

## Survey of Important Internal Moments of the Process of Birth of the Specific Political System of Interwar Hungary (1919-1922)<sup>1</sup>

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The end of World War I brought a radical change of the political map of Central Europe. The Habsburg Monarchy broke up and the so-called successor states were constituted on its fundamentals. Besides Austria and Hungary, they included Czechoslovakia, Poland, Rumania and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State. The constitution of the successor states was confirmed at the Paris Peace Conference. The Peace Treaties resulting from it gave an international-legal full stop to the war conflict. The concept of the Versailles peace system benefited most the victorious successor states. The Versailles peace system brought dramatic limitation of the political power of the defeated successor states of Austria-Hungary, i.e. for Austria and Hungary, not only in the actual Central European region. The adaptation to new post-war internal and external political conditions was very complicated for the latter, i.e. Hungary. The result of the search for new state identity of post-war Hungary was the birth of the interwar, so called Horthy Hungary at the turn of 1919 and 1920 with specific semi-authoritative regime. From constitutional perspective, the interwar Hungarian state was based on civic parliamentarianism with all appropriate bodies, but with autocratically regulated form or activity in practice. The foundations of the semi-authoritative interwar Hungarian kingdom were laid by the conservative Christian-national political course that had seized power in August 1919, pushing the civic-democratic political powers, including social democracy, that had striven to build civic-democratic post-war Hungary like the Western democracies at the turn of 1918 and

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1919, to the margin of the political spectrum. The goal of this study is to summarize synoptically the important internal moments of the birth of so called Horthy Hungary that had predetermined its basic character and development during the whole interwar period, as well as the beginning of consolidation of the country and short outline of its course.

### Summary of social-political and economic situation of Hungary at the turn of 1919 and 1920

Hungary experienced the most complicated immediate post-war development of all successor states of Austria-Hungary. It was burdened not only by the consequences of the state-legal revolutionary turns from 1918 and 1919 but also by the occupation of a part of the country by the Rumanian, Yugoslavian or French armies. The Rumanian army had been occupying the Hungarian territory to the east of Tisza River since April 1919, after having it taken during the anti-Hungarian push during the Hungarian Republic of Councils. But on 4 August 1919, the Rumanian army took also the capital of the country, Budapest, in spite of the prohibition by the Paris Peace Conference. The Rumanian army stayed in the capital until autumn, 14-16 November when the Rumanians left not only Budapest but also the territory between the Danube and Tisza rivers. The army of the Serb-Croat-Slovene State occupied larger part of the Baranya County including the town of Pécs in the south of Hungary from 1918. The territory was abandoned and transferred under the sovereignty of Hungary only in August 1921 upon pressure of the Entente Powers, after the failed declaration of local Serbian-Hungarian Republic. During the existence of the Hungarian Republic of Councils,<sup>2</sup> smaller part of today's Southern Hungary including the town of Szeged was occupied by the French army, under whose protection the conservative anti-revolutionary opposition and the National Army lead by the Admiral Miklós Horthy de Nagybánya, the future head of state of interwar Hungary was organized.

A significant factor affecting the formation of the shape of interwar Hungary consisted in the insurmountable division of the society into several implacable camps - supporters of the left wing and the right wing in all their shades, further into supporters of the republic and supporters of

the monarchy, the latter divided into further two antagonistic camps - die-hard legitimists, i.e. supporters of the Habsburg house and uncompromising supporters of free election of the king. But the sharp differentiation of the society of the country, based on political beliefs, was complemented by spontaneous anger against the surrounding world due to the international-legal enforcement of territorial curtailment of the country, which united the society virtually across the whole Hungarian political scene. The feeling of hopelessness, bitterness and loss of rights due to the status of defeated country constituted the greatest trauma of the society of interwar Hungary. The interwar Hungarian society was not able to fight down the national feeling of grievance, resulting from the deep-rooted thousand-year-long tradition of natural unity of the lands Lands of St Stephen's Crown during the whole so called Horthy period of the Hungarian history.

Although the Hungarian peace treaty between the Allied and Associated Powers and Hungary, i.e. the confirmation of the borders of post-war Hungary, was signed only on 4 June 1920, its oppressive territorial provisions had been set in fact a year before, in June 1919, by decision of the supreme Entente representatives to the Paris Peace Conference. The area of Hungary decreased by two thirds, from 282 thousand km<sup>2</sup> (without Croatia)<sup>3</sup> to 93 thousand km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>2</sup> Thus the territory of the Hungarian State was reduced by almost 190 thousand km<sup>2</sup> that passed to Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Austria. The number of inhabitants of Hungary dropped from 18,3 million (without Croatia)<sup>4</sup> to 7,9 million, and up to one third of Hungarians found themselves outside the Hungarian State.

The above stated conflict of interwar Hungarian society based on political beliefs was overcome very difficult too; its deep roots were nourished by post-war revolutionary period under the sign not only of the red but also the white terror; the excesses of the white terror outlasted until 1920 when not only the internal but also the very fragile external sensitivity to such pathological phenomena in the Hungarian society at that time brought gradual termination or at least marked restriction of the abnormal persecution practices of the difficultly controllable paramilitary groups. The distinctive conflict of the society on political base was not in fact completely warded off during the whole period of interwar Hungary, particularly due to the semi-authoritative regime in the country symbolized by the regent of the

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3) With Croatia 329 thousand km<sup>2</sup> in total.

4) With Croatia 20,8 million in total.

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2) The Hungarian Republic of Councils lasted from 21 March 1919 to 1 August 1919.

country, the temporary head of state, Admiral Horthy. The established regulated political system did not allow full opening of the political scene, as was usual in the Western democracies at that time and kept nourishing the hostile division of the society into the “state-constituting” Christian-national and agrarian right wing and into the left wing, dangerous and unacceptable to the state, together with the civic-democratic political stream blamed for having passed the power in the country to communists on 21 March 1919.

But the international-political isolation of post-war Hungary and irreconcilable political differentiation of post-war Hungarian society, inherited from hectic revolutionary months, did not constitute the only obstacles to successful start of internal consolidation of the country. Another crucial hindering aspect of stabilization of post-war Hungary consisted in the burdening economic and social situation of the country, worsened even more during the revolutionary events of 1918 and 1919. Hungary entered the new phase of its history with completely wrecked economic life, not only due to war but also due to considerable territorial losses. For example the production of the country in 1920, the year of the first ordinary post-war elections, the year of peace negotiations with Hungary and the year of enforcement of consolidation course in the country constituted about 20-30% of the level of 1913. But the deepest drop was experienced by the agrarian production, typical to Hungary. The export of corn dropped by one half in 1920, as against the average of 1913.<sup>5</sup>

Another indicator of the lamentable condition of the economy of the country rose to the skies. The post-war financial situation of Hungary was virtually disastrous. The paralyzed economic life of the country during the war years devalued the common Austrian-Hungarian crown by 60%. But in summer 1919, the crown dropped down to 15% of its original pre-war value. The continuing dramatic fall of the crown is well illustrated by its rapidly dropping value as against the Swiss franc. While in August 1919, 100 crowns were equal to 11.6 Swiss francs, in June 1920 the value of 100 crowns as against the Swiss currency dropped to mere 3.1 francs. In consequence of the rapid revolutionary events in immediate post-war period, the Hungarian financial policy found itself in chaotic web of provisional measures. The Government was able to cover the state budget only by disproportionate print of paper banknotes.<sup>6</sup>

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5) M. ROMPORTLOVÁ, Z. SLÁDEK, *Hospodářský a sociální vývoj ve střední a jihovýchodní Evropě*, Brno 1994, p. 65.

6) S. BALOGH (ed.), *Magyarország a XX. században*, Budapest 1985, pp. 137 and 139.

The economic fall of the country was naturally combined with disastrous social situation. The living standard of state officials and officers dropped, as compared to the situation of pre-war years 1913-1914, by up to 82-87% and that of workers by 61-74%. The number of unemployed exceeded the acceptable limit by far. About one third of workers were unemployed. The unemployment statistics were further markedly negatively changed also by the influx of refugees from the separated territories. Almost 350 thousand of registered refugees moved to post-war Hungary due to forced leaving of their original residence. The major part of them came from the end of 1918 until the end of 1920. The territorially markedly diminished Hungary was thus confronted with unsolvable problem of having to employ up to 235 thousand intellectual workers in a country with about eight millions of inhabitants. The situation was worsened even more by the need of placement of significant part of officers and non-commissioned officers of the army whose staff had been reduced to maximally allowed limit of 35 thousand men due to the peace treaty.<sup>7</sup>

#### Accession to power of Christian-national political course

In spite of the social-political problematic and economic aspects that had complicated markedly the return of Hungary to peaceful and calm reconstruction of the country and made considerably more difficult the adaptation of the country to the new post-war internal and external political situation, last but not least predestining markedly the specific character of the internal political atmosphere in the country in that period, during the second half of 1919, after the fall of the Republic of Councils, conditions leading to assertion of the desired internal standardization were established in the country. The political situation of Hungary was naturally not calmed down immediately by the fall of the “Soviet” Republic in summer 1919.

The situation in Hungary after the fall of the Republic of Councils showed stalemate character. István Friedrich, the new Hungarian Prime Minister who had thrown down the Prime Minister Gyula Peidl governing on top of the unicolour socialist, the so called trade union government, only six days<sup>8</sup>

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7) BALOGH, p. 138. E. IRMANOVÁ, *Maďarsko a versailleský mírový systém*, Ústí nad Labem 2002, p. 198.

8) Gyula Peidl's government held power less than a week, from 1 to 6 August 1919.

and had put the Archduke Joseph the Habsburg, member of the Hungarian branch of the Habsburg family, to the top of the country as *homo regius*,<sup>9</sup> did not want to resign, in spite of repeated calls of the Entente. The Entente did not want to recognize Friedrich as political partner for his bold political experiment of restoration of the Habsburg power in the country<sup>10</sup> even after the archduke's resignation and after the subsequent extension of the Cabinet by non-Christian-national politicians and start of active preparations of the first ordinary post-war parliamentary elections in the country, on the base of broad right to vote in compliance with the ideas of the Entente. Nevertheless, it was during Friedrich's function as Prime Minister that the Christian-national political course was established in the country and gave birth to so-called Horthy Hungary. The main political stream of interwar Hungary, the Christian-national stream, was formed out of neo-conservative and moderate conservative liberal political groups of dualistic Hungary of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Diplomatic mediation at the stalemate Hungarian internal political scene became key to the stalemate political situation in the country with missing united power centre or state-wide authority of the Hungarian administration that "shared" the control in the country with the ascending power of the high commander of the so called National Army, Admiral Miklós Horthy<sup>11</sup> and was additionally under control of the command of the occupa-

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9) Archduke Joseph the Habsburg stayed on top of the country only half month (16 days), until 23 August.

10) Compare Sir Clerk's speech at the interparty conference within his mediation on the Hungarian political scene on 17 December 1919 when he confirmed the fact of non-recognition of the Prime Minister Friedrich by the Entente because of his effort to restore the Habsburg state power through the regency of Joseph the Habsburg. See e.g. *Népszava*, 47, 232, 19 December 1919, pp. 2–3, or p. 3 (*Clerk George beszéde a hétfői pártközi konferencián*). Compare also IRMANOVÁ, pp. 134–135.

11) Horthy became official the high commander of the National Army of the country, i.e. of all anti-revolutionary armed forces in the regions not controlled by the Rumanians after having sworn in as "*high commander of all armed forces in the country*" before *homo regius*, Joseph the Habsburg, in presence of István Friedrich, the Prime Minister, on 15 August 1919 (for the original record of Horthy's swear see Hungarian State Archive (Magyar Országos Levéltár, MOL), K 26. Miniszterelnökség (hereinafter referred to only as ME), 1919 – I. – 4405, fol. 3–4, or p. 2; quoted from *ibidem*). Compare also F. PÖLÖSKEI, *Horthy és hatalmi rendszere. 1919–1922*, Budapest 1977, pp. 23–24.

tional Rumanian army that supervised virtually all political and cultural life even in the political centre of the country. The main goal of the direct entry into the events in Hungary was the retreat of the Rumanian army from the country, demanded ineffectively by the Entente from the Rumanian government since long time, and particularly the effort to mediate the formation of a government cabinet with broader political mandate that could be sent an invitation to the Paris Peace Conference and that would be allowed to hold finally the parliamentary elections in the country. A turn towards direct active policy of the Entente as against Hungary took place in direction of the Anglo-American diplomacy.<sup>12</sup>

Sir George Russel Clerk, a British diplomat, was charged with the mediating role at the Hungarian internal scene and his mediating political mission in Hungary started on 23 October.<sup>13</sup> During the mission, the retreat of the Rumanian army from central part of Hungary and the handover of the territory left by the Rumanians to the National Army lead by Horthy was finally achieved. Thanks to that, Horthy who managed the strongest military power of the country worked his way to the very top of the political events and his influence and authority immediately exceeded the previous frame of army commander. Therefore Horthy played an important role from his strengthened and legalized power position even in the complicated internal political negotiations under Clerk's direction. The difficult Clerk's negotiations with the representatives of the decisive political streams of the country were finally successfully completed on 24 November by formation of the new, so called concentration government lead by Károly Huszár, the Prime Minister, and by its subsequent recognition by the Paris Peace Conference on 25 November. Only then the Entente expressed its readiness to negotiate with Huszár's government as the "temporary *de facto* cabinet" of Hungary, until a government reflecting the voters' would be created in the country on

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12) Gy. JUHÁSZ, *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919–1945*, Budapest 1987, pp. 43–46; K. SALAMON, *Nemzeti önpusztítás. 1918–1920. (Forradalom-proletárdiktatúra-ellenforradalom)*, Budapest 2001, p. 190, or p. 195; IRMANOVÁ, p. 167. F. BOROS, *Magyar-csehszlovák kapcsolatok 1918–1921-ben*, Budapest 1970, pp. 94–96 and 116–119.

13) For more details on Clerk's mission see Gy. RÁNKI, *A Clerk-misszió történetéhez*, *Történelmi Szemle*, 1967, 2, pp. 156–187.

the base of the results of parliamentary elections.<sup>14</sup> So only the seventh post-war Hungarian Cabinet,<sup>15</sup> or the fifth post-war Hungarian Prime Minister obtained recognition of the Entente Powers.<sup>16</sup>

The new twelve-member Cabinet included, besides five representatives of the Party of Christian National Union (*Keresztény Nemzeti Egyesülés Pártja*) including the Prime Minister, three representatives of the Christian Smallholder Party (*Keresztény Földműves Párt*) and one member of the more liberal smallholders, the Statewide Smallholder and Agrarian Party (*Országos Kisgazda- és Földműves Párt*), i.e. nine representatives of the so called Christian bloc in total. The National Liberal Party (*Nemzeti Liberális Párt*) got one ministerial position but its representative in the Cabinet represented the conservative fraction of the party that was close to the policy of the Christian bloc.<sup>17</sup> Each of the liberal National Democratic Party (*Nemzeti Demokrata Párt*) and the Social Democratic Party (*Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt*), i.e. the real representatives of the proclaimed concentration, got one ministerial position in the new governmental team.<sup>18</sup>

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14) Compare the text of Clerk's note to the new Hungarian Prime Minister Károlyi Huszár, on behalf of the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference from 25 November 1919 in: MOL, K 27, ME., Minisztertanács (hereinafter referred to only as MT), 25 November 1919 (box No. 123), pp. 4–6, or pp. 4–5.

15) Without three governmental formations of the socialist-communist government, the so-called Revolutionary Directive Council of Sándor Garbai under the Hungarian Republic of Councils.

16) PÖLÖSKEI, pp. 41–56; SALAMON, particularly pp. 197–207; IRMANOVÁ, pp. 136–138. For the history of Horthy's influence in anti-revolutionary period compare PÖLÖSKEI, pp. 22–30 and I. ROMSICS, *Ellenfóradalom és konszolidáció: A Horthy-rendszer első tíz éve*, Budapest 1982, pp. 72–74. See here further the record from the meeting of the Cabinet from 24. and 25 November 1919. In MOL, K 27, ME., MT., 24 November 1919 (box No. 123) and MT, 25 November 1919 (ibidem), point 2 of the agenda of the Cabinet meeting.

17) Compare e.g. the comment on the political situation or the attitude to current political issues of an unnamed leading representatives of the party, "close to the Government", expressed to the editor of the newspaper *Az Újság* during the days of the December Government crisis in connection with the submitted requirements of social democracy. *Az Újság*, 17, 183, 18 December 1919, pp. 1–2 (In *Holnap dől el a politikai válság*).

18) SALAMON, pp. 206–207.

So Huszár's cabinet was concentration cabinet only on the surface, with regard to its composition *in effectu*. Also Károly Huszár's Government provided the greatest share of governmental power to the Christian-national political course. Most essential positions in the concentration government were occupied by ministers from Christian parties, i.e. ministers from the so called Christian bloc, and the governmental policy of the new Cabinet went on fully corresponding with the governmental policy of the Prime Minister István Friedrich. The shape of the Cabinet constituted victory of the strong position of the Christian-national course and reflected the fact stated by Ernő Garami, the president of the Hungarian social democracy in an interview with a collaborator of *Az Újság*, a liberal newspaper, during the finishing interparty negotiations under Clerk's direction by mid-November: "*The parties disposing of governmental power imagine concentration so that the existing political line would be fully preserved, the current principles of the regime would be unaffected and the power would stay in the hands of the parties governing today. Democratic parties, in position of one-two also-rans, would help to present the impression that not a compact government party but a concentration cabinet holds the power...*"<sup>19</sup> That meant: the very composition of the coalition and concentration cabinet predetermined on whom detention and on whom possession will fall.

The position and authority of the new government was strengthened, as against Friedrich's cabinet, by the "unreserved" support of Horthy, the chief commander of the National Army. After Clerk's recognition of the National Army organized by Horthy as the only guarantee of order in the country after the Rumanian occupational army had left Budapest, the high command became the second power centre in the capital as well. And it was a significant power centre. The power relationship between the central governmental administration and the high command is fittingly illustrated by the observations of an unnamed citizen of the Serb-Croat-Slovene State from his considerably long stay in Budapest, published in the Czech *Národní listy* newspaper. "*The Hungarian government has a quite inferior position besides Horthy. Horthy often gives commands that are not in compliance with their decisions. In Pest<sup>20</sup> itself, he acts as if there is no authority besides him, and*

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19) *Az Újság*, 17, 156, 16 November 1919, p. 5 (*Hétfőn dől el az ország sorsa. – Garami Ernő nyilatkozata*).

20) To wit Budapest.

therefore frequent conflicts between the civil and military power occur.”<sup>21</sup> The power influence of the high command on the Government was indisputable up to such level that it can be stated that in fact, the army did not serve to civil administration but rather the contrary. The strong position of the high command was obvious also at later assertion of Horthy to the function of temporary head of state, but also at his actual election to the top of the country by the first legislative body of interwar Hungary, created on the base of the first post-war parliamentary elections.

The base to continue further strengthening of the semi-authoritative tendencies of the arising political system based on purposeful correction of civil rights in compliance with national interests, from the position of the view of the Christian-national governmental course, had been given to the concentration Huszár's Government by Friedrich's administration already. The basic preventive measure of the new counter-revolutionary political direction was strict control of press. The political censorship of the press had been applied by the command of the Rumanian army during the whole period of their presence in the capital already. But the “official” censorship of the state apparatus was only one of the obstacles to the “non-Christian” and “non-national” press. The press, “dangerous” from the authoritative national-Christian perspective, was independently censored also by the high command. So the practice was, in the end, so that the censors of the high command censored the contents of the press printed already and affected by the “legal” censorship. When they found it “dangerous”, they avoided its distribution arbitrarily. They confiscated specific issues and burnt them on railway stations near the capital. The army proceeded in similar way also in regions where also arbitrarily units of repressive services, the army and border police, contributed to avoid the distribution of “inconvenient” press.<sup>22</sup>

But free spread of speech was restricted not only by political censorship of press products. On the base of joint measure of the Ministry of the Interior and the high command of the National Army from 10 January 1920, also the telegraphic and phone contact was controlled, by special committees lead by army officials and consisting of delegated members of individual

departments (army, interior, finance, justice and commerce) mastering foreign languages and post clerks.<sup>23</sup>

Also purposeful reduction of freedom of assembly and association should contribute to protect the ideological base of the Christian-national post-revolutionary or anti-revolutionary governmental course. The right of free assembly and association was restricted by specific orders from the period of Friedrich as Prime Minister, and their reduction continued later under the first cabinet of Count Pál Teleki in the course of 1920.<sup>24</sup> The measures adopted in this connection under István Friedrich were left unchanged also under Huszár's concentration cabinet.<sup>25</sup>

The counter-revolutionary justice measures that cast much stronger shadow on the germinating interwar political system of Hungary became a lot more striking. The mass “justice” sanction of “enemy creatures” by the state administration had been asserted under Friedrich as Prime Minister already, and it continued also in the period of Huszár's concentration cabinet. Besides the governmental decree of the counter-revolutionary regime on “temporary modification of justice”, adopted under Friedrich's second cabinet,<sup>26</sup> it was particularly the ministerial internment decree that highlighted the most the authoritarian tendencies of the germinating political system in Hungary. The internment legal standard in form of the ministerial decree was issued just under Huszár's government, although it started being prepared still under Friedrich as Prime Minister.<sup>27</sup> The internment decree of the Minister of the Interior “*on remanding in custody of persons dangerous from the perspective of state safety or from the perspective of public order and safety, arousing fears and suspicious and harmful for econo-*

23) Ibidem, p. 78.

24) Teleki's first governmental cabinet administered the country from 19 July 1920 to 14 April 1921, when it resigned after the first restoration attempt of Karl the Habsburg.

25) PÖLÖSKEI, pp. 79-82.

26) The governmental decree of the second Friedrich's cabinet not only restored the dualistic legal standards in the field of justice (see gov. decree No. 4038/1919 ME. in: *Rendeletek Tára*, Budapest, Magyar Kir. Belügyminisztérium, 1919, pp. 647-651), but on the base of Act 1912: LXIII. on exceptional measures for the case of war it introduced also abbreviated procedure in criminal proceedings (see § 1 and 2 of gov. decree 4039/ 1919. ME., ibidem, pp. 651-656, or p. 652). For anti-revolutionary criminal measures compare briefly e.g. PÖLÖSKEI, pp. 57-60.

27) PÖLÖSKEI, p. 62.

21) *Národní listy*, 59, 294, 10 December 1919, p. 4 (*Politický přehled - Maďarsko - Horthy. Co se děje?*).

22) PÖLÖSKEI, p. 75.

*mic reasons*” was issued under No. 91383/ 1919. BM. on 5 December 1919.<sup>28</sup> The purposeful character of the internment decree was highlighted by the fact that it not only had not defined the cases justifying to internment but it did not define the maximum time limit for which the interned person could be kept in custody either. That fact offered naturally sufficient space for arbitrary assertion of such measures.

### First ordinary post-war parliamentary elections in Hungary in January 1920

Only one year after declaration of independent Hungary, by the end of 1919, the country met the basic conditions for implementation of the first post-war standard parliamentary elections: relatively calmed turbulent Hungarian society, Rumanian occupational army away from the capital and mostly from eastern Hungary too and particularly the takeover of power by the government cabinet recognized by the Entente, with activity spread on essential part of Hungary. Thus it was only Huszár’s government that got the consent from the Entente Powers to call and implement the first ordinary post-war parliamentary election in the country. Also Friedrich’s administration had striven to implement them, but without success. As it had not been recognized by the Entente Powers, it did not dispose of sufficient mandate to declare regular parliamentary election with results having the necessary international legal respect.

Nevertheless, the right to vote, on the base of which the first post-war parliamentary election took place in the country, had been standardized by the governmental decree of Friedrich’s cabinet No. 5985/1919. ME.<sup>29</sup> According to § 1 of the governmental decree, the right to vote was assigned to all men who had been holders of Hungarian citizenship for six months at the minimum, having permanent residence at one place for six months at the minimum and aged over 24 years. But in case of minimally twelve-week service in the battlefield, the age limit was reduced to 21 years. The age limit

of 24 years was set also for women. But in their case, the assignment of the right to vote was conditioned by obligatory literacy.<sup>30</sup> Passive right to vote was restricted by the age limit of 30 years.<sup>31</sup> All members of the army, gendarmerie and police in active service were deprived of the right to vote.<sup>32</sup> Direct and secret right to vote was set by § 6.<sup>33</sup> The election was based, also in correspondence with the decision of the second Friedrich’s cabinet, on majority election system.<sup>34</sup>

Although Huszár’s cabinet finally did not comply with one of the basic conditions of recognition of his government by the Entente Powers in autumn 1919, i.e. the provision of democratic election campaign, full open to all competing political subjects on the base of equal chances, it managed to lead the country to ordinary parliamentary election without further serious internal commotions that would lead to further power conflicts in the society, and the election was the first one based on general, equal and direct right of vote. But the fact is that the opportunity of free competition of all political parties was provided only *pro forma*. The most obvious example of it was the almost permanent suppression of right to free and equal political competition particularly with regard to the Hungarian Social Democratic Party whose candidates were very often provided from freedom of free movement and frequently detained and interned. The above stated governmental decree from 5 December 1919 was purposefully abused to political persecution in order to intimidate the social democratic candidates and their potential voters. Although the proposal had been oriented particularly against communists, it was abused mainly against social democrats in practice.<sup>35</sup>

The social democrats responded to those practices oriented against them by leaving not only the concentration cabinet but also by withdrawing their candidates to the parliament on the base of the decision of the party leaders from 15 January 1920, thus boycotting the parliamentary election. But as the election was compulsory for each authorized voter, social democracy did not invite their potential voters not to participate,

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28) See *Rendeletek Tára*, 1919, pp. 1076-1081, or p. 1084 (annex to gov. decree). According to the governmental decree, persons dangerous and suspicious with regard to state interests and interests of the society or with regard to the public order and safety, as well as persons arousing fears from the above stated perspective. (See § 2, or § 1 of the governmental decree, *ibidem*, p. 1077, or p. 1076.)

29) *Ibidem*, § 1, pp. 879-881.

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30) *Ibidem*, p. 879.

31) *Ibidem*, § 2, p. 880.

32) *Ibidem*, § 3, *ibidem*.

33) *Ibidem*, § 6, p. 881.

34) *Ibidem*.

35) I. ROMSICS, *Magyarország története a XX. században*. Budapest 2000, p. 135.

but instructed them through their central newspaper, *Népszava*, thoroughly to boycott the election actively, i.e. to participate in the election if possible, but to vote by crossing out the whole ballot paper.<sup>36</sup> But the persecution by the state apparatus affected also candidates of liberal parties, besides the social democratic candidates. In some cases even the second main political direction of the country, the smallholders, had problems with restriction of free political competition.

The first ordinary post-war parliamentary election of post-war Hungary reflects the most markedly the irreconcilable and distinctive differentiation of the Hungarian society based on the political belief of the population that gave its specific character to the election. The first standard post-war election in Hungary, as well as the preceding canvassing constituted, thanks to the set governmental course, mainly election and canvassing against the communists, their social democratic “accomplices” and also against the “traitors” of the nation – liberals who, according to the Christian-national politicians should clear the way or hand the governmental power over to the communists, thus causing the origin of the detested Hungarian “Soviet” Republic. The Christian-national governmental course, as well as the National Army intervening markedly into the life of the country, exerted considerable effort to create the picture of the only possible path to salvation of Hungary, of the only possible alternative for the country, together with the Catholic Church not only during the canvassing but also during the whole period after the fall of the Republic of Councils: the alternative consisted in restoration or building of strong national Christian Hungary. As most inhabitants of the country had strong Christian belief and as the conservative political thinking had strong roots from the period of Austria-Hungary, it is natural that such purposeful offensive of the crucial political forces, aided also by the uncompromising attitude of the international community towards Hungary, found fertile breeding ground and predestined more or

less both the results of the actual parliamentary election and the future political atmosphere in the country.<sup>37</sup>

The pre-election political scene of Hungary at the turn of 1919 and 1920 was controlled by two central political directions: Christian-national and agrarian. The national Christians were represented by the party of Christian National Union (KNEP), established on 24 October 1919. The political interests of smallholders were patronaged by the Statewide Smallholder and Agrarian Party (OKgFP) that had turned away from the liberal-democratic direction after fusion with the Christian smallholders on 29 November 1919, claiming publicly allegiance to the Christian bloc. The Hungarian Social Democratic Party, reorganized after the fall of the Republic of Councils on 24 August 1919, had the most complicated position in the country. Its discredit caused by conspiracy with the Communist party on 21 March 1919 and its participation in the creation of the Hungarian “Soviet” Republic doomed it to the extreme margin of the political scene in the anti-revolutionary atmosphere. That occurred although social democracy claimed full allegiance to the original party program from 1903 and representatives of the right wing of the party of the state apparatus became the new head of the party. The civic-democratic liberal political forces that were under constant pressure of ideological offensive of the Christian-national course and the state bodies controlled by it were markedly weakened. Their position was considerably weakened also by absent unity and by substantial fragmentation. The National Democratic Party, established on 10 October 1919, was the only successful political formation of the liberal-democratic current.<sup>38</sup>

The first ordinary post-war parliamentary election in the country took place on 25-26 January 1920. But for the moment, the election could be held only in 164 electoral districts out of the total number of 219 electoral districts. The remaining electoral districts were situated on the

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36) *Népszava*, 48, e.g. 17, 20 January 1920, p. 3 (*A választások és a szociáldemokrata párt*) or ibidem 19, 22 January 1920, p. 2. (*Hogyan szavaznak a szociáldemokraták. Utmutató a választásokra.*). During the election, ballots spoiled according to the instruction of social democracy were submitted by 71 000 voters for example in the capital.

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37) The course of the election campaign is well illustrated by the following words from an article of the *Národní listy* newspaper (see *Národní listy*, 15, 20, 20 January 1920, p. 3 (*Politický přehled - Před volbami*): “*The censorship spoils issuing of election leaflets, calls and brochures, distorting completely their contents and sense. Mentions on state form and republic are not admitted either. Uncomfortable candidates and persons who could succeed in the election are arrested.*”

38) Summarized survey on the political scene of Hungary in autumn 1919 see e.g. A. TÓTH, *The Hungarian Political Stage of the Second Half of 1919 and the Results of the First Regular Post-War Parliamentary Elections in 1920*, Prague Papers on the History of International Relations, 2009, pp. 350-365.

territories occupied by the Rumanian and Yugoslavian army. The election could be called there only after the foreign armies would have left. The unequivocal winner of the election was the Christian bloc. OKgFP got the most posts in the post-war Hungarian National Assembly with restricted transitory two-year term of office. It occupied 78 posts in the National Assembly in total (47.56 %<sup>39</sup>). The candidates of KNEP occupied 73 posts (44.51 %) in total in the legislative body. To the contrary, the liberals failed the election completely, as was expected. Only 6 candidates (3.66 %) of the National Democratic Party got into the National Assembly. Nevertheless, the National Democratic Party became the second strongest political party in the capital, following the National Christians. It obtained 68 000 valid votes, i.e. 19% out of the 374 262 votes submitted in the Budapest electoral districts in the first ballot.<sup>40</sup>

The smallholders won also in the Rear Tisza Region where the election was held between 13 June and 19 July 1920 in the 44 electoral districts. The central party of smallholders got further 27 mandates there. On the contrary, KNEP got only 8 mandates there. The election in the remaining 11 electoral districts in the Baranya County in the south of the country was held almost one and half year later, on 30-31 October 1921. Smallholders won them too, succeeding in 6 electoral districts. The KNEP party obtained only one mandate.<sup>41</sup>

The right of vote from 1919 was the most democratic right of vote applied on the territory of Hungary. On its base, 3 133 094 authorized voters could go to the ballot boxes, constituting almost 87 % of all inhabitants over 24 years of age. To the contrary, the total number of authorized voters of former dualistic Hungary in 1910 was only 6.4% of the total number of population. That means that from the total number of Hungary inhabitants at that time, 18 264 533<sup>42</sup>, only 1 162 241 could take part in the election to the former Hungarian Parliament.<sup>43</sup>

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39) The percentage expresses here and further in the text the percentage proportion of the mandates occupied out of the total number of all mandates of the legislative body.

40) L. HUBAI, *Magyarország XX. századi választási atlasza 1920-2000. I. köt.*, (MVA, I.) Budapest 2001, pp. 25-26.

41) Ibidem, p. 28.

42) Without Croatia and Slavonia.

43) M. RUSZKAI, *Az 1945 előtti magyar választások statisztikája*, Történeti Statisztikai Közlemények, 1959, 3, 1-2, p. 16.

The structure of representation of individual social groups in the new Hungarian legislative assembly changed markedly as compared to the last election period of the dualistic Hungary. The representation of aristocracy in the first elected legislative assembly of post-war Hungary dropped strongly, by two thirds, from 15 % to 5 %. The representation of big and small landowners dropped more than by a half, from 36 % to 15 %. On the contrary, the number of deputies representing small farmers, i.e. smallholders, increased markedly, from 1 % up to 15 %. So in 1920, the representation of smallholder classes of the society in the parliament achieved the percentage level of representation of aristocracy in the last lower chamber of the parliament of dualistic Hungary. But compared to 1910, the representation of the Catholic Church in the Hungarian legislative body increased markedly in 1920, by almost two thirds, from 4 % to 11 %. And it was in 1920 when the first woman was elected to the parliament.<sup>44</sup>

#### Restoration of constitutionality and election of temporary head of state

The first post-war legitimately elected legislative assembly of the country was convoked festively to the 16 February 1920. Its primary task was to define post-war Hungary from legal and constitutional perspective. It was expressed in the basic legal article of interwar Hungary, the so-called Horthy Hungary, No. 1920: I. tc. on restoration of constitutionality and temporary arrangement of execution of supreme state power that was adopted by the National Assembly on 28 February 1920 and declared in the Code a day later. The origin of the basic act of legal and constitutional character was accompanied by complicated negotiations between both strongest political parties, KNEP and OFKgP. The Gordian knot of the negotiations was, from the beginning, particularly the issue of the head of state, characterized by sharp clash of views between the supporters of legitimism, i.e. supporters of the Habsburgs, which means of the former Austrian Emperor Charles I, or Charles IV as the Hungarian king, and the supporters of national kingdom who strove for free election of a new monarch of the country. Both those antagonistic camps originated from the strongest parliamentary parties. The legitimists included particularly the deputies and politici-

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44) ROMSICS, *Magyarország*, p. 135.

ans from the Party of Christian National Union and the supporters of free election of king the deputies and politicians from the Smallholder Party.

The adoption of the basic legal article of interwar Hungary No. 1920: I. tc. completed the process of restoration of standard legal and constitutional limits of functioning of the internal political life in the country. The act codified particularly the current legal and constitutional position of Hungary. It stated the separation of the country from the Austrian-Hungarian state and the termination of both chambers of the land assembly of dualistic Hungary on 16 November 1918, recognizing the new temporary legislative body of the country, the National Assembly, convoked on the base of the results of the January parliamentary election, as the exclusive legitimate representative body of national sovereignty.<sup>45</sup> The act legitimized the period following after the fall of the Republic of Councils, from the arrival of István Friedrich to the position of Prime Minister on 7 August 1919, i.e. all governments constituted after that date and their decrees. On the other hand, it cancelled all legal measures of the Popular Republic<sup>46</sup> and of the Republic of Councils in form of acts, decrees, as well as all other measures of legal character of both those republics issued under other names. It ordered particularly complete removal of so called popular decrees and popular acts from the national *corpus iuris*.<sup>47</sup> The basic purpose of those provisions of Act No. 1920: I. tc. was to restore legal continuity of post-war Hungary with the period before 31 October 1918, i.e. with dualistic Hungary.

The act arranged further the issue of the head of state. It stated that the execution of royal power had been interrupted on 13 November 1918, on the base of the official letter of the Emperor Charles I, written in the imperial castle at Eckartsau, to the east of Vienna, in which he had given up the direction of state matters of Hungary.<sup>48</sup> But the legal article did not solve the issue of the head of state finally, but *ad interim*. It assigned the National Assembly

only to elect the temporary head of state in regent rank.<sup>49</sup> In connection with arrangement of the issue of supreme state power in the country, the act defined the authority of the temporary head of state, i.e. defined the restrictions of rights of royal power for the regent. His basic authorities included appointment of the government and the right to return acts to the National Assembly to re-debate, except for acts related to state form of the country or of head of state. But the regent could return acts to the National Assembly only once.<sup>50</sup> In case the legislative body became inquorate, the regent could dissolve the National Assembly. But the regent could do that only after the deputies did not obey his appeal to restore the quorate character of the parliament.<sup>51</sup> The right to adjourn parliament session had originally not been awarded to the regent. Nevertheless, on the base of Horthy's antecedence of being elected to the top of the state, the regent was awarded, within extension of the range of his authorities, also the right to adjourn and terminate the session of the National Assembly by the additional Act No. 1920: XVII. tc. from 18 August 1920, fully according to the right belonging to royal power in compliance with acts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century No. 1848: IV. tc., or 1867 : X. tc.<sup>52</sup>

In the foreign political sphere, the temporary head of state was awarded the right to receive and send envoys. He could enter into ally and other agreements through the government, but only provided that they did not affect the matters falling under the authority of the legislative process. In such case, the regent depended on the consent of the National Assembly. Also in case of declaration of war, use of army outside the state borders or also in case of entering into peace treaty, the regent was imposed the duty of additional request for consent of the National Assembly.<sup>53</sup>

The regent could execute the executive power according to the law only through the ministry accounting to the National Assembly. All measures and decisions of the temporary head of state, including the measures related also to armed forces, were legally valid only if countersigned by the responsible minister. But that condition did not concern the constitutional

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45) 1920. évi Országos Törvénytár (*Corpus Juris, CJ*) 1920, 1920. évi I. törvénycikk az alkotmányosság helyreállításáról és az állami főhatalom gyakorlásának ideiglenes rendezéséről, preamble of the Act, p. 1 and § 11, 4.

46) The Hungarian Popular Republic was originated by so called Chrysanthemum Revolution and declared on 31 October 1918. Its existence was terminated on 21 March 1919 by establishment of the Republic of Councils.

47) Ibidem, § 9 and 10 of the Act, pp. 3 and 4.

48) Ibidem, preamble of the Act, p. 1.

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49) Ibidem, § 12, p. 4.

50) Ibidem, § 13, ibidem.

51) Ibidem, pp. 4-5.

52) Ibidem, 1920. évi XVII. törvénycikk az alkotmányosság helyreállításáról és az állami főhatalom gyakorlásának ideiglenes rendezéséről szóló 1920. évi I. t.-c. 13. §-ának módosításáról, p. 77.

53) Ibidem, 1920: I. tc., p. 5.

rights belonging to the regent from the position of commander-in-chief, i.e. the measures concerning direction, command and internal organization of the National Army. In spite of the monarchist character of the regent rank and the monarchist political system of interwar Hungary, the regent was not awarded the right to grant titles of nobility. The temporary head of state was also denied the right to award general amnesties. The regent's person was inviolable and enjoyed the same criminal protection as the monarch. In case of violation of law or constitution, he could be held responsible by the National Assembly. But the relevant initiative of hundred deputies as a minimum was needed for that.<sup>54</sup>

The temporary head of state of post-war Hungary, confirmed in the provision of Act No. 1920: I. tc., was elected by the National Assembly on 1 March 1920. Admiral Miklós Horthy de Nagybánya got the position. Out of the total number of the 141 votes submitted, 131 were for Horthy, 7 deputies gave their vote to Count Albert Apponyi, the president of the Hungarian peace delegation, and 3 votes were invalid. Horthy's election to the regent position was confirmed by the parliament on 5 March by the second act adopted, Act No. 1920: II. tc.<sup>55</sup>

It can be striking that the basic legal article based on constitutional law of so-called Horthyan Hungary did not emphasize explicitly the state form of the country or official name of the state, which was Hungarian Kingdom. The monarchist structure of interwar Hungary is referred particularly in the declaration of the preamble of the Act confirming interruption of execution of royal power in the country by 13 November 1918. But the Act did not emphasize verbatim that the monarchist state form of Hungary, in compliance with the legal continuity with dualistic Hungary, persisted. In connection to the reference to future final solution of the issue of head of state, the Act operated only with formulations like "final solution of execution of supreme power in the country" and "head of state", i.e. not with formulations of "monarchist power" or "monarch".

To get compact picture with regard to constitutional form of interwar Hungary, so called Horthyan Hungary, let us remember also the preceding declared constitutional forms of post-war Hungary. The first post-war constitutional definition of Hungary was expressed in the popular act No. I.

from 1918, passed by the government of Count Mihály Károlyi on 16 November 1918.<sup>56</sup> By that legal act, Hungary was declared a republic and Popular Republic of Hungary became official name of the state. Count Mihály Károlyi became the first post-war head of state or first Hungarian president; he was charged with administration of supreme state power in the country temporarily by the Hungarian revolutionary National Council on 11 January 1919. On 21 March 1919, the civic-democratic popular republic was substituted by the socialist-communist experiment in form of the Hungarian Republic of Councils. The supreme state representative of the Republic of Councils was Sándor Garbai who presided the Revolutionary Governing Council, i.e. the "soviet" government consisting of popular commissioners. It was in that case equivalent to the position of Prime Minister. After the resignation of the government of the Republic of Councils and the accession of Gyula Peidl's unicolour social-democratic government on 1 August 1919, the Popular Republic of Hungary was restored, which the Government claimed allegiance to by the governmental decree No. 1/1919 ME, based on the decision of the Cabinet from 2 August 1919.<sup>57</sup> Let us emphasize that, from the perspective of significance at that time, the name of "popular republic" should express that the Hungarian Government claimed allegiance to the principle of civic parliamentary democracy. Both Peidl's and Károlyi's government wanted to dissociate from the old "aristocratic", i.e. monarchist dualistic Hungary and the national-right-wing forces that wanted to link post-war Hungary, from constitutional perspective, to the social-political system of pre-October Hungary.

The only unambiguous legal allegiance of Hungary to the monarchist state form was represented, until autumn 1921, by the governmental decree No. 2394/1920. ME, passed by Sándor Simonyi-Semadam's government, the first post-war Hungarian government originated from the results of the parliamentary election, based on its decision adopted at its second Cabinet session on 16 March 1920. The fact that act No. 1920: I. tc. did not emphasize *expressis verbis* the state form of the country required, in context with the official naming of governmental bodies and authorities, additional emphasis on the fact that restoration of legal continuity of the country with the period before 31 October signified also restoration of the monarchist state form. So the governmental decree declared clearly: "*The act of restorati-*

54) Ibidem.

55) See ibidem, 1920. évi II. törvénycikk nagybányai Horthy Miklós úrnak kormányzóvá történt megválasztásáról, pp. 7-8.

56) CJ 1918. Budapest, 1918, p. 202.

57) MOL, K 26, ME., 1203. cs., 1919 - I. - 3887, folio 2-4 a *Hivatalos Közlöny*, 1919, 109, p. 3 August, title page.

*on of constitutionality and temporary arrangement of execution of supreme state power, 1920: I. stated that the execution of royal power had been interrupted on 13 November 1918, but Hungary had not changed its thousand-year-long state form and had not cancelled the royal majesty and the royal power as legal institution.”<sup>58</sup>*

Hungary declared its monarchist political system as higher state form only on the occasion of dethroning of the Habsburgs under the pressure of foreign countries after the second restoration attempt of the ex-king Charles the Habsburg in October 1921 in act No. 1921: XLVII. tc. “On extinction of monarch rights of His Majesty Charles IV and the successor rights of the Habsburg House” of István Bethlen’s government, passed by the deputies on 6 November 1921. The § 3 of the act declared preservation of the monarchist state form of Hungary, postponing the issue of occupation of the vacated throne for a later point in time.

### *Start of final consolidation of the country and outline of its progress*

The implementation of the first ordinary post-war parliamentary election in the country at the beginning of 1920, the constitutional definition of post-war Hungary together with the temporary solution of the issue of head of state by legal article No. 1920: I. tc. and the election of the temporary head of state constituted the indispensable constitutional base for consolidation of internal political and later also economic life of the country. On 15 March 1920, the eighth post-war Hungarian cabinet under participation of both strongest parliamentary parties, KNEP and OKFgP, under Sándor Simonyi-Semadam as Prime Minister, was appointed the regent of the country to administer the country until the parliamentary election in the Rear Tisza Region. But such indispensable basic constitutional acts did by far not constitute the last meritorious steps “codifying” the form of interwar Hungary. Hungary was to engage in conclusion of the peace “talks” and signature of the peace treaty, implementation of the above stated parliamentary election also on the gradually left Hungarian territories, as well as in final solution of the issue of head of state that, after the signature of the Peace Treaty of

Trianon, constituted the basic obstacle of the internal political consolidation process or cooperation of the governmental coalition.

The conclusion of the peace treaty was under way already. Hungary was invited to the Paris Peace Conference on the base of the decision of the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference from 1 December 1919, although Budapest had been invited to send its peace delegates to Paris on 1 May 1919 already. But at that time, the invitation of the Supreme Council was stopped by the Vienna Entente missions reluctant to deliver the invitation to the then “soviet” Cabinet of Budapest.<sup>59</sup> Hungary signed the peace treaty with the Allied and Associated Powers on 4 June 1920, although it did not agree with its uncompromising provisions. The Hungary peace convention became publicly known as the Peace Treaty of Trianon, by the place of its signature, the Grand Trianon Palace at Versailles near Paris.<sup>60</sup>

The greatest share in the process of strengthening of the foundations of the consolidation process of the country appertains to Count Pál Teleki’s government that had substituted the temporary Simonyi-Semadam’s cabinet after the June and July parliamentary election in the Rear Tisza Region on 19 July 1920. The central item of the government program of the first Teleki’s cabinet was firstly to restore legal order in the country, to extend the political base of the Christian-national political course by suppressing the non-standard political power of the military and semi-military structures, achieved during autumn 1919, under simultaneous restoration of the dominant political power of large farmers, aristocracy and financial capital representatives, as well as further correction of political space for civic-democratic opposition powers and social-democratic movement.<sup>61</sup>

The basic legal frame for strengthening of the Christian-national political line in the social-political life of the country was provided to Teleki’s government by the extended validity of all legal measures originated on the base of act No. 1912: LXIII. tc. on extraordinary measures for the

58) The quotation from the record of the concerned Hungarian Cabinet. MOL, K 27, ME., MT., 16 March 1920 (box No. 125), pp. 28–29.

59) For the issue of invitation of Hungary to the Paris Peace Conference see A. Tóth, *A Huszárkormány meghívása a párizsi békekonferenciára (1919. december – 1920. január)*, Századok, 2005, 139, 5, pp. 1477–1495.

60) For the history and progress of conclusion of peace treaty between the Allied and Associated Powers and Hungary in English compare I. ROMSICS, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920*, Boulder, Colorado 2002.

61) Gy. RÁNKI (ed.), *Magyarország története, 1918–1919, 1919–1945*, Vol. I., Budapest 1978, pp. 426–427.

case of war, or on extraordinary regime of state power with reference to “extraordinary” conditions in the country caused by the events of the years 1918-1919. It was established by the legal article No. 1920: IV. tc., passed by the National Assembly on 28 April 1920, under Simonyi-Semadam’s government. The provision of the act from 1912 was extended by one year as from ratification of the peace treaty.<sup>62</sup>

In compliance with the above stated program, Teleki’s government under the regent’s support proceeded finally to liquidation of country and Budapest brachial troops or to their transformation, liquidating also the best-known centres of brachial power during the second half of the year. Although those measures of the Government did not lead to full elimination of extreme-right-wing forces from political power and political life, their manoeuvring space was markedly restricted, particularly with regard to undesirable adventurous arbitrary repressive events of the so called white terror, provoking undesirable negative response even abroad. The stabilization of internal political situation of the country under direction and in spirit of the Christian-national course should be supported also by the bill of Teleki’s cabinet for more efficient protection of state and social order, adopted by the National Assembly as legal art. No. 1921: III. tc. on 16 March 1921. The act stated that he who instigated or lead to organization or movement directed at violent subversion or destruction of legal order of the state and the society, particularly at violent establishment of exclusive government of any social class, committed crime under pain of prison of up to five years. In cases of armed movement, its leaders could be condemned to prison for ten to fifteen years. The act included also provisions for protection of the state and the nation. According to its wording, he, who stated or spread such untrue fact that would harm the reputation or credit of the Hungarian nation, committed offence under pain of prison of up to five years. If such action were directed at instigating any foreign state or organization to unfriendly action against the Hungarian nation, the originator of such action could be condemned to prison for up to ten years. But if such action of any foreign state or organization had provoked unfriendly action against the Hungarian nation, its originator could be condemned even to life imprisonment.<sup>63</sup>

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62) For the provisions of Act No. 1912: LXIII. tc. see CJ 1912. Budapest, 1912, pp. 691-710. For the wording of Act No. 1920: VI. tc. CJ 1920. Budapest, 1920, pp. 26-27.

63) RÁNKI, pp. 431-432. BALOGH, p. 126.

Nevertheless, the actual completion of the process of consolidation of the country pertains only to the long-year Prime Minister, István Bethlen. Count Bethlen’s accession to the Prime Minister position on 14 April 1921 terminated the period of relatively frequent changing of Prime Ministers and Governments, seven of the former<sup>64</sup> and nine of the latter<sup>65</sup> being changed in the period from 31 October 1918 to 14 April 1921. Count Bethlen was appointed the Hungarian Prime Minister after the resignation of Teleki’s cabinet after the unsuccessful first restoration attempt of ex-emperor Charles I in Hungary in spring 1921, and held the position of Prime Minister almost ten years, until 24 August 1931.

Count Bethlen, the Prime Minister, main architect of the political system of interwar Hungary, so called Horthyian Hungary, was defender of democratic civic parliamentarianism. But he advocated its political regulation in order to direct the share of individual social groups in political administration of the country. For that reason, Bethlen opposed radical extension of civic freedoms including the right to vote, as its adaptation to the political-power needs of the conservative Christian-national political course constituted the basic frame to the semi-authoritative direction of the democratic principles of civic parliamentarianism in interwar Hungary. The regulation of the right to vote should further eliminate particularly the share of left-wing opposition, i.e. social democracy, in the political power of the country. But its objective was to regulate also the political influence of civic-liberal political directions, i.e. of political groups based particularly on those pre-war political currents that accentuated principles of classical civic liberalism, as against the governmental regulated liberalism of that time. So those objectives were identical to the objectives of the Christian-national governmental set of pre-election period, i.e. of the turn of 1919 and 1920. The political system of so called Horthyian Hungary, completed and strengthened by Bethlen on the base of the above stated purposeful politi-

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64) Six Prime Ministers without the President of the Revolutionary Governing Council of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Sándor Garbai (Count Mihály Károlyi, Dénes Berinkey, Gyula Peidl, István Friedrich, Károly Huszár, Sándor Simonyi-Semadam and Count Pál Teleki - the Prime Ministers arranged chronologically by their terms in office).

65) Without the Revolutionary Governing Council that governed between 21 March 1919 and 1 August 1919 in three formations. The Prime Minister István Friedrich presided during his term in office (from 7 August 1919 to 24 November 1919) three government teams in total.

cal regulation of functioning of democratic principles of civic parliamentarianism gave final basic practical constitutional frame to the constitutional principles confirmed in the first legal article of constitutional character No. 1920: I. tc. adopted by the post-war legislative body of the country for the period of subsequent 24 years, i.e. until the country was occupied by the Germans during World War II in 1944.

The political system of interwar Hungary, completed during Bethlen's era, was based on the basic Bethlen's thesis on democracy, about which he said in his program speech before the deputies of the national Assembly that: *"It cannot signify blind power of the mass, blind power of undirected masses."*<sup>66</sup> "Blind power of masses" must be perceived here not only as left-wing political groups representing particularly the labourers, but also the civic-democratic political groups representing particularly the interests of middle classes of towns and villages that had not participated in central political administration of the country in decisive manner so far. But the policy of the Prime Minister Bethlen was, as against the left-wing opposition, characterized not only by unilateral adverse correction of limits of free political competition. Count Bethlen, the Prime Minister, was primarily good political pragmatist and strategist, aware of the need of preservation of the principles of pluralistic political life of the country not only with regard to the political image of Hungary abroad, but also from the perspective of social reconciliation in the society. The society was to experience several years of difficult period of economic consolidation, with the main necessary victim consisting of lower social classes, i.e. of the part of society constituting fertile grounds particularly for social-democratic movement. Therefore Bethlen could not proceed to restrict radically the political activity of the main speaker of those classes, social democracy, because such step could lead to uncontrollable and undesirable explosion of politically and pointedly organized social dissatisfaction and resistance directed by social democratic party. That would have markedly negative impact on economic life and on the desired economic stabilization of the country. But power checkmate of social-democratic movement from the official political life could lead to general undesirable harm to the credit of civic parliamentarianism and plura-

lism political system of Hungary abroad, which could have been used not only by the Hungarian democratic emigration.

The need to provide at least for minimum level of constructive character of opposition policy of social democracy, i.e. its minimum state loyalty, was necessary towards foreign countries last but not least as at that time, social democratic parties constituted essential parliamentary force or were even governmental parties in most countries. Thus any open political obstruction by left-wing opposition would be undesirable for Christian-national Hungary also from the foreign political point of view. So Bethlen was interested in holding social democracy in play, in spite of gradual restriction of the right to vote. That means, it was necessary to allow not only its participation in the legislative body but also to provide for constructive line of its opposition policy, not damaging state interests of Hungary. Nevertheless, at the beginning of Bethlen's era even social democracy was aware of the fact that it rather incurred harm by its intentional absence from parliamentary life and that its passive role was rather counter-productive for it. By the end of 1922, opposition agreement was entered into between Bethlen's government and the Hungarian social democracy. The agreement called Bethlen-Peyer's pact delimited coexistence of both parties, of the government representing central Christian-national political line and social democracy, in the set limits of functioning of the political system of the country. Within the pact, the social democracy promised, among other things, that it would support foreign policy of the government, it would not promote republican system, it would withdraw from political cooperation with civic-liberal opposition and it would not initiate political strikes. The government promised the socialists, among other things, not to prevent the organizational functioning of social-democratic party and trade unions and the distribution of the central newspaper of the party, *Népszava*.<sup>67</sup>

That internal political strategy of Bethlen's policy trying to preserve maximally the impression of full implementation of democratic principles of civic parliamentarianism, or full preservation of its basic construction unit, political pluralism in Hungary had primarily new foreign political concept of Hungary in the background. The new political line did not give cold shoulder to the revisionist line, but concentrated its interest pragmatically primarily on integration into new structures of foreign political relationships of the Versailles peace system, within which it wanted to establish

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66) *Az 1920. évi febr. hó 16-ára hirdetett Nemzetgyűlés naplója*. (Stenographic records from the National Assembly session convoked for 16 February). Vol. IX (21 March 1921 - 12 May 1921, 166. - 190<sup>th</sup> session.) Budapest, Az Atheneum Irodalmi és Nyomdai Részvénytársulat Könyvnyomdája, 1921, 175<sup>th</sup> session, p. 187.

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67) RÁNKI, pp. 448-451.; BALOGH, pp. 131-133; PÖLÖSKELI, pp. 180-183.

basic standard multilateral relationships and try to break through its foreign political isolation. Hungary expressed the new political course on 23 May 1921 already, when Bethlen's government filed application to the League of Nations. By that, together with signature and subsequent ratification of the peace treaty in 1920, Hungary confirmed in fact the newly constructed international political system based on mutual respect of political and territorial independence of the member states. Such turn of the Hungarian foreign policy directed by the Prime Minister Count Bethlen constituted, from the perspective of surviving emotions of the Hungarian society due to signing and ratification of the peace treaty with the Allied and Associated Powers, uncompromising for Hungary, clear sign of the upcoming new phase of the policy of the Hungarian governmental set, directed by the Prime Minister, Count Bethlen, and the Regent Horthy. But by that, the Hungarian government virtually positioned itself against the radical national-right-wing political groups promoting open revisionist policy. Open political activity of those groups became undesirable and dangerous to the Government from the perspective of its new foreign political line. The sober and realistic aspect of the new political course of interwar Hungary was evidenced also by liquidation of the first restoration attempt of the ex-Emperor Charles I in spring 1921 as well as of his subsequent second attempt for restoration of his royal power in Hungary in autumn 1921, after which the political influence of the legitimists on central policy was gradually markedly restricted, which could be seen also in the appointment of the non-legitimistic Count Bethlen as Prime Minister by Regent Horthy instead of the legitimistic Prime Minister, Count Teleki.<sup>68</sup>

But the Prime Minister Bethlen focused, within his effort to strengthen and consolidate the internal political scene in order to provide for standard political environment, not dangerous to the Christian-national consolidation interests of the state inwards and outwards, not only on political pacification of the opposition social democracy. For the governmental policy to be long lasting, continuous and efficient, also stable parlia-

mentary majority had to be ensured, to provide the Government with firm and reliable support. Therefore the main effort of the Prime Minister Count István Bethlen consisted from the beginning in creation of a politically consolidated and homogenous unified governmental party that would be bound, with regard to the government, by the jointly binding political line and program, thus providing the political interests of the governmental cabinet with stable political support in the National Assembly. The Christian-national and agrarian governmental coalition originated from the election was delicate and inhomogeneous and its heterogeneity not only in essential political issues often paralyzed the activity of the Government and of the parliamentary majority. The first Bethlen's attempt for creation of unified governmental party in summer 1920 ended only at the level of a rather loose political union of both biggest political parties, KNEP and OFKGP, and it did not last long due to the then insurmountable contradiction in the royal issue.

The chance of implementation of Bethlen's plan increased in autumn 1921 when the National Assembly adopted the above stated act of dethroning. So the Gordian knot that had paralyzed the efforts to unify both governmental political parties into one subject was solved. Nevertheless, due to two restoration attempts of ex-Emperor Charles I in 1921, Bethlen deviated politically from the "central" party of the Christian-national political course because of the legitimists, concentrated particularly around the KNEP party, and got closer to smallholders, who were mostly supporters of free election of the king. So the Prime Minister saw the foundation of a future united governmental party not in the KNEP party any more, but in Nagytádi's Smallholder Party he had wanted to decompose and unite with KNEP. Therefore he focused his policy on the effort for his political line to be accepted by smallholders, or for him to be accepted by the smallholders. He succeeded in the end at the beginning of 1922, and on 22 February 1922 he joined the Smallholder Party together with several conservative liberal or conservative deputies, becoming its political leader. The Smallholder Party, expanded and changed in such way, went on acting under the name of Christian Smallholder, Agrarian and Civic Party (*Keresztény-keresztényen Kisgazda, Földműves és Polgári Párt*), or in short as United Party (*Egységes Párt, EP*). So the narrowly agrarian smallholder party focused primarily on country classes became a party with much broader social platform, the so-called collection party. The united governmental party created by Bethlen was active for the whole ten-year period of so-called Bethlen's era in unchanged form and on unchanged base. But it held the role of central united governmental party

68) BALOGH, pp. 129-130. For details on the issue of restoration attempts of Charles I in Hungary and his foreign political dimension in 1920 see M. ÁDÁM, *Les deux coups d'Etat de l'ex-roi Charles et la Petite Entente*. Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, 1985, 31, 1-2, pp. 33-85. For newer data on the first restoration attempt see A. TÓTH, *Czechoslovak Policy and the First Restoration Attempt of Charles Habsburg in Hungary in the Spring 1921*. Prague Papers on the History of International Relations, 2007, pp. 241-279.

for the whole interwar period, although in the Thirtieths it shifted strongly to the right as against the Twentieths.<sup>69</sup>

The basic internal political goal of the Prime Minister, Count Bethlen, to establish power-political balance on the internal political scene, while preserving the dominant political position of the existing power forces, i.e. to reduce the political influence of town and country middle classes and to increase the political influence of traditional higher social classes as against reality, e.g. the efforts of the political elite from 1919 and 1921, was completed by the second post-war parliamentary election in 1922 on the base of the reduced right to vote. The composition of the new National Assembly reflected the results of Bethlen's policy combined with autocratic elements that should ensure guaranteed stable majority political power to the central governmental course. The political forces dangerous to Bethlen's policy, preventing it from assertion in the National Assembly due to reduced right to vote<sup>70</sup>, either fell out from the new legislative body or shrank into insignificant parties or party fractions. So in the newly elected National Assembly, the representation of the legitimists uncomfortable to the Government both from internal and from foreign political perspective was markedly restricted, as well as the representation of the democratic smallholder political direction endangering the large farmer groups, the neo-conservative Christian socialists endangering the interests of big capital and last but not least the extreme anti-Semitic groups uncomfortable to the governmental course. Only 40% deputies from the first election period were re-elected to the second National Assembly. Left-wing opposition represented by deputies of social democracy was newly elected to the legislative body. But their opposition policy was regulated from the perspective of state interests by the above stated so called Bethlen-Peyer's opposition pact. So the implementation of the second postwar parliamentary election in the country in 1922 confirmed the basic line of the political system of the country: the legislative power depended on the legislative body, the legislative body was controlled by the United Party, the united governmental party depended on the Government

whose political line depended on the Prime Minister and from the Regent of the country in the background.<sup>71</sup>

The limits of the widest democratic right to vote in the history of the Hungarian parliamentarianism from 1919 were not preserved in the course of so called Horthy Hungary, and they were gradually markedly restricted. That tendency is clearly declared by the fact that twenty years later, Hungary had 400 000 less authorized voters than in 1920. That means that, while the number of citizens had grown by 15% between 1919 and 1939, the number of authorized voters had dropped by 12% in the same period. The distinctive difference could be seen in the second post-war parliamentary election in 1922 already. In the election of 1922, the right to vote was awarded to about 750 000 inhabitants less than in the first post-war parliamentary election. So only 29.5% of the total number of inhabitants of the country were authorized to vote. The right to vote was assigned to all men over 24 years of age then, but the age limit was shifted to 30 years for women. A condition of obtaining the right to vote was, among other things, at least 10 years of citizenship and 2 years of permanent residence. And the right to vote was not secret any more, or better said it was not secret in blanket. The election was secret only in Budapest and surroundings and in statutory towns. The smallest fall of the proportion of the number of authorized voters and the number of inhabitants of the country occurred in inter-war Hungary at the election of 1926, when only 26.6% of inhabitants had the right to vote.<sup>72</sup>

So before 1922, the Prime Minister Bethlen succeeded in creating standardized stable political environment respecting outwards the principles of pluralism political system, but on the other hand not restricting the political goals and plans of Bethlen's governmental course. After creating some political base, Bethlen's governmental apparatus could fully focus on stabilization of the disastrous economic situation of the country.

The stabilization of economic and financial situation of Hungary was not easy, but both the economy as the finances were restored successfully in the course of the first half of the Twentieths. The basic tool of the Government to stabilize the economic life of the country was high inflation. While, as stated above, 100 crowns were equal to 3,1 Swiss francs in June 1920, the value of 100 crowns dropped to 2,34 in summer 1921, in 1922 to 0,56, in 1924 to 0,08 and in 1927 to 0,0065 Swiss franc. In consequence of

69) PÖLÖSKEI, pp. 171-177. RÁNKI, pp. 442-443. BALOGH, p. 133. Gy. FÖLDES, L. HUBAI, *Parlamentari választások Magyarországon 1920-1998*, Budapest 1999, pp. 86 and 92.

70) For adaptation of the right to vote on occasion of the second postwar parliamentary election and for the history of political negotiations *in re* compare FÖLDES, HUBAI, pp. 87-91.

71) BALOGH, pp. 135-137.

72) Ruzskai, pp. 28-30; Balogh, p. 134; Romsics, *Magyarország*, pp. 222-225.

inflation combined with import bans and import restrictions, so called inflation prosperity was established in 1921 to 1922. Thanks to those measures, industrial production of the country was almost doubled and the agricultural production was increased by 20% between 1920 and 1924. Both of the sectors of the national economy, the industry and agriculture, approached or achieved 70% of the level of pre-war Hungarian economy by 1924. But in 1923 and 1924, the inflation policy became unsustainable. The uncovered print of banknotes did not manage to cover huge price increase and money lacked in circulation. The lack of cash in commerce and industry provided ideal field to loans with interest rates between 20-40%. As compared to pre-war years, the banknote circulation increased up to thirty times. But the high increase of prices (up to twenty times as compared to pre-war period) deepened markedly the social situation of lower social classes that became unbearable. Real salaries of 1923 corresponded to only half the value of the pre-war salaries. It was practically not realizable any more to implement practically the consequent restriction of state budget expenses and to rely on own forces, as the Finance Minister Lóránd Hegedüs had tried in 1921 without success. Hungary, like Austria in 1922 and later Rumania, Poland and Bulgaria, had to proceed to solve its burdensome financial situation through international loan; Bethlen's government applied for it in 1923. In 1924, the state stopped covering its expenses by printing uncovered banknotes and stopped offering large inflation credits. It established a formally independent central bank of the country, the Hungarian National Bank that became the only standard subject in the country with the right to print banknotes. By summer 1924, the Government had met the basic conditions of using foreign loan and could make use of its account as from June 1924.

The state economy got balanced by the end of 1924, and the period of prosperity was started. About a fourth of the international loan covered the state budget deficit, and the rest was used primarily to pay old debts and to build schools, hospitals and public buildings, etc. In the course of the second half of the Twentieths, further loans flowed into the country, in total amount of about 3 billion in the new currency, pengő, but they were unfortunately used mainly in non-productive sphere. However, high interest percentage was paid for such credits, and whole industrial branches were pledged. Nevertheless, the positive growth of Hungarian economy in the second half of the Twentieths is well illustrated by the GDP calculated per one inhabitant (according to P. Bairoch), ranking Hungary at top place in the space of (not only) south-eastern Europe. While in 1925, the GDP in Hungary was 365 dollars per inhabitant; in 1924 it was 424 dollars already. In the

same year, GDP per inhabitant in Czechoslovakia was 586, in Rumania 331, in Yugoslavia 341, in Bulgaria 306 and in Poland 350 dollars *per capita* (dollar from 1960).<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

The political system of interwar Hungary, so called Horthy Hungary, the foundations of which were laid at turn of 1919 and 1920 and completed during the internal political consolidation process in 1920 to 1922 was based, from constitutional perspective, on civic parliamentarianism, with a system of several political parties, with a parliament and a government accounting to the parliament, sovereign justice and pluralism cultural life. But the functioning of standard political institutions of civic parliamentarianism of interwar Hungarian Kingdom was purposefully regulated by the supreme state power through anti-democratic measures and interventions. The main anti-democratic element of the political system of so-called Horthy Hungary was the restriction of competition of political parties through unequal conditions or through elimination of considerable part of the society from the competition. The basic tool for regulation of political power of individual social and interest classes of the society consisted in the relevant restriction of civic freedoms particularly through public manner of voting in the election in most electoral districts, correction of freedom of press and later even through religious and racial discrimination. But the political system of so called Horthy Hungary did not include the main fascist and national-socialist elements leading to absolute totalitarization, i.e. official ideology, system of one party, liquidation of parliamentarianism, elimination of pluralism of cultural life and its complete state control, assertion of armed pressure terrorist system for intimidation of the society.<sup>74</sup>

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73) ROMSICS, *Magyarország*, pp. 152-156. BALOGH, pp. 139-140 and 142. ROMPORTLOVÁ, SLÁDEK, pp. 65-67.

74) ROMSICS, *Magyarország Története*, Budapest 2007, p. 806.