform opposition, since he was left with no chance of taking on a government office because of his political views.

Szabolcs had not been considered either an opinion leader in the national discourse or in the discussion of the general assemblies. The attack of administration took a clear turn of the events, though. During his judicial chairmanship, he became the most enduring, critical and ferocious judge on the Lord Lieutenant magistrates of the County, while through the trenchant, strongly martial tone accompanied with crossing swords with the chancellor, on behalf of the municipal authority Bónis was pioneer. He was unquestionably the head of the Szabolcs opposition from 1846, therefore his next his candidacy was clear. However, it was

indispensable to avoid the repeat of the failure of the competition in Bratislava of 1844, which ended by his resignation. It might not have been only for Bónis' ailment that he was absent from the election of Nagykálló in 1847, but also in a symbolic way he meant to suggest that was against the canvasser methods. His wife played a key role of control here. There could be several reasons why Erzsébet Darvas decided for the first time to escort his husband to Bratislava. In their fragile financial situation it might have been a relief that the spouse had to run solely one household. In addition, it may have been in favour of her presence that she had the greatest influence on her husband in order that the social life of the Diet city could tempt him in the wrong direction again or he could lose control over his passion for gambling.

The fact that such names as Deák, Klauzál, Bezerédj, Ödön Beöthy or Sebő Vukovics absented themselves from the National Assembly opened in 1847 contributed to the appreciation of Bónis. It can be stated that during his third delegate in Bratislava, he participated more actively than ever, he turned one of the most frequent speaker at the discussions at the Lower Chamber. Bónis deserved Kossuth's confidence by his endurance and devotion on attacking the administration system, which he could consistently count on later as well. However, according to Menyhért Lónyay' diary Bónis had a momentary hesitation when he paid a visit at the palatine István in early February of 1848. This may have been mostly due to the fact that he respected authority over the loud opposition he belonged to. On the other hand, it cannot be excluded that they tried to circumvent on his tough financial situation – just as his wife's memoir makes references to it – and he was promised to his debts paid if had he turned against his party.

The changes of 1848, the rise of the former opposition also placed Samu Bónis in the most favorable position ever. In political terms, Bónis had the opportunity to choose from jobs of high prestige, as a result, his financial security seemed to be finally guaranteed. Little odd as it was, Bónis retained his mandate besides having been appointed the Head of Department at the Ministry of Justice. The main reason lies in the fact that parliamentary war of words meant the comfort zone for him. Work by the desk, the struggle with administrative tasks had never been Bónis' cup of tea. He used to pass such duties on to others since Law School years, while having been a real companionable person, he preferred to seek for platforms of verbal communication. Not only in connection with the first National Assembly, but also in general, Bónis' numerous procedural, opposition-party manifestations shall be examined. The reason for his constant battle against the chaos of the Chamber must have arisen from his

countless negative experiences on the destructive atmosphere and endless debates in Szabolcs County.

His pledges in 1848–49 proved that Bónis used to be one of Kossuth's main trustees all along. His presence as National Assembly Commissioner at Pákozd, his duties on remittance beside the main army, his position of Government Commissioner of Szabolcs, and above all, his assignment to transport the Holy Crown to Debrecen all justified his strong commitment and loyalty. Naturally, following his open confrontation with the Dynasty, Bónis had no other choice of principle. From the beginning of 1849 it was apparent that in the event of a defeat in a war considered as legitimate self-defense, he could expect to face the most serious level of impeachment thus death penalty.

From a career perspective, with holding the office of state secretary Sámuel Bónis reached the peak point in his career in the wake of the success of the spring campaign. The rapid changes of the events, the pernicious deterioration of the military situation, however, led to his services were needed elsewhere in just a few weeks. In their history writing it is quite controversial how his relation to Görgei shaped as Commissioner in the military camp. At that time his company was Kornél Ábrányi who was trying to emphasize in reminiscences written after the treason charges had already spread that the general roughly neglected Bónis as the government's man. In contrast, Lajos Steier mentioned a friendly relationship based on the tone of the reports sent of the Szabolcs County politician to the government, while more recent literature primarily Tamás Katona and Róbert Hermann tried to find the golden mean and highlight the fairness of the relationship. We also believe that the cold and reserved reception of Bónis was clear, but on the other hand, it was also detectable that he felt no offense, instead he pulled every string to heal the relation between Görgei and Kossuth. Bónis was not primarily driven by a commitment to one or the other, yet he realized that to avoid the more likely downfall, only solidarity could offer a slight chance.

The second phase of Bónis' public life started in 1861. However the theses discusses the period schematically, Bónis' soft oppositivism shall be highlighted, just as the relatively fast reconciliation with the system of 1867. Two factors may have played a key role in this. On the one hand, had he been driven by interests and also tricks – which had never been unusual of politicians – yet respect for the majority position used to be a fundamental principle for him. True that his background linked to 1848 could have led him only to the resolution party, but on the other side, hardly could he ever ignore his trust in Deák, since they shared a long history of "heartfelt sympathy". His vehemence may have diminished due

to his age and wisdom in life. Supposedly, the elderly Bónis was more motivated by public respect than divisive parliamentary work. Perhaps for this reason, he decided on judicial career instead. Bónis' expectations came true. In the last years of his life newspapers reported on the baths of Karlsbad, his positions in social organizations, or his appearance in the Korányi Saloon. This period portrayed a man, who had already received general respect that overarched party affiliations.

According to our findings, Sámuel Bónis, against minor setbacks, ran a rising career up to 1849, then in possession of prerogatives after 1861, as one of the embodiments of legal continuity, he could return as a respected member of the 48's generation. His public career showed completely reverse dynamics with the development of his social situation. His life story sets an example for declassification and gentrification. His direct ancestors had belonged to the circles of the wealthy bene possessionati, but with the Nyírtét estate Bónis also inherited a valuable property. That was where he plunged into almost bankruptcy in decade and a half. This kind of loss affected to some extent the whole squirearchy who failed to comply with market conditions, although considering Bónis' situation, this could be attached to his personal skills and lifestyle. On the whole, few data were found in relation to his farming activity, but it can be concluded that he lacked both skills and motivation about it. This was associated with his constant financial mismanagement. Once he could afford he was inclined for gallantry, his uncontrollable passion for gambling, as well as the financing the election of the 1843 delegate ultimately ruined his conditions. In the course of the unstoppable decline, the turn of 48', the transition to the government position, brought only a temporary change. The genuine turn was founded by the unusual double marriage of his daughters with the Korányi brothers Frigyes and Adolf. This case is also a spectacular example that statements referring to the squirearchy's general anti-Semitism are simplistic, thus examining complicated individual paths could be sufficient to nuance the image. Regardless of the role of emotions in the two relationships, the mutual interests of families cannot be disputed. One side regained its formerly standard of living, while the other was on the safe path of social inclusion. In the family branch of his son junior Samuel Bónis, where no similar action had been taken, property fragmentation and continuous shrinkage continued spectacularly.

Sometimes it could lead to bias when historiography experiments to categorize prominent persons based on their performance. Coming from the perspective of the roles of Kossuth and Deák, Széchenyi or Wesselényi, many may be seen as less relevant episodists who only slightly affected on the main processes. However, if the horizon of the examination

is reversed, and we assume how many people participated in the Diets of the reform period or in the national assemblies, the image nuanced in an instant. Discreditably, there are many whose name can only be found at the bottom of archontology or perhaps a brief description of an almanac can be discovered. Sámuel Bónis used to be an influential figure in Szabolcs County for long decades through the 19th century - the period we examined closely. Despite the fact that the internal social relations, the manipulative groups of the one-lotted nobles from conical villages, the scandalous sometimes the purblind power intentions and obtaining financial benefits associated with it, just as the clean-up that lacked programmes or objectives, caused constant struggles for him to stay on ground. Although he could not reach the highest decision-making positions in a national comparison, Bónis belonged to the internal circles of the emerging reform opposition. This shall be considered a great accomplishment as we can state that the majority of delegates representing their municipality at the general assemblies had never been able to leave their local acquaintance let alone playing a significant role in the central administration. Samu Bónis embodied a good patriotic commitment in the good sense for which he was ready to make significant sacrifices on the altar of his personal safety and well-being. For all these reasons, Samu Bónis deserves the attention of posterity, to which we try to contribute with our theses.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (4)

1. **Király, Z.:** Adalékok egy politikai pályafutás kezdetéhez: Bónis Sámuel fiatalkori évei.
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Beregi Szle. 53 (2), 3-23, 2018. ISSN: 1216-092X.
2. **Király, Z.:** Szabolcs vármegye és az 1839-40. évi országgyűlés.
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Halg. Műtanulm. 2, 166-182, 2013. ISSN: 2063-6024.





List of other publications

Hungarian book chapters (1)

6. **Király, Z.:** Magyar történelmi személyek és helyek a középiskolai történelemoktatásban, a kerettantervek és a tankönyvek tükrében.

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