

Gyorgy Heltai: The Shaping of the Hungarian
Foreign Policy after 1945

I. SUBJECT

The shaping of Hungarian foreign policy between 1945 and 1948. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs enjoys relative independence. Preparation of documentation for the Paris Peace Conference. Establishment of friendly relations with the Western powers. Hungary tries to find a modus vivendi with her neighbors; greatest difficulties encountered vis-a-vis Czechoslovakia; Yugoslavia plays the role of mediator on several occasions. A plan for a federation of the satellite states in the Danube Basin seriously considered for a while in the highest Communist circles, known as the Zhdanov-plan; discarded by the Soviet in 1948. From the summer of 1947 on, increasing Communist interference in foreign affairs. After the break with Tito and under Cominform pressure, even the semblance of an independent Hungarian foreign policy is suppressed. --
Period covered: Xmas 1944 - October 1948.

II. OUTLINE

- 1.) Janos Gyöngyösi, a provincial editor, proposed by the Russians as first post-war Minister of Foreign Affairs in the coalition government formed at Debrecen, Christmas 1944. The new minister has no illusions as to the scope of Hungarian foreign policy, foreseeing its subordination to Soviet decisions. However, the Soviet does not seem to pay much attention to the activity of the Ministry. After the government had moved to Budapest in May 1945, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed into a large apparatus, due partly to the return to their posts of its former, in majority anti-fascist, officials, and partly to the political game of the coalition parties, each of which insisted on having its own reliable men in high posts.

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- 2.) The chaotic conditions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cease in the fall of 1945. Its activity is focused around two main tasks:
 - a.) delineation of the new Hungarian foreign policy and reorganization of diplomatic missions;
 - b.) preparation of the material for the peace treaty negotiations.

a.) There is no interference with the work on party level, each party having already placed reliable men in key positions in the Ministry. Smallholders and Communists cooperate and usually their decisions carry, over the protests of the Social Democrats. The essence of the new foreign policy is: close ties with the Soviet Union, but, at the same time, even friendlier relations than those of the Horthy regime, with the Western great powers. This line is approved by Rakosi himself, the Communist reasoning being

that Hungary has to display such foreign policy as to convince the U.S.A. and Great Britain of the independence and democratic development of the country, which, at the same time, will popularize the new Communistic state system and thus prove useful to the Soviet Union itself.

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g.) The preparatory work for the presentation of Hungary's case on the forthcoming Paris peace conference was undertaken in accordance with the new foreign policy line. Hungary was given to understand that her frontiers will be again reduced to those of the Trianon treaty. On the other hand, she could not remain indifferent to the fate of approximately three million Hungarians beyond those frontiers. Various political factors precluded even an attempt to adjust frontier with Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Similarly on the basis of international political considerations, only in the direction of Rumania did there seem to be a reasonable chance of success for the Hungarian claims. - From the political point of view, the preparatory work concentrated on exposing the ambiguous character of Hungary's alliance with Germany, her repeated attempts for a separate armistice with the Allied Powers, the asylum given to victims of German terror, including Jews, escaping from neighboring countries into Hungary, the underground resistance movement, etc. The purpose of all this was to demonstrate that Hungary in the last ten years had been far from being as fascist as, in particular Czechoslovak, but recently also Soviet, propaganda had claimed it. -- Also the documentation put forth arguments to prove the untenability of the Trianon frontiers from the point of view of the viability of Hungary's economic structure and contained propositions in a realistic spirit for territorial settlements. Further, it pointed to the heavy economic losses Hungary had suffered through German exploitation.

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- 3.) The Rakosi-clique opposed the documentation prepared for the peace conference: it did not serve their purposes either to correct the international reputation of Hungary, or to improve her economic conditions. The perfidity of Rakosi and of the Russians manifested itself even with regard to the small concessions made previous to the Paris conference. The peace treaty imposed heavy economic clauses on Hungary and handed over the country to the Soviet.

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- 4.) Parallel to the preparation and negotiation of the peace treaty, the most difficult foreign policy problem was the Hungarian-Czechoslovak relations -- mass expulsion from, internment and forced mass resettlement of Hungarians in, Czechoslovakia. Lengthy negotiations for the settlement of the minority question began between the two countries in February 1946, but the persecution of the Hungarian minority continued. Hungary informed the four great

powers of the situation; the Soviets "resented" Hungary's appeal to the Western powers in such "domestic" affairs, but continued to ignore the Czechoslovak procedures. Finally, Yugoslavia undertook the role of mediator, and new negotiations were opened.

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- 5.) The re-building of diplomatic representations. In September 1945, the U.S. was the first to announce the establishment of diplomatic relations with Hungary. Marshall Voroshilov, chairman of the Allied Control Commission in Hungary, withheld the publication of the announcement in order to publish first a similar announcement made by the Soviet Union twenty-four hours later. -- In the organization of the foreign missions, the principle of "friendliness toward the West" was followed. The Communist party approved of it as it wanted to secure the confidence of the capitalist countries for trade and credit purposes. The Communist Party held the power in its hand right from the beginning, and even though the appointment of ambassadors and often of the more important officials was a matter of agreement among the coalition parties, nobody could obtain a position without the express approval of the Communists. Nevertheless, at the beginning of 1946, career diplomats of non-Communist background were sent to all the important posts. (In the course of the following two years, reliable men of the Communist Party were attached to these missions.) This policy brought its fruits in the form of trade treaties and credits offered by the Western countries. -- The only exception was the embassy at Belgrade: the Communist Party paid great attention to sending reliable Muscovite Communists there. This was due to the special position occupied by Yugoslavia. Beside enjoying great popularity, it was the first country to show friendliness to, and co-operation with, the new Hungarian diplomatic corps. -- The friendly foreign policy toward the West remained outwardly unchanged even after the first so-called conspiracy trial, compromising prominent members of the Smallholders Party and provoking the resignation of Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy in the summer of 1947.

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- 6.) The problem of Hungary's relations with her neighbors remained difficult. On several occasions, Yugoslavia acted as mediator both with Czechoslovakia and Rumania. Her attitude was prompted by a larger political concept, namely that of a federation of the satellite countries in the Danube Basin. This plan, extremely confidential, was looked upon favorably by the Soviet Union until 1948, and was known to the well-informed as the Zhdanov-plan. The underlying idea was to have this federation install a socialist state system of more nationalistic and even somewhat bourgeois coloring, in order to prove to the West that socialism can be realized

with democratic methods. This plan suited perfectly both a Hungarian foreign policy concept going back to the period between the two world wars, searching to remedy the situation created by the Trianon Treaty, and the non-Communist post-war Hungarian politicians who believed to the last moment that it will be possible to have democracy in Hungary in the shadow of the USSR. The Communists, of course, knew better. Rakosi in person was very much against any plan of a Danube federation, though at the time he dared not openly oppose it; it was obvious to him that Tito would play the leading role in it, and he was afraid for his own position. In view of various well-known developments, the plan was dropped by the Russians in 1948.

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- 7.) Without officially proclaiming it, by 1948 a change in the Hungarian foreign policy had become noticeable. Since the Communist take-over after the elections in 1947, the Communist Party deliberately went about suppressing Western sympathies in the Hungarian foreign policy. In the Cominform, Rakosi was being reproached for Hungary's "capitalist" relations. However, for economic considerations, he was afraid of an open break and tolerated the efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to maintain friendly relations with the West. Since the summer of 1947, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs nominally came under Communist direction, first with Eric Molnar, then, in August 1948, with Rajk as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The break with Tito in the summer of 1948, created a crisis in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the Hungarian foreign missions, which had enjoyed the assistance of the respective Yugoslav missions from the beginning, were unable or unwilling to break their friendly ties with the Yugoslavs; they were also reluctant to abandon their more or less pleasant relations with the Western countries, which, in a final analysis, were useful to Hungary and which, once broken, would be too difficult to reestablish, if another change of policy would make them desirable again. -- In October 1948, a sharp attack on the "duplicity" of the Hungarian foreign policy was published in the paper of the Cominform. This time, Rakosi did not hesitate any more; he took in hand the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and put an end to "deviations." A Hungarian foreign policy has ceased to exist.

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