

GRAND DELUSIONS: INTERWAR HUNGARIAN
CULTURAL DIPLOMACY, 1918-1941

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ABSTRACT

ZSOLT NAGY: *Grand Delusions: Interwar Hungarian Cultural Diplomacy, 1918-1941*
(Under the direction of Chad Bryant)

This dissertation examines the development of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy, concentrating on efforts in three areas: academia, the tourist industry, and motion picture and radio production. In the post-Versailles era new and old European states faced the challenge of creating or revising their respective national identities. They also forged images of their respective nations for various foreign audiences. In Hungary, the significance of international public opinion became painfully apparent only after the First World War when the victorious Allies granted 71.5 percent of the country's territory to its neighbors. In order to secure Hungary's status as a proper European nation and to gain invaluable international support for its foreign policy aims—the revision of the Trianon Treaty and international recognition of the Hungarian state—the Hungarian political elite devised an all-encompassing cultural diplomatic campaign. In cooperation with the country's intellectual and industrial elite, they mobilized and deployed the country's cultural capital—real and imagined—in order to influence international public opinion. The Hungarian leadership viewed cultural diplomatic efforts as a continuation of war by other means.

While the main focus of this study is Hungary, this dissertation also offers a transnational view of interwar cultural diplomacy. First, interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy was influenced by and carried out in competition with other East and East-

Central European nations. Second, these efforts were part of a larger, nearly universal, phenomenon whereby nations large and small sought to sway international public opinion. While domestic discussions about Hungarianness vis-à-vis Europeanness had a crucial effect on the image they tried to construct, models and information provided by other countries also played an important role in the reorganization of Hungarian cultural production. Finally, changes in international relations also influenced the ways cultural diplomacy supplemented traditional diplomacy.

In the end, this dissertation offers a different perspective on the interwar period by examining a small country's efforts to maneuver the uncertain terrain of post First World War international relations. It is a story of how Hungarian elites perceived, and misperceived, themselves, their surroundings, and their own ability to affect the country's fate amid high hopes and deep-seated anxieties about the country's place in a newly reconstructed Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

“It is obvious, that our political situation in the world can only be improved, if the great nations’ collective verdict of us will improve too.”
(Kuno Klebelsberg, 1927)¹

“Recent polling suggests that support for the United States throughout the world is on a slight increase but remains well below the fifty percent mark in many countries, even among those nations normally considered strong allies. . . It is time to re-think how we conduct our public diplomacy.”
(Senator Richard G. Lugar, 2009)²

Why would one start a study that promises to examine interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy with quotes from the Hungarian Minister of Culture and a Senator from Indiana? The reason is very simple. Anxieties about reputation have been, and continue to be, an essential component of international relations. Utilization of culture and cultural production has been one of the ways countries have aimed to construct a positive image in order to formulate public opinion. To create and promulgate a positive image is the task of cultural diplomacy. These anxieties were especially evident in the wake of the First World War as governments realized the underlying power vested in public opinion. Why else would one find among the contributors to the 1926

¹ Kuno Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1928), 107. The document was first published in the *Nemzeti Újság* in November 1927. All Hungarian translations, unless noted otherwise, are mine.

² Quoted in John F. Kerry, *U.S. Public Diplomacy. Time to Get Back in the Game: A Report to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations* (United States Senate: One Hundred Eleventh Congress, First Session, February 13, 2009), v. accessed November 11, 2010, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CPRT-111SPRT47261/pdf/CPRT-111SPRT47261.pdf>.

Encyclopedia Britannica the names of German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, Czechoslovak President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš, Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Iorga, or Hungarian Prime Minister István Bethlen?³ These influential statesmen all believed that their respective country's reputation is something that needed to be carefully constructed and nurtured. Cultural diplomatic activities were especially crucial to the foreign policy objectives of East and East-Central European countries. The lack of military, economic, and political power meant that cultural production that targeted foreign public gained priority.

Interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy, the focus of this study, was an essential element of the country's emergent foreign policy strategy. In November 1918 Austria-Hungary capitulated, signaling the end not only of the First World War but also of the Dual Monarchy. Within two years Hungary experienced a democratic bourgeois revolution and its failure; the rise of a Soviet Republic, its red terror, and its ultimate collapse; foreign occupation; counter-revolution; pseudo-civil war; white terror; and a draconian peace treaty. On June 4, 1920, Hungarian delegates signed the Treaty of Trianon, which had been drafted by France, Great Britain, and the United States. With the stroke of a pen Hungary lost 71.5 percent of its prewar territory and 63.6 percent of its population. Importantly for the revisionist argument, there was also the issue of the approximately three million ethnic Hungarians in the detached territories who, overnight, became minorities of the neighboring countries. Hungarians reacted to the treaty with disbelief and resentment. The "Trianon Syndrome," as some historians termed it, transformed the mentality of the country. Revisionism became Hungary's civic religion.

³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.33-35, 13th ed. (London: Encyclopedia Britannica Ltd., 1926).

The majority of the population, including Hungarian leaders, agreed that recovering the lost territories should be the primary aims of foreign policy, and as such it became the motivating force behind the country's cultural diplomatic campaign.

“It is not the sword, but culture that can sustain and make the Hungarian homeland great once again,” Kuno Klebelsberg announced in his 1922 inaugural speech.⁴ Klebelsberg as minister of religion and public education (Ministry of Culture—VKM) was intimately connected with the Hungarian cultural diplomatic efforts. Indeed, he was one of its main architects.⁵ He argued that the negative image of the county was responsible for the severity of the treaty. After the treaty, the Hungarian political elite, Klebelsberg and his colleagues, Prime Ministers Pál Teleki and István Bethlen, and members of the Foreign Ministry (KÜM), saw cultural diplomacy as one of the most viable means of regaining these lost territories. The “ministry of culture shall simultaneously carry out the duties of the ministry of national defense,” as Klebelsberg put it.⁶ After the First World War, Hungary found itself the *bête noire* of the European continent. The Great Powers deemed Hungary to have been one of the parties responsible for the outbreak of the war. The Hungarian leadership was anxious that the Great Powers

⁴ Quoted in Kuno Klebelsberg, *Jöjjetek harmincas évek!* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1930), 111.

⁵ Count Kuno Klebelsberg was born on November 13, 1873, in Magyarpécska, Transylvania (today Pecica, Romania). After his secondary education he studied in the universities of Berlin and Munich, as well as the Sorbonne. Between 1913 and 1917 he was a state secretary in the Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Public Education. During the red terror of Béla Kun he hid out in the countryside. Between 1922 and 1931 he was the minister of culture and education. During his reign, culture and education became central to Hungarian political life. He was responsible for the reorganization of the Hungarian educational system on all levels, from kindergarten to university. In addition, he also conducted the country's cultural and sport diplomacy, and supported the building of various colleges and sport facilities. He spared no energy in achieving his goal. His ardent workload took its toll. While visiting an opening of a public school in the countryside, he developed paratyphoid fever and died on October 12, 1932.

⁶ Kuno Klebelsberg, *Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno beszédei, cikkei és törvényjavaslatai, 1916-1926* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1927), 516. The statement was originally made on February 20, 1925, during discussion about the budget the Ministry of Culture.

might perceive their newly independent country as anachronistic, belligerent, and a liability to European peace.⁷ Thus, the new Hungarian government sought to break free of its international isolation and relied on cultural diplomacy in its attempt to do so. It also realized that its campaign to win over the hearts and minds of the West suffered from a late start as neighboring countries had already made considerable advances in this area. Other nationalist groups from the region and their lobbyists had been at work in Western capitals soon after the war had begun. They further argued that restoring the country's integrity—geographic and otherwise—and establishing Hungary as a legitimate member of the community of European nations required a worldwide public relation campaign of cultural diplomacy.

Emergence of Cultural Diplomacy

Before proceeding further with the Hungarian case a few words about the emergence of cultural diplomacy are in order. Richard T. Arndt depicts the significance of cultural diplomacy as follows: “if war in Hugo Grotius’s phrase was the ‘last resorts of kings’ – *ultima ratio regum* – then cultural diplomacy was surely the first.”⁸ Cultural diplomacy has been practiced since the Bronze Age. Some scholars, such as historian Jan

⁷ To what degree this view was just a figment of the Hungarians’ imagination is debatable. Yet, while recalling his stance at the 1919 Peace Conference, Sir Harold Nicolson, member of the British delegation, wrote that while he thought of Austria as a “pathetic relic,” he “confess[ed]” that he regarded Hungary to be a “Turanian tribe with acute distaste.” He added: “Like their cousins the Turks, they [the Hungarians] destroyed much and created nothing.” László Péter, “British-Hungarian Relations since 1848: An Introduction” in László Péter and Martyn Rady, eds., *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848* (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004), 8.

⁸ Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D. c.: Potomac Books, 2005), xi

Melissen, argue that image cultivation was practiced in the time of the Bible and practitioners of this sort of activity were present during the Byzantine times and the Italian Renaissance.⁹ According to him, the Venetians had already introduced the regular distribution of newsletters, but it was the invention of the printing press that truly revolutionized the role of public opinion in international relations. One of the “true pioneers” who realized the potential of “identity creation and image projection” was Cardinal Richelieu in early seventeenth-century France.¹⁰ In 1635 he established the Académie Française to cultivate French language and culture in order to broaden the influence of the kingdom.¹¹ His successor, Cardinal Mazarin, continued the work of his tutor and in turn established the Collège des Quatre-Nations in 1643. It was only at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, as historian of cultural diplomacy Philip M. Taylor writes, that “attempts to inform, cultivate, control and manipulate public opinion have resulted in the scientific development of the new arts of publicity, public relations, advertising and propaganda conducted through organizations designed specifically to influence the audience to respond in a manner desired by those in power or by those who wish to be in power.”¹² France’s Alliance Française (1883) was the forerunner of this development. The institution’s goal was to promote the French

⁹ Jan Melissen, “The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice,” in Jan Melissen, ed. *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Philip H. Gordon and Sophie Meunier, “Globalization and French Cultural Identity,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 19, no. 1 (2001): 34.

¹² Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

language and culture worldwide. Among its founders were Jules Verne, Ferdinand de Lesseps, and Jules Renan.¹³

Yet the real turning point in the history of cultural diplomacy was the First World War. As Harold D. Lasswell put it in his 1927 *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, “the history of the late War shows that modern war must be fought on three fronts: the military front, the economic front, and the propaganda front.”¹⁴ In the aftermath of the Great War intellectuals and politicians alike became aware of the power of propaganda. A new emphasis on the cultivation of public opinion resulted in an explosion of studies on the subject. The United States led the way in the new field of public relations. Universities, one after the other, started to offer courses on the subject and public relations firms were established. Intellectuals, such as philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), were deeply concerned with the effects of propaganda on the public consciousness, not to mention its effect on political practices. Opposed to the liberal optimists, such as Dewey, were the realists, who propagated a scientific understanding of the concept and promoted the new brand of public relations expertise. Their camp included the likes of Edward Bernays, Ivy Ledbetter Lee, Harold Lasswell, and Walter Lippmann.¹⁵ Lippmann pointed out that we, as people, know our environment only indirectly. Newspapers, books, and other materials indirectly influence our understanding and belief system, argued Lippmann.¹⁶ In his 1923 book *Crystallizing Public Opinion*

¹³ Alliance Française Homepage, accessed September 7, 2010, <http://www.alliancefr.org/sommes-nous>.

¹⁴ Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), 214.

¹⁵ Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 15.

¹⁶ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), 4-5.

Edward Bernays argued that “perhaps the most significant social, political and industrial fact about the present century is the increased attention which is paid to public opinion.”¹⁷ Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, used a combination of his uncle’s psychoanalysis and the French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon’s work on crowd psychology to explain the concept of public relations. In his view, “no idea or opinion [was] an isolated factor.”¹⁸ Harold D. Lasswell argued in a similar vein; however, he went even further by pointing out that those ideas and opinions were often constructed by governments through the utility of propaganda. He maintained that even after the conclusion of the war “all governments are engaged to some extent in propaganda as part of their ordinary peace-time functions.”¹⁹ To what end? Lasswell had an answer to this question as well: “They [governments] make propaganda on behalf of diplomatic friends or against diplomatic antagonists, and this is unavoidable.”²⁰

Nations small and large came to appreciate the benefits of positive foreign public opinion. Democratic and authoritarian governments from London to Tokyo deployed their cultural capital and under the aegis of “cultural diplomacy.” Various governmental and institutions closely related to government opened their doors with the goal of promoting their respective nations’ cultural, scientific, and historical achievements. In order to fulfill their task they utilized all the scientific and technological advances of the

¹⁷ Edward L. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York: Liveright Publishing Cooperation, 1923), 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁹ Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

time period, projecting their messages on moving pictures and through radio waves. In 1923 the French government acknowledged openly the need for “intellectual expansion.” The “cultural relation section” of the French Foreign Ministry began to open various cultural institutions within and outside of embassies worldwide. In these institutions one would find the crème of France’s young intellectuals, many of them would become household names in academic circles, names such as Claude-Lèvi Strauss, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes.²¹ Throughout the interwar years the French example was followed by German institutions, the Italian Dante Alighieri Society, the Soviet Union’s Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Nations, the Japanese Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, and the British Council, to name a few.²²

The development of these institutions continued apace. During the Cold War cultural diplomacy—just like that of traditional diplomacy—was dominated by the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States. In 1953 the Eisenhower administration established the United States Information Agency (USIA) as an “independent foreign affairs agency within the executive branch of the U.S. government charged with the conduct of public diplomacy in support of U.S. foreign policy.”²³ The USIA’s mission was to “understand, inform, and influence foreign publics in promotion

²¹ Arndt, *The First Resort*, 37.

²² For more on this see Ruth Emily McMurry and Muna Lee, *The Cultural Approach: Another Way in International Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1947); Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960); Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Philip M. Taylor, “Cultural Diplomacy and the British Council: 1934-1939,” *British Journal of International Studies* 4, no. 3 (Oct., 1978): 244-265; and Sang Mi Park, *Japan as a Cultural State (bunka kokka Nippon): Theater, Culture, and Politics* Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2007.

²³ USIA Homepage, accessed December 10, 2010, <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/>.

of the U.S. national interest, and to broaden the dialogue between Americans and U.S. institutions, and their counterparts abroad.”²⁴ The USIA oversaw—until its arguably premature dissolution in 1999—cultural and educational exchange programs such as the Fulbright program, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Free Asia, as well as hundreds of America Houses and information centers.²⁵ After 9/11 a great number of intellectuals and diplomats alike questioned the US government’s decision to dismantle the USIA program. As the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations recently pointed out it is “Time to get back in the Game.”²⁶ The competition, as the committee referred to it, remains quite stiff. The British Council, for example, has locations in some 110 countries with over 7,900 staffmembers. The list of similar institutions includes Germany’s Goethe Institute, Spain’s Instituto Cervantes, Portugal’s Instituto Camões, and Poland’s Adam Mickiewicz Institute. Two of the latest additions to this list of cultural institutes created quite a stir among Western—mainly US—policy makers. The Iranian Cultural Centers, according to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, are currently operating in forty-five countries and “conducting an active outreach program particularly in those predominantly Muslim African and Asian countries. Iranian Cultural Centers offer Persian language classes and extensive library resources.”²⁷ Another major development was the opening of China’s first Confucius Institute in 2004. According to the institute’s official website, “by June 2009, 282 Confucius Institutes and 272

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, trans. Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 55.

²⁶ Kerry, *U.S. Public Diplomacy*, 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

Confucius Classrooms had been established in eighty-three countries and regions around the world.”²⁸ Today’s nations, large and small, regardless their political and ideological systems employ cultural diplomacy as an essential part of their foreign policy apparatus.²⁹ Indeed, cultural diplomacy continues to be one of the most important factors in international relations.

Terminology and Perspective of Cultural Diplomacy

What is cultural diplomacy? Is it simply propaganda masquerading as cultural diplomacy? For that matter what are the differences, if any, between “propaganda,” “publicity,” “cultural diplomacy,” “self-advertisement,” “image cultivation,” “image projection,” “public relations,” “soft power,” “nation-branding,” “perception management,” “national reputation management,” and the most recent addition to this list, “public diplomacy?” Perhaps the easiest, but evasive, answer to the question “what is cultural diplomacy?” has been provided by former US ambassador turned professor, Cynthia P. Schneider. In her formulation, cultural diplomacy is “hard to define, but you’d know it if you saw it.”³⁰ Manuela Aguilar offers a more comprehensive and convincing definition: “the way a government portrays its country to another country’s people in order to achieve certain foreign policy goals . . . and incorporates the activities of governmental agencies established to disseminate information, news, and interpretive

²⁸ Confucius Institutes Online, accessed November 17, 2010, <http://www.chinese.cn/>.

²⁹ Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy*, 8.

³⁰ Cynthia P. Schneider, “Cultural Diplomacy: Hard to Define, but You’d Know It If You Saw It,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2006): 191.

material about the country . . . to instill sympathy and understanding for the goals of a country's domestic and foreign political action.”³¹

However, this definition needs to be modified somewhat in order to illustrate the true nature of cultural diplomacy in interwar East-Central Europe. The end of the First World War and the peace treaties that followed significantly altered both the physical and the mental map of East and Central Europe. The great empires of the Romanovs, of the Hohenzollerns, and of the Habsburgs—not to mention the Ottoman Empire—gave way to a collection of new, or considerably altered, nation-states. In most of these cases, the new states were weak and faced both internal and external pressures. Internally, they dealt with vexing issues concerning economic recovery, democratization, and the dilemma of minorities.

As if internal pressures were not debilitating enough, these post-Versailles states found themselves in a dependent relationship with Western countries, as well as in a bitter rivalry with one another. Hungarian, Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav leaders competed for the West's acceptance and support in order to secure their country's place within the European community and to establish sovereign rights over their real and perceived national territories. The reason behind this competition lay with the Versailles system itself. It affirmed that the Western powers had the sole right to mediate and settle any border disputes and adjustment plans, call for plebiscites, and oversee the compliance of the various states with the treaties in respect to their

³¹ Manuela Aguilar, *Cultural Diplomacy and Foreign Policy: German American Relations, 1955-1968* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 9.

minorities.³² In this new geo-political climate the small nation-states of Eastern and East-Central Europe bound by their treaty obligations had to face a new reality: the game might be played in the East, but the referee and the rules came from the West.³³ They all understood cultural diplomacy as a zero-sum game. It is not surprising that, for the regions' leaders, from Hungary's István Bethlen to Czechoslovakia's Edvard Beneš, diplomacy was, to reappropriate Carl von Clausewitz's maxim, a continuation of war by other means. On this battlefield, artists, architects, and filmmakers became warriors, just as their paintings, buildings, movies, and other cultural products became weaponry.

My formula for this practice combines Aguilar's definition of "cultural diplomacy" with Simon Anholt's definition of "nation branding" and "competitive identity" together with the latest of the terms, "public diplomacy."³⁴ Such a formulation

³² These rights nominally belonged to the League of Nations, but in reality it was under the purview of the Great powers. On interwar minority rights see Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³³ The definition of "West," as a homogeneous entity, is of course problematic. For example, Hungarian cultural diplomacy targeted Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, and the United States, not to mention Holland, Sweden, or for that matter Argentina and Japan. And the list could be extended. Naturally there were subtle differences in the way Hungary addressed Germany and the United States, for example, but even if the means differed in certain ways the goals remained the same.

³⁴ It was Simon Anholt who coined this term in 1996. Yet, he begins his 2010 book, *Places: Identity, Image, and Reputation* by stating: "Let me be clear: there is no such a thing as 'nation branding.' It is a myth, and perhaps a dangerous one." While it may seem a "tantalizing prospect" it is an illusion to believe in a "quick fix for a weak or negative national image," Anholt continues. By now, Anholt views nation-branding not as the solution, but rather as the problem, for he believes that it is "public opinion that brands countries—in other words, reduces them to a weak, simplistic, outdated, unfair stereotypes—and most countries need to fight against the tendency of international public opinion to brand them, not encourage it." Instead, he suggests—admittedly, referring to contemporary issues—that "governments need to help the world to understand the real, complex, rich, diverse nature of their people and landscapes, their history and heritage, their products and their resources: to prevent them from becoming mere brands." For more, see: Simon Anholt, *Places: Identity, Image, and Reputation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 3.

The latest exhortation is "public diplomacy." The phrase is generally attributed to Edmund Gullion, dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 1965. However, Nicholas J. Cull argues that his was simply a "fresh use of an established phrase." According to the Fletcher School definition, "public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation

might look like this: “Take one small to medium sized country with clear foreign policy goals but a lack of political, military, and economic might necessary to achieve them. Add in much needed manpower: intellectuals, business and industry leaders and, most importantly, a governing political elite—the more influential and more dedicated they are the better. These people in turn establish powerful governmental and non-governmental agencies and institutions that utilize the country’s cultural productivity to create an image. The selection and creation of the right cultural product—for example, an academic journal, an escorted tour, a film, or even a piece of music—is the most important step in the process. These items must showcase the country’s individuality, the uniqueness of its culture, the contribution of its genius to European culture, and the merits of its character; while meeting the expectations and the tastes of the West. After all, these items, and the image they are supposed to propagate, are designed for foreign consumption.” Even when all these conditions were met, practitioners of interwar East-Central European cultural diplomacy faced a number of challenges. First, selecting the right elements necessary to create a positive image abroad was a complex undertaking for there was little agreement on the choices to be made. Second, practitioners had to make sure that the end-products did not have a “propaganda-smell,” since most Western countries squarely rejected propagandistic overtures. Lastly, the practitioners had to

and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents, and the process of intercultural communications....Central to public diplomacy is the transnational flow of information and ideas.” Yet, not everyone agrees with this definition. The *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (2009) and the Wilton Park conference(s) brought together scholars and practitioners of public diplomacy with the aim of defining what public diplomacy is. The conference concluded that “public diplomacy entered the lexicon of the 21st century without clear definition of what it is or how the tools it offers best be used.” For more, see Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009).

realize that they were not only battling Western indifference and the existing stereotypes and negative images of their given country, but they were also competing with practitioners of other East-Central European countries, for they too sought to win the support of the West.

While definitions are important, it is even more essential to learn how contemporaries defined their activities. János Hankiss, Hungarian thinker and practitioner of cultural diplomacy since the early 1920s, defined cultural diplomacy (*kultúrdiplomácia*) as an action that “brings about foreign policy goals with the use of cultural instruments.”³⁵ Hankiss argued in his *A kultúrdiplomácia alapvetése (The Basic Tenet of Cultural Diplomacy)* that one must understand cultural diplomacy as a combination of three different factors. First, it was competition. He argued that, if Hungary wanted to claim, in his words “maintain,” the country’s “cultural superiority,” or simply did not want to fall behind the competition, all must accept the fact that the competition was indeed real and that it took money and effort to compete on the world stage’s “politics of presence.” Second, continued Hankiss, cultural diplomacy was an advertising campaign. This is one of the most significant factors of Hungarian cultural diplomacy, for “as everybody well knows, Hungary is not or very little known abroad.” As he put it, the old adage “good wine needs no bush”³⁶ (“*jó bornak nem kell cégér*”) holds little truth and indeed the greatest enemy that cultural diplomats must face is indifference. He further pointed out that Hungarian cultural diplomacy must break with

³⁵ János Hankiss, *A kultúrdiplomácia alapvetése* (Budapest: Magyar Külügyi Társaság, 1937), 1.

³⁶ The adage, popular in Hungary at the time, has English origins where public house owners hang a branch on their door to suggest good quality ale/wine. It was made famous in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.

the habit of viewing Western public opinion as a “court of law” and instead look at it as an “audience.” In addition, continued Hankiss, behind Hungary’s “advertising campaign” there must be a well-developed idea, power, adaptability, knowledge of humanity, and consistency. The third and final facet of cultural diplomacy, according to Hankiss, was education, for he believed that the different nations continue to educate one another and that during the process they educate themselves.³⁷ He also summarized the three main goals of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. First, make Hungary known abroad in all respects. Second, move Hungary forward in the competition of nations. And lastly, advance the matter of treaty revision.³⁸ To be sure, Hungarian cultural diplomacy aimed to achieve all these goals. The ways the Hungarian government and the country’s intellectual and economic elite created, organized, and carried out this cultural diplomatic campaign is the main topic of this dissertation. The study examines these developments and, in the process, challenges our thinking about the relationship between national identity, culture, and foreign policy.

Scope, Aims, and Significance

My study offers a new interpretation of interwar diplomatic history of East-Central Europe by examining how the Hungarian leadership sought to mobilize diverse cultural and intellectual resources to alter the country’s international situation and to amend its post-1920 borders. I want to emphasize that this is *not* another study about the

³⁷ Hankiss, *A kultúrdiplomácia*, 10-16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

rights and wrongs of the postwar treaties in general, nor it is a reevaluation of the Treaty of Trianon. Without a doubt, territorial revisionism was the leitmotif of both traditional and cultural diplomacy in Hungary, just as securing the postwar status quo motivated Romanian, Yugoslav, and Czechoslovak diplomacy. However, my study seeks to better understand the shared experience of this cultural and political moment in Europe, while avoiding what Konrad Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger call the “obsessive preoccupation with the role of one’s own nation as either victims or a perpetrator.”³⁹ This study is thus about the origins, organization, and practice of East-Central European cultural diplomacy between the two wars. But this study reveals much more. I suggest that interwar East-Central European national identity construction, and its imagery, was a result of regional competition, state interaction, and the various countries’ efforts to live up to real and imagined European/Western ideals. Consequently, my dissertation seeks to go beyond the limited framework of the nation-state and attempts to better understand the evolution of national politics and national cultures within an international framework.

My dissertation engages existing scholarship on cultural diplomacy in general, and interwar East-Central European history in particular, but also aims to forge new directions. Scholars of cultural diplomacy have for the most part disregarded both East-Central Europe and the interwar period, preferring to focus on post-World War II American-Soviet cultural diplomacy.⁴⁰ Following the examples set forth by Jessica C. E.

³⁹ Konrad H. Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger, “Contours of a Critical History of Contemporary Europe: A Transnational Agenda” in Konrad H. Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger eds., *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 16.

⁴⁰ For example, see, Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*; Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938-1950* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*

Gienow-Hecht and Andrea Orzoff this dissertation challenges the hitherto hegemonic periodization and geographical focus of the pertinent literature and argues that cultural diplomacy in the period between the two world wars was indeed looked upon as a viable and essential addition to traditional diplomacy and that some of its principal practitioners were the “small countries” of East-Central Europe.⁴¹ Being a “small country” with the added burden of being a “small country” defeated in war significantly reduced Hungarian diplomatic options. Cultural diplomacy seemed a viable option to enlarge Hungary’s presence on the international stage.

Inspired by the work of Holly Case, this study questions the predominant interpretation of interwar East-Central Europe, as a “subset of German history, as a time-lagged aping of the rise of Fascism and the failure of liberal democracy.”⁴² Instead, by tracing the development of Hungarian cultural diplomacy from 1919 to 1941, I argue that it was not any one ideology that governed Hungarian foreign policy, but something more pedestrian: borders and legitimacy. Neither of these concepts is peculiarly Hungarian. On the contrary, geographical boundaries, and the sentiments that surrounded those borders, have been principal causes of war and violence throughout European (and world) history. The question of borders not only defined interwar East-Central European history, but provided the conditions for the start of World War II. The problem of borders was best

(University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2003); and Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

⁴¹ Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, ed., *Decentering America* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, eds., *Culture and International History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003); and Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴² Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

summarized in 1939 in a delightfully funny book *Europe—Going, Going, Gone!* by Count Ferdinand Czernin. In his chapter entitled “The Burden of the Borders” Czernin writes: “The borders of Europe still exist, and they stopped being mere blue, or green, or yellow lines on the map, lines upon which customs barriers and tariff walls are raised and lowered, and where passports have to be stamped with beautiful eagles, lions and vultures . . . most of them, have become particularly insurmountable obstacles”⁴³ Indeed, borders were insurmountable obstacles that impeded cooperation and peaceful development in the entire continent.

Recovering the lost territories, and gaining sovereign rights and legitimacy over them, was the leitmotif of interwar Hungarian foreign policy. I suggest that the Hungarian political and cultural elite—despite political changes—had no special affinity toward Germany, but continued to work toward the “West” in general. Also significantly, as my dissertation will show, the Hungarian elite were and for the most part remained anglophile and sought to gain the support of Great Britain. This, however, did not stop them from making substantial overtures to the United States and France, not to mention the Scandinavian countries, Japan, Brazil, and Argentina. To be sure, Hungary did have close political, economic, and cultural ties with Germany, but these relations did not start with Hitler. While I would not want to entirely ignore the influence of anti-Bolshevik sentiment, the discontentment with democracy, or the radicalization of the Right and the growth of anti-Semitism, I argue that it was not some sort of like-mindedness based on ideological beliefs that caused Hungary to gravitate toward Hitler. It is much more simple

⁴³ Count Ferdinand Czernin, *Europe—Going, Going, Gone! A Sketchy Book Trying to Give a Rough Explanation of Europe, its Politics, and its State of Mind, for the Benefit Mainly of Anglo-Saxons, Politicians, and other Folk with Uncomplicated Minds* (New York: Greystone Press, 1939), 78.

(or more complicated): Only in 1938, and after many efforts to forge positive relations with a Western power, did Hungary make a Faustian deal with the Third Reich, a deal that was the result of the apathy of the other Great Powers and was motivated by a sense of injustice, wants, and unchecked pride.

Just as one cannot view Hungarian foreign policy as monolithic activity, one cannot view Hungarian cultural diplomacy in such a way either. Until 1918 there was little of what one might call cultural diplomacy in Hungary. Between 1918 and 1927 the government's main goal was to consolidate power, bring about domestic stability, and to break out from international isolation. Revisionist rhetoric, as such, was removed from the official agenda. However, that does not mean that the government forgot about its main goal. It was during these years that the infrastructure and institutional setting that was necessary to carry out a cultural diplomatic campaign was established. The peak of Hungarian cultural diplomacy was between 1927 and 1938, when the Hungarian government actively sought to influence foreign public opinion in order to gain the necessary support for territorial revision. The 1938 Munich Conference and the outbreak of the Second World War initiated a new phase in Hungarian cultural diplomacy. Further territorial revisions remained a main goal, but keeping the country out of the war by securing neutrality also became a chief occupation for those who planned and carried out the country's cultural diplomatic campaign. These goals were, of course, contradictory and it was a contradiction with tragic consequences.

The second issue that governed Hungarian foreign policy was the quest for legitimacy. This issue is a rather complicated one. On the one hand, Hungary needed to establish itself as a legitimate European country in order to convince the rest of the world

of the legitimacy of its claim to lost territories. On the other hand, one should not forget that defeat meant that Hungary had to come face to face with its marginality just as it, paradoxically, achieved independence. It was a genuine moment at which Hungary and Hungarians had the opportunity to (re-)define themselves as independent peoples for the first time since 1526. To apply Victor Turner's expression, the society was "betwixt and between."⁴⁴ It was a liminal stage when society as a whole had already separated itself from its past, but had not yet arrived to the point of aggregation. It was the critical and complex moment of transition when the recently defeated country celebrated its newfound independence and mourned its territorial and human losses. While in the short-run cultural diplomacy aimed to create a positive, marketable image, in the long-run it helped to delineate the basic characteristics of the nation. In the process, practitioners and creators wrestled with questions of Hungarianness and the meanings of being European. This process of identity (re-)construction illuminates not only the Hungarian anxieties about Europeanness, but also allow us the gain a better understanding of the zeitgeist of interwar Europe as a whole.

As for the general aim of this dissertation, it hopes to reach out to a diverse community of scholars in the humanities and social sciences in order to fulfill one of the main goals of this project, which is to remove the geographical, methodological, and historiographical restraints that characterize discussions of interwar Eastern and East-Central Europe. Instead the study has been situated within a larger European, and to a more limited scale, global, framework. As a final caveat I want to emphasize that I share Anthony Haigh's assessment on the role of cultural diplomacy. According to him,

⁴⁴ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93.

cultural diplomacy is a “technique which can be used for good purposes or bad, and is therefore strictly neutral in its connotation.”⁴⁵ It is the technique and message of Hungary’s cultural diplomacy that I intend to illustrate; hence my dissertation should be read as neither endorsement nor a condemnation of these policies.

Structure

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter contextualizes the construction of interwar cultural diplomacy in Hungary and elsewhere. It starts with the war years of 1914-1918 to illustrate the growing importance of propaganda. The chapter asks the following questions: In which ways did the Hungarian leadership arrive at the understanding that the “resurrection” of the country depended on its image abroad? What steps did it take to organize the country’s cultural production in order to compete with the similar efforts of the neighboring states?

Chapter 2 illustrates the complexity of image (re-)construction. By investigating the ways Hungarians viewed themselves and the rest of Europe, my study depicts the anxieties, fears, and hopes that surrounded Hungary’s effort to renew its tarnished image abroad. I also argue that competing visions of Hungarianness played an important role in the construction of national identity. Finally, the chapter speaks to the larger questions of Europeanness, for the Hungarian elite were determined to build a national identity that would enable the country to join the European community of nations.

⁴⁵ Anthony Haigh, *Cultural Diplomacy in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1974), 28.

The next three chapters present detailed studies of the Hungarian cultural diplomatic campaign in practice by examining three separate, yet related, topics: academia and scholarship, the tourism industry, and radio and film production. There were other topics to consider for sure. Sports, fairs and festivals, and industrial/agricultural products and their marketing could have been included in the discussion. I have decided to limit my examination to the three subjects for two reasons. First, there is the basic problem of sources. Unfortunately, during the Second World War and the Revolution of 1956 much of the relevant documentation that was housed at the Hungarian National Archive was destroyed. My second consideration is has to do with target audiences. Academic representation targeted a small, educated, and, for the most part, privileged elite of intellectuals, such as university professors and their students. Tourism targeted those who could afford to travel. In the 1920S and 1930s, despite the advances made in mass transportation, travelling abroad for leisure for the most part remained the privilege of the well-off, which included the elite and the upper middle class. However, radio and cinema offered ways for Hungarians to bring the country to the lower classes, as these media were the most “democratic” instruments of cultural diplomacy. Consequently, my selection provides an across-the-border analysis of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. The in-depth analysis of these three “construction sites” indicates that cultural diplomacy, depending on its target, at times complemented traditional diplomacy, while at other times it probed possible avenues that traditional diplomacy could not. Moreover, it shows that the construction of national identity, especially when it is done for foreign consumption, is a complicated process accompanied by uncertainty, manipulation, and conflict. Governmental and non-

governmental organizations joined forces to fashion a European identity for Hungary, yet they were uncertain about what would be considered European. In their search for positive illumination of the Hungarian character they manipulated (at times invented) cultural traditions and created and managed new outlets for cultural production, which on occasion led to conflict between traditionalists and modernizers, as well as between ideologues and businessmen. These same efforts drove a wedge between Hungary and its neighbors.

The concluding chapter investigates the ever-so-elusive issue of reception and both the short-term and long-term legacies of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy. The latter concern seems especially intriguing in the light of post-1989 Hungarian efforts to convince the rest of Europe of the European character of the country.

It seems fitting here to return to Count Ferdinand Czernin. In a way—in a very humorous way—he names the two main issues that govern my understanding of interwar Hungary, and East-Central Europe in general: the issue of borders and national character. In his chapter on Hungary he writes:

The Hungarian is chivalrous and patriotic and loves his “lost provinces,” even though those provinces may love being lost. He wants them back and will go on saying “Nem, nem, soha,” [No, no, never] which means that he is one day going to get them. Hungary, for such a small country, has considerably more boundaries than it deserves. In fact, it has two complete sets of them. The real ones and the historic ones. The former the Hungarian despises and the latter he is likely to explain you at the slightest provocation. . . . Though they are charming people to dine and get drunk with, they are impossible people to get on politically. . . . Hungarians are proud.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Czernin, *Europe*, 156 and 159.

CHAPTER ONE

MOBILIZING THE NATION: FROM WAR PROPAGANDA TO PEACETIME CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

“International public opinion is an amazing thing. It is like atmospheric pressure, one cannot see it, yet under its pressure one has anxious feelings.”
(Kuno Klebelsberg, 1927)¹

On May 4, 1921, the Hungarian Parliament discussed the country's position in the arena of international public opinion. Count Gyula Andrassy (1860-1929) pointed out the lessons of the First World War as he reviewed a publication on the propaganda work of Lord Northcliffe. In his speech to the National Assembly, Andrassy argued that Hungary must realize that, in the current situation, armed conflict is out of question. Therefore, there was no need for saber-rattling. Instead, he proposed that Hungary must influence international public opinion.² His viewpoint was shared by most governmental and intellectual elites, who believed that the country's future was intimately connected with its foreign reputation. Most everyone in these circles also shared the widely-held belief that the severity of the Trianon Treaty was the direct result of the circumstance in which Hungary was an unknown, or misperceived entity. There was also a consensus about the reasons behind the poor state of Hungary in international public opinion. First and foremost, there was enemy propaganda during the First World War. According to this

¹ Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus*, 97.

² *Nemzetgyűlési Napló*, IX. kötet, 1920, 398-404 (May 4, 1921).

understanding, enemy propaganda misrepresented Hungarian goals and its character to the West, thus turning public opinion against the country. Klebelsberg, for example, pointed out that it was this sort of “slander” that painted an “odious” picture about Hungarian aspirations and the Hungarian cause in front of the “grand forum of Europe.”³ While the political elite believed in its own story of victimization, it too assigned blame to the lack of Hungarian efforts in the past to present Hungary and its achievements on the international stage. Klebelsberg addressed this matter as well, when he noted that one of the greatest errors of the recent past was that the political elite’s almost single-minded focus on domestic issues. Cultivating the country’s foreign reputation was more or less entirely eschewed, as if Hungary had not been in the center of Europe but an island in the Pacific Ocean, Klebelsberg argued.⁴

The post-Trianon Hungarian elite sought to alter the situation through a cultural diplomatic campaign. Inspiration for this campaign was provided by the propaganda of the First World War. Yet Klebelsberg and his colleagues also recognized that, in the aftermath of the war, propaganda, the word and activity, bred “mistrust” and attracted “suspicion.”⁵ Their task was to create a positive image of the country abroad through means that would not repulse people. In other words, the challenge was to conduct propaganda in camouflage. The central theme of cultural diplomacy was based on a conviction according to which the solidification and promotion of the country’s alleged cultural superiority (*kultúrfölény*) and Western roots would facilitate the rise of Hungary. Klebelsberg argued that the challenge for Hungary was to maintain and expand its role as

³ Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus*, 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

primus inter pares, that is, to be “first among equals” in the field of cultural achievement in East-Central Europe, and to portray its superiority to world.⁶

The first part of this chapter explains the emergence of wartime propaganda organizations and its effects on the way the Hungarian leadership viewed the significance of foreign public opinion. The second part illustrates Hungary’s struggle to gain international recognition between 1918 and 1920. The third part examines the period between 1920 and 1927 when the Hungarian government struggled to break out from its international isolation. The fourth section analyzes the importance of 1927, a year which marks the beginning of active Hungarian foreign policy, and as such, the beginning of an openly revisionist cultural diplomatic campaign. The last section of the chapter shows the changing directions and aims of cultural diplomacy from 1927 to 1941, which I consider the end of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy.

From the Emergence of Wartime Propaganda to the Changing Nature of International Relations

One of the things we surely know about the First World War is that techniques of mass persuasion were important weapons in the arsenal of the belligerents. Historians have studied wartime propaganda, but for the most part they have focused their attention on Allied efforts against Germany.⁷ Studies of British anti-German propaganda often

⁶ Ibid., 247.

⁷ For example, see Michael L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-1918* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

point to the key role that Lord Northcliffe's Crewe House played in gathering much needed public support for the British war efforts. It is only recently that historians—most significantly Mark Cornwall—have turned their attention to the practice and influence of propaganda on the Eastern front.⁸

The British propaganda campaign against Austria-Hungary was also carried out by the Crewe House.⁹ In his 1920 publication about the story of Crewe House, Sir Campbell Stuart, Northcliffe's deputy director, triumphantly wrote that the operation against Austria-Hungary was British "propaganda's most striking success."¹⁰ Lord Northcliffe, as he was known both home and abroad, was owner of *The Times*, *Observer*, the *Sunday Dispatch*, and *The Daily Mirror*, and used his considerable influence to recruit editors, politicians, and intellectuals into the service of Crewe House. Two of these recruits were R.W. Seton-Watson and Henry Wickham Steed. Seton-Watson (1879-1951) was a trained historian, while Steed (1871-1956) was a journalist and the *The Times* Vienna foreign correspondent between 1902 and 1913.¹¹ Seton-Watson and Steed

⁸ Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (London: Macmillan, 2000). See also, József Galántai, *Magyarország az első világháborúban, 1914-1918* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974). For a more recent work, see Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1997).

⁹ It was in February 1918 that Viscount Northcliffe (born Alfred Charles William Harmsworth), British newspaper and publishing tycoon, accepted Prime Minister Lloyd George's invitation to become "Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries." Crewe House was the name of the building wherefrom the British propaganda was directed. Its name became synonymous with the activity carried out under its roof.

¹⁰ Sir Campbell Stuart, *Secrets of the Crewe House: the Story of a Famous Campaign* (London and New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), 20. Stuart wrote in the preface that the publication of his book "had to be postponed until the main principles of the Peace had been decided." The main reason behind the delay was that the nature of some of the documents "might have embarrassed the Allied Governments," Stuart admitted. Then he went on to say that during the war and the subsequent peace negotiations the knowledge of the Crewe House and its workings had to be withheld from public knowledge. See, Stuart, *Secrets*, vii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

co-directed the activities of the Austro-Hungarian section, which was the first unit of the Crewe House that began operations.

The section under the direction of Seton-Watson and Steed had two goals. The first objective was to provide moral and active support to the various nationalities living within the Habsburg Empire. By stirring up their already existing nationalist sentiments, the Austro-Hungarian section aimed to handicap the Dual Monarchy's army.¹² The second objective of the section was to destroy Austria–Hungary as a political entity. The second aim was especially problematic since there was considerable opposition to it in Great Britain. In his rather self-aggrandizing memoir, *Through Thirty Years*, Steed referred to this opposition as “Jew hornets,” “Jesuit hornets,” “British snob hornets,” and other “pro-German hornets.”¹³ What he found most troubling, in other words, was the supposed influence of German-Jewish international finance, the “militant Roman Catholicism,” and the “snobbishness of British ‘society’ which looked upon ‘Austrians’ as ‘nice people’ because”—Steed asserted rather bitterly—“their country houses were well kept, their shooting was excellent, and their urbanity superior to that of the Germans.”¹⁴ In the case of Hungary, Seton-Watson and Wickham Steed also had to face the fact that because of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution (and Lajos Kossuth's subsequent tour of the West) Hungary enjoyed a certain degree of respect in Great Britain. Wickham

¹² Ibid., 21.

¹³ Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years, 1892-1922: A Personal Narrative*, Vol.II (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), 198.

¹⁴ Ibid., 129.

Steed was keen to destroy the myth of Hungary as a country with a “system of liberal and progressive self-government.”¹⁵

The propaganda campaign greatly benefited from the cooperation between Seton-Watson and Steed, on the one side, and various émigré intellectuals, such as Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Milan Ratislav Štefánik, and Edvard Beneš, on the other. It was the latter three that established the Czechoslovak National Council in February 1916. In his 1916 pamphlet, *Détruisez l'Autriche-Hongrie! Le martyre des Tchéco-Slovaques* (“Destroy Austria-Hungary! The Martyrdom of the Czech-Slovaks”), Beneš left little doubt about their determination to undo the Dual Monarchy.¹⁶ It was a message that resonated well with Croatian, Serb, and Romanian nationalists. The relationship between the émigrés and Crewe House was mutually beneficial. Steed and Seton-Watson provided a platform for said émigrés, while their presence lent credibility to Crewe House’s propaganda. It was in this spirit of cooperation that Masaryk, with the help of Seton-Watson and Wickham Steed, secured a lecturing position at London’s King’s College and founded the Czech Press Bureau in London.¹⁷ The two also assisted in the creation of the Press Bureau’s propaganda publications, including the *La Nation Tchèque* and *The New Europe*.¹⁸

¹⁵ For example, see Henry Wickham Steed, “Nemesis in Hungary—Future of the Magyars—A Tyrant Oligarchy,” *The Times*, 20 January 1915, 9.

¹⁶ Edvard Beneš, *Détruisez l'Autriche-Hongrie! Le martyre des Tchéco-Slovaques* (Paris: Delagrave, 1916). The English-language translation appeared in 1917 under the title *Bohemia's Case for Independence* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1917).

¹⁷ Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1918* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40-1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

These publications, especially the latter, were presented as scholarly journals lending further credibility to the propaganda they carried out. It was on the pages of these publications that Seton-Watson, Steed, and émigré politicians sowed the seeds of distrust about the Dual Monarchy's ability to secure peace and began the campaign that represented Hungary as the domineering force within the empire, and one that was almost solely responsible for the war. For example, Seton Watson explained the origins of the First World War on the pages of the journal *The New Europe* in a following way: “. . . this is not only a German War, but also a Magyar War. Nay more, it is as much a Magyar War as it is a German War: for the Magyars have done more than any other people to create that electrical atmosphere in South-Eastern Europe which produced the fatal explosion.”¹⁹ The journal continued driving home the point about Hungary's war-guilt. In a 1917 article, Seton-Watson simply introduced the Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza as “the masterful Tisza, whom our reader knows as one of those responsible for the European war.”²⁰ Another approach employed was to use atrocity stories to establish parallels between “Teutonic Huns” and the “savage Magyars.” Once again, *The New Europe* illustrates this point. “It is not the custom of The New Europe to deal with atrocities,” the editorial begins. However for all of those who asked why the Yugoslavs and Czechs will not favor home rule within the Dual Monarchy the journal offered a document—supposedly based on a report from the Croatian newspaper *Novosti*—about the brutality of Hungarian soldiers in the Balkan, a “veritable Witches' Sabbath, which filled the spectators with loathing and horror.” The editor notes as a fact that a “single

¹⁹ R.W. Seton-Watson, “The Roumanians of Hungary,” *The New Europe* 1, no. 1 (19 October 1916-11 January 1917): 20.

²⁰ Rubicon [R.W. Seton-Watson], “Half-Gods in Hungary,” *The New Europe* 4, no. 41 (July 26, 1917): 38.

Magyar battalion had 1,000 yards of rope with it, when it was sent from Sarajevo to the frontier. At Tuzla (today in Bosnia and Herzegovina) over 300 Serbs were seen hanging on trees.”²¹ These kinds of atrocity stories were coupled with another propaganda theme, which offered an introduction to the history, culture, and politics of the various nationalities that constituted the Habsburg Empire. The general idea was to emphasize that the southern Slavs, Romanians, Czechs, and Slovaks suffered under the yoke of their Hungarian and German overlords and a need for territorial reorganization.²²

In order to centralize anti-Habsburg propaganda and win more support for the destruction of the Dual Monarchy, Crewe House organized a number of inter-allied propaganda conferences. First there were meetings in Paris (March 6-8, 1918) and then in the Crewe House in London (March 14, 1918), before the establishment of the Central Inter-allied Propaganda Commission or Padua Commission (April 18, 1918-June, 1918).²³ The Padua Commission, which was actually organized in cooperation with the Italian High Command, built an impressive network that included links to the Czechoslovak National Council, the Yugoslav Committee, and of course, Crewe House.

²¹ “How Austria-Hungary Treats the Yugoslavs,” *The New Europe* 5, no. 60 (October 18, 1917): 153-57.

²² According to historian Tibor Glant, anti-Habsburg and anti-Hungarian propaganda in the United States employed four themes: 1) prove war-guilt; 2) use of atrocity stories; 3) emphasize historical and cultural accomplishment of the various nationalities; and 4) offer a plea for support in regard to the postwar reorganization of Austria-Hungary. While Glant’s study establishes these approaches in connection to propaganda carried out in the US, I think that these factors are more than applicable to this analysis as well. Tibor Glant, *Through the Prism of the Habsburg Monarchy: Hungary in American Diplomacy and Public Opinion During World War I* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs distributed by Columbia University Press, 1998), 147. On the changing Hungarian –US relations see Tibor Frank, *Ethnicity, Propaganda and Myth-Making: Studies on Hungarian Connections to Britain and America, 1848-1945* (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1999); and Tibor Frank, *Roosevelt követe Budapesten* (Budapest: Corvina, 2002).

²³ Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, 197, 202-228.

According to the painstaking research of Mark Cornwall, during its seventeen-month existence the Padua Commission produced 492 different leaflets in ten languages.²⁴

With the help of émigrés, anti-Habsburg and anti-Hungarian propaganda was present on the other side of the Atlantic as well. For example, the Bohemian National Alliance's diligence was essential in bringing the "Czechoslovak question" to the US political theater. The Alliance and the Slav Press Bureau, with its close ties to the Czechoslovak National Council, made its initial move before the US entered the war. These organizations sent individual letters, along with copies of Tomáš Čapek's *The Slovaks of Hungary: Slavism and Panslavism* and prints of *The New Europe*, to every US senator and representative.²⁵ In September 1917, when President Wilson established the Inquiry, a collection of scholars that were to examine the European situation and advise the president, Czechoslovak émigrés were ready. The organization was directed by Colonel Edward M. House. Among its members were the founding editor of *The New Republic*, Walter Lippmann, geographer Isaiah Bowman, and historian James Shotwell. The Czechoslovak National Council greatly benefited from the Inquiry's and Wilson's lack of geographical, historical, and cultural knowledge of the region. As the last Austro-Hungarian ambassador to the United States, Konstantin Dumba, put it "the utter ignorance of facts and geography displayed by Wilson . . . were the Czechs' best allies."²⁶ The Czechoslovak nationalists were able to convince the Wilson administration

²⁴ Ibid., 445-53.

²⁵ Charles Pergler, *America in the Struggle for Czechoslovak Independence* (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company Publishers, 1926), 58-64.

²⁶ Quoted in Nicole Marie Phelps, "Sovereignty, Citizenship, and the New Liberal Order: US-Habsburg Relations and the Transformation of International Politics, 1880-1924" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2008), 318.

that Bohemians, Moravians, and Slovaks formed a single cohesive ethnic unit. Just as importantly, they also successfully conveyed that the new Czechoslovak state—which was to replace oppressive Habsburg rule—would be a model democratic state that will uphold the ideals of the American Revolution.²⁷

Other émigré groups also found a way to influence US public opinion. The style and message of Romanian-born American writer Konrad Bercovici, for example, differed very little from those of his counterparts publishing in London and Paris. His article, “Hungarian Lust for World Power,” presented Hungarians to American readers as follows: “The cruelty and intolerance of the Magyars is as proverbial in the Balkans as is their arrogance and stupidity. Long of arms, bowlegged, with fierce mouth and deep-seated, small eyes, the Magyar is the typical savage of history. Like his brother, the Teuton, he is an abject slave and a horrible master.”²⁸ In the same piece he directly addressed the United States and argued that if the US would not take charge of the region, the consequences will be nothing short of horrific:

After this war is over Eastern Europe will be turned into a charnel-house. The mad passion, the blood lust so long repressed of all those thinly veneered barbarians [Hungarians, Germans, and Turks] will be given free play. Dark days are awaiting Eastern Europe. The peaceful readjustment of boundaries based on equitable principles of nationality will only be possible if a strong and disinterested hand directs it. Like the German, the Magyar does not desire a place in the sun; he wants all the space under the great luminary. There is only one way to prevent terrible bloodshed in the Near East at the close of this war—the United States Government must see to it that all the nations of the Balkan Peninsula form

²⁷ Ibid., 318-319.

²⁸ Konrad Bercovici, “Hungarian Lust for World Power,” *The New York Times* (17 May 1918), 53.

a federated republic like our own. This would prevent future wars and save the Balkan peoples from the Kultur of the Teuton, Turk, and Magyar.²⁹

Austria-Hungary lost the propaganda war. While it is true that the Dual Monarchy too carried out propaganda, it was more limited in its scope. These activities sought to depict the monarchy as the bulwark of European culture against the barbaric tides from the East. Russia was depicted as a deadly threat to European ideals of liberty and honor: it was a war of worldviews and battle of cultures, as some newspapers referred to it. They also carried out a largely unsuccessful propaganda campaign against Italy.³⁰ The *Kriegspressequartier* (War Press Office), a unit within the *Armeeoberkommando* (Austrian High Command), controlled press releases and regulated both domestic and foreign correspondence.³¹ In order to counter the influence of enemy propaganda, both the Austrian and the Hungarian halves of the empire introduced strict censorship of the press. But this is as far as their efforts went. In general, most of the Austro-Hungarian leadership remained cold to the idea of propaganda. Emperor Karl I of Austria (Karl IV in Hungary), grandnephew of Franz Josef, summarized his stand on propaganda when he reiterated that ideas “could not be recommended like laxatives, toothpaste, and foodstuff.”³² Similar was the judgment of the former Austro-Hungarian Chef of Staff,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, 74-104.

³¹ Andrea Orzoff, “The Empire without Qualities: Austro-Hungarian Newspapers and the Outbreak of War in 1914,” in *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War*, ed. Troy R. E. Paddock (Westport, CT and London: Praeger Press, 2004), 167, 172, and 185.

³² Ibid., 186.

Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf. He viewed the Entente propaganda campaign as despicable, vulgar, and dishonorable.³³

In the end Austria-Hungary not only failed to fight the propaganda war, but lost the actual war too. There were undoubtedly a number of reasons behind the collapse of the monarchy. Most historians would agree that it was the monarchy's failure to unite its people, to secure their continued loyalty and to offer something in exchange, and the overall stresses of war that led to the dissolution. The role of propaganda in this collapse and the actual influence of propaganda in the decision to dissolve the monarchy and establish nation-states is a matter of debate. However, the crucial fact was that the Hungarian elite were convinced that losing the propaganda war was the reason for losing the war, and then territories.

Hungarian inactivity on the field of propaganda during the war does not mean that there were no voices calling for action. On December 7, 1915, Count Mihály Károlyi—one of the country's few self-identified pacifists—gave a speech in the Hungarian Parliament. He emphasized the need for genuine electoral and constitutional reform, not the least because this would prove to the world that the Hungarian nation was just as civilized as any other. As he put it: “We are not highwaymen [*betyár*], we are not a nation of Gypsies, now and for all time, we, object to being represented as some sort of an outlaw nomadic nation, barbaric, savage, a nation of highwaymen, a country of

³³ “While we conducted the war according to traditional practices, our enemy did so with all the tricks of modern skullduggery. . . . In a vulgar fashion, the Entente states soiled the chivalrous clothing of their soldiers with a dirty filth of a base and despicable propaganda, which reckoned on the grossest stupidity and depravity of the masses.” Quoted in Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, 8.

wranglers [*csikós nemzet*] . . .”³⁴ Even conservative statesmen like Count Albert Apponyi began to address the question of the country’s foreign image. He pointed rather bitterly to the role that Lord Northcliffe’s media empire and the Reuters monopoly played in Hungary’s foreign presentation. However, he too emphasized that one should not be surprised that the country had such a negative image, for the Hungarians had failed to provide information about the nation’s achievements, just as they had failed to combat the negative depiction of the country in the foreign press and public opinion.³⁵ The journalist-turned-diplomat Gyula Gesztesi argued that with the exception of Germany no other nation was more “hated” than Hungary. The reason behind this, he claimed, was the lack of Hungarian efforts to establish an organized “media policy.” As an example Gesztesi pointed out that the Ukrainian National Press Bureau in 1916 alone produced thirty-six daily (and weekly) papers and magazines in Ukrainian, French, English, German, Hungarian, Russian, and even Esperanto and circulated them in cities such as in Vienna, Berlin, Budapest, Munich, and Cleveland. Even more eye-opening for Hungarians, continued the author, should have been the success of the efforts of Czechs and Yugoslavs. Gesztesi argued that, in the past, for example after the 1848 Revolution, the Hungarian elite paid due attention to the media and Hungary’s national image. The Hungarian émigré press bureau in Brussels helped to keep the Hungarians’ struggle at the forefront of people’s minds on the continent and beyond. He further argued that this sort of commitment to European public opinion was necessary and should be the example to

³⁴ *Képviselőházi Napló*, XXVII. kötet, 1910, 318 (December 7, 1915).

³⁵ Gróf Apponyi Albert, “Előszó,” in Gyula Gesztesi, *A magyarság a világsajtóban: magyar sajtópolitika* (Budapest: Dick Manó, 1918), 1-12. This collection of studies first appeared in 1916 and 1917 on the pages of the *Új Nemzedék*.

follow.³⁶ In December 1918 another intellectual, Alpár Rejőd, argued that Hungary could no longer afford to ignore international public opinion and in fact should view the “past ten years of self-conscious work” of the surrounding nationalities as an example to follow. He was especially critical of the Hungarian government’s lack of attention to émigré communities. He told the story of a high-ranking Hungarian diplomat, who refused to make use of Hungarian clubs abroad because to him “beer-breath-smelling” clubs and their “bowling nights” were not acceptable places for information exchange. Rejőd maintained that Hungary could not afford this sort of attitude and must use every available means to promote the country abroad.³⁷ Indeed, by the end of 1918 Hungary needed a sympathetic foreign audience more than ever because Western powers were gathering in Paris to decide upon the future of the region.

Hungarian Dreamland and its Destruction, 1918-1920³⁸

On October 17, 1918, the Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza announced: “I must acknowledge that what Count Mihály Károlyi said yesterday is the truth. We have lost this war.” He continued, “We could make our enemy’s final victory an expensive one

³⁶ Gesztesi, *A magyarság a világsajtóban*, 14-17.

³⁷ Alpár Rejőd, *A külföldi propaganda új alapjai* (Budapest: Károlyi György kő-és könyvnyomdája, 1919), 1-8. The pamphlet was published in the series sponsored by the World Federation of Hungarians (Külföldi Magyarok Világszövetsége). The study originally appeared on the pages of *Magyarországi* on December 15, 1918. I thank Michael Miller for sending this source to me.

³⁸ This section is based on my MA thesis. Zsolt Nagy, “The Hungarian Dreamland and its Leaders: the 1918 Hungarian Democratic Revolution, Mihály Károlyi and Oszkár Jászi,” (MA Thesis, University of Chicago, 2006).

. . . yet we have no more hope of winning this war, hence we must seek a peace.”³⁹ Count Károlyi demanded swift and explicit action, fearing that the existing government would not be able to deal with the domestic situation. He called for the resignation of the cabinet and the proclamation of an independent Hungary:

The most important thing is to make peace. It would be a sin to support any illusion contrary to this fact. . . . In the foreign political situation, just as in the domestic state of affairs we are facing entirely novel problems hence we must follow a new orientation. The political course followed hitherto has utterly failed. . . . In the future we ought to conduct a nationality policy, which corresponds with the spirit of the time. . . . We must openly take a new stand on the basis of pacifism, and we must accept this, as the sole foundation of our future.⁴⁰

On November 1, after receiving news that the emperor had named Count János Hadik as prime minister despite the fact that he represented the old regime, the city of Budapest rose in revolt. The short and, with the important exception of the assassination of István Tisza, relatively bloodless revolution triumphed and the National Council under the presidency of Károlyi took power.⁴¹ In an essay entitled “At the First Moment,” Hungary’s famed poet Mihály Babits declared that the triumph of the revolution was a miracle. He compared the achievement that transformed “feudal, half-dead, militaristic Hungary of Tisza” into an “independent, liberal and radical republic,” to the wonders of

³⁹ József Östör, *Tisza István saját szavaiban* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1927), 143.

⁴⁰ Károlyi quoted in *Az Est*, 17 October 1918, 1.

⁴¹ The Károlyi-led bourgeois democratic revolution and its legacy is still a divisive issue in Hungary. Closer examination of the topic is outside the purview of this study. I am interested in it in so far as it shows the way Hungarians gravitated toward propaganda and cultural diplomacy. For more on the topic, see: Iván Völgyes, ed., *Hungary in Revolution, 1918-19* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1971); Peter Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918-1919 and the Big Three* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); Tibor Hajdu, *Az 1918- as magyarországi polgári demokratikus forradalom* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968).

the folktales.⁴² Even Károlyi's political opponents, a group that interestingly enough included his father-in-law Count Gyula Andrásy, gave him their support. Andrásy later wrote that "public opinion expected an immediate and favorable peace only from Károlyi, a fact which gave him and the revolution an enormous power. Even Károlyi's greatest enemies wanted him to take power."⁴³ Károlyi's wife remembered how Andrásy accepted political defeat: "Now it is Mihály's turn. He wagered on the winning horse. Now he must show what he can do! We all must support him in this situation."⁴⁴ Károlyi had every reason to feel confident that with the support of nearly the entire country he and his government would be able to take on any of the challenges they faced, internally or externally. With this moment the country, its people, and its leadership arrived at the stage historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls the "state of unreality – or dreamland."⁴⁵ Perhaps surprisingly, one of the foreign prophets of this, newly independent "dreamland" was President Woodrow Wilson.

After his January 8, 1918, speech, in which he laid out his famous Fourteen Points, the American president enjoyed an unprecedented level of popularity in Hungary. Most papers carried his speech. Wilson's collected works became a national bestseller and flew off the shelves with such speed that they had to be reprinted. "Since the Wilsonian principles will become the foundation of the forthcoming peace treaty," argued

⁴² Mihály Babits, "Az első pillanatban," *Nyugat* 21-22 (1918), accessed: December 18, 2011, http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/index_abc_sz.htm.

⁴³ Count Julius Andrásy, *Diplomacy and the War* (London: John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, 1921), 285.

⁴⁴ Mrs. Mihály Károlyi, *Együtt a forradalomban* (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1973), 261.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Co., 2003), 10.

a Budapest daily, “it is the duty of all cultivated men to know and understand the works of the American president.”⁴⁶ The general public was convinced that he was the “only politician in the world who will be able to forge peace.”⁴⁷ The sudden rise of Wilsonianism in Hungary can be explained by investigating not Wilsonian principles *per se*, but rather how the Hungarians perceived them. Many believed in the promise of Wilsonianism. It offered a program for ending the war, and more importantly perhaps, it was viewed as an ideology that could be applied to solve the challenges Hungary was facing. It was believed that President Wilson’s principles were compatible with the leadership’s aims, which were to maintain the country’s territorial integrity through a system of confederation and the institution of plebiscite. Károlyi argued in the Manifesto of the Hungarian National Council (October, 16 1918) that Hungary must provide to all non-Hungarian nationalities the opportunity for national self-determination. He claimed that the acceptance of Wilsonian principles “will not endanger us, rather it will provide a solid foundation” for a future of Hungary.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Károlyi Party also advocated the idea of “safeguarding and assuring” autonomy for the nationalities within Hungary, which were to be reorganized and reformed in the “spirit of civic democracy, universal equality and civic liberty,” as expounded by Wilson, declared the party’s outline.⁴⁹ This kind of “Hungarian Wilsonianism” was the only ideological choice that offered the possibility of Hungary’s rapprochement, as an independent country, with the

⁴⁶ “Wilson beszédei és üzenetei,” *Az Est*, December 10, 1918, 7.

⁴⁷ “Miért fordult a monarchia Wilsonhoz?” *Az Est*, October 6, 1918, 5.

⁴⁸ From the Manifesto of the Hungarian National Council in Tibor Hetés, *A magyarországi forradalmak krónikája*, (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1969), 61.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Gyula Mérei, *A Magyar Októberi forradalom és a polgári pártok* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969), 153.

Western world. Moreover, Wilson's demand for the democratization of the monarchy legitimized the revolution and the aims of the Károlyi government. As Károlyi himself said: "I loathe more and more the social order of the old world with its injustice, cruelty, corruption and falsehood; I longed for a more humane one based on the works read in my youth and to which now I reverted, through the impetus of Wilsonian ideals."⁵⁰

Internationalism and pacifism for Károlyi was a matter of conviction. He was especially influenced by the "type of pacifism that was preached by Wilson."⁵¹ In his memoir he recalled that Wilson and his pacifism was a historical force behind his fight. He argued that Wilsonian pacifism and its promise offered a new outlook, new prospects and the assurance of a new world for all humankind.⁵² "We had confidence in the democratic and pacifist quality of public opinion and especially in the policy of President Wilson, a policy that stood higher than any mere nationalism," wrote Oszkár Jászi, Károlyi's Minister of Nationalities.⁵³ Károlyi was also confident—mistakenly, as we now know—that Wilson's vision would carry the day. He wrote: "My foreign policy is based on Wilsonian ideals. We have only one ideology: Wilson, Wilson, and for the third time Wilson. I am sure that Wilson will win not only in America but in Europe as well. The role of America is to remake Europe, extirpating the idea of revenge and creating a peace

⁵⁰ Mihály Károlyi, *Memoirs of Michael Károlyi: Faith without Illusion*, trans. Catherine Karolyi (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1957), 85.

⁵¹ Mihály Károlyi, *Egy egész világ ellen* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1965), 215. To what degree was Wilson a pacifist could be debated, but what is important here that Károlyi viewed him as such.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Oscar (Oszkár) Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1924), 37.

that will not leave people embittered.”⁵⁴ Little did he know, or want to know, that President Wilson’s position was far from secure, for he faced challenges both at home and abroad.

Not only did Wilson lack support at home; he lost his influence on the international arena as well. The latest research on the topic indicates that Wilson’s refusal to recognize the validity of secret deals and promises made during the war contributed to his diminishing capacity to realize his goals.⁵⁵ At the same time, the influence of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau grew significantly. The relationship between the three was far from ideal. The latter was quoted saying to Colonel House: “Talk with Wilson! How can I talk to a fellow who think himself as the first man in two thousand year to know anything about peace on earth . . . I get on with you. You are practical. I understand you, but talking to Wilson is something like talking to Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶ Nor was his own staff fully in agreement with the President. Robert Lansing, Secretary of State under Wilson, concluded early on that the Wilsonian principle of self-determination would jeopardize the peace process: “The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite. It will raise hopes which can never be realized. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives. In the end it is bound to be discredited, to be called the dream of an idealist who failed to realize the danger until too late . . . What a calamity that the phrase was ever uttered! What a misery it will cause!”⁵⁷ The overall demand for

⁵⁴ Quoted in Peter Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 90.

⁵⁵ Norman A. Graebner and Edward M. Bennett, *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy: the Failure of the Wilsonian Vision* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 40.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Graebner and Bennett, *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy*, 40.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Graebner and Bennett, *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy*, 50.

national self-determination became so extensive that even Colonel House noted that the idea “has become a craze and in many instances ridiculous.”⁵⁸ The non-Magyar nationalities—more than 50 percent of the population—of the Hungary did not think of the idea as “ridiculous” and they pushed for independence. Károlyi faced not only face the challenge of Wilson’s diminishing influence but also had to cope with an explosive nationalities problem as well.

The nationality question was, as Oszkár Jászi readily acknowledged it, “the Archimedes point for the future of Hungarian democracy and independence.”⁵⁹ The relationship between the Magyar elite and the non-Magyar nationalities had been steadily declining since 1848 and worsened after the 1867 Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich*, or Compromise. The non-Magyar nationalities—with the exception of the Croats—did not receive rights and privileges they hoped for. As the Nationalities Act XLIV of 1868 stated:

In accordance with the basic principles of the Constitution, all subjects of Hungary politically form a single nation, the indivisible unitary Hungarian nation, of which every citizen, whatever his ethnic affiliation, is a member with equal rights. . . . By virtue of the political unity of the nation, the state language of Hungary being Hungarian, the sole language of debate and administration in the Hungarian parliament shall continue henceforth to be Hungarian.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Jászi, quoted in Péter Hanák, *Jászi Oszkár dunai patriotizmusa* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1985), 51.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina and Osiris, 1999), 64-65.

The subsequent generation went even further. They refused all “aspirations to polyglot status” and referred to them as mere “political vulgarities.”⁶¹ A period of “Magyar-ization,” or forced assimilation of other nationalities followed.⁶² Some of the strongest measures of Magyarization were authorized by Count Albert Apponyi in the 1907 law known as “*Lex Apponyi*,” which was to ensure the dominance of Hungarian in education. Consequently the number of ethnic schools was cut by half and only 20 percent of the country’s primary schools were permitted to teach in non-Magyar languages.⁶³ The idea was to create a new type of “Magyar gentleman.” Contemporary historian Béla Grünwald depicted this transformation as a meat-grinder: non-Magyar boys were forced in at the one end, and Magyar gentlemen, alienated from their ethnic group and cultural heritage, emerged at the other.⁶⁴ The supremacy of the Magyars was well represented in all spheres of life. In 1910, approximately 96 percent of civil servants, 91.6 percent of all public employees, 96.8 percent of judges and public prosecutors, 91.5 percent of secondary school teachers and 89 percent of medical doctors spoke (or claimed to speak) Hungarian as their mother-tongue.⁶⁵ When in the fall of 1918 Károlyi dispatched Jászi to seek a compromise with the nationalities, he presented the idea of a Danubian Confederation, a federalized structure for the monarchy based on the Swiss

⁶¹ Romsics, *Hungary*, 65.

⁶² The degree of “forced” assimilation is still a contested issue among historians. Some, like László Kontler, argue that the “dimensions of forced Magyarization have been often exaggerated” and asserts that “on the whole the treatment of the national minorities in Hungary before the First World War could still be described as relatively tolerant, especially compared with contemporary Eastern and South-eastern Europe.” See László Kontler, *A History of Hungary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 292.

⁶³ Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians. A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, trans. Ann Major (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 300.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Lendvai, *The Hungarians*, 300.

⁶⁵ Data in Lendvai, *The Hungarians*, 301.

model. The arrangement included five federal states: Hungary without Croatia and Slavonia, Austria, territories of the Czech Crown, Poland, and a Croatian led Illyria that would include Serbia, while there was a possibility for enlargement with the joining of Romania. Since there were large numbers of minorities within all the proposed member states Jászi guaranteed territorial and cultural autonomy.⁶⁶ Despite the hopes of Károlyi, the plan offered too little and came too late.

Yet the most debilitating issue that the Károlyi government had to face was the lack of international recognition of Hungary and his government. The Western powers not only had control over the new boundaries, but also had the power to confer or, as in the case of Hungary, withhold recognition and legitimacy of the new states. Károlyi and his entourage traveled to Belgrade on the November 8, 1918, to negotiate an armistice with the commander in chief of the Allied Army of the Orient, the French general Louis Franchet d'Esperey.⁶⁷ The general (“who put on the airs of Napoleon, and showed an ignorance and a narrowness which would have disgraced a Breton village domain”⁶⁸) and the treaty guaranteed the jurisdiction of Hungary over its territory and decided on the military demarcation lines. The delegation left Belgrade with a sense of accomplishment not realizing that the Allied Supreme Council recognized the convention as being “of

⁶⁶ For more on this, see Oszkár Jászi, *Magyarország jövője és a Dunai Egyesült Államok* (Budapest: Új Magyarország Részvénytársaság, 1918); Oszkár Jászi, *Homage to Danubia*, ed. György Litván (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1995); and György Litván, “Oszkár Jászi’s Danube Federation Theories,” in Ignác Romsics and Béla K. Király eds., *Geopolitics in the Danube Region* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

⁶⁷ Peter Pastor, “Major Trends in Hungarian Foreign Policy from the Collapse of the Monarchy to the Peace Treaty of Trianon,” *Hungarian Studies* 17:1 (2003), 5.

⁶⁸ Oscar Jászi, *Revolution*, 53. According to some sources the general was especially taken aback by the presence of the Jewish Baron Lajos Hatvany. See Arno J Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918-1919* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 523.

purely military character with no political significance,” thus it did not represent the sought after political recognition that Károlyi had wished for.⁶⁹ The withholding of this acknowledgment encouraged the neighboring states to embark on the occupation of Hungarian lands. During the months of November and December the Czechoslovak, Serbian, Romanian armies occupied large parts of the country. The occupiers, disregarding the Belgrade convention’s decision concerning Hungarian jurisdiction, did away with the Hungarian public and civic administration in the areas they took over. They were able to do so with virtually no military opposition. The returning troops (1.2 million) were disarmed and discharged, which later contributed Hungary’s own “stab-in-the-back” legend.

Károlyi made repeated pleas to the Great Powers, personally appealing to Wilson to no avail. On January 18, 1919, The Paris Peace Conference opened without representation from the Károlyi government. Károlyi bitterly commented that “[e]veryone is disappointed with me, yet nobody offers a helping hand. The Entente will not recognize my government, saying that it is not stable. Yet, who could form a stable government under the current circumstances?”⁷⁰ He argued that excessive territorial demands of Czechoslovakia and Romania would endanger Hungarian democracy and even aid the growth of Bolshevism. Romania’s Ion I. C. Brătianu on the other hand accused Károlyi of encouraging Bolshevism and claimed that the Romanian incorporation of Transylvania was a necessity in order to have a strong barrier against Bolshevik Russia. A similar argument was presented by the Czechoslovak

⁶⁹ Pastor, “Major Trends,” 5.

⁷⁰ Quoted in *Az Est*, January 29, 1919, 1.

representatives, who, like their Romanian counterparts, made their territorial demands known in February.⁷¹ In the beginning of March Károlyi publically indicated that he would not sign a treaty enshrining territorial demands against Hungary, yet he also voiced his hopes that Wilsonian ideals would be victorious at the conference.⁷² To promote his vision (peace without territorial reorganization) abroad the Károlyi government established the Országos Propaganda Bizottság (National Propaganda Committee). It was this organ that devised the slogan “*Nem! Nem! Soha!*” (“No! No! Never!”), which became not only the rallying cry of Hungarian irredentist organizations for years to come, but also a formulaic source for the stereotypical representation of Hungarians. On March 20, Colonel Vix (sometimes referred to as Vyx), the head of the Allied Military Mission in Budapest, presented Károlyi with the new territorial demands, known as the Vix Memorandum.⁷³ When Károlyi and his Minister of Defense, Vilmos Böhm, suggested that the demands were unacceptable and it could lead to the disintegration of a democratic government and even the growth Bolshevism, Vix replied in German: “*Das ist mir ganz egal*” (“I could not care less”).⁷⁴ The next day Károlyi resigned, and this paved the way for the Bolshevik rule of Béla Kun. The Károlyi government had come to an end largely because it failed to gain the necessary international recognition. The Western powers’ refusal to grant legitimacy to Károlyi meant the end of the Hungarian experience with liberal democracy as well. This was something that even Lloyd George

⁷¹ Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*, 522.

⁷² Károlyi quoted in *Az Est*, March 4, 1919, 4.

⁷³ On the negotiations and plans, see Mária Ormos, *From Padua to the Trianon 1918-1920*, trans. Miklós Uszkay (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁷⁴ Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*, 547.

acknowledged: “We cannot be blind to what just has happened in Hungary. Károlyi was favorable to us and endeavoring to work with us, but found no encouragement.”⁷⁵

It was rather clear to everyone both at home and abroad that early support for the Bolshevik regime was not the result of some sort of sudden change of heart about its actual ideology.⁷⁶ It was nationalism that allowed Kun to take power, not Bolshevism. He was aware of this as well. He promptly rejected the Vix Memorandum and began to establish the Hungarian Red Army. A number of leading former K.u.K (Austro-Hungarian Imperial and Royal Army) officers joined Kun and promised to fight every enemy that threatened the country’s territorial integrity. His saber-rattling did not go unnoticed. Fear of the Russian Red Army and a Bolshevik Revolution in Germany further motivated the Great Powers. The Allied Commission sent the South African-British general Jan Smuts to negotiate with Kun. General Smuts offered certain modifications to the Vix Memorandum and an invitation to the Paris Conference. It was the sort of an international recognition that Károlyi was unable to secure during his brief tenure. Yet the same force that put him to power also limited his freedom to act. He could not accept mere alterations; that would not satisfy the population. Kun was forced to action. Despite the patriotic fervor of the troops, the military brilliance of Lt. Colonel Aurél Stromfeld, and some success in Slovakia, shortage of food and other materials and the lack of hoped-for Russian support coupled with the destabilizing—and at times brutally executed—policies of the government led to the disintegration of the army. On August 1, 1919 Kun and some of his closest allies fled to Vienna, and from there to Moscow, while Romanian

⁷⁵ Quoted in Peter Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 147.

⁷⁶ See, for example, the analysis put forward by *The Times*. “Bolshevist Rule in Hungary,” *The Times*, March 24, 1919, 12.

troops occupied Budapest. The counterrevolutionary forces under the leadership of the last admiral of the Austro-Hungarian Navy, Miklós Horthy, were gathering at the southern city of Szeged.

Unlike the pacifist Károlyi, the conservative Horthy was recognized as the head of the Hungarian government by the Allies. During the subsequent White Terror—which was carried out in retaliation for the preceding Red Terror that preceded it—paramilitary troops brutalized the countryside. The final death toll was between 3,000 and 5,000 people, including many Jews who were labeled as instigators and supporters of the Bolshevik regime. On March 1, 1920, Horthy was elected Regent of Hungary. Yet, he was not able to stop what was coming either. On June 4, 1920—despite Hungarian pleas for a plebiscite—representatives of the Hungarian Kingdom signed the Treaty of Trianon. The war was over, but a new war, a war waged on a different battlefield had just begun.

Hungary, 1920-1927: From Turmoil to Consolidation

In 1920 Hungary was economically fragile, politically divided, and internationally isolated. At Trianon the country lost its salt, gold, and silver mines. Only 38 percent of the railway network remained within the new borders. The country that once was one of the leading exporters of timber was now reliant on imports. Overall agricultural production in 1920 made up 50 to 60 percent of that prior the war. Industrial output in the same year was about 35 to 40 percent of that before the First World War. A stagnant economy coupled with rampant inflation led to hunger and misery. This was especially

true of those 350,000 to 400,000 refugees arriving from the detached territories.⁷⁷ It soon became apparent that the country could not recover without substantial international loans. However, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia supported by France opposed any loan to Hungary.

In addition to economic problems the country was also politically divided. In 1920 the three political groups—democrats, right wing radicals, and conservatives—had their daggers drawn. Somewhat unexpectedly, Horthy, who came to power as a symbol of the radical Right, appointed first Pál Teleki, then in April 1921, Count István Bethlen as prime minister. The conservative Bethlen remained in power for more than a decade and his regime can be credited with the consolidation of conservative power, economic recovery, and stabilization. The 1922 new electoral law curtailed the number of electives. After the 1919 electoral reforms, 40 percent of the total population was entitled to vote. After the 1922 restructuring this figure went down to 28 percent. This was not a uniquely Hungarian-state of affairs. Yugoslavia (23 percent), Switzerland (25 percent), France (28 percent), and Belgium (30 percent) had similarly restrictive electoral systems, while Germany (61 percent), Austria (59 percent) and Great Britain (47 percent) boasted much higher numbers.⁷⁸ Bethlen made a compromise with democratic and social democratic forces (the Communist party was outlawed) and the improving circumstances weakened the support of the radical Right. Many of leading figures, from Gyula Gömbös to Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, gravitated toward Bethlen.⁷⁹ Another domestic challenge was the

⁷⁷ Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. Században* (Budapest: Osiris, 2005), 154.

⁷⁸ Based on Hirata Takesi's work, used in Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 224.

⁷⁹ For more on domestic policy, see Thomas Lorman, *Counter-Revolutionary Hungary, 1920-1925: István Bethlen and the Politics of Consolidation* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs. Distributed by

status of Karl IV, the last emperor of the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire. As the Apostolic King of Hungary he laid claim to the throne of Hungary. In this he was supported by royalist circles of the country. He attempted to return to Hungary and claim the throne twice during 1921. The first peaceful attempt during the spring of that year failed. The second attempt, on October 23, 1921, led to violence between the opposing groups. Ultimately the royalist coup failed. On November 6, 1921, the Hungarian Diet proclaimed the dethronement of Karl IV, who was exiled by the Great Powers to the island of Madeira, where he died in April 1922. The country remained a kingdom with Regent Miklós Horthy at the helm: a kingdom without a king. Yet Horthy did not wield dictatorial powers. His rule was based on a parliamentary system, albeit one with limited representation and power.

The Horthy regime, while legally recognized, was isolated at the international level. In 1922 there only eight countries were not part of the League of Nations: Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Mexico, the United States, Bolshevik Russia, Turkey, and Hungary. The Little Entente—an alliance among Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia devised under French tutelage—further limited Hungarian maneuvering room in the new international setting. This military and political pact sought to circumvent the restoration of Habsburg rule, keeping Hungary and Hungarian irredentism in check, thus creating a common voice in the international scene. The main goal for Hungary was to break out from its international and diplomatic isolation.

Hungarian efforts were countered by the Little Entente's determination to secure the peace and the territorial restructuring that accompanied it. The lesson they learned

Columbia University Press, 2006). This book is an especially important source for understanding the 1922 election and the rapprochement between Bethlen and the Social Democrats.

during the war was that propaganda works. Thus, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia remained committed to continue their propaganda. However, this propaganda had to be less confrontational and less propagandistic. They continued to utilize previously built relationships as new, and more refined, scholarly publications and political magazines were added to time-tested venues such as of newspaper articles and popular books. The League of Nations' monthly list of selected articles show a bewildering number of publications that offered expert analysis—from a Czechoslovak and Romanian point of view—on the “Hungarian problem” and the role of the new states in securing European wide peace and prosperity. Seton-Watson and his colleagues continued to publish on the behalf of their wartime allies on the pages of the *Contemporary Review*, *Current History*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Spectator*, *Economist*, and the newly established *Central European Observer*.⁸⁰ The brutality of the White Terror did not help matters, for most Western newspapers condemned on the happenings. The *Contemporary Review*, for example, published a very critical essay in which it quoted Horthy's alleged order to the “White Terrorists”:

The officers' troops summoned on an alarm are under the obligation of proceeding with armed force against the disturbers of the peace at the first command, and to fire a volley upon the crowd at once without the usual warning shots. The shooting must continue implacably without consideration for the number of victims. Use your arms with the consciousness that you see before you not human beings but wild beasts.⁸¹

⁸⁰ For the list of publications, see Norman S. Field, ed. *League of Nations & United Nations Monthly List of Selected Articles, Political Questions, Vol.1, 1920-1928* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications Inc., 1971).

⁸¹ Quoted in “World of Nations: Facts and Documents. The Hungarian White Terror and the Allies,” *Contemporary Review* 117 (1920), 713.

The source of the quote was the Viennese Socialist newspaper, the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. R. W. Seton-Watson's pen continued to work in the pre-1920 fashion: harsh, albeit not unreasonable criticism of Hungary as opposed to unreserved praise for Czechoslovakia and the justification of the Little Entente. Indeed, the White Terror, the Numerus Clausus (a 1920 Law limiting a percentage of Jewish students in higher education), and the continuous lack of representation of peasants and workers were without doubt events that deserved criticism. However, when Seton-Watson put the Károlyi government as the liberal model for Hungary to follow, he conveniently forgot that the Great powers refused to offer much-needed international recognition.⁸² At the time when Hungary was dependent on securing foreign loans, the international press was far from supportive. Another major publication, *The Economist*, offered a similarly unsympathetic assessment of Horthy's Hungary:

[To] the traveler fresh from Austria, present conditions in Hungary assume the light of sinister contradiction. Whereas in Austria the task of reconstruction is being faced by all sections of the people with common resolution and renewed hope, Hungary, befogged by illusions, bedevilled by suspicions and hatred, is drifting on a tide of warring interests, discontent, and despair. While the problem of Austria was never more than an economic question, over Hungary, reactionary, irredentist, and potentially dangerous, there might well be erected a sign: 'It is useless to throw economic stones at this notice-board.' Every question is confused by political issues, each factor in the grave problem which the country presents being obscured by psychological considerations.⁸³

How far one should consider the situation in Austria in the early 1920s simply as an "economic question" is debatable, but the *Economist's* characterization of Hungary as a country "befogged by illusions" was accurate. The country, which in the early 1920s was

⁸² R. W. Seton-Watson, "Hungary Under Admiral Horthy," *Contemporary Review* 121 (1922): 174-84.

⁸³ "The Problem of Hungary.-I," *The Economist*, 20 October 1923, 597.

facing economic collapse, political upheaval, international isolation, and a thoroughly negative international reputation, was indeed “befogged” by an illusion which determined its action for decades to come. It was the illusion of revisionism that actually united the otherwise divided country.

Predictably, the Hungarian reaction to the Treaty of Trianon was one of universal disbelief, horror, and anger. Indeed, it was universal in that it was not limited to any single political, social, or economic group.⁸⁴ Revisionist propaganda started soon as the treaty was signed—if not before. However, in the beginning the source of this sort of propaganda was not the government, but various private organizations, albeit those with close ties to governmental circles. The likes of Területvédő Liga (Tevél—League for the Protection of [Hungarian] Territory), Magyar Országos Véderő Egyesület (MOVE—Hungarian National Defense Force Association), Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete (ÉME—Association of Awakening Hungarians), and the Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség (Apostolic Cross Blood Alliance) were only a few of the dozens of organizations that carried out unofficial propaganda.⁸⁵ By 1921 the activities of these irredentist organizations—mostly

⁸⁴ The literature on Hungarian revisionism is vast. The best single volume study on the topic, in my opinion, is Miklós Zeidler, *Revíziós gondolat* (Budapest: Osiris Zsebkönyvtár, 2001). A revised and expanded edition was published under the same title in 2009, see: Miklós Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat* (Pozsony [Bratislava]: Kalligram, 2009). Zeidler’s English language study also offers a fine guide to this issue, see: Miklós Zeidler, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary 1920–1945*, trans. Thomas J. DeKornfeld and Helen DeKornfeld (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs. Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2007). Also see Ignác Romsics, ed., *Trianon és a magyar politikai gondolkodás, 1920–1953* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1998); and Béla Király, Peter Pastor, and Ivan Sanders, eds., *Essays on World War I: Total War and Peacemaking. A Case Study of Trianon* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982).

⁸⁵ More on these organizations, see chapter 2 in Anikó Kovács-Bertrand, *Der ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg: Der publizistische Kampf gegen den Friedensvertrag von Trianon, 1918–1931* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997). While the merit of Kovács-Bertrand’s work is unquestionable, I do not agree with her suggestion—through her periodization—that with the 1931 resignation of Bethlen Hungary’s revisionist propaganda changed dramatically. On the contrary, this study will illustrate that while traditional diplomacy indeed moved toward the Berlin-Rome axis, cultural diplomacy continued to target other locations from Great Britain through the United States to Brazil.

right wing—became so widespread that a Budapest daily asked: who actually makes the country's foreign policy? It concluded that the painful situation was that, in the past, nobody wanted to make foreign policy while nowadays everyone thinks they should.⁸⁶

The government's situation was precarious. On the one hand, as the political elite attempted to consolidate its power it could not afford to alienate the population by ignoring the very real emotions of disbelief, horror, and anger that resulted from the treaty. Nor did they want to, for anger over the treaty diverted attention from other real domestic problems, such as the situation of the peasantry and the workers. On the other hand, however, as part of the ratification of the treaty (July 26, 1921) the country was to halt the activities of irredentist organizations. More importantly, irredentist propaganda was deemed harmful to the government's aim of joining the League of Nations and securing much-needed international loans while continuing its struggle to break out of isolation. As a result, during a confidential meeting between Prime Minister István Bethlen, then Minister of Foreign Affairs Miklós Bánffy, representatives of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and the most influential leaders of social organizations, it was decided to suspend such organizations and limit similar activities in the future.⁸⁷ With this action the government took charge of revisionist propaganda. It was the beginning of a development—which was to come full circle in 1927—whereby, according to an unofficial division of labor, the unofficial propaganda in its more direct and more vitriolic fashion was conducted by societal organizations, more often than not

⁸⁶ "Minden szó," *Az Est*, July 24, 1921, 1.

⁸⁷ Zeidler, *A Revíziós gondolat* (2009), 107. See also "Irredenta szervek." *Az Est*, August 10, 1921, 1.

supported financially by the government, while the officially-conducted activity was more indirect, less propagandistic and employed the tools of cultural diplomacy.

The decision to assert governmental control over revisionist policy was a prudent decision, for the Hungarian government lacked connections, institutional settings, and organizations to compete in the new field of international public relations and, thus could not afford to alienate international public opinion. Since the 1867 *Ausgleich* Hungary and Austria had a joint foreign policy and as such a joint foreign representation was directed from the Ballhausplatz in Vienna. According to Hungarian historian and specialist on the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Pál Pritz, in the Ballhausplatz there were 292 Hungarian citizens employed out of the total of 902.⁸⁸ The Károlyi government announced the establishment of an independent Hungarian Foreign Ministry in December 1918. Yet this amounted to little more than a rhetorical separation, since Károlyi was not recognized as the legal ruler of Hungary, and as such could not offer real alternative as the country's reorganized foreign representation. For the most part, the personnel recruited during the Károlyi government remained in place even under the Kun regime. In October 1919, after the fall of Kun, Hungarian Foreign Ministry moved to its permanent location to the Dísz Square. The first embassy was established in Vienna (during the Károlyi government) and it was not until the middle of 1920 that the second embassy—in the Vatican—was opened. Consulates and missions were established in Berlin, Bern, and Warsaw. This was followed by the establishment of embassies in Paris (September 1920), London (June 1921) and Washington (January 1922).⁸⁹ By 1922 Hungary had some sort of diplomatic

⁸⁸ Pál Pritz, *Magyar diplomácia a két háború között* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1995), 20.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

representation in fourteen places and plans were being made to establish new ones. However, as Pritz points out, most of these diplomatic missions were understaffed, without connections to the foreign political elite, and in general were less than functional.⁹⁰

The establishment of the political intelligence division of the KÜM was a first step toward creating the necessary structure to carry out Hungary's campaign of cultural diplomacy. In 1920 Zoltán Gerevich suggested that the organ had hitherto overseen preparations for the Paris treaties—*Békeelőkészítő Iroda*—seemed to have lost its *raison d'être*. Nevertheless, he pointed out that this conclusion was not entirely true. In his memo he formulated the aforementioned division of labor whereby the government officially eschewed propagandistic activities, leaving it to nongovernmental organization and practicing what he called “scientific propaganda.” Gerevich argued that the main targets of this “scientific propaganda” should be foreign political and intellectual circles. Furthermore, continued Gerevich, a central organ within the KÜM would also enable the government to direct activities and coordinate with other governmental and non-governmental organs.⁹¹ The exact date of this transition remains unknown. Nonetheless, other documents suggest that the new division within the KÜM was indeed established, although its existence and much of its activity remained hidden until 1927. The main document that proves the existence of this division is an order dated November 6, 1922,

⁹⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁹¹ The document reproduced in Pritz Pál, *Iratok a magyar külügyi szolgálat történetéhez, 1918-1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1944), 79-81.

calling for an internal review of the KÜM.⁹² The subsequent memo—designated: “*Szigorúan Bizalmas!!!!*” (“Strictly Confidential” with indeed four exclamation points)—pointed out that, since the activities of the Political Intelligence Division were for the most part confidential the report should not cover the entire activity of the division.

According to the document, the main purpose of the division was to connect Hungary with “universal European social, cultural, and scientific life” in order to bring about “friendly relations” between the country and the international community. As such it was to support and assist foreign travelers visiting Hungary—individuals, students, and organized groups alike. Together with the Ministry of Culture, it was to establish student and teacher exchanges. Moreover, it was to support Hungarian exhibitions abroad. It was also designed to establish and reestablish ties between Hungarian and foreign academic and scientific institutions and to distribute official Hungarian government publications (including, but not limited to official statistics), and other academic works. Furthermore the division was likewise to supply photographs illustrating Hungarian culture, industry, and the likes to foreign magazines and presses. Finally the last nonconfidential activity of the division was to place movies “representing Hungarian life from the correct point of view” in foreign markets. Other sorts of activities listed—crossed out with pencil— were overseeing propaganda organs’ work abroad, the contact with foreign Christian groups, fighting against Bolshevik ideology, countering the negative propaganda of the White Terror, and similar counterpropaganda from Hungarian émigré groups which undermined Hungary’s interests.⁹³ In my reading, the document established not only the activities of

⁹² MOL K67, 3. csomó 1.tétel (November 6, 1922).

⁹³ MOL K67, 3. csomó 1.tétel (January 11, 1923).

the division, but also the basic tenets of the country's cultural diplomatic efforts that followed.

The KÜM, nominally led by the minister of foreign affairs but in reality by Prime Minister Bethlen, found a willing partner in Klebelsberg, minister of the VKM. Under the careful direction of Bethlen and Klebelsberg, the two institutions began to forge Hungarian cultural diplomacy. Bethlen and Klebelsberg shared the belief that Hungary must return to the community of European nations. As Bethlen said, Hungary “must be in harmony” with the rest of Europe, for Hungarians were “not living on an island, but are members of a grand family of nations.”⁹⁴ In the process they mobilized the country's cultural and, in due course, industrial production. They established a circle of politicians, intellectuals, artists, and industrialists who all shared a single belief and a single vision. They believed that that the Trianon Treaty was the result of Hungary's negative image abroad. The Hungarian political and intellectual elite believed that improving of the country's foreign image would improve the country's international standing and ultimately would lead to the revision of the treaty. To them cultural diplomacy became a tool that opened doors otherwise closed or hard to open.

At the beginning of the 1920s, Hungarian foreign policy was an ad-hoc activity. Because of the country's international isolation, there was very little space to maneuver. Various, and often contradictory, plans were drafted. For example, the Hungarian government aimed to begin secret negotiations with Czechoslovakia and Romania. Yet, at the same time they also reached out to Germany, Italy, and Bolshevik Russia, three

⁹⁴ Bethlen quoted in *Az Est*, May 9, 1922, 3.

states that had no interest in maintaining the status quo. Hungary made overtures toward Germany from the start. However, Gustav Stresemann's *Erfüllungspolitik*, which sought rapprochement with the rest of Europe, did not need a revisionist Hungary on its side. In 1924 Italy signed a friendship treaty with Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Overtures were made toward Bolshevik Russia as well. After its official establishment in 1922, the Soviet Union also was seen by a number of Hungarians as a possible partner. After all, the Soviet Union was not invited to Paris. It actually supported the idea of an independent Transylvania, it had territorial claims against Romania, and it was a potential trading partner. These overtures came to nothing because of the protests of right-wing groups and rigidly anti-Bolshevist conservative elements (the latter group including Horthy himself) opposed such an opening. Despite the fact that Hungary gained admission to the League of Nations in September 1922, the country remained isolated and its finances and developments were closely monitored by the Allied Military Commission. Finally, in the spring of 1924, Hungary received a loan from the League of Nations that was undersigned by Great Britain, the United States, Switzerland, and Italy among others. With the loan Hungary not only obliged itself to reparations, but also gave the League of Nations the right to oversee the spending of the government. The Hungarian budget and spending was supervised by one Jeremiah Smith, a lawyer from Boston.⁹⁵

Hungary's alternatives were limited by its continuing diplomatic isolation and financial difficulties until 1926/1927, when the Bethlen government, backed by Italy, was able to step out into the international arena. It was the beginnings of a new stage in

⁹⁵ Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 157.

Hungarian diplomatic activities, a period that historian Gyula Juhász aptly termed, “active foreign policy,” in which cultural diplomacy played an essential role.⁹⁶

1927: Opening a New Phase

Most historians of Hungarian foreign policy would agree that 1927 Hungarian foreign policy underwent a significant change. Benito Mussolini, alarmed by ongoing Hungarian-Yugoslav negotiations that would impact his plan to establish a strong Italian influence in Southeastern Europe, reached out to the Hungarian leadership and offered the possibility of cooperation. As Gyula Juhász points out, Hungary faced two choices. One was to continue negotiations with Yugoslavia in the hope that it would result in a weakening of the Little Entente. The other option was to halt negotiations with Yugoslavia and instead move closer to a greater power (though certainly not a Great Power). Italy was certainly not satisfied with the postwar settlements, and as such seemed a perfect partner to Hungarians. After Klebelsberg had laid the groundwork, Bethlen arrived to Rome on April 4, 1927. In his meeting with Mussolini he explained that Hungarian policy was determined by three factors: the issue of borders, the question of rearmament, and the position of the Little Entente. During the visit an Italian-Hungarian peace and friendship treaty was drafted.⁹⁷

The next date that often appears in historical studies as a watershed moment in Hungary’s road from isolation is June 21, 1927. It was on this day that a British

⁹⁶ Gyula Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1919-1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), 81. Juhász’s study is admittedly written in line the established Marxist-Leninist historical understanding. However, it was not only groundbreaking in its scope, but in my opinion it remains one of the best single-volume studies on the topic.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-5.

newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, published an editorial entitled: “Hungary’s Place in the Sun.” The piece was written by Harold Sydney Harmsworth, better known as Viscount Rothermere, media tycoon (owner of the *Daily Mail*), conservative politician, and not least brother of Lord Northcliffe. In the piece he criticized the postwar treaties and pointed out that the Treaty of Trianon was the “most ill advised.” He advocated revisions of the frontiers based on ethnic lines, which he argued was the only way to avoid further “conflagration.”⁹⁸ There has been much speculation about the reasoning behind Rothermere’s article. Some have suggested that it was written under the influence of a lady with Hungarian roots (research shows she was actually an Austro-German). Others pointed toward the Hungarian Foreign Ministry as the source of inspiration, while yet others believed that Mussolini was behind it. In his own memoir Rothermere claimed that he was not solicited in any way by anyone to take on the cause of Hungary.⁹⁹ We may never learn the truth behind Rothermere’s action, but for now it is enough to say that his article sent shockwaves through the continent from Paris to Prague. Of course, nowhere was the reverberation greater than in Hungary. The public welcomed Lord Rothermere as the champion of Hungary. Later on there was even talk of putting his son on the vacant Hungarian throne. Streets were named after him and a memorial fountain was erected to his honor.¹⁰⁰ However, not everyone in Hungary was entirely satisfied with Rothermere’s action. Among those that were not happy was István Bethlen. The prime minister had two

⁹⁸ Ignác Romsics, “Hungary’s Place in the Sun: A British Newspaper Article and its Hungarian Repercussions,” in *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848*, eds. László Péter and Martyn Rady (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004), 193-94.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 195-97.

¹⁰⁰ The memorial is known as the Magyar Igazság Kútja [Fountain of Hungarian Justice]. The memorial was redesigned after WW II to cover up any suggestion of Rothermere and Hungarian irredentism. Since 2006, it has once again stood in its original form on Budapest’s Szabó Ervin Square.

objections to Rothermere's action. His first objection had to do with the timing. Bethlen was seeking to establish cordial diplomatic relations with London and Paris, and the Hungarian public's frenzy over the article undermined his position. Second, and perhaps more important, was the fact that the Viscount's suggestion of territorial revision based on ethnic principles was not what Bethlen had in mind. Even though government circles never openly articulated it, their goal was to restore historical Hungary's territorial integrity.¹⁰¹ While media in Prague, Bucharest, and Belgrade reacted with the expected displeasure and the various governments used this event as yet another example of Hungarian irredentism, official circles reacted with less zeal. For example, Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs Vojislav Marinkovich told John Dyneley Prince, American Minister to Yugoslavia, the following about Rothermere's action:

I really have nothing to say on the subject. Lord Rothermere is a rich man and the owner of a newspaper, but this has no significance because he has no authority. In fact, he has only attracted attention in Hungary and we already know the attitude of Hungary with respect to this subject which they have now reiterated. The only political circles in Europe which are paying serious attention to Lord Rothermere are certain elements in Hungary, but the Hungarian government itself is behaving very cautiously.¹⁰²

The newly-established Magyar Revíziós Liga (MRL—Hungarian Revisionist League) had reservations of its own about Rothermere. Novelist Ferenc Herczeg, head of MRL, made this point on the very first meeting of the organization when he said that “the so-called Rothermere-proposal is not representative of Hungary's aims and has not been

¹⁰¹ Romsics, “Hungary's Place in the Sun,” 199-200.

¹⁰² National Archive at College Park, RG 59 Department of State Decimal File 1910-1929 BOX#9782 (#864.014/17).

advanced by Hungarians, as the Hungarian nation will not resign her right to restore its territorial integrity.”¹⁰³

As part of the new active foreign policy, the government, and Bethlen in particular, altered its official stance on the question of revisionism. Most historians date the official announcement of this new policy to a speech by Bethlen in Debrecen in March 1928 in which he stated that the government’s goal is peaceful revisionism, the alteration of existing frontiers (like most government officials Bethlen refrained from openly advocating the restoration of historical borders).¹⁰⁴ However, he already alluded to this by his June 2, 1927, campaign speech in the provincial city of Zalaegerszeg.¹⁰⁵ According to the same source, the prime minister’s speech reverberated as far as Paris, for *Le Temps* published a report highly critical of Bethlen’s speech.¹⁰⁶ Whatever the exact date may have been, one thing is for certain: Hungarian foreign policy changed dramatically.

Stages of Cultural Diplomacy, 1927-1941

From 1927 onward cultural diplomacy was an indispensable component of the new foreign policy. The country had recovered economically, had returned to the international stage, and even the Allied Military Commission had left the country. The official Hungarian revisionist propaganda was no longer simply to wine-and-dine foreign journalists, intellectuals, and politicians—though they continued the practice. Instead, by

¹⁰³ Quoted in Romsics, “Hungary’s Place in the Sun,” 200.

¹⁰⁴ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 86.

¹⁰⁵ “Győzedelmes politika,” *Zalai Közlöny*, June 2, 1927, 1.

¹⁰⁶ “A franciák hét esztendeje,” *Zalai Közlöny*, June 4, 1927, 2.

mobilizing the country's cultural products, its industries, and its artists and intellectuals they began to work on altering the foreign image of Hungary. Culture and cultural production, as Klebelsberg understood it, had become a new arsenal in the fight among nations.¹⁰⁷ The campaign no longer limited itself to convincing the foreign political and intellectual elite. While they remained important, practitioners of cultural diplomacy also targeted mass public opinion through the promotion of tourism and by using new cultural media of cinema and radio.

They targeted three groups in this grape-shot-like cultural diplomatic campaign. The main targets were the Great Powers. This is far from surprising. The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy—not a great power in its own right—led to the creation of small, militarily weak, economically fragile, and politically ineffective countries that relied greatly on the great powers. This dependency was especially detrimental to Hungary, which after losing the war found itself diplomatically cut off from the rest of the world. The anti-status quo character of Italy and Germany made those countries natural allies and as such targets of cultural export. Great Britain remained a primary target for Hungarians, not least because of the Hungarian elite's Anglophile character. France was a more difficult place in which to operate, for the Czechoslovaks and the Romanians already had great resources in place. The United States was a natural choice for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the United States had never ratified the Paris Treaties. Hungary and the United States actually signed a separate peace treaty on August 29, 1921, stating “that the United States shall not be bound by the provisions of Part I of that Treaty, nor by any provisions of that Treaty including those mentioned in paragraph

¹⁰⁷ Klebelsberg, *Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno beszédei*, 542.

(l) of this Article, which relate to the Covenant of the League of Nations, nor shall the United States be bound by any action taken by the League of Nations, or by the Council or by the Assembly thereof, unless the United States shall expressly give its assent to such action.”¹⁰⁸ The next main target was the League of Nations. Recent research indicates that articles 8, 10, 11, and 19 of The Covenant of the League of Nations were especially appealing to Hungarians.¹⁰⁹ Article 8 called for the “reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety,” which in the case of Hungary, facing its neighboring countries’ overwhelming forces, saw as a point of support. Article 10 guaranteed the member states’ “territorial integrity and existing political independence,” which once again, because of the weak state of the Hungarian armed forces (limited to 35,000), was an important provision. Article 11 allowed nations to bring forward any issue that they deemed to be “affecting international relations which threaten[s] to disturb international peace or the good understanding between nations upon which peace depends.” Finally, and most importantly to Hungarians, article 19 stated that “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.”¹¹⁰ The last article especially contributed to the idea that Hungary might be able to revise the treaty through the League of Nations. The third target group has much to do with the ideal of the League

¹⁰⁸ WW I Document Archive, *US Peace Treaty with Hungary*. (Article II section 2), accessed December 22, 2011, http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/US_Peace_Treaty_with_Hungary.

¹⁰⁹ Miklós Zeidler, “A Nemzetek Szövetsége a magyar külpolitikai gondolkodásban,” in *Magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás a 20. században*, Pál Pritz ed. (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006), 160-161.

¹¹⁰ Avalon Project, *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, accessed: December 22, 2011, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp.

of Nations in which all nations—regardless of their size— were represented and, in theory, were able to voice their opinion. Thus Hungarian cultural diplomacy did not shy away from advancing a positive national image in smaller (not necessarily geographically) countries from Argentina to Estonia, and everywhere between. The strategy of appealing to nations far and wide remained a constant feature of Hungarian cultural diplomacy.

As Hitler rose to power in Germany, Hungarians hoped to find a new ally for their revisionist goals. During the premiership of Gyula Gömbös, 1932-1936, the country reoriented itself toward the Rome-Berlin axis. However, it was not a happy marriage. Berlin made it clear from the beginning that it would not support Hungarian revisionist goals against Romania. In addition, there was more and more pressure from Germany to secure special privileges for Hungary's German minority. Under the Darányi government, 1936-1938, Hungary made attempts to renew ties with other Western powers, especially Great Britain, in order to free itself from Germany's economic and political influence. After the March 1938 Anschluss, the new Hungarian government, led by Béla Imrédy, established ever-closer ties with Berlin, but at the same time it also continued to make attempts to gain Britain's economic and political support. After all, Hungary now shared a border with Germany, a situation that made a lot of people uneasy.

Many, though not all, of the Hungarian demands were satisfied by the First Vienna Award on November 2, 1938. The country received approximately 4,605 square miles with a little over one million inhabitants, the majority of whom were ethnic

Hungarians.¹¹¹ Very few people in Hungary knew, or cared to know, that the price of this territorial reacquisition included further political and economic concessions to Germany. Cultural diplomacy worked energetically to secure worldwide recognition for the territorial gains. After a short intermezzo by Béla Imrédy's government (May 1938-February 1939), which passed the First Jewish Law but ironically was forced out on the grounds of Imrédy's own Jewish heritage, it was once again Pál Teleki's turn at the helm.

Teleki tried to find a balance in Hungary's foreign policy. Cultural diplomacy continued to appeal to the world. This time the goal was legitimizing territorial gains and continuing to make inroads toward further revision. With the outbreak of the war in 1939, cultural diplomacy changed gears. While acquiring further territorial concessions remained its primary goal, it also sought to secure Hungarian neutrality.

The Second Vienna Award of August 1940 granted Northern Transylvania to Hungary. Hungary regained 16,602 square miles and two and a half million inhabitants, of which about half were ethnically Hungarian. (Approximately 400,000 Hungarians remained within the borders of Romania). The decision was made under German and Italian arbitration. Once again the country was elated. Yet it had become ever more difficult for Teleki to continue his balancing act.

Regent Horthy, hoping for further territorial revisions—despite his own earlier refusal of Hungarian armed action against Czechoslovakia—and under unrelenting pressure from Berlin and Hungarian war-hawks, authorized the discussion of joint Hungarian-German military action against Yugoslavia (only after Croatian independence

¹¹¹ According to the 1941 Hungarian census, ethnic Hungarians made up 84 percent of the population in this area. According to the 1930 Czechoslovak census, ethnic Hungarians made up 57 percent of the region's population. See Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 246.

would be proclaimed). Teleki saw no exit strategy for the country or himself. His letter to Horthy, a de facto suicide note, is worth quoting in its entirety:

Excellency,

We have become word-breakers – out of cowardice – and broke our promise of the eternal friendship agreement based on your Mohács [historically significant town in Hungary] speech. The nation senses that we have cast away its honor. We have sided with the villains because the atrocities they reported, which are a pack of lies. There were none against Hungarians and none even against Germans! We will be robbing a corpse. We will be the most miserable of nations. I did not hold you back. I am guilty.¹¹²

On April 13, 1941, two days after an independent Croatia was declared, Hungarian troops occupied former Hungarian territories and advanced into Serbia under German command. On April 7, Great Britain cut diplomatic ties with Hungary. On June 26, 1941, Hungary entered World War II on the side of Nazi Germany, and on December 12, 1941, Hungary declared war on the United States. Hungarian cultural diplomacy lost its *raison d'être*.

Conclusion

The First World War not only changed the geopolitical configuration of East-Central Europe but also altered the hitherto existing practices of international relations. Most everyone realized the newfound significance of public opinion meant that diplomatic activities could no longer be restricted to negotiations carried out by political elites. In this new climate diplomats had to pay attention to the foreign image of their

¹¹² In his second letter to Horthy he stated that in the event of his survival, he was resigning as the Prime Minister. The letter is quoted and translated in Balázs Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki (1874-1941): The Life of a Controversial Hungarian Politician*, trans. Thomas J. and Helen D. DeKornfeld, (Boulder, CO.: Social Science Monographs and Columbia University Press, 2006), 231-32.

respective countries. The political elite recruited scholars, artists, and the likes, to construct and promote a positive national image abroad. For the small countries of Europe, international public opinion could mean the difference between anguish and jubilation.

While Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia had greatly benefited from their war-time propaganda activities, they were detrimental to Hungary. As the First World War came to its end, the new democratic Hungarian government, under Mihály Károlyi, struggled to gain international recognition. This lack of recognition severely limited Károlyi's ability to deal with both domestic and international issues. Eventually, Károlyi's inability to secure recognition led to the collapse of its democratic government. After the short tenure of Béla Kun's Bolshevik regime, the conservative forces of Miklós Horthy gained power. The newly reconstituted Kingdom of Hungary and its Prime Minister István Bethlen, despite the illiberal nature of the regime, was finally able to secure international recognition. As historian Thomas Lorman has concluded—in regard to the British point of view, but this is more generally applicable—“the failings of the Bethlen government, its illiberal policies, its grudging acceptance of the peace treaty and its unwillingness to cultivate good relations with its neighbors were all a price worth paying for the economic, social and political stability that were hallmarks of the Bethlen consolidation.”¹¹³

Although the Bethlen government gained its much sought-after international recognition, Hungary remained isolated. The country's foreign image continued to be

¹¹³ Thomas Lorman, “‘In Praise of Stability’: British Foreign Office Opinions of the Bethlen Consolidation, 1920-1925” in *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848*, eds. László Péter and Martyn Rady (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004), 151.

dreadful, not at least because the enduring activities of its neighbors. Consequently, Bethlen and his cabinet had to be realistic about how much room it really had to maneuver. After 1922 the government subdued irredentist voices and instead used the time to seek economic, cultural and political recovery. As Klebelsberg put it, “in 1922 it would not only have been madness, but straight-out comical for us to rattle our sabers, when indeed we had very few sabers to rattle.”¹¹⁴

After 1927, as the country gained access to the international stage, the propaganda work—in disguise of cultural diplomacy—could go full steam ahead. According to the earlier division of labor, nongovernmental organizations such as the Hungarian Revisionist League carried out “hard” propaganda—covertly financed by the government. On the other hand, the government itself utilized the tools of cultural diplomacy. The tools were peaceful, but it was a war nonetheless. And as one British politician wrote years later “in modern war, not to use propaganda is treason. . . . Not to use it skillfully is to court disaster.”¹¹⁵ Hungarian cultural diplomacy, albeit with modified goals, continued to court foreign public opinion until 1941.

The Hungarian elite, in competition with its Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Yugoslav counterparts, contended for the support of the international public. This war-like competition, much like an actual war, required mobilization of resources. These resources were not guns, bullets, and soldiers but cultural resources mobilized by the country’s political, intellectual, and industrial elite. The majority in Hungary agreed that the country must wage this new war by creating a new positive image abroad. By 1927

¹¹⁴ Klebelsberg, *Jöjjetek*, 111.

¹¹⁵ John Hargrave, *Propaganda the Mightiest Weapon of All: Words Win Wars* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co. Ltd., 1940), 2.

the necessary infrastructure was in place; however, the question of what that image should look like continued to divide the leadership. Negotiating the country's foreign image was a complex undertaking that caused much anxiety. The next chapter seeks to illustrate the complexity of this question as it examines the question of Hungarianness vis-à-vis Europeanness.

CHAPTER TWO

DEBATING IDENTITY: NATIONAL CHARACTEROLOGY AND THE DILEMMAS OF HUNGARIANNESS

“Ferry-land, Ferry-land, Ferry-land . . . even in its most daring dreams it is only roaming back and fro between two shores. From East to West or, rather, the other way around.”
(Endre Ady, 1905)¹

Mi a magyar? (What is a Hungarian?) was one of the most divisive questions in interwar Hungary. A myriad of intellectuals, public figures, and even politicians sought to answer the question. Because Hungarian cultural diplomacy’s main aim was to construct and project a positive image of the country abroad, it relied heavily on a process in which the political and intellectual elite sought to delineate the essence of Hungarianness. What should Hungary’s Sunday best look like? What message should it convey? While there was a near universal agreement on the need of a new image, the various factions offered very different understandings of the past and the present, just as they failed to agree on the fundamental building blocks of the Hungarian national character.

The matter of competing, and often contradictory, visions of Hungarianness was further complicated by anxieties about the country’s relationship to Europe. The almost obsessive questioning of Europeanness was a peculiarly East and East-Central European

¹ Endre Ady, “Morituri,” *Figyelő* 1-2 (1905): 633-635. Translation by György Péteri in György Péteri ed., *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 1.

phenomenon. It amounted to an atmosphere that historian István Bibó described as “political hysteria.” In his essay, “The Misery of the Small States of Eastern Europe” (“A keleteurópai kisállamok nyomorúsága”), Bibó argued that this political hysteria was a result of uncertainty about national existence and territorial status.² This sort of anxiety about national existence might be an “empty phrase” to Westerners, admitted Bibó, for whom “national death” might be just a “pompous picture” for they cannot even imagine the “complete political annihilation” of a nation. But to the small states of Eastern Europe there was a shared belief in a real need to justify their right to exist.³ This mentality, one could argue, was rooted in historical experience. For centuries inhabitants of this region fought to survive first Mongol then Ottoman assault only to fall under Habsburg rule. In the aftermath of the First World War some, like the Romanians and Czechoslovaks, benefited greatly from the peace and sought to justify their territorial gains. Others, such as the Hungarians, felt betrayed by territorial losses and looked for remedy. Regardless of their different aims all the region’s small nations sought justification and assurance abroad. That is why the new or newly reconstructed nation-states only in theory were free to construct their identities and the images of those identities. In reality, because of their dependency on the larger and stronger states, and international public opinion in general, they were forced to pay attention to what kinds of identities and images they were constructing and in what ways those images were propagated. Disagreements about the identifying elements of national character made the building of an effective cultural diplomacy—already a daunting task—ever more difficult.

² István Bibó, *Harmadik út: politikai és történelmi tanulmányok*, ed. Zoltán Szabó (London: Magyar Könyves Céh, 1960), 117.

³ *Ibid.*, 131-32 and 137.

This chapter does not offer a comprehensive picture of Hungarian national identity construction, but provides the necessary background information that is indispensable for understanding what comes next. Ever since Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities*, we have understood that national identities are constructs constantly being negotiated and renegotiated.⁴ The first part of the chapter examines the construction and negotiation of prewar Hungarian national identity with special emphasis on the changing understanding of Hungarianness and the country's relationship to the Habsburg monarchy. The second part of the chapter situates the post-1918 Hungarian cultural and identity crisis within the larger analytical framework of regional and continental crises of a similar nature. The next section offers a short overview of *nemzetkarakterológia*, a discussion of national characteristics that created its own cottage-industry in interwar Hungary. The last part of the chapter, drawing from János Gyurgyák's recent study, presents four different visions of Hungarianness. Based on their ideologies, their historical memories, their views on modernity vis-à-vis tradition, and their stand on the question of Europeaness, I distinguish among 1) radical liberals—later *urbánusok*; 2) *fajvédők* (race defenders); 3) *népiesek* (generally mistranslated as “populist”); and 4) conservative national liberals.⁵

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁵ János Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok: a magyar nemzeteszmé és nacionalizmus története* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2007).

National Identity before the Nation-State?

Before the beginning of the nineteenth century there were three different definitions of the term “Hungarian,” were used interchangeably depending on what was to be emphasized. According to historian Jenő Szűcs, the first classification included all of those living in the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom (*regnum Hungariae*), regardless of one’s language or social status. The second included all those who belonged to the same linguistic and cultural group (*lingua et moribus*), those speaking Magyar. The third type, and the most privileged one, included those who belonged to the social order of the nobility (*natio Hungarica*).⁶ Thus, before the nineteenth century we cannot talk about the existence of one single national identity because there was no definitive national consciousness, let alone a nation-state. For example, in order to be part of the privileged group of the *natio Hungarica* (about five percent of the total population) knowledge of Hungarian was not a requirement.

It was the enlightened absolutism of Maria Theresa (1740-1780), and more importantly that of her son Joseph II (1765-1790), which ignited the development of Hungarian nationalism in its modern sense. The period was highlighted by the struggle between an ever-changing *natio Hungarica* aiming to safeguard its privileges and a Habsburg regime aiming to curtail it. One of the cornerstones of this early nationalist sentiment was the role of the Hungarian language. The likes of György Bessenyei—himself ironically enough a member of the noble guard of Maria Theresa—called for cultural reforms. One of the key issues was the primacy of the Hungarian language instead of Latin (the language of administration) and German (which was to be the *lingua*

⁶ Jenő Szűcs, *A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó-JATE-Osiris, 1997), 337.

franca of the entire Habsburg dominion). In his 1802 essay, Bessenyei, addressing the nobility, argued that “it is time, dear Sirs, for the mind of the Hungarian Nation to be clarified in her mother-tongue regarding its objects!” In the spirit of the Enlightenment, of which he was a product, he further argued that Hungarian translations of Latin, Greek, French, and German works were necessary in order to refine the nation. To Bessenyei being Hungarian meant speaking, reading, and writing in Hungarian, for he believed that “whoever elevates the language of his homeland brings the esteem of his Nation into a luminous light.”⁷ During the 1820s and 1830s, under the leadership of Ferenc Kazinczy, the Hungarian language underwent major modernizing reforms in order to raise the nation’s cultural output to the European level while using the Hungarian vernacular.

It was during this period that we can begin to speak of the emergence of a modern national consciousness in Hungary—albeit one without an existing independent nation-state. At the forefront of the movement was the nobility—more specifically the lesser nobility, which, while often translated as such, was not the same as the gentry. The emerging national sentiment left its mark on the development of Hungarian culture. For example, it marked the maturity of Hungary’s national romanticism in literature with the likes of Mihály Vörösmarty and Ferenc Kölcsey. Some argue that this was the time

⁷ György Bessenyei, “Beszéd az országnak tárgyárul,” trans. Dávid Oláh, in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945): Texts and Commentaries*, Vol. I, eds. Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 152-54.

period when a “dominating trend in Hungarian literary and art criticism” originated. According to this “trend,” literature and art was seen as a “service to the nation.”⁸

One of the aims adopted by romantic poets was the literary representation of Hungarian history in binary opposition to Habsburg Austria. Vörösmarty, in his 1825 *Zalán futása* (*The Flight of Zalán*), recalled Hungary’s ancient past when the Magyar tribes arrived to the Carpathian Basin. The heroic poem tells the story of a series of battles in which the Magyar tribes led by Árpád (and his lieutenant Ete) defeated the tribes of Zalán and as such gained the rights for the lands. It not only celebrated the country’s Eastern origin, but it also emphasized the heroic bravery of the Magyar fighters (albeit it also offers a love story between Ete and Hajna) and offers a historical justification for the existence of independent and strong Hungary. In many ways *Zalán futása* was also designed to be a call to arms, as the first lines indicates: “Where are you, glory of old? Lost deep in the night of shadows?”⁹

The figure of Árpád, closely linked in myth and tradition with Attila the Hun, became especially popular among Hungary’s Protestant nobility, who used this origin myth to further distinguish themselves from the Catholics.¹⁰ Their more recent heroes

⁸ George Barany, “Hungary: From Aristocratic to Proletarian Nationalism” in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, eds. Peter F. Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1969), 265.

⁹ Mihály Vörösmarty, “Zalán futása,” trans. Watson Kirkconnell and Adam Makkai in *In Quest of the Miracle Stag: the Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago and Budapest: Atlantis-Centaur/M.Szivárvány/Corvina. Distributed by University of Illinois Press, 1996), 214. (Hereafter, I will refer to this anthology as *Quest*).

¹⁰ Jenő Szűcs, *Nemzet és történelem: tanulmányok* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1974), 415-20 and Katalin Sinkó, “Árpád versus Saint István,” in *Hungarians between ‘East’ and ‘West’: Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 1994), 15.

were the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *kuruc* fighters (anti-Habsburg paramilitary, mainly Protestant, forces) in direct opposition to the *labanc* (Austrian and Habsburg loyalist, mainly Catholic, forces). Although the confessional differences became less pronounced, the *kuruc* versus *labanc* mental construct, and its conflict, reverberated deep into the twentieth century.

Opposite the figure of Árpád stood the tradition that venerated the role of Saint Stephen (Szent István), Hungary's first Christian king (ruled 1000-1038). This story celebrated Hungary's connection with the West. According to this founding myth, Hungary was offered up to the Virgin Mary by Saint Stephen, and since then it has been *Regnum Marianum*—the land of Mary. It was under her protection that Hungary became the shield of Christendom against the Mongols and Ottomans and the bulwark of the Catholic faith. Stephen and his descendants Imre and László were all canonized, making an everlasting connection to Western Christianity, and, more importantly, the Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, the Habsburg House, in the face of growing Protestant influence, encouraged and even promoted the legends of the Hungarian saints and the worship of Mary. However, to the Hungarians it was more than being part of the Catholic universe; their myth was also used as a justification for autonomy within the Habsburg Empire.¹¹

The duality of national self-identification also had significant impact on domestic policies, which was best illuminated by the conflicting relationship between nineteenth-century Hungary's two greatest figures: Lajos Kossuth and István Széchenyi. Kossuth,

¹¹ Sinkó, "Árpád versus Saint István," 12-14.

from the Calvinist lesser-nobility, envisioned an independent Hungary. In his vision the ethnic Magyar nationality would enjoy privileges—regardless of social standing—against the non-Magyar nationalities of the Hungarian realm, who in turn were to be Magyarized. On the other hand, there was Széchenyi—a member of an old and prominent Catholic noble family—who looked toward gradual change, emphasized the promotion of education, and disagreed with Magyarization. He believed in the idea of a political nation, albeit under Magyar leadership. During the 1848-1849 Hungarian revolution and freedom fight Kossuth's vision dominated.¹² Consequently, although Hungary indeed gained a short-lived independence, the joint forces of the Austrian army, the agitated non-Magyar nationalities, and the Russian forces of Nicolas I (1822-1855) eventually put down the Hungarian uprising.

After a short hiatus between 1849 and the 1867 *Ausgleich*, during which Hungarians practiced passive resistance, the Hungarian national identity question resurfaced once again. The underlying questions remained the same. The debate continued to address the issue of political versus ethnic nation and the country's relationship to the Habsburg monarchy. According to ethnographer Tamás Hofer, there were three kinds of self-identification based on competing loyalties: loyalty to the Dual Empire of Austria-Hungary, loyalty to the idea of a multi-ethnic Hungarian Kingdom, and loyalty to Hungary as a home of ethnic Hungarians who made up little more than half

¹² It must be noted that Kossuth, while in exile, radically modified his vision of Hungary and by the 1860s he was promoting the idea of a federalized Hungary. It was a plan that became the intellectual framework for Oszkár Jászi's Danubian Confederation five decades later.

of the kingdom's population.¹³ All three groups actively shaped national identity through the production of national culture. The first level of understanding was articulated in public buildings such as railway stations and theaters that were more or less similar throughout the empire and emerged as products of the modernization drive within the Dual Monarchy.¹⁴ Those who promoted a multi-ethnic political state believed in an inclusionary vision of Hungarianness whereby all ethnicities living in the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy were members of the nation. These liberals aimed to extend privileges and rights to all as they articulated the image of a unified multi-ethnic Hungary. Hofer's study illustrates that in this "imagined community" folk culture played a pivotal role not least because the majority of non-Magyar (and Magyar) nationalities were peasants. Intellectuals, such as the members of the Hungarian Ethnographic Society, aimed to promote ethnic folk traditions. To this end they created separate sections to study Serb, Slovak, Romanian, and German folk culture. Literary figures, from Mór Jókai to Kálmán Mikszáth, often found their subject-matter in non-Magyar settings and wrote of them in a positive light.¹⁵ By the 1890s this group had lost momentum and influence and those with the vision of a "Hungary of Magyars" came to prominence. Their exclusionary policies led to the curtailment of the rights and privileges of non-Magyar nationalities. It was the period when, according to Hofer, Hungarian folk culture became implicitly Magyar, promoting an idea of historically fixed, ancient Hungarian "essence" that was to be "guarded and kept pure." This understanding promoted the Oriental traits

¹³ Tamás Hofer, "Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary and Rival Versions of National Identity," in *Hungarians between 'East' and 'West': Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 1994), 35.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 37-38.

of Hungarian culture as invented tradition and heritage in way that argued for the uniqueness of the Hungarian “folk soul.”¹⁶ This folk national soul was rooted in the vast Eastern steppes in the areas around the Volga River, where, consistent with contemporary literary historian and novelist Zsolt Beöthy’s 1896 argument, the iconic symbol of Hungarianness, the warrior horseman was born. In his interpretation it was the Magyar race’s superiority, thanks to the Hungarians’ ancient Oriental traits, that made it the only ethnic group in the region that had the proclivity and characteristics to form a nation. He defined “Hungarian race” as an end product of its historical past, not in a biological sense. Beöthy declared that through historical development the Magyars were able to assimilate others and “shape” them to their “own likeness” while maintaining a kind of original Magyar “spirit,” or as he put it: “Thus the nature of the Hungarian soil, the dominion of the Hungarian race with its public institutions, the character of Hungarian history, the Hungarian language . . . all these, despite the unceasing intensive mingling of races , have sustained, at least in its main features, the original Hungarian spirit.”¹⁷

By the turn of the century competing visions of Hungary and Hungarianness were part of the political discourse. The experience of the First World War, revolution, counterrevolution, and the subsequent peace treaty further polarized the construction of Hungarian national identity and its imagery. Furthermore, and more importantly, in the aftermath of the First World War the debate about Hungarian national character intensified. However, the parameters of the debate changed significantly. With the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy, the matter of Habsburg loyalty was no longer relevant.

¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹⁷ Zsolt Beöthy, “A magyar Irodalom kis-tükre,” trans. Dávid Oláh, in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945): Texts and Commentaries*, Vol.III/1, eds. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górný, and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 29-32.

The issue of defining Hungarians in terms of ethnic/religious vis-à-vis political understanding also lost its relevance in a relatively homogenous Hungarian nation-state—with a very important exception of the discussion about the role and position of Hungary's Jewish population. The main debate during the postwar years was about specific Hungarian characteristics and aimed to negotiate the balancing characterizations of modernity and tradition and pondered the meaning and importance of Europeanness. Although some of the discussions had roots in the country's past, this debate was also a part of a wider regional and continental cultural crisis that was one of the unforeseen results of the war.

Post World War I Crisis of Culture

The First World War left more than physical devastation in its wake. The experience of war also led to a cultural and intellectual crisis as intellectuals and artists struggled to make sense of their new reality, a nexus of the new and the old. On the one hand, the world was rapidly transforming through technology. The distances between people were shrinking thanks to discoveries and inventions in communications and transportation. On the other hand, many questioned the direction in which humanity was moving and began to question the future of Western civilization. The “lost generation,” as Gertrude Stein referred to it, and which included the likes of F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Elliot, and Erich Maria Remarque, reacted to their new reality with considerable disillusionment and rebellion. Novelist Robert Briffault, in his *Europa in Limbo*, described the postwar perplexity:

It looked much the same a few days before ten million men went to the shambles of war. Europe seems – to the external eye – to be still standing, much the same, after the blast and shambles, does it not? But is it? In reality, not one building-stone of it, of the essential core and foundation of it, is left standing! Every one of its values, the animating sparks of meaning without which no building-stone and no life can stand – every one is fallen and lies level with the ground.¹⁸

German historian Felix Gilbert – who came of age as the Wilhemine Empire crumbled, and as, in the midst of civil strife and revolution, the Weimar Republic was born – voiced a similar feelings. He recalled the interwar years and wrote: “The only certainty we had was that nothing was certain.”¹⁹ Others also painted a dark picture of the future of humanity, no one more so than Sigmund Freud. In his 1929 *Civilization and its Discontents* he wrote: “Men are not gentle creatures, who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowment is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. . . . *Homo homini lupus* [Man is wolf to man].”²⁰ During the 1920s, argues historian Jan Ifversen, “Europe’s predicament was regarded not solely in political, economic or military terms, but as something that touched the very heart of European life. Often it was referred to as a crisis of civilization.”²¹ Indeed, most historians would agree that one of the consequences of the war was the amplification of the debate that

¹⁸ Robert Briffault, *Europa in Limbo* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937), 474.

¹⁹ Quoted in Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 363.

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents,” in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1995), 749.

²¹ Jan Ifversen, “The Crisis of European Civilization after 1918,” in *Ideas of Europe since 1914: The Legacy of the First World War*, eds. Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle (Houndmills, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 14.

focused on the deep-seated questions about the meaning and consequences of modernity vis-à-vis tradition.²²

In Weimar Germany, for example, according to historian Eric Weitz, culture and politics were characterized by “the restless questioning of what it means to live in modern times, the search of new forms of expressions suitable to the cacophony of modern life, and the belief in the possibilities of future.”²³ Others, as Jeffrey Herf points out, focused their attention on perceived conflict between advancing technology and the traditions of German nationalism, which was exaggerated by political reality. As he puts it, “the battle between *Technik* and *Kultur* took place against the background of military defeat, failed revolutions, successful counterrevolution, a divided Left, an embittered and resentful Right.”²⁴ Peter Gay would argue that the crisis was about the dual character of the Weimar Republic, namely that it was “both old and new.”²⁵ The question of Germanness divided the already fractured society even further. What is German? What art is German? Is cosmopolitan Berlin representative of the German essence? Or is it the Franconian

²² I use these terms in the widest possible sense. I refer to modernity as a cultural and ideological phenomenon in opposition to traditional cultural and ideological values. For a short, but useful discussion of the question of modernism, modernity, and modernization, see Maria Todorova, “Modernism” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945): Texts and Commentaries*, Vol.III/1, eds. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny, and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 4-25.

²³ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 253.

²⁴ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 18. According to Herf, it will be the Nazis who “bridge” this gap between technological modernity and traditional German culture. Similar discussion was also taking place in interwar Japan, see Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²⁵ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: the Outsider as Insider* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968), 2

village? Despite political and cultural penchants, “all of Weimar’s protagonists grappled with this tension-bound world of modernity.”²⁶

Other countries, despite the fact that they were on the victors’ side, experienced a similarly tumultuous time. Italy found itself in the unenviable position after the war as the “least of the great powers.”²⁷ The problem was, argues historian Mabel Berezin, that in 1922— as Mussolini gained power—“Italy remained a state without a nation.”²⁸ In Italy the debate over modernity vis-à-vis tradition was further complicated by the Italian Fascists’ drive to create the new Italian men. The concept of *bonifica*, or reclamation became the centerpiece of the Fascist regime’s campaign to “combat degeneration and radically renew Italian society by ‘pulling up bad weeds and cleaning up the soil’.”²⁹ Berezin defines the “Fascist project” as follows: “the Italian fascist regime that governed Italy from 1922 to 1943 aimed to create new men and women, a new ethos, a new culture . . . the regime sought to forge new identities.”³⁰ Giovanni Gentile, who according to Victoria de Grazia was the personification of Fascism’s ideal of culture, envisioned the renewal of Italy’s cultural life “by means of a dynamic new synthesis of the national heritage and fascist ideology.”³¹ Bringing together Italy’s Ancient past, the triumphs of

²⁶ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 4.

²⁷ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 5-6.

²⁸ Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 42.

²⁹ Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 4.

³⁰ Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, 4-5.

³¹ Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 187-88.

the Renaissance, and the futuristic vision of Fascism was further complicated by the question of Europe. In 1934, the young art critic Renato Poggioli asked his peers: “Should we Italians become more European, or should Europe become more Italian? . . . Are we merely an eccentric peninsula on the continent, or are we still and always the garden of the Empire? To defend ourselves spiritually, should our culture turn its back on Europe, or should we be open to that which comes from outside?”³²

However, I argue that it was interwar East and East-Central Europe that experienced the postwar cultural crisis to its fullest extent, and more, in a very peculiar form. With the end of empires, physical borders were not the only boundaries that had changed. The newly constructed or reconstructed countries of the region were facing the challenge of creating their own, independent, national characteristics. Before the war, they were able to define themselves in opposition to their Austrian (or Austro-Hungarian), Russian, German, or Ottoman overlords. The end of the war changed all that. Polish novelist Witold Gombrowicz’s diary entry is a testament to this problem. He wrote: “After our struggles with Russia, with Germany, a struggle with Poland awaited us. It is not surprising, therefore, that independence turned out to be more burdensome and humiliating than bondage. As long as we were absorbed with the revolt against a foreign power, questions such as ‘Who we are?’ ‘What are we to make ourselves?’ lie dormant, but independence awakened the riddle that was slumbering with us.”³³ With jubilation over independence also came anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Cultural crisis—combined with economic and political troubles—led to a crisis of national

³² Quoted in Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 1.

³³ Quoted in Eva Plach, *The Clash of Moral Nations: Cultural Politics in Piłsudski’s Poland, 1926-1935* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), viii.

identity, for they saw a positive and unified national character as the basic foundation of their policies that aimed to either maintain or challenge the postwar status quo.

The case of interwar Poland, for example, depicts a great deal of anxiety and apprehension about the construction of national character. Poland as a country had not existed since the Third Partition of 1795. The Great War meant the rebirth of the Polish nation. The reunification process (1918-1922), historian Jerzy Jedlicki points out, brought forward a number of questions that intellectuals aimed to tackle: “Will this [reunification] work? What precisely is the nature of the bond which unites, or could unite, a land so long separated, social classes so alien to each other, dialects so disparate?”³⁴ The Polishness of culture, before the unification, meant language, literature, respect of education and, above all, argues historian Peter D. Stachura, “the perfect combination [of] an effervescent patriotism and rejuvenated Catholicism.”³⁵ Even before unification there was disagreement about the exact meaning of Polishness among the various groups. The unification process, however, further polarized society. Historian Eva Plach asserts that a total of fourteen different governments strove to govern Poland between 1918 and May 1926. The 1920s’ were the pinnacle of divergence as there were nearly one hundred political parties in Poland, each with their very own vision of Polishness.³⁶

Although Romania gained significant territories and achieved its territorial aspirations, Romanians also experienced the unforeseen consequence of these territorial

³⁴ Jerzy Jedlicki, “Polish Concept of Native Culture” in *National Character and Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery, eds. (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995), 1. (Hereafter I will refer to the collection as *NCI*.)

³⁵ Peter D. Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 101.

³⁶ Plach, *The Clash*, 3.

gains: the question of national unity. As a result, the idea of “national character” generated heated debate in interwar Romania as well. As Katherine Verdery points out, it was a discussion about *specificul național*, which literally translates as “the nationally specific” or “the national specificity.”³⁷ While the discussion was not entirely new, it was radically intensified because of the presence of Hungarian, German, and Ukrainian minorities in postwar Romania. As historian Irina Livezeanu puts it, the postwar territorial settlement was an “embarrassment of riches” and an “ambiguous and difficult gift.” Like a “Trojan horse,” continues Livezeanu, “it brought apparent and momentary glory but concealed untold social, demographic, political, and cultural challenges.”³⁸ In addition, Romania, like most of its regional counterparts, was heavily dependent on the West in the political, economic, and military arena. The country’s intellectual and cultural elite was deeply divided between two camps: “Europeanists” or “Westernizers” and the traditionalists. The “Europeanists” propagated the continuation of Romania’s development based on the Western European model. They argued that Romania’s disposition was Occidental rather than Oriental and emphasized progress in science.³⁹ To them the Romanian national character was rooted in the cities. Consequently, they promoted the continuing internationalization of Romanian culture and intellectual life. On the other side of the equation were the traditionalists, “those intellectuals who sought

³⁷ Katherine Verdery, “National Ideology and National Character in Interwar Romania,” in *NCI*, 103.

³⁸ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 7.

³⁹ For more on interwar Romania and science, see: Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 2002).

models for Romanian development in its autochthonous past, real or imagined.”⁴⁰ Even though the traditionalist camp was far from united, they all agreed on the unique and predominantly rural character of Romania, and, generally speaking, feared the continuation of “cultural imports,” cosmopolitanism, and the “craze” for everything that was French. Leading historian and prominent political figure, Nicolae Iorga bitterly complained about the condition of Romanian affairs and said that while Romanians had a national state they lacked national culture.⁴¹

What about the Hungarians? The postwar cultural crisis led to an especially problematic discussion about national character in Hungary. It was a country much like Germany— a defeated nation that experienced Bolshevik revolt and counterrevolution. However, it was also a country, unlike Germany and more like Romania, that was dependent on others because it lacked its own military, economic, and political power. It was a nearly homogeneous country due to traumatic territorial loss. As a result of the postwar settlement, Hungary became a weak and small country with dreams of greatness and stature. These circumstances forced Hungarians to search for an identity that would reflect their national aspirations and assist them in fulfilling them both at home and abroad.

⁴⁰ Keith Hitchins, “*Gîndirea*: Nationalism is Spiritual Guise” in *Social Change in Romania, 1860-1940*, Kenneth Jowitt, ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), 141.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

Hungarian *Nemzetkarakterológia*

Interwar Hungarian *nemzetkarakterológia* had multiple functions. It was to provide explanation for past failures, to assist in understanding the present, and to aid the betterment of the future. The discussion of national character produced enough works to fill a small library. I selected three works to discuss that I believe best illustrate the sentiments surrounded this matter.

The first work is Gyula Szekfű's 1920 *Three Generations: History of a Declining Age* (*Három nemzedék—Egy hanyatló kor története*). Szekfű was undoubtedly the most important figure of the conservative national liberals. He was one of the early Hungarian practitioners of the German *Geistesgeschichte* school (*szellemtörténet* or *szellemi történelem* in Hungarian).⁴² Inspired by the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Troeltsch, Heinrich Rickert, and Eduard Spranger—among others—his historical analysis focused on the role of the psychological and historical development of the human soul. His colleague and co-author of an important major history of Hungary—and later minister of culture—Bálint Hóman defined the school's connection with Hungarian history as follows: "Hungarian history is nothing but the history of the Hungarian soul, i.e. the description of those forms in which the Hungarian soul manifested itself for many millenniums."⁴³ *Three Generations* established the basic guidelines of the conservative national liberals' canon. While it was motivated by the desire to answer the question

⁴² For a contemporary account of the school, see Tibor Joó, *Bevezetés a szellemtörténetbe* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1935). For a modern assessment of the role of *Geistesgeschichte* school in Hungarian historiography, see Steven Bela Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1976), 62-94.

⁴³ Hóman quoted in Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography*, 65.

“How have we gotten here?” it became much more, as historian Paul Hanebrink puts it, *Three Generations* “was a foundational text of Christian nationalist ideology, providing the most influential scholarly presentation of the theses that united Christian nationalists in Hungary.”⁴⁴

In *Three Generations* Szekfű argued that the “First Generation” of reformers of the first half of the nineteenth century applied an understanding of Hungarian history and Hungarianness that was to be emulated. They promoted gradual or evolutionary progress based on cumulative reform of Hungary’s cultural, economic, and social life. The central figure of this epoch was István Széchenyi. In Szekfű’s reading Széchenyi epitomized all that was great in his generation and the idea of “conservative reform system.” Szekfű’s analysis went back to Széchenyi’s original critique: Hungary was a wasteland (*parlag*) and would remain such unless there was a moral and intellectual reconstruction of the entire nation. According to Szekfű’s reading, Széchenyi argued that this moral and intellectual reconstruction of the national spirit was needed in order to overcome what he called “ancestral sins of the nation:” vanity, conceit, “flash in the pan elation,” common slothfulness, envy, factionalism or partisanship, and the yearning for power (*hiúság, önhittség, “szalmaláng lelkesedés,” közrestség, irígység, pártviszály, and hatalomvágy*). All of these traits led to self-delusion, mystification, and daydreaming.⁴⁵ If one recognizes in this listing some of the seven deadly sins, it is not an accident for both Széchenyi and Szekfű were Catholic. Though well-intentioned, Lajos Kossuth and his followers obstructed the hitherto positive developments, argued Szekfű. Even more

⁴⁴ Paul Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 118.

⁴⁵ Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék—Egy hanyatló kor története* (Budapest: Élet Kiadó, 1922), 2nd.ed., 10 and 59-65.

importantly, they strayed from the historical concept of the nation (St. Stephen's) and promoted French and even American liberal ideals ill-fitted to Hungarian reality. In Szekfű's analysis people who belonged to the heroic pantheon of Hungarian history (Lajos Kossuth, Bertalan Szemere, and even Sándor Petőfi—the national poet) received harsh criticism for their radical/revolutionary liberalism and their embrace of nationalism.⁴⁶ Of course, one might note that this was not the first time Szekfű bucked prevailing historical norms. In his 1913 *A száműzött Rákóczi (The Exiled Rákóczi)* he already launched a serious attack on established historical memory by offering a de-mythologizing account of eighteenth-century *kuruc* leader Ferenc Rákóczi.

The “Second Generation” of Ferenc Deák and Gyula Andrássy, architects of the 1867 *Ausgleich*, received high marks from Szekfű. On the other hand, József Eötvös, because of his work on the Nationality Laws—which according to Szekfű further dismantled the idea of a political nation—received criticism, as did the liberal policies of Kálmán Tisza.⁴⁷ Szekfű also condemned the development of Hungarian capitalism. He argued that it was not Hungarian capitalist development because it was organized and run by Austrians and, more importantly, by Jews and because it was underpinned by foreign ideas of *laissez faire* and free competition.⁴⁸ According to Szekfű, in viewing Jews as a religious community, instead of an ethnic group, and allowing immigration, the Second Generation allowed for the Jewish character of Hungarian capitalism and economic life to take hold.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 111-220.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 301-04 and 333-35.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 340-55.

The “Third Generation” surrendered the country’s intellectual life to foreign elements, Szekfű argued.⁴⁹ It was the Third Generation, under and despite the leadership of István Tisza, which allowed the influx of radical bourgeois influence and permitted Marxism to gain ground. It was the Third Generation, continued Szekfű, whose efforts at centralization made Budapest a center of radical liberalism and capitalism, while drowning out the energies and importance of the countryside. Consequently, his argument went, Budapest and its “Jewish Hungarian culture” secured a monopoly over the cultural life of the entire nation.⁵⁰ Szekfű was also critical of the lesser-nobility’s and even the aristocracy’s “abdication” of involvement in the economic and cultural development of the country, not becoming part of the middle-class, and allowing the masses of the countryside to remain uneducated, thus permitting the internationalization of the working-class.⁵¹

Even a cursory examination of the issue of Hungarian *nemzetkarakterológia* cannot be complete without bringing Lajos Prohászka and his 1941 *A vándor és bujdosó* (*The Wanderer and the Exile*) into the discussion.⁵² While the book was published in 1941, it is actually a collection of studies published between 1932 and 1935. Prohászka shared the cultural pessimism of Oswald Spengler whose 1918 *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*Decline of the West* in its English translation) was widely read in Hungary.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 356.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 384.

⁵¹ Ibid., 443-57.

⁵² Lajos Prohászka, *A vándor és a bujdosó* (Budapest: Lucidus Kiadó, 2005), 34-59. Reprint of the 1941 edition. The word “bujdosó” is usually translated as “exile.” The translation of this noun is important because Prohászka identified it with the Hungarian nation. As I will show Prohászka’s “bujdosó” doesn’t really mean “exile.” Instead it means someone who is hiding or remaining stationary.

He was also clearly influenced by the *Geistesgeschichte* school, for he too believed that certain character traits determine the historical development of a given people. Prohászka set out to create Europe's national-identities-map—in the fashion of José Ortega y Gasset and Salvador de Madariaga—with Germany and Hungary at its epicenter. In his construct France was the stylizer (*stilizáló*), Greece was the expressive (*kifejező*), England the settler (*telepes*), Italy the humanistic, while Spain was ascribed Don Quixote-like characteristics.⁵³ Germany was characterized as the wanderer, for Prohászka argued that German national character was best described by an “eternal search,” an “unwillingness to settle down,” and a certain belief in limitless boundaries, which in turn resulted in emotional and physical mobility.⁵⁴ A nation that shared a historical fate with Germany, argued Prohászka, was Hungary. Indeed, continued Prohászka, both nations were outsiders in Europe. But Hungary was not the same as Germany; on the contrary, the Hungarian national traits made Hungary the antithesis of Germany. Hungary's curse was to be born on the border of East and West. That is the reason for the duality of its character. On the one hand, it has a servile-like submission to great Western cultures. On the other, it defiantly wants to guard its independent spirit. None of these attitudes, continued Prohászka, was beneficial to achieving self-understanding and self-knowledge. Coming from the East, Hungarians brought with them the spirit of the steppes: their marauding and adventuring attitudes. Then arriving in Europe, it was overcome by the “curse” of the steppes: a desire to be hidden from danger, to be closed in, to feel secure. The result was a feeling of *finitizmus*, a peculiar sentiment of naïve complacency. This

⁵³ Prohászka, *A vándor és a bujdosó*, 34-59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 71-106.

finitizmus made Hungarians averse to anything that might be problematic and unresolved, while fighting for what is certain—even if it is scant. According to Prohászka that is why advancement and growth is not an organic and flexible development in Hungary, but always the result of outside impetus and often coming through violence and pain.⁵⁵ Many “foundational experiences” came with the same duality. That is why a desire for independence turns into intellectual seclusion, deterministic belief leads to lack of ambition, and bravery leads to inevitable struggle even if futile.⁵⁶ But, all in all, concluded Prohászka, there is no Western Hungarian nor is there an Eastern Hungarian. Both traits are to be found within the Hungarians. The unrepentant, stationary, and comfort-seeking Oriental is as much a part of Hungarianness as the forward-looking, European oriented and new-direction-seeking Occidental.⁵⁷

Perhaps the best-known and most often cited example of interwar Hungarian nemzetkarakterológia, however, was the 1939 volume entitled *Mi a magyar? (What is a/the Hungarian?)*. It was edited by Gyula Szekfű and among the contributors one finds some of the most outstanding intellectuals of the period, from the great littérateur Mihály Babits to the composer Zoltán Kodály. The book can be seen as a direct challenge to Prohászka’s dialectical construction in which Hungary was the direct opposite of Germany. The anti-German sentiment among the intellectual and the cultural elite intensified during the late 1930s. Szekfű’s 1920 *Three Generations* was based on the concept in which Hungary was an established and significant component of a Christian-

⁵⁵ Ibid., 117-22.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 126-41.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 174.

German community, which in time would grow into a Christian-Hungarian community.⁵⁸ While he remained critical of radical liberalism and capitalist society, his late 1920s and 1930s work, as seen in *Magyar Szemle*, indicates his turn to a more European orientation and his deep-seated distrust of Nazi Germany and its Hungarian imitators.⁵⁹ In his preface Szekfű clearly indicates that the volume was a product of the preceding few years' intellectual debate, which was a reaction to growing German influence, or, as he put it, the dark shadows that were taking over this once sunny country.⁶⁰

Perhaps the most intriguing contribution to the volume was by Sándor Eckhardt. As a literary historian educated at the Paris École Normale Supérieure he sought to sketch out the nature of Hungarianness as seen from abroad. In Eckhardt's reading the negative reputation of Hungary originated with the tenth-century West European campaigns of the Magyar tribes. This image of a barbaric, bloodthirsty, and wild race continued to develop throughout medieval times, maintained Eckhardt.⁶¹ He further argued that this harmful characterization was resurrected in the 1823 French fables of Charles Athanase Walckenaer, who connected the old French word *Hongre* (for "Hungarian") with the monster-like creature, the ogre. Eckhardt, a scholar of French, pointed out that the word actually originated from the Latin *orcus* (god of the underworld). Yet, he continued, this did not stop someone like the French historian Charles Seignobos from writing the

⁵⁸ Szekfű, *Három nemzedék*, 108.

⁵⁹ Gyula Szekfű, "A Turáni-szláv parasztállam" in *Magyar Szemle* 5, No.17 (1929): 30-37. See also his 1934 *Three Generations and What Came Afterwards* [*Három nemzedék és ami utána következik*], which is an expanded version of his earlier 1920 work and illustrates Szekfű's changing views.

⁶⁰ Szekfű Gyula, "A szerkesztő előszava," in *Mi a magyar?* Ed. Gyula Szekfű (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1939), 7. Henceforth, I refer to it as *Mi a magyar?*

⁶¹ Sándor Eckhardt, "A magyarság külföldi arcképe," in *Mi a magyar?*, 87-90.

following passage about the Hungarians in 1937: “They produced the impression of ferocious monsters and have left no trace behind them save their name, the French Hongrois, having become ogres, supernatural beings who were supposed to eat children.”⁶² During the Ottoman attacks the fighting spirit of the Hungarians was emphasized as a positive attribute, continued Eckhardt, because it was a fight for the protection of Christendom. The shield of Christianity, the bastion of the West, and similar phrases earned Hungary some positive foreign responses. It was only a short-lived reprieve. By the end of the seventeenth century Hungary was once again represented in negative terms. In this view the central message was the uneducated, uncultured, one could say, uncivilized nature of Hungarians with special emphasis on the backwardness of its ruling elite. According to Eckhardt, this detrimental understanding of Hungary and Hungarianness was promoted by the Viennese Court, which claimed that Hungarian culture as such did not exist. If there was anything Hungarian that was remotely related to civilization, it was due to Germans, proclaimed the Viennese Court.⁶³ Nineteenth-century European romanticism rediscovered Hungary as the land of passion. Its symbols were the gallant hussar and the passionate Gypsy with his dreamy music.⁶⁴ The period during and after the revolution of 1848, which gained Hungarians a great deal of sympathy, was the

⁶² The passage appears in Hungarian. This translation is from the 1974 (!) English publication of Seignobos’s book. To my greatest surprise I found other similar characterization of Hungarians in connection with this not-so-loveable ogre. For example Charles Dickens wrote the following: “More than a thousand years ago, there wandered through the heaths of Asia . . . a rude Mongolian nation, a section of the Ugrian race whose wild ways in the conquered country gave the name of Ogre to the cannibal monsters of our nurseries . . . Our Ogre nation, the Magyars . . . would wander Westward for the conquest of a new and better pasturage . . . Under [their] chiefs, the wild Hungarians, ugly Mongolian hordes, mounted on shaggy little ponies, spread abroad, and ravaged many parts of Europe.” See Charles Dickens, “The Story of a Nation,” in *Household Words Conducted by Charles Dickens* 4, no. 89 (1851): 249-50.

⁶³ Eckhardt, “A magyarság külföldi arcképe,” 100-07.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 115-20.

only time when the image of Hungary was as positive abroad as it was at home, declared Eckhardt. From here on a dual character of Hungarianness developed in Europe: on the one hand they are generally sympathetic, though somewhat anachronistic, chivalrous, gentlemanly folk who find enjoyment in fighting, merry-making, and Gypsy music, all in all reminiscent of their wild, Oriental ancestors. On the other hand, these same Oriental traits made Hungarians incapable of coping with a modern urban lifestyle, and as a result they remained a sort of alien body in Europe, Eckhardt's study concluded.⁶⁵

Eckhardt's examination illuminates one of the key emotions of interwar Hungarian self-understanding, which is a feeling that nobody understands Hungarians: their past is misunderstood, their contributions remain unappreciated, and their character was distorted. Even so, Eckhardt made it clear that the culpability should not be borne by the West alone. As he saw it, the mistaken self-identification with Attila and his Huns, the self-glorification of Hungary's barbarian past, and the never ending self-promotion of the *puszta* romanticism were all harmful to the nation. He was not alone in thinking that the self-construction of identity and imagery must be carefully considered because of its importance to influence foreign public opinion. One of those who shared this sentiment was Kuno Klebelsberg.

Main Themes and Topoi

The political credo of Klebelsberg was actually a program that called for the rejuvenation and reconstruction of the country's cultural life. It was a loosely defined reform program—termed *neonacionalizmus*—that played an essential role in the development of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. He defined it in the following way:

⁶⁵ Ibid., 120-30.

“solidarity of positive, active, productive and constructive people in order to rebuild the destroyed country.” This work, continued Klebelsberg, requires us to “consciously join forces while avoiding hyperbolic criticism and a negative attitude.” In addition, the Minister of Culture warned against self-celebration, self-aggrandizement of the past, just as he rejected squabbling in the name of patriotism. Klebelsberg stood in opposition to “naïve optimism,” but he also refused the pessimism of the “apostles of an ominous and despairing” future.⁶⁶

Klebelsberg’s ultimate goal was to reform the country’s cultural life in a way that would allow Hungary to join European cultural life. He called for action that would allow Hungary to maintain and expand its cultural superiority vis-à-vis the neighboring countries. This idea received a great deal of political support from the Bethlen government onward and became one of the leitmotifs of Hungarian identity construction and its imagery, and in turn, it was one of the basic guidelines of its cultural diplomatic efforts. However, this does not mean that there was an agreement on the meaning of Hungarianness. In the end Hungarian cultural diplomacy had to address four competing visions of Hungarianness: 1) *urbánusok* (radical liberals); 2) *fajvédők* (race defenders); 3) *népiesek* (generally mistranslated as “populist”); and 4) conservative national liberals.

The question and meaning of Hungary’s European character was the main source of the division. Europeanness in the contemporary Hungarian understanding meant advocating a Western orientation and welcoming modernity. The problem of where Hungary belongs has occupied the Hungarian imagination from the Enlightenment

⁶⁶ Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus*, 5-6.

onward.⁶⁷ Apprehension about belonging is clearly emphasized in the opening lines of Mihály Vörösmarty's 1828 poem, *Zrínyi*. In the poet's words Hungary is a "torn away" and "kinless" nation that looks to the West, only to return its gloomy gaze to the East.⁶⁸ However, because many blamed Trianon on Europe—again, used as a short-hand for the West—the issue of European orientation was a thorny subject.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the radical liberals—an ideological movement originating among Budapest's young and bourgeois circles— became the unabashed promoters of European orientation and modernity. Members of this group, such as Karl Polányi, Karl Mannheim, György Lukács, and Oszkár Jászi, "became disillusioned by the emptiness of the patriotic sloganeering that permeated political and social life."⁶⁹ Their debates were published in their newly founded journal, *Huszadik Század (Twentieth Century)*. It was on the pages of this journal that Jászi began to formulate the basic principles of a political and cultural movement. In his article, "Az új Magyarország felé" ("Toward the New Hungary"), he argued that the image of modern Hungary should not be dominated by the medieval figures of a holy prince and a saintly nun. He called for the modernization of Hungarian society and culture, for the abolition of the semifeudal political and economic system, and for the secularization of society.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See Iván Berend T., *Helyünk Európában: nézetek és koncepciók a 20. századi Magyarországon* (Budapest: Magvető, 1986).

⁶⁸ "Néz nyugatra, borús szemmel néz vissza keletre, A magyar, elszakadott testvértelen ága nemének" Mihály Vörösmarty, "Zrínyi," in *Összes versei* (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1961), 141.

⁶⁹ Attila Pók, "Jászi as the Organizational Leader of a Reform Movement," *Hungarian Studies* 18, no. 1-2 (1991): 17.

⁷⁰ Oszkár Jászi, "Az új Magyarország felé," *Huszadik Század* 8 (1907): 1-12.

One of the devoted readers of *Huszadik Század* was Endre Ady, who was considered by most as the founder of Hungarian literary modernism. His 1906 collection *Új versek (New Poems)* represents a radical break with the prevailing tradition of national romanticism. In his poems and essays Ady offered a relentless criticism of Hungarian reality. He condemned the backwardness of societal structure and its cultural milieu. In his poem titled “A magyar ugaron” (“On The Magyar Fallow”) he painted a picture of a regressive Hungary:

I walk on meadows run to weed,
on field of burdock and of mallow.
I know this rank and ancient ground—
this is the Magyar fallow.⁷¹

In this “fallow”—to connect the previous poem with another—stands “the lost horseman” of the Hungarians. Unlike Beöthy’s proud and warrior-like horseman, Ady’s horseman, the Hungarian of his day, is a lost and apprehensive character:

You hear the hollow hoofbeats of
a horseman lost since long ago.
The shackled soul of ghosted woods
an ancient reedlands wake to woe.⁷²

The heirs to the fin-de-siècle radical liberals were members of a new intellectual left-leaning group of the late 1920s and 1930s called *urbánus* by contemporaries. The new group stood against the status quo of the Horthy regime. This intellectual and cultural current was best represented by the likes of Pál Ignotus, Ferenc Fejtő, and Béla Zsolt. They rejected the discontinuation of liberalization, which was taking place both at the

⁷¹ Endre Ady, “A magyar ugaron,” trans. Anton N. Nyerges, in the *Quest*, 403.

⁷² Endre Ady, “Az eltévedt lovas” trans. Anton N. Nyerges, in *Quest*, 418.

societal and the cultural level. They stood against growing anti-Semitic sentiment and promoted Jewish assimilation, which they saw as an essential component of a much-needed new Hungarian identity. They loudly promoted a Western European orientation, progressive modernity, and democratic values. While most shared the above mentioned attitudes, the *urbánus* group was far from unified; as such it did not have a unified Hungarian-ideal-type nor did it have an established political platform of which to speak.⁷³ However, the progressive, modernizing, and European outlook of the *urbánus* circles was an influential cultural and intellectual movement, which had a concrete impact on the official image construction.

The *fajvédők*, on the other hand, squarely rejected any orientation toward Europe, along with its liberalism and its penchant for modernity. While their ideology was rooted in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the movement was born in the turmoil that followed the First World War.⁷⁴ The number of parties, societies, and associations that could be placed under the umbrella of *fajvédők* is simply staggering—as is the sheer volume of their publications. While there were undoubtedly similarities between the early 1920s movements of Magyar Országos Véderő Egyesület, Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete, and the Etelközi Szövetség, they cannot be equated with either the mid-1930s German/Italian copycat national socialist movements (Magyar Nemzeti Szocialista

⁷³ Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok*, 197-200.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

Munkáspárt, Egyesült Nemzeti Szocialista Párt or the Nemzeti Akarat Pártja) or with the later Nyilaskeresztes Párt (Arrow Cross Party) of Ferenc Szálasi.⁷⁵

The early membership of *fajvédő* (race defender) movements was largely based on the returning young officer corps of the K.u.K army. They were also the backbone of the counterrevolutionary forces gathered in the southern Hungarian city of Szeged and served as the military arm of the early Horthy government. Among these returning officers, one can find Gyula Gömbös and Miklós Kozma. Both of them as we will see, were to play significant role in Hungarian politics. The basic idea behind the movement was that liberal—or rather what they saw as liberal—government had yielded to foreign influences, which in turn had led to war and the demise of historic Hungary. By “foreign influences” they meant Hungary’s Jewish population—albeit not entirely. For, while they did not see Jewish assimilation as a real possibility, and they argued for the limitation of the role of Jews in Hungary’s economic and cultural life, they did not seek their physical destruction. Therefore, simply characterizing them as an anti-Semitic movement would not be telling the whole story. In their view Hungary had to be rejuvenated and a new Hungarian ideal-type was needed to face the challenges of the postwar order and to secure the continuing existence of the Hungarian nation. They had various prescriptions. As a result, the *fajvédő* movement was simultaneously anti-Semitic and anti-clerical, anti-capitalist and anti-Bolshevik, anti-bourgeois and anti-nobility, but almost universally anti-European.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ There were many more organizations—both political and social—that could be listed here. I have only selected the best-known ones.

⁷⁶ Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky is one of the movement’s most interesting figures. He moved from the *fajvédő* camp to becoming an anti-Fascist. In the end he was executed by the Arrow-Cross. On his views on

According to their historical understanding, explained by the pseudo-scientific approach of the Turanist movement, Hungarians belonged to the Orient, as they shared common Ural-Altaic origins with Turkish, Bulgarian, Finnish, Estonian, and Mongolian people. Some even included Koreans and Japanese in this grouping and dreamed of a pan-Turanian conglomeration that would counterbalance Western hegemony. Others saw it as a way to find equilibrium vis-à-vis pan-German and pan-Slav ideologies. To them the Hungarian peasantry remained the only guardian of the country's Oriental past, and as such, safeguards of the future.⁷⁷

Dezső Szabó's 1919 novel *Az elsodort falu* (*The Village that was Swept Away*) was the literary manifestation of the *fajvédő* ideology.⁷⁸ The novel takes place in Transylvania. The choice is not accidental, for many, like Szabó, located the roots of

Hungary's place in Europe, see Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, *Helyünk és sorsunk Európában* (Budapest: Gergely R., 1941).

⁷⁷ There is a difference between the Turanist Society [*Turáni Társaság*] and the Hungarian Turanist Union [*Magyarországi Turáni Szövetség*]. The former was European oriented. The above mentioned ideology was representative of the latter.

Turanist Society originated in the last third of the nineteenth century as a real scientific—linguistic—project that sought to prove or disprove the Hungarian language's Finno-Ugric origin. Interest in the movement was further amplified by political and economic motivations, as the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy sought to carve out its own area of influence. The Turanist Society [*Turáni Társaság*], established in 1910, aimed to bring together the various interests in order to promote further research. The membership of the society was a surprisingly diverse mixture of politicians and intellectuals from Mihály Károlyi through István Tisza to Pál Teleki. See Balázs Ablonczy, "'Láncsahegy,' néprokonság, small talk: turanizmus és keleti gondolat a két világháború közötti magyar külpolitikai gondolkodásban" in *Magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás a 20. században*, ed. Pál Pritz (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006), 88-89.

The society remained active until 1945. The list of influential people associated with the society is very impressive. It included Prime Ministers (Dénes Berinkey, Teleki, Bethlen, Gömbös, and Kálmán Darányi) and KÜM officials (Zoltán Gerevich, Lajos Villáni, Zoltán Baranyai, and Domokos Szentiványi); as such the society was closely connected with government circles. On Turanism in general, see Joseph A. Kessler, "Turanism and pan-Turanism in Hungary: 1890-1945" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1967), x-li.

⁷⁸ Szabó's status and legacy remains a contested topic. See, for example, Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 82. Berend places Dezső Szabó squarely within the *népies* camp.

what remained “true Hungarianness” in Transylvania’s Hungarian villages. The main character János Böjthe, the scion of a noble family with a lineage supposedly going back to Attila the Hun, turns against the prevailing aristocratic order, rebels against capitalistic and modernizing life, and rejects the foreign influences of Jews and Germans. As a final act of defiance he marries a peasant girl giving emphasis to Szabó’s main claim that the future of Hungary rests with the “purity” of the Hungarian peasantry.

The *népiesek*, for the most part, shared the *fajvédő* movement’s apprehension about European orientation and modernity.⁷⁹ However, the ideology borrowed from the Left as well as from the Right. Dezső Szabó’s influence, Ady’s legacy and Jászi’s program were equally represented within the *népies* view. In late 1920s when the ideology became a significant current in Hungarian cultural and political life, membership of the new movement included socially sensitive middle-class intellectuals growing up in the radical bourgeois tradition and a new intellectual circle with peasant origins. However, virtually everyone agreed on the need for radical changes in the social, economic, and cultural life of the peasantry. They too dreamed of a new Hungary. The vehicle to reach this new Hungary was to be the peasant tradition and peasant culture, which they saw as a besieged, endangered identity. However, the ideology behind the *népies* current was more than simple peasant romanticism. While the radical peasant

⁷⁹ Just as “race defender” is not a good translation of the Hungarian “*fajvédő*,” the English word “populist” too fails to be the correct translation for the word “*népies*.” Nor should the *népies* movement be equated with the German *völkisch* movement. Perhaps it has more commonality with the pre WW I German *Jugendbewegung* or the Russian *narodniki* movements. I will continue to use the Hungarian word throughout this study. For an interesting essay on the place of *népies* ideology in modern Hungarian intellectual discourse, see Gábor Kovács, “A népi mozgalom helye a politikai eszmetörténetben” in *Beszélő* 10, no. 6 (2005), accessed: February 4, 2012, <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/a-nepi-mozgalom-helye-a-politikai-eszmetortenetben>.

orientation was a shared feature—together with anticlericalism, anticapitalism, and the rejection of the existing political structure—they were divided on many other issues, including but not limited to the question of Jewish assimilation. As a result the spectrum of *népies* contribution is between that of the far-Right and the far-Left, and everything between.

Perhaps the most influential representatives of the *népies* current, László Németh, was also the main architect of its political/ ideological offshoot: the third way (*harmadik út*). It was based on a critical review of Western culture, which, Németh argued, had reached the zenith of its existence. According to this interpretation, totalitarian dictatorships, in both their Bolshevik and Nazi varieties, were nothing less than a last-ditch effort at some sort of renewal.⁸⁰ He pointed toward the untapped energies of Central and Eastern Europe as the source of renewal not only for the narrower region, but for Europe as a whole.

The best-known member of the *népies* group, Gyula Illyés, represented the Left-wing of the movement. His political agenda was simple: he wanted to enhance the quality of life for his kinsmen, the people of the deep countryside, and the masses of landless peasants. His 1936 *Puszták népe* (*Peoples of the Puszta*) was a unique blend of sociological examination and literary essay. His *puszta* is not in the Great Plains of Eastern Hungary but rather the south Transdanubian countryside of Western Hungary. He sought to destroy the idealized and romanticized picture of the countryside that some of his contemporaries continued to paint. Instead he offered a critical look at the living

⁸⁰ Miklós Lackó, *Sziget és a külvilág—válogatott tanulmányok* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1996), 176-77.

conditions and problems of the Hungarian countryside, with its own social hierarchy, its own—sometimes brutal—laws and justice, and with its own isolated culture. He presented this as a “wild” and “dangerous” world where no shared morality safeguarded the virtue of young women, where the concept of private property was different, and where even the smell of everyday life could have been offensive to outsiders.⁸¹ The landless peasants of the *puszta* were the unknown and forgotten people of Hungary, as Illyés put it: “In general everybody forgot them in every age until it had become a custom. Not only [had] the statesmen of all times, but the scholars too passed them over. Thus there are even fewer ‘genuine’ details of their past than of their present.”⁸² His peasants were not the mythologized peasants of the *fajvédő* representing the bravery and intractability of Attila and Árpád. His peasants heroes were those who succeeded in breaking out of this world: the butcher’s assistant in a provincial town, a railway porter, or a tram-driver.⁸³ Illyés’s portrayal should not be seen as negative. He was a son of the *puszta*. He also appreciated its inhabitants’ warmth and hard work, as well as their connection to the land, but he wanted to offer a realistic picture of their life in order to address the real social and economic problems that these people were facing day after day. It was an eye-opening read for many and furthered the interest of the countryside and its peasant culture.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Gyula Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, trans. G. F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1967), 34-35 and in passim. I used the English translation of this great work, which is fortunately widely available, as my way of recommending it to an English-speaking readership.

⁸² Gyula Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, 72.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁸⁴ Another interesting—albeit less well-known—*népies* intellectual was Zoltán Szabó. One of his main concepts was the idea of “intellectual defense of the homeland” (*szellemi honvédelem*). As that the name suggests *szellemi honvédelem* was a call to arms. He rejected the false dichotomy of people (*nép*) and

The *népies* camp did not gain political prominence during the interwar years. Some of its members turned to the Communist Left while others moved closer to the Hungarian Nazis. Its significance lie in its cultural prominence and the role it played in the *népies-urbánus* controversy. This dispute between the two groups over the nature and future of Hungarian culture indeed had considerable impact on the official identity and image construction.

Conservative national liberals—the most important and most influential of all the intellectual and cultural currents—promoted a European orientation. Their construct was based on the Christian National (*keresztény-nemzeti*) ideology, which was the basic foundation of official government policy, and as such, it was the most important element of official identity and image construction. In the mid- to late 1920s the overriding consensus among the political elite pointed toward a European, that is Western, oriented policy. Klebelsberg, for example, readily acknowledged that Hungary’s roots were in Asia. He also went as far to agree that some of Asian racial characteristics remained intact. However, argued Klebelsberg, for millennia Hungarians had been living in the heart of Europe. He did not question the notion that Europe showed its “ungrateful” side to Hungary with the Trianon Treaty, which to him was clearly “unjust and brutal,” yet he

nation (*nemzet*) and advocated for the idea of a politically independent national culture. He also presented a different vision for the reorganization of East-Central Europe. This went against the spirit of Hungarian imperial dreams for he promoted the “Europe of small nations.” In his view the greatness of a nation was not dependent on its size, but based on its contribution to the betterment of humanity. Therefore, he continued, small nations—such as Hungary— should not try to mimic their larger counterparts (a hawk should not try to imitate an elephant). As a result Hungary should gear up its culture for the moment where the whole of humanity will be disappointed with the emptiness of grand ideas and be an example to others by showing the “great depths of a small tarn.”

See Zoltán Szabó, “Szellemi honvédelem” in *Magyar Néző*, ed. András Sándor (Budapest: Természet –és társadalombarát Fejlődésért Közalapítvány és Kortárs Kiadó, 2002), 17 and Zoltán Szabó, “Magyarság és Közép-Európa” in *Magyar Néző*, ed. András Sándor (Budapest: Természet –és társadalombarát Fejlődésért Közalapítvány és Kortárs Kiadó, 2002), 62-64.

disagreed with those who propagated a break with the West. Breaking relations with the West would be the rejection of a traditional European outlook that was exemplified by St. Stephen, King Matthias, and István Széchenyi and would have amounted to the rejection of the very essence of Hungarianness, contested Klebelsberg. To refuse modern reforms in the center of Europe, concluded the minister, would be “absurd,” and the nation would vanish.⁸⁵ This anxiety about the nature of Hungarian-European relationship was perhaps best verbalized by Dezső Kosztolányi. His poem, *Európa (Europe)*, reveals the feeling of betrayal and disappointment Hungarians felt toward Europe, but also illustrate how anger was subdued and turned into a plea:

Europe, to you,
by you, praising you, I present my plea
from this century's blind botching,
and as others bury you, tolling through the night,
with a shrill dithyramb, with joy,
with good morning I greet you.

O primordial continent,
you ancient, you roughened, you holy, you majestic
tutor of souls, filter of scents and tastes,
worker of wonders, bravely-browed, bookish,
antique Europe.

My stepmother even, then I would contend for you
and spank you with mouthings and prank you with
kisses
and yoke you in phrases, so at last you love me.

From here who could tear me,
from here who could tear me, could snatch from your
bosom?
Have I not always been your pure son, and faithful?
Have I not always since I was a brat, sitting
at night in the rays of my lamp, learning your lesson,
attending, marveling at your hundred-tongued speech,

⁸⁵ Klebelsberg, *Jöjjetek*, 49-50.

so that each word insinuated itself in my heart?
Since then my ravings have been understood;
wherever they fling me I have hundreds of kinsmen,
wherever they break me I have one thousand brothers.⁸⁶

The Hungarian political elite's incontestable commitment to Europe had to do with much more than a simple case of belonging. They were convinced that Hungary could not afford to turn its back on the very concept that was the main message of its cultural diplomatic campaign, which was the Europeanness of the country. The state concept of St. Stephen (*Szent István-i állameszme*)—promoted, among others, by Gyula Szekfű—offered a historical justification for this claim.

The figure of St. Stephen was perfectly fitted to serve both as a religious and secular symbol. The first Christian king of Hungary became in interwar image construction a symbol of Hungary's commitment to Western Christianity, and consequently, to Europe. This commitment in Hungarian historical memory was more than a symbolic gesture. It made the country the "bulwark" or "shield" of Christendom, ensuring that the West was able to continue its uninterrupted development.⁸⁷ Under government direction the St. Stephen's Day (August 20) celebration was transformed from the saint's feast day to a national holiday. The holiday was to represent the Christian unity of the country and the celebration of the nation's Christian character, which was seen as an eternal lynchpin between Hungary and Europe. This was one of the few instances where government policy successfully overcame divisions. Confessional

⁸⁶ Selection from Dezső Kosztolányi, *Európa* trans. Alan Dixon, accessed February 12, 2012, http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/Kosztol%C3%A1nyi_Dezs%C5%91/Eur%C3%B3pa/en/2037-Europe.

⁸⁷ For more on this, see Ignác Romsics, "From Christian Shield to EU Member," in *The Hungarian Quarterly* 48, no. 186 (2007): 3-27.

rhetoric, Catholic or Protestant, had a very limited place. As historian Paul Hanebrink puts it, “church leaders had to acknowledge that the state’s interest in national unity took precedence. Religious activists could pursue their confessional interests only as long as they furthered the government’s policy of consolidation.”⁸⁸

St. Stephen, as a secular figure, was also the symbol of Hungary’s “civilizing mission,” which cultural diplomacy offered as one of the key rationalizations for the revision of the Trianon Treaty. According to this rationalization, as the first king of Hungary St. Stephen broke with the tribal traditions and established a new political entity: the Hungarian Kingdom built on the lines of Western European feudalism; hence it was quintessentially European in its essence and structure. Moreover, his legacy also served as a justification for claims that the Hungarians had a special talent for state-building, unlike other nationalities in the region. This also fit an enduring argument: the historical kingdom of St. Stephen and its successors was a political nation not an ethnic nation. This argument, which was based on some very dubious evidence, was to counter Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav claims to the contrary. Finally, it also served as historical evidence for a contemporary manifestation of the Hungarian imperial dream: the multinational empire of St. Stephen based on the concept of *pax Hungarica*. According to this interpretation, the basic foundation of the Hungarian Kingdom was and should be the maintenance of European and Western civilization on the frontier of Asiatic and European culture.⁸⁹ In this political framework Hungarians would continue to play the role of first among equals—just as the English distinguished themselves within the

⁸⁸ Hanebrink, *In Defense*, 110-14 and 117.

⁸⁹ László Ottlik, “Pax Hungarica,” *Magyar Szemle* 22, no. 87 (1934): 289-97.

British Crown, argued a contemporary advocate of the idea.⁹⁰ Cultural diplomacy sought to represent and promote all these ideas in its campaign that aimed to convince international public opinion about the need for the continuing existence of a strong Hungary within revised borders.

Conclusion

Hungarian cultural diplomacy faced a conundrum at its very conception. There was in effect a collective agreement within governmental and intellectual circles that cultural diplomacy must be pursued, yet there was much disagreement about what image to project. While there had been discussion about the Hungarian national character in the past, the First World War and the subsequent crisis—which in the case of Hungary, and in most East-Central European countries, was more than a cultural crisis, but also an economic and political crisis—altered the nature of the debate. Intellectuals and politicians alike sought to redefine the nation’s image abroad in order to ensure the country’s continuing existence and to build a case for challenging the status quo. The almost obsessive questioning of the country’s national character and its relationship to Europe divided Hungary’s cultural and intellectual elite. Conservative national liberals dominated the discussion, for they possessed political power. They made it clear that the country was to follow a European orientation. However, as the following chapters will show, they could not disregard opposing views of Hungarianness. Therefore, cultural diplomacy remained a curious, often perplexing, combination of new and old, traditional

⁹⁰ László Ottlik, “Uj Hungária felé,” *Magyar Szemle* 4, no. 13 (1928): 9.

and modern, whereby the modern and progressive served as a proof of Europeaness while the traditional sought to depict uniqueness. Thus the following chapters trace out the machinery of cultural diplomacy as it developed and the struggles to find the right content for cultural diplomacy's various forms.

CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATING INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION: CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS

“With the power of knowledge that we are to hammer the prison door of Trianon, and with words that appeal to the intellect we will call on the nations of the world for justice.”
(Kuno Klebelsberg, 1929)¹

In the mid-1930s Lord Tyrrell, chairman of the British Council stated that “we [the United Kingdom] must regard our educational and cultural forces with as much care as our armed forces.”² The rationale behind this statement was one of the “chief lessons” of the First World War, namely as Sir Stephen Tallents put it in his 1932 pamphlet, *The Projection of England*: “No civilized country can to-day afford to neglect the projection of its national personality or to resign its projection to others.”³ The Hungarian elite also came to this realization. István Bethlen summed up the situation and explained the importance of positive international public opinion from the vantage point of the less powerful nations:

Never were the peoples of the world so anxious to appear in a favorable light before the public opinion of other countries. Two momentous experiences are responsible for this. In the war period they were forced to realize how deeply other nations’ opinion of themselves—especially those of the Great Powers—were able to influence their destinies. The period that followed the conclusion of

¹ Klebelsberg, *Jöjjetek*, 92.

² Quoted in Philip M. Taylor, “Cultural Diplomacy and the British Council: 1934-1939,” *British Journal of International Studies* 4, no. 3 (1978): 260.

³ Tallents quoted in Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection*, 111.

the Peace Treaties taught the nations another painful lesson by showing that they could not lead an isolated existence; that for good or ill, their fortunes were bound up with those of other countries. . . . These experiences induced many nations especially the small ones, to launch, on the one hand, [an] assiduous campaign of propaganda in order to present themselves in a favorable light to the Western nation; while, on the other, a general movement was started to promote an international spiritual intercourse.⁴

As this chapter will show, academic institutions, publications, and lectures abroad were meant to remind the West of Hungary's achievements, its place among the "Western" nations, and the European character of the country. Discussions and debates about Hungary's Oriental character, or Eastern orientation, were not presented abroad. Indeed, proving their Europeanness had become the main goal of all East-Central European countries as they competed for the support of the West. As historian Andrea Orzoff points out, each state "cited its adherence to Western cultural norms as proof of its moral worthiness," its historical achievements, and its role in defending and creating Western civilization.⁵ Their "stories," as Holly Case calls them, were "stories of always having belonged to, protected, defended, preserved, and represented European culture and values."⁶ Indeed, this was a cut-throat competition that required the total mobilization of the various countries' cultural resources. The Hungarians, just like their counterparts in the region, reorganized their cultural and educational institutions in order to meet a dual goal of raising the standards of education at home and projecting the image of a cultured nation abroad.

⁴ Stephen Bethlen [István Bethlen], "The Hungarian Quarterly, its Aim and Scope," *The Hungarian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1936): 3. While Bethlen penned this for the inaugural issue of *The Hungarian Quarterly* in 1936, the reasoning behind these words motivated Hungarian cultural diplomacy since the early 1920s.

⁵ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 9.

⁶ Holly Case, "Being European: East and West," in *European Identity*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 115.

The motivation behind these reforms was quite simple. As suggested in earlier chapters, much of the Hungarian political and intellectual leadership believed that the West's negative image of Hungary was primarily responsible for the severity of the treaty. Perhaps, however, the Hungarian understanding of the power of national reputation was best articulated by János Hankiss: "Once there are vultures circling above a destiny of a small nation, it is not the same if it is called Holland or Abyssinia, Switzerland or Montenegro, Belgium or Panama."⁷ He continued by claiming that there can be no doubt that the outcome of the treaty would have been different if "Western public opinion would have looked at Hungary as a recognized first-class 'small' nation, not a fairytale land of shepherds, Gypsies, and oligarchs."⁸

Hankiss was not alone in his opinion. Zoltán Magyary, state secretary of culture under Klebelsberg, pointed out in his work on the basic tenets of Hungarian politics of science (*tudománypolitika*) that there were new challenges to face once the union with Austria had ceased; Hungary for the first time in a great while represented its own true self in front of a foreign audience.⁹ Others, such as Gyula Kornis, were more specific and asserted that because of the rather esoteric nature of the Hungarian language Europe was not aware of the Hungarian contribution to the historical and scientific development of Western civilization. Even worse, continued Kornis, the neighboring countries either

⁷ Hankiss, *A kultúrdiplomácia*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ Zoltán Magyary, "Tudománypolitikánk mai állapota és e mű programja," in *A magyar tudománypolitika alapvetése*, ed. Zoltán Magyary (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1927), 16.

totally ignored Hungarian research or used it for their purposes.¹⁰ Kornis further argued that one of the most endangered elements of Hungarian culture was its history, for “the enemies”—here almost certainly he was referring to the successor states of Romania, Czechoslovakia, and perhaps to lesser degree Yugoslavia and even Austria—were “sparing neither money nor energy” to conduct research, to establish journals and magazines, and to open new institutes devoted to history. On the other hand, he continued, the Hungarians not only failed to put up a defense, but “don’t even have the prerequisite of a defense,” that is, to survey the field and keep an eye on developments related to the history of Hungary and the region.¹¹ Reading these two lieutenants of the reform movement that started during the regime of Klebelsberg, one can see the three assignments of Hungarian cultural diplomacy, at least as far as academic production goes. First, as Magyary puts it, there was a need to erect “sentinels” (*őrszem*) of Hungarian culture in foreign cultural centers, possibly creating institutions to house these sentinels.¹² Second, these institutions were to serve as outposts of Hungarian culture. The people manning these institutions were to maintain contact with the country’s intellectual and academic elite. Finally, Hungarian cultural and historical achievements, and as well as the country’s contribution to the development of Western civilization, were to be promoted through foreign language publications and lectures. It is no exaggeration to say that the cultural elite of Hungary saw establishing Hungary’s reputation as a sophisticated nation to be a primary goal of cultural diplomacy. As Magyary puts it, one “cannot

¹⁰ Gyula Kornis, “A szellemi tudományok múltja, jelene, és jövő feladatai,” in *A magyar tudománypolitika alapvetése*, ed. Zoltán Magyary (Budapest, Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1927), 116.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 117. Here Kornis is being a bit harsh on his colleagues, for KÜM and VKM both monitored the relevant literature.

¹² Zoltán Magyary, “Célok és feladatok,” in *A magyar tudománypolitika alapvetése*, ed. Zoltán Magyary (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1927), 471.

escape being measured,” but it is within the Hungarian nation to see to it that it will not be found wanting, for “it is not only the question of national honor, but the precondition of a better future.”¹³ The Hungarian political and intellectual elite answered this call, but the majority of the efforts had taken place after 1927, as the country began its recovery. Governmental and government-supported associations took control of educational institutions and scholarly publishing with the purpose of using these tools to educate and convince Western audiences about the just cause of Hungarian revisionism. This chapter tells the story how the Hungarian government reorganized the academic industry, produced scholarly publications, and organized lectures. It also reveals the complexity of constructing the image they tried to project. In addition, the chapter reveals the nature and dimensions of the regional competition and the surprising level of attention that academia received from East-Central European political leaders.

Institutions

A history of Hungarian cultural institutions prior to the Trianon Treaty would have to focus on three places. The first would be the Pazmaneum in Vienna. This was a seminary founded in 1623 by Cardinal Péter Pázmány, a leading figure of the Hungarian counter-Reformation. The second place, the Hungarian Historical Institute (Magyar Történeti Intézet) in Rome, was also the fruit of individual initiative. It was founded in 1895 by Bishop Vilmos Fraknói, a priest and historian whose earliest work was about the

¹³ Magyary, “Tudománypolitikánk,” 16.

life and works of Cardinal Pázmány.¹⁴ Third on the list would be the short-lived Hungarian Scientific Institute of Constantinople (Magyar Tudományos Intézet). Klebelsberg, then head of the Hungarian Historical Society (Magyar Történelmi Társulat), argued in 1917 for the necessity of a government-organized and funded scholarship system that would enable young students to further their education abroad and consequently provide for the future intellectual reserves of the country.¹⁵ This institute was the first realization of his dreams. As director of the institution between January 1917 and September 1918 he organized a number of lectures and other events to foster cooperation among Hungarian, German, Austrian, and Turkish scholars.¹⁶

The post-Trianon era saw the growth of government interest in establishing Hungarian academic institutions abroad. Within the VKM there was a special section that was to oversee cultural relations with foreign countries and to supervise and manage the works of the various Hungarian institutes, libraries, and centers. However, KÜM also had its own cultural section. Their stated goal was, as Géza Paikert wrote many years later, to emphasize that “Hungarian culture is an integral part of European culture, without which no European culture would be complete.”¹⁷ Nor was the competition idle. For example, in 1928 then-President Tomáš Masaryk pledged six million Czechoslovakian crowns (c.

¹⁴ Gábor Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék: politika, kultúra és történettudomány a “neobarokk társadalomban”* (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2010), 102. I would like to thank the author for allowing me to read this outstanding study in manuscript.

¹⁵ József Deér, “A külföldi collégiumok” in *Magyar Szemle* (October, 1931): 112.

¹⁶ Gábor Ujváry, *Tudományszervezés – Történetkutatás – Forráskritika* (Győr, Hungary: Győr-Sopron Megye Levéltára, 1996), 68.

¹⁷ G. C. Paikert (Géza Paikert), “Hungarian Foreign Policy in Intercultural Relations, 1919-1944,” *American Slavic and East European Review* 11, no. 1 (1952): 43. Géza Charles Paikert was the head of the Division of Intercultural Affairs at VKM in the 1930s, and from 1947 to 1975 professor of history and political science at Le Moyne College (NY).

\$2,125,000)¹⁸ toward the construction of a Slavonic Institute in London's King's College, which remained the institutional center of pro-Czechoslovak intellectuals throughout the interwar years.¹⁹

In order to be competitive, VKM, with the active support of KÜM, initiated the reorganization of the Hungarian scholarly industry at home and abroad.²⁰ However, such a reform required a great deal of money, something that was not in abundance in postwar Hungary. Klebelsberg and company fought an uphill battle trying to convince the parliament and media that supporting scholarly reforms was far from being a “luxury.” Klebelsberg actually argued that spending money on building scientific/ academic institutions at home and abroad was an absolute necessity, because Hungary could not

¹⁸ Approximated relative value indicated in 2010 US \$. Henceforth relative value will be shown in prentices after historical amount.

¹⁹ The Czechoslovak Government had delivered on its pledge by 1938. See I. W. Roberts, *History of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1915-1990* (London: SSEES University of London, 1991), 25-39.

²⁰ My chapter will focus on the government's effort abroad. However, the domestic scene is also very interesting. One of the most significant domestic accomplishments of Klebelsberg and his successor Bálint Hóman was the creation of the *népiskola* system. The *népiskola* was a public elementary school that was most prevalent in the countryside. It was especially challenging in places where the population lived in the *tanya* structure, which was essentially a collection of loosely connected homesteads. After Trianon Hungary lost approximately 67 percent of its elementary schools. An average *népiskola* in 1920 boasted 130 students and 2.9 teachers. Between 1922 and 1925 only 150 new schools were built. Under the new government program of 1926, the public education program gained momentum. The result was the opening of 1096 new *népiskola* between 1926 and 1931. The growth continued—with decreasing speed—throughout the 1930s. Despite continuing challenges the program proved successful in curtailing illiteracy. In 1930/1931 among the Hungarian population six years and older, 7 percent were illiterate (in 1910 it was 33 percent and 1920 it was 15 percent). The corresponding illiteracy rate in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia was about 5 percent. In comparison—to illustrate the remarkable success of the program—in Yugoslavia 45 percent, in Romania 42 percent, in Bulgaria 39 percent, and in Poland 23 percent of the same segment of the population was illiterate. Secondary education also underwent some restructuring. According to the new model there were three different types of secondary schools: 1) *reáliskola* (which had a special emphasis on natural sciences) 2) *humán gimnázium* (classical education with special focus on Latin, Greek, and history), and 3) *redlgimnázium* (which had a special emphasis on humanities, Latin, French, and German). The transformation of the domestic scene also included the reorganization of Hungarian university life, the creation of the Biological Institute at Tihany to study the flora and fauna of the Lake Balaton, the Astronomical Observatory [*Csillagvizsgáló Intézet*] at Buda, and the National Hungarian University Collection [*Országos Magyar Gyűjteményegyetem*]. See Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 175-179; and Stephan Michael Herzog, “Negotiating Modernity: Cultural Reform in 1920s Hungary” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003), 141-51.

afford to let its culture “shrink” since one of the principal grounds of the Hungarian revisionist claim was that Hungarians were able to create a greater and better quality culture than their neighbors.²¹ This was a comprehensive reform of the Hungarian education system from kindergarten to the scientific research institutions. While reforming the Hungarian politics of academia, Klebelsberg looked to the Prussian/German *Wissenschaftspolitik*. Klebelsberg was particularly impressed with the works of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft and the achievements of the *Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft*. This is not to say that the Hungarians simply used German institutions as their only model.²² On the contrary, Klebelsberg wanted to stay clear of the dominating influence of any one culture. Instead he wanted to infuse Hungary with the best that all cultures had to offer in this respect. This is what he called “culture-political chemistry” (*kultúrpolitikai vegyészet*).²³ That is why Zoltán Magyary travelled widely, studying similar institutions and universities worldwide— including, against some objections from the Foreign Ministry, to the USSR. In the end, between 1925 and 1930 the VKM received almost 10 percent of the total budget, more than double what it received in the years between 1900 and 1913.²⁴

The first two Hungarian institutes were the Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna and the Collegium Hungaricum in Berlin, both of which opened their doors in 1924. The establishments served dual purposes. On the one hand they were to aid Hungarians

²¹ Kuno Klebelsberg, *Elnöki megnyitó beszéd: a Magyar Történelmi Társulat 1920. évi május hó 14-én tartott közgyűlésén* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1920), 15.

²² For more on this, see Gábor Ujváry, “Baráti háromszög (Carl Heinrich Becker, Klebelsberg Kuno, Gragger Róbert és a hungarológia megszületése),” *Hungarológia* (March, 2000): 99-120.

²³ Sándor Domanovszky, “Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno,” *Napkelet*, Vol. 21 (1936): 79.

²⁴ Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 175.

studying abroad and as such contribute to the development of a new, European-oriented, educated, and cultured elite. On the other hand, they were also to function as representative institutions of Hungarian culture. As Antal Lábán – the director of the Vienna institute – stated: “These institutions shall be evidence of Hungary’s will and aptitude to endure.”²⁵ They were places of international academic exchange, places of support for foreign students interested in Hungarian topics, and places that housed libraries and exhibitions. Each of the institutions was led by esteemed academic professionals, who could and did more to earn the appreciation for “the name of Hungary” than “simple political tools” could have achieved, Klebelsberg argued.²⁶

As the government announced its active foreign policy in 1927, educating international public opinion became an even more essential part of cultural diplomacy. The 1927 Act XIII, “Hungarian Institutions Abroad and the Scholarship Program serving high cultural aims,” (*A külföldi magyar intézetekről és a magas műveltség célját szolgáló ösztöndíjakról*) was passed by the Hungarian Parliament to further boost Klebelsberg’s program. It called for the further development of institutions already in existence (Vienna and Berlin) and for the establishment of new ones.²⁷ Subsequently, the VKM received 1,200,000 Hungarian pengő (c. \$2,840,000) to establish new institutions that could serve as the outposts of Hungarian culture.²⁸ Shortly thereafter, the Hungarian government

²⁵ Antal Lábán, *A bécsi Collegium Hungaricum* (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1928), 27.

²⁶ Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus*, 25.

²⁷ *Ezer év törvényei, 1927/XIII*, accessed May 11, 2010, <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=7697>. All laws enacted by the Hungarian Parliament(s) in its various forms are available online. I thank to Miklós Zeidler for directing me to the website.

²⁸ This amount did not include the 200,000 pengő (c. \$473,000) allocated to the renovation/enlargement of Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna, nor the “regularly scheduled” 380,000 pengő (c. \$898,700), which was

purchased the Palazzo Falconieri in Rome and the third Collegium Hungaricum opened its doors.

Each of these centers of learning had a specialization. Vienna was the place for students of history—thanks to the Historical Institute in Vienna—as well as those learning German or studying to become doctors and lawyers. Berlin mainly welcomed those interested in the natural sciences and engineering. Rome remained a functioning seminary for Catholic priests. It was also the place for church and art historians as well as practitioners and students of the fine arts.²⁹ According to its field of specialization, each institution was led by a distinguished academic professional. Antal Lábán in Vienna was an accomplished literary historian, who published his *Ungarn in seiner Dichtung* (*Hungary in its Poetry*) in 1923.³⁰ Robert Gragger of Berlin's Collegium Hungaricum was also a literary historian who discovered Hungary's first written poem *Ómagyar Mária-siralom* (*Old Hungarian Lament of Mary*), which dated back to the thirteenth century. He was the author of a number of books: *Molière első nyomai a magyar irodalomban* (*The First Traces of Molière in Hungarian Literature*) in 1909; *Preussen, Weimar und die ungarische Krone* (*Prussia, Weimar and the Royal Hungarian Crown*) in 1923. In addition he also launched two academic journals (*Ungarische Jahrbücher* and *Ungarische Bibliothek*) to publicize Hungarian history, art, and

given for the maintenance of already existing institutions and scholarships, was part of the sum. See *Ezer év törvényei, 1927/XI*, accessed May 11, 2010, <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=7695>.

²⁹ Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 135.

³⁰ Ágnes Kenyeres, ed., *Magyar életrajzi lexikon*, accessed July 22, 2010, <http://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/index.html>.

literature.³¹ Art historian Tibor Gerevich led the effort to promote Hungarian culture in Rome. He too was an established scholar in his field, whose notable works included *Tracce di Michelangelo nella scuola di Francesco Francia* (*Traces of Michelangelo in the School of Francesco Francia*) in 1908, *A régi magyar művészet európai helyzete* (*The European Place of Ancient Hungarian Art*) in 1924 and *L'arte antica ungherese* (*Old Hungarian Art*) in 1930.³² In addition to being experts on their fields, the directors of the various academic centers performed the role of modern cultural attachés.³³

Thus the institutions were more than simple dormitories for scholarship holders. The Collegium Hungaricum system made an impression on Colonel John A. Baer, US military attaché in Vienna. He provided the following summary:

Under its educational system, Hungary maintains in various foreign capitols [sic], organizations called “colleges”, which are really centers for various Hungarian activities. According to the information obtainable the purpose of these centers is first to give advantage to gifted students by helping them to study in foreign universities, and second, to serve as a liaison point through the directors of these centers for maintaining contact with the leading intellectuals in the places where the centers are located. They are also used for dissemination of information concerning Hungary, which is termed in some quarters “propaganda”³⁴

The colonel’s appraisal was accurate. One of the aims of the Collegium Hungaricum system was to promote the historical accomplishments of Hungary, as well as the achievements of its arts and sciences. Historian Gábor Ujváry argues that propaganda was only the secondary goal of these institutions, for Klebelsberg strongly believed that if

³¹Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 131.

³⁴ National Archives at College Park (NACP), RG 59 (Internal Affairs 864) M1206, roll 6.

Hungary was to ascend it needed an educated elite of “European standard.”³⁵ However, he also viewed them as the essential representatives of Hungarian culture abroad. In his 1927 speech during the parliamentary budget debate he argued that it was not the goal of the Collegium Hungaricum to conduct some sort of “inferior propaganda.” Nevertheless, continues the minister, it is the mission of these institutions to represent the “power of Hungarian culture and knowledge” abroad in order to convince Europe of the “injustice of Trianon.”³⁶ Klebelsberg continued to bombard the government with requests for money until his death in 1932. At the time when his successor Bálint Hóman took over the VKM there were three institutions called Collegium Hungaricum (Vienna, Berlin, and Rome), a Hungarian-French University Information Institute (Paris), and five lectureships at institutions of higher education in Germany, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, and Poland.

Despite the untimely death of Klebelsberg, the governmental approach to the issue of academic representation remained unchanged. One of the reasons of course was that Hóman— trained historian and director of the Hungarian National Library (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár) and the Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum) — was a close collaborator of Klebelsberg’s and a trusted specialist in the field of cultural diplomacy. Another reason was the realization that the competition was unrelenting. A 1933 confidential report states that the “expansion” of Hungarian culture abroad is not competitive with the similar undertakings of the “successor states,” especially in France. According to the report, Hungary cannot compete with the influence

³⁵ Klebelsberg quoted in Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 129.

³⁶ Klebelsberg in *Felsőházi napló*, 1927. I. kötet, 410.

of the Institut d'Études Slaves (Institute of Slavic Studies).³⁷ Indeed, the Paris institute had been a center for Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, and, to a certain degree, Polish cultural activity since its establishment of 1919.³⁸ Hóman, while not entirely in agreement with all that Klebelsberg had done, represented a continuation of a policy that started with the inauguration address of the latter, thrived between 1927 and 1932, and continued to grow until Hungary entered the war in 1941—and actually even after that. My calculation—based on the published official budget—indicates the VKM *officially* received approximately 4,900,000 pengő (\$11,588,600) between 1927 and 1940. Others, like Iván Nagy in his 1936 study, argue that between 1924 and 1935 the Hungarian government spent 8,175,000 pengő (c. \$19,334,000).³⁹ The discrepancy could be explained by the fact that in addition to official government money secured from the yearly budget, there had been transactions with private and semiprivate companies for financial support of the government programs, such as foreign scholarships.⁴⁰ Traditional diplomatic work also aided these efforts. Under Hóman, Hungary signed cultural and intellectual agreements of cooperation with Italy (1935), Poland (1935), Austria (1935), Estonia (1938), Finland (1938), Japan (1938 and 1940), Germany (1936 and 1940), and Bulgaria (1941).⁴¹ These treaties were to guarantee a place for the growth of Hungarian cultural representation abroad, as they regulated agreements on such matters as textbooks and student

³⁷ MOL, K636, 672. doboz (June 20, 1933).

³⁸ Institut d'Études Slaves, accessed July 20, 2010, <http://www.institut-slave.msh-paris.fr>.

³⁹ Quoted in Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 139.

⁴⁰ I thank Gábor Ujváry for pointing out this possibility.

⁴¹ Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 153.

exchanges, as well as institutional representation.⁴² By the time Hungary entered the war, the country had developed a remarkable network of foreign cultural and academic institutions: no less than sixty-four in fifteen different countries.⁴³

The Hungarian Reference Library in New York City

The Hungarian Reference Library in New York (hereafter: HRL) was but one of these sixty-four institutions. The establishment and day-to-day operation of the HRL mirrors the hopes, anxieties, successes, and failures of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy. The official opening of HRL took place on April 20, 1938 even though it had been operating since October 1937. It was the crowning achievement of Hungarian cultural diplomacy because since the early 1920s diplomats and intellectuals alike urged the creation of an academic and cultural institute to counter the growth of Slavic studies in the United States.⁴⁴

In 1927 Hungary was in fact very meagerly represented in US academic circles. Thanks to John D. Rockefeller's International Education Board, three Hungarian students gained entrance—each with a one year scholarship and \$1200 yearly stipend—to US universities. Pál Teleki used his personal connections to secure two places for Hungarians at the Michigan Agricultural College at East Lansing, Michigan (today known as Michigan State University) for the 1924/25 school year. Hungarian language, literature, and history were taught at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania—

⁴² MOL, K66, 239. csomó III-6/2, Draft of German-Hungarian Cultural Agreement (October 10, 1934).

⁴³ Paikert, "Hungarian Foreign policy," 64; and Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 155.

⁴⁴ One of the original ideas was to create a cultural institution and Hungarian (Finno-Ugric) lectureship within the organizational and institutional setting of Columbia University. See János Pelényi's letter to Lajos Walko. MOL, K66, 82. csomó, III-6 (March 30, 1927)

albeit entirely funded by the American Reformed Church. Through the Institute of International Education in 1924 Hungary was represented by one single female student at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. In the 1925/26 school year six female college students spent a year at Vassar, Radcliffe (part of Harvard University since 1999), Smith, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, and Teachers College (affiliated with Columbia University).⁴⁵ Without a doubt, this is a rather meager list for a country hoping to establish its cultural credentials.

Why and more importantly how, would a country roughly the size (after Trianon) of Pennsylvania want to build its cultural and academic standing in the United States? In part, as I mentioned, a competitive spirit motivated Hungarians to establish the HRL. First there was the Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Yugoslav cultural and political propaganda in the US that presented a problem to the Hungarian political elite. Second, there were the activities of those Hungarian intellectuals with left-leaning tendencies, who were forced to leave Hungary after Horthy came to power. An internal memorandum named Oszkár Jászi as one of those whose actions were deemed “harmful” to the Hungarian government’s goal of reconstructing the country’s image abroad. The Hungarian government’s trepidation about harmful propaganda by Hungarians went so far that, as early as 1923, Rosika Schwimmer—feminist, and the first female ambassador in Hungary under the Károlyi government of 1918—was followed and reported on.⁴⁶ The third reason, according to the same memo, was to nurture the second-generation

⁴⁵ Zoltán Magyary, “Külföldi magyar tudományos intézetek és egyéb tudományos kapcsolataink,” *A magyar tudománypolitika alapvetése*, ed. Zoltán Magyary (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1927), 467-68.

⁴⁶ MOL, K67, 3. csomó, 1. tétel (December 11, 1923).

Hungarian-Americans' links to the Old Country.⁴⁷ Moreover, the architects of Hungary's cultural diplomatic campaign preferred a grapeshot-like approach, whereby no target was too small or too insignificant. If VKM and KÜM worried about the way Hungarian literature was taught in Buenos Aires—and indeed, it was taught there, and the Hungarian consulate proudly noted that there was no official representation of the successor states' literature—surely they would want a Hungarian institute in the United States.⁴⁸ Finally, Hungarians never forgot the fact that the US Congress failed to ratify the Paris treaties—including that of Trianon—and the press, as well as the general public, looked toward America with cautious optimism about the possibility of US support for Hungary's revisionist goal.

The Hungarian ambition to represent the country in academic and cultural circles was also part of a general trend in which the United States became a target of international cultural diplomacy. The idea of an “information library” came, perhaps not that all surprisingly, from Britain. American anxieties about propaganda and its effects began as soon as the First World War ended. Many became conscious of the fact that during the war British propaganda influenced, some even argued manipulated, US public opinion.⁴⁹ The word “propaganda” earned a negative connotation worldwide, or as one British Foreign Office official noted, it had a “particularly bad odor,” one that prompted his colleagues to eschew the use of the word altogether in favor of the word “publicity.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (July 27, 1935).

⁴⁸ MOL, K66, 239. csomó III-6/a (September 18, 1934).

⁴⁹ Gary, *The Nervous Liberals*, 23.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Taylor, *The Projection*, 5.

One of the ways Britain eased American fears was that the Foreign Office was to be “extremely careful to avoid the appearance of propaganda, whether direct or indirect,” states Philip M. Taylor.⁵¹ The British ship *Telconia*—some claim it was another ship—cut the transatlantic cables between Germany and the United States as soon the war started, thus Great Britain in effect had control over the flow of news and information coming from war-torn Europe to America.⁵² The British Bureau of Information in New York, created in April 1917, was one of the main weapons of British wartime propaganda. Additional branches opened in San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. In order to provide less obtrusive propaganda in 1920 the British Bureau of Information was “rechristened” to a more neutral-sounding British Library of Information.⁵³ By the mid-1930s the library with its sixteen employees had become the “semi-official arm” of British diplomacy, according to a Hungarian internal report written by József Szentkirályi (later known as Joseph St. Clair), the Deputy Director of HRL.⁵⁴ The British example was soon followed by similar official and semi-official cultural centers and “information libraries” established by France (1925), Germany (1925 and 1939), Italy (1938). Plans were made by Japan as well (1934).⁵⁵ Among other “information centers”—as a 1937 US study compiled by the American National Committee on International Intellectual Cooperation designated them—were the Japanese

⁵¹ Taylor, *The Projection*, 68.

⁵² Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 45.

⁵³ Taylor, *The Projection*, 70.

⁵⁴ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (1939?).

⁵⁵ Ibid. For the planned Japanese Information Library see “Japan in Amity Move,” *The New York Times*, September 5, 1934, 10.

Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, the China Institute, and the American Russian Institute for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union, Inc.⁵⁶ The latter, despite its supposed “non-political character” was in “close contact” with the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Nations. The American-Russian Institute maintained a reference library and information center, published a monthly paper “Research Bulletin on the Soviet Union, which contain[ed] a summary of news events having to do with foreign, domestic, and cultural happenings in the USSR, and list[ed] current books and pamphlets which ha[d] to do with the Soviet Union.” In addition, the institute, since its creation in 1926, sponsored and gave “lectures, meetings, dinners and exhibitions.”⁵⁷ Indeed, “educating public opinion” in the United States was by no means a uniquely Hungarian undertaking.

However, the urgency of the Hungarian government to establish its cultural presence in the United States was most importantly the result of the changing attitudes that originated in the mid-1930s and came to full circle with the Anschluss, the Munich Crisis, the Vienna Accord(s), and the outbreak of the Second World War. Contrary to the one-sided movement of Hungary’s traditional diplomacy toward Germany, its cultural diplomacy remained more universal in scope and continued, and one could argue, even increased its efforts to reach out to Western Powers. This time, however, the goals were slightly changed. On the one hand, cultural propaganda was to convince the Western Powers that the Vienna Awards were just. In order to do so, Hungary aimed to counter Romanian and Czechoslovak propaganda in, among other places, the United States. Pál Teleki created a special section within the Office of the Prime Minister to conduct foreign

⁵⁶ Edith E. Ware ed., *The Study of International Relations in the United States: Survey for 1937* (New York: published for American National Committee on International Intellectual Cooperation by Columbia University Press, 1938), 268, 270, and 422.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 423.

propaganda work in 1939. Its section leader, Domokos Szentiványi, was sent to the United States in 1938 to study the situation of Hungarian representation there. Upon his return, he argued that “especially in the light of recent developments,” he “found it unnecessary to stress the significance” of continuing Hungarian efforts in America.⁵⁸ Another important reason behind continuous Hungarian efforts was articulated in an internal memo, which, while specifically talking about ongoing attempts to sway French public opinion, embodied the thinking of the inner circles around Teleki. Cultural diplomacy served as the country’s exit strategy. The memorandum argued that “while the defeat of Germany in the war is highly unlikely” the continuation of the Hungarian Studies Center in France is vital *in order to cultivate the ground for the peace-negotiations, which will come after the war.*⁵⁹ Through cultural diplomacy, the Hungarian political leadership, with Prime Minister Teleki at the helm, aimed to both maintain old relationships and forge new ones. Hungary, despite pulling increasingly toward Germany, was not about to burn its bridges to the other Great Powers.

The HRL started out as a library based on the collection of Károly (Charles) Feleky. In 1924 he told the Hungarian reporter Árpád Pásztor: “It was my dream that the Hungarian government build a Hungarian House in New York, place my library in it, and name me librarian.”⁶⁰ Charles Feleky was born in Budapest and arrived in the New World in 1885. At first he worked as a nightclub pianist, but this was only his first step in the American music scene. Not too long afterward he was conducting theater orchestras

⁵⁸ MOL, K63, 472. csomó, 75. tétel/2 (n.d.).

⁵⁹ MOL, K30, 1. csomó, B/9/c tétel (October 25, 1939). Emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Kenneth E. Nyirady, *The History of the Feleky Collection and its Acquisition by The Library of Congress*, (Washington D.C.: European Division of The Library of Congress, 1995), xvii. The quote originally appeared in Árpád Pásztor, “Feleky Károly és könyvtára,” *Pesti Napló*, February 27, 1938.

and touring extensively. During one of his trips he acquired the original pieces of his English–language Hungarica collection, which by 1924 grew to 5,500 books and over 100,000 articles and magazine clippings (by 1930 the collection increased by another 2,000-3,000 volumes).⁶¹ His apartment in New York was a “Mecca for students of Hungarian and central European affairs” as Stephen Duggan, Director of the Institute of International Education described, it years later.⁶² Feleky did not live to see his dream fulfilled. He died on October 4, 1930, and left behind an incredible collection, which was a result of a lifetime of work and some \$32,000.⁶³ But the story of his collection had really just begun, for his collection was well-known in Hungarian intellectual circles.⁶⁴

According to Géza Paikert, the Hungarian government’s ambition was to create the HRL as a “house of Hungarian culture,” which was to be the nucleus of a “giant” scholarly center. This center was to develop into a publishing house and a hub to serve the “Hungarian cause”—often-used euphemisms signaling revisionist goals—in every “cranny and nook” of the United States.⁶⁵ In February 1936, Pál Teleki, János Pelényi (Hungarian envoy to the US), György Ghika (Chief consular officer, later envoy to the US), Ferenc (Francis) Deák (law professor at Columbia), and the earlier mentioned

⁶¹ Nyirady, *The History of the Feleky Collection*, 1-4.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁴ One of the people who visited the Feleky collection was Vilmos Fraknói—the same man who dreamed up the Hungarian Historical Institute (Magyar Történeti Intézet) in Rome. He published an article about the growing collection of Feleky in the journal *Magyar Könyvszemle* in 1912. It is perhaps an ironic twist of fate that sixty-six years later in the same journal Tamás Rónai sadly noted that his piece about HRL was also intended to be a salute to the memory of Feleky, whose name was entirely missing from the Hungarian lexicons. It is my sad duty to note that as of today the *Hungarian Biographical Lexicon (Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon)*—at least its online version—still omits his name.

⁶⁵ Paikert quoted in Tamás Rónai, “A New York-i Magyar Tájékoztató Könyvtár történetéhez,” *Magyar Könyvszemle* 89, No.1 (1978): 84.

Stephen Duggan (who in addition to being the Director of the Institute of International Education, was also the president of the Hungarian-American Society) met to discuss the basic structure of the future HRL. Teleki's note makes it clear that they considered various institutional arrangements. One was to establish the Hungarian library with a close association to Columbia, similar to the setup of the Deutsches Haus and the Italian Library. However, they decided against the idea because they feared the library would fall under university control. They also discussed the possibility that the future library should be closely associated with the Hungarian-American Society or perhaps with the Hungarian embassy itself. They decided that, while the library should be connected with both it should have its own building. They even toyed with the idea that the library should be housed together with the Hungarian Travel Bureau, but once again they decided against the plan, in order to avoid the possible "taste of propaganda." At the same meeting they also discussed the library budget, which they determined to be \$6000 (c. \$90,000) per year. The last item on their agenda was the position of director. Here they all agreed that this post should not be filled by a professor. Their reasoning was that a professor would not commit to the position for the duration desired and, once again, it might seem like a propaganda effort.⁶⁶ By this time, informal negotiations between Antoinette Feleky (the widow of Károly Feleky) and the Hungarian government, represented by László Telkes and János Pelényi, were well underway.

The VKM section of "Foreign Cultural Relations" officially authorized Pelényi to start talks with Feleky's widow about purchasing the collection. The letter from VKM states that the ministry was willing to spend between \$14,000 (c. \$210,000) and \$16,000

⁶⁶ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (February, 1936).

(c. \$240,000) on the collection.⁶⁷ The same message also requested an opinion about the possibility of Telkes becoming a candidate for the position of director.⁶⁸ At the same time a very telling telegram arrived to the VKM from Chief Consul Ghika in which he stated that in “agreement with the envoy it is their opinion that for very deliberate reasons it would be surely desirable that the designated buyer of the Feleky collection should not be the government.”⁶⁹ What “for very deliberate reasons” (*jólmegfontolt okokból*) actually means one can only speculate. However, knowing the Hungarian government’s fear of being seen as conducting propaganda, it might be reasonable to assume that Ghika referred to the aforementioned possibility. The reply telegram from KÜM designating the Hungarian National Museum as the buyer seems to make this conjecture even more plausible.⁷⁰ The Feleky Collection was acquired in April 1937. After some tense negotiations the Hungarian government paid, from the VKM’s budget, \$10,000 (c. \$150,000) up front and committed itself to paying an additional \$6,000 (c. \$90,000) over a ten-year period.⁷¹ The government also rented a seven-room office on the third floor of the Berkeley Building (19 West 44th Street), within walking distance from the New York Public Library and other landmarks. The rent was \$1,200 (c. \$18,000) a year.⁷² The HRL was ready to join the cultural and intellectual circles of New York. Telkes, by then the director of the library, drafted a plan for the first year. The library was to:

⁶⁷ MOL, K639, 5. csomó, (November 16, 1936).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ MOL, K106, 64. csomó, 24. tétel, Washington-i Nagykövetség (December 23, 1936).

⁷⁰ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 29, 1936).

⁷¹ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (July 6, 1937). Also in Nyirady, *The History of the Feleky collection*, 5.

⁷² Ibid.

- 1) Provide up-to-date information about all questions related to Hungary and the Danube basin.
- 2) Maintain old connections and develop new contacts with American publishing companies including, but not limited to printed media.
- 3) Keep a watchful eye on all English-language publications related to the region.
- 4) Provide aid to Hungarian and American scholars working on the region and attempt to establish student and teacher exchange programs.
- 5) Organize and support Hungarian exhibits and other cultural events.
- 6) Broadcast Hungarian related programming via radio.
- 7) Organize book clubs and film-screenings.⁷³

The main goal was, as Telkes put it, to “avoid even the appearance of political, religious, or other similar propaganda . . . with the hope that with strictly scholarly, objective, and earnest work,” the introduction of Hungarian culture to the American public would be possible.⁷⁴

It was in accordance with these guidelines that the HRL in New York, led by the talented Telkes, became one of the cornerstones of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. Unlike the Collegium Hungaricum institutions, whose dual task was to aid the development of the future elite of the country and to represent Hungarian culture, the information library’s main goal was to propagate Hungarian culture. In the person of Telkes the library had an energetic and capable director. Telkes was born in 1902 in Budapest. He earned his PhD at Budapest University in law and political science. After practicing law in Budapest for some years, in 1930 he moved to the United States, earned a degree at

⁷³ MOL, K106, 64. csomó, 24.tétel (July 19, 1937).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Harvard Law School and worked as a researcher on international law. Later he lectured on comparative private law, while at the same time organizing the Hungarian collection of the Harvard law library.⁷⁵

One of Telkes's first assignments was to legitimize the HRL as a cultural institution. The idea of creating an advisory board peopled with influential US citizens whose moral (and at times financial) support and intellectual gravitas would lend weight to HRL was put forward by Telkes as early as July 1937⁷⁶ and then once again by Géza Paikert in January 1938.⁷⁷ Four months later, by the time the institution opened its doors, the advisory board (or Advisory Council as it was called) was in place. The question of membership was a significant issue. During correspondence between Telkes and Paikert the two discussed the unequivocal influence of scholars on the formulation of public opinion and, at times, on the (foreign) policy makers.⁷⁸ In light of their conversation, the following list of intellectuals on HRL's Advisory Council is rather telling. Among its members were Edwin M. Borchard (professor of Law at Yale University), Nicholas Murray Butler (President of Columbia University), Isaiah Bowman (American geographer and one of the chief advisors to President Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference, one of the directors of the Council of Foreign Relations, and president of Johns Hopkins University), Joseph P. Chamberlain (professor of Law at Columbia), the aforementioned Stephen Duggan, Robert M. Haig (professor of Economics at Columbia),

⁷⁵ Library of Congress (European division), *Materials for an American-Hungarian Lexicon: the biographical files of the Hungarian Reference Library, 1937-1942* (edited by Kenneth E. Nyirady). Microfilm: 93/991 MicRR.

⁷⁶ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (July 6, 1937).

⁷⁷ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (January 25, 1938).

⁷⁸ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (November 15, 1939).

Manley O. Hudson (professor and Chair of International Law at Harvard University), Eldon R. James (Director of Harvard Law Library), Philip C. Jessup (professor of International Law at Columbia), Roswell Magill (professor of Law at Columbia), Ernest M. Patterson (professor of Economics at the University of Pennsylvania and the president of the American Academy of Political and Social Science), Lindsay Rogers (professor of public Law at Columbia), and James T. Shotwell (professor of History of International Relations at Columbia, former member of “The Inquiry,” and director of the Division of Economics and History at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace). Indeed, this remarkable list of intellectuals clearly illustrates that the relationship between academics, public opinion, and policy was not lost on the Hungarians.

Telkes hit the ground running. Between August 1, 1937, and December 15, 1937, he mailed out 1,691 letters and 3,375 cards advertising the forthcoming opening of the library. According to his report, HRL had 1,452 visitors between October and mid-December of the same year.⁷⁹ He planned to send out 10,000 pieces of correspondence to spread news about HRL. Among the first visitors was one Jupiter Doycheff, the Bulgarian chief consul at New York, who not only donated relevant books to the library, but also stated that he would advise Sofia to establish a similar institution in the foreseeable future. Both the consulate and Budapest were satisfied with Telkes and his efforts. János Pelényi went as far as to write to VKM that the only criticism he could have is that “la mariée est trop belle” (“the bride is too beautiful”) referring to the unanticipated momentum and the early success of HRL.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 15, 1937).

⁸⁰ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 31, 1937).

The official opening of the HRL took place on April 20, 1938. Actually, there were two openings. One, the formal one, was for the cultural and political elite, the other for the general public. The formal opening included welcoming speeches by Pelényi, John H. Finley (editor of the *New York Times*), Stephen Duggan, and Harry M. Lydenberg (director of the New York Public Library) accompanied by the music of Ernő Dohnányi. The general opening included a small concert whereby Hungarian and Hungarian-Americans performed music by Béla Bartók, Franz (Ferenc) Liszt, Tchaikovsky, as well as songs from operettas from Imre Kálmán and traditional Hungarian folksongs. The official brochure answered questions about the utility of HRL. It stated that “Hungary has been one of the centers of the diplomatic, economic, scientific and artistic activities of Central Europe for centuries. There has hardly been a problem, [sic] arising in the Danubian basin which might not likewise be considered as a typical Hungarian issue. Hence, the books of the Hungarian Reference Library pertain not only to Hungary, but to the Danubian Basin and Central Europe as well.”⁸¹ It further stated that for those students interested in Hungary, the HRL represented “a virgin field of dissertation research.” For “contributors to periodicals, authors and editorial writers” the library not only offered “excellent facilities,” but also a place of “authoritative information” free of charge.⁸² Under “special activities,” the pamphlet pointed out that there were to be “weekly lectures on timely topics” and that “by means of special exhibits and concerts, the art and music of Hungary” was to be represented.⁸³ The *New York Times* quoted Pelényi saying that HRL was to be “an important bond between the cultural

⁸¹ Official brochure. MOL, K639, 5. csomó (1938).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

lives of Hungary and the United States” because, he continued, it is “not a propaganda organization.”⁸⁴ In actuality, HRL was a propaganda organization, but this propaganda was different from that of the propaganda of the Great War. In the Hungarian Reference Library propaganda was cleverly disguised as a purely cultural institution, in accordance with the practice and understanding of contemporary cultural diplomacy.

HRL received even further attention as Budapest grew ever more anxious about the rise of Czechoslovak and Romanian propaganda in the United States. After the Munich Agreement, Czechoslovakia’s cultural and political propaganda intensified in the United States, a fact that did not go unnoticed in Hungarian government circles. An internal memo entitled “Counter-balancing Czech propaganda in America,” called for greater representation of Hungary through all available outlets.⁸⁵ Another confidential report from the consulate emphasized the role and influence of Edvard Beneš, who took up a position as a visiting professor at the University of Chicago.⁸⁶ The Romanian government also reorganized its propaganda. On October 3, 1939, Romania established its own Ministry of Propaganda.⁸⁷ At the same time the Foreign Ministry of Bucharest instructed the Romanian embassy staff in Washington D.C. to carry out a campaign to counter Hungarian propaganda in the United States.⁸⁸ Prime Minister Ion Antonescu even proclaimed that “propaganda to be ‘a new army’ upon which ‘the future of the state

⁸⁴“Hungarian Library Opens,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1938, 15.

⁸⁵ MOL, K30, 4. csomó, B/38 tétel “Cseh kérdés,” (October 25, 1939).

⁸⁶ MOL, K30, 4. csomó, B/38 tétel “Cseh kérdés,” (September 22, 1939).

⁸⁷ MOL, K30, 2. csomó, B/22 tétel (October 3, 1939). According to the same document, the overall budget of the propaganda organ for 1940/41 was nearly 317.95 million lei.

⁸⁸ Case, *Between States*, 51.

depended.”⁸⁹ Hungarian fears were further fueled by rumors that the Romanian government had budgeted one million dollars for the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair. The entrance of the Romanian pavilion was decorated with a sign stating that “Roumania has over 20,000,000 people completely united in language, tradition and culture.” It was reported that Consul Popovici promised that the pavilion was only the beginning of Romania’s new focus on propaganda in the US, for his government was planning to establish a propaganda bureau in order to “present Romania to the Americans as they wanted and not the way the Hungarians like to see it.”⁹⁰

Telkes and the HRL, with the sound support of Budapest, worked vigorously to gain the support of the US public. He utilized all available outlets and personal connections to conduct cultural propaganda. Between November 1937 and March 1939, HRL organized forty-seven lectures, exhibits, and concerts.⁹¹ Telkes gave talks at HRL, Yale, and Harvard on various topics ranging from “1000 years of Hungarian Culture,” to “Hungarian Heroes of the American Revolution and of the Civil War,” to “Hungary and her Music.” Invited American specialists and professors also gave public lectures. A few representative titles included “A College Professor Sees Hungary” by Professor Clarence A. Manning of Columbia and “Hungary’s Place in Music History” by Marshall Bartholomew of Yale. Other talks were designed to boost Hungary as a tourist destination, such as “How to get around on little money in Hungary.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁰ MOL, K66, 471. csomó, III-6/2 (July 17, 1939).

⁹¹ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 31, 1938).

⁹² Ibid.

In January 1939 Telkes reported that that the number of inquiries— letters, phone or in person—were increasing significantly (up to one thousand per month) since the Munich Agreement put the region in the center of political commentaries.⁹³ Utilizing the upsurge of interest in things related to East and Central Europe, Telkes was able to secure a contract with the WQXR radio station in New York to broadcast a special half hour of Hungarian musical programming every Friday from 8:30 PM to 9:00 PM. It included various musical scores from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.⁹⁴ Using his personal connection to Olin Downes, music critic of the *New York Times*, who was responsible for the musical programming at the World’s Fair, Telkes successfully placed Hungarian music in the program of the New York World’s Fair. The HRL also organized film-screenings and Telkes made a lucrative deal with the Hamburg-American Line to produce and show a short film about Hungary, as a tourist destination, during the ships’ transatlantic voyages.⁹⁵ The same company also aided Telkes’s effort to promote the International Summer University of Debrecen and its satellite campus in Keszthely (a picturesque little town at Lake Balaton). As a result of his efforts there were 40,000 brochures promoting lectures on Hungarian culture, history, and language for potential study-abroad students.⁹⁶ To be sure, students remained one of the main focuses of Hungarian efforts; many times it was put forward that cultural propaganda should be a long-term commitment. Along with the HRL outreach campaign that targeted campuses nationwide, VKM successfully negotiated a position for József Szentkirályi (deputy

⁹³ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (January 15, 1939).

⁹⁴ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (January 30, 1939).

⁹⁵ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (July 11, 1938).

⁹⁶ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (January 30, 1939).

director of HRL) to teach introductory Hungarian language and literature courses at Columbia. Some of the more unusual actions Telkes and the HRL took were convincing a company specializing in greeting cards to print 200,000 Christmas cards with a wintry scene depicting the Hungarian parliament and the Danube with the caption “Christmas on the Beautiful Blue Danube of Budapest”—free of charge.⁹⁷

Telkes and company seized every opportunity to put Hungary in the public eye. When Hungary was celebrating its “National Protestant Day” the Hungarian Royal Postal Service issued a series of five stamps to commemorate the country’s Protestant past. It was an opportunity—according to Telkes—to educate the American public about the Protestant past of Hungary. Swiftly he and his staff composed an English-language information guide to the stamps, made copies of them, and sent them to newspapers and magazines.⁹⁸ It was a rather successful campaign. According to Telkes, over thirty newspapers and magazines took note of the stamps and the event. One of the newspapers that picked up the story was the *New York Times*, which published an article telling the stories of Hungarian students (Péter Meliusz Juhász and Mátyás Dévai Bíró) who had studied in Wittenberg and were among the first religious reformers in Hungary, Gáspár Károli who first translated the Bible into Hungarian, in 1590, Albert Szenczi Molnár who translated the Psalms into Hungarian, Gábor Bethlen who was a famous Hungarian Prince of Transylvania and benefactor of Protestants, and Zsuzsanna Lórántffy, the first lady of Hungarian Protestantism.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 31, 1938).

⁹⁸ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (October 10, 1939).

⁹⁹ See “Hungary Commemorates the First Protestant Day,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1939, 152.

The success of HRL as a cultural outpost in the US is remarkable, especially in the light of unremitting financial problems. Between 1937 and 1939 the Hungarian government budgeted \$605 (c. \$9075) per month to operate HRL.¹⁰⁰ In comparison, the Italian Information Library reportedly worked with a budget of \$1,500 (c. \$22,500) per month budget.¹⁰¹ Despite some rumbling discontent from certain intellectuals in Hungary, the government was very much satisfied with the work of HRL. Nothing illustrates their appreciation more than the government plan of 1941 that included the hiring of staff, enlargement of the library, the purchasing of additional books, and a new budget that called for nearly \$2,000 (c. \$300,000) per month.¹⁰² Hungarian cultural diplomacy was not to be outshined in the United States. The future of HRL indeed looked bright.

Until 1941 Hungarian cultural diplomacy enjoyed the full support of the government. However, Hungarian cultural diplomacy lost one of its earliest, most ardent and influential supporters, when Prime Minister Pál Teleki committed suicide. HRL continued to operate even under ever-more-difficult circumstances, publishing a number of books and pamphlets. Szentkirályi edited a number of works: *Colonel Michael de Kovats: American Revolutionary War Hero* (New York, 1940); and *Béla Bartók: His Life and Music* (New York: 1940); and *Hungary: Past and Present* (New York: 1941). Another undertaking was to compile an “American-Hungarian Register,” collecting biographical data on about one thousand people.¹⁰³ But once Hungary declared war on

¹⁰⁰ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 31, 1937).

¹⁰¹ “44 Agencies Added to Foreign List,” *New York Times*, October 15, 1938, 9.

¹⁰² MOL, K30, 5. csomó, B/56/e/2 tétel (February 4, 1941).

¹⁰³ The project was never realized. However, the information collected was microfilmed and is available at the Library of Congress. See Library of Congress (European division), *Materials for an American-*

the United State, the *US State Department* ordered all Hungarian official government agencies and organizations to be closed. Afterward, Hungarian interests were represented by the government of Sweden. The HRL was notified of its official closure on January 28, 1942. Subsequently the library's collection was seized by the Alien Property Custodian. The Feleky Collection was transferred to Columbia, while the rest of the holdings were relocated to a Manhattan warehouse. The collection would be reunited in 1953 when the Library of Congress acquired it.¹⁰⁴ Telkes, who had become a US citizen, remained in the country. He actually sued the Hungarian National Museum for severance and other payments. Subsequently he worked for the US State Department, the World Bank, and the United Nations. Deputy Director Szentkirályi also remained in the United States and as Joseph St. Clair worked at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey.¹⁰⁵ HRL's once so promising enterprise came to a rather sad end.

Academic Publishing

“The power that makes the trigger-finger hesitate, or obey, is more powerful than armed force. It controls it. The power is the Power of the Word: the Word of Persuasion—the Word of Command. Words are weapons. We must not despise words and the use of words. Words win wars.” Thus wrote First World War veteran turned

Hungarian Lexicon: The biographical files of the Hungarian Reference Library, 1937-1942 (edited by Kenneth E. Nyirády). Microfilm: 93/991 MicRR.

¹⁰⁴ For this and the rest of the history of the collection, see Nyirady, *The History of the Feleky Collection*, 11-30.

¹⁰⁵ I thank Kenneth Nyirady for the information about post-HRL careers of Telkes and Szentkirályi.

pacifist, John Hargrave.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the influence of words on public opinion cannot be underestimated—especially that of the written word, and especially the written word of the erudite and respectable. If words are bullets, then the firearms are books, journals, and newspapers. Behind all these “firearms” are the shock-troops of propaganda, scholars and journalists. In order to provide a full picture of the significance of scholarly publications, this section will build on and expand upon some of the materials already introduced in chapter 1. First, I will reintroduce R. W. Seton-Watson and his wartime journal *The New Europe*.¹⁰⁷ Second, I will discuss the ways that this weekly review influenced the development of interwar cultural diplomacy in Hungary and the successor states. And finally, I will focus on the development of Hungarian scholarly publications in the service of cultural diplomacy and the challenges that these efforts confronted.

It was on October 19, 1916, that the first issue of *The New Europe*, a weekly review founded and financed by R. W. Seton-Watson, was published. He and his collaborator Wickham Steed were joined by an illustrious list of domestic and foreign scholars and politicians: Emile Boutrox (Académie Française), Ronald M. Burrows (King’s College, London), Jovan Cvijić (Belgrade University), Octavian Goga (Romanian Academy), Take Ionescu (Romanian minister without portfolio), Nicolae

¹⁰⁶ Hargrave, *Propaganda*, vi.

¹⁰⁷ There are surprisingly great numbers of detailed studies on the role of R. W. Seton-Watson. See László Péter, “R. W. Seton-Watson’s Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Balance of Power,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 82, no. 3 (2004): 655-79; Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1981); Mark Cornwall, “Great Britain and the Splintering of Greater Hungary,” in *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848*, ed. László Péter and Martyn Rady (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004). (Hereafter I will refer to the collection as *BHR*.)

Iorga (Bucharest University), and Tomáš G. Masaryk (formerly professor at Prague University). According to its mission statement the weekly was

devoted to the study of foreign politics and the problems raised by this war [WW I]. Its foremost aim is to further and consolidate that entente cordiale of allied publicists, which must accompany the wider political entente, *if the Allies are to think and act in harmony, and to help forwards the formation of a sane and well-informed body of public opinion upon all subjects affecting the future of Europe.* . . . After our armies have won the war, our statesmen will have to win the peace, and their task will, indeed, be difficult, *unless public opinion is alert, organized and eager to support them* . . . our methods will be frankly critical and vigilant. . . .An integral victory such as alone can secure to Europe permanent peace . . . [and] *the emancipation of the subject races of central and south-eastern Europe from German and Magyar control*, such must be our answer to the Pangerman [sic] project of “Central Europe” and “Berlin-Bagdad.”¹⁰⁸

Seton-Watson and his colleagues made it clear that their aim was to shape public opinion. They wasted little time in creating the image of a belligerent Hungary. Seton-Watson and his colleague not only wrote about the war-guilt question but also paid special attention to demolishing any lingering British sympathy toward Hungary. On account of the 1848 Revolution, the memory of Lajos Kossuth and the idea of liberal Hungary still had some traction—though not nearly as much as Hungarian leaders believed it had. By placing Hungary squarely alongside Germany, illustrating Hungary’s responsibility for the war was one of the best ways to destroy any lingering positive sentiment toward Hungary. And the contributors were by no means timid about addressing their readership directly:

I think you, British reader, will be astonished. You, whose ideas about the Hungarian people were so high! You, in whose mind passes the heroic personality of the fighter for freedom, Lajòs [sic] Kossuth, whose memory is so popular in England! But, *quantum mutatus ab illo!* [How he changes from what he once was!] How little the Hungarians of the last decades resemble Kossuth. I think he would be ashamed of them if he had lived in present times. Hungary of to-day is not the classical country of freedom which exists in your imagination! Prussia and

¹⁰⁸“Mission Statement,” *The New Europe* 1, no. 1 (October 19, 1916-January 11, 1917): 1. Emphasis mine.

Hungary are the only two countries in Europe whose ideal is domination by force and by oppression of other people. Not in vain is Count Tisza [Prime Minister of Hungary during WW I] the best friend of Kaiser William and their sinister acts are closely connected in the responsibility of this war.¹⁰⁹

Dissemination—5,000 copies a week—of *The New Europe* continued until October 28, 1920. The end of the war did not stop Seton-Watson and his collaborators from continuing their work to try to convince the British public about the wretched character of the Hungarians. On the contrary, *The New Europe* warned against Hungarian propaganda, which, it claimed, was launched “with the intention of saving something of the illegitimate patrimony of the now defeated Magyar oligarchy for their successor, the would-be democratic government of Hungary.”¹¹⁰ It further argued that while it might be true that public opinion was once quite so “gullible” that it could have been misled by “an astute propagandist,” the editors of the journal hoped and believed that this was no longer true, “and even the most sentimental British humanitarian has learned enough during the war to enable him to descry a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”¹¹¹ As peace talks began, R. W. Seton-Watson tightened the screws even more, and while he continued to warn against Hungarian propaganda efforts, he addressed the question of territorial settlement directly. From the “Magyar oligarchs who are pulling the wires in every Western capital,” wrote Seton-Watson,

it is impossible to expect an honest acceptance of the status quo . . . the Magyar aristocracy will never voluntarily renounce its dream of hegemony and will always seek allies for the reversal of present conditions. It has been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and the peace of Europe demands that it [Hungary] should be reduced to complete and permanent impotence. Hungary has

¹⁰⁹ N. Lupu, “Roumania Irredenta,” in *The New Europe* 5, no. 61 (December 13, 1917): 276.

¹¹⁰ Anonymous, “Ware Magyar Propaganda,” *The New Europe* 9, no. 114 (December 19, 1918): 234.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

no future save as a mainly peasant community, content to live in peace with its neighbours and renounce its evil dream of racial hegemony.¹¹²

By the time the last issue appeared Hungary had signed the Treaty of Trianon. Romania and the newly-established Czechoslovakia, together with Yugoslavia, emerged as victors of the Great War. One might have thought that it was time for scholars to return to their ivory towers. However, exactly the opposite took place.

In 1922 R.W. Seton-Watson, in his expressively entitled lecture (*The Historian as a Political Force in Central Europe*) declared that “finally the Great War brought home to the general consciousness the need for mutual interpretation between nation and nation, and at the same time the crying need for a basis of sound historical knowledge in the statesmen who settle the world’s affairs.”¹¹³ He viewed history, especially that of Central Europe, as a discipline with a dual task. On the one hand, it was about “the scientific and critical treatment of historical subjects.” On the other hand, it also belonged “to the field of practical politics.”¹¹⁴ Yet for the generation of East and East-Central European scholars and politicians his message carried no revelations. As historian Andrea Orzoff points out, “wartime triumph left” the likes of Masaryk and Beneš “certain that their cosmopolitan enlightened interpretation of Czech history and nationalism had

¹¹² R. W. Seton-Watson, “The Fall of Béla Kun,” *The New Europe* 12, no. 148 (August 14, 1919): 100.

¹¹³ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Historian as a Political Force in Central Europe* (London: School of Slavonic Studies at the University of London King’s College, 1922), 5.

¹¹⁴ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Historian as a Political Force*, 12.

always been right.¹¹⁵ Not surprisingly, Czechoslovak leaders' "concerns with propaganda, information, and the press were central to their postwar vision."¹¹⁶

Masaryk and others deliberately cultivated relationships with Western elites. The Czechoslovak leadership understood that the newly established country was vulnerable to its neighbors and their revisionist goals. More specifically, the Czechoslovak elite hoped to convince the Western powers to view their country as the keystone of European peace, in direct contrast to the Hungarians' attitude that it "serves to feed the germs of distrust and uncertainty throughout Central Europe . . . [for] in this way is [no] universal peace in Central Europe to be secured."¹¹⁷ Beneš and those around him recognized the incomparable value of Western public support. The importance attached to the positive portrayal of the country abroad can be illustrated by examining the institutionalization of these efforts.

The Third Section of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry was responsible for both domestic and foreign propaganda. The primary task of the Third Section was to gather information and to target Western public opinion. What messages were to be distributed? The centerpiece of Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy was the "Czechoslovak modern national myth." According to this myth, Czechoslovakia was rescued from the repression of Habsburg German-speakers, and after 1918 the new state of Czechoslovakia emerged and "made itself an island of democratic values, rationalism, and fair-mindedness" in the

¹¹⁵ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 55.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹⁷ *The Central European Observer*, January 7, 1927, 20. For similar arguments, see Kamil Krofta, *The Substance of Hungarian Revisionism* (Prague: Orbis, 1934); and Emanuel Moravec, *The Strategic Importance of Czechoslovakia for Western Europe* (Prague: Orbis, 1936).

much-troubled region of East Central Europe.¹¹⁸ Through the state-owned publishing house Orbis, the Third Section published academic journals and weeklies, such as the French-language *L'Europe centrale*, the German-language *Prager Presse*, and the English language *Central European Observer*.¹¹⁹ In addition, the Third Section was responsible for inviting and entertaining influential foreigners, overseeing radio and film production, and becoming involved in newspaper publishing as well as directly supporting—morally and financially—foreign journalists, correspondents, and academics. To be sure, the Third Section was “paying for positive opinion.” For example, the Third Section had twenty-six French newspapers, press agencies, and radio agencies on its payroll. It is estimated that in 1933 alone Czechoslovakia spent eighteen million French francs on international propaganda.¹²⁰

The Romanian political and intellectual elite also appreciated the power of scholarly propaganda. They showed their appreciation to those who worked tirelessly to create a positive atmosphere around Romania. For example, R. W. Seton Watson was rewarded and honored by the Romanian Parliament.¹²¹ After the First World War Romania’s newly acquired frontiers became the target of three different revisionist campaigns.¹²² It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that if the leitmotif of Hungary’s diplomatic effort was to revise the Versailles system then Romania’s was to maintain it.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 70-71.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 145-47.

¹²¹ “The Romanian Parliament Honours Scotus Viator [penname of Seton-Watson]: Speech given by Octavian Goga on June 19, 1920 in *The New Europe* 16, no. 196 (July 15, 1920): 24.

¹²² Hungarians sought to reclaim Transylvania and the Banat; the Soviet Union had its eyes on Bessarabia; Bulgaria looked toward its lost territory of Dobrudja.

On this issue all the warring factions of Romanian political life—with the exception of the Communists—would agree.¹²³

Under the direction of Nicolae Titulescu (until 1936) the country's foreign policy, described by one British Foreign officer as “very much a one man show,” sought to promote the idea that Romania's territorial integrity was the key to future peace and stability not only in the region, but in Europe as a whole.¹²⁴ In order to sway public opinion, Titulescu employed every weapon in his arsenal. It was a wide-ranging arsenal, which he successfully deployed during the Paris Peace Conference and continued to use. He maintained personal relationships with Western political and public figures, as well as journalists (both at home and abroad) and scholars whom he “subsidized” from a “secret fund of the Foreign Ministry.” R. W. Seton-Watson was among those who received regular payments from the Romanian government.¹²⁵

Soon after its first edition, in May 1934, the *Revue de Transylvanie* became one of the most important Romanian conduits to the West. This French-language journal was published by ASTRA (the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People). Historian Paul E. Michelson argues that the journal was an example of an activity he calls “militant scholarly patriotism.”¹²⁶ The creator and director of the journal was Silviu Dragomir, professor of history at the University of Cluj and, rather tellingly, a one-time deputy of the Romanian Parliament who was later a

¹²³ Keith Hitchins, *Romania, 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 50-54 and 426.

¹²⁴ Dov. B. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), 1-15.

¹²⁵ Lungu, 15-16. On Seton-Watson's honorarium, see Case, *Between States*, 40.

¹²⁶ Paul E. Michelson, “Silviu Dragomir, The Historian-Militant and the *Revue de Transylvanie*” (unpublished manuscript). I would like to thank Professor Michelson for sharing his manuscript with me.

member of the Goga-Cuza government. He was one of the leading contributors to Romanian efforts to counter Hungarian revisionist propaganda, and as such, he was the ideal candidate to direct the journal. The journal operated until 1944 and “poured forth some 3600 pages explaining, defending, and promoting a Romanian perspective on issues related to Transylvania.”¹²⁷ Perhaps not at all surprisingly one of the first of Dragomir’s polemics was designed to discredit István Bethlen and his writings and lectures on the behalf of the cause of Hungarian revisionism.¹²⁸ Even as traditional diplomacy turned toward Germany—mainly to counter Hungary—the journal continued to publish scholarly articles and propaganda pieces in a scholarly camouflage. The “Transylvanian Question,” as Holly Case illustrates in her excellent study, remained the source of tension, as intellectuals—both Romanians and Hungarians—continued to publish materials (historical, ethnographical, and anthropological studies with maps and statistics) attempting to legitimize their claim to the region.¹²⁹

This was the nature of the competition in which Hungary found itself. Unlike their Czech and Romanian counterparts, Hungarian diplomats and scholars had little or no experience with cultural propaganda. In the beginning, while the Hungarian political elite was busy setting up the basic organs of the government, private groups took on the challenge of cultural propaganda. The situation was made more difficult by the country’s diplomatic isolation from the rest of the continent. In order to appease the Western powers and secure much-needed loans, the Hungarian government *officially* shelved the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Silviu Dragomir, “Les deux attitudes du comte Bethlen,” *Revue de Transylvanie* 1, No.2 (1934): 214-218. See also Professor Michelson’s manuscript.

¹²⁹ See Holly Case, *Between States*, 48-66.

question of territorial revision. For example, by order of KÜM territories lost to Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Austria could not be referred to as “occupied territories” (*megszállott területek*). The reasoning behind the decree was that any and all expressions and terms that might suggest that Hungary did not recognize the Trianon Treaty would be harmful to the country’s international relations.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the Hungarian government did pay for propaganda. Strictly in an unofficial capacity, KÜM and VKM financially supported various nongovernmental and private agencies/societies. According to an unwritten agreement on the division of labor, the government conducted no official propaganda, while various societies—emphasizing their non-affiliation with official government organs—carried out the majority of cultural and political propaganda work.¹³¹ Bethlen and his government were indeed very worried about avoiding the charge of propaganda. It was a position that was not always easy to defend. An exchange in the Hungarian Parliament between deputy József Pakots and István Bethlen illustrates very well that not everyone agreed with the official policy of the government. Pakots challenged Bethlen about the lack of KÜM involvement in Hungary’s revisionist propaganda. Bethlen retorted that the various organs of KÜM were not designed to conduct propaganda. Furthermore, continued the prime minister, if the organs of KÜM were to involve themselves with propaganda they would only end up “discrediting and compromising” the Hungarian diplomatic corps in the eyes of various foreign governments.¹³² In this way the government washed its hands of all aggressive revisionist

¹³⁰ MOL, K59, 13. tétel (September 3, 1920). Reproduced in Pritz, *Iratok*, 428. The message was reiterated a year later. See Pritz, *Iratok*, 429.

¹³¹ Pritz, *Magyar diplomácia*, 235.

¹³² *Képviselőházi Napló*, XVII. kötet, 1927, 329 (February 6, 1929).

propaganda, which, though supported, was not organized by the administration. On occasion the government still found itself deeply embarrassed by the conduct of various irredentist groups and revisionist organizations.

One of the most prolific nongovernmental organizations was the Tevé. It was established in November of 1918, and except under the Béla Kun regime, continued its work until May 1921, when the government suspended the society. During this period, Tevé published no less than 440,000 items of propaganda in French and English. Then Foreign Minister Miklós Bánffy argued that Tevé not only incited Hungarians—especially the youth—in the successor states, but also created a dangerous international climate. The government made an unsuccessful attempt to coordinate the activities of the various groups under the umbrella group of the Társadalmi Egyesületek Szervezetének Központja (TESZK—Central Organization of Social Groups) under the direction of Pál Teleki.¹³³

Two of the best organized, government-supported organizations were the Magyar Külügyi Társaság (MKT—Hungarian Society for Foreign Affairs, founded 1920) and the Magyar Revíziós Liga (MRL—Hungarian Revisionist League, founded 1927). Both of these associations aimed to put propaganda on a scientific basis. Unlike their right-wing and counter-revolutionary predecessors these organizations clearly enjoyed the moral and unofficial financial support of the government. The MKT at home aimed to educate Hungarians about the art of foreign policy making. Abroad it tried to impress upon foreign audiences the worthiness and legitimacy of Hungary as a European country. The MKT mission statement reads as follows: “the members of the Hungarian nation must be prepared for a campaign of conquest [*hódító hadjárat*], and it will be the difficult

¹³³ Zeidler, *A Revíziós gondolat*, 106-08.

undertaking of Hungarian society to put the necessary arms in the hands of the warriors of this campaign, whose duty will be the winning of minds and hearts of the various nations, because the order of today [and tomorrow] will be based on the minds and hearts of nations.¹³⁴ In order to accomplish the ultimate goal of the society, that is to “secure the place of the Hungarian nation [among the company of free nations] that is its due thanks to its thousand-year old traditions, to its role in safeguarding Western civilization, and establishing and protecting Western culture in the Carpathian Basin”¹³⁵, the MKT was to work closely with, but nominally independently of the KÜM, in representing the interests of Hungarian foreign policy at home and abroad. The Magyar Revíziós Liga (MRL) took on the actual propaganda work both at home and abroad. While closely connected with the government, MRL was an umbrella organization consisting of thirty-five societies and associations.¹³⁶ The two organizations, but especially MRL, published numerous essays and studies and sponsored and organized lecture tours, but Bethlen and company still felt the need for more and better scholarly propaganda.

The challenge of publishing quality scholarly publications was the governing motive behind the establishment of the Magyar Szemle Társaság (MSZT—The Society of the Hungarian Review). The society, with close official and semi-official ties to the government, was established in 1927. Nothing is more telling of the significance that was attached to the success of this society than the fact that Prime Minister István Bethlen was its president. The society’s journal, *Magyar Szemle*, was edited by the most prominent Hungarian historian of the era, Gyula Szekfű. The society and a journal has

¹³⁴ “A Magyar Külügyi Társaság megalakulása,” *Külügyi Szemle* 1, no. 1-2 (July-October, 1920): 2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁶ Zeidler, *A Revíziós gondolat*, 127.

been accused of being little more than the mouthpiece of the government. This accusation was not without foundation. Among the board members were some of the most well-known figures of Hungary's political and intellectual elite. This conservative group included Bálint Hóman (historian and later minister at the VKM), Gyula Kornis (historian and state secretary at VKM), Gusztáv Gratz (historian and deputy at the Hungarian Parliament), Ferenc Herczeg (novelist and president of MRL), and Benedek Jancsó (historian, literary scholar and an expert on Romanian irredentism). These were just few of the people who contributed to the success of this monthly journal which, according to some estimates, had over three and a half million subscribers.¹³⁷ Hungary's only foreign-language scholarly journal was the *Ungarische Jahrbücher*, and the society was clearly aware that Hungary needed to target the intellectual elite of France and the English-speaking countries as well. They were especially taken by the perceived success of Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy and they pointed to the publications by Orbis with a mixture of admiration and jealousy.¹³⁸ Others, such as Elemér Radisics, pointed out that it was unreasonable and absolutely unnecessary to continue publishing propaganda in the Hungarian language, for there was no need to convince Hungarians about the injustices of the status quo.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Radisics argued, not only was it not enough to translate (mostly badly) Hungarian publications, but one had to provide facts in an objective, yet

¹³⁷ Mihály Zichy, "Adalékok a Magyar Szemle történetéhez," *Magyar Szemle* 6, No.6 (December, 1997), accessed August 27, 2010, http://www.magyarszemle.hu/szamok/1997/6/adalekok_a_magyarszemle_tortenetehez. For more on the history of the journal see Matthew Caples, "Et in Hungaria Ego: Trianon, Revisionism, and the Journal Magyar Szemle (1927-1944)," *Hungarian Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005), accessed August 27, 2010, <http://epa.oszk.hu/01400/01462/00033/pdf/051-104.pdf>.

¹³⁸ Endre Moravek, "Cseh propaganda," *Magyar Szemle* 9, no. 2 (34) (June, 1930): 144-51.

¹³⁹ Elemér Radisics, "A magyar propaganda hibái," *Magyar Szemle* 9, no. 4 (36) (August, 1930): 324-25.

enjoyable fashion. Moreover, he urged his countrymen to follow the advice of Sir Campbell Stuart and pay the utmost attention to the psyche of propaganda's target group as well as to the psyche of the opponents.¹⁴⁰ By the beginning of the 1930s Hungarian foreign publications began to appear in all the major Western capitals.

Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie (1932) and the *Hungarian Quarterly* (1936) were the crowning achievements of the Hungarian government's efforts to present the Hungarian past and present to a foreign audience in a positive light. As early as 1923, Zoltán Baranyai, Hungarian representative at the League of Nations, called for an end to the publication of "pamphlet-like and occasional" French language propaganda and called for scholarly, yet accessible, publications.¹⁴¹ The *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie* (NRH) was established in 1932, with the active support of Bethlen, as a successor to the prewar *Revue the Hongrie*. The NRH's yearly budget was 66,000 pengő (c. \$155,660). Half of the money came from the KÚM. The remainder was provided by other government organs, private individuals and groups. After 1933 even the French Foreign Ministry contributed to the costs of the publication of the journal.¹⁴² Despite various governmental changes the publication continued and enjoyed the continuous financial and moral support of the various Hungarian governments until 1944. In order to legitimize the journal as a scholarly and objective publication rather than a propaganda tool the editors György Ottlik and József Balogh recruited foreign authors to contribute. Among those

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Radisics most likely was referring to Sir Campbell Stuart's *Secrets of Crewe House: The Story of a Famous Campaign*.

¹⁴¹ MOL, K67, 4. csomó, 1. tétel (March 10, 1924).

¹⁴² Henri de Montety, "A Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie: a magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás tükre," in *A magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás a 20. században*, ed. Pál Pritz (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006), 179-180.

who supplied pieces were Nicholas M. Butler, Édouard Herriot, and Salvador de Madariaga.¹⁴³

On June 10, 1935, some of the most influential political, intellectual and industrial leaders of the country gathered to address the burning need to launch an English-language journal and publish a new *History of Hungary*. The *Hungarian Quarterly* (HQ) was to address this need. Bethlen, who presided over the initial meeting, justified the initiative with the following argument:

The written informative work, which we have conducted among the Anglo-Saxon nations in the past one-and-the-half decades, was extremely deficient, and more than more than once, it was simply harmful. Instead of stylistically and grammatically accurate [*nyelvi formában biztos*], sober, and objective informative works, there have been hybrid and short-lived printed organs written in poor English. To replace these publications with a journal that is edited with integrity, written with excellent English, presented in an appealing way, and skillfully disseminated, is a national interest of the first order [*elsőrendű*].¹⁴⁴

Among those who were present on the meeting were (in alphabetical order): József Balogh, István Bethlen, Pál Biró (industrialist), Ferenc Chorin (industrialist), Prince György Festetich, Gusztáv Gratz, Count Béla Hadik, Béla Imrédy (president-director of the Hungarian National Bank, later Minister of Finance and Prime Minister), Baron Móric Kornfeld (industrialist and politician), Gyula Kornis, Zoltán Magyary, Bishop László Ravasz (prominent leader of the Reformed Church and member of Parliament), Zsombor Szász (diplomat and publicist), Gyula Szekfű, Pál Teleki, Lajos Walkó (Minister

¹⁴³ Montety, 185. Henri de Montety tells the story of one of the failures of Balogh's "outreach campaign." Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, a young French publicist, was "wined and dined" in Hungary for weeks, but all the editors secured in return was an article calling for a Danubian Confederation, an idea that pleased them very little.

¹⁴⁴ Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Kézirattár, (OSzKKt— Hungarian National Széchényi Library manuscript division) József Balogh papers, Fond 1/1525/13883. I thank Tibor Frank for pointing out this collection to me.

of Commerce and later Minister of Foreign Affairs), and Count István Zichy (historian and head of the Hungarian History Museum).¹⁴⁵ If some of the names seem familiar, this is certainly no accident. Indeed, official—or rather semi-official—Hungarian cultural diplomacy was the work of a small group of influential people, the leading members of Hungarian political, intellectual and economic life. The close cooperation of these people made the HQ possible in the first place.¹⁴⁶ The HQ was to have a 42,000 (c. \$99,050) pengő annual budget. Bethlen solicited 40 percent of the funds by asking “national business circles”—the Hungarian National Bank, the Association of Savings and Loan Banks (Takarékpénztárak és Bankok Egyesülete), and the National Union of Manufacturers (Gyáriparosok Országos Szövetsége) — for monetary contributions. The remaining sixty percent was to come out of the KÜM budget.¹⁴⁷

Once the necessary funds were available, the Society of the Hungarian Quarterly—as the group of people behind the publication was known—launched its campaign to legitimize the journal as a genuine scholarly periodical. Utilizing money and personal connections, advisory boards were set up both in England and the United States. Major Edward Owen Rutter, historian and novelist, was named as HQ representative in London, at a remuneration of £200 per annum. In the US Francis Deák became the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ On the organization of this group see Tibor Frank, “Patronage and Networking: The Society of The Hungarian Quarterly, 1935-1944,” *Hungarian Quarterly* 50, no. 196 (2009) 3-12.

¹⁴⁷ Tibor Frank, “Editing as Politics: József Balogh and The Hungarian Quarterly,” in *Ethnicity, Propaganda. Myth-Making: Studies on Hungarian Connections to Britain and America, 1848-1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999), 267. Frank also points out that on other occasions Bethlen suggested that in actuality 60 percent of the necessary funds came from the leaders of Hungarian industry, commerce, and banking. Individuals, such as Baroness Rothschild in England, also contributed to the annual budget.

interim representative of the journal.¹⁴⁸ Through various media HQ also recruited some influential Americans to serve as members of the US advisory board, including George Creel and John F. Montgomery (US ambassador in Budapest), most of whom would serve on the HRL advisory board a few years later as well. In addition, to counter any possible accusations of propaganda and government involvement, HQ recruited Columbia University Press as the American agent for the periodical. Through Bethlen's personal invitation, Nicholas Murray Butler wrote the opening article in the first issue. From the beginning Balogh, as the chief editor of HQ, travelled to England to enlist influential Englishmen. He invited prospective contributors to Budapest, organized social functions in their honor, took them to the country estates of the Hungarian aristocracy, and arranged audiences for them with the leading political figures of the country. His efforts paid off, for he secured articles written by some of the highest members of English society, including Lord Allen of Hurtwood, Sir Thomas Cuninghame, the Viscountess Snowden, Sir John Marriott, Admiral Mark Kerr, Sir Charles Petrie, Lord Stamp, H. W. V. Temperley and Lord Gorell, to name just a few.¹⁴⁹

Bethlen and company also made sure that there was an internal monitoring system that oversaw all foreign publications. In the case of the HQ, Bethlen made it clear that he did not want to see any competition for the journal. The *Danubian News*, which was a MRL publication, presented a particular problem since its "style" did not fit the ideals of official circles. Bethlen called for the discontinuation of the publication, or as he put it "if for some unforeseen reason that were not possible" the journal must change its profile

¹⁴⁸ OSzKKt, József Balogh papers, Fond 1/1525/13887.

¹⁴⁹ Frank, "Editing as Politics," 272.

entirely.¹⁵⁰ The KÜM and its special section were especially keen to monitor any and all publications worldwide that were relevant to the region.¹⁵¹ The same group also oversaw Hungarian publications abroad making sure that their message was aligned with the wishes of the government. For example, HQ editor Balogh's letter to KÜM illustrates that the various topics were to be approved by the government organ. Among the questions were 1) Can the idea of territorial revision based on historical justification be discussed? 2) To what degree is criticism of Germany and German policies allowed? 3) Should the question of Ruthenia, Ukraine, and Polish-Hungarian borders be debated? 4) Should the issue of nationalities in Hungary (especially that of Germans) be discussed? 5) How advisable was it to discuss the subject of cooperation between the small states of East and South-East Europe?¹⁵² Indeed, after 1927, once Hungary openly admitted its "peaceful revisionism" campaign, the government did its utmost to design, control, and disseminate a positive image of the country. In the next section, I will discuss the chief themes of the HQ and Hungarian scholarly publications in general.¹⁵³

International recognition of the historical deeds of Hungary was seen as vital to legitimating Hungarian revisionist claims. All the publications and lectures were designed to convince educated foreign elites of Hungary's credentials as a European country, moreover one whose contributions were crucial to the development of Western

¹⁵⁰ OSzKKt József Balogh papers, Fond 1/1525 (January 4, 1936).

¹⁵¹ A small sample of books and publication reviewed by the special section and various KÜM organs—without even attempting to cover them all—gives an idea about the importance attached to foreign publications. The list includes works by Seton-Watson, Beneš, Nicolae Iorga, John D. E. Evans, H. G. Wells, Bernadotte E. Schmitt, Christopher Sidgwick, Frank H. Simonds, John O. Crane, and Philip Gibbs.

¹⁵² OSzKKt József Balogh papers, Fond 1/322/3229. The correspondence is dated January of 1939. The issue of German appeasement increasingly limited the possible topics of discussion.

¹⁵³ It would be impossible to mention all the works published with government support, hence I limit my analysis to those I deem the best representatives of this "cottage industry."

civilization. In this appraisal of Hungarian history there was no room for Árpád, nor was there any discussion about mythical bloodline between Magyars and Attila the Hun. The basic idea was to represent Hungary as the architect and guardian of European culture in the Carpathian Basin. Count Albert Apponyi—one of the Hungarian delegates at Trianon—summed up this idea in the following way:

The Hungarian nation had and has a lofty world-historic mission, determined by the achievement and tendencies of thousand years, the fulfillment of which it has been obstructed and weakened by the catastrophe of Trianon. The mission was, and still is the defence and the peaceful extension of the higher standards of Western life, by political and military, as well as by cultural efforts, according to the requirements of the age. The Trianon mutilation has detached from the West territories it had already conquered, and throw them back into semi-Oriental conditions, imperiling thereby existing Western cultures in these territories, and slackening the progress of those who do not yet possess such a culture, because they no longer feel the stimulus of its rival power. The mutilation of Hungary, the weakening of the Hungarian nation, is a loss to the great intellectual and moral interest of mankind, a loss without compensation.¹⁵⁴

The foundation of its position as a country with cultural superiority, the argument ran, was a result of Hungary's thousand-year-long historical and cultural development. "Does it [Hungary] possess such qualities, can it point to such achievements, that it may be expected to offer some characteristic contribution to the moral and spiritual riches of humanity? Would humanity be poorer, were there no Hungarian nation? To these questions we may boldly and confidently reply in the affirmative," wrote Apponyi in 1928.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Count Albert Apponyi, "The Historic Mission of Hungary and of the States Aggrandised to her Detriment" in *Justice for Hungary: Review and Criticism of the Effect of the Treaty of Trianon* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), 19-20.

¹⁵⁵ Apponyi, "The Historic Mission of Hungary, 7. Quoted as appeared in the original.

The idea of Hungary's mission "civilizing mission" remained a central theme of arguments made on the pages of journals and in the lecture halls. It was a way to provide a universal meaning to Hungarian nationalist claims. In 1942, Sándor Márai, the Hungarian novelist and public intellectual, explained the "civilizing mission" of Hungary and its place within Europe:

We believe that the sole historical means of subsistence for Magyars is for them to consciously accept and demand this leading cultural and economic role . . . the Magyar nation in Southeast Europe is the balancing force whose useful and beneficent effects no new power constellation can do without. . . . No one can deny that the Magyars have a calling, the supreme sense of which is that they should allow the free expression of talents and abilities of all nationalities that live here within the framework of the Hungarian state. . . . And just as it is an undeniable fact that Hungary was, for centuries, the eastern bastion of Western culture, so too is it undeniable that this Western Christian culture continues to radiate most shiningly in Southeast Europe, to the present day, within the boundaries of historical Hungary. ¹⁵⁶

Central to this argument was the supposedly unique Hungarian ability to form an enduring political nation in the Carpathian Basin. Gyula Kornis addressed this issue on the pages of *HQ*. He argued that the Hungary's "mission" and *raison d'être* was to "bring about an advanced state of culture in the Danubian region." He explained that "no matter what our conception of culture and its components—religion, law, ethics, science, art—they can thrive only in proportion to the political and stateforming [sic] power of the nation in question." To him Hungarian legitimacy was rooted in the fact—a fact that is questioned by others, as we will see—that "until the tenth century no race had been able to obtain a permanent footing" in the region. This was an achievement accomplished only

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Romsics, "From Christian Shield," 22.

by the Hungarians, continues Kornis, who in turn “reorganized” the territory, “reclaimed” the “barren lands,” and made it part of “civilized Europe.”¹⁵⁷

Hungary’s ties to Western Christianity were another dominant argument to prove the country’s European character. Ferenc Eckhart in his 1932 *A Short History of the Hungarian People* emphasized the decision of St. Stephen to accept Roman (Catholic) Christianity instead of the Eastern Church. The argument states that because of St. Stephen’s religious policy the conversion —admittedly “achieved largely by force and not by persuasion”—saved Hungary from the fate of becoming “Slavic.”¹⁵⁸ The KÜM ensured that all Hungary’s diplomats could act as historians abroad. Among the topics was Hungary as the true “*scutum fidei*” (Shield of Trinity or Shield of Faith). According to this view, Hungary’s role as the Eastern bastion of Western Christianity against the Mongols and Turks exemplified the Europeanness of the country.¹⁵⁹ A memorandum entitled “Guidelines for contact with Americans” (“Írányelvek az amerikaikkal való érinkezésre”) deemed the subject of “Hungary’s historical role as the protector of Western culture and Christianity” an “effective” topic. The instruction cautioned would-be diplomats to make audiences aware that “the reason Western European culture could develop in peace” was the “five centuries long” sacrifice of the Hungarian nation.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Julius (Gyula) Kornis, “Hungary’s Place in History,” *The Hungarian Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Autumn, 1936): 45-46.

¹⁵⁸ Ferenc Eckhart, *A Short History of The Hungarian People* (London: Grant Richards, 1931), 24-25. Eckhart’s work was published both in French and English, both publications financed by the government.

¹⁵⁹ MOL, K67, 9. csomó, 3.tétel, 68. dosszié (undated).

¹⁶⁰ MOL, K67, 1. csomó, 1.tétel (1920?).

Diplomats and scholars alike searched for historical subjects to prove Hungary's supposed democratic and liberal character in order to counter charges made against it. Pál Teleki went back to 1222 to illustrate this point. In his lecture tour he asked the following question:

All of you are familiar with the Magna Charta of King John as the keystone of constitutional freedom in England. You may be less familiar with the fact that among the continental nations Hungary was first to obtain a similar solemn pledge for the respect of civic liberties. I speak of the Golden Bull [Aranybulla] of King Andrew, given in 1222. Here begins a very marked analogy in the development of Hungarian constitutional life. . . . If we speak of democracy in those remote times, [and] we surely find there the origins of the most inspiring ideals of our own time.¹⁶¹

If the Golden Bull was not enough, there were the examples of the struggles of Ferenc Rákóczi and Lajos Kossuth –“two of the great champions of Hungarian liberty”—against the Habsburgs to illustrate the Hungarians' devotion to liberty and European ideals.¹⁶² Similarly great emphasis was placed on historical connections between Hungary and the West. Studies, such as that of Alexander (Sándor) Fest, aimed to illustrate, for example, that despite the geographic distance there were 900-year-old “political and spiritual links between England and Hungary.”¹⁶³ Others, like Georg (György) Lukács addressed

¹⁶¹ Paul Teleki, *The Evolution of Hungary and its Place in European History*, ed. Béla Király, (New York: Academic International Press, 1975), 35. Teleki wrote additional works in which he explained the ways he saw Hungarian–European relations, See Pál Teleki, *Európáról és Magyarországról* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1934) and his *Magyar politikai gondolatok* (Budapest: Stádium, 1941).

¹⁶² George Trócsányi, “The Hungarian National Character,” *The Hungarian Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (Summer, 1939): 198.

¹⁶³ Alexander (Sándor) Fest, “Political and Spiritual Links between England and Hungary,” *The Hungarian Quarterly* 1, No.1 (Spring, 1936): 72-79.

France, while others, such as Eugene (Jenő) Pivány, wrote about Hungarian-American links.¹⁶⁴

Despite the fact that government circles took charge of publications not everybody was happy with the outcome. Some questioned the target of the cultural propaganda and argued that the “continuity of Hungarian culture” and the preservation of the “Hungarian national idea” were the most important challenges. Hence they insisted that cultural policy should first and foremost aid and support those three million Hungarians who after the treaty became minorities in the successor states.¹⁶⁵ Historian and favorite pupil of Gyula Szekfű, Domokos Kosáry, questioned the approach and use of historical tropes. In a letter from London to his former advisor he challenged the logic of relying on what he sarcastically called the “wondrous resemblance” of the English *Magna Charta* and the Hungarian *Aranybulla*. “It is something that here and today they [the English public] would not believe even if it came from the Archbishop of Canterbury,” wrote Kosáry. He similarly dismissed some unsubstantiated notions about America gaining its name from the Hungarian warrior-king St. Imre (Emeric).¹⁶⁶ Kosáry argued instead that similar to the approach of Marc Bloch—Kosáry had attended Bloch’s lectures in Paris—he would prefer the idea of a “histoire comparée de l’Europe Centrale.”

¹⁶⁴ Georges Lukács, *La Hongrie et la civilisation* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1927), and Eugene Pivány, *Hungarian—American Historical Connections* (Budapest: Royal Hungarian University Press, 1927).

¹⁶⁵ Kálmán Pongrácz, “Magyar kultúrfolytonosság,” *Magyar Szemle*, (September, 1930): 33-44.

¹⁶⁶ Kosáry to Szekfű (undated) Manuscript Collection of the University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest (ELTE Kt hereafter), MS G628. I thank Gábor Ujváry for pointing out this collection to me.

He argued that that every nation could write its own history, but only a comparative history of the region would truly illuminate the historical role of Hungary.¹⁶⁷

Hungary was not the only East-Central European nation that deemed history a useful weapon in its cultural diplomatic arsenal. While Hungarians maintained that they built a state on previously “barren” land, the Romanian historians countered it with a theory of their own. Vasile Pârvan in his *Dacia: An Outline of the Early Civilisation of the Carpatho-Danubian Countries*, building on the earlier works of Petru Maior, stressed that there was continuity both of race and of culture in the Danubian region from as early as circa 1500 B.C., when the people who were later known as Getae or Dacians settled there. The Dacians in turn became romanized and they are, the argument runs, the ethnic ancestors of the Romanian nation.¹⁶⁸ Another thesis about continuity was put forward by Nicolae Iorga, Pârvan’s mentor. Iorga—one-time Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, historian and Rector of the University of Bucharest—viewed southeastern Europe in general, and Romania specifically, as “the spiritual and institutional continuation of Byzantium.”¹⁶⁹ He argued that the Byzantine ideals, church, and civilization were preserved and protected by various Wallachian and Moldavian princes, such as Constantin Brâncoveanu and Nicholas Mavrocordat. To Iorga, the synthesis of Byzantine high culture and traditional Romanian culture and the supposed continuity of

¹⁶⁷ ELTE Kt, MS G628, Kosáry to Szekfű (January 21, 1937). He would not write this comparative history—which in fact is not comparative—until 1941: *A History of Hungary* (Cleveland and New York: The Benjamin Franklin Bibliophile Society, 1941). The publication fulfilled a long-standing Hungarian dream of publishing a history of Hungary for an American audience.

¹⁶⁸ Vasile Pârvan, *Dacia: An Outline of the Early Civilisation of the Carpatho-Danubian Countries* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1928). The book was a result of his earlier Romanian work *Getica: o Protoistoric a Dacici* (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1926) and his Cambridge lectures.

¹⁶⁹ In Virgil Căndea’s introduction to the reissue of Nicolae Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium* (Iași, Oxford, and Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies in cooperation with the Romanian Institute of International Studies, 2000), 8.

its ancient past made Bucharest “the true intellectual capital of South Eastern Europe.” It was an idea which he advocated throughout various publications and during his American lecture tour.¹⁷⁰ Iorga’s lectures were indeed excellent tools of Romanian cultural diplomacy. A Hungarian diplomat, after attending on of Iorga’s lectures in Geneva, reported back to KÜM that the lectures were simply “gripping.”¹⁷¹ Iorga’s towering intellect certainly helped to present Romania, in the words of R. W. Seton-Watson, as the “Latin sentinel upon the Danube.”¹⁷²

Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy also paid a great deal of attention to historical studies. In this historical construction the quintessential Czechoslovak characteristic was humanism (*humanita*), which was embodied by President-Liberator Masaryk. Humanism became the lynchpin that connected present Czechoslovakia with its Bohemian historical past, a quality that needed to be publicized worldwide.¹⁷³ Masaryk spoke of this in his *Conversations with Karel Čapek*:

As far as our national programme is concerned, remember what I told you with regard to the development of Europe, and to our own history, that is that we must take a hand in world politics, and consequently be in lively and friendly contact with other nations. Our national revival is a child of Enlightenment and of late Romanticism, it sprang from humanitarian ideals of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries which were broadcast in France, in Germany, everywhere, Humanity – that is indeed our national programme.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Nicolae Iorga, *My American Lectures* (Bucharest: State Printing Office, 1932), 192.

¹⁷¹ MOL, K67, 4. csomó, 1.tétel (April 2, 1924).

¹⁷² Seton- Watson in his preface to Nicolae Iorga, *A History of Anglo-Romanian Relations* (Bucharest: Societate Anglo-Română, 1931), 4.

¹⁷³ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 55.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Masaryk, *Masaryk on Thought and Life: Conversations with Karel Čapek*, trans. M. & R. Weatherall (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 212.

A contemporary Hungarian observer argued that despite some domestic disagreement on the recent development of Czechoslovak historiography, there was a unified message that historical studies transmitted toward the West. After reviewing Kamil Krofta's works, he concluded that, in this view, Czechoslovakia was portrayed as the "chosen nation" of humanity, of freedom of thought and religion, while its history was presented the accumulation of struggle and of martyrdom in the service of human rights and democracy.¹⁷⁵

Of course, Hungarians were not the only ones keeping an eye on the literature of the competition. Romanians and Czechoslovaks kept tabs on Hungarian publications. Interestingly enough, they all thought that the others had the upper-hand. All the countries sought to recruit foreign scholars in order to disprove one another's claims. The two towering figures in the field of East-Central European history, R. W. Seton-Watson and C. A. (Carlile Aylmer) Macartney, wrote reviews and opinion pieces—not to mention entire monographs—in support of Romanian/ Czechoslovak, or Hungarian historical interpretations, respectively.¹⁷⁶ Seton-Watson in his influential *Treaty Revisions and the Hungarian Frontiers* continued to discredit Hungarian claims, historical and otherwise, for the just cause of revisionism. His work was written in reaction to István

¹⁷⁵ Lajos Gogolák in *Századok* (1936), 316-317. See Kamil Krofta, *The Short History of Czechoslovakia* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1935).

¹⁷⁶ The output of these two figures was vast. From R. W. Seton-Watson see, *Racial Problems in Hungary* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1908); *German, Slav, and Magyar: a Study in the Origins of the Great War* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1916); *Treaty Revision and the Hungarian Frontiers* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1934); and *A History of the Roumanians. From Roman Times to the Completion of the Unity* ([n. p.] Archon Books, 1963) (Originally published in 1934). From C.A. Macartney, see *The Magyars in the Ninth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1930) and *Hungary and her Successors: the Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences, 1919-1937* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1937). The two actually broke off relations over one of Macartney's letters to *The Times*. On this and more see, László Péter, "The political conflict between R. W. Seton-Watson and C. A. Macartney over Hungary," in *BHR*.

Bethlen's 1933 British lecture tour, which indeed raised public interest in the Hungarian Question. The insert quotation from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, in the second page of the publication set the tone for his argument: "Heaven grant us its peace, but not the King of Hungary's."¹⁷⁷ The well-selected quote was followed by a sophisticated argument in which Seton-Watson rejected claims for the Allies' culpability for the destruction of Austria-Hungary and refuted the "myth of incompetent experts."¹⁷⁸ He emphasized the role of Magyarization, in the past and the present, not leaving out the question of Hungarian Jewry, including the 1920 Hungarian *Numerus Clausus*.¹⁷⁹ In sum, Seton-Watson concluded that Hungarian revisionist aims were dangerous to even consider at this time.

Criticism of Hungarian academic propaganda was not limited to the continent.

When Francis Deák wrote his analysis of Hungary's role at the Paris peace conference—actually, in his interpretation, the lack of Hungary's role—American historian Bernadotte

¹⁷⁷ R. W. Seton-Watson, *Treaty Revision and the Hungarian Frontiers* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1934), 2.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-23.

¹⁷⁹ On September 26, 1920, the Hungarian Parliament enacted *Act XXV*—more commonly known as the *Numerus Clausus*—which essentially limited the percentage of Jewish students in higher education to the percentage of Jews in the population as a whole. The law was enforced to some extent, but by 1928 it was amended, for both Prime Minister Bethlen and Klebelsberg were worried about the international reaction to the law. This decision created widespread anti-Semitic rioting that especially targeted university students. On foreign media coverage of the amendment, see "Hungarian Minister Attacks Anti-Semitism," *New York Times*, November 11, 1928, 59.

The impact of the *Numerus Clausus* on the Jewish community continues to be a topic of research. On the flight of Hungarian Jewish students in universities of Austria and Germany—including the likes of Leó Szilárd and Arthur Koestler—, see Michael L. Miller, "'A numerus clausus száműzöttjei' a berlini felsőoktatási intézetekben 1920 és 1933 között," *Múlt és Jövő* 4 (2006): 84-91 and Michael L. Miller, "From White Terror to Red Vienna" in *Wien und die jüdische Erfahrung, 1900-1938*, Frank Stern and Barbara Eichinger, Eds., (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 307-323.

For the statistical survey of the impact of Numerus Clausus on Hungary's Jewish population, see Gergely Egressy, "A Statistical Overview of the Hungarian Numerus Clausus Law of 1920—Historical Necessity or the First Step toward the Holocaust?" *East European Quarterly* 34, No.4 (2001): 447-464.

This remains a rather controversial topic, which is certainly not within the scope of this study. For the latest on this issue, see Kovács M. Mária, "A jobboldal és a numerus clausus," *Élet és Irodalom* 52, No.42 (October 16, 2009), accessed July 7, 2010, <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;24276>

E. Schmitt harshly criticized it. According to Schmitt, who once was courted by the Hungarians, Deák's account was much to be welcomed and his "yeoman work in collecting the materials" was much appreciated. However, after pointing out certain issues with the piece, as she saw it, he concluded that "Mr. Deak, in short, despite his parade of scholarship, remains very much a Hungarian propagandist."¹⁸⁰

Criticism aside, Hungarian scholarly publications and lectures continued to "educate" foreigners about the just cause behind Hungarian revisionist aims. Not even the outbreak of the Second World War entirely stopped these efforts. *A Companion to Hungarian Studies* was published in 1943, for example. In its preface István Bethlen stated:

The *Companion to Hungarian Studies* has been produced to meet a practical need. In recent years the editors of *The Hungarian Quarterly* have found by experience that it is difficult, if not impossible to ask foreign experts to write on Hungarian questions because the information necessary to them on the subject of Hungary and the Hungarian people is almost entirely in the Hungarian language. . . . The *Companion to Hungarian Studies* is therefore intended to supply this need . . . [with the] hope that this book, written and edited in time of war, will one day be read in time of peace by all who are interested in the problems of Central Europe.¹⁸¹

The *Companion* was to serve the Hungarian cause in the upcoming treaties after the war. Once again, the political and intellectual elite of Hungary were to be disappointed.

¹⁸⁰ Bernadotte E. Schmitt's review of Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942) in *The Journal of Modern History* 15, No. 1 (1943): 64-65.

¹⁸¹ Stephen Bethlen and comp. *A Companion to Hungarian Studies* (Budapest: The Society of Hungarian Quarterly, 1943), xi-xii. Other publications included Francis Deák and Dezső Ujváry, eds., *Papers and Documents Relating to the Foreign Relations of Hungary* (Budapest: Royal Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1941).

Conclusion

Hungarian, Romanian, and Czechoslovak intellectuals and politicians mobilized their respective countries' cultural capital in order to gain essential Western support for their foreign policy goals. The borders between scholarship and politics evaporated as scholars became members of parliaments and politicians found themselves in lecture halls. In this mobilization academic institutions became fortresses, scholarly publications turned into weapons, and scholars left their ivory towers to become warriors. The Hungarian political elite believed that cultural propaganda's central aim should be to enlighten the foreign public about past and present Hungarian cultural and historical achievements.

Despite political changes, government support for securing venues by which to present the Hungarian point of view remained constant. Notwithstanding the country's economic problems, the political elite organized and financed cultural and academic centers, established scholarly journals, and arranged lecture tours in the hope of influencing international public opinion. In order to appear as a quintessentially European country that was the key for further development of the region, scholars presented arguments about the country's cultural superiority, its historical civilizing mission, its historical and cultural connections to Western Civilization, and its sacrifices in the name of Christianity and Western ideals. In this field of cultural production the political elite's control was nearly total. There was no room for amateurish propaganda, just as there was no place for works propagating an Eastern orientation of Hungary. The government's commitment to this form of cultural diplomacy was unwavering, as

politicians and intellectuals continued their worldwide efforts to construct and promote a positive Hungarian image abroad.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTING HUNGARY AND GATHERING FRIENDS: TOURISM AND ITS IMAGERY

“Tourism is the best foreign policy”
(Archduke József Ferenc, 1927)¹

On June 20, 1927, in the Upper House of the Hungarian Diet during the budget debate, Archduke József Ferenc (1895-1957) rose to speak: “Revered House, tourism is the best foreign policy.” He continued: “It is the best foreign policy, because it garners friends for the country by acquainting [others] with our domestic reality. Secondly, it allows us to speak about ourselves in a way that enables those abroad [*külföld*] to become acquainted with us, which helps us to remove their misconceptions [regarding our country].” He went on to point out that advancing and promoting the state of the tourist industry was the best way to confirm and support the political goals of the Bethlen cabinet and to battle against the “international smear campaign” (*rágalomhadjárat*) that aimed to destroy the country’s reputation.² The majority of Hungary’s political elite shared his opinion. Politicians and industry experts agreed that tourism and the related industries were more than an economic concern. Oszkár Bársony—chief executive of IBUSZ (Idegenforgalmi Beszerzési Utazási és Szállítási Rt.), the Hungarian national

¹ *Felsőházi Napló*, I. kötet, 1927, 155 (June 20, 1927).

² *Felsőházi Napló*, I. kötet, 1927, 155-56 (June 20, 1927).

travel agency—voiced similar views. He averred that in the postwar international climate the Hungarian leadership had to pay attention to the political utility of the tourist industry because “the tourism sector has developed into a political weapon, which—without harming others—has become the most instrumental mechanism of the campaign that seeks to enlighten foreigners [about the character of the country].”³ Another captain of industry, Béla Marko, director of the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office (Székesfővárosi Idegenforgalmi Hivatal) went even further and stated that “foreign tourism is the most direct and most effective way to inform others about the worth and value of the nation, hence it is the strongest weapon of propaganda.”⁴

In this chapter I argue that the tourist industry played a pivotal role in Hungary’s cultural diplomatic campaign. In this respect Hungarians were not alone. It may be true that originally travel was simply a means to advance trade and commerce, but with the development of mass tourism in the twentieth century the nature of travel changed forever. People from various social backgrounds, not just the wealthy and the privileged, traveled to see sights, experience something new, learn, or simply have fun. Upon their return home they talked and wrote about what they saw. The experience of the tourist became an indicator of the host country’s level of civilization and culture. Therefore as public opinion came to matter more and more to states so did the national image that

³ Oszkár Bársony, *Utazás és idegenforgalom: tegnap, ma és—holnap* (Budapest: Magyar Cobden Szövetség, 1934), 25. Oszkár Bársony (1879-1943) was one of the first Hungarian experts of tourism. His involvement with Hungarian tourism goes back to 1902. While this publication was published only in 1934, the message, I argue, is relevant even earlier.

⁴ Béla Markos, *Az idegenforgalom* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Egyesülete, 1941), 34. Similarly to Bársony, Béla Markos (1893-1974) was also one of the pioneers of Hungarian tourism. He rose to become the director of the Székesfővárosi Idegenforgalmi Hivatal (Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office). Despite the late publication date of his work likewise representative of the mentality that saw tourism as a factor of Hungarian foreign policy.

tourism helped to create. Tourism has the ability to identify, (re)construct, and promote a certain national narrative or, as Rudy Koshar argues, it can be a “building block of national identity.”⁵ Thus it does not come as a surprise that interwar governments recognized the political and ideological utility of tourism. No longer simply an economic concern, travel and leisure-related industries became too valuable to leave to business interests alone. Indeed, as a US Government study testifies, by 1930 there were about fifty national governments that to one degree or another actively participated in the promotion of the industry.⁶ Professor A. J. Norval—who was commissioned in the late 1920s by the South African government to produce an international and national survey of the state of the tourist industry—concluded:

In view of the national importance of the tourist industry to any country at all interested in its development and in view of its bearing on national life economically, sociologically, and politically, no government can neglect the control and direction of its tourist traffic and the formulation of a clearly defined tourist policy directed toward the development of tourist traffic from foreign countries.⁷

Shelley Baranowski and Victoria de Grazia have closely examined the two clearest examples of governmental control over tourism—Germany’s Kraft durch Freude and Italy’s Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro movement.⁸ However, unlike these organizations,

⁵ Rudy Koshar, *German Travel Cultures* (Oxford, UK and New York: Berg, 2000), 10. Also see Joshua Hagen, *Preservation, Tourism and Nationalism: The Jewel of the German Past* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

⁶ Herbert Max Bratter, “The Promotion of Tourist Travel by Foreign Countries” in *U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce Trade Promotion Series No. 113* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1931), iv.

⁷ A.J. Norval, *The Tourist Industry: a National and International Survey* (London: Sir Issac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1936),152.

⁸ Shelley Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture*

the interwar Hungarian political elite, supported by the tourism industry, was not primarily seeking to promote domestic tourism. Their agenda was to promote Hungary as a travel destination to foreigners. In this the Hungarian model is closer to Italy's government-founded ENIT (Ente nazionale per le industrie turistiche) and the Soviet Union's efforts through its All Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS).⁹ This chapter explains the ways that the Hungarian political, cultural, and industrial elite reorganized the country's nascent tourist industry in order to use it as a tool in their campaign to convince the West of the necessity and just nature of their revisionist claims.

The chapter comprises four parts. The first part tells the story of the nineteenth-century beginnings of the Hungarian tourist industry. During the period, tourism already had a dual function. On the one hand, it was, and remained, a money maker. On the other hand, it also contributed to the Hungarian politicians' aim to define Hungary in opposition to Austria, and as such it was part of a larger nation-building project. The second section illustrates the challenges faced by post-First World War Hungarian tourism. In addition, it also examines the government's effort to gain control of the tourist industry and utilize it in its cultural diplomatic campaign. The third part introduces the ways that the question of Hungarianness and the mental mapping of Hungary as a tourist destination overlapped with one another. In it I show that the Hungarian elite simultaneously sought to promote the country as a modern, progressive and

of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁹ On ENIT see Taina Syrjämaa, *Visitez L' Italie: Italian State Tourist Propaganda Abroad, 1919-1943* (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1997). On the Soviet efforts see Michael David Fox, "From Illusory 'Society' to Intellectual 'Public': VOKS, International Travel and Party: Intelligentsia Relations in the Interwar Period," *Contemporary European History* 11, no. 1 (2002): 7-32. On later Soviet policy see Anne E. Gorsuch, "'There's No Place like Home': Soviet Tourism in Late Stalinism," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 4 (2003): 760-85.

unquestionably European. Yet Hungary was also a place that was uniquely defined by the traditions of the countryside. Sometimes it was both at once. The last section focuses on 1938 (the Year of St. Stephen), which I see as the beginning of a decline of the tourist industry and its service to cultural diplomacy.

The Hungarian Tourist Industry before the First World War and the Image of Hungary

Prior to the 1867 Ausgleich, the Hungarian tourist industry was almost non-existent. Since the middle of seventeenth century the sons (and to a lesser degree the daughters) of the English (and later on other Western European) upper-classes traveled to the continent. The Grand Tour, as the activity became known, usually followed the Paris-Turin-Florence-Rome-Naples-Venice-Vienna-the Rhineland-Low Countries route. Hungary was not among the usual or even desirable destinations. Nor was Hungary a popular destination as the tourist industry began to thrive in Western Europe during the nineteenth century. On the contrary, as one French traveler noted in 1818 as he reached Vienna from Paris, he came across a clerk who upon learning of his desire to continue his travel to Hungary “repeatedly exclaimed, striking his head in astonishment: ‘Von Paris nach Ungarn! From Paris to Hungary!’”¹⁰ Those who visited the country (among them a large number of female travelers), acknowledged its natural beauty but often provided a harsh depiction of it. Julia Pardoe’s 1840 *The City of the Magyar* cautioned that “all persons travelling in Hungary must make up their minds resolutely to fling from them

¹⁰ François Sulpice Beudant, *Travels in Hungary in 1818* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1823), 48.

every feeling of hyper-fastidiousness, both as regards to roads, horses, drivers, and accommodation; to brave delay, disappointment, even danger, and to prepare themselves to do battle with inconvenience of every description.”¹¹

The birth of the Hungarian railway (July 15, 1846), the subsequent 1856 opening of the Vienna-Pozsony (today Bratislava in Slovakia)-Pest railway line, and the 1867 *Ausgleich* gave new hopes to the nascent Hungarian tourist industry that remained unfulfilled. With the 1868 establishment of the Royal Hungarian State Railways or MÁV (Magyar Királyi Államvasutak) the government took charge of the railways and began the organization of the tourist industry. Yet the traveling public’s image of Hungary continued to be rather negative. In 1866 one of the most influential British monthlies, *MacMillan’s Magazine*, published an article “Glimpses of Magyar Land.” The author’s view of Hungary was discouraging: “When you have travelled over a dozen miles in Hungary you have seen the country. Such was the assurance I received from everybody; and my subsequent experience confirmed its truth. Hungary has one singular recommendation, as a land to travel in, namely, that it contains absolutely nothing.”¹² In addition, the “strange-sounding un-European names” of towns and places made the author uneasy, and he only felt relief when he saw the lights of Pesth (Pest in nineteenth-century German spelling). Still, he was not impressed by Hungary’s largest city either. He wrote (quite sarcastically): “Pesth has the merit of not having anything much to offer in the way of sights.”¹³ The American 1877 edition of *A Satchel Guide for the Vacation*

¹¹ Julia S. H. Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar, or Hungary and Her Institutions in 1839-40* (London: George Virtue, Ivy Lane, 1840), 55.

¹² Edward Dicey, “Glimpses of Magyar Land” in *MacMillan’s Magazine*, vol. 13, 1866, 378.

¹³ *Ibid*, 380. It was not until 1873 that Buda, Pest, and Óbuda merged and Budapest was born.

Tourist in Europe concluded that in Budapest “the churches and the public buildings are of no particular interest.”¹⁴

Indeed, as József Böröcz’s quantitative analysis of contemporary guidebooks shows, Hungary was barely on the “mental map” of Europe.¹⁵ What little “imagination” existed offered a mental picture of Hungary as a country more oriental than the occidental, a country where gypsies, aristocrats, and peasants lived in a fairytale-like harmony. The Puszta (the Hungarian Plains) was where Westerners discovered what they saw as the real essence of Hungary. French travel writer Victor Tissot’s *Unknown Hungary* paints the following picture, which is worth quoting at length.

On the wide staircase, leading to a room raised seven to ten feet above the one which we were, stood three young girls dressed in the Hungarian national costume. The outline of their graceful figures showed to advantage under the *rékli*, a jacket embroidered with braid and silver buttons, and ornamented with flowers, of leather work, something like a hussar’s cloak, and lined with sheepskin with its warm soft wool. Their petticoats, fastened over this, descended puffed out in a thousand plaits like pipes nearly to the ankles, clothed in well-fitting stockings, their feet being shod in shoes, whose high heels were destined to keep time in cadence to the evolutions of the czardas. . . . These three girls were of a fresh and striking beauty. Their large brown eyes with their fringed lashes had all the calm depth of those of Orientals, and their rosy lips, showing white teeth, smiled with all the *spirituel* gaiety which is one of the charms of a Hungarian woman.

The young peasants came down to the lower floor, and the judge good-humouredly detailed to me, one after the other, the various parts of their costume.

“And now,” he said, pulling out his watch, “let us go to the Gipsies.”

Amongst the Gipsies! . . . Free as a bird, a traveler like the wind, the Gipsy goes as the humour may take him, in the direction of his will or fancy. What does he

¹⁴ Quoted in József Böröcz, *Leisure Migration: a Sociological Study on Tourism* (New York: Pergamon/Elsevier Science Ltd, 1996), 23.

¹⁵ Böröcz, *Leisure Migration*, 32-39. Böröcz’s analysis is based on weighted representation of various countries in the *Appleton’s European Guide Book Illustrated* and *A Satchel Guide for the Vacation Tourist in Europe* published between 1870 and 1925.

require to make him happy? A brunette companion, the sun, a carpet of grass, a boundless horizon, a murmuring of a stream in the moss, a little of the poetry of savage life, which make city life seem monotonous and sad in comparison. There where he can find pasture enough for his horses, and wood enough for his fire, he pitches his cloth tent, and spends his days lying on his back or on his face, smoking his pipe, “as tranquilly as if he wanted nothing in the wide world,” and, whilst he watches the smoke dispersing in the air, dreaming ineffable dreams. . . . In his apparent misery this Mohican of Europe remains a millionaire of illusion, of gaiety, of good humour . . . this is the Gypsy’s home, the land of his adoption! and where could he find it better than in the immense steppes of Hungary, where he can travel whole days without meeting a living creature except the eagle, swans, flights of ducks, and troops of wild horses? Like the Bedouin, whose brother in vagabondage and poetry he is, the Gypsy cannot settle down. . . .¹⁶

Tissot’s picture, in which he transformed the Hungarian countryside into the land of “beautiful women, fine horses, good wine, and gypsy music,” would remain the standard motives of Puszta Romantic for years to come.¹⁷

While the tourist industry continued to be the primary focus of private enterprises, by the last decades of the nineteenth century governmental circles had also started to become more aware of the economic, social, and political advantages that tourism could offer. Private organizations aimed to organize and promote Hungarian hot springs and spas, Budapest, Lake Balaton, and the Tatra Mountains to both domestic and foreign audiences. Among those targeting the domestic traveler were the Carpathian Association of Hungary (Magyarországi Kárpát Egyesület) established in 1873 and the Spa Joint-Stock

¹⁶ Victor Tissot, *Unknown Hungary*, trans. Mrs. A. Oswald Brodie (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1881), 26-28. The translation was based on the fourth (!) French edition. But the original was only a year earlier, 1880. Italics in the original.

¹⁷ On the role of East and Southeastern Europe in Western imagination, see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Company of Almád (Almádi Fürdő Részvénytársaság).¹⁸ The next landmark decision was connected with Under-Secretary Gábor Baross, who during his lifetime earned the nickname “Iron Minister” because of his commitment to the development of the Hungarian railway system. His involvement signaled the beginning of state interest in tourism. Under his sponsorship the First Hungarian Ticket Bureau (Első Magyar Menetjegy Iroda) was established in 1884 in order to coordinate train travel.¹⁹ The real breakthrough was the government-sponsored 1885 National Exhibition in Budapest, which was considered by Oszkár Bársony to be the birth of the Hungarian tourist industry.²⁰ That year 66,773 foreign visitors came to Budapest.²¹ Nevertheless, industry experts realized the need for further reforms and improvements. In order to promote Budapest as a tourist destination a special committee put forward a fifteen-point program.

- 1) Produce descriptions in various foreign languages about Budapest.
- 2) Place reviews of Budapest in foreign newspapers.
- 3) Place a review of Budapest in the Baedeker guide.
- 4) Produce photos of Budapest and distribute them abroad, *with special emphasis on the East.*

¹⁸ On The Carpathian Association of Hungary and subsequent Magyar Tourist Association and their role in the nationalization of the tourist industry, see Alexander Vari, “From Friends of Nature to Tourist-Soldiers: Nation Building and Tourism in Hungary, 1873-1914,” in *Turizm: the Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 64-81.

¹⁹ Lajos Kudar, *Az IBUSZ története* (Budapest: IBUSZ Igazgatóság, 1992), 6.

²⁰ Quoted in Márta Jusztin, “‘Utazgassunk hazánk földjén!’: A belföldi turizmus problémái a két világháború között Magyarországon,” *Korall*, Vol.26 (2006): 190.

²¹ Statistic from Béla Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története és jövő célkitűzései* (Budapest: MIÉSZ, 1942), 11. A word of caution is necessary about these and the statistics that follow. For the most part these numbers will represent visitors only to Budapest; there was no effort made to collect data for the rest of the country.

- 5) Find means to get favorable ticket circulation—both in price and duration—on those railway and nautical lines that connect the East and the West through Budapest.
- 6) Advertise travel deals.
- 7) Publish foreign language guides.
- 8) Publish and distribute information pamphlets about conditions and prices of hotels, restaurants and transportation.
- 9) Produce maps of Budapest.
- 10) Regulate hotel room prices.
- 11) Provide foreign-language-speaking (*nyelveket beszélő*) museum guides.
- 12) Produce foreign language catalogues of the treasures of the museums.
- 13) Establish clubs, recreational and holiday sites.
- 14) Provide moral and financial support for festivals.
- 15) Establish the Budapest Metropolitan Museum.²²

The program was developed by the private factor and sought the rapid professionalization of the tourist industry. Establishing the infrastructure and service industry necessary for the further development of tourism was the organizers chief concern. The program also made it clear that tourism was driven by economic concerns, hence that promotion of Hungary in the East among the wealthy sons and daughters of the Russian nobility.

While it is hard to argue with the predominance of economic considerations in the development of nineteenth-century Hungarian tourism, it was also became an essential component of the nation-building project in which Hungary sought to differentiate itself from its Austrian counterpart. Hungarian efforts were in tune with the nineteenth-century

²² József Klaudy, *Az európai legelső nemzeti utazási iroda története* (Budapest: IBUSZ kiadás, 1943), 18-19. Italics are mine.

zeitgeist and its “international exhibitionary complex”²³—as sociologist Tony Bennett referred to it—whereby each nation “started to construct heritage and tourist attractions in contrast and comparison with others.”²⁴ One of the milestones of Hungarian attempts to define national essence was the 1896 Millennial Exhibition in which the country celebrated its one thousand year history. Private interest and state concern coincided in organizing a celebration that would put the country on the map of Europe—figuratively and literally. One of the exhibition’s main goals was to signal the cultural independence of Hungary from Austria.²⁵ The exhibition was also noteworthy because it represented the kind of duality between traditional and modern that would define Hungary’s image construction for decades to come. On the one hand, a visitor would have gazed upon the colorful traditional folk heritage of the nation that openly celebrated its Eastern, some would say Oriental roots. Indeed, organizers of the exhibition not only embraced the “exotic island of Europe” representation of the country but actually promoted it. In the center of celebration was the overshadowing figure of Árpád. The leader of the Magyars and his seven chieftains were memorialized in the epic painting of Árpád Feszty and the monumental statues of the Millennium Memorial on Budapest’s Heroes’ Square. In the

²³ Tony Bennett quoted in Mary Neuberger, “Introduction: Exhibiting Eastern Europe,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010), 539.

²⁴ Orfar Löfgren, “Know Your Country: a Comparative Perspective on Tourism and Nation Building in Sweden,” in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 139. Hereafter, *Being Elsewhere*.

²⁵ For more on the 1896 Millennial Exhibition see András Gerő, *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making: the Unfinished Experience* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 1995) and Dorothy Barescott, “Articulating Identity through the Technological Rearticulation of Space: the Hungarian Millennial Exhibition as World’s Fair and the Disordering of Fin-de-Siècle Budapest,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 571-590. On Hungarian exhibitions in World Fairs, see Terri Switzer, “Hungarian Self-Representation in an International Context: the Magyar Exhibited at International Expositions and World’s Fairs,” *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, ed. Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsh (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 160-86.

latter, which historian András Gerő refers to as the “national altar,” the figure of St. Stephen (together with some historical figures of the Habsburg House) was relegated to the back of the exhibition.²⁶ Nor did St. Stephen fare better in exhibition’s official picture guide. The publication, issued in four languages, did not even include the name of Hungary’s first king.²⁷ On the other hand, however, the organizers made every possible effort to showcase the modern, progressive, and determinedly European character of the country, for they sought to illustrate that Hungary was equal in every aspect to Austria. Visitors of the celebration could travel on the first underground railway in continental Europe, take a stroll on Budapest’s recently completed main boulevard, the Andrassy Avenue, and view Hungary’s new Parliament building. News of the exhibition, which was opened by Emperor Franz Joseph, made it to the most important newspapers from Vienna to Chicago. The arrival of 93,408 foreign visitors to Hungary in 1896 nevertheless did not live up to the hopes of its organizers, who had hoped for a better showing.²⁸ Nor did it alter the foreign image of Hungary. The British monthly review, *The Nineteenth Century*, devoted a lengthy essay to the event. While there were certainly positive elements and even some optimism about the country’s future, the otherwise very friendly piece was not without stereotypes and judgmental attitudes. It began by stating that even those who knew that a certain country called Hungary existed “somewhere in Europe or near Europe—public consciousness was really not quite clear about that”—they were mostly familiar with four things: Hungarian wines, Hungarian music and

²⁶ On the changing utility of the Millennium Memorial see András Gerő, *Képzelt történelem* (Budapest: PolgArt, 2004), 203-240.

²⁷ See Gyula Laurencic, *Az ezeréves Magyarország és a milleniumi kiállítás* (Budapest: Téka, 1990) Reprint of the 1896 original.

²⁸ Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 11.

musicians, Hungarian flour, and Lajos Kossuth.²⁹ In his view the Hungarian is rhapsodic, for the “Magyar will spend fifteen hours in wild dancing, drinking, and rollicking to the bewildering music of his national airs but on sobering up he will go to the council-chamber of his country and discuss in gravest manner the topics of national or local policy.”³⁰ It was not the glowing image Hungarians were hoping for. Even more discouraging for the organizers was the fact that Budapest was far from ready to welcome masses of tourists as infrastructural issues—such as the quality and quantity of accommodation—surrounding the exhibition indicated.³¹

To remedy these problems then Prime Minister Kálmán Széll organized in 1900 a symposium “What needs to be done to attract foreigners to Hungary?”³² The same year saw the first Hungarian work on tourism and the establishment of the Royal Hungarian Automobile Club (Királyi Magyar Automobil Club). In 1902 the Central Ticket Bureau (Központi Menetjegyiroda) was established. This entity merged the different bureaus of the Royal Hungarian State Railway, Thomas Cook, and Wagons-Lits. 1902 also was the birth year of the predecessor of IBUSZ, the Tourism and Travel Company Incorporated (Idegenforgalmi és Utazási Vállalat). To aid the development of the industry Hungarian efforts especially targeted Russia. The idea was to present Hungary to the Russian nobles, who flocked to Europe, as more than just a transit country but rather as a destination. Accordingly, the first travel bureaus were opened in St. Petersburg, Kiev, Odessa, and

²⁹ Emil Reich, “Hungary at the Close of her First Millennium,” *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 39 (Jan.-June, 1896), 837.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 838.

³¹ Jusztin, “Utazgassunk,” 191.

³² Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 12.

Warsaw.³³ Improvements continued as Budapest organized its first Spring Trade Fair (Tavaszi Vásár) in 1906, which was the predecessor of the Budapest International Trade Fair (BNV—Budapesti Nemzetközi Vásár). In 1908 the establishment of the Permanent Medicinal and Thermal Bath Association of Budapest (Budapest Állandó Gyógyfürdő Bizottsága) sought to organize and further develop Budapest's spa culture.³⁴

The outbreak of the First World War naturally slowed the progress of the tourist industry everywhere. While no exception, Hungary still attempted to advance travel and leisure related activities. Among them the most significant was the 1916 establishment of the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office (Székesfővárosi Idegenforgalmi Hivatal), followed by the National Tourism Bureau (Országos Idegenforgalmi Iroda), established by then Prime Minister Sándor Wekerle which sought to gain government control over the industry.³⁵ However, the reality of war circumscribed possibilities. The organization was aborted and with that the advancement of Hungarian tourism and related industries came to a temporary halt.

Between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1910s the Hungarian tourist industry developed from its embryonic stage to an industry of national interest. The once private enterprise became something that concerned the state, for the leadership realized the potentials of tourism in regard to nation-building. During the first decades of the twentieth century government officials and tourism experts and government officials

³³ Mária Jusztin, "A turizmus története a két világháború között Magyarországon" (PhD diss., Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest, 2002), 151-152. I would like to express my gratitude to Márta Jusztin for sending me a copy of her dissertation.

³⁴ Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 12-3.

³⁵ Ibid.

alike grew more and more wary of the nation's foreign image. A 1903 pamphlet of the Central Ticket Bureau already signaled the changing attitudes toward the significance of tourism. Tourism, the pamphlet stated, was an industry with "patriotic and national importance." It further argued that the would-be visitors' personal experience will alter the "oblique and false" foreign views of Hungary.³⁶ It was an argument that would continue to serve as the foundation for the rationale behind the postwar Hungarian government's efforts to reorganize and take control over the tourist industry.

The Reorganization of Hungarian Tourist Industry after the First World War³⁷

In addition to the country's international isolation, economic devastation, and political unrest, Trianon had turned Hungary into—as contemporaries referred to it—a "sehegye, setengere ország," meaning a country without mountains or sea. The Hungarian tourist industry lost, apart from Budapest, its most desirable tourist destinations. Hungary lost its access to the Adriatic Sea, the Tatra Mountains, and the Carpathians. More illustrative of the challenges that the tourism sector faced was that pre-Trianon Hungary (without Croatia) had 203 spa and medicinal bath resorts, whereas after the treaty only sixty-three remained. Before the treaty the country had boasted thirty

³⁶ Quoted in Klaudy, *Az európai legelső*, 25.

³⁷ Here the historian faces a very daunting task. With the exception of Márta Jusztin's dissertation there has been no effort made by any historian to reconstruct the history of interwar Hungarian tourism in its entirety. The reason behind this is twofold. One has to do with the fact that tourism only recently appeared as an interest to historians, both Hungarians and others. The second, more problematic reason has to do with the absence of archival sources. Unfortunately the most relevant documents—part of the holdings of the Hungarian Ministry for Commerce—were destroyed during the Battle of Budapest in 1945. The entire documentation of IBUSZ before 1947 has also disappeared. Much of what follows is a reconstruction based on scattered sources published by the contemporary leaders of the industry.

mountain retreats; after 1920 only two remained.³⁸ Béla Markos, director of the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office drew a connection between the deficiencies of the tourist industry and the outcome of Trianon. “It has been stated many times,” argued Markos, “that if we had paid more attention to the tourist industry and to foreigners . . . if we had served the aims and objectives of our national propaganda with the necessary purposefulness—if even we had had these sorts of objectives—Trianon could not have happened.”³⁹ As the country started to recover, so did the tourist industry. The dual goals were to transform tourism into a financially solid element of the economy and to utilize it in the country’s ongoing cultural diplomatic endeavors that sought to alter the image of Hungary abroad and consequently to revise the treaty. These goals motivated the development in which the state reorganized and centralized Hungarian tourist industry.

The first stage in the restoration of tourism and its shift from private enterprise to state-industry began as soon as the domestic political and economic situation was stabilized. The first attempt to revive Hungarian tourism was linked with one of the most respected political and public figures of contemporary Hungary, Count Albert Apponyi. The Spa City Budapest Association (Budapest Fürdőváros Egyesület) was established in 1922 under his presidency. Archduke József Ferenc followed Apponyi in the presidency of the association that sought to develop Budapest’s spas and thermal baths.⁴⁰ The first attempt to organize the various tourist-related groups into one umbrella organization was the founding of the Union of Hungarian Tourist Interests (Magyar Idegenforgalmi

³⁸ Statistics from *Felsőházi Napló*, IV. kötet, 1927, 33 (March 13, 1929).

³⁹ Markos, *Az idegenforgalom*, 13.

⁴⁰ Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 13.

Érdekeltségek Szövetsége) in 1925. The same year saw the publication of the first tourist propaganda pamphlet as well. However, while influential politicians contributed to these developments, most of these efforts came from the private sector. The most significant milestone in the state's advancement in Hungarian tourism happened in 1926 when the Hungarian government, through the medium of the Royal Hungarian State Railway Company, purchased 80 percent of the Tourism and Travel Company Incorporated's shares.⁴¹ The timing is not accidental. It was not until 1925 that the government was able to create a balanced budget and stabilize the economy by introducing a new currency. The new company, IBUSZ, was the first step in the state centralization of the tourist industry. In these efforts the Hungarian government followed examples provided by the ever-growing number of nations that decided to take ownership (to varying degrees) of their tourist agencies: the Austrian ÖVB, the Czechoslovak Čedok, the Polish Orbis, the Yugoslav Putnik, and the Romanian Sardev.⁴²

IBUSZ was a majority-owned government agency, or as Minister of Commerce Tihamér Fabinyi referred to it, "eighty percent government owned, but hundred percent government regulated,"⁴³ and as such enjoyed enormous benefits. One member of the Hungarian Diet aptly characterized IBUSZ in the following manner: to outsiders it was a private enterprise, while to insiders it was a state-collective enterprise (*állami közüzem*).⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Képviselőházi Napló*, XI. kötet, 1927, 261 (April 25, 1928).

⁴² During the interwar years ÖVB (1917), Orbis (1920), Čedok (1920), and Putnik (1923) all became in varying degrees government-owned and operated. Thanks to Igor Tchoukraine and Noah Sobe for providing relevant information.

⁴³ MOL K106 174. csomó 139.tétel (Washington D. C., January 4, 1935).

⁴⁴ *Képviselőházi Napló*, XXVI.kötet, 1927, 491 (April 30, 1930). Speech given by Károly Rassay.

IBUSZ enjoyed a monopoly on domestic railway ticket sales, and it was shielded against foreign competition, including take-over bids by the Wagons Lits-Cook. It purchased and incorporated other companies with profiles from transport through advertising and publishing not to mention yacht-building as well as candy and chocolate production. Finally, IBUSZ also enjoyed a monopoly on selling newspapers, magazines, tobacco products, chocolate, candy, and fruit on trains and railway stations.⁴⁵

IBUSZ and other organizations began to represent Hungarian interests abroad. The country joined AGOT (Association des Grandes Organisations Nationales de Voyages et Tourisme), an international organization that sought to promote tourism and business cooperation (in 1933 IBUSZ director Oszkár Bársony was the president of the organization). Hungary sent representatives to the 1928 Conseil Central du Tourisme International conference that was held in Brussels. In the same year Hungarian delegates reached agreements with Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia about promoting the region as a whole at the Middle European Travel Convention in Prague.⁴⁶ At this point economic concerns seemingly overshadowed tourism's utility in cultural diplomacy.

The 1929 establishment of the Parliamentary Committee on Tourism (Parlamenti Idegenforgalmi Bizottság) was a further indication that the government indeed viewed tourism as political tool. Among its members one finds present and future Prime Ministers (István Bethlen, Gyula Gömbös, Kálmán Darányi, Pál Teleki, and Miklós Kállay) and members of the influential nobility (Count Móric Esterházy, Count Sándor Festetics, and Archduke Ferenc József). However, the world-wide Great Depression had

⁴⁵ Ibid., 493-494.

⁴⁶ Bratter, "The Promotion of Tourist Travel," 13.

a negative impact on the government's plan to further centralize the industry. Yet this by no means meant that tourism received less attention. On the contrary, tourism and IBUSZ received criticism. A 1933 parliamentary debate between Egon Turchányi (member of the parliament) and Tihamér Fabinyi (minister of commerce) was representative of the importance that was attached to the question. Turchányi questioned IBUSZ's monopoly and also the company's commitment to foreign propaganda. He argued for the need of government control over the industry similar to that found in France, Italy, and Germany. Reading the parliamentary minutes illustrates that both parties were indeed very familiar with and referred to the works of industry experts, such as Robert Glücksmann, Arthur Bormann, Angelo Mariotti, and Maximilian Klafkowski, when they reasoned that "the question of tourism cannot be organized in a healthy and economic way" if there is no single permanent entity that oversees all aspects of the industry.⁴⁷ In his response Minister Fabinyi, while defended IBUSZ activities, acknowledged the need for some reorganization and pointed out that the issue of tourism was very seriously regarded in government circles not least because of its political utility that would enable Hungary "to gain friends" who, on returning home, would "preach" and help Hungarian justice (i.e. the revision of Trianon) to prevail.⁴⁸ Jenő Czenner, both a politician and industry expert, discussed the issue in a similar vein. In his article "Tourism as an instrument of our foreign policy," published in *Külügyi Szemle (Foreign Review)*, he argued as the title suggests that "tourism is an indispensable instrument of foreign policy." He defined the role of tourism as one of the most important tools for improving Hungary's image in the

⁴⁷ *Képviselőházi Napló*, XIV. Kötet, 1931, 17-9 (March 8, 1933).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

court of international public opinion. He acknowledged the “smart” propaganda of the Soviet Intourist and the German Railway Information Bureau, yet he warned against the misuse of tourist propaganda. He believed that while tourist propaganda was one of the remaining forms of acceptable propaganda, he maintained that it still had to be done in a way that ensured it would not feel and look like direct propaganda.⁴⁹ In another article he offered further justification for the government’s centralization of the industry. The military analogy he employed to describe the past achievements of tourism and its future role is telling of the mindset of not only the author but perhaps all of those involved in the industry’s reform. In 1934 he wrote: “The work done until now can be compared with irregular forces’ guerilla warfare which was able to break down the resistance. Now draws closer the territorial occupation, which requires a standing army, a qualified officer corps, and a forceful general who can establish a front and can organize the occupation.”⁵⁰

As soon as Hungary recovered from the economic crisis—not least thanks to trade agreements signed with Germany—the second phase of tourist industry’s centralization began. The Hungarian Royal Ministry’s 11.001/1935 order on the matter of the regulation of tourism sought to create a central body to oversee the industry and to ensure its cohesive development. This central institution was the Hungarian National Tourism Bureau (Országos Magyar Idegenforgalmi Hivatal). The OMIH, as the organization became known, operated under the aegis of the Ministry of Commerce. Its first president,

⁴⁹ Jenő Czenner, “Az idegenforgalom mint külpolitikánk eszköze,” *Külügyi Szemle*, vol. 10 (Apr., 1933): 150-1.

⁵⁰ Jenő Czenner, “A magyar idegenforgalmi politika reformja,” *Magyar Szemle* 20, no. 3 (March, 1934): 271.

Géza Tormay, was appointed by the Ministry of Commerce and the Cabinet Council.⁵¹

Paragraph three of the OMIH order made it clear that all tourism-related activity—both at home and abroad—belonged to the sphere of the organization. The following seventeen-point regulation shows that the government aimed to centralize and regulate all aspects of the industry. The Bureau was tasked as follows:

- 1) To regulate the work and agenda of all tourism-related authorities, institutions, associations, and societies to make certain that their efforts are coordinated.
- 2) To oversee the budget and development program of all tourism-related and government-supervised institutions.
- 3) To manage, inspect, and facilitate tourism activities at the county, town, and village level.
- 4) To ensure that places, collections, institutions, folk art manufactured goods and other products with significance to tourism are readily available and of a quality worthy to represent the national culture.
- 5) To supervise all tourism-related investments.
- 6) To ensure that significant sport and touristic events, congresses, cultural festivals, exhibitions, hunting and fishing prospects and all other possible tourism-related occasions are serving the enhancement of tourism.
- 7) To assure that the preconditions and prospects are available for greater foreign purchase of folk, craft, and industrial goods.
- 8) To supervise the quality standards of the food and beverage trade and to support its further development.
- 9) To conduct tourism propaganda abroad, to direct other entities' similar efforts, to study and utilize instruments of modern propaganda.
- 10) To establish tourism propaganda bureaus abroad, supervise them and relocate or close them as appropriate.
- 11) To ensure cooperation with tourism-related organizations abroad.
- 12) To generate an annual budget and plan designed to further develop the tourist industry.

⁵¹ A Magyar Királyi Minisztérium 11.001/1935. M.E. számú rendelete az idegenforgalmi ügyek szabályzásáról, §1 and §2. Published in *A magyar idegenforgalom évkönyve* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Szindikátusa, 1936), 8.

- 13) To review public transportation plans related to the tourist industry.
- 14) To supervise the work of domestic travel agencies and other tourist propaganda bureaus.
- 15) To supervise the work of tour guides and pay attention to the quality of their vocational training.
- 16) To collect and process tourism-related data and information.
- 17) To develop tourism-related training and literature.⁵²

This seventeen-point program, unlike the end of nineteenth-century's fifteen-point program, made it clear that the government had general control over the tourism industry. From building infrastructure through regulating the service industry to overseeing propaganda the government gained power to manage the industry as a whole. The dual nature of the industry—economic and cultural diplomatic—was addressed in the structure of the organization. The OMIH was organized into two departments. One was to oversee the economic aspects of the industry, while the other was to supervise its propaganda. Without question the latter—which is most germane to the argument of this study—required further attention and investment. Accordingly, as the program illustrates, the government sought to standardize the production of propaganda, paying due attention not only to quantity but quality as well. Indeed, foreign propaganda for Hungarian tourism needed all the help it could muster, for the foreign image of Hungary continued to be less than desirable.

Tourism Propaganda and the Constant Problem of Image

⁵² Ibid., 8-10.

“[There] are so many strange and exaggerated stories afloat about Hungary and her people, that a few remarks on this subject cannot be omitted” states the 1927 government-sponsored guidebook, *Budapest: All that is Interesting in the Hungarian Capital*.⁵³ The guidebook—published for an American audience—was especially critical of Victor Tissot’s above-mentioned characterization of Hungary. “The naïve impression contained in M[onsieur] Tissot’s book on Hungary are [sic] still accepted in some countries,” reads the travel guide. It continues by stating that “not long ago, a French Minister, asking about Hungary, enquired whether the streets of Budapest were yet clear of the ‘csikós’ (horsemen of the plains). This is equivalent to asking an inhabitant of New York whether cowboys are still lassoing [sic] wild cattle on Broadway or Fifth Avenue!”⁵⁴ Was there ever such a French minister? Perhaps there was not. Yet, this snippet represents the fears and anxieties that Hungarians felt about their image, which, one might add, were not entirely without foundation. In one of the era’s most popular American travelogues, the *Carpenter’s World Travels* series, Frank G. Carpenter painted a romantic, yet rather medieval picture of Hungary. Unlike Czechoslovakia, which was “the land of the peasant whose greatest men have sprung from the soil and whose people believe in democracy,” Hungary was the “land of the aristocrats where nobility still rules.”⁵⁵ Through his photos and descriptions the reader learned of a romanticized and mystical Hungary that is “home of the fortune-telling gypsies, who ply their trade in the

⁵³ Municipal Information Office, *Budapest: All that is Interesting in the Hungarian Capital* (Budapest: Printing Office of the Municipality of Budapest, 1927), 23. The original publication translated the Budapest *Székesfővárosi Idegenforgalmi Hivatal* as the Municipal Information Office. In my translation this is the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Frank G. Carpenter, *The Alps, the Danube, and the Near East* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1924), 130.

cities.”⁵⁶ On the other hand this is a country where medieval conditions are still present for the same “wanderers” (Gypsies) who live in the countryside, “where they are noted for letting their children go naked, even in cold weather” and where “under the watchful eye of the noble owner . . . gangs of men and women bend their backs at work in the fields from dawn until dark.”⁵⁷ Not unlike his nineteenth-century French counterpart Victor Tissot, Carpenter too had something to say about the female population of the country. He writes: “The people of Budapest show everywhere evidence of the blending of the East and the West . . . the faces show the mixture of races, but the life and the fighting spirit of the Magyar are everywhere predominant. The women are especially beautiful; more beautiful, I think, than any I have seen elsewhere. They have olive complexions, dark, luxuriant hair, and great dark eyes. They walk with a swing, and they have fine figures.”⁵⁸

To counter the negative and/or stereotypical representation of the country the Hungarian Foreign Service founded a number of foreign travel writers who were politically reliable yet credible enough to write travelogues and guides about Budapest and Hungary. “Those who come to Budapest will not, we think, quarrel with the statement that it is one of the most beautiful and attractive Capitals of Europe” writes Clive Holland in his 1935 *Hungary: The Land and Its People*.⁵⁹ His book was very well

⁵⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁹ Clive Holland, *Hungary: The land and its people* (London: John Miles Ltd., 1935), 87. In fact, “Clive Holland” is the pseudonym of Charles Hankinson. See Lóránd Czigány, ed., *The Béla Iványi-Grünwald Collection of Hungarica: A catalogue*. (London: Szepsi Csombor Literary Circle, 1967), 57. Thanks to Peter Sherwood for pointing out this detail.

received by the Hungarian authorities who ordered hundreds of copies placed in various embassies and cultural/educational institutions worldwide. Only a few pages in the files of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry archive remain as evidence that Holland was hired by the ministry; worked directly with László Bárdossy, who six years later would become the prime minister of Hungary; was provided with a car and chauffeur, accommodations, food and beverages for two; and aided in every possible way to write his book.⁶⁰

Similarly, when Hubert Hessel Tiltman approached the London embassy for support of his new guidebook on the “unknown Europe,” his request was well received. The decision’s impetus is telling of the Hungarians’ mindset. First, Tiltman was a relatively known author. Second, while the KÜM disapproved of some of his earlier books, such as *The Terror in Europe* which was critical of the white terror of the Horthy regime, and *Peasant Europe* which was deemed too “radical,” he was nevertheless seen as someone who was a “friend of revision,” for he was “clearly aware of the injustice of the peace treaties.” In addition, from the viewpoint of the KÜM he was acceptable because—according to the KÜM—while he had friendly relations with Czechoslovak circles, he “could not stand the Romanians”, and was a *persona non grata* in Yugoslavia. With this sort of letter of recommendation Tiltman could arrive in Hungary and enjoy both the financial and moral support of the government.⁶¹

In addition to recruiting and paying off foreign writers, the KÜM also played a pivotal role in the establishment of travel bureaus abroad. It facilitated the OMIH, IBUSZ, and various other state-owned (and related) organizations’ efforts to compete for

⁶⁰ MOL K66, 264. csomó, III/6/b/1 (April 25, 1935).

⁶¹ MOL K66, 296. csomó, III/6/b (December 28, 1934).

foreign tourists. By the mid-1930s Hungary had turned its attention mainly toward the West and had bureaus in Vienna, Berlin, Rome, Venice, Milan, Paris, London, Brussels, Ankara, Cairo, Sofia, and New York.⁶² The New York office was especially important to Hungary for two main reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, the United States was one of the key targets of Hungarian cultural diplomacy from the beginning because the US never ratified the postwar treaties and its support for Hungarian revisionist aims was essential. Second, the American tourist was the prime target for all nations involved in tourism, for they had the most money to spend. According to a US government study, in 1929 alone American tourists spent \$839,000,000 (c. \$10.7 billion) on foreign travel.⁶³ Hungary received \$1,063,000 (c. \$13,500,000) of this amount.⁶⁴ The small East and East-Central European countries, despite the obvious negative impact of the Great Depression, became new, hitherto undiscovered destinations for American tourists. This was something that even caught the eye of *The New York Times*. In 1930 the newspaper reported that as “the dollar travels further” and “as more governments offer new attractions” so does “Mid-Europe draw a tide of tourists.”⁶⁵ In 1934 when the Hungarian Tourist Bureau opened its doors in the R.K.O. Building of the Rockefeller Center, it was done with the stated goal of improving Hungary’s (tourist) image in the USA. According to the report sent to the Washington embassy, in 1935 the office answered 1500 written queries and provided 3,000 people with information.⁶⁶ Among the office’s activities were lectures in the largest

⁶² Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 17.

⁶³ Bratter, “The Promotion of Tourist Travel,” 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁵ “Mid-Europe Draws a Tide of Tourists,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 1930, 4E.

⁶⁶ MOL K106, 174. csomó, 139.tétel (Washington Embassy, May 7, 1936).

US cities, publicity via newspapers and magazines, film and radio presentations, and the organization of exhibitions. In addition, the bureau oversaw the distribution of propaganda materials from the Cunard White Star ships to university libraries. In 1937 alone the office sent out 120,497 pamphlets and 3,353 posters to travel agencies, libraries, and schools in the Americas.⁶⁷ In addition, both KÜM and the OMIH put pressure on the government to offer special exchange rates in the form of travel coupons, and finally to offer free visas to American travelers. The results were impressive. Between 1934 and 1937 the number of Americans who visited Budapest grew 260 percent, from 2,595 to 12,936.⁶⁸

KÜM and its ambassadorial staff were also essential to the building and safeguarding of Hungary's image abroad, both as a tourist destination and in general. A 1934 KÜM order called upon all embassies and consulates for the "most effective support" of tourist propaganda. The KÜM staff also monitored all Hungarian related publications, measured their effectiveness for positive propaganda, and served as the first line of defense against negative publicity. For example, when Bernard Newman, who toured the Danube region on bicycle published *The Blue Danube*, the London embassy pointed out to KÜM its possible use for propaganda. The KÜM deemed the book "good," but decided that it had no potential for either political or tourism-related propaganda; hence it did not order it for mass distribution.⁶⁹ They also oversaw the quality and subject-matter of propaganda that originated from Hungary. It was an especially serious

⁶⁷ MOL K106, 174. csomó, 139.tétel (Washington Embassy, April 30, 1938).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ MOL K66, 264. csomó, III/6/b/1 (May 27, 1935).

concern, for despite strenuous efforts the quality and the production of Hungarian propaganda materials remained disorganized.

According to Béla Mátéka, secretary of the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office, the first large-scale Budapest propaganda pamphlet was produced in 1925 with 200,000 copies.⁷⁰ By 1937 the same office produced 1,103,102 pieces of propaganda in eleven languages. They mailed this astonishing number of materials (weighing 20,291 kilos or 44,640 pounds) in 49,479 parcels worldwide.⁷¹ Likewise, IBUSZ also increased its propaganda budget. In 1932 43,000 pengő (c. \$99,437) were set aside for propaganda; by 1936 the company spent 226,000 pengő (c. \$523,148) on advertising.⁷² The number of magazines and newspapers also skyrocketed. The *Idegenforgalmi Újság* (*Tourist News*, established in 1924) was amongst the first to target foreigners already in Hungary. A paper that started out as an in-house information pamphlet for the Grand Hotel Royal grew into a magazine published in Hungarian, French, and German, with information useful for all travelers. The *Budapester Fremdenzeitung* (established in 1928) began by providing information for tourists in German, English, and French. After its reorganization in 1935 the magazine included surveys and short studies of Hungarian history, art, music, and even gastronomy.⁷³ Others publications followed, such as the *Idegenforgalmi Kurír*, a free weekly magazine—produced in four languages—that was

⁷⁰ Béla Mátéka, “A székesfőváros idegenforgalmi propagandája történetéhez gyűjtött adatok, prospektusok, stb—1922-1942.” (Unpublished manuscript, available at the Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár).

⁷¹ Dezső Zilahy and Béla Markos, eds., *Jelentés Budapest 1937. évi idegenforgalmáról s az 1937. év idegenforgalmának gazdasági eredményeiről* (Budapest, Budapest Székesfőváros Házinyomdája, 1937), 33. This was an annual report on the status of Budapest’s tourism, published between 1931 and 1941. Hereafter I will refer to this as *Jelentés* and by year.

⁷² Kudar, *Az IBUSZ története*, 20.

⁷³ For more on this, see Jusztin, “A turizmus története,” 194-198.

mailed to 3,000 addresses in Europe and the United States.⁷⁴ But perhaps the most representative and the highest in quality of all these publications was the *Hungaria Magazin* (1936-1944), a joint venture of IBUSZ and the Royal Hungarian State Railways.

Hungarian efforts began to pay a dividend. The number of foreigners staying in Budapest hotels and pensions between 1927 and 1937 rose 93 percent from 94,869 to 182,747. These numbers include those coming from former Hungarian territories as well of those arriving from further afield. The number of those tourists originating from outside of the boundaries of the former kingdom went up from 60,400 to 149,580, which is an impressive 148 percent increase.⁷⁵ The average time spent in Budapest also increased from 2.5 nights to 3.27.⁷⁶ In addition, according to the same statistics from the Hungarian Economic Research Institute, an estimated additional 56,391 visitors stayed in private Budapest accommodations in the year 1937.⁷⁷ Figures show that in 1937 the twelve most significant nations for the Hungarian tourist industry were Germany (30,938 visitors), Austria (29,069), Czechoslovakia (20,680), Romania (17,662), Great Britain (15,815), the United States (12,936), Italy (9,130), Yugoslavia (8,135), France (7,964), Netherlands (4,776), Poland (3,515), and Switzerland (3,463).⁷⁸ As the statistics illustrate the Hungarian tourist industry experienced positive growth. By 1937 the once nonexistent industry produced forty million pengő (c. \$111,111,000), which represented seven

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, “A magyar idegenforgalom alakulása, 1927-1937— Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet 13.számú külökiadványa,” (Budapest: Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, 1938), 30.

⁷⁶ Ibid.,12.

⁷⁷ Ibid.,10.

⁷⁸ *Jelentés 1937*, 7.

percent of the country's total exports.⁷⁹ Tourism was making a substantial contribution to the Hungarian economy.

Despite the industry's economic success not everyone was pleased with the image that tourism created and promoted. Debate raged on the pages of the *Magyar Szemle* discussing the pros and cons of Hungary's tourist image.⁸⁰ More and more people—politicians, industry experts, and public intellectuals—continued to question the quality of Hungarian tourist propaganda, and most importantly the message it carried. There were calls for the creation of a Hungarian Baedeker, one that was free of clichés.⁸¹ János Pelényi, the Hungarian Ambassador to the United States voiced his disappointment with the quality of Hungarian tourist propaganda in a private letter to Nándor Zichy (director of OMIH's propaganda division). He maintained that Hungary needed better representation of its culture in the United States than the folk-dolls, gourds, and embroidery that Washington received as propaganda material. According to Pelényi this material belonged “in a low-end Rathskeller [German word designating a cellar-pub]” and simply put, “it would have been better to throw the money out of the window without much ceremony, than to spend” it on this sort of advertisement.⁸² The real question that the Hungarian tourist industry faced was not about its economic viability, but its utility in Hungary's cultural diplomatic efforts.

⁷⁹ Kudar, *Az IBUSZ története*, 21.

⁸⁰ Exchange on the German public opinion was especially interesting. See, Dezső Keresztury, “Magyarország a német közvéleményben,” *Magyar Szemle* 16, no. 1 (September, 1932):18-29 and Endre Moravék, “A német közvélemény és Magyarország,” *Magyar Szemle* 11, no. 3 (March, 1930), 284-87.

⁸¹ Sinister, “Magyar ‘Baedeker’ Magyarországról,” *Magyar Szemle* 12, no. 3 (July, 1931), 273-74.

⁸² MOL K106, 174. csomó, 139.tétel (Washington Embassy, undated).

The image of Hungary abroad—what kind of image should Hungary build?—was a divisive issue. As the industry became more and more politicized, the question of tourism turned into the question of national character, and hence competing visions of Hungarianness that focused on ideals, places, and symbols. Sándor Karácsony, in his aptly-titled essay “Hungarianness as a problem for tourism” (*A magyarság, mint idegenforgalmi probléma*), argued that “if we want them [foreign tourists] we must have something to show them and something to tell them.” “Unfortunately,” he continues, “we do not even know ourselves.”⁸³ The section that follows aims to illustrate the lack of consensus on this issue and seeks to answer some of the following questions: What were the competing visions for the national brand “Hungary”? In which ways did the government create and promote these rival perceptions? To what degree were those Hungarian stereotypes produced by Hungarians themselves?

The Tourist Image of Hungary: Competing Mental and Physical Landscapes

Interwar Hungary’s tourist image had three main components. First, there was modern, Western, and progressive Budapest. Second, there was the traditional, Eastern, and romanticized countryside. The third and final element was what one could call the “rest,” which was characterized by a mixture of occidental and oriental, a blend of “old and new,” including Lake Balaton, Lillafüred, and some of the largest towns of the countryside. These were much more than simple geographical destinations. Each of these places represented a different vision of Hungary. Each of these places identified,

⁸³ Sándor Karácsony, “A magyarság, mint idegenforgalmi probléma,” in Béla Markos, ed., *Az idegenforgalom* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Egyesülete, 1941), 240. Note the publication date. This shows that the question of national character remained a troublesome question.

(re)constructed, and promoted different—and often seemingly conflicting—national narratives to answer the question about the essence of Hungarianness. Government and the private sector sought to find a balance in which all three representations were presented in order to appeal to the greatest number of tourists.

Representing the modern, cosmopolitan, fashionable, and unquestionably European Hungary, Budapest was, and remains, the center of the Hungarian tourism industry. As Robert Nemes illustrates in his *The Once and Future Budapest*, Budapest was the “holy city” for nineteenth-century Hungarian nationalists when they aimed to make Buda-Pest a wholly Magyar city, the symbol of magyardom.⁸⁴ The growth and development of the city cannot be divorced from the awakening Hungarian national consciousness. In 1720 the population of Buda and Pest was a mere 11,000. By 1831 the number of inhabitants had grown to 103,000. In 1867 Buda and Pest boasted 280,000 people, making the twin cities the seventh largest metropolis in Europe. In the last year war, Budapest’s population stood at 933,000. Between 1867 and 1914 Budapest was the fastest growing city in Europe.⁸⁵ It was the center of industry, culture, and politics, but many Hungarians felt ambivalent about their booming capital. According to historian John Lukacs’s analysis, “the elements of a fatal discord and division between the urban and the populist, between the commercial and the agrarian, between the cosmopolitan and the nationalist, between the non-Jewish Hungarian and the Jewish-Hungarian culture and civilization of Budapest were already there” in 1900.⁸⁶ But, continues Lukacs, the “break

⁸⁴ Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 3.

⁸⁵ John Lukacs, *Budapest, 1900: a Historical Portrait of a City and its Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 73.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 91.

had not yet come,” for the time period was the peak of industrialization and capitalism and as Budapest grew as a center of commerce, finance, and industry the “coexistence” between the leading classes remained mutually beneficial.⁸⁷ As the rift grew so did the differences and disagreements between capitalist, modern, and cosmopolitan Budapest and the agricultural, semi-feudal, and traditional countryside. Along with the cultural fissure developed a political one as Budapest became the symbol of the liberal Left (often even of the radical Left) and the rest of the country was seen as the fortress of the conservative Right. Once the “holy place, the Mecca of Hungary”, Budapest was seen by some, like Dezső Szabó and Miklós Bartha, as the “fever-ridden Sodom.”⁸⁸

The final break with Hungary’s liberal past came in the wake of the First World War. After the short-lived regime of Count Mihály Károlyi and its dream of a democratic Hungary, Béla Kun and his 133 days of Bolshevik dictatorship further exacerbated already existing political and cultural divisions. Budapest and its progressive liberal population—mostly Jewish—became the scapegoat for all the damage and harm that had befallen the country, from losing the war through red terror to foreign occupation.⁸⁹ The counterrevolutionary forces gathered in the southeastern city of Szeged. In their new Christian Hungary there was no room for “sinful Budapest.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*, 189 and Lukacs, *Budapest*, 187.

⁸⁹ On the issue of “scapegoating,” see Attila Pók, *A haladás hitele: progresszió, bűnbakok, összeesküvők* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2010). According to the 1910 census approximately 23 percent of Budapest’s total population was Jewish.

⁹⁰ On Christian Nationalism, see Hanebrink, *In Defense*, 108-137.

On the November 15, 1919, Admiral Miklós Horthy arrived in Budapest at the head of his troops, riding a white horse. It was a symbolic move, for in the Hungarian mythology the white horse plays a central role. According to legend, it was a white horse that the Magyars gave in exchange for their land in the Carpathian Basin. Árpád, the chieftain who led and settled the Hungarians in 896, was often represented riding a white stallion. This was the establishment of a new Hungary and Admiral Horthy, addressing the crowd and the mayor of Budapest, left little doubt about how he felt about the city.

Mr. Mayor! In the name of the Hungarian national Army, I offer you my sincere thanks for the warm welcome. Today, on the threshold of this city, I am not prepared to speak in conventional phrases. My sense of justice compels me to tell you plainly what is uppermost in my mind in this moment. When we were still far distant, when our hope of returning to this poor, ill-fated city, arms in hand, was the merest of glimmers, we cursed and hated her, for from afar we saw only the mire into which she had sunk and not the persecution and martyrdom which our Hungarian brethren were suffering.

The Hungarian nation has ever loved and admired Budapest, this city which, in recent months, has been its degradation. Here, on the bank of the Danube, I arraign her. This city has disowned her thousand years of traditions, she has dragged the Holy Crown and the national colours in the dust, she has clothed herself in red rags. The finest of the nation she threw into the dungeons or drove into exile. She laid in ruin our property and wasted our wealth.⁹¹

Yet, Horthy and company were also “ready to forgive” the “misguided city if she will turn from her false gods to the service of the Fatherland.”⁹² One of main services Budapest was to carry out was to become a destination for tourists worldwide and to present to the world the “best of Hungarian virtues,” as Horthy demanded. But what were those Hungarian virtues? What form would those virtues take? After all, if the goal of

⁹¹ Admiral Nicholas Horthy, *Memoirs* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1957.), 104-05. This was the English publication of the memoirs. There are other versions of this infamous speech with some stylistic variations, but the main message and the accusatory tone remain the same.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Hungarian cultural diplomacy was to represent Hungary as a progressive and modern country with European qualifications, there was no other place like Budapest to show it. Despite Horthy's misgivings about the character of Budapest, the city barely broke with its prewar traditions and continued to be a symbol of modernity.

From the beginning IBUSZ, OMIH, and their counterparts produced a plethora of new nicknames for the capital: “the Queen of the Danube,” “the Pearl of the Danube,” “Spa City Budapest,” and “Fashion Town Budapest.” Béla Mátéka’s manuscript tells the story of the birth of the brand-name “the Queen of the Danube.” Venice was referred to as the “Queen of the Adriatic,” and Stockholm was known as the “Venice of the North,” but what about the Danube Mátéka asked. While Vienna was a larger city, its geographical location on the river was not like Budapest’s. Linz and Passau enjoyed very fine settings, but they were too small, while Belgrade—according to Mátéka—could not compete with Budapest as a “metropolis?”⁹³ One of the immediate concerns of industry experts was to promote Budapest in Vienna. Vilmos Kovácsházy, a member of the Budapest Metropolitan Council, pointed out that in 1928 Vienna’s tourist traffic was five times that of Budapest. He argued that the most pressing issue was to convince those tourists visiting Vienna to continue their journey to Budapest.⁹⁴ In 1931 the Budapest Tourist Office opened its doors in Vienna. The office had a dual function. On the one hand it was a place for ticket purchases, money exchange, and other administrative tasks. On the other hand it was a center of propaganda. The office placed travel posters in railway stations and wagons, (promoting the BNV and St. Stephen’s Week in August),

⁹³ Mátéka, “A székesfőváros idegenforgalmi propagandája,” n.p.

⁹⁴ Vilmos Kovácsházy, *Magyar idegenforgalmi propaganda Wienben* (Budapest: Különlenyomat a fővárosi évkönyv 1930.évi kötetéből), 3-4.

placed travel ads in newspapers and travel brochures, and gave talks promoting Budapest using slides and films. In 1936 alone the office placed 284,851 pieces of propaganda material and gave seventy-four talks to 11,252 people. According to the office's records, in 1936 alone, 24,773 people from sixty-two countries visited the office and received information. The office organized 134 bus tours to Hungary for 10,856 people in the same year.⁹⁵

In propaganda Budapest was represented as a modern health spa and bath destination. The *Hungaria Magazin* cover from 1937 unites two of the main characteristics of “Spa City Budapest:” healing and enjoyment (see Figure 1). Budapest's spa culture dates back to Roman times. Aquincum—as the settlement was known in 300 AD—was the capital of the Roman Pannonia. According to excavations, Aquincum boasted twelve baths, all of which were destroyed after the fall of Pannonia. During medieval times the development of the thermal baths continued. The zenith of the development of bath and spa culture was reached under the 145 years of Ottoman rule. The occupying Ottomans did not destroy the baths. Rather, they were committed to develop them further. The growth of spa culture persisted under the Habsburgs, but most of the development occurred in Northern Hungary (Trencsénteplic and Pistány [Pöstyén], both in today's Slovakia). By the nineteenth century spas were destinations for the nobility and for the wealthy seeking remedies for their health problems and for those simply seeking pleasure.

⁹⁵ Vilmos Kovácsházy, *Budapest székesfőváros idegenforgalmi propagandája Bécsben* (Budapest Székesfőváros Házinyomdája, 1937), 4-27.

As mentioned earlier, most of Hungary's spas were lost after the Trianon Treaty, thus Budapest once again became the center of attention. "Let Budapest be the grand center of culture, art, and commerce, and most importantly let it be a world-famous spa city, which it is destined to be by nature," said Archduke József Ferenc, president of the Budapest Spa City Association.⁹⁶ In order to gain control over the use and development of thermal baths Law XVI of 1929 was passed. The distinguished between medicinal and (leisure) baths. The former designation required the approval of a healthcare professional. The government proposed the establishment of a body to oversee all aspects of the operation of spas, including the regulation of the expansion and establishment of new spas. It also gave the government body the right to expropriate lands where new thermal sources were located. To promote the development of new establishments the government also offered twenty years of operation free of tax to new investors. The Hungarian government followed the examples provided by French, Italian, Swiss, Austrian, and German authorities in this field. Under the direction of the new official body, the National Committee for Springs and Bath Resorts (Országos Forrás- és Fürdőügyi Bizottság), and the Central Committee of Budapest's Medicinal and Holiday Resorts (Budapesti Központi Gyógy- és Üdülöhelyi Bizottság) Budapest's spa culture continued to grow and modernize. By 1930 there were thirteen thermal baths in Budapest providing between thirteen and fifteen million gallons of thermal water daily. The Central Committee and the OMIH sponsored the visits of foreign journalists and doctors, hosted tourism and medical conventions (such as the 1929 International Exhibition of Balneology and Tourism), and placed promotional materials in newspapers, medical and

⁹⁶ Quoted in János Benyó, *Budapest fürdőváros és az idegenforgalom* (Budapest: Magyar Idegenforgalmi Érdekeltségek Szövetsége, 1932), 36.

tourist journals.⁹⁷ In addition to exhibitions and fairs (such as the “Das Bad von gestern und heute” exhibit in Zurich and the Brussels World’s Fair) they also utilized tools of modern propaganda, such as radio and film.⁹⁸ The “Three Health Weeks in Budapest” program was especially successful and by 1936 the visiting of Budapest spas was in the ascendant, while other historical baths in Europe (Baden bei Wien, Karlsbad, Wiesbaden, or Marienbad) were losing tourist traffic. For the political and industrial elite Budapest’s success as a spa destination showed the nation’s success as a modern and progressive country. Perhaps the best praise and validation of Budapest as a “Spa City” came from Gaston Gerald, the French Minister of Tourism (and later the founder of the Commanderie des Cordons Bleus de France): “Not every nation has the good fortune to win through tourism . . . but for the Hungarians nature gave everything to make their country one of the centers of European tourism. The beauty of Budapest and its health spas are without equal in the world. Every time I am here I feel that I am at the edge of the West, at the last stronghold of the West.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *A magyar idegenforgalom évkönyve* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Szindikátusa, 1936), 16-17. The competition for medical tourism was intense. Czechoslovakia, for example, was also a great destination for health-spa seekers. The Czechoslovak Čedok also utilized medical journals to promote its spas. See, for example, “The Spas of Czechoslovakia. A Medical Tour of Pistany and the High Tatra Health Resorts,” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 3465 (1927): 1015-1016.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Benyó, *Budapest fürdőváros*, 36.

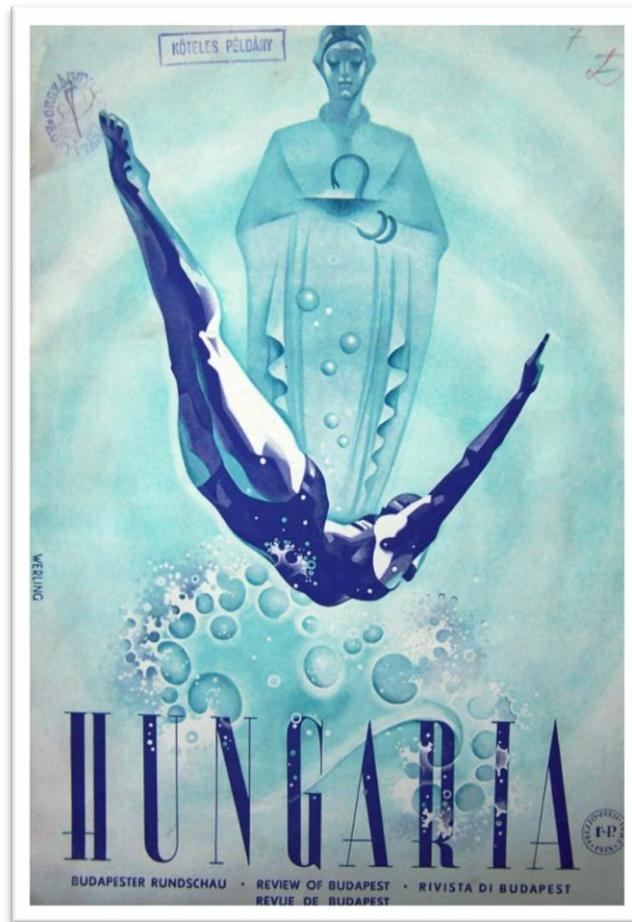


Figure 1. *Hungaria Magazin* (July 1937). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament (*Országgyűlési Könyvtár*)

Budapest had something else to offer for visiting tourists, something that the small spa towns of Europe could not compete with: a vibrant nightlife. As the cover art for *Hungaria Magazin* shows the city offered sophisticated dancehalls accompanied by the backdrop of the Budapest's nightlights (See Figure 2). Although I am not certain that the cover art represents an actual place, or simply an artistic rendition of the message, in reality, the city certainly offered a seemingly limitless variety of busy coffeehouses, bars, and nightclubs, from the ordinary through the sophisticated to the risqué. Budapest's nightlife had something to offer to everyone. One of the staples was the EMKE bar where

the patrons could enjoy both Gypsy music and jazz. Hungarians often spoke out against the predominance of Gypsies in travelogues about Hungary. The above-mentioned Victor Tissot made a point about the presence of Gypsies—similar to their “Bedouin brothers”—and their culture. Yet, before one blames Tissot’s characterization on Westerners’ orientalism, one must read—with stylistic, grammar mistakes, and all—the ways Hungarians presented the Budapest scene themselves.

We must admit that Budapest has also fallen victim to the dancing and jazz band epidemic now raging all over the world, although there are ample opportunities in Budapest, before the jazz band period, to have really good time with traditional gipsy music. There certainly is no another city like Budapest with good gipsy bands in every Hotel, Restaurant and Café.

In many localities the gipsies, those brown-faced descendants of the Pharaohs, supply dancing music for the five o’clock teas every afternoon, but the jazz bands are even more numerous.¹⁰⁰

The undisputed king of 1930s Budapest nightlife was the Arizona Nightclub. The establishment catered almost exclusively to foreign tourists. Its fame carried it to the pages of *Life* magazine and an Irish travelogue (entitled: *Ilonka Speaks of Hungary: Personal Impressions and Interpretation of the National Character*) devoted an entire chapter to describing a night at the Arizona. The nightclub opened at 10.00 p.m. daily; from 11.00 p.m. to 4.00 a.m. there was a cabaret and revue show offering variety performances on a revolving stage. Among them one could find African-American jazz standards, striking Hawaiian music, Portuguese *fado* from a “forgotten opera called *Blanco y Negro*,” “exotic ballet,” “acrobatic dancers” who were “apparently naked except for the gold paint which covered them” trapeze artists, and a Folies Bergère-style performance aptly titled “The Blue Danube.” The small dance stage was crowded with

¹⁰⁰ Municipal Information Office, *Budapest*, 12.

patrons quenching their thirst with premium liquors, wine, and cocktails. Among the most popular cocktails was “The Prince of Wales” (apricot brandy, Canadian rye whisky, bitters, a splash of water and sugar, garnished with orange peels), rumored to have been invented by the Prince of Wales, who before becoming King Edward VIII visited the country on numerous occasions.¹⁰¹

The municipal government made sure that the city presented its best face after dark. The Chain Bridge, the Parliament building, the Royal Castle, Heroes’ Square, and the Fisherman’s Bastion—among others—were all illuminated nightly. The city also paid special attention to public safety. In addition to the regular police force, the municipal government continued to improve the street-lighting in the city. In 1926, Budapest spent 529,582 pengő (c. \$1,249,000) on public lighting. By 1938 the annual cost was up to nearly one and a half million pengő (c. \$4,166,000). As one member of the city government said, this sort of improvement was absolutely necessary for a city that wants to claim the status of a metropolis, for in the grand cities of the world “lighting has the same role as the reflector-light has on a stage, it bathes the main characters in light. [Since] Budapest, the Queen of the Danube, is this sort of leading character among the metropolises of Europe; it must be bathed in a sea of light before the world.”¹⁰² To be sure Budapest offered the kind of nightlife and entertainment that was on a par with Berlin or Paris.

¹⁰¹ John Brophy, *Ilonka Speaks of Hungary: Personal Impressions and Interpretation of the National Character* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1936), 130-33 and 156-57.

¹⁰² Árpád Halász, *Budapest húsz éve, 1920-1939: fejlődéstörténeti tanulmány* (Budapest: Wolff Károly Emlékbizottság, 1939), 270-72.



Figure 2. *Hungaria Magazin* (November 1940). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament

Budapest was also promoted as a city of fashion. This promotion was centered on the alleged beauty and modernity of the women of Budapest. Yet the representation of the women of Budapest remained rather ambivalent. On the one hand, the cosmopolitan, progressive, and in all respects Western image of Budapest's female population served to illustrate the modernity of the city as well as the country. Instead of an image of the Hungarian as sexist, male chauvinist, and womanizing, Hungary's intellectual, and to a certain degree political, circles aimed to construct an image of a society where women were independent and progressive. As the travel magazine cover art illustrates, the

Budapest woman was not only attractive and stylish, but as she smokes her cigarette she also represented the modern, emancipated women of her time (See Figure 3).

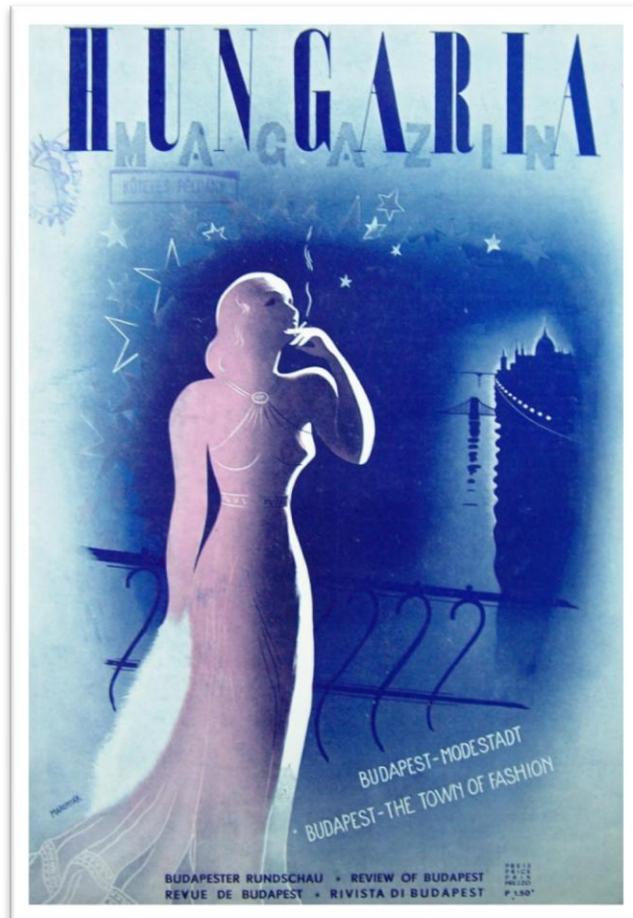


Figure 3. *Hungaria Magazin* (November 1937). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament

In order to further this image, the government sponsored various international gatherings, such as the Eighth World Congress of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women in 1938.¹⁰³ However, the magazines and travel brochures also continued to impress upon the readers the image of a beautiful and sensual Hungarian woman. Here are a few sentences from the aforementioned travel guide, published by the Budapest Municipal Tourist Office:

¹⁰³ "Nők világtkongresszusa," *Pesti Hirlap*, August 5, 1938, 1.

Good-looking women of all classes are to be found in the crowds: elegantly clad ladies of the highest aristocracy, not less handsome women of the wealthy middle class, fashionable actresses, representative members of the plutocracy, business girls, midinettes and stylish mannequins, all mingle in the delightful kaleidoscope for the onlookers, walking aimlessly up and down . . . watched and criticised by the men of leisure of the corresponding classes.¹⁰⁴

Budapest, together with its baths, nightlife, and beautiful women, was presented—and was—a cosmopolitan and modern city. Yet it was also the capital city of Hungary, and there were tours and activities designed to illustrate the historical nature of the city. The tours and publications emphasized the “storied and heroic struggle” of the Hungarians that highlighted the achievements of St. Stephen and Budapest’s role in the defense of the Christian West against the Ottoman Empire. The St. Stephen’s Day celebration in August and the spring festivals gained more and more notice abroad. Automobile and bus tours were also carefully laid out on a roadmap whereby the visitor would not see the shadier side of the city, its working districts, and its deprived outskirts. The IBUSZ’s discounted tour “Three Days in Budapest” was especially successful and by the mid-thirties Budapest indeed featured on the great itineraries of European travelers.

The countryside, almost in direct opposition to Budapest, promoted a different face of Hungary. The promotion, much based on the Puszta Romanticism of the past, intended to endorse the romantic, traditional, and one could argue exotic Eastern features of Hungary. As already discussed earlier, many in Hungary viewed the essence of Hungarianness as something rooted in the countryside and its people. Intellectuals, artists, and politicians all spoke out against the fast pace of modernization. Their anxiety about the disappearance of rural life, its traditions, and its part in the national character made

¹⁰⁴Municipal Information Office, *Budapest*, 5.

them oppose nearly everything that Budapest stood for. The Hungarian poet and novelist Gyula Illyés even stated that Budapest was not in Hungary. In his view only God knew where Budapest belonged: based on who was making the claim, it might have been positioned above, under, or next to the country, but not within Hungary.¹⁰⁵ Their response was to rescue rural life by refashioning and presenting it as something uniquely Hungarian.

The quintessential physical landscape of Hungarianness was the Great Plain of Eastern Hungary, the *Alföld*. Cultural anthropologist and ethnographer Tamás Hofer argues that in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, “when Hungarians worked out their modern national identity, they wanted most of all to be different from Austrians. If the Austrians idealized the Alps’ mountainous peaks, then the Hungarians chose the flatness of the Great Hungarian Plain as their ‘national landscape.’”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps nothing illustrates this distinction better than the first two stanzas from Hungary’s revolutionary writer, Sándor Petőfi, in his 1844 poem *Az Alföld*. With your pines, with your scenic regions,

Rough Carpathians, you are nothing to me!
Perhaps I am amazed by you, but I do not like you
And my imagination does not roam your mountains-valleys.

Down in the ocean smooth regions of the Alföld
I am at home; my world is there.
If I see the endlessness of the plains
My eagle soul escapes from its prison.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Gyula Illyés, *Magyarok—naplójegyzetek* (1938), 5, accessed: May 6, 2011, <http://mek.oszk.hu/02500/02522/#>.

¹⁰⁶ Hofer, “Construction,” 41-43.

¹⁰⁷ Sándor Petőfi, “Az Alföld” in *Sándor Petőfi: His Entire Poetic Works*, Trans. Frank Szomy (Boca Raton, FL: n.a., 1972), 74.

The Great Hungarian Plain—and Eastern Hungary in general—was seen by many as the home of Hungary’s native lesser nobility, a historical Hungarian class. Amongst the most famous of this stratum was Lajos Kossuth, who was born in Monok, in the Tokaj region. Eastern Hungary, and especially the Hungarian Plains, was associated with the East more than just in terms of geographical proximity. The East of Hungary was often associated with the Reformation and the religious and national struggle against the Catholic Habsburg dynasty. (Interestingly enough, Transylvania was the other place that earned similar accolades—for similar reasons—in Hungarian imagery.) The peasantry, the herdsmen, and the shepherds were other dominant features of the Great Plains (See Figure 4). In this imagery they were the ones despite modernization who were able to retain the original essential Eastern traits of the Magyars. The crown of Eastern Hungary was the Hortobágy, the Puszta. This natural grassland stood as an antithesis to noisy, hectic, and enclosed Budapest and it was presented in *Hungaria Magazin*’s English-language article as the “empire of quiet, rest, and freedom.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ “Bugac Puszta,” *Hungaria Magazin* (June 1937), 13.



Figure 4. *Hungaria Magazin* (December 1941). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament

For some interwar industry experts and intellectuals the Puszta and its people symbolized the uniqueness and individuality of Hungary and Hungarian culture. It was presented as a time-travel-like experience whereby the “desk-bound spirit of the slave-driven town dweller finds utter peace in the intense silence and the feeling of boundless liberty.”¹⁰⁹ It was promoted as a haven for hunters and lovers of nature. In many ways the Hortobágy was represented as the Wild West—or rather the Wild East—of Europe. It was untouched by modern life, and the land—like its people—preserved its pristine natural beauty. The countryside was steeped in Christian tradition—notwithstanding

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

confessional divisions—and stood in contrast to Budapest’s secular, cosmopolitan, and Jewish characteristics. Here the traveler would not find the crowded and noisy coffee houses of Budapest. One would not drink champagne and cocktails. Instead one would find the *csárda* (village tavern) where the locals gathered to drink the wines of the plains. If the cowboy was the quintessential inhabitant of the American Wild West, then the *csikós* was the living embodiment of Hungary’s Wild East. Even color had the function of intensifying and illustrating the gap between Budapest and the countryside. The extravagant collage of colors stood as an obvious contrast to the drabness of the city. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the folk costumes of the women of countryside who in every way was the antithesis of the women of Budapest (See Figure 5). She, unlike her Budapest counterpart, was represented as one that content with traditional life and in harmony with nature.

The *matyó* people, with their highly ornamented and vibrantly-colored dresses, became the ideal type of what Hungarian propaganda experts wanted to represent as Hungary’s unique folk culture. Mezőkövesd was the town at the center of the *matyó* tradition, even if this tradition was the product of the late nineteenth century. The timing is not really all that surprising. The *matyó* tradition might not enjoy the universal recognition of the kilts of the Scottish Highlands, but nevertheless it too is the result of the Europe-wide mass production of tradition. As Hugh Trevor-Roper, Terence Ranger, and Eric Hobsbawm have shown, most of the folk traditions we think of as timeless representations of a certain national group were in fact “invented” and “discovered” in

the late nineteenth to early twentieth century as part of converging social and political movements connected with the nation-building project.¹¹⁰

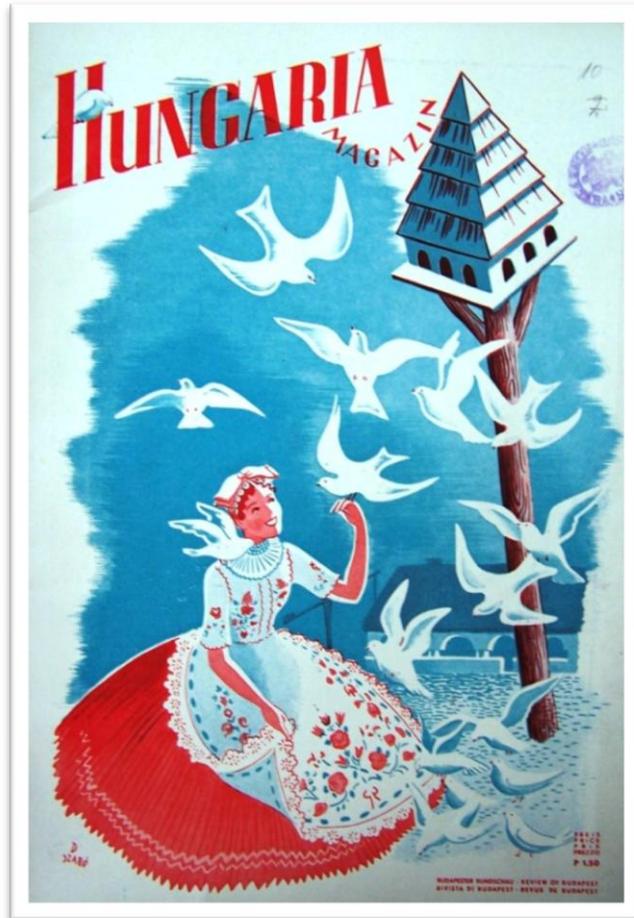


Figure 5. *Hungaria Magazin* (November 1939). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament

In 1857 the clothing of Mezőkövesd generally speaking became representative of the simplicity of the Hungarian peasant class and eschewed colors almost entirely. By the 1885 National Exhibition the Mezőkövesd folk culture, with its highly ornamented dresses and “oriental cacophony of colors”—as contemporaries described it— was one of

¹¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

the central pieces of the display.¹¹¹ There were three reasons behind this metamorphosis. The first underlying cause was the nineteenth-century Hungarian nationalists' desire to emphasize the distinctiveness of the Magyars vis-à-vis the other ethnic groups, mainly the Austrians. Second, it was a response to modernization and modernity that was associated with the newly developing bourgeoisie, who in general was of non-Magyar origin. And lastly, there was the peasants' own striving to enrich their culture with colors and ornaments hitherto characteristic of the Magyar nobility. According to national activists, at the heart of the Hungarian distinctiveness were the "folk soul" and its "Asian love of pomp." As Tamás Hofer argues, "colourful clothing, richly elaborated wedding rituals and other village festival . . . were turned into supposed proofs of Asian or Eastern identity."¹¹²

In post-Trianon Hungary politicians, intellectuals, and tourism professionals certainly appreciated the value of folk culture and tradition. In 1921 the Catholic prelate and parliamentary delegate Sándor Giesswein stated that it was everyone's duty to "dig up and preserve the traditions of the past." As an example he offered Mezőkövesd and Sweden. During his visit to Sweden he had been duly impressed by the fact that the women of Sweden did not follow the latest Parisian fashion trends, but instead preferred their folk costumes to be their everyday clothing. He went on to argue that this sort of commitment in Hungary could only be found in Mezőkövesd, where folk traditions and

¹¹¹ Iván Kápolnai, "A matyóság népszerűségi viszonyai a 19. és a 20. században," in *Eredmények és feladatok a matyóság néprajzi kutatásában*, ed. Iona Viszóczy (Mezőkövesd: Herman Ottó Múzeum, 2006), 65.

¹¹² Hofer, "Construction," 44.

craftsmanship was still alive. To further the development he even suggested making folk craft mandatory in schools for both girls and boys.¹¹³

In a special symposium organized by the progressive literary journal *Nyugat* (interestingly enough “Nyugat” means “West” in Hungarian) intellectuals and industry experts gathered to discuss the state of Hungarian tourism. It was here that the contemporary literary giant Zsigmond Móricz also argued for the necessity of reevaluating the role of the countryside in Hungarian tourism. While he was somewhat ambivalent about the idea of mass tourism—he referred to it as a mass epidemic—he too realized its value and argued that in order to incorporate the countryside into the tourist itinerary, it needed investment. According to his evaluation, the habit of “blasting the visitors by showing our Trianon wounds” would not be beneficial, for sympathy cannot be earned this way. Instead, he put his faith in the supposed hospitality of the Hungarians—which he maintained was a national trait going back to the times of St. Stephen—as the basic building block of tourism.¹¹⁴

Once again, Béla Mátéka’s manuscript provides evidence for the first steps that were taken to incorporate the countryside into the tourist flow. In 1923 the village association of Mezőkövesd decided to organize a day of exhibitions and culture. The organizers contacted Mátéka at the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office. With considerable difficulty Mátéka gathered about thirty foreigners and took a train ride to the village. They enjoyed day-long festivities that included meals and wine in the *csárda*,

¹¹³ *Nemzetgyűlési Napló*, X. kötet, 1920, 261 (June 9, 1921).

¹¹⁴ *Idegenforgalom—Nyugat konferencia, 1932 december 7*, accessed May 21, 2011, <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/nyugat.htm>.

gypsy music, and *matyó* dance.¹¹⁵ After this modest beginning Mezőkövesd and the *matyó* soon became an important stop for the thousands of travelers who took the reduced-price train service (*filléres vonatok*) arranged by IBUSZ—based on the Italian model of *treno popolare*—to this and other provincial destinations to experience the tranquility of the countryside and its peasant weddings and harvest festivals.

Despite this relative success, critics did not fail to point out that the picture of the Great Plains was highly romanticized and very unrealistic. The brochures and propaganda failed to mention the poverty and shortages that also characterized the region. In Mezőkövesd, for example, the Hungarian Royal Railways and the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office opened a guest hostel—Matyó House—which claimed to offer an “authentic” *matyó* experience for 60-70 tourists per night. Opponents of such projects referred to it as a “Potemkin Pub” and argued that this and similar developments did not address the real-life problems of country folk. Instead, they exacerbated existing problems by commercializing traditional lifestyle, which critics feared would ultimately lead to the disappearance of real traditions.¹¹⁶

The third component of the tourist image of Hungary focused on the Lake Balaton and, to a lesser degree, the provincial cities of the country. This image aimed to combine progress and modernity with natural beauty of the countryside. Lake Balaton—“the Hungarian Sea”—is the largest freshwater lake in Central Europe. It is approximately forty-eight miles long and its average width is about six miles. Its average depth is about ten feet (the deepest point is about forty feet) which makes it possible to enjoy the lake

¹¹⁵ Mátéka, “A székesfőváros idegenforgalmi propagandája,” n.p.

¹¹⁶ Jusztin, “A turizmus története,” 102.

from the end of May to the end of September. The growth of beach culture around Lake Balaton lagged behind that in other countries. While the English seaside, for example, experienced a major transformation at the end of the eighteenth century, the first organized attempt to transform Lake Balaton took place only in 1873 under the auspices of the Spa Joint-Stock Company of Almád (Almádi Fürdő Részvénytársaság).¹¹⁷ The completion of the Southern Line (Budapest-Zagreb-Rijeka railway connection that included the entire southern shore of the lake) in the same year helped the development of the region, but for the most part the growth remained sporadic and ad-hoc. It was in the late 1880s that the first major hotels were built in Siófok, which became a desirable destination because of its proximity to Budapest (less than two hours by train). The first scientific attempts to study the lake were a result of the 1891 establishment of the Hungarian Geographic Society's Balaton Committee (Magyar Földrajzi Társaság Balaton Bizottsága) under the leadership of Lajos Lóczy. In passing one may note that one of Professor Lóczy's most ardent geography students was Pál Teleki, later Prime Minister. Nevertheless, until the end of the First World War there was little to no sustained government interest in the lake.

With Trianon Hungary lost its connection to the Adriatic (and hence to the resort towns of the Istria), and Lake Balaton gained more and more significance. Between 1921 and 1927 the number of villas around the lake grew from 1,960 to 3,236. Simultaneously the development of beach culture and Balaton's tourism came into the government's

¹¹⁷ On the development of European beach culture, especially that of England and Spain see John K. Walton, "Consuming the Beach: Seaside Resorts and the Cultures of Tourism in England and Spain from 1840s to the 1930s" in *Being Elsewhere*, 272-298. Similarly belated—during the later decades of the nineteenth century—was the discovery of Russian Crimea. See Louise McReynolds, "The Prerevolutionary Russian Tourist: Commercialization in the Nineteenth Century," in *Turizm*, 17-43 (especially, 34-42).

focus. By 1928 the government financed the building of the Balaton highway, opened new harbors and a regular ferry service, and established a permanent research institute for the scientific study of the lake at Tihany.¹¹⁸ In order to regulate and enhance the development of beach culture around the lake the Council of Ministers established the Royal Balaton Management Committee (Királyi Balatoni Intéző Bizottság or Kirbib) in April 1928. The president of Kirbib, Lajos Körmendy Ékes, pointed out the two main goals of the committee. First, they wanted to improve the quality of the settlements around the lake. This ambition required a great deal of new investment in the infrastructure (water and drainage systems, road building, and the establishment of new harbors, as well as new hotel developments) and agreed guidelines for all waterfront development. The second issue Kirbib sought to address was the issue of prices. While certainly cheaper than the Italian or French Riviera, the prices around Lake Balaton were comparatively higher than anywhere else in the country. Because of the short season restaurant and hotel owners aimed to “make up” for lost time with higher prices, which according to Körmendy Ékes, harmed both domestic and foreign tourism.¹¹⁹ The development of the 125-mile-long waterfront around the lake greatly benefited from the regulations of the earlier mentioned Law XVI of 1929, which gave control to a government sanctioned body to designate and appropriate land for holiday resorts.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s governmental and industry circles alike had very high hopes for Lake Balaton. The once-unimportant body of water and its environs were now a “national treasure” comparable in significance only to Budapest. The

¹¹⁸ Lajos Körmendy Ékes, “Balatoni feladatok,” *Magyar Szemle* 6, no. 2 (June, 1929): 160-61.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 162-65.

question of Lake Balaton was widely discussed in the Parliament as well. Members of Parliament argued that the development of Lake Balaton as a resort area would enable foreigners to view Hungary as nation with a highly developed culture rather than the land of the Puszta and a people of shepherds.¹²⁰ They demanded the modernization of hotels—some even went as far to insist that the perfect model should be the Lido of Venice and its Grand Hotel Excelsior.¹²¹ The government allocated an annual 150,000 pengő (c. \$353,775) for fifteen years to finance the expansion of the lake. Parliamentary members also demanded better propaganda for the lake and berated Hungarian newspapers and film stars for promoting foreign destinations, such as Biarritz and Monte Carlo on the French Riviera or San Remo in Italy, instead of Lake Balaton.¹²²

“*Sport in Sonne, Luft und Wasser*” (sport in sun, air, and water) reads the German tagline promotion of the special Balaton edition of *Hungaria Magazin*. Indeed, the promotion depicted Lake Balaton as the “playground of Hungary” where all sort of sports—from waterskiing to sailing to car racing and tennis—were available (See Figure 6). The photo collage of beautiful bikini-clad women—with the tagline “She...and the Balaton”—also hinted at the promise of romantic encounters.¹²³ But Balaton was not only promoted to those of healthy and beautiful bodies. On the contrary, the supposed “invigorating” medical benefit of the Balaton—similar to the likes of a “gigantic bathroom with radioactive waters”—made the lake perfect for the “frail and sick” and

¹²⁰ *Képviseelőházi Napló*, II. kötet, 1935, 377 (June 6, 1935).

¹²¹ *Képviseelőházi Napló*, XVII. kötet, 1927, 342 (February 7, 1929).

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ “Sport in Sonne, Luft und Wasser,” *Hungaria Magazin* (May 1938), 10-13.

was advertised as the “best possible remedy for weak children, according to the new English-language bulletin of the Hungarian National Tourist Board.¹²⁴ Lake Balaton was also publicized as a paradise for amateur pilots and car enthusiasts. The Royal Hungarian Automobile Club organized tours to the Balaton with guaranteed quality service and the best prices in selected gas and service stations. (A small notice warned that in Hungary the rule was “keep to the left and overtake on the right.)

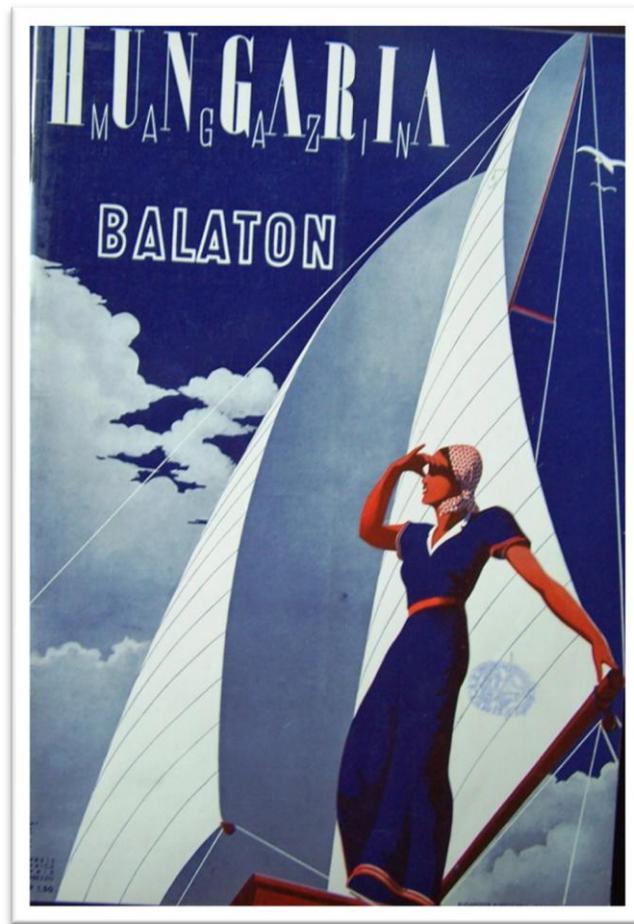


Figure 6. *Hungaria Magazin* (May 1938). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament

Along the shoreline the larger cities of Siófok, Balatonfüred, and Keszthely offered cultural and culinary programs to visitors. The latter, Keszthely—also known as

¹²⁴ “A lake which acts like the sea,” *Hungarian Tourist News*, no. 6 (June 1934), 5-6.

the “Capital of the Hungarian Sea”—resurrected its nineteenth-century, several week-long cultural festival, the “Helikon” (named after the mythic Mount Helicon, home of the Greek muses). The city—which was dubbed by Hungarians the “Hungarian Zurich” and “Little Weimar”—also offered summer seminars and shorter holiday courses to foreigners on a variety of topics. Among the courses, which were presented in English, German, French, and Italian, were “Hungary and European Culture,” “Periods of Hungarian Humanism,” or “The Hungarian Spirit in Our Epic Poems.”¹²⁵ In 1934, the local newspaper proudly exclaimed in a headline: “We are starting to be fashionable.”¹²⁶ Indeed the following year the town reported a 240 percent rise in tourist traffic.¹²⁷

Balaton was also promoted as a destination for a newly developing type of tourism: village tourism. The Országos Magyar Weekend Egyesület (National Hungarian Weekend League) and the Kirbib published material to educate those involved in this emerging facet of tourism. While the main target of village tourism was Hungarians, it is safe to say that English-language articles such as the “Romance of Lake Balaton” aimed to promote a different, more traditional and more relaxing side of the Hungarian Sea.¹²⁸ This promotion focused on the surrounding “beautifully wooded slopes, valleys, and vineyards” of the northern slopes and the natural settings of the lake.

Various travel organizations, led by IBUSZ, organized excursions and longer tours to the Balaton. They offered “two for one” coupons and prearranged discounted

¹²⁵ *Balatonica* (special collection)—1596, Helikon Library, Keszthely. Special thanks to Éva Vári for her assistance.

¹²⁶ *Keszthelyi Hirlap*, March 18, 1934, 5.

¹²⁷ *Keszthelyi Hirlap*, February 27, 1935, 3.

¹²⁸ “The Romance of Lake Balaton,” *Hungaria Magazin* (May 1937), 16.

trains to various destinations on the shoreline. According to the local Keszthely newspaper, in 1932 two specially-discounted trains brought 1,738 passengers to the town.¹²⁹ Balaton was represented in the various travel exhibitions and world's fairs as one of the centers of Hungarian tourism. Travel posters and brochures in various languages promoted Lake Balaton as the beach destination for all. Romanticized, poetic descriptions of its beauty appeared in magazines. Scientific works on its flora and fauna were translated and distributed worldwide. Works of József Egry, painter of Balaton landscapes, found their way to galleries and exhibitions from New York to Berlin.

The available statistics offer a somewhat misleading picture. According to 1932 statistics, during the year 2,395 foreigners spent 93,220 nights at the lake. By 1937 the number of foreign tourists grew to 13,084 and the nights spent grew to 175, 125.¹³⁰ However, despite the growing number of beach-goers and the unquestionable improvements made, the Balaton's tourism remained hampered by problems of insufficient infrastructure, seasonal limitations, and an inadequate level of beach culture. As a tool of foreign policy, the Balaton's contribution, while not entirely insignificant, did not lived up to its billing either. The Kirbib also realized the need for future development and in 1938 it worked out a five-year plan. It called for the restructuring of the region's agriculture, modernization of transportation (bus lines, airport, and shipping), expansion of infrastructure (roads, harbors, and hotels), preservation of cultural and historical sites, and the establishment of museums and cultural centers. The entire plan

¹²⁹ *Keszthelyi Hirlap*, September 18, 1932, 7.

¹³⁰ Statistics in Jusztin, "A turizmus története," 92-93.

called for an investment of twenty million pengő. Yet, because of the changing political climate and the looming war, this grand plan was not realized.¹³¹

Of course, there were other places in the countryside that enjoyed the benefits of tourism. For example, the mountain resort of Lillafüred, which was a personal project of Prime Minister István Bethlen—and thus a rather controversial topic in Parliament—was established to fill the void of the lost resorts of the Tatra Mountains. The grandiose plan called for the drilling of a thermal spring and for the organization of an international film festival, neither of which was fully realized. The city of Szeged in 1931 organized its first Open Air Performance. Over the years the festival gained a European-wide reputation, and like its model, the Salzburg Festspiele, entertained large audiences. The repertoire during the early years included Imre Madách's drama *The Tragedy of Man* (*Az ember tragédiája*), Zoltán Kodály's folk opera *Háry János*, or performances of Puccini's *Turandot*. The KÜM press division provided tickets and transportation for the foreign media that included representatives from *Reuters*, *The New York Times*, *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, and the like.¹³² Yet perhaps the most prominent cultural diplomatic achievement was the Fourth International World Scout Jamboree that was held in 1933 at the Royal Palace of Gödöllő. This was quite a coup for the Hungarians since after England (twice) and Denmark, Hungary was only the third country to organize this international gathering. Newspapers worldwide reported that the nearly 30,000 scouts

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² MOL K66, 378. csomó III/6 (various).

were welcomed by Regent Horthy and the founder of the Scouts, Lord Baden-Powell, and Chief Hungarian Scout Pál Teleki.¹³³

The three different landscapes and the meanings they carried divided intellectuals, politicians, and tourism experts alike, yet under the government's watchful eyes all three images of Hungary—and visions of Hungarianness—were utilized. The government aimed to assist the development of all three with various degrees of financial, legislative, and moral support.¹³⁴ An undated pamphlet titled “Fairy Tales Become True: Come and See Hungary” from the Hungarian embassy in London gives a sense of the types of propaganda that resulted of the negotiation of images and ideals:

It is hard to avoid using what may seem extravagant language when writing about Hungary. Europe is awakening to the fact that Hungary is an inviting and rewarding field of travel for tourists seeking something new and different in the way of holiday experience.

Hungary was once a powerful and big country. Now she is dismembered, reduced to one third of her prewar size, yet in spite of this, the Magyars have preserved the nation's age old traditions, intellectual supremacy and moral integrity, thus maintaining their spiritual unity with Western Civilization.

In order to become acquainted with Hungary, a country as yet insufficiently known, one has to study the history of the country to learn the special character of Hungary's culture.

Creation of art, natural beauty; the modern life of Budapest, the world's greatest health resort; the unique vision of the Hungarian prairie, the gay colours of the picturesque national costumes and, last but not least, the proverbial Hungarian hospitality await you, thus making your holiday a delightful and never to be forgotten experience.

¹³³ Amongst the newspapers there were *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, and *The Times* (London).

¹³⁴ MOL K106, 174. csomó 139.tétel (August 24, 1934).

So come to Hungary and prepare for a voyage such as you have never before even dreamed of.¹³⁵

From the late twenties on—despite the universally negative effects of the Great Depression—the Hungarian tourism industry steadily expanded. By the mid-1930s it started to show that, the continuing discussion and negotiation of the “real” Hungarian tourist image notwithstanding, the tourist industry was indeed more than just an economic concern. The crowning achievement of Hungarian tourism and the ultimate representation of the country was to take place in 1938, designated as the Year of St. Stephen to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the death of Hungary’s first king.

1938: Hopes, Disappointments, and Change

Tourism professionals and politicians alike looked forward to 1938 with much hopes that were ultimately unfulfilled. What was to be a crowning achievement actually signaled the beginning of decline and yet another restructuring of the Hungarian tourist industry. In accordance with shifting national priorities, it was no longer Árpád and his chieftains that represented the image of Hungarianness. It was the figure of St. Stephen—Hungary’s first warrior-king—that became the central historical figure worthy of celebration (See Figure 7). The Year of St. Stephen was designed to be the ultimate display of Hungary’s *bona fides* as a European nation and the definitive demonstration of its Christian character. It was to prove that Christianity was one of the key elements of Hungarian national identity. Regardless of confessional divisions between the largely Protestant eastern Hungary and the majority Catholic population of the West, Christianity

¹³⁵ MOL K92, 23. csomó, 19.tétel (London Embassy, n.d.)

had a unifying impact by focusing on the country's role in defending Western (European) Christendom against the tides of non-Christian invaders. Christianity was also closely connected with the question of Hungary's European credentials. The decision of its founder and first king, St. Stephen, to accept the crown from the Catholic Pope linked Hungary forever to Western Christendom—so the argument went. This was to be a year of religious and secular celebration of Hungary, seeking to gain international attention for the country.

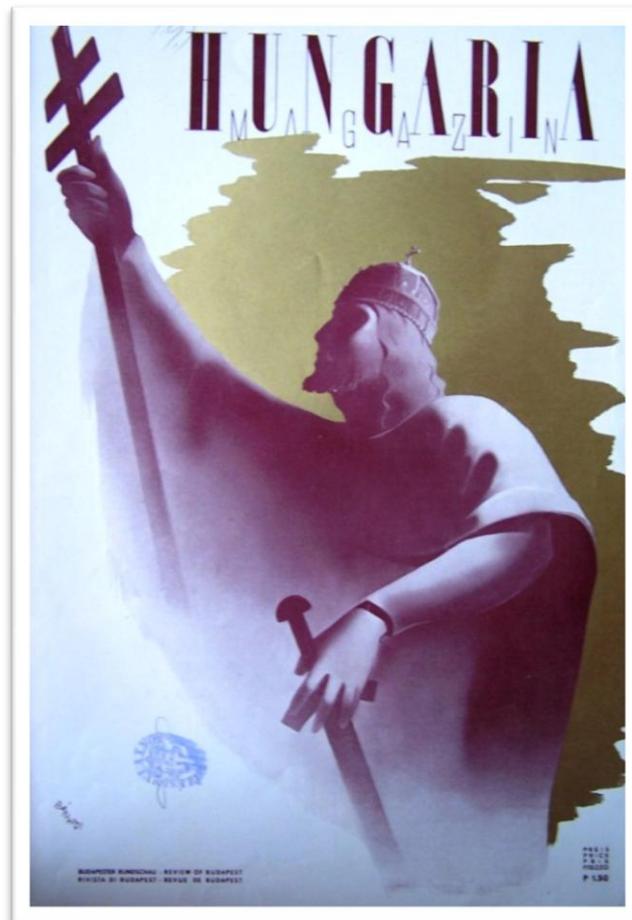


Figure 7. *Hungaria Magazin* (August 1938). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament

The central event of the celebration was the Thirty-fourth International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest. The first main gathering of the world's Catholics to

celebrate the Eucharist was held in 1881 in Lille, France. After First World War the event had been hosted by Rome, Amsterdam, Chicago, Sydney, Tunis, Dublin, and Manila.¹³⁶ The idea to hold the Eucharistic Congress in Hungary was born in 1929. The main organizer of the event was Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi, Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary. He recalled that his “struggle” to secure Hungary as the host of the 1938 congress was especially difficult for the country behind him was not a massive nation, but a “small and humiliated” one. In addition he feared the “unchristian-like behaviors” of other nations, particularly those of the “successor states,” for he believed that they would be able to “scuttle” (*megfúr*) the Hungarian plans with the assistance of France.¹³⁷ Both secular and religious leaders realized the significance of the event. Zsigmond Mihalovics, canon and the director of the congress, first and foremost emphasized the importance of the event in the fight against atheism—perhaps a barely-concealed reference to Bolshevism. Yet he also pointed out that Hungary must make the best of this “special propaganda occasion” for “never before have we had a similar occasion to showcase ourselves to foreigners in a more sympathetic way.”¹³⁸ In 1937 Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi and Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya visited Adolf Hitler. On this occasion Darányi informed Hitler that it was the wish of Regent Horthy — although he was himself a Protestant—that Hitler should not put any obstacles in the way

¹³⁶ Jenő Gergely, *Eucharisztikus világtalálkozó Budapesten—1938* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1988), 22-28.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹³⁸ Zsigmond Mihalovics, “A budapesti eucharisztikus kongresszus jelentősége,” in *A magyar idegenforgalom évkönyve* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Szindikátusa, 1937), 41.

of German pilgrims wishing to attend the congress. The Führer's answer was evasive and conditional on the state of the relationship between Nazi Germany and the Vatican.¹³⁹

The opening ceremony in May was attended by Hungarian as well as international religious and secular leaders. Among them of course were Regent Horthy and his wife, who as a Catholic was also the patroness of the event, and Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli as the representative of the Holy See. Cardinal Pacelli—who after March 1939 was better known as Pope Pius XII—in his opening remarks paid tribute to Hungary as the shield of Christendom and defender of Christian civilization. In his speech the Cardinal also emphasized that once again Christendom was in danger and called for its defense “against the leaders of religious negation and of social revolution” following the example of Hungary's earlier struggle against the Turkish infidels.¹⁴⁰ The clear danger was Bolshevism. However, in the wake of the *Anschluss*, which had taken place just two months earlier, the looming danger of Nazi Germany too was considerable. Once again, I think Hanebrink is correct in arguing that both Hungarians and the Vatican judged the Budapest Congress “as an event at once anti-Communist and antifascist.”¹⁴¹ The Eucharistic Congress came to end on May 28, 1938. The following day saw the official launch of the Year of St. Stephen.

St. Stephen's Year—which included the traditional St. Stephen's Week and St. Stephen's Day—cannot be divorced from the celebration of Hungarian statehood. Despite its religious overtones it was also a secular celebration of the ideals and history of the Hungarian Kingdom and its first king. The patron of the 1938 festivities was

¹³⁹ Gergely, *Eucharisztikus világtkongresszus*, 77.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Hanebrink, *In Defense*, 145.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

Regent Horthy. These festivities were central events in Hungarian tourism as well. The programs of 1938 were designed to satisfy tourists of every kind. They included the gathering of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta led by Grandmaster Prince Chigi Albani della Rovere, the International Hungarian Pilot-Picnic, but the highlight of the celebrations took place in August.

Much of the program of 1938 was the continuation of earlier established practices of the traditional August 20 St. Stephen's Day festivities and those of the 1930 St. Imre's Year. St. Imre, or Emeric, was the son of St. Stephen. He died at the age of twenty-four in a hunting accident. The year 1930, the 900th anniversary of his death, was designated the Year of St. Imre, which in many ways was a "dress rehearsal" for the 1938 celebration of St. Stephen. It included the performances of the *Gyöngyös Bokréta* (Pearly Bouquet), a performance group entirely devoted to the preservation and promotion of folk-culture. The group, which was established in 1931, enjoyed the moral and financial support of the government. Year after year the dance performances were one of the central programs of the August celebrations. In a way they brought the traditions, sounds, and colors of the countryside to Budapest. In August 1938 the group—which included sixty different ensembles with 1,400 performers—gave twelve performances.¹⁴² In many ways throughout the years the St. Stephen's Day celebration changed in purpose and objective. According to August 1927 statistics, there were 15,139 domestic guests, from the "lost territories" 3,210, and 6,629 foreigners were registered in the hotels and pensions of Budapest. In contrast, ten years later there were 7,653 domestic guests, from the "lost

¹⁴² *Jelentés 1938*, 26-27.

territories” 3,084 and 28,068 foreigners in the same Budapest venues.¹⁴³ The absence of domestic visitors was something of which contemporary experts were keenly aware. Behind the transformation were the rising prices of Budapest accommodations and the tourist organizations’ concentrated foreign propaganda. The Hungarian celebration of Hungarianness ironically became a spectacle for foreigners. Different ideas were thrown around on how to bring back the people of the countryside. This and similar ideas maybe behind the fact that in 1938, while the already popular fireworks and procession of the Holy Right (the mummified right hand of St. Stephen) were retained, they also sent the holiest relic of the Hungarian Catholic Church on a cross-country tour for the first time in its history. In the ultimate show of governmental participation, the House of Parliament temporarily relocated to Székesfehérvár, which was the ancient royal seat of the Hungarian Crown and the final resting place of fifteen Hungarian kings (albeit not to St. Stephen). It was here that the members of the Parliament proclaimed Law XXIV of 1938 which made August 20 a national holiday in order to commemorate the life and works of St. Stephen “the creator of the Christian Hungarian state, who laid the foundation of the nation’s European mission.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, this was the main message of the celebrations. Just like the holy year itself it too had a dual message—both religious and secular. On the one hand, it aimed to illustrate the Christian character and traditions of the country, while, on the other, it aimed to emphasize the nation’s equally important European character to foreigners and domestic audiences alike.

¹⁴³ Vilmos Kovács házy, “Néhány szó a Szent-István hétről,” in *A magyar idegenforgalom évkönyve* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Szindikátusa, 1937), 25.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in *Pesti Hírlap*, August 19, 1938, 3.

Despite governmental support and the best efforts of the various tourist organizations, 1938 failed to bring the desired results. In 1938 the number of foreign visitors in Budapest declined by 20 percent. At the same time the Lake Balaton region experienced a 60 percent decline in the number of visiting foreigners. In the rest of the countryside the number of foreign visitors dropped by 30 percent. Especially problematic was the decline in Western tourist traffic: from Austria (-48 percent), Great Britain (-48 percent), France (-42 percent), Germany (-28 percent) and the United States (-23 percent). As a result, the overall revenue from foreign tourism fell from the previous year's 38.3 million pengő (c. \$106,388,888) to 28.8 million (c. \$80,000,000).¹⁴⁵ Consequently, the tourism industry's investment in the St. Stephen Year did not yield an acceptable return. For example, a confidential report prepared by the OMIH stated that the exceptional expenditures of the St. Stephen Year and the Eucharistic Congress nearly bankrupted the organization and consumed the entire annual budget of the organization.¹⁴⁶

The drastic decline of tourism was a continent-wide phenomenon, which can be best explained by the volatile state of international relations. Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria, the growing tension in the Sudetenland, and overall fears and rumors of a coming war resulted in a general anxiety about foreign travel. Hungary was especially impacted by this because of its geographical location. Vienna, which in the past was "jumping-off point" to Hungary for many Western tourists was lost as such. In addition,

¹⁴⁵ Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, "Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet jelentése Magyarország idegenforgalmáról az 1938 évben," (Budapest: Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, 20 March 1939), 2-3 and 9.

¹⁴⁶ MOL K69, 785. csomó "I" tétel, titled: "A megváltozott viszonyok miatt milyen feladatok várnak az Országos Magyar Idegenforgalmi Hivatalra?" (March 19, 1939).

the impact of the 1937/1938 economic recession and the subsequent currency devaluations made travel less affordable.

However, there were two developments that gave reason for cautious optimism and served as impetus for some major restructuring of the Hungarian tourism industry. First, with the First Vienna Award (November 1938) parts of the Felvidék (Upper Hungary) returned to Hungary. With this decision—or dictate as some would argue—the Hungarian tourist industry was given new possibilities. The *Hungaria Magazin* did not waste much time and immediately started the foreign and domestic promotion of the region.

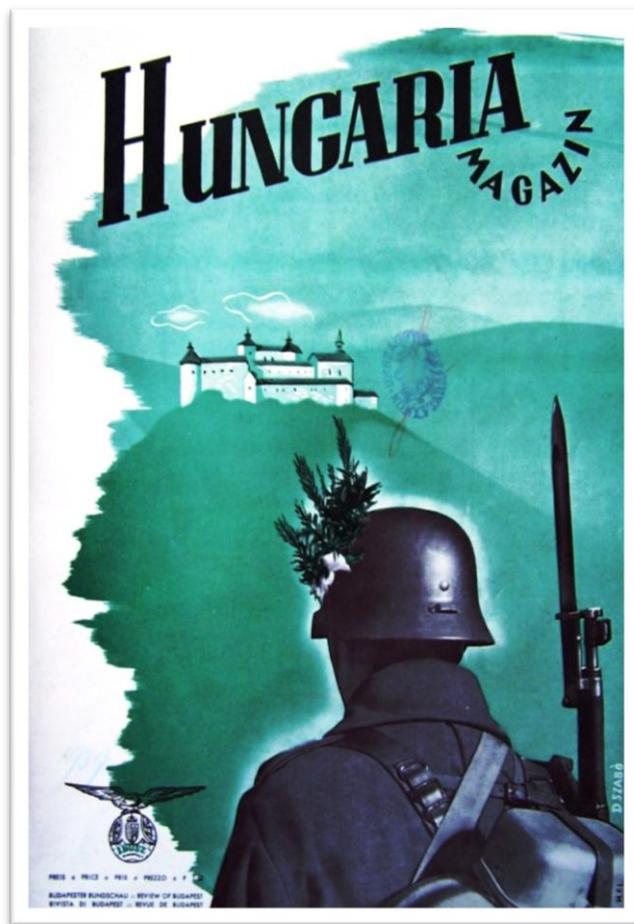


Figure 8. *Hungaria Magazin* (April 1939). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament

On the cover of the April 1939 *Hungaria Magazin* one can see a picture of a Hungarian soldier, with a flower arrangement on his helmet, as he marches toward a medieval castle that looks like the castle of Krasznahorka or Krásna Hôrka, which after Trianon belonged to Czechoslovakia until the decision made in Vienna in 1938 (See Figure 8). This cover art also signaled the second changing trend of Hungarian tourism: its new emphasis on the domestic market. The newly reacquired territories and the growing numbers of domestic tourists led to new debate about a need to prioritize the domestic traveler even on the expense of its foreign counterpart.

Discussions about changes necessitated by the recent developments reached the highest levels. The parliamentary exchange between Count György Apponyi and the Minister of Commerce and Transportation, Antal Kunder, illustrates the tension. Apponyi expressed his concerns about the new direction of the tourist industry in which the domestic market would have priority over the foreign market. He argued that the focus hitherto on tourism's foreign propaganda was correct, because it enabled the country to "vindicate the just nature of its cause [i.e. revision of the treaty]." While he agreed with the necessity for governmental oversight, Apponyi rejected the idea that the government should follow the examples provided by the German *Kraft durch Freude* or that of the Italian *Dopolavoro* and change its focus to promote domestic working class tourism at the expense of the foreign promotion. He also voiced his dislike of the organizational and personal changes that had taken place within the leading organs of the Hungarian tourist industry, which he believed were the result of an unofficial arianization of the industry.¹⁴⁷ In his reply Minister Kunder aimed to reassure the House that the government sought to improve both domestic and foreign tourism. He categorically rejected the idea that any

¹⁴⁷ *Képviselőházi Napló*, XXIII. kötet, 1935, 70-73 (March 1, 1939).

kind of arianization was taking place within the leading organs of the industry. While there were no Jews among those who had lost their position within the OMIH, he would not explain the circumstances behind the personnel changes.¹⁴⁸ One can only speculate about the real reasons, but it is important to note that nearly two months after this exchange the Second Hungarian Jewish Law (Law IV of 1939) limited to 6 percent the number of Jews allowed to be employed in the public and governmental, as well as in certain intellectual, sectors. The above-mentioned confidential OMIH report testifies to some of the organizational and rationality changes that the government sought to deploy in order to address the impact of the new political climate. The highest organ of Hungarian tourism was to be the newly established Tourist Propaganda Work Association (Idegenforgalmi Propaganda Munkaközösség), which oversaw and regulated the entire industry's propaganda both home and abroad. The report acknowledges a number of challenges, among them: the war-like atmosphere, political aversion, currency issues, passport and visa difficulties, the absence of American travelers because of the New York World's Fair, covert governmental restrictions on foreign travel, and rumors and anxiety in general.¹⁴⁹

Indeed, Hungarian tourist propaganda had not given up foreign tourists. The new campaign aimed to restore confidence in Hungarian travel by emphasizing the peaceful characteristics of the country. Tourist propaganda, much like cultural diplomacy in general, also targeted the US public. A special edition of the *Hungaria Magazin* distributed at the New York World's Fair aimed to convince the American reader that

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 74-6.

¹⁴⁹ MOL K69, 785. csomó "I" tétel, titled: "A megváltozott viszonyok miatt milyen feladatok várnak az Országos Magyar Idegenforgalmi Hivatalra?" (19 March 1939)

Hungary was the European Maryland. In this Maryland, which suffered throughout its “glorious history of 1000 years,” now only “the ancient stones recount the history of the past,” for “the people themselves think only of the future: a future of freedom in a peaceful Europe.”¹⁵⁰ The cover art of the magazine, depicting a Hungarian woman dressed in folk clothing setting the dove of peace free, sought to reinforce this message of peacefulness (see Figure 9).

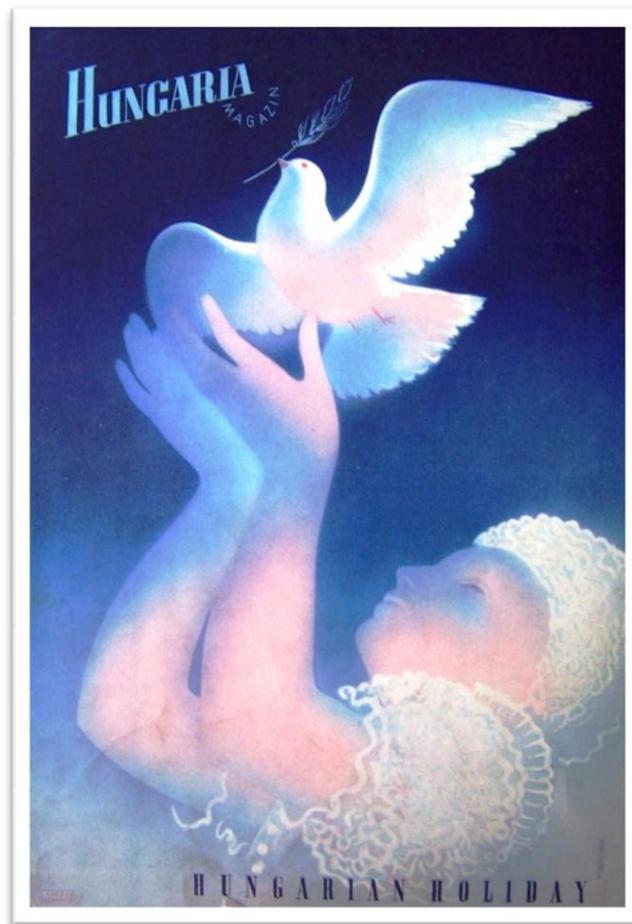


Figure 9. *Hungaria Magazin* (Special Edition, 1939). Source: Library of the Hungarian Parliament

While tourism propaganda and cultural diplomacy continued to promote the idea of Hungary as a peaceful and European nation, actual foreign policy took a more and

¹⁵⁰ *Hungaria Magazin* (Special New York World's Fair Edition, 1939), 1.

more belligerent stand. In March 1939 Hungarian troops occupied Carpatho-Ukraine. After the August 1940 Second Vienna Award, which granted Hungary Northern Transylvania, Hungarian troops marched into the region. As a recent work by Balázs Ablonczy indicates, tourism played an important role in the Transylvanian nation-building efforts in which the Hungarian government sought to repatriate Transylvania back to the Hungarian imagination.¹⁵¹ As Hungary entered the war, Hungarian tourism promotion became limited and inward looking. Just as cultural diplomacy lost reason to exist, so did the foreign promotion of Hungarian tourism.

Conclusion

“No nation can live without the aspiration of greatness, wrote Hungarian writer and public intellectual, Sándor Márai in 1938.¹⁵² After the First World War one of the ways Hungary sought to establish its greatness was through a cultural diplomatic campaign that utilized the recently-born tourist industry. In Hungary, just as in many other nations worldwide, governmental circles, intellectuals, and industry experts realized that tourism was more than just an economic factor. Even before the war, as Hungarian tourism was in its embryonic state, there was cooperation between the private sector and governmental administration, for tourism contributed to Hungarian nation-building efforts. After the war, as the government recognized that tourism also could be utilized as a potent yet nonconfrontational weapon of propaganda the collaboration between private

¹⁵¹ Balázs Ablonczy, “Promoting Tourism: Hungarian Nation-Building Policies in Northern Transylvania, 1940-1944,” *Hungarian Studies Review* 36, no. 1-2 (2009): 39-63.

¹⁵² Sándor Márai, “A nagyság igénye,” *Pesti Hírlap*, March 12, 1939, 7-8. This quotation is actually from Márai’s editorial review of French-Swiss writer Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz’s *Besoin de Grandeur*.

sector and the government became even more pronounced. However, at this time the goal changed. The new objective had more to do with the foreign promotion of Hungary. Tourism was seen as an essential component of foreign policy, a tool of cultural diplomacy. While the relationship between the private and government sectors was mutually beneficial, the latter began to take charge of the tourist industry as soon as the economic and political situation allowed it.

Hungarian tourism promotion had to address two related problems. On the one hand, the country's foreign image was either negative or it was based on stereotypes steeped in nineteenth-century Puszta romanticism. This was a source of concern, for cultural diplomacy's key argument was that Hungary was a modern and progressive country, and as such the region's best representative of European values. On the other hand, industry experts and government officials also had to account for the different domestic visions of Hungarianness. Competing visions and beliefs of Hungarianness—often with roots in the country's past—were mapped onto various landscapes. As a result, different geographical settings acquired different meanings. In the end, Hungarian tourism promoters utilized three different landscapes and connected them with different meanings in order to attract as many visitors as possible. In this process Budapest became the symbol of Hungary's European character, the emblem of progress, modernity, and cosmopolitanism. The Great Hungarian Plain and its people, in contrast, were the physical representatives of the country's Eastern and "Oriental" past, as well as its conservative and traditional character. The culture and natural beauty of the countryside

was to illustrate the uniqueness of Hungary.¹⁵³ The third landscape—the rest, which included the Lake Balaton—was presented as an amalgam of the modern and the traditional. While Budapest remained the undisputed center of Hungarian tourism, the Great Plains, the Balaton, and the some other destinations also began to contribute to the growth of Hungarian tourism. Between 1927 and 1938 the Hungarian tourist industry—despite the negative impact of the Great Depression—experienced rapid growth as the country became one of the popular European destinations. The looming threat of war and worsening economic situation made 1938—which was designated as a special year for the Hungarian tourist industry as it was the secular and religious celebration of the nation—a failure. During the subsequent years as Hungary edged closer and closer to the abyss of war, the function and governing motif of the tourist industry also changed. Ultimately, the war almost completely destroyed a once promising industry.

¹⁵³ Hungarians were not the only one trying to refashion their image by mixing modern and traditional. On the French efforts, for example, see Shanny Peer, *France on Display: Peasants, Provincials, and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World's Fair* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998).

CHAPTER FIVE

BECOMING AUDIBLE AND VISIBLE: RADIO BROADCASTING AND CINEMATIC PRODUCTION IN THE SERVICE OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

“I was not serious about this. Everything that we do is politics in any case,
but at least we deny it.”

(Miklós Kozma, 1929)¹

These two sentences, written by Miklós Kozma’s upon his return from an international radio conference held in Constantinople where he argued for the need to keep radio broadcasting apolitical, provide the basic argument for this chapter. He typed these two sentences in parentheses after the official summary of his trip. The first sentence referred to the official position that he took on the international stage: radio broadcasting must be kept apolitical. He was surely not serious about it, for he, and most everybody else, believed that radio was a political tool. This conviction was not limited to radio but also influenced cinematic production. His two-sentence notation essentially affirmed, that in the post-First World War international climate, no cultural production was apolitical. Early twentieth-century technological advances made in radio and cinema provided new weapons to those in charge of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. Miklós Kozma was one of these people. He was what today one might call a media tycoon. He was in charge of the Magyar Távirati Iroda (MTI—Hungarian Telegraph Bureau);

¹ MOL K429 Xerox/1 (May 29, 1929).

founder and majority owner of the Magyar Telefon Hirmondó és Rádió Rt (MTHR—Hungarian Telephone News Service and Radio); and creator of the Magyar Filmiroda (MFI—Hungarian Film Bureau). He was also a politician. Between 1935 and 1937 he was the minister of interior, then, for a short time in 1940-1941, governor of Carpatho-Ukraine. However, while Kozma's role in Hungarian cultural diplomacy is undeniable, this chapter is not all about him.² Instead I want to illustrate the ways that the Hungarian political elite reorganized and utilized the modern mediums of radio and cinematic production in the campaign that aimed to further establish the country's European credentials.

While the chapter examines radio broadcasting and cinema production separately, the basic questions they raise are the same. What steps did the government take to provide the necessary technology and infrastructure? In what ways did the international events aid or challenge the ways in which the Hungarian political and business professionals sought to redefine the nation's foreign image? What message did they seek to distribute and how did they do it? To what degree did domestic discussion of Hungarianness inform the decision of this message? In other words, the chapter looks to go beyond the sound of the radio and the frame of the picture. Having said this, the chapter also has its limitations, the most obvious of which is to not include feature films in my examination of cinematic production. The first reason for this exclusion is a pragmatic one, for I do not believe that I could have done justice to such a complex issue as interwar Hungarian feature film production in the space allotted. The second reason is

² For an excellent and indispensable biography of Miklós Kozma, see Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér: Kozma Miklós—Pokoljárás a médiában és a politikában, 1919-1941* (Budapest: PolgArt, 2000). Hereafter: Ormos, *Kozma*.

that feature films' primary target audience was domestic and its main purpose was to entertain. *Kulturfilme*, and to a certain degree newsreels, were made directly in service of informing foreign audiences and enhancing Hungary's image abroad. As such they were essential components of Hungarian cultural diplomacy.

Radio Broadcasting: Providing Voice for a Nation

“Little copper threads are nation builders ... the annihilation of space and time in the transmission of intelligence is a basic thing in the progress of the world,” reads the 1922 *The Complete Radio Book*.³ In the case of Hungary the history of these “little copper threads”—the basic materials for early radio receivers—goes back to 1903. It was the year that the Hungarian government purchased the country's first radio transceiver. The first experimental connection was achieved with antennas placed between the smokestacks of the Manfréd Weiss Works and the United Incandescent Lamp and Electric Company. The reception was not good because of the proximity of the electric streetcars. Nevertheless, the experiment aroused the interest of military and government circles both in Budapest and Vienna, marking the beginning of the government's long-standing attention to the potential of radio. At the beginning of the First World War, the Hungarian government purchased two more radio transceivers to keep a connection between Budapest, Sofia, and Istanbul (in addition to the already working connection with Vienna). The war further accelerated research in the already exciting areas of radiotelephony and wireless telegraphy. In the fall of 1921 a new five kilowatt telegraph

³ Raymond Francis Yates and Louis Gerard Pacent, *The Complete Radio Book* (New York: The Century Co., 1922), 187.

station opened in Csepel.⁴ The first Hungarian broadcasting studio was actually an old furniture-moving cart that stood on Gyáli Street. The first two kilowatt radio transmitter (later enlarged to three kilowatts) in Csepel was imported from Germany in January 1925. Opening experimental broadcasting began in May of that year, four years after Pittsburgh's KDKA station made the world's first public broadcast.⁵

By 1925 the government clearly recognized the potential of radio broadcasting. Archival sources indicate that from the early 1920s foreign consulates paid extra attention to the development of this new technology. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the correspondence between the London consulate and the KÜM. Károly Rácz, who was also foreign correspondent of the MTI, pointed to the development of the new media in Great Britain and emphasized its utility for global communication and propaganda.⁶ In many ways it was the BBC model, "chartered by the Crown and operated for the national benefit,"⁷ which provided the blueprint for the further growth of Hungarian radio. The question was not if the government should or should not be concerned with the new media, but to what degree. There were two international alternatives to select. The first alternative was to follow the US model. It was a more "chaotic" system in which radio was a private and unregulated enterprise. The BBC model was the more "orderly," for radio remained a private enterprise, enjoyed government monopoly, but was state-

⁴ Kilowatt is the SI unit measuring power. In the case of radio broadcasting it measures the power of electromagnetic output. In simple terms the greater the number is the farther and better quality transmitting is possible.

⁵ "Tízéves magyar rádió-- A Magyar Királyi Posta és a Magyar Telefon Hirmondó és Rádió Rt. együttes kiadása a Magyar Rádió fennállásának tizedik évfordulója alkalmából" (Budapest, 1935), 7-9.

⁶ MOL K66, 239. csomó III/6/2 (London, March 11, 1924).

⁷ César Saerchinger, "Radio as a Political Instrument," *Foreign Affairs* 16, no. 2 (January, 1938): 245.

regulated.⁸ With Ministry of Commerce order 32.250/1925 the Hungarian government selected the second model. The government—while retaining the right of licensing—gave the broadcasting monopoly to the newly-formed MTHR under the MTI consortium, and as such fell under the majority ownership of Hungary’s media czar, Miklós Kozma. Thus the MTHR was responsible for studios, technical apparatus, and programming. The governmental organ of the Hungarian Royal Postal Service was responsible for supplying and maintaining the broadcast system (broadcast towers, relay stations, and the like).⁹ The latter was also responsible for collecting license fees from would-be radio listeners. (As a 1977 Hungarian pop-song by the group LGT says, “one had to pay equally for good and bad news.”) Kozma’s connection to government circles explains the decision in part. However, most historians also agree—though there is little or no written evidence—that Kozma also unofficially agreed to fund non-radio-related governmental expenses.¹⁰

From this point onward the government’s interest and support of radio broadcasting remained constant. The first official Hungarian broadcast took place on November 30, 1925, from MTHR’s new studio, which was essentially a modified three-bedroom flat on Rákóczi Street. The ceremonial opening of the studio took place the next day with Horthy and his family representing the government.¹¹ Kozma’s speech left little

⁸ For more on the differences between the American and the British system, see Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of the British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-83. It was Hilmes’s characterization of “chaos” versus “order” that I employed.

⁹ “Tízéves magyar rádió,” 10-11.

¹⁰ Ormos, *Kozma*, 139.

¹¹ “Tízéves magyar rádió,” 10-11.

doubt about the role that the radio was to play in Hungary's cultural diplomatic campaign:

The arsenal of the Hungarian culture has been augmented with a powerful weapon. Everybody knows the significance—especially to today's Hungary—of the fact that the Hungarian word can pass beyond our borders through these waves. Broadcasting's calling is not limited to bringing Hungarian culture to the home, but its importance is that this is the only free connection to our blood relatives who have been torn from us, and furthermore to demonstrate our cultural supremacy over other nations.¹²

Other sources state that Kozma also added that “business considerations will be secondary to the needs of Hungarian culture.”¹³ This was the attitude that the government expected, especially because, in the meantime, the KÜM was spending more and more energy studying the diplomatic possibilities of radio broadcasting. Studies of the British broadcasting system gave government officials considerable food for thought about the radio's role in “world propaganda and world publicity.” While they realized that there was no possible way to compete with the likes of the BBC, the conclusion they drew was clear. Radio was a new tool in the “European competition for cultural-propaganda,” and Hungary could not afford to miss out in this competition. The next logical step therefore was to build a more powerful radio transmitter.¹⁴ September 27, 1927, marked the beginning of the construction of a new twenty kilowatt transmitter in Lakihegy. The new transmitter was 150 meters in height and its two towers were 460 metric tons each.

¹² Quoted in Ormos, *Kozma*, 138-9. Also see István Salamon, ed., *Rádiótörténeti szöveggyűjtemény* (Budapest: Magyar Rádió Rt.1999), 9.

¹³ Quoted in István Kollega Tarsoly, ed., *Magyarország a XX. században*, vol.3 (Szekszárd: Babits Kiadó, 1998), 355.

¹⁴ MOL K66, 239. csomó III-6/2 (London, June 28 and June 29, 1926).

Broadcasting began on April 29, 1928. In November 1928, Kozma was able to note—not without pride—that the radio had moved to the forefront of (governmental) interest.¹⁵

The role of radio in Hungarian cultural diplomacy was debated on the floor of the Hungarian Diet. Member of the House Ákos Dencz, for example, argued that the radio was such a monumental discovery that perhaps only the steam engine could compete with it. He pointed out that radio waves do not respect boundaries, but enmesh the globe from shoddy huts to sparkling skyscrapers. As such, all nations aim to utilize its immense potential. It is especially important to Hungarians because—he recalled an earlier remark made upon the first successful Hungarian broadcast—“we have something to say, we have pain, we have grievances; and this is what we cry through the ether, where there is no toll-keeper, who could stop us.”¹⁶ The next representative, Gyula Petrovác, pointed in a different direction. In his analysis, while he agreed that the radio’s ability to speak to foreigners was unquestionably important, the radio’s other important role was helping to break out from the “cultural blockade.” However, for Petrovác the goal was to reach Hungarians who were living in the neighboring successor states.¹⁷ Indeed, radio broadcasting had three target audiences: Hungarians at home, Hungarians abroad, and foreigners elsewhere. The latter two were very much connected with the country’s cultural diplomatic campaign. The goal of radio was twofold: to provide high quality and entertaining programming to Hungarians living in the neighboring countries and, at the

¹⁵ MOL K429 Xerox/1. In his diary he emphasized that both Lajos Walkó (KÜM minister) and Kuno Klebelsberg “discovered” the radio. See notes for November 10, 1928 and November 11, 1928.

¹⁶ *Képviselőházi Napló*, XVI. kötet, 1927, 252-253 (November 23, 1928).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

same time, to represent Hungary's cultural superiority and its contribution to European culture to foreign listeners farther afield.

The international community realized the potential dangers of radio, for as M. L. Sourek, chairman of the board of the Broadcasting Association of Czechoslovakia, put it, "no barriers can check the passage of Hertzian waves, which penetrate everything along their path."¹⁸ In October 1927 approximately 600 delegates from sixty countries gathered in Washington D.C. to regulate the development and operation of radio broadcasting.¹⁹ After seven weeks of intense discussion the conference agreed to 1) allocate of frequency bands for international radio broadcasting; 2) regulate broadcasting that affected other countries; 3) set standard rates for radio telegrams; 4) recognize internationally fixed call signals for various countries; and 5) regulate technical apparatus to prevent wave emission and interference between various national and international services.²⁰ In his closing speech Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover stated that the agreement was a "sign of the progressive capacity of the world to solve international problems" and a "fine tribute to the character and the spirit of the delegations" from all the nations present at the gathering.²¹ To the small nations of East-Central Europe, including Hungary, radio presented a relatively affordable way to carry out their propaganda through the airwaves. This was not direct political propaganda. There was no open criticism of the neighboring

¹⁸ M. L. Sourek in International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, *Broadcasting and Peace: Studies and Projects in the Matter of International Agreements* (Paris: League of Nations, International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1933), 205.

¹⁹ "International Radio," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1927, 6. The number of nations represented in Washington DC is not clear. For example, *The New York Times* gave a figure of 79.

²⁰ "Agreements of International Conference Covers All Phases of Radio," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1927, 20.

²¹ "Radio Convention Signed at Parley," *The New York Times*, November 26, 1927, 12.

countries, nor were there demands for territorial revision in the broadcast. However, it was not apolitical either. On the contrary, radio broadcasting was designed to be an instrument of mass persuasion.

The “radio is the permanent world-exhibit of [our] national culture,” stated the first director of the newly-established MTHR, retired Lieutenant-Colonel Ernő Szóts.²² He was Kozma’s personal friend and wartime comrade, but it was not the only quality that made him the right choice. Szóts spoke a number of languages, which helped the MTHR to build international relations (MTHR joined the International Radio Union—also known as the International Broadcasting Union— in 1926); he was energetic and wholly committed to his role. His first challenge was to find a suitable location for a new studio. In the fall of 1928 the new palace of the radio ceremonially opened its doors in the same place Hungarian Radio still stands today. The demand for radio grew rapidly. In 1925 there were approximately 10,000 radio subscribers; by the end of 1928 the figure stood at 168,453.²³ The Budapest station was on air for ten and a quarter hours every day (on Sundays for eleven and a quarter hours). Hungarian literature was well-represented in the broadcast. The great figures of Hungarian literature from Mihály Babits through Zsigmond Móricz to Dezső Kosztolányi all appeared in front of the microphone. However, Hungarian literature had one main disadvantage, namely that it was in Hungarian. If the radio broadcast sought to reach foreign, non-Hungarian-speaking, audiences, it had to be able to speak to them in a language that was not as esoteric as

²² “Sóvárdi Szóts Ernő,” *Rádióélet*, March 14, 1930, 3.

²³ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1929*. The reports of the MTHR general assembly are available in the Archives of the Magyar Rádió Zrt. The collection is not a public archive. I would like to thank to Hajnalka Sütheő, Tamás Sávoly, and István Salamon for their assistance.

Hungarian. The answer was music, which was not only a source of entertainment but, as a universal language, it did not require translation. Hence, most of the programming consisted of music, which included classical, opera, and the ever-so-popular Gypsy-music.

From the beginning the MTHR sought to reach audiences outside of the country's physical border and build an international style of programming. The "speaker" (another adopted word) announced the programs in French, English, and Italian. In 1931 the radio began to broadcast news in foreign languages (French, English, Italian, and German). This was also reinforced by a joint endeavor of the radio and the Magyar Külügyi Társaság (Hungarian Society for Foreign Affairs).²⁴ The relationship, which was not always without tension, produced a foreign-language lecture series whereby the European listeners were provided information on a variety of topics related to Hungarian culture and history. The growing recognition of Budapest radio—and the variety it provided—was perhaps best illustrated by the fact that in 1932 Hungarian radio's guests included English novelist and playwright John Galsworthy, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in the same year, British writer and pioneer of erotically charged romantic novels, Elinor Glyn, German composer and conductor Richard Strauss, and his French fellow composer Maurice Ravel.²⁵ In order to elevate the Budapest Radio's international profile, MTHR also organized programming exchanges with other nations. In 1931 alone, the Budapest station received thirty-five foreign broadcasts, which included those of Pope Pius XI from Rome, the NBC Symphony Orchestra from New York conducted by Arturo

²⁴ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1932*

²⁵ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1933*

Toscanini, Tristan and Isolde from Bayreuth, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Richard Strauss, the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race, and the Faraday memorial celebration from London. On the other hand, the Budapest station sent 26 programs to 173 foreign stations.²⁶ Hungarian radio broadcast successfully transformed from an institution that, just a decade earlier, was housed in an old furniture-moving cart to becoming the voice of the nation abroad. However, not everyone agreed with the choices made.

Domestic Challenges

From the late 1920s onward the radio was a target of attacks that questioned its Hungarianness. One of the main charges against the radio was precisely something that had made it successful as a tool of cultural diplomacy: its international character. There were voices, mainly coming from rightist circles, arguing that no language other than Hungarian should be used. *Rádióélet*, the MTHR's official weekly, responded to these charges in a quite frank fashion: "It benefits Hungary to introduce itself in these universal languages, because if it does not, it will only exclude itself." Furthermore, continued the editorial, "we must love ourselves, but the warm love of our nation will not make us the center of the universe."²⁷ Others pointed toward an alleged foreign bias in the radio programming, especially in relation to music. It was quite a sensitive issue since two-thirds of Hungarian broadcasting was music. It was part of the larger European trend in

²⁶ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1932.*

²⁷ "A magyar rádió magyarsága," *Rádióélet*, March 27, 1931, 581.

which 66 percent of programming was music programming and 34 percent prose.²⁸ Some argued that there was too much Gypsy music. This was the trump card of those who believed that Hungary was already too much associated with Gypsies. Zoltán Kodály, Béla, Bartók, and Eugene (Jenő) Ormándy, while not directly involved in the row about the quantity of Gypsy music on the airwaves, all contributed to the argument in various forums. For example Ormándy—who was the conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra for forty-four years—argued passionately on the pages of the *Hungarian Quarterly* that modern Hungarian music rooted in the spirit of the Magyar peasant and had “nothing to do with the gypsy [sic] music which is too often mistaken as ‘typically Hungarian.’”²⁹ Others however claimed that there was too little Gypsy music. Some protested against the idea of broadcasting music from abroad as part of the European concert series that included Prague, Warsaw, and Berlin. *Rádióélet* once again refuted these charges and pointed out that during 1930 the radio played the works of 410 Hungarian composers/musicians as against those by 893 foreign composers. The ten most frequently aired Hungarian composers were Ferenc Lehár, Ferenc (Franz) Liszt, Imre Kálmán, Jenő Hubay, Ferenc Erkel, Béla Bartók, Pongrác Kacsóh, Károly Goldmark, Ernő Dohnányi, and Zoltán Kodály, in descending order. The ten most played foreign composers were Schubert, Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Beethoven, Puccini, Chopin, Johann Strauss II, Bach, and Brahms, in descending order. “To those charging us with foreign bias,” insisted the editorial, “we ask if they could produce overnight the new Hungarian Bach, Mozart,

²⁸ “Idegen műsor-hazai műsor,” *Rádióélet*, October 3, 1930, 4.

²⁹ Eugene Ormándy, “Modern Hungarian Music,” *The Hungarian Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1937): 164-69. Also see Zoltán Kodály, “Magyarság a zenében,” in *Mi a magyar?* ed. Gyula Szekfű (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1939), 379-419.

Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Johann Strauss, Wagner, Rossini, Verdi, Puccini, Bizet, Debussy, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Chopin?”³⁰ To those critiquing jazz music for being too decadent and foreign to the Hungarian spirit, the editorial pointed out that all the performers were Hungarians, and they often played pieces composed by Hungarians. These pieces were as Hungarian as those composed in the age of Rákóczi, the editorial argued vehemently.³¹ Ernő Dohnányi was invited to be the musical director of the radio to address these charges. According to the statistics, in 1931 the programming included: 51 operas from the Hungarian Opera House, 3 operas from the studio, 8 operas on gramophone-records, 5 operettas from the studio, 28 classical concerts from the Hungarian Academy of Music, 23 concerts from the Vigadó (Budapest concert hall), 183 philharmonic concerts, 163 opera concerts, 312 performances of popular or light music, 153 military band concerts, 138 performances of choir music, 257 gramophone concerts, the broadcasting of 470 Gypsy bands, 60 Hungarian folk-song-nights with Gypsy bands, 44 jazz bands, 1331 prose broadcasts (including poems and literature and informational programs), 178 dramas, musicals, and cabarets, 136 religious programs, and 209 courses of various kinds, including language lessons.³²

Despite the occasional criticism, Hungarian radio continued to provide a balanced, entertaining, and high quality programming to listeners at home and abroad. Under Dohnányi the MTHR and the government organized the Hungarian Ferenc Liszt Year (1935-36). The stated goal was to emphasize the world-famous composer’s

³⁰“A magyar rádió magyarsága,” *Rádióélet*, March 27, 1931, 579-80.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1932.*

Hungarian roots and promote the establishment of a “Liszt-cult.” Accordingly, between September 1935 and October 1936 the program included no less than 562 pieces by the composer. The Liszt European concert of September 10, 1936, was transmitted to fourteen European and eighty American stations.³³ In order to ensure the quality of Gypsy music—which remained the one of the most popular genres both at home and abroad—the radio decided to supervise the bands and their selection. This actually led to strife, known as the Gypsy War, between the radio and the Gypsy musicians. The relationship thankfully one word was mended and in 1937 a two-hundred member Gypsy band playing Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody No.2 celebrated the Gypsies’ 500-year legacy in Hungary.³⁴ The Hungarian radio became a popular spot for foreign musicians as well. In 1936 alone 54 foreign soloists and 23 conductors performed in the Budapest studio.³⁵ In the same year, the Hungarian radio received 85 programs from abroad and provided 62 broadcasts, even from as far away as Japan.³⁶ The radio also continued its foreign language programming in 1936, with 120 lectures in five languages.³⁷ The MTHR not only remained committed to its international style of programming but continued to widen its scope, not the least because Hungarian radio continued to enjoy the undivided support of the government.

³³ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1937.*

³⁴ “Cigányok 500 éve Magyarországon,” *Rádióélet*, April 30, 1937, 5.

³⁵ “A magyar rádió a diplomácia szolgálatában,” *Rádióélet*, July 9, 1937, 11.

³⁶ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1937.*

³⁷ “A magyar rádió a diplomácia szolgálatában,” *Rádióélet*, July 9, 1937, 11.

Radio: Cultural Diplomacy's Sharpest Weapon

The KÜM was also interested in the utility of radio, for it too recognized broadcasting as a modern way of providing a voice to Hungary abroad. It was especially active in carrying the voice of the nation to the English-speaking nations. For example, Hungarian ambassador to the United States, Count László Széchényi—husband of American heiress Gladys Vanderbilt—gave a radio address at the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) on May 25, 1930. Using his extensive network of connections he was able to recruit Nicholas Longworth, Speaker of the House, to give some introductory remarks, which emphasized that Hungary “had been a nation for more than a thousand years—a people intensely proud of their nationality, highly cultured, exceedingly musical—they have produced Franz Liszt and no nation can ask for more glory than that—and with a national desire for liberty and self-government that has met the instant response and sympathy of the United States.” Széchényi’s own address touched on the question of war-guilt, and the “heroic struggle” of post-Trianon Hungary, before he drew historical connections between the two countries.³⁸

The KÜM was also instrumental in bringing the voice of Miklós Horthy to the American audience on May 1, 1932. A letter by César Saerchinger, CBS European Service Director, is evidence that the idea to have a guest speaker for the first Hungarian broadcast in America came from the Hungarian Legation in London.³⁹ Kozma personally intervened with István Csáky (foreign minister at the time) to find the right “prominent figure.” Kozma pointed out that other nations had already exploited this possibility. He

³⁸ MOL K66, 187. csomó (June 11, 1930).

³⁹ MOL K66, 202. csomó III-6 (April 27, 1932).

especially emphasized the radio addresses of Tomáš Masaryk of Czechoslovakia, Wilhelm Miklas of Austria, and Heinrich Brüning of Germany. Kozma was not sure who should give the address, but he stressed the need for someone “whose name means something in America.” He made a point of noting that while he knew that the Regent was not inclined to doing “this sort of thing,” he would prefer if Horthy would change his attitude to the issue on special occasions.⁴⁰ We do not know what had to happen for Horthy to change his mind, but despite his known dislike of modern technology he indeed agreed to give the radio address. His English-language message was well received in the US.⁴¹ The *New York Times*, under the headline “Regent of Hungary Heard Here on Radio,” reported on the event and quoted some of Horthy’s message, which praised George Washington (it was the 200th anniversary of his birth) and President Hoover, while it also emphasized the friendly relations between the two nations.⁴²

The KÜM also paid attention to foreigners connected with broadcasting. For example, when Vernon Bartlett, BBC correspondent and former secretary of the League of Nations’ London branch, visited Budapest, the KÜM had already received advance notification about his impending visit. Accordingly, he was wined and dined, introduced to the Hungarian political and cultural elite, and received the close attention of the government in general. As a result, reported the *Pesti Hirlap*, five million BBC listeners learned about Hungary through Bartlett’s special. The newspaper quoted Bartlett as

⁴⁰ MOL K66, 202. csomó III-6 (April 12, 1932).

⁴¹ Horthy spoke English very well. There was/is a persistent rumor that Horthy learned English from James Joyce while the Irish author was in Pula (today in Croatia). Although the episode made it into biographies of both men there is no actual evidence that these language lessons ever took place.

⁴² “Regent of Hungary Heard Here on Radio,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1932, 12.

stating that “in a sensible world, if everyone would think sensibly, then the Hungarian borders would be amended.” It was something, as the paper noted, that Hungarian radio could not put forward so bluntly without charges of irredentism.⁴³ KÜM employees in every major country continued to seek out opportunities to present Hungarian culture and history (and even politics) to foreign listeners.

The true breakthrough in Hungarian radio broadcasting came with the completion of the new 120 kilowatt Lakihegy station. The old Lakihegy station was barely a year old when the MTHR already started planning for a larger transmitter. The assembly pointed out that European nations had launched a building program of bigger stations, in accordance with the International Radio Union standards, a maximum of 100 kilowatts—(one might note that the maximum transmitter limit in the United States remained at fifty kilowatts). The members referred to the fact that Germany decided to build eight new 100 kilowatt stations, while a new 100 kilowatt station was already under construction in Prague. They were especially worried about the Czechoslovak radio’s plans to build more powerful stations in Košice (Kassa) and Bratislava (Pozsony) with “detrimental effects” on the quality of reception of the Hungarian broadcasts.⁴⁴ The 314 meter tall metal structure, the tallest in Europe at the time, was ceremonially opened on December 2, 1933, by Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, whose speech was broadcast live. With the new tower Hungarian radio became one of the most powerful and modern broadcasting operations in Europe and the Lakihegy antenna remained the symbol of the Hungarian Radio until the first decade of the twenty-first century. The new tower not only provided

⁴³ MOL K66, 202. csomó III-6 (October 12, 1932). Includes press-clipping from *Pesti Hírlap*, December 16, 1932, n.p.

⁴⁴ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1930.*

its broadcasts with an unprecedented range, but it also enabled new programming changes. Budapest I broadcast from the new tower, and the new station Budapest II was broadcasting twenty-eight hours per week from the old twenty kilowatt setting, while the new shortwave Budapest III, from Székesfehérvár, broadcasted overseas.⁴⁵ Further development and modernization of the studio system continued. The MTHR hired the best and most talented professionals. Hence György Békésy, then a communications engineer, was able to design the acoustics of the radio's Studio 6. The studio was built between 1932 and 1936 especially to house and broadcast live concerts.⁴⁶ By the mid-1930s Hungarian radio was a significant factor in cultural diplomacy. Just a few weeks after the opening of the Lakihegy transmitter Kozma openly acknowledged the role of radio in Hungarian foreign policy:

In the world-competition of nations, small nations [too] want to prevail, [however] since they do not possess quantity of arms, they must all the more prevail through the quality of arms. This is especially true for everything that is Hungarian related, because we are not only a small nation, but we are also a mutilated nation. Our culture is not only there as a guardian of our national existence, but also as a weapon in achieving our future goals. In this arsenal one of the sharpest weapons is the radio.⁴⁷

The development of this “sharpest weapon” did not go without notice. Countries of the Little Entente and the international community both recognized that the seemingly apolitical instrument of radio was indeed a potent political apparatus.

⁴⁵ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1934 and 1935.*

⁴⁶ This studio is still in use. Békésy—better known in the West as Georg von Békésy—was awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology for his research on mammal hearing in 1961.

⁴⁷ Miklós Kozma, “A legélesebb magyar fegyverek egyike a magyar rádió,” *Cikkek, nyilatkozatok, 1921-1939* (Budapest: MTI Rt. Nyomda, 1939), 115. The article was first published in the *Antenna* magazine on December 24, 1933.

From “the Battle of Radio Armaments” to War

In his aptly-entitled article “The Battle of Radio Armaments” American publicist and propaganda strategist Heber Blankenhorn argued for a close connection between broadcasting and international friction. He blamed the nationalist attitudes in broadcasting for many of the contemporary problems. The radio race for larger audiences, with bigger and better transmitters, was responsible for the “high-power broadcasting armament,” which he compared to a naval arms race that sought to develop the largest caliber of battery guns. According to the author, while the United States was upholding the legal limitations of 50 kilowatt stations, others were not. “Little Hungary is to have one of 120 kilowatts, Prague 120, Vienna likewise.” He continued that “Poland’s new station, supposed to be 120, has just started up at 156. Berlin and Paris are going up; and so are the Russians. The Russians, as part of the Five-Year Plan, are thinking of spending \$45,000,000 for a station of 500 kilowatts and a short-wave transmitter to reach anywhere.”⁴⁸ Blankenhorn voiced his disapproval over a development that turned radio from instrument of cooperation to weapon of war:

“Free” radio means an easy and constant interchange of thought between one country and another. Free trade in radio broadcasting may well prove a source of international understanding and good will. But the trend is not in that direction. Threats and fears, hostile radio barriers and controversies promise little to human kind. “Science,” which was made for peace, devised the horrors, the gas, and liquid fire of the last war. The throttling of radio may bring about a result quite as hideous.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Heber Blankenhorn. “The Battle of Radio Armaments.” *Harper’s Magazine* 164, no. 979 (December, 1931): 83-88.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

The *Washington Post* did not mince its words either offering an editorial “Unseen World War is Fought; Nations Fill Ether with Words.” While the editorial did not use the word “cultural diplomacy,” it is very clear that the author of the piece understood the basic rationale behind the competition for listeners:

A new world war is being fought today with an old, old weapon—words. Nations all over the globe hurl verbs, nouns, and adjectives across the sky day after day, night after night, in an endless battle which no one sees, a battle of which man never before has experienced. It is war by radio. . . . It is war, but diplomatic war. The broadcasts placate rather than threaten. Their battle is for friends. They try to get their particular nation’s attitude across to the people of other nations. They build their national, social, political, and economic viewpoints into programs in such a way that they will not be consciously noticed but will still be unconsciously felt. . . . Warfare in this ethereal realm may take strange forms. Sympathy may be transmitted in music. . . . War—or peace—teams cannot be formed without sympathetic ties between peoples.⁵⁰

Although the editorial concluded that radio may also be a tool of peace, for people sympathetic to one another will not go to war, it was not a sentiment that would have been shared by Hungary’s neighbors.

The Little Entente countries were also keenly aware that the Budapest station reached Hungarians within their borders. A letter from István Munka, a Hungarian teacher living in southern Czechoslovakia, to the MTHR is representative of the growing tension. In the letter he states that since 1927 he has been a faithful listener of Budapest radio. He was among the first in his small village to possess a radio and the set often ended up on the front porch so others—mainly fellow Hungarians—could also enjoy the broadcast. According to Munka, in December 1930, he received a citation for disturbing the peace. The citation claimed he was listening to the Hungarian National Anthem, even

⁵⁰ “Unseen World War is Fought; Nations Fill Ether with Words,” *The Washington Post*, September 19, 1937, B5.

though he insisted that on the day in question this was not broadcast.⁵¹ As a first step, the Little Entente countries turned to the League of Nations International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation with charges of Hungarian *propaganda inadmissible*. On the word of the correspondence of Frigyes Wünschler, acting director of MTI, with Ferenc Mengele, head of the press department at KÜM, the International Radio Union's meeting saw a heated debate, where Kozma disputed not only the charges against the Hungarian radio, but the role of the union vis-à-vis the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation. The letter emphasized that the Little Entente's action should be monitored, but for now this should not be made public.⁵² Predictably, three days later the *Budapesti Hirlap*'s headline stated that "the Little Entente wants to silence the Hungarian radio."⁵³ According to the editorial, the Little Entente employed three different tactics. First, in the pages of national and international media it accused the Hungarian radio of broadcasting propaganda endangering the peace and agitating among minorities. Second, the respective nations introduced laws controlling the radio audience. And finally, the third phase should be to bring these charges to the international community, making it into a "European issue."⁵⁴

The neighboring countries' growing criticism of the Hungarian broadcast served only as a reassurance to Kozma and company that the radio was achieving its goals. Both

⁵¹ MOL K66, 238. csomó III-6/1 (March 7, 1931).

⁵² MOL K66, 238. csomó III-6/1 (May 18, 1933).

⁵³ This piece is from the Hungarian Radio Archive's Article press clipping collection. As such the page numbers are often not visible. In the future I will indicate as "MRA, 'Article Title,' *Newspaper Source*, date.

⁵⁴ MRA, "A kisantant el akarja némítani a magyar rádiót," *Budapesti Hirlap*, May 21, 1933.

the technical quality and the entertainment value of Hungarian radio programming were superior to its neighbors. It was something that even the contemporary Czechoslovak *Kultura* magazine (from Trnava [Nagyszombat] in today's Slovakia) acknowledged. The magazine maintained that the most significant problem was the poor technical quality of the Bratislava broadcasts and its meager programming. It also pointed out that in the Slovak region everyone, including ethnic Slovaks, preferred to listen to Radio Budapest.⁵⁵ The article further argued that the favorable position that the Budapest station enjoyed among all listeners was due to the fact that Prague did not supply enough Slovak cultural programming. On the other hand, the Hungarian radio, keenly aware of this tension between Prague and the proponent of more independent Slovak culture, offered Slovak nights on the radio.⁵⁶ A newspaper in Subotica (Szabadka) in Yugoslavia's Vojvodina region, which had a large Hungarian population, made similar comments. According to this source—as reported in the Hungarian newspapers—because of the poor technical quality and low programming standards of its competitors everybody in the region listened to Hungarian radio, which through its relay station was able to provide clear and entertaining broadcasts. The *Subotica* newspaper demanded the construction of a 200+ kilowatt Belgrade station and in the meantime asked for the seizure of crystal radio receivers.⁵⁷ It is representative of the Hungarian attitude that András Hóry, permanent deputy minister in the KÚM from 1934-1935, sent a letter thanking Kozma,

⁵⁵ “A szlovenszkoi rádió és Budapest,” memo in MOL K66, 238. csomó III-6/1 (June 26, 1934).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ MRA, “Szerb támadás a magyar rádió ellen,” *Budapesti Hírlap*, June 20, 1933.

stating that the “recognition coming from the enemy pages” was the best testimony to the patriotic and quality work of the radio.⁵⁸

While quality programming remained radio’s best asset in the field of broadcasting competition, it did not shy away from direct political confrontation either. On October 9, 1934, a lone gunman assassinated King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou in Marseilles. While the assassin was a Bulgarian national (of Macedonian ethnicity, to further complicate the story) he had close connections with the Croatian Ustaša movement (separatist, ultra-national fascist group). The Ustaša had, in turn, close ties with Hungary and Italy. Following the assassination Yugoslavia, supported by Romania and Czechoslovakia, charged the Hungarian government with responsibility for the assassination. The case went to the League of Nations. In the meantime—by December—the Yugoslav government had expelled thousands of ethnic Hungarians from its territory. The situation was becoming perilously close to an armed conflict between the two countries.⁵⁹ The “radio-war” between Hungary and members of the Little Entente intensified. The Hungarian press reported that in April 1933 the Czechoslovak government had introduced censorship of radio broadcasting, which could endanger “the democratic values of the republic.”⁶⁰ Czechoslovak radio also temporarily discontinued its Hungarian language programs. According to contemporary Hungarian reports, in Uzhgorod (Ungvár) the Czechoslovak

⁵⁸ MOL K66, 238. csomó III-6/1 (July 7, 1934).

⁵⁹ For more on the assassination and its aftermath see, Mária Ormos, *Merénylet Marseille-ben* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1984).

⁶⁰ MRA, “A csehszlovák kormány a külföldi rádió propagandája ellen,” *Újság*, April 21, 1933.

authorities made public listening to Hungarian radio a punishable offense.⁶¹ The MTHR decided that it needed the aid of a professional diplomat. In January 1935, Jenő Nelky, former chief of the KÜM's press department, ambassador in Vienna, consul in Argentina and the USA, became the head of the radio's foreign division and the permanent representative of Hungary at the International Radio Union.⁶² The Hungarian–Czechoslovak radio-war even made it into the pages of the *American Current History* and *Foreign Affairs*. In the former, the Czechoslovak censorship was mentioned as a reaction to Hungarian agitation. It also highlights the fact that since there are “no frontiers in the air” Belgrade too built a powerful new transmitter, which, according to the official statement, was to “penetrate everywhere where southern Slavs live and drown out Hungarian revisionist propaganda.”⁶³ César Saerchinger was even more critical of Czechoslovakia. In his view, “Czechoslovakia is the only democratic country using ‘authoritarian’ methods for the consolidation of its regime. Its excuse for the curtailment of freedom on the air is that in view of the country’s precarious strategic position the end justifies the means.”⁶⁴ Yet he could not have known that Hungarian radio, by 1938, was secretly broadcasting anti-Czech propaganda and agitated for the rise of Slovak and Rusyn national sentiment.⁶⁵ Later, with the First Vienna Award, Hungary received part of its lost territories from the by then defunct Czechoslovakia. As Hungarian troops were

⁶¹ MRA, “Magyarellenes rádiórendelet Ungváron,” *Pesti Napló*, December 30, 1934.

⁶² MRA, “Nelky Jenő a rádió külföldi osztályának vezetője,” *Pesti Napló*, January 5, 1935.

⁶³ Frank C. Hanighen, “Propaganda on the Air: the International Problem of Radio Censorship,” *Current History* 44, Vol.3 (1936):48-49.

⁶⁴ Saerchinger, “Radio as a Political Instrument,” 249.

⁶⁵ This is based on Mária Ormos’s research. She argues that two stations (“Szlovák bujdosó” [Hiding Slovak] and the “Ruszin függetlenségi komité” [Rusyn Independence Committee]) were broadcasting from Nyíregyháza, Hungary. See Ormos, *Kozma*, 556.

marching into Košice (Kassa), so were the employees of the Hungarian radio. Walking next to them were people of the MFI. While radio sought to give voice to Hungary abroad, the film elite was looking to make Hungary visible on the international stage.

The Birth, Destruction, and Rebirth of the Hungarian Movie Industry, 1896-1929

Interwar Hungarian political elites sought to utilize cinematic production to inform and enlighten foreign audiences. It was a significant challenge, for the image of Hungary was rather negative and was often based on stereotypes connected with Puszta Romanticism. Cultural diplomacy's aim was to destroy the image of a Hungary as backward, semifeudal, and generally anachronistic. Instead, it aspired to present Hungary as a modern, progressive, and European country. Having a modern cinema industry was essential in these efforts. However, the development of Hungarian cinematic production was not as straightforward as that of the radio.

In 1921 a story appeared on the front page of the Hungarian weekly *A Mozi (The Cinema)* entitled "My Excursion to 1938 and Back. My Guide: H. G. Wells." The storyteller took a trip to the future with the help of Wells's time machine. He visited Hübösvölgy, in the second district of Budapest, which by then had become home to a giant Hungarian film studio. In his imaginary voyage the narrator had coffee with the most influential people in the European film industry (Olaf Fønss, Fritz Lang, Conrad Veidt, and Robert Reinert), all of whom were working in Budapest. Paul Wegener—director of the film *The Golem*—was putting the finishing touches to his tenth movie,

made in Budapest.⁶⁶ Another director was complaining that the Budapest studios could produce only 800-1,000 films a month, which could still not satisfy the American public's thirst for Hungarian movies. They alone insisted on 300 movies per month. The last stop on the journey was Budapest's Margaret Island. Both Wells and the narrator saw a large English sign on the giant glass dome that covered the entire island. It read: "World." Upon descending through the opening of the dome, they landed in a medieval German town. They then witnessed the Grand Canal of Venice, and city scenes of Constantinople, Moscow, and Amsterdam. There were hundreds of structures in this strangely invigorating place, which—as they learned—was known as Film City (*Filmváros*).⁶⁷

The author's imagined journey to the future illustrates the hopes and aspirations of some of the Hungarian film elite. Yet, in 1921, these hopes and aspirations might have been seen as fantastic as the idea of time travel. At the time the Hungarian movie industry was in a state of utter shambles. This had not always been the case. Moving pictures arrived in Budapest in 1896 during the millennial celebrations. Soon thereafter the city's vibrant coffeehouses became make-shift movie theaters. None was more famous than the Velence (Venice), where the history of Hungarian cinema began, with the headwaiter (József Bécsi) doubling as the projectionist.⁶⁸ This new mode of entertainment was

⁶⁶ Olaf Fønss (1882-1949) was a Danish-born actor and director (1882 and star of the 1913 film *Atlantis*. Fritz Lang (1890-1976) was the director, among other films, of the silent classic *Metropolis*. Conrad Veidt (1893-1943) was a German actor, well-known for his role in the 1919 classic *The Cabinet of Dr. Cagliari*. Robert Reinert (1872-1928) was a German film director and novelist. Paul Wegener (1874-1948) was an actor, writer and director, who played a pivotal role in the development of German expressionist film.

⁶⁷ Ferenc Szántó. "Kirándulásom 1938-ba és vissza. Vezetőm: H. G. Wells." *A Mozi* 6, no. 9 (February, 1921): 1-2.

⁶⁸ John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffee House to Multiplex* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), 5-7. On the history of Hungarian silent films, see Zsolt Köhádi, *Tovamozduló*

incredibly popular among Hungarians and the number of cinemas grew at an amazing pace.⁶⁹ The celebrated Hungarian writer Frigyes Karinthy even declared that “the moving picture is the most wonderful creation of human ingenuity.”⁷⁰ By 1912 there were 270 permanent movie theaters in Hungary.⁷¹ By the eve of the First World War there were 108 cinemas in Budapest alone.⁷² The first Hungarian film studio, Hunnia, was built in 1911/12.⁷³ The first Hungarian moving picture *A tánc* (*The Dance*) was made in 1901: it was a series of films depicting various dance forms. Two of the first Hungarian narrative films—or dramatic art films—were the 1912 *Nővérek* (*Sisters*) and *Ma és holnap* (*Today and Tomorrow*).⁷⁴ Others soon followed. By the end of the First World War there were over two dozen film studios at work and, between 1914 and 1918, they released well over 250 pictures.⁷⁵ It was during this era that the likes of Mihály Kertész (who later became known as Michael Curtiz, famed director of the 1942 classic *Casablanca*), Sándor Korda (later Alexander Korda, director and producer, one of the founding fathers of the British

ember tovamozduló világban—A magyar némafilm 1896–1931 között (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1996).

⁶⁹ John Lukacs dates the opening of the first “real cinema” at 1899, while according to David Frey it was in 1906. See: John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and its Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 178, and David S. Frey, “National Cinema, World Stage: a History of Hungary’s Sound Film Industry, 1919-1944” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2003), 25.

⁷⁰ Frigyes Karinthy, “A mozgófénykép metafizikája,” *Nyugat* 12 (1909), accessed September 18, 2011, http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/index_abc_sz.htm

⁷¹ István Nemeskürty, *Word and Image: History of the Hungarian Cinema*, trans. Zsuzsanna Horn and Fred Macnicol (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1974), 13.

⁷² Frey, “National Cinema,” 25.

⁷³ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, 14. The studio was forced to close down a year later, but the name was restored later.

⁷⁴ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 8-10.

⁷⁵ Frey, “National Cinema,” 26. According to Nemeskürty, thirty-two filmstudios were established between 1908 and 1919.

film industry), his two youngest brothers Zoltán and Vincent, and Béla Blaskó (better known as Béla Lugosi of *Dracula* fame), among others, began their careers.

The short-lived Bolshevik Revolution of 1919 brought to power a regime that was among the first in postwar East Europe to utilize cinema for political purposes. Commissar of Culture and Education, György Lukács, paid special attention to the movie industry, which, Nemeskürty claims, almost uniformly supported the Bolshevik regime, though not primarily out of ideological considerations. According to Nemeskürty, the main reason behind the support of the Hungarian film industry was economic interest, because under the previous system most of the power rested with the film distributors and cinema owners, not with the filmmakers.⁷⁶ Hungarian film production was nationalized—this was a world first—and put under the control of a Commissars' Council and two other governmental organizations. Béla Paulik, László Márkus, and Sándor Korda produced thirty-three feature films. Mihály Kertész directed the movie *Jön az öcsém* (*My Brother is Coming*), which was one of the first, if not in fact the first, agitprop film.⁷⁷ Even more importantly the Hungarian Bolsheviks also utilized film production to produce their own newsreels, entitled *Vörös Riport* (*Red Report*). The regime produced twenty of these newsreels, each about five minutes in length.⁷⁸

In August 1919 the Hungarian Soviet Republic fell and the new regime dismantled the movie industry. Miklós Horthy's counterrevolutionary forces unleashed the most violent retribution. The White Terror targeted Left-wing intellectuals and

⁷⁶ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, 42.

⁷⁷ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 21.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

politicians, as well as Jews. Sándor Korda, Mihály Kertész, Béla Lugosi, Béla Balázs, and György Lukács were only a few names in the long list of artists and intellectuals who were forced to leave Hungary. Distrusting films, the new Horthy regime severely restricted film production and distribution. Most of the films (features and newsreels) made under the Kun regime were destroyed. Cinema operators, mainly Jews, did not fare much better. According to contemporary police reports, as result of the enforcement of the 8454/1920 M. E. order, 75 percent of cinema owners were forced to sell, for they did not receive new permits.⁷⁹ The report added that this did not achieve the desired results. Most of the new owners were completely lacking in know-how and capital, and hence not able to operate the cinemas proficiently and so many of them failed. By 1921 only eighty-three movie theaters were in operation.⁸⁰

Industry professionals and leading intellectuals took stock of the state of the Hungarian film industry and emigrated. Others tried to find solace in envisioning a better future through a time machine. Still others attempted to convince the government to reform the regulations surrounding movie production and distribution. László Márkus (later director of the National Opera) tried to bring about change by arguing that Hungarian-made films should be used in the country's propaganda abroad. As he put it: "we must use everything that can induce the conscience of the world [to revise the Trianon Treaty] and film, being an art form that echoes through the souls of the masses, is the most suitable above all others." What sort of films should Hungarians make? Márkus argued that it must be an entirely Hungarian product that represents the culture of

⁷⁹ Police report published in "Budapesti mozgóképszínházak, 1903-1923," *Filmspirál* 25 (2001), accessed September 19, 2011, <http://www.filmintezet.hu/magyar/filmint/filmspir/25/mozik.htm>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Hungary, and as such it would illustrate the “cultural superiority” of the country, which in his mind was the only “incontestable” and “irresistible” argument in support of Hungarian justice. Therefore, he continued, Hungarian films should not make “awkward” pictures where the harbor of Újpest doubles for the sea, the old district of Buda for Paris, and Váci Street for New York, but it should tell the stories of Hungarian scholars, Hungarian artists, and other Hungarian figures set in Budapest, in the Hortobágy, or at Lake Balaton.⁸¹ Even more to the point was film director Pál Fejős’s 1922 open letter to the minister of the interior. Fejős pleaded to the minister to reconsider the regulations that limited film recording within Budapest by requiring the purchase of special daily permit. This permit was not only expensive, but also demanded a number of bureaucratic steps, such a certificate of good moral standing (*erkölcsi bizonyítvány*) to prove that one was politically and socially reliable. He asked the minister to imagine himself for a moment as a film director. Would he want to deal with all these procedures? Would he want to ask leading actresses to provide evidence of their birthdates? He continued by arguing that the regulations made it impossible to make movies in Hungary:

Your Excellency! In the name of the once so promising Hungarian film industry and film art, I ask Your Excellency to remedy this terrible situation before all the embittered Hungarian directors, actors, cameramen leave for abroad, where the state aids film production, and one is not obliged to complete an obstacle course before each recording. Help us, Your Excellency! There are already too many of us in emigration!⁸²

⁸¹ Márkus László, “Milyen filmet adjunk a külföldnek,” *Filmművészeti Évkönyv*, ed. Andor Lajta (1922), 115-16.

⁸² The open letter was originally published in the magazine *Mozihét* (September, 1922). Reproduced in *Filmspirál* 33 (2004), accessed September 19, 2011, http://www.filmintezet.hu/uj/kiadvanyok/filmspiral/33/a_rendorseg.htm.

His plea apparently fell on deaf ears. In 1924 Fejős too left Hungary. Indeed, the once promising Hungarian film industry was nearly destroyed. There were no seasoned directors and no investment capital. Elsewhere, in the mean time, cinema was fast becoming a profitable industry, and a significant factor not only in entertainment but also in politics.

By the mid-1920s the new regime consolidated its power. With the domestic situation secured, the government began to reassess its relationship to the movie industry. In order to raise much-needed capital in 1923 the Ministry of the Interior, with the 6900/1923 B. M. decree, allowed the return of the displaced Jewish cinema operators by making partnership arrangements lawful.⁸³ Diplomats began to suggest to the government that Hungary needed to make use of the cinema's ability to inform and propagandize. The New York consulate requested pictures and films that would depict Hungarian folklore, fishing and hunting, industry and commerce, as well as parades and festivals. The consul emphasized that the requested material should be free of propagandistic overtones and "accompanying tales."⁸⁴ The Hungarian Consul in Munich, in his memorandum addressed to KÜM, argued that the "movie as an educational and cultural tool is indispensable" and "it alone will be the illustrative source material in the future." As an example, the consul offered the model of German *Kulturfilme* to follow.⁸⁵ The poor state of the domestic film industry was also a topic of Parliamentary debates. József Pakots, one-time screenwriter and Social Democratic member of Parliament contended that the

⁸³ Frey, "National Cinema," 43.

⁸⁴ MOL K67, 2. csomó, 1.tétel (New York Consulate, August 18, 1922).

⁸⁵ MOL K67, 5. csomó, 1.tétel (Munich, October 22, 1924).

once promising movie industry was in ruins because official circles failed to appreciate the “internationally great interest” in film production. Now, he continued, as the government struggles to find ways to portray the achievements of Hungarian culture abroad and to publicize the negative economic and social impact of the Trianon Treaty to those who created it, Hungary must follow other nations’ examples and support film production. Pakots emphasized that the question of the domestic film industry was not only an economic, but a cultural, social, and propagandistic issue.⁸⁶

One of the people who listened was Miklós Kozma, whom Prime Minister Bethlen appointed in 1922 to invigorate the works of MTI. Kozma was politically the right choice. He was a former military officer, supporter of the counterrevolution, and until 1920 captain of national defense. He was also a committed supporter of the White International, an aborted attempt to bring together a German-Austrian-Hungarian-Russian anti-Bolshevik alliance, which, according to historian Mária Ormos, illustrates that early Kozma was a “foreign policy illiterate.”⁸⁷ Even if one accepts Ormos’s judgment on Kozma’s foreign policy abilities, it is unquestionable that he was among the first to realize that the country needed to remodel its news and information service. With the moral and financial support of the KÜM, the East News Reel Agency was created, which served as the first attempt to produce Hungarian-made newsreels for foreign audiences.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ *Nemzetgyűlési Napló*, XXXV. kötet, 1922, 103 (October 21, 1925).

⁸⁷ Ormos, *Kozma*, 74.

⁸⁸ On this agency I could not find further documentation. My only source is the manuscript of Tibor Megyer (Meyer), who was one of the first news cameramen in Hungary. Tibor Megyer, “A magyar filmhíradó és annak fejlődése egy operatőr szemszögéből és saját élményei alapján, 1923-1961” (unpublished manuscript, available at the Magyar Nemzeti Filmarchívum [MNFA— Hungarian National Film Archive], 1975), 1. I thank Márton Kurucz for making this source available to me.

In the next few years three major events signaled the growing interest of government circles. In 1924 the MFI was established with Miklós Kozma and Zoltán Taubinger (who later, as part of the trend that supported more Hungarian-sounding names, changed his surname to Tőrey) at the helm. The business model for the new company was provided by the Italian LUCE. Kozma travelled to Italy to study Italian film production and upon his return wrote a fifty-eight-page study on his experiences. Even more telling was his private letter to András Hóry, Hungarian ambassador in Rome, in which he told his friend that he had also prepared a confidential “aide-memoire” to the Cabinet, in which he suggested that the reorganization of the country’s film industry should be based on the Italian model in its entirety, while pointing out some of the differences between the situation of the two nations. He also told his friend that the new film law would be based on his recommendations, but this information was too sensitive and could not be leaked to the press under any circumstances.⁸⁹ The new company’s main profile, similarly to LUCE, was propaganda, documentary, and newsreel production, and as such it enjoyed the financial support of KÜM. Accordingly, the new company received 60,000 pengő (c. \$141,500) from KÜM.⁹⁰ The government became not only a major shareholder in the new company, but also its best customer. Shortly after its establishment the MFI took over newsreel production and produced the *Magyar Híradó* (*Hungarian News*).

Prime Minister István Bethlen’s 6292/1925 decree established the Filmipari Alap (Film Industry Fund) in order to support and regulate film production and distribution.

⁸⁹ Quoted in István Molnár, “Film és államhatalom Magyarországon, 1900-1945” (unpublished manuscript, 1972), 87-8. Available at the MNFA Library, Ref. Ké 213/1

⁹⁰ Ormos, *Kozma*, 103.

Among the board of directors one could find representatives of KÜM, VKM, and the Ministry of Interior. In order to finance home-grown film production (and the operation of the Film Industry Fund) the government levied a new tax on movies based on their length. Hungarian-made movies received differential treatment, and were very often were entirely exempted from the tax.⁹¹

The third episode on the road to recovery was the creation of Hunnia Film in 1928. One of Hungary's largest film studios, the Corvin, went bankrupt in 1925. The Film Industry Fund bought out the studio and started to modernize it. The goal of the 810,000 pengő (c. \$1,910,400) investment was to resurrect domestic film production. While nominally independent, in reality the new company was very much under government control. János Bingert, a former police captain and employee of the Ministry of Interior, became the director of Hunnia.⁹² Hunnia was also the largest beneficiary of the Film Industry Fund for years to come. The mandate of Hunnia was clear. In accordance with the unofficial division of labor, while MFI was responsible for the production of *Kulturfilme*, documentaries, and newsreels, while Hunnia was to produce Hungarian-made feature films.

While the government attained a degree of control over the film industry, it did not coordinate and control its activities in same way that the Soviets, and later the Nazis, did.⁹³ The timing of growing government interest, however, was not an accidental. Just as

⁹¹ Frey, "National Cinema," 45-46.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹³ On the government role in Nazi and Soviet cinematic production, see Siegfried Kracauer, *From Cagliari to Hitler: a Psychological History of German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947); Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); David

academia and tourism, the film industry also benefitted from the fact that by 1927 Hungary had broken out of its postwar isolation. Because the Bethlen administration's more active foreign policy that sought to gain support for the revision of the treaty, the country's foreign image became important. The film screen, which provided "an unrivalled method of propaganda," to quote British writer W. Somerset Maugham, was not to be left out from the arsenal of Hungarian cultural diplomacy.⁹⁴

Celluloid Résumés—the role of *Kulturfilme* and Newsreels

A confidential memorandum written by Zoltán Gerevich, a KÜM ministerial advisor, called upon all Foreign Ministry outposts to pay special attention to those foreign movies that were "so-called Hungarian or Hungarian-related films." He referred to some of the movies that included Hungarian related elements such as raffish Hungarian hussars, which painted a negative picture of Hungary. In order to avoid these sorts of cinematic representations, which, according to Gerevich, "were not only hurtful, but downright offensive," all KÜM employees were ordered to use both official and unofficial avenues to remedy the situation.⁹⁵

Changing the "offensive" image of Hungary abroad required new tools.

Censorship of course only worked in the domestic market. To counter negative film

Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001); and Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁹⁴ W. Somerset Maugham, "On Writings for the Films," *The North American Review* 213, no. 786 (May, 1921): 670.

⁹⁵ MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (May 5, 1930).

images the government had to find a film genre that could neutralize harmful characterizations of the country, but do this without being too propagandistic. The choices were *Kulturfilme* and newsreels. The former was developed by the German UFA (*Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft*) in the mid-1920s to illustrate the achievements of past and present German culture and life.⁹⁶ The question of what the national image should look like on the screen divided Hungary's cultural, film, and political elite.

In the beginning of cinema most people believed that the new art form would be universal and not national. However, by the 1930s—especially with the introduction of the “talkie”—the national film became an issue of great importance. In the case of Hungary the debate was centered on the feature films' cinematic representation of Hungarianness. On one side, as in the case of tourism, stood those who imagined Hungary as a progressive, modern, and urbanizing nation. The stories of these movies were little different from those of Hollywood, with the modern Budapest middle-class providing the subject matter. Movies, such as *Hyppolit a lakáj* (*Hyppolit the Butler*), *Meseautó* (*Dream Car*), or *Havi 200 fix* (*200 a Month Salary*) and similar films “glamorized bourgeois values and luxury, technological and economic advance, and urban Budapest.”⁹⁷ These films, largely created by returning Hungarian Jews, painted a picture of Hungary as a progressive country, where people dancing the foxtrot and enjoying all that modern life had to offer.⁹⁸ On the other side, were the movies that

⁹⁶ David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 7.

⁹⁷ David S. Frey, “Aristocrats, Gypsies, and Cowboys All: Film Stereotypes and Hungarian National Identity in the 1930s,” *Nationality Papers* 30, No.3 (2002): 388.

⁹⁸ Foxtrot was danced in the 1936 movie *Havi 200 Fix* in a club that very much reminding me for the Arizona Club mentioned in the previous chapter.

situated Hungarianness in the recent past, in the stories of the countryside, and their subject-matter was centered on the peasants, aristocrats, and the hussars. For the non-Jewish film elite and for conservative nationals these images symbolized the true essence of Hungary.⁹⁹ Ultranationalist sentiment, anti-Semitism, and the influence of the German film industry were not the only reasons behind this debate. As David Frey's study points out, economic considerations too played a large role. The movie-going public abroad was not interested in the same Hollywood-type (and Weimar Germany) middle-class pictures, for "debonair aristocrats, gypsy-music-singing peasants, cowboys on the Puszta plain, gentry nationalists—these were the images they knew and associated with Hungary."¹⁰⁰ It was an argument that Pál Fejős made upon his return to Europe and Hungary. In the Nyugat conference on film he argued that Hungarian cinema cannot compete with Hollywood. Instead, it needed to provide "exotica," which might be "kitsch" (*gicc*s), but would open the American market to Hungarian films.¹⁰¹ In the same time, as Hungary recovered from the Great depression, the domestic film market changed. As peasants and workers became movie-viewers, studios started to make movies for domestic consumption, where the heroes and heroines were those that the new audience easily associated with: the nineteenth century figures of hussars, noblemen, and the peasants of the countryside.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ For more on this see Anna Manchin, "Interwar Hungarian Entertainment Films and the Reinvention of Rural Modernity," *Rural History* 21, no. 2 (2010): 195-212.

¹⁰⁰ Frey, "Aristocrats, Gypsies, and Cowboys All," 390.

¹⁰¹ "Az Amerikai fimről—Nyugat konferencia," *Nyugat* 24 (1932), accessed: March 27, 2012, <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/00548/17146.htm>.

¹⁰² Frey, "Aristocrats, Gypsies, and Cowboys All," 390.

Kulturfilme and newsreels, unlike feature-films, were not primarily market-oriented products. They were not market-oriented in the sense that their function was not to make profit, but to inform the audience, to present the country in the best possible light. As a result, interwar Hungarian *Kulturfilm* was a curious mixture of old and new, a combination of traditional and modern, and the fusion of country and city. The first attempt to produce such a picture especially for foreign audiences was the 1928 film *Hungária*. This was produced by MFI and was paid for by the KÜM. The Foreign Ministry received 200,000 pengő (c. \$471,700) from the state budget (152/res.1927) for “foreign film propaganda.”¹⁰³ According to one of the cameramen, Tibor Megyer, the production required significant investment (cameras, copy editor, labeling apparatus, etc.).¹⁰⁴ Five cameramen worked in rotation under the supervision of a KÜM employee, Dr. Ernő Walter. In the end they shot 10,000 meters of raw footage, which they cut by careful editing to 1800-2200 meters.¹⁰⁵ The end-product was the 1928 silent *Hungária*, an “Ode to the Remaining Hungarian Lands,” in eight acts.

The first scene leaves little to the imagination, for it plainly presents the grievances of post-Trianon Hungary. In line with the official stance on the issue—dictated by Prime Minister István Bethlen and the KÜM—the issue of revision is the central theme of the first act. The accompanying subtitle reads as follows:

There was little attention paid to the Hungarians by the world. From under the shadows of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy it only rarely burst through the Hungarian name. Yet it [Hungary] has been living in the heart of Europe for a thousand years. For one thousand years it has been standing guard on the peak of

¹⁰³ MOL K66, 164. csomó. Appendix to the 32.028/1928/Sajtó/H (March 19, 1928).

¹⁰⁴ Megyer Manuscript, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

the Carpathians, so that behind it the West could build in peace. After one thousand years spent safeguarding the cross [now] the cross of Trianon was placed on its shoulders. This cross split this living organism into five parts. [Here a picture shows the map of the historical Hungarian Kingdom. The new borders are drawn in, and then the picture breaks into pieces.] The remaining rump, however, amazingly, through heroic efforts, under the leadership of noble Admiral Miklós Horthy [“vitéz nagybányai Horthy Miklós” in the original] continues to function, in order to be worthy of the traditions of the last one thousand years. [Image shows Horthy walking out of the palace and looking into the camera]

The country was represented as the bastion of the West against the invading hordes. This “Eastern Bastion of the West” mentality was, as previous chapters illustrated, was one of the main tropes of Hungarian self-understanding. It was the country’s sacrifice that made it possible for the now ungrateful West to grow and progress. Yet, even after the “unjust” treaty, Hungary continues to thrive. In the next scene the audience sees Count Albert Apponyi (who represented Hungary at the Paris Treaty negotiations) and Prime Minister Bethlen as they visit the countryside. As the picture continues to roll, one cannot help but see it as a celluloid résumé whereby all that is positive or noteworthy is being illustrated: the Hungarian countryside with its picturesque scenery, its agriculture, its wine production (with special emphasis on Tokaj), its folklore and village festivals, sites of its past with centuries-old castles, churches, and provincial centers. Here and there the picture and the supplementary captioning make reference to the consequences of Trianon for Hungary’s waterways or emphasize the fact that only the city of Sopron received the right to decide its future by plebiscite. Scenes depicting the state of Hungarian heavy industry and mining continue, before coming to Budapest. The city comes to life with its cultural and tourist sites, and of course, as the “world’s number one spa-city.” A few illustrated pictures of Lillafüred are followed by images of Lake Balaton. After paying homage to the role of education, the audience is introduced to the Hungarian Levente

Association (mandatory youth organization) and learns about the Hungarian triumphs in the Olympic Games and other sporting events. The closing images depict the St. Stephen's Day celebrations and the festive annual procession of the Holy Right Arm (the relic of St. Stephen).¹⁰⁶

Hungária (1928) received extraordinarily positive media coverage at home. Even before its release, the *Magyar Filmkurir* stated that at last the film joined the “Hungarian cause,” which was the revision of Trianon, and through this sort of propaganda Hungary would acquire new friends. “For it was our national disaster,” continued the piece, “that until now they [foreigners] did not know us, because if they could have known us, if they had been aware that here lives a highly cultured nation, which should have never been broken apart or balkanized, for it is a sin, then Trianon would not stand now as the darkest page of Hungarian history.”¹⁰⁷ The exclusive domestic premiere of the picture was on August 23, 1927, at the Royal Apolló Theater. The audience included Hungarian and foreign dignitaries, among them Kuno Klebelsberg and Miklós Kozma. All the major newspapers reported on the event and all—even the Left-leaning *Népszava*—gave it nothing but accolades. Nearly all the papers pointed out that the film was not made for domestic audience. Instead, they continued, the purpose was to inform the rest of the world about the nation. To that end, the government made all possible steps to distribute the film in Europe and America.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Description based on a 1977 line-by-line description of the movie. MNFA, TÖ 523.

¹⁰⁷ “Magyarország propagandája filmen—Hungária,” *Magyar Filmkurir*, October 30, 1927, 1.

¹⁰⁸ “Nagy sikert aratott a bemutatón a Hungária c. propaganda-film,” *Nemzeti Újság*, August 24, 1929, 22. Other newspapers *Magyarság*, *A Mai Nap*, *Népszava*, *8 Órai Újság*, and the *Pesti Hírlap* all covered the event.

KÜM spearheaded the foreign distribution of *Hungária* (1928). The film was immediately furnished with English, French, and German language captions. The embassies and consulates in London, Washington DC, New York, Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Berlin, and Munich received copies and the authorization to distribute them in accordance with their best judgment.¹⁰⁹ However, the Great Powers were not the only targets. The KÜM paid for Italian and Spanish language copies (a free screening of the latter was held at the 1929 Barcelona World's Fair).¹¹⁰ At the request of the Hungarian Consulate in Helsinki the KÜM also financed the production of Finnish, Swedish, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian-language copies. There were even discussions about an Esperanto version of the film.¹¹¹ KÜM employees organized screenings in schools, in cultural institutions, as well as at special events. One such special event for example, took place, on February 14, 1930, at the *Svensk-Ungerska Sällskapet* in Stockholm. The matiné screening began with a speech by vice consul Sándor Kiss. He made clear the purpose of the program:

A few days ago I was asked by somebody whether this Hungarian film, which we will show you today, means that we want to make propaganda—yes or no. Well, to such a question the usual answer of a diplomate [sic] would have been an evasive one. But I went right into the matter and answered with plain yes. Yes, we mean propaganda by it. But all of us, you as well as I, are trying to make propaganda if we are abroad. We do try to make our country known to give the best possible idea of our nation and of our country to all those foreigners whom

¹⁰⁹ MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (#30.330).

¹¹⁰ MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (June 6, 1929).

¹¹¹ MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (December 19, 1929) and MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (April 8, 1930).

we meet. And anyone who does not think and act like this is not worthy of being called a son of his country!¹¹²

The program, which in addition to the film included Hungarian music, was a success. The audience, including diplomats, journalists, and even members of the royal family, responded to the film with enthusiasm. The local newspaper, *Stockholm Dagblad*, reported that indeed the “program was in service of propaganda, but it was a really appealing, elegant, and serene propaganda.”¹¹³

Despite the seeming success of *Hungária* (1928), the film, and with it the Hungarian cultural diplomatic campaign, faced a number of problems. First, there was the issue of competition. Other East and East Central European countries too recognized the utility of film. Contemporary newspapers reported that Polish and Czechoslovak movies made inroads into European markets, especially that of France.¹¹⁴ It was also reported that the “grand Czech national film,” *Saint Wenceslas*, received one million crowns from the government.¹¹⁵ The Hungarian news reports were correct. Victor Velek’s outstanding study—which was published, tellingly, in 2010 to commemorate the September 28 Czech National Day—illustrates that after early financial problems the Czechoslovak government stepped up and financed the making of *Saint Wenceslas*. The silent movie was a historical epic to commemorate the thousand-year anniversary of the martyrdom of Duke Wenceslas, “the highest symbol of Czech[oslovak] statehood and

¹¹² MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (February 14, 1929). Original is in English.

¹¹³ Ibid. Original Hungarian translation of the Swedish article.

¹¹⁴ “És mi mit exportálunk?” *Magyar Filmkurir*, January 20, 1929, 6.

¹¹⁵ “Nemzeti film készül egymillió állami támogatással,” *Magyar Filmkurir*, January 5, 1930, 6.

personification of humane values.”¹¹⁶ Romania, Hungary’s other competitor on the international stage, also utilized cinema to shape foreign public opinion. The Romanian Ministry of National Propaganda (1927-1936) took charge of documentary film production. It hired domestic and foreign companies and professionals. Under its aegis, writes Romanian film historian Manuela Cernat, the Romania Film company released the 1929 *Today’s Romania—Picturesque Romania (Romania Azi—Romania Pittoreasca)*.¹¹⁷ The 3200 meter film, directed by Iosif Bertok, similarly to *Hungária* (1928), illustrated Romania’s past and present, its tourist sites, its industry and agriculture, and the capital Bucharest. The film premiered on November 29, 1929, in the Bucharest National Theater before beginning an eight year domestic and foreign tour.¹¹⁸

The second great challenge was the introduction of sound-film or “talkies.” On October 6, 1927, Warner Bros. released the first true talkie, *The Jazz Singer* starring Al Jolson. Another Al Jolson feature, *The Singing Fool*, was the first talkie shown in Hungary on September 29, 1929. It was not until 1931 that the first Hungarian-made talkie premiered, *A kék bálvány (The Blue Idol)*. Despite high expectations the movie was not a commercial success. However, *Hyppolit a lakáj (Hyppolit the Butler)* in the same year was a great hit with the Hungarian movie-going audiences.¹¹⁹ At the same time the

¹¹⁶ Victor Velek, *Saint Wenceslas: the First Czechoslovak Historical Epic Film*, trans. Radek Blaheta (Prague: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2010), accessed: September 30, 2011, http://www.vlada.cz/assets/tema/SvVaclavBooklet-verze05-_anglicka_.pdf. The film premiered on April 19, 1930. An earlier and different version of the film, *Saint Wenceslas Relics (Svatováclavské památky)* premiered on November 28, 1928.

¹¹⁷ Manuela Cernat, *A Concise History of the Romanian Film*, trans. Andrei Bantas (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982), 22.

¹¹⁸ Information available on the Romanian website Cinemagia, accessed October 4, 2011, <http://www.cinemagia.ro/filme/romania-azi-30288/>.

¹¹⁹ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, 72-77.

KÜM received a number of reports stating that *Hungária* (1928), while a success, could no longer accomplish its objectives due to the triumph of sound-film. The MFI offered to make a new, sound-version of *Hungária*.¹²⁰ The new film was to be one of the crowning achievements of Hungarian cultural diplomacy.

Making a talkie required a great deal of money. However, the Great Depression left the country's treasury in a precarious situation, meaning that the government alone could not finance the remaking of the movie. The original estimate called for 40,000 pengő (c. \$94,340), which would not include the required number of prints. The KÜM appealed to various sources. In the end the movie was paid for by contributions from governmental and semigovernmental circles and the leading sections of Hungarian industrial life (the latter included two of the greatest Jewish industrial barons, Manfréd Weiss and Leó Goldberger):

KÜM	10,000 pengő
MÁV (Hungarian State Railway)	10,000 pengő
Budapest Székesfőváros (Budapest Metropolis)	10,000 pengő
Goldberger Textile Works.....	5,000 pengő
Manfréd Weiss Works	5,000 pengő
United Incandescent Lamp and Electrics Company	5,000 pengő
Hungarian Rubber Ware Factory	5,000 pengő
Szent Lukács Gyógyfürdő (St. Lukács Thermal Baths)	1,000 pengő

¹²⁰ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (June 5, 1932); MOL K66, 218. csomó III-6/c (New York, October 11, 1932); and MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (June 3, 1933).

Total 51,000 pengő ¹²¹

The result of these efforts was the 1934 version of *Hungária*.¹²² The final cost of the 1522 meter long film was 42,000 pengő (c. \$99,056). The MFI was committed to making *Hungária* (1934) a quality product. The art direction was the work of László Kandó, a painter; the accompanying music was the work of Ernő Dohnányi and Sándor László; and the camerawork was done by István Somkúti.

The film starts out with a modeling clay-made map of historical Hungary, being cut up with a bayonet. Once again the opening caption summarizes the Hungarian position regarding the validity of the Trianon Treaty: “The people of this cruelly and imprudently mutilated country persistently strive to bring forth a future that is worthy of its grand past. Its rich culture presented much to the European civilization, but it also faithfully guards the ancient genuineness of its eastern origin.” The second sentence provided the guiding principle of the selection, which aimed to combine the traditional and modern elements of Hungary to present them as equally essential components of the Hungarian character. The opening scene takes the audience to the Austro-Hungarian border village of Horvátjárfalu.¹²³ Here, a well-situated border guard politely checks the incoming German-speaking tourists’ passports and informs them (in German) about the length and the condition (“200 km on a very good highway”) of the road to Budapest. The next scenes suggest alternative ways to reach Budapest, by a modern train or by a

¹²¹ MOL K66, 378. csomó III-6/c (April 6, 1934).

¹²² In Zsolt Kőhádi’s otherwise excellent study, he misidentifies the date of release. It was not released in 1931. See Zsolt Kőhádi, “A magyar film hangot keres, 1931-1938,” *Filmspirál* 2, no. 1 (1996): 78.

¹²³ Today’s Jarovce, near Bratislava. Ironically enough this is one of the three settlements ceded to Czechoslovakia after the conclusion of the Second World War.

ship on the Danube. The Budapest images aim to illustrate the metropolitan quality of the city, which harmoniously coexists with its historical sites. The “world’s first spa city” is emphasized through lively pictures of thermal baths and the wave-pool of the Hotel Gellért. Once again, sport motifs are front and center as the audience learns about the Hungarian accomplishments in the Olympic Games, water polo, rowing, track and field events, soccer, tennis, boxing, gymnastics, fencing and the somewhat less “Hungarian” sports of water-skiing and polo. A lengthy part of the film shows agricultural production, which utilizes both “ancient and modern” methods. The scenes of harvest festivals—with the indispensable Gypsy violinist and the *csárdás*—add an exotic look to traditional village life. It is interesting, and somewhat perplexing, that the second sound bite of the movie depicts the unintelligible sound (“pi-pi”) that a man makes while calling the household’s turkeys. As the film continues the audience is told that while Hungary is an agricultural country, its industry has also achieved “European significance.” To illustrate this point (and to live up the needs of the sponsors), the Manfred Weiss Works and the Goldberger Textile Works are shown in great detail.

After these scenes of modernity the audience is transported to the serene countryside of the Great Plains where herds of horses, cattle, and the like roam free. The provincial cityscapes of Szeged, Debrecen, Veszpém, Pécs, and Sopron appear before the film reaches Lake Balaton and its “capital,” Keszthely. Here once again the audience can see the mixture of old (the medieval abbey of Tihany) and new (motorboats on the lake). The film’s last scene offers a clearly political message—sort of bookending the picture as a whole. The caption reads as follows: “The Hungarian nation’s devout struggle—which seeks life, peace, culture, and a better future—trusting in God and the youth of Hungary,

is led by the re-vivifier of the maimed country, Miklós Horthy.” The Regent is shown with the palace guards, in the St. Stephen’s Day procession, while surveying the troops at the Fourth International World Scout Jamboree (1933) held in Gödöllő, Hungary. During the last images the Hungarian National Anthem serves as the background music. The last frame of the film slowly zooms in on a campfire surrounded by youth. The last sound heard is their shout: “*Hajrá!*”(Let’s go!).¹²⁴

The film was less confrontational in its tone than was its 1928 counterpart. With the clear exceptions of the beginning and the end, there was no obvious depiction of irredentism. There were no irredentist statues, no discussion of the creek, which during the peace negotiations was supposedly introduced as a navigable river, nor is there any mention of plebiscites. Secondly, Horthy is the only political figure pictured. Bethlen (who was no longer prime minister, although he remained influential) and Count Apponyi (who died in 1933) do not appear in the 1934 version. The film’s main goal was to provide an informative and enlightening picture of Hungary. It was also designed to gain notice for Hungary as a tourist destination. To this end, the film harmoniously combines the old and the new. The film was to provide evidence of Hungary’s uniqueness that rooted in its traditional countryside. The pictures of the Puszta and its people, underlined with carefully selected folk music served this purpose. On the other hand, the film also sought to dismiss stereotypical representations of Hungary. Hungary was unique not backward. To further this point the modern scenes of industry and cosmopolitan Budapest were accompanied with modern music selected by Ernő

¹²⁴ The above description is based on a copy of the original movie. I would like to express my gratitude to the director of the MNFA, Vera Gyürey, for allowing me to copy the film and to Attila Pók for facilitating this exchange.

Dohnányi. However, the end goal of the picture was the same: to create a positive image of Hungary abroad in order to gain support for the country's revisionist goals.

The film premiered in March 1934 at the Royal Apolló. The audience included Miklós Horthy, Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kálmán Kánya, and two of Hungary's future Prime Ministers, Béla Imrédy and Kálmán Darányi. The domestic press praised the film and one paper even argued that *Hungária* (1934) was a testament to Hungary's willingness to live, to create, and to work despite Trianon.¹²⁵ In addition to the Hungarian version, three German, four French, one Italian, and two English versions were soon made.¹²⁶ The contract between the KÜM and the MFI (represented by Baron Lajos Villani and Zoltán Taubinger respectively) allocated 60 percent of any profits to the Foreign Ministry and 40 percent to the film studio. The MFI and the KÜM decided that the latter was to be responsible for distribution in Germany, France, Switzerland, the United States, Scandinavia, and South America.¹²⁷

Hungária (1934) travelled far and with great success. The KÜM, wherever possible, made an attempt to sell the distribution rights. Both commercial and political considerations led to this decision. For example, Villani negotiated a contact with the French Leo Film Company that allowed the distribution of *Hungária* (1934) in France and its colonies, Holland and the Dutch colonies, Belgium and the Belgian colonies, as well as in Luxemburg. The Hungarian foreign representative institutions and agencies,

¹²⁵ "Hangos Hungária," *Filmkultura*, April 1, 1934, 5.

¹²⁶ MOL K66, 378. csomó III-6/c (April 6, 1934).

¹²⁷ MOL K66, 240. Csomó III-6/c (March 23, 1934).

however, retained the right to screen the movie at special showings, free of charge.¹²⁸ Similar negotiations were carried out with Gaumont-British Pictures in the UK, LUCE in Italy, and the UFA in Germany.¹²⁹ The latter allowed *Hungária* (1934) to be screened in all UFA cinemas and a shorter version to be sent with all UFA made movies to all German cinemas—albeit in exchange for free copies.¹³⁰ In order to avoid a “propaganda-smell,” the film was often screened under the sponsorship of various friendship societies that were not directly connected with governmental institutions. For example, in Italy the film premiered in Rome on April 26, 1934, under the aegis of the Amici dell’ Ungheria (Friends of Hungary) society.¹³¹ Similarly, in Paris the film premiered under the egis of an ad-hoc society (Comité des Amitiés Franco-Hongroises), created by the embassy staff for this occasion. Here, in order to avoid any possible charge of propaganda, the opening scene—with the bayonet slicing up the map—was cut and a French publicist was hired to introduce the film.¹³² According to the embassy report, the first two showings were a “smash hit” (“*bomba siker*”). The KÜM also gave plenty of rope to the embassies to edit the film to the best of their judgment (for example, to cut the length of the industry scene or order additional captioning).¹³³ In New York the film premiered on board the S.S. Hamburg. The event was sponsored by the American-Hungarian Academy of Art and a

¹²⁸ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (July 25, 1934).

¹²⁹ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (April 12, 1934).

¹³⁰ MOL K66, 265. csomó III-6/c (March 22, 1935). This document is about the negotiations. I could not locate the final contract.

¹³¹ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (May 5, 1934).

¹³² MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (Paris, July 6, 1934).

¹³³ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (Paris, July 12, 1934).

New York Evening Post journalist was invited to make the opening remarks.¹³⁴ By 1937 eighteen Hungarian embassies, consulates, and the like owned at least one copy of the film, from Washington D.C., through Buenos Aires, to Teheran.¹³⁵ *Hungária* (1934) was also successfully screened in Ankara, Algiers, and São Paulo. During 1937 in northern Brazil alone the film was screened in twenty-four cities on forty different occasions.¹³⁶

It is difficult to gauge the success of *Hungária* (1934) internationally. However, the main point, one could argue, is that the government believed that the film was a great success. Embassy reports show that the film was often praised for its artistic direction and musical score. The international print media also reported on the picture. According to one report, the screening of the film was so successful in Holland, for example, that even *Het Volk* (which was a publication of Dutch Social Democrats—traditionally opposed to Hungarian political and revisionist aims) praised the film as “excellent propaganda about an interesting country.” Moreover, the report emphasized, it also brought the question of Trianon to the forefront (it illustrated this with a map) and argued that the minority question was obviously still not remedied.¹³⁷ If the goal was to become visible on the international stage than one can certainly say that the *Hungária* movies did just that.

Prompted by the accomplishments of these films the government continued to finance future *Kulturfilme* to promote Hungary abroad. The subject matter of these films

¹³⁴ MOL K66, 240. csomó III 6/c (p. 525 and 559).

¹³⁵ MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (p.33-4).

¹³⁶ MOL K66, 265. csomó III-6/c (Rio de Janeiro, November 10, 1937).

¹³⁷ Original Hungarian translation of the Dutch article, part of the 1600/1934 report. MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (The Hague, June 7, 1934). See also, Frey “National Cinema,” 192.

continued to promote Hungary as tourist destination (both modern Budapest and the serene countryside), introduced the accomplishments of Hungarian horticulture, and promoted the St. Stephen myth. The Ministry of Trade and Commerce, the KÜM, and other governmental and semigovernmental organizations financed the production of *Hallali* (French word for horn that signals the end of the hunt]; *Budapest Fürdőváros* (*Spa City Budapest*); *Magyar falu* (*Hungarian Village*); *A magyar falu mosolya* (*The Smile of the Hungarian Village*); *A magyar nép derüje* (*The Radiance s of the Hungarian Folk*); *A magyar falu művészete* (*Art of the Hungarian Village*); *Magyar ló* (*Hungarian Horse*); *Magyar bor* (*Hungarian Wine*); *Magyar gyümölcs* (*Hungarian Fruit*); *Vadászat Magyarországon* (*Hunting in Hungary*); *Szent István, a magyarok első királya* (*St. Stephen, the First King of the Hungarians*); and a number of others introducing Hungarian swine, cattle, and poultry husbandry. These films were screened world-wide, including at world's fairs and film festivals, where they received a number of awards and other certificates of merit.¹³⁸ A German-language copy of the *Vadászat Magyarországon* found its way to Herman Göring, as a personal gift for his support of the Hungarian Hunting Exhibit in Berlin.¹³⁹

The Hungarian government circles' and the film elite's continuing support of the *Kulturfilme* was not a uniquely Hungarian trend. Reading through government correspondence and media sources it becomes clear that many nations in Europe (and beyond) made use of the genre. For example, during the Seventh Venice Biennale in 1939 thirteen nations—from Hungary to South Africa— exhibited no fewer than fifty-six

¹³⁸ "Kulturfilm," *Magyar Film*, February 18, 1939, 15.

¹³⁹ MOL K66, 378. csomó III-6/c (February 26, 1938).

Kulturfilme.¹⁴⁰ Romania by this time had established its National Cinema Office (1936) with the mandate to produce documentaries and newsreels.¹⁴¹ Two of their *Kulturfilme*, *Bukovine, pays des monastères* and *Au pays des “Motz”*; were screened at Venice—to the great irritation of the Hungarian government. The latter, *Au pays des “Motz”* or *Țara Moșilor* in Romanian, was directed by the “father of the Romanian cinema,” Paul Călinescu, who won the top honor in the *Kulturfilm* category.¹⁴² The film represented the life of the Moși people, inhabitants of the northwest Transylvanian Apușeni Mountains, a region that a year later—under the provisions of the Second Vienna Award became part of Hungary. In light of the significant growth in the Romanian movie industry (and its success at Venice), which in the mind of the KÜM presented a danger to Hungarian interests, Baron Villáni ordered the Bucharest embassy to pay special attention to it. In case of any anti-Magyar sentiment the embassy was to report to the KÜM, so that Villáni, using international agreements and friendly relations, could limit or ask to censor those Romanian films’ screening abroad.¹⁴³ To be sure, the 1930s saw a rise in the importance of *Kulturfilme*. The genre became an accepted, once more even preferred tool of cultural diplomacy. Yet it was not the only type of cinematic production that attracted the attention of the governments.

¹⁴⁰ “A VII. velencei Nemzetközi filmversenyen bemutatott játékfilmek és kultúrfilmek jegyzéke,” *Magyar Film*, September 30, 1939, 5-6.

¹⁴¹ Cernat, *A Concise History of the Romanian Film*, 34.

¹⁴² “Paul Calinescu; Father of Romanian Cinema,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 2000, Obituaries, accessed October 11, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/mar/28/news/mn-13552>

¹⁴³ MOL K66, 420. csomó III-6/c (September 6, 1939).

As mentioned earlier, the *Magyar Híradó* was the product of MFI from 1924 onward. As time went on newsreel production became the monopoly of MFI. Even though the company did not receive further direct financial support from the government—nothing from the budget of the Film Fund—it remained a major shareholder in the company. In the beginning, the *Magyar Híradó* was a rather primitive enterprise. It had only two cameramen and hardly any foreign connections. The *Híradó* was slow and remained silent, which created a great deal of tension with cinema owners. According to Tibor Megyer's manuscript, it was only in 1929 that he was sent to England to study the Fox Movietone sound-system.¹⁴⁴ In 1930 there was another milestone in the development of the Hungarian newsreel, when Fox Movietone News filmed a sound report with Miklós Horthy. The report included a speech from the Regent (both in Hungarian and English) that was screened around the world.¹⁴⁵ By the spring of 1931 the MFI had purchased the German Tobis-Klang system, which was fitted into a car, allowed to create outside reports. (Later it was exchanged for sound system made by the Hungarian engineer Károly Pulváry, which offset the cost considerably). The first Hungarian made sound newsreel premiered in September 1931. The news changed its name to *Magyar Világhíradó* (MV—*Hungarian World News*), signaling the achievement and the future aspirations of the Hungarian news.

MV was both a business and a political venture. In order to make the MV relevant and commercially successful the MFI signed newsreel exchanges with a number of foreign news agencies. Among the first were the French *Éclair-Journal*, the German

¹⁴⁴ Megyer Manuscript, 4.

¹⁴⁵ "Nagybányai vitéz Horthy Miklós, Magyarország kormányzója magyarul és angolul megszólalt a hangosfilmen," *Filmkultura*, January 1, 1930, 1-2.

UFA-Tonwoche, the Austrian Selenophon, and the British Gaumont. What was to be included in the news, what was to be received from and sent abroad was decided during the weekly executive committee meetings. The government remained visible in the decision-making process, but the selection was not solely directed by politics. Testimony to this point is the personnel on this executive board. For example, during the July 27, 1933 executive meeting the MFI was represented by Miklós Kozma and Zoltán Taubinger, the KÜM was represented by Baron Lajos Villáni, while the VKM was represented by Lóránd Horváth.¹⁴⁶

What would a typical MV include in 1933? The 240 meters long MV #492 contained the following reports: 1) “Discount Cruises to Vienna;” 2) “Passion Plays in Budaörs” (Hungary); 3) “World’s Scout Jamboree at Gödöllő (Hungary);” 4) “Hungarian Triumphs in London” (track and field), 5) “July 14th in France” (from *Éclair-Journal*); 6) “[Wiley] Post’s Flight around the World” (from UFA-Tonwoche); and 7) “French National Sailing Championship” (from *Éclair-Journal*). It was also decided that newsreels containing pictures of the World Jamboree, of Hungarian female athletes, and of the passion plays were allowed to be sent abroad.¹⁴⁷ As one can see, the news was informative, but not entirely apolitical. The selection of news sent abroad suggests that the MFI promoted the country’s culture in accordance with some of Hungarian cultural diplomacy’s main themes that publicized the country’s international status and its commitment to Christianity.

¹⁴⁶ MFI Executive Committee Meeting on July 27, 1933. (July 27, 1933). (Henceforth MFI Meeting)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

However, at times MV had to take a more direct political stance. For example, during the Marseilles crisis, in the same way as the radio did with its international broadcast, MV decided to produce a 250 meter long special report on the plight of the Hungarian refugees. The MFI produced twenty-eight copies and using its connections to various foreign news services the report was distributed in Germany, Austria, France, Italy, the UK, Poland, and the United States.¹⁴⁸ By special envoy they also sent a copy to Geneva (where the League of Nations was discussing the charges against Hungary). According to the MFI minutes, the KÜM and the Hungarian delegation to Geneva expressed their appreciation for the specially-made film, for it was “seriously useful.”¹⁴⁹

In order to increase the influence of the MV, the MFI also continued to seek new contacts in the international news community. By 1936 the MFI sought to find a way to distribute its MV in the neighboring countries. The transaction was designed as *quid pro quo* trade without monetary exchange. From the discussion surrounding the deals, it is clear that both the KÜM and the MFI realized the potential influence of MV on the ethnic Hungarians living in the successor states. The first contact was the Prague-based Elekta-Journal (later with the also Prague-based Aktualita). It was soon followed by an agreement with the Zagreb-based Svetolon.¹⁵⁰ In 1937 negotiations were also started with

¹⁴⁸ MFI Meeting on December 13, 1934. MOL K66, 335. csomó III-6/c/1 (December 13, 1934).

¹⁴⁹ MFI Meeting on December 20, 1934. MOL K66, 335. csomó III-6/c/1 (December 20, 1934). According to Villáni's report, the special was not shown in Italy and Germany, nor did the Polish news use it. On the other hand, according to the same report, it was screened “with great success in the UK and the United States.” See MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (April 16, 1935).

¹⁵⁰ MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (February 4, 1937).

the Romanian ONT News, which was under the supervision of Romanian government circles.¹⁵¹

The relationship between the MFI and the KÜM was quite peculiar and not without difficulties. As mentioned earlier, the KÜM owned 40 percent of MFI's shares and the government remained the company's main (one could say sole) customer. However, during 1935-36 Kozma became the minister of interior and successfully lobbied to change the division of labor that had hitherto existed between Hunnia and MFI (feature films vs. *Kulturfilme* and news). While the MFI indeed embarked on the production of feature films, it did not receive money from the Film Fund. The KÜM also began to apply more and more pressure on the MFI with regard to its programming, which until then was based on reciprocation with other countries and remained rather civil. Villáni expressed the wishes of the KÜM that the MFI should make an effort to place political news in Czechoslovakia through its connections with Elekta-Journal. The polite, but firmly negative, answer from the MFI pointed out that in 1936 Elekta had to date received and screened fifteen Hungarian- related reports, while MV only screened four Czechoslovak-related ones. The letter continued that unwanted pressure on the Czechoslovak partner would not only jeopardize the results achieved to date, but it would destroy the relationship.¹⁵² At the same time the KÜM also instructed its representative in Prague to pay extra attention to the subject-matter of the Czechoslovak news. There is little to no documentation on the actual results of this exchange, but one document testifies that a report about the 1937 Italian royal and governmental visit to Budapest

¹⁵¹ MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (October 23, 1937).

¹⁵² MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (December 6, 1936).

indeed made it into the Czechoslovak news. It is another matter that the Prague representative of KÜM was far from happy with the quality of the one-minute report and called it “the mockery of the spirit of Hungarian-Czech film exchange agreement.”¹⁵³

Another issue further poisoned the relations between the government and the MFI. In late 1937 the MFI decided to raise its capital stock by 150,000 pengő (c. \$417,222). The KÜM refused to take part in the increase, as a result its share decreased to 20 percent. An internal KÜM memo testifies that the ministry was very fearful of relinquishing its seat on the board of the executive committee and argued that the KÜM could not afford to surrender its influence and control of MFI matters for the *Kulturfilme* and newsreels were the “most effective and grandest instrument of propaganda.”¹⁵⁴

Unfortunately, once again, there is no documentation on the outcome of these negotiations, but one can assume that the government and the MFI found a solution. I am basing this assumption on a number of facts. First, the MFI retained its monopoly and continued to be the sole producers of *Kulturfilme* and newsreels. Second, the KÜM actually intervened at the Finance Ministry on the behalf of MFI so the latter could receive special consideration for its exports. Third, the Ministry of Interior 54.100/1939 order stipulated that 30 percent of all “shorts” screened in the cinemas had to be Hungarian -made (*ergo* MFI-made).¹⁵⁵ Lastly, is the fact the Baron Villáni was still present at the weekly meeting of the executive board suggest that KÜM retained its

¹⁵³ MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (Prague, May 31, 1937).

¹⁵⁴ MOL K66, 335. csomó III-6/c/1 (December 4, 1937).

¹⁵⁵ Ministry of Interior 54.100/1939 order in *Magyar Film*, June 10, 1939, 11.

influence.¹⁵⁶ There were fewer and fewer colorful reports about swimsuit fashions in Miami, about the Tour de France, about dancing Japanese mice, and about the Miss Europe competition. The news became dominated by domestic and foreign political reports. Of course, this could have been due to the worsening international situation. But it could also be that the MFI finally became the unofficial “mouthpiece” of the Hungarian government for good.

Conclusion

With the outbreak of hostilities, both radio and newsreels become overtly political instruments. For example, the new 31 kilowatt Košice (now once again Kassa) station began broadcasting in 1942, following a significant investment to replace an apparatus taken by Czechoslovak authorities. By then a small broadcasting station was also in operation in Cluj (Koložsvár) with the stated goal of achieving a broadcasting monopoly throughout Transylvania—especially those regions populated by ethnic Hungarians.¹⁵⁷ The plan to build a powerful new station did not come to fruition. There were also plans for building a film studio in Cluj.¹⁵⁸ Under the influence of growing anti-Semitic sentiment, supported by the Jewish Laws, both radio and film production was restructured in order to create a Christian national culture. A great number of artists decided to leave the country, including Béla Bartók, famed director István Székely, and

¹⁵⁶ For example, see MFI Meeting on March 30, 1939. MOL K66, 420. csomó III-6/c (March 30, 1939).

¹⁵⁷ MRA, “Kiséreti rádióállomás Koložsváron,” *8 Órai Újság*, September 21, 1940, and “Halló, itt Koložsvár,” *Antenna*, October 6, 1940.

¹⁵⁸ I thank David Frey for this information.

Hungarian film star Gyula Kabos.¹⁵⁹ Other highly successful directors, such as Viktor Gertler and László Gaál were forced out of the industry (the latter was killed by the Hungarian Arrow Cross sometimes in 1944).¹⁶⁰ Both radio and film production tried to serve the government's efforts to keep Hungary out of war, but without much success. Miklós Kozma became the governor of the Sub-Carpathian region annexed by Hungary. Here he was directly responsible for depriving the region's Jewish population of their legal rights, including the right to own property. Moreover, he was indirectly responsible for the murder of 10,000-15,000 Hungarian Jews, who were without citizenship papers and as such were deported from the region and murdered at Kamenec Podolski by the Einsatzgruppen.¹⁶¹ By then radio broadcasting the Germans and the Italians had come to rely on the radio. Now and then their broadcasts tried to address the West and try to persuade them that the war against the USSR was a defensive war. The radio also became the instrument of a last-ditch effort to jump ship in October 15, 1944, when the Hungarian government sought to make a separate peace with the Allied Powers. A few hours later fascist thugs from the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party occupied the building of the radio; many people were arrested and some even murdered. In December 24, 1944, after nearly two decades of innovation and growth, Budapest radio fell silent. The pride of Kozma's radio, the 120 kilowatt Lakihegy station, was blown up by German forces.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 51. Bartók refused to perform in the radio's German and Italian broadcast already in 1937.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ormos, *Kozma*, 753-69. Ormos suggest—albeit without much evidence—that the knowledge that he unwillingly became an accomplice in the murders may contributed to Kozma's heart attack, which essentially killed him on December 7, 1941 at age 57.

¹⁶² Kollega Tarsoly, ed., *Magyarország a XX. században*, 376-78.

Film production fared somewhat better—especially that of feature films. There was little possibility for *Kulturfilme*, and newsreel production suffered from the same lack of source materials as the radio, which stemmed from Hungary’s isolation. The film industry, by then “Christianized,” sought to retain a level of cultural sovereignty vis-à-vis Germany.¹⁶³

Kozma once said that “Our Lord was especially kind to us in that he gave this invention [meaning radio] to humanity after Trianon.”¹⁶⁴ Indeed, the political significance of radio and cinema grew at incredible pace. In the post-First World War period these new inventions enabled nations to present themselves, their images, and their sounds on the international stage. The realization of these phenomena was by no means limited to Hungary. Nor were they important only to the Bolsheviks, the Fascists, and the Nazis. All developed nations utilized these new instruments of mass persuasion. In Hungary, a country that competed with its neighbors for the attention of the world, radio and cinema were especially important. These instruments’ contribution to Hungary’s cultural diplomacy cannot be underestimated. They reached people beyond the physical border of the country. One did not need to be studying in a university or be part of a certain intellectual circle to turn on the radio. One did not need to be wealthy to buy a cinema ticket and take a virtual tour of the country. This is something that Hungarian cultural diplomacy recognized quite early.

¹⁶³ As David Frey’s study indicates that the new, and surprising, destination of Hungarian feature films was Yugoslavia. See David S. Frey, “Hungarian Film in the Shadow of the Swastika, 1933-1945,” in *Cinema and the Swastika: the International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, eds., Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 159-72.

¹⁶⁴ “Az öt éves magyar rádió,” *Rádióélet*, October 31, 1930, 17.

CONCLUSION

“If there is an international institute of propaganda, it ought to present a diploma to the Hungarian entrusted with the task of placing Hungary’s grievances before the world”
(Bernard Newman, 1939)¹

“It is perfectly true, of course, that good cultural propaganda cannot remedy the damage done by a bad foreign policy, but it is no exaggeration to say that even the best of diplomatic policies may fail, if it neglects the task of interpretation which modern conditions impose.”
(Anthony Eden, 1937)²

In regards to interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden’s point about the relationship between cultural propaganda and foreign policy is apropos. Even if one accepts—for the moment—that Hungary carried out “good” cultural propaganda, it indeed could not remedy the Hungarian leadership’s “bad” foreign policy. Since the mid-1930s, Hungary inched closer and closer to Nazi Germany. The territorial gains of the First Vienna Award seemed to justify this policy. Teleki was one of the few who realized the danger inherent in Hungary’s German orientation, yet it did not stop him from continuing the pro-German course. Why? After all, some of the lost territories had been returned, and now, the political elite, as well as the manipulated domestic public, expected more. To achieve this goal the assistance of Germany seemed

¹ Bernard Newman, *Danger Spots of Europe* (London: The Right Book Club, 1939), 286. Newman was a British author and historian Bernard Newman

² Quoted in Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization*, 50-51.

paramount. Secondly, there was the issue of the ever-growing presence and influence of Hungary's own extreme-right. In the spring 1939 elections the Hungarian Arrow-Cross secured 900,000 votes and won over forty seats in the Parliament, essentially becoming the second most powerful force in Hungarian politics.³ It was under these circumstances that the Teleki government joined the Anti-Comintern Pact in February 1939, exited from the League of Nations in April 1939, and passed the country's Second Jewish Law in May 1939. However, the "tight-rope" prime minister, as I mentioned earlier, also refused to allow German troops to use Hungarian railway lines in their attack on Poland. Moreover, Hungary actually opened its border in September 1939 to Polish refugees. This action was representative of Teleki's second goal, which was to maintain neutrality during the war, for he correctly understood that Germany's attack on Poland would bring Great Britain, France, and even the United States into the conflict. Teleki sought to assure that Hungary would not get involved in a war with any of the Great Powers. He recognized that neutrality would gain favors for Hungary after the war. He even reestablished diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. Hungarian cultural diplomatic efforts were redoubled in France, Great Britain, and in the United States. In March 1940, Teleki authorized preliminary work for the organization a government-in-exile in the United States to begin. Based on the experience of the First World War, the prime minister wanted to make sure that Hungarian interests would be represented abroad even under German occupation, since he believed Western victory was inevitable. The success of the German blitzkrieg changed his mind. According to his biographer, historian Balázs Ablonczy, Teleki was especially distraught by the fate of the small Western and Northern European countries of Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and Holland. His faith in an Allied

³ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 158.

victory waned. Accordingly, he ordered the return of the five million dollars that was sent to the Hungarian Minister in Washington, János Pelényi, to establish a government-in-exile.⁴ Even as he continued his efforts to maintain neutrality and Western goodwill, once again, the country moved closer to Nazi Germany, which was by now seen as the potential victor in the war. When the Soviet Union began pressuring Romania for territories in Bukovina and Bessarabia, Hungary turned to Berlin to guarantee its share.

The Second Vienna Award of August 1940 granted Northern Transylvania to Hungary. In exchange for the German arbitration, Teleki agreed to recognize the Volksbund as a privileged and exclusive party representing Hungary's German minority. In addition, the government agreed to supply Germany with food and raw materials beyond the requirements agreed upon in the joint economic deal signed in 1935. Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the Hungarian Arrow-Cross, was pardoned and released from prison. Finally, Hungary joined the Tri-Power Pact (or Tripartite Pact) in November 1940.⁵ Less than a week later both Romania and Slovakia followed suit. Nobody wanted to be at a disadvantage in the competition for Hitler's goodwill. Another unforeseen consequence was the negative international reaction to the Second Vienna Award. Great Britain refused to recognize the treaty as valid, although it stated that new border arrangements would be necessary after the war. The US was also critical, but showed some degree of sympathy.⁶

⁴ Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki*, 207-08.

⁵ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 175-76.

⁶ Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki*, 215.

Teleki's cultural diplomatic machinery set out to legitimize these territorial gains in the eyes of international public opinion. However, there was very little room for Hungary to maneuver. German troops were stationed in Romania and Slovakia. In addition, Hungary had shared a border with the Third Reich after the Anschluss. The prime minister learned through unofficial channels that a German attack on the Soviet Union was only a question of time. Once again he reconsidered the aims of Hungarian foreign policy. He tried to sign a nonaggression pact with Moscow, which, in the face of Horthy's opposition, was essentially reduced to a trade agreement. As a gesture of good faith, and a channel to the world, the Teleki government approached Yugoslavia and eventually in December 1940 signed a treaty guaranteeing permanent peace and eternal friendship between the two countries. At the same time relations between Yugoslavia and Germany deteriorated. It was obvious to all that a German attack would come sooner rather than later. Teleki recognized that Hungary would not be able to refuse Germany again. It would ultimately mean that Hungary would be fighting a war on the side of Germany against the West and the Soviet Union. In the mind of Teleki, this was an unwinnable war.⁷

In the face of this unsolvable situation, Teleki—by now clinically depressed due to personal and professional problems—committed suicide on April 2, 1941. With his death the last link to the West was gone, for, despite his anti-Semitic policies and staunch revisionist attitude, Teleki was much respected in the Western world. Teleki's act was not able to arrest the country's tragic decline. The new Hungarian government led by László Bárdossy made a last-ditch effort to save face. It articulated that Hungary would join the

⁷ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 179-81.

impending German action against Yugoslavia, only if and when Yugoslavia as a political entity ceased to exist. This did not fool anyone. Indeed, before April 11, 1941, as Hungarian troops crossed into former Yugoslav territories, Great Britain had already severed diplomatic relations with Hungary. In his communiqué to the Hungarian Minister in London, British Foreign Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, left little doubt about the position of his government:

His Majesty's Government was until quite lately trying to understand the undoubtedly difficult position of your Government has found themselves in both externally and internally. We have shown more than one sign of this understanding. But now you have handed over your country to the opponent of England and have, almost simultaneously, attacked the country with which only a few months ago you concluded a pact of friendship. This will remain an everlasting shame upon the reputation of Hungary. If a country is no longer master of her fate and voluntarily resigns her independence, then at least she should not sign a pact of friendship which she then breaks. Tell it at home that England will remember that when peace will be made. . . . Teleki was the last man in whom we had confidence. We shall have no more dealing with those who are now in power.⁸

This was perhaps the very moment when Hungarian cultural diplomacy had lost its *raison d'être*.

Hungary rapidly moved toward disaster. On June 26, 1941, Hungary declared that it considered itself at war with the Soviet Union (albeit there was no official declaration of war). On August 8, Hungary passed its Third Jewish Law prohibiting marriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews. On December 6, Great Britain declared war on Hungary. On December 12, Hungary declared war on the United States. In January 1943, the 200,000 man strong Second Hungarian Army engaged the Red Army at Voronezh. The result was catastrophic: 40,000 Hungarian soldiers died, 35,000 men

⁸ Quoted in Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 186.

injured, and about 60,000 captured. Prime Minister Miklós Kállay tried to renew contact with the West and even with the Soviet Union in order to seek a separate peace. Hitler has suspected as much and, as a result, on March 19, 1944, German troops occupied Hungary. Between May 15 and the end of June—under the new Prime Minister Döme Sztójay—Hungarian authorities, in collaboration with the SS, deported 440,000 Hungarian Jews mostly to Auschwitz. In addition, thousands of Hungarian Gypsies shared a similar fate. (The number of these victims is strongly contested. Historians offered estimates ranging from 5,000 to 50,000). In early July, Horthy stopped deportations. His belated action in the end spared approximately 200,000 Budapest Jews from being deported to Auschwitz. As a last ditch effort, various official and semiofficial circles, including the group under the leadership of Miklós Horthy Jr. and Domokos Szent-Iványi (colleague, student, and friend of the late Pál Teleki), tried to initiate peace talks with the West and the Soviet Union. In a radio address on October 15, 1944, Horthy proclaimed an armistice. However, by this time he did not command the loyalty of the necessary political and military forces. On the very next day, under professional and personal duress, Horthy resigned as Regent and relinquished power to the leader of the Hungarian Arrow-Cross, Ferenc Szálasi. Under his regime of terror tens of thousands of Jews were murdered and his thugs began the summary execution of other Hungarian civilians. On December 21, 1944, a Provisional National Assembly met in Debrecen and elected a new National Government with Béla Dálnoki Miklós as its prime minister.⁹ By this time the Red Army had encircled Budapest. During the 102-day siege 38,000

⁹ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 208-333.

civilians died along with 40,000 German and Hungarian soldiers and about 80,000 Soviet Red Army troops.¹⁰

On April 13, 1945, the war ended in Hungary. The results were tragic: approximately 900,000 dead and 600,000 in Soviet POW camps. Approximately 40 percent of the national wealth was destroyed.¹¹ The Soviet troops' incredible sacrifice liberated the country. However, the liberation was also accompanied by the mass rape of women, deportations, and the beginning of a different kind of occupation that would last until 1989. On February 10, 1947, Hungarian representatives signed a treaty in Paris. Despite designs for a federalized reconstruction of the region and plans for new borders (based on ethnic composition) the Paris Treaty essentially reestablished the Trianon borders.¹²

So does this mean that cultural diplomacy failed? This seemingly simple question is, in reality, quite complex. Can we take ambassadorial communications reporting on the “great success” of the film *Hungaria* in Brazil at face value? After all, can one evaluate the impact of a well-written journal article on its readers or assess the influence of Béla Bartók's music on foreign radio listeners? Today we may be able to do so, but how can we compute the sum of emotional or other responses of a faceless public during the interwar period? There remains uncertainty about how to measure the public's response, not to mention cultural diplomacy's influence on actual policy. In the end, the small

¹⁰ For more on this see Krisztián Ungváry, *The Siege of Budapest*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 269-270.

¹² For more on the post WW II designs, see Ignác Romsics, *Múltról a mának* (Budapest, Osiris Kiadó: 2004), 264-283.

Eastern and East-Central European countries lacked the means to poll the objects of their cultural diplomatic campaign. Yet one cannot entirely sidestep this question. Thus, with the obvious benefit of hindsight, I would like to examine the success and failure of Hungarian cultural diplomacy by looking at its short and long-term impact.

If one considers the short-term goals of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy then one must conclude that the campaign was a failure. From 1918 to 1941 the Hungarian government in cooperation with the country's intellectual and industrial elite sought to create a positive image abroad in order to gain the necessary international support for the revision of the Trianon Treaty. The country indeed regained some of its lost territories, but it had absolutely nothing to do with its cultural diplomatic campaign. It was a result of a mistaken foreign policy carried out by traditional diplomacy, and the country paid dearly for it later. One of the main objectives was to convince international public opinion of Hungary's Western/European character. This is much harder to assess, but Teleki's eulogy in the *Washington Post* indicates that old stereotypes, just as old habits, indeed do die hard. Despite all the efforts to the contrary, Hungary continued to be seen as an Oriental country that had just lost its Oriental prime minister in an Oriental fashion:

There is something Oriental about the suicide of the Hungarian Premier, Count Teleki, that might almost be interpreted as a form of racial atavism. The Magyars have for many centuries been thoroughly assimilated into the West European culture, but they were, as the very name of their nation still imply, of relatively recent Mongolian origin. Though we do not know the full circumstances surrounding his death, it is obvious that Count Teleki killed himself not for personal reasons—for the highest reason of state. In other words, it was an official action in his official capacity. It has already been interpreted as a deliberate admission to the Hungarian people that his policy of gradual appeasement, skillful and honest as it was, is responsible for the present unhappy conditions of his country. It can also be interpreted as an official diplomatic notification to the

Germans that he considered that Hungarian participation in the presumably impending attack on the Yugoslav nation, with whom his government so recently entered a treaty of perpetual friendship, would be an act of national dishonor.

By no Western standards, even the strict, chivalric standard of the Hungarian nobleman, can Teleki's honor be called into question. He had been guided throughout by the most unselfish motives, and it is known that his concept of what would best preserve the peace and independence of his country often ran strongly counter to his personal sympathies concerning the war. His errors, however serious, were committed in the purest of good faith. He had done his best to avert the catastrophe, and more than their best it is said even angels cannot do. His final gesture was much like that of the Oriental who believes that faith can be lost through fate as well as forfeited by an act of will. It was Oriental, too, in this suggestion that national honor can be restored by an act of individual sacrifice. It recalls those mandarins of the Celestial Kingdom who strangled themselves on a hint of the Emperor's displeasure, the Japanese general who slew himself because of minor tactical mistake, and the Tokyo policeman who atoned with his blood for having inadvertently made the Son of Heaven 20 minutes late for an official function.¹³

Interwar Hungarian diplomacy failed because it was built upon two delusions.

First, there was the Hungarian elite's mistaken belief in the inherent and obvious greatness of Hungary and the justness of its cause. Their error was in trusting that cultural diplomatic tools could help to gather enough international support for the revision of the treaty. As this study shows, their efforts to prove the country's alleged cultural superiority and European character did not stop at empty phrases and slogans. Between 1919 and 1941, but especially after 1927, under the Hungarian government's direction the country's cultural production underwent a wide-ranging modernization. With the assistance of the country's intellectual elite the Hungarian government established a number of cultural and academic institutions abroad and founded scholarly publications. In order to attract visitors they also mobilized the country's nascent tourist industry. Last, but not least, the government also utilized the opportunities provided by the modern

¹³ "Count Teleki," *The Washington Post*, April 5, 1941, 8.

media: radio and cinema. In the end, illustrating the country's historical and cultural ties to Europe and providing evidence for an existence of a modern Hungary brought very little political value. The reason behind this was the second delusion, which Hungary actually shared with its neighbors.

The second delusion was believing that Hungarian problems—or small countries' matters in general—carried much weight in an international system that was dominated by Great Power interest. There were people who recognized this early on. For example, one intellectual wrote the following about English public opinion:

We Hungarians are suffocating here at the eastern borders of European civilization; we live in Central Europe and think of ourselves in Europe. For us the world is Europe, world politics is the politics of Europe; international questions are European questions. . . . The Englishman can feel that he is in the center of the world. He is the overlord of a kind of empire where the sun never sets and one that oversees the lives of one quarter of humanity. . . . England thinks in continents, while for us Europe is the world. . . . In Europe it [England] is seriously concerned only with two powers. France and Germany. . . . Maimed-Hungary's events and problems are no interest of the English public opinion and of English politics.¹⁴

Despite this realization this author also argued that Hungary must carry on promoting its cultural supremacy, not through propaganda but through scientifically sound historical, geographical, and political publications written in foreign-languages.¹⁵ Efforts continued but with no avail. For example, under the Darányi government, 1936-1938, Hungary made attempts to renew ties with other Western powers, especially Great Britain, in order to free itself from Germany's economic and political influence. After the March 1938 Anschluss, the new Hungarian government, led by Béla Imrédy, established

¹⁴ Sándor Körmendy-Ékes, "Az angol közvélemény" *Magyar Szemle* 7, no. 3 (November, 1929): 273-74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

ever-closer ties with Berlin, but at the same time it also continued to make attempts to gain British economic and political support. After all, Hungary now shared a border with Germany, which was a situation that made a lot of people nervous. The British attitude once again was nonchalant, best illustrated by the following remarks made on May 29, 1938, by Sir Orme Sargent of the British Foreign Office:

I am sure there are lots of unhappy Hungarians who would like Great Britain to protect them from being 'absorbed' by Germany, and who hope that this may be effected by Great Britain's economic intervention. But all our past experience, and all our present evidence, goes to show that Hungary cannot be rendered independent of Germany by any economic action that we can take. . . . There are other countries where British interests are definitely more important and where moreover we have got the means of reinforcing our position, such as Greece in the first place and possibly also Roumania. *Don't therefore let us be tempted to waste our energy or our money in trying to salvage countries like Hungary, where the game is already up.*¹⁶

In sum, practitioners of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy—similar to their Czechoslovak counterparts—failed to realize that such efforts could not prevail in an era of international relations that was dominated by Great Power interests, weakened by worldwide economic problems, and stained by the largely discredited League of Nations. However, more than anything else, Hungarian cultural diplomacy failed because its goal of revising the Trianon Treaty was of no interest to anyone else but the Hungarians.

If one considers the long-term impacts of Hungarian cultural diplomacy, then the picture is less bleak. Interwar cultural diplomacy helped the legitimization of Hungary's status as an independent state. After the Second World War the international community

¹⁶ Quoted in Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 138. Emphasis is mine. On the changing nature of Hungarian-British relations see: Géza Jeszenszky, *Az elveszett presztizs* (Budapest: Magvető, 1986); Gábor Bátonyi, *Britain and Central Europe, 1918-1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); and András Bán, *Hungarian-British Diplomacy, 1938-1941* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2004).

did not question the country's right to exist. On the other hand, after the 1947 Paris Treaty revisionism was no longer a possibility.¹⁷ Cultural diplomacy lost its importance. Under the regime of Mátyás Rákosi—Hungary's very own "little Stalin"—cultural relations and cultural diplomatic activities, if we can even call them that, were limited to the Soviet Union. Anikó Macher suggests that between 1953 and 1955 Hungary was able to secure some autonomy to conduct its own cultural relations. Cultural exchange programs were started with France (at the state level) and Great Britain (at the nongovernmental level). This time the Revolution of 1956 disrupted these developments. In 1959 the political situation normalized enough to speak of official cultural diplomacy, which, not unlike during the interwar years, involved publishing, musical events, and other cultural exchanges. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in charge of improving relations with the West, especially with NATO member countries.¹⁸ Once again cultural diplomacy was seen as an accepted, perhaps even preferred, tool for diplomats to use in convincing the West about liberalization under the new regime of János Kádár. Indeed, Kádár's Hungary enjoyed a certain degree of freedom as far as its cultural policy went, which in the absence of freedom to conduct independent foreign policy was especially important. Moreover, as Macher points out, the Hungarian Communist Party was increasingly anxious about the possible influence of a growing Western cultural presence, especially on the part of the French and British, and thus made

¹⁷ On cultural diplomatic activities of this period, see József N. Szabó, *Hungarian Culture—Universal Culture: Cultural diplomatic Endeavours of Hungary, 1945-1948* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999).

¹⁸ Anikó Macher, "Hungarian Cultural Diplomacy, 1957-1963: Echoes of Western Cultural Activity in a Communist Country" in *Searching for Cultural Diplomacy*, eds. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 75-88.

cultural policy a priority.¹⁹ With the UN's December 1962 decision to take the "Hungarian Question" off its agenda, these fears subdued a bit. By 1963 Western countries once again had diplomatic representation in Budapest, and cultural diplomatic activities continued to serve as a permitted tool to cultivate relations with the West.²⁰

Cultural capital, built up during the interwar years, helped Hungarians to retain a degree of independence. The infrastructure that was created in service of interwar cultural diplomacy remained essential during the communist regime. The *New Hungarian Quarterly* was relaunched in 1960 and until its reorganization in 1993 remained one of the very few English-language academic journals that offered an overview the country.²¹ Cultural institutions—although in a more politicized form—continued to serve as an avenue to the foreign public.²² The tourist industry similarly benefited from interwar achievements and allowed Hungary to have a very lively tourism sector after its borders were reopened. The Lakihegy radio transmitter continued to serve Hungary and Hungarians abroad until 1977. The Hunnia Film Studio was nationalized as well and served as the backbone of the Hungarian film industry for years to come. However, perhaps the most important long-term achievements of interwar cultural diplomacy were its unintended consequences. These state projects in some sense were built and sponsored to be "weapons" of Hungarian revisionist offensives, but in actuality through this modernization they helped to alter the cultural and intellectual landscape of the country and move Hungary forward to the twentieth century. Finally, in some ways these

¹⁹ Ibid., 89.

²⁰ Ibid., 90-95.

²¹ Since 1993 the journal once again published as *The Hungarian Quarterly*.

²² Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 162-65

achievements helped Hungarians to retain a sense of belonging not to the Soviet Union, but to Europe. After 1989 Hungary, along with its neighbors, once again faced the challenge of proving its Europeanness.

In the end, however, the real significance of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy lay not necessarily in its success and failure. This study, more than anything else, is about its perceptions and limitations. The Hungarian leadership mistakenly perceived that the post-First World War remapping of East and East-Central Europe had much to do with Hungary's foreign reputation. In reality, it was a result of Great Power interest. They also incorrectly believed that by altering the country foreign reputation—changing the international public's perception of Hungary—they could also alter the postwar settlement. Once again, the postwar settlement was altered by Great Power interests and conflicts. They also misperceived the significance of their own achievements. In actuality, promoting Hungary as the “shield of Christendom,” disseminating the message of Hungary as “the easternmost outpost of the West,” and professing its “Europeanness” mattered very little in the grand scale of international relations.

In examining interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy this study is also about limitations. First, there are the limitations of cultural diplomacy itself. Cultural diplomacy could work if it were coupled with a sensible foreign policy. Hungary's aim to revise the treaty limited the successful outcome of its cultural diplomatic efforts. Cultural diplomatic efforts also require an interested audience. This raises a question about the responsibility of Great Powers vis-à-vis small countries. The second limitation is just that: the limitations of being a small country. Post-First World War Hungary and its

neighbors might have been independent political entities, but because of their dependencies—economic, military, and diplomatic—this independence was rather limited. Their ability to navigate the troubled waters of the period was restricted by their lack of power, which is the main characteristic of small countries. Here again, one might think about the Great Powers' responsibility to recognize and positively act upon this fact. Of course, this is not to entirely absolve Hungary (and its neighbors) for what they did. The Hungarian leadership's unwillingness to accept the postwar settlement—just as its neighbors' unwillingness to alter it—determined much of the country's future fate.

Finally, by examining the epoch and this particular subject matter, this dissertation has also sought to alter the perception and stretch the limitations of our own understanding of interwar Europe. Discussions of interwar European history should not be limited to the usual suspects of Germany, Great Britain, and France. By investigating the unique perspective afforded to us by the small countries of the region, we can perhaps reevaluate how we see the period as a whole. In my view, the story of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy illustrates that the epoch cannot be perceived as a mere prelude to the tragedy of the Second World War that followed. Instead, we should view it as the culmination of the First World War that preceded it. In this story the small East and East-Central European countries, including Hungary, have their own place, for they are essential components to our understanding of the period as a whole—together with their successes, failures, and delusions.

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