Imperial Historicism: An Example of Scientific Justification of Foreign Policy and Warfare in the 19–20th Centuries in Hungary[1]

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The 19th century saw the modern development of nation states and the early development of human sciences. These progresses linked up with the ideologies of nation-building. Some European states having long history and imperial traditions applied the study of their own history to support their national political purposes. The new political ideology was historicism used for imperial purposes, imperial historicism. With the help of imperial historicism, 19th century thinkers and statesmen identifying themselves and their community with the historical forms of their community attempted to build or uphold their empire. Hungary, or at least some Hungarian thinkers and statesmen, was one of those states which used imperial historicism to define their foreign policy and internal political purposes. Examining political thinking of the 19th-century Hungary one can find several forms of imperial historicism and historical self-identification. This paper presents imperial historicism and its Hungarian forms.

Keywords: *warfare ideology, imperial historicism, nationalism, Arnold Ipolyi, Gusztáv Beksics, János Asbóth*

Introduction

The end of the 19th century was the modern heyday of Hungarian imperial thinking. At that time Hungary constituted the biggest part of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. After the defeat of Austria by Prussia (1866) the foreign policy of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy turned to the Balkan Peninsula. Hence, Hungary was not only the biggest part of the empire, but it was closer to the economically and politically desired surrounding territories and states than other parts of the Monarchy were. The political situation, however, was complex and challenging. On the one hand, after Prussia defeated Austria in

1866 (and France in 1870–1871), it established the German Empire on the Western borders of the Monarchy. On the other hand, the Russian Empire used the ideology of Pan-Slavism to affect the Slavs of the Monarchy and the Balkan Peninsula. Hence, the Monarchy (and the Hungarians in it) found itself between these two dangerous empires and tried to lead its own foreign policy. In this effort, among others, the study of history came to the help of Hungary.

Harnessing the study of history for political purposes was a common practice in Europe at that time, we can find efforts in Great Britain, France and Germany as well. In Great Britain legendary historical persons (like King Arthur and Robin Hood) were used for strengthening the Saxon-related identity of Great Britain and securing the Saxon rule over the Celts (e.g. Welsh people).[3] In France Vercingetorix, the Gallic hero, was raised in order to emphasise the Gallic identity of post-revolution France, and under Bonaparte to create a justification for conquering the territories of Europe where previously the Gauls had lived.[4] Finally, in Germany the examples of the Antique Germanic peoples and the heroes of *The Song of the Nibelungs* (e.g. Siegfried) were emphasised with the main purpose of uniting German states and principalities, then of supporting the political claims of the Prussian–German Empire.[5]

The main purpose of all European efforts, including Hungary, to harness history was to create (in the case of Germany), and maintain a national empire by exercising the roles of an empire. These roles include securing political liberty, peace and defence inside the empire and spreading its own national civilisation inside and outside of the empire (in this period in exchange for natural resources and the possibility of capital export).[6] This is the reason why this ideology of the 19th century can be named imperial historicism.

In the following, first the increasing significance of the developing sciences in the 19th century, and the relationship between nationalism and the early development of history studies will be mentioned and then, the imperial historicism of the 19th century Hungary will be detailed.

Development of sciences, nationalism and the study of history

The 19th century is the age of nationalism when developing sciences earned a prominent role – beside/instead of religion – in the justification of politics.[7] European states tried

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[3]   Stephanie Barczewski, ''Nations Make Their Own Gods and Heroes': Robin Hood, King Arthur and the development of racialism in nineteenth-century Britain', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2, no 2 (1997), 179–207.

[4]   Michael Dietler, '"Our Ancestors the Gauls": Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe', *American Anthropologist* 96, no 3 (1994), 584–605.

[5]   Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book – Tacitus's* Germania *from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York – London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011); Hans Kohn, 'Romanticism and the Rise of German Nationalism', *The Review of Politics* 12, no 4 (1950), 443–472.

[6]   Herfried Münkler, *Empires. The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 80–107.

[7]   Cf. George Markus, 'Changing Images of Science', *Thesis Eleven* 33, no 1 (1992), 24; Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 6; Daniel Woolf, *A Concise History of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 160–165.

sciences to strengthen their self-consciousness and identity, and to justify their wars and foreign policies.

Sciences in the 19th century were in the early stage of their development. Scholars at that time rarely thought science should be value-free and must be outside politics.[8] Science and politics stood in close relation and had mutual effects on each other. Some examples of the effects were the demands which were addressed to the political life of a country and statesmen by scholars. They took philosophy (as the systematising science), history, law of nations, economics, geography and biology to promote political conceptions. In this paper the focus is put on the content of the claims of Hungarian historians in connection with Hungarian foreign politics and warfare.[9]

The modern study of history was born in the 19th century when the theories of history of the Enlightenment (which researched the common and purposeful human history with an abstract and universal method) gave place to the modern study of history step by step. The birth was not a single event, but it was a development process. The first step was romanticism, which got rid of the universal method of natural sciences and popularised the special historical understanding of the individual past events (in the form of studying the deeds and life of great men of the past). This created the possibility of the individual 'past'-s. Another step was historicism, which stretched historical understanding to the study of nations; particularly to the character traits and values of nations that the nations were showing through their lifelong history. This led to the possibility of evolving national histories. Finally, positivism came by emphasising the importance of criticising historical sources and adding the modern scientific method to the previous stages of the development.[10] Without the final stage, the study of history was only a form of collective memory, with every potential distortion of it. Collective memory is an important part of the life of a community which can strengthen the self-consciousness and collective identity of the community, but to be a modern science, it should be criticised and weeded out by positivists.

The importance of historicism is greatly emphasised in this paper. Historicism focusing on communal past events, was not a wholly new method of the study of the past. Historicism in the 19th century, however, had a more universal scope.[11] This broadly understood that historicism denied the exclusive relevance of the universal human reason at least in three fields.[12] In the field of cognition, where historicism claimed that empathy and other non-conceptual forms of cognition (and not just the rational and cognitive methods) have significance in studying the past, and generally the social and cultural phenomena; in the field of the theory of state, where historicism proposed the claim that states are important not only as means for the happiness of their citizens, but for their own right;[13] and finally

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8   Max Weber famously criticised this attitude: Max Weber, 'Science as Vocation', in *The Vocation Lectures,* by Max Weber (Indianapolis–Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 19–20.

9   For philosophy-based warfare ideologies in the 19th century see Mihály Boda, 'A háború tudományos igazolása a 19–20. század fordulóján Európában és Magyarországon: a filozófiai militarizmus', *Hadtudomány* 31, E-issue (2021).

10   Cf. Woolf, *A Concise History of History,* 157–178.

11   Iggers, *The German Conception of History,* 29–30.

12   Ibid. 7–13.

13   Boda, 'A háború tudományos igazolása'.

in the field of value theory, where historicism held that historically developed character traits and values are more important than universal human features.[14] The representatives of historicism relying on the new value theory and the unique values allegedly featured a particular national history concluded to contemporary political statements.

One of the early representatives of this sort of historicism was the German philosopher, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), who influenced European nationalist thinkers of the 19th century. Herder held that the basic unit of history is not humanity but nations which all have their distinctive features. In his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* he wrote: 'Thus nations modify themselves, according to time, place, and their internal character: each bears in itself the standard of its perfection, totally independent of all comparison with that of others'. At the same time, he thought the history of humanity had significance as well, because 'the more pure and fine the maximum on which a people hit, the more useful the objects to which it applied the exertions of its nobler powers, and, lastly, the more firm and exact the bond of union which most intimately connected all the members of the state and guided them to this good end, the more liable was the nation itself and the more brilliant the figure it made in history'.[15]

Imperial historicism in the 19th century Hungary

Herder's theory of nation and historicism appeared in Hungary in the first half of the 19th century, and it gave the foundation of the backward-looking imperial historicism. Imperial historicism in Hungary had been developing in three forms by the end of the century, among which the intension of self-identification with the past constituted the difference. The ethnical theory of self-identification emphasised the partly common but partly changeable character traits of the past and present Hungarians; the institutional theory of self-identification claimed that there are common institutions, among them the Idea of the Holy Crown; and finally, the political theory of self-identification demanded a whole political and social identification between a special political formation of the Hungarian past and the present.

Ethnical self-identification with the past

Herder's theory of the internal character of nations could be observed as early as the Hungarian Reform Era, particularly in the cultural-ethnical theory of nation of István Széchenyi.[16]

In his book, *Kelet népe* [People of the East], Széchenyi claimed that every people has a 'genius' which is accompanying the people through its history and brings about the

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[14] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 9–34.

[15] Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (Ebook: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), book 15, III.

[16] János Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok* (Budapest: Osiris, 2007), 46.

rise of the people. The absence of the 'genius' causes stagnation in the life of people. The Hungarian 'genius' is 'constitutional liberty' and relating to this 'uplifted ethnicity'. The root of 'constitutional liberty' is the partly Eastern origin of Hungarians, which gave Hungarians the constitutors of their 'genius': unlimited fever ('korlátlan tűz'), pure strength ('vas erő'), and destructive devotion ('romboló ittasság'). According to Széchenyi, however, these character traits should be changed to bring out the rise of the Hungarians: fever should turn into noble zeal ('nemes hév'), strength into courage ('bajnoki bátorság'), and devotion into magnanimity ('nagylelkűség').[17]

'Constitutional liberty' and these character traits do not stand in and for themselves. Széchenyi claimed that every human nation is the result of God's creation, however, Hungarians can rise over the others by their developed character traits. By uplifting, Hungarians can get closer to God in their humanity, than the other nations could who are without constitution. These further nations are 'mixed' ('zagyvalék') nations, who are satisfied without constitution. The risen people, like Hungarians, should consolidate their risen morality inside their borders and should spread their risen humanity (for example language) among the 'mixed' peoples. Risen peoples should assimilate 'mixed' peoples. The proper way for assimilation is to become an 'ideal' for them in the development in humanity and to get closer to God. The violent spread of ethnicity is improper, because mixed peoples are also the creatures of God.[18]

Institutional self-identification with the past: The Doctrine of the Holy Crown

The Idea of the Holy Crown was born in the Hungarian Middle Ages.[19] Reference to this Idea in the 19th century included at least two claims, which could be connected to the Idea independently. One of these claims focused on the function of the Idea of the Holy Crown without the reference (or only with marginal reference) to the Holy Crown. The other claim referred to the unique legal institution of the Holy Crown connected to the same function. The function in question was that the Hungarians and their state have the historical mission of integrating the peoples living in the Carpathian Basin and so, securing peace, defence and civilisation for them. The expression of the legal institution of the Idea in the 19th century was called the Doctrine of the Holy Crown which is the legally detailed version of the Idea.

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[17] István Széchenyi, *A kelet népe* (Pozsony: Wigan Károly Fridrik, 1841), 9–17.

[18] Ernő Fábián, 'Széchenyi István szabadelvű politikai modellje', *Erdélyi Múzeum* 54, no 14 (1992), 19–20; Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok,* 50.

[19] Mihály Boda, 'The Hungarian Theory of Just War Based on the Idea of the Holy Crown', *Journal of Military Ethics* 20, no 3–4 (2021).

The historic mission of the Hungarians: integrating different peoples living in the Carpathian Basin

The description of the Hungarian historic mission of integrating different peoples living in the Carpathian Basin was considered of importance generally by Hungarian historians in the 19th century. These historians did not refer to the Idea of the Holy Crown or the Idea was not in the centre of their thinking. An early representative of this sort of thinking, however, was not a historian, but a politician, Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894).

Kossuth was formulating a historical-political theory of the nation in the columns of the newspaper *Pesti Hírlap* during the 1840s. The historic Hungarian mission was an important part of this theory. The content of the mission was, according to Kossuth, that Hungarian people should represent Hungarian liberty, so it must liberate itself (from the Habsburg rule), must protect its liberty and should gift peoples living in the Carpathian Basin with this liberty.[20] Hence, Kossuth thought too peoples have uniqueness which had been developing and strengthening during the history of peoples. The uniqueness of the Hungarians is the desire of liberty, which is expressed by the language, the constitution, the common sentiments, and the common historical rights.[21] This uniqueness should be preserved, cultivated and completed, and by implication the Hungarians should build national unity in the Carpathian Basin.[22] Kossuth thought that some nations could be exemptions from Hungarian national unity, those which have their own national history (e.g. the Croatians). These peoples should take the Hungarian language in their public administration only (displacing Latin language with it), but their territory should not be a real province of Hungary, only an attached province.[23]

In the second half of the century, two historians, Mihály Horváth (1809–1878) and Arnold Ipolyi (1823–1886), emphasised the importance of the Hungarian ability of liberty-giving. The foundation of Horváth's works was that the final aim of human history is the final development of the citizens' world when the whole humanity will be joining in liberty and equality.[24] The Hungarians excel in this history with their 'flaming love of liberty', which appeared previously in their brotherly and comradely relations to other peoples of the Carpathian Basin.[25] Ipolyi's theory followed a similar track:

'When the Hungarians were conquering the country, they did not discriminate between the conquerors and the captives as different nations. They demanded neither hegemony nor privileges nor separate rights for the ruling ethnicity. They did not build walls amidst the ethnicities and did not create casts. They did not have damned fellowmen as the French has, oppressed class as the English has, or helots as the free and literate people of Hellas had, or slaves like the Negros and outlaw Indians of the free American republic. […] Every

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[20] Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok*, 30–31.

[21] Ibid. 39.

[22] Domokos Kosáry, 'A Pesti Hírlap nacionalizmusa 1841–1844', *Századok* 75, no 7–10 (1943), 376, 408, 412.

[23] Ibid. 387; Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok*, 40.

[24] Ignác Romsics, *Clio bűvöletében* (Budapest: Osiris, 2011), 86.

[25] Quoted by: Ibid. 126.

person with any language and nationality who became the member of the Hungarian crown received its every liberty and became the member of the ruling nation'.[26]

Hence, the history of the non-Hungarian peoples of the Carpathian Basin connected them to the Hungarians. History did not bring them subjection but constitution-based liberty, a particular relationship which, according to Ipolyi, results in historical rights and duties for their own time. Hence, the historian is the person who – as a judge – could make a decision on such rights and duties because he knows the past. The conclusion Ipolyi draws is that the Hungarian nation has a right for the Hungarian state language, and because of its higher spiritual abilities, the Hungarian nation has the duty to impinge to the less developed peoples. The common good of the country could be secured in such a way only. The consequence of such historical rights and duties is the occurrence of so called 'mixed peoples' ('vegynépek') (empires contained many less developed peoples led by a more highly developed people), which are superior to peoples including just a single nation ('fajtiszta nép').[27]

Analysing history, Ipolyi draws attention to many special Hungarian social institutions with the help of which Hungarians were able to realise their historical mission. Such institutions were the (mythical) blood oath (at the beginning of the *Honfoglalás* [The Hungarian Conquest of the Carpathian Basin]), the Apostolic Hungarian Kingdom (in the Middle Ages), and the Idea of the Holy Crown by István Werbőczy (in the early modern period).[28]

The role of the Doctrine of the Holy Crown in imperial historicism

During the formation of the Doctrine of the Holy Crown a historian of law, Imre Hajnik (1840–1902) studied the development of the Hungarian medieval social institutions in his book written on the legal history of Hungary (*Magyarország az Árpád-királyoktól az ősiségnek megállapításáig és a hűbéri Európa* [History of Hungary from the Age of the House of the Árpád Kings to the Statement of Primordiality]). According to Hajnik, Hungarian institutions feature exclusively the Hungarian legal development and distinguish it from European legal history. The distinctive elements of the European legal development are central control (coming from ancient Rome and medieval Catholic Church), and individual liberty and absolute loyalty (coming from the ancient Germans). These features were compounded by the Carolingian Empire, and the Ottonian Holy Roman Empire, which resulted in the feudal social system of the Middle Ages.[29]

Contrary to the European development, Hajnik took the Hungarian progression as marked by the 'national common spirit', 'which was shown by our ancestors from their first

[26] Arnold Ipolyi, 'A magyar nemzetegység és államnyelv történeti alakulása', in *Egyház, műveltség, történetírás,* ed. by Flóris Rómer, Arnold Ipolyi and Vilmos Fraknói (Budapest: Gondolat, 1981), 102.
[27] Ibid. 108–113.
[28] Ipolyi, 'A magyar nemzetegység és államnyelv történeti alakulása', 102–103.
[29] Imre Hajnik, *Magyarország az Árpád-királyoktól az ősiségnek megállapításáig és a hűbéri Európa* (Pest: Heckenast Gusztáv, 1867), 1–7.

appearance'.[30] Hajnik listed several institutions which express 'national common spirit'. So, the blood oath was not Árpád's own initiative but the nation's, and the nation chose Árpád to be the leader of the conquest of the Carpathian Basin (at end of the 9th century). Similarly, the members of the nation took part on King Stephen I's lawgiving days (in the first half of the 11th century). And again, the rights of the members were secured in the Golden Bull under King Andrew II (at the beginning of the 13th century). The land properties were particularly secured by the right of the primordiality (landed properties of the nobility are inalienable and in case of dying out they escheat) under the Anjou kings (in the 14th century), which were expressed in the Idea of the Holy Crown of István Werbőczy (at the beginning of the 16th century). According to the Idea, the rightholders are the members of the Holy Crown because of their landed property.[31] Another historian of law, Emil Récsi (1822–1864) continued shaping the Doctrine of the Holy Crown by adding items to the list of public law institutions. These items included several acts of the 17–19th centuries, among them the *Pragmatica Sanctio* (1723) and Article X of the Act of 1790/92 which secured the succession of the Habsburg kings (and queens) and prescribed the respect of the peculiar tradition of Hungary in the Habsburg Empire, respectively.[32]

The most important part of the Hungarian 'national public spirit' is supposedly the 'wisdom of organising the state', according to the jurist Károly Kmethy (1863–1929). This wisdom contained liberty-loving, by which the Hungarian nation 'was able to create, accept and love constitutional state only, in which authority belonged to and was practiced by the allness. […] The nation itself was the state'.[33]

The concept of 'wisdom of organising the state', the political liberty, and Hungarian 'allness' had significance at least in three aspects in the 19th century: in the relationship of the Hungarian nation and other nations in the Carpathian Basin (ruled by the Hungarians at that time); in the relationship of the Hungarian nation and the Habsburg king; and finally in the relationship of the Hungarian nation and the territories and states formerly ruled by Hungarians before the 19th century. The first of these is an issue of internal politics, which is not of importance here.[34] The two others, however, are in close connection with the Hungarian ideologies of foreign policy and warfare.

In the question of the relationship between the Hungarian nation and the Habsburg king, the Doctrine of the Holy Crown strengthened the position that political authority in Hungary derives from the Holy Crown and is wielded by the king and the nation together. Béla Szabó, a legal expert in the middle of the 19th century, expressed this claim by stating that 'Hungarian royal prerogative is put down in the crown; […] the Hungarian king is not the owner of Hungarian sovereignty but the holder of it […] he does not rule, and he is not a dominator *(dominateur, Herrscher)*, because domination is corollary of ownership. The king reigns *(regnat, il regne, regiert)* […] and neither the Hungarian nation nor any

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[30]   Ibid. 13.
[31]   Ibid. 14, 27, 99–100, 101–102.
[32]   Emil Récsi, *Magyarország közjoga amint 1848-ig s 1848-ban fennállott* (Budapest: Pfeifer Ferdinánd, 1861), 116–120.
[33]   Károly Kmety, *A magyar közjog tankönyve* (Budapest: Politzer Zsigmond és Fia Kiadása, 1902), ix–x.
[34]   See Tomasz Kamusella, *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 456–472.

of its members are subjects *(subditi, sujet, Unterhanen)* of the Hungarian king'.[35] Hence, Hungary differs from other parts of the Habsburg Empire, which are subjugated to the ruling (and not just reigning) king as fiefdom or real province. For this reason, according to Szabó, the existing Habsburg Empire does not have a legal unity, only a political one, which *status quo* should be terminated 'with respect to the Hungarian countries'.[36] For this reason the National Assembly ('országgyűlés') should legally initiate the recognition of the legal status of Hungary as reigned (but not ruled) by the king, and the reintegration of those territories and countries into Hungary which had belonged to Hungary during its history but then got separated and became parts of the Habsburg Empire only. The legal foundation of these claims is the *Pragmatica Sanctio* (1723) and Article X of the Act of 1790/91, according to which Hungary with its attached countries is an independent country with separate constitution.[37] Szabó offered his suggestion as a middle position between two extremes (unification in every respect, and independence in every respect), which was suitable for the justification of the revolution in 1848 (but not the war for independence in 1849).

In respect to those parts of Hungary which were outside not only of Hungary but of the Habsburg Empire as well, the Doctrine of the Holy Crown would have justified their recapturing. According to Emil Récsi the Holy Crown has rights over the historical Hungarian territories. Although these territories could be divided into territories of the motherland (where the authority of the Holy Crown prevailed) and the adjunct territories (where the authority of the Holy Crown did not prevail, only the rights),[38] these territories 'constitute the unified body of the country' for the reason of the unified nature of the Crown.[39] The adjunct territories include those territories which are inside the Habsburg Empire (Dalmatia, Galitia, Lodomeria, Bukovina), and those which are outside the Empire (Slavonia, Croatia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Moldova, Romania). Hungarian kings did not renounce the rights for the latter territories but tried to uphold them. Récsi grounded this claim by referring to the so-called 'reannexation clause' of the inaugural diploma (issued by Hungarian kings at their enthronement in order to secure their respect for Hungarian political traditions) which had been in the diploma since the liberation wars (1687). According to the clause, 'every part of this country or its attached provinces which had been recovered by that time or would be reclaimed thereafter with the help of God […] should have been integrated into the mentioned country'.[40]

This place of the diploma, however, was not unambiguous. Récsi added a footnote to the above citation, in which he substituted his opinion. He stated that the 'reannexation clause' does not justify an offensive war of the king purposing to recover a previously lost territory if the loss was legalised by a peace treaty. The clause hence should be interpreted as saying if somehow previously lost territories came back to the Habsburg Empire then

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[35]   Béla Szabó, *A' Magyar Korona országainak státusjogi és monarchiai állása a'* Pragmatica Sanctio *szerint* (Pozsony: Az Író Sajátja, 1848), 81–83.

[36]   Ibid. 52.

[37]   Ibid. 88–92.

[38]   Récsi, *Magyarország közjoga amint 1848-ig s 1848-ban fennállott,* 29–30.

[39]   Ibid. 73–74.

[40]   Ibid. 77–78.

they should be integrated into Hungary.[41] According to Récsi, the Hungarian claims for the previously lost territories are historical and legal in character, which had political significance but not legal.[42]

Political self-identification with the past

The third form of the Hungarian self-identification with past is the self-identification with past empires by setting them examples for the Hungarian foreign policy at the turn of 19–20th centuries. Suggestions included reference to the empire of king Anjou Louis I, or Louis the Great and of King Matthias I.

Empire of the Danube Valley: Empire of King Matthias I

Gusztáv Beksics (1846–1906), a publicist and representative in the National Assembly, in his book entitled *Mátyás király birodalma és Magyarország jövője* [King Matthias's Empire and the Future of Hungary] took the historical example of the Hungarian kings and drafted his own theory of foreign policy based on these examples. According to Beksics, Hungarian history was featured by 'firmness and constancy' in many periods,[43] like under the rule of the Árpád dynasty, and for the last time under the rule of King Matthias I. The turning point of the Hungarian history was the lost battle of Mohács (1526). The previous period – King Matthias's rule – was the 'great' time of the Hungarian history,[44] the following periods, however, were the periods of 'vegetation' of the alliances with Austria. Matthias's great empire was based on the necessities of his era, the danger posed to Hungary both by the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Empire. 'Matthias, to save his country, made it great'.[45]

According to Beksics, the situation at the turn of the 19–20th centuries is similar to the period of Matthias:

'The problem of the Hungarians and Hungary before Mohács was whether they were able to establish a great state between the German Empire and the Turkish Empire. […] Matthias solved this task.

[…] Now and in the future, we are talking about this state, adopting to the changing conditions, would come about again, naturally in a long and hard struggle and in a wholly different shape.

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[41]   Ibid. 73–77. Cf. László Buza, 'A magyar Szent Korona igényei a volt mellékországokra', *Budapesti Szemle* 167, no 3 (1916), 398–399.

[42]   According to another approach, if capturing is sponsored and performed by the king then it is not recapturing at all but a new conquest. Only a third approach, which is based on the natural right, could justify the recapturing of the previously lost territories. This position, however, is contrary to historicism. Cf. László Buza, 'A magyar Szent Korona igényei', 415–416, 402.

[43]   Gusztáv Beksics, *Mátyás király birodalma és Magyarország jövője* (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1905), 5.

[44]   Ibid. 2.

[45]   Ibid. 7.

The place of the Ottoman Empire has been taken over by the Slav Empire, however in different geographical positions. Living between the huge German and Slav masses, the Hungarians should not only secure their life conditions but should also organise their balancing mission between these world powers'.[46]

In order to establish the empire, Matthias conquered and became the 'natural leader' of the surrounding peoples. According to Beksics, that is just what is needed at the turn of the 19–20th centuries: the re-establishment of the historical Hungarian state. For doing this 'Matthias's empire is the ideal',[47] so Hungary should pursue 'national unity' inside the country,[48] and 'great unfolding of the Hungarian species' and acquisition of hegemony and influence outside. However, in contrast to Matthias, Hungarians should direct their initiatives in the direction of the Balkans only and not towards the Austrian provinces. Influence should be figured out as 'constitutional leadership', to help the surrounding peoples in reaching their national independence and in their constitutional development to which Hungary's 'thousand years old' constitution should be an ideal. By such development, these peoples would be able to resist the Russian and Pan-Slav intrusion, because the Russian political system is despotic, absolutistic, and violent; the Slavs themselves are in turn an eccentric and disjointed people, unable to establish their constitutional independence by themselves.[49] As a result, according to Beksics, a Danube Valley Empire could be established, which includes Austria and the Balkan peoples and countries apart from Hungary.

The 'Greater Hungarian' Empire

János Asbóth (1845–1911), a politician, argued for the necessity of a Hungarian empire in his work *Eszmék a magyar faj hivatásáról* [Ideas on the Mission of the Hungarian Species]. Asbóth started from the definition of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, which is according to him 'the constant association of two unified states by a treaty between the states'.[50] Asbóth, however, accepted neither part of this definition, because he thought only Hungary was unified and Austria was not (it did not exist before the 1860s); these states entered into the association by necessity and not by a treaty; and this association is not constant because an essential feature of the Hungarian nation was that it was developing constantly reflecting to European necessities. The next stage of this development would be establishing a Hungarian empire led by a Habsburg king:

'A great empire should be coalesced around Hungary. […] The mission of the Hungarian species in turn is to establish, consolidate, and maintain this empire. By this it satisfies its own necessity, the necessity of the minor species, and the European necessity. The Hungarian species was always pursuing this, it started that when it settled down after the

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[46]   Ibid. 138.
[47]   Ibid. 179.
[48]   Ibid. 158.
[49]   Ibid. 144–152.
[50]   János Asbóth, 'Eszmék a magyar faj hivatásáról', in *Jellemrajzok és tanulmányok korunk történetéhez,* by Asbóth János (Budapest: Az „Athenaeum" R. Társulat Kiadása, 1892), 25.

migration, it established that under Louis the Great and Matthias, […] it will venture that for the third time'.[51]

However, according to Asbóth, necessity was not and is not enough to establish the empire, but the Hungarian character traits are essential as well. These are: the pride which could be achieved by risk-taking and firm spirit, the feeling of the call to do something great, and the demand of leadership, which was completed by the caution: 'we are not created to be small: Hungarians have a Roman feature as well'. This Hungarian character meets the multiple, geographically determined and historically revealed necessities. These are: the European balance of power which should be maintained between a German and an Eastern (this time Russian) empire; and at same time Hungarian and the surrounding peoples' independence should be secured.[52]

The resulting Hungarian empire would include Austria (which detached from Germany after the establishment of the Prussian led Germany), and those territories and political entities which were in the history under Hungarian rule for some time, and 'gravitate in direction of Hungary': Bukovina, Moldova, Romania, Galicia, Lodomeria, Bohemia, the German Alpine provinces, Dalmatia, the provinces by the Lower Danube, Bulgaria, Serbia and Bosnia.[53] Asbóth hence imagined an empire which included all the historical Hungarian conquests and acquisitions, so this empire can be called 'Greater Hungarian' Empire.[54]

In practice, however, Asbóth connected the establishment of the Hungarian empire to the weakening and withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire. Hence, from his list he would have attached only those territories to Hungary which had been under Turkish rule, and from where the Ottoman Empire had withdrew. Until this time the duty of Hungary is to prevent these territories from getting into the sphere of interest of other great powers. Asbóth had no doubt about the success because he thought that the Hungarian species has a 'great expansive force'. The territory of Hungary had been broadening very much from the 17th century (when it was only a narrow lobe at the borders of the Austrian and Bohemian provinces) till the 19th century. Hungary recovered those territories which had been lost because of the Turkish conquest step by step. According to Asbóth, this process does not have an end and continues with the further weakening of the Turkish rule.[55]

Summary

In the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, political ideologies of foreign policy were mostly linked to the development of the modern European nation states. 'Nation' is such a unity of individuals that nevertheless has a meaning beyond the allness of the individuals. A nation can survive generations of individuals and governments and is

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51 Ibid. 26.
52 Ibid. 26–27, 31–33.
53 Ibid. 33–42.
54 István Hajnal uses the expression of 'Greater Hungarian empire' in a different sense. See István Hajnal, *A Batthyány-kormány külpolitikája* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1987), 33.
55 Asbóth, 'Eszmék a magyar faj hivatásáról', 44–45.

authorised to reinforce or reject the laws and general policies of the individuals living on a particular territory. In that age, some nation states that had a long history stretching back in time, attempted to find the fundament of their ideology in history. Imperial historicism, which pursued deducing historical rights and duties from historical facts and to support the policy of the nation state, was the suitable ideology for these states. The deduction was theoretically possible because the representatives of the nation states (or at least who accepted the theoretical position of historicism) identified their community with the historical antecedent forms of the community.

For doing this, they applied the study of history which was at an early stage of its development.

Similar deduction would be more difficult on the strength of the fully evolved study of history.

In Hungary one can observe three forms of self-identification with the past, which differs in intensity of the self-identification. These forms are the ethnical self-identification (Széchenyi), the institutional self-identification (Ipolyi, Szabó), and the political self-identification (Beksics, Asbóth). These forms prevailed independently, however, the representatives of the more intense forms revised the content of the less intense forms in light of their own ideology.

Other 19th century nation states, which did not have a long history, attempted to support their political purposes (above all their political independence) with the help of another science of that age, the science of the laws of nations based on natural law. This idea was important in Hungary too in the Reform Period; however, after the Compromise (1867), historicism and the study of history came into prominence instead. In Western Europe, natural law thinking, however, did not disappear wholly, but by the Great War it had come into the limelight again. In Hungary the thinking of imperial historicism still ruled political ideologies, which was not applied to offensive aims at that time, but mainly to defensive aims, to argue for upholding the unity of the country. In the spring of 1917, István Bethlen (1874–1946) argued in the National Assembly that while Woodrow Wilson and the Triple Entente were supporting the 'principle of nationality', according to which peace should be promoted by respecting the national sovereignty, it was out of accord with the existence of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. '[T]he existence of the Monarchy, however, was not in contrast with the interest of humanity and progress, on the contrary, the existence of the Monarchy and the independence of Hungary are necessary to maintain peace and secure the possibility of progress for the interests of humanity in that part of Europe where we live *(general approval)*'.[56]

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[56] István Bethlen, 'A háború esetére szóló kivételes hatalomról. (A monarchia jövő külpolitikája)', in *Bethlen István gróf beszédei és írásai. Első kötet* (Budapest: Genius Könyvkiadó, 1933), 122.

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