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# *„The Grand Master of the Tightrope Walk": An Overview of the Turning Points in Kádár's Foreign Policy*

*„There are countries that we must consider potential enemies – the United States and other similar forces – although we fight against them* [...], *we still consider it possible* (*indeed, right and necessary*) *to have normal interstate relations and peaceful coexistence.* [...] *War is not necessary for the worldwide victory of socialism."*[1]

Between 24 and 27 March 1980, the 12th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) took place in Budapest. In an increasingly difficult economic and foreign policy environment, János Kádár[2] delivered his congress speech in which, alluding to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, he declared: „In the recent situation, the international situation has become more acute; we are again hearing the voices known from the

1 Ambassadors' Conference, 1967. MNL OL M-KS 288. f., 32. cs., 22. ő. e. Published in: Borhi 2009, 107.

2 János Kádár (1912–1989) was a Hungarian politician. Between 1948 and 1950, Minister of the Interior; in 1956, Minister of State, then Chairman of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government between 1956 and 1958. Minister of State from 1958 to 1961, then Chairman of the Council of Ministers from 1961 to 1965. Between 1957 and 1989, a member of the HSWP Central Committee; from 1957 to 1985, First Secretary of the HSWP Central Committee; from 1985 to 1988, General Secretary; a member of the Political Committee. For more on him, see: János Kádár: https://neb.hu/asset/phph9pkfx.pdf (Accessed April 12, 2025)

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time of the Cold War. Reactionary circles are now – on the pretext of the events in Afghanistan – conducting a general anti-Soviet, anti-communist propaganda campaign directed against the socialist social order and are taking steps against détente; their action against the Moscow Olympics also serves this purpose. As for Afghanistan, everyone knows that the legitimate Afghan government, faced with an external threat, requested military assistance on the basis of a valid treaty between the two countries, and this the Soviet Union – in accordance with international law – provided. The Soviet Union has already clearly expressed that if the reasons for the request for assistance and the provision of assistance cease to exist, it is ready to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan."[3] The international press, which had been continuously evaluating and analysing the policies of the HSWP's number one man for nearly two decades, did not let the Hungarian party leader's statement pass without comment. The papers regarded the preceding sentences as an unambiguous oath of foreign policy allegiance and recalled that, in return, socialist Hungary, in its domestic and economic policy, was trying to act independently as far as its possibilities allowed.

Among the major Western papers, the Italian *Corriere della Sera* also pointed out that Kádár had clearly sided with the Soviet Union on the question of Afghanistan, but at the same time stressed that Hungary would certainly continue its political-economic cooperation with the West. It called János Kádár „the grand master of the tightrope walk," since he was simultaneously trying to secure Eastern raw materials and Western technology for his country.[4]

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3 Excerpt from János Kádár's speech at the congress. Vol. XXXVIII, No. 71, Tuesday, 25 March 1980, 3.

4 Sandro Scabello, 'Kadar's full support for Moscow, but the opening to the West remains', 25 March 1980, 5.

https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/view.shtml#!/NTovZXMvaXQvcmNzZGFoaWRhY3MxLoAzOTMzNg%3D%3D (Accessed: November 22, 2024). 25 March 1980. In 'János Kádár' – The Opinion of the Western Press. Confidential News Agency and Correspondent Press Reviews of the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency (copies), 1978–1982. 3rd file. These general political or thematic news collections, marked with the abbreviations „TT" or „Szig. Biz." (Strictly Confidential), comprised confidential news agency and correspondent materials which, upon arrival at the Budapest headquarters of the Hungarian news agency, the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency, could, following an editorial decision, be

The characterisation of Kádár formulated in the title primarily outlined a situation that projects the Hungarian leader's foreign policy balance sheet in the relation between East and West. On one side stands the Soviet Union – with respect to which, according to the paper, Kádár gave no reason for Moscow to be „overly suspicious of his loyalty" – and on the other side stand the Western countries, with respect to which the Hungarian leader succeeded in finding political solutions by which „he did not burn the bridge built with the West."[5]

The intersection of this imaginary set is therefore a country whose attitude towards the West and its relationship with the countries on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain cannot be ignored. The question arises: how did the Soviet Union relate to Hungary's rapprochement with the West? What do we mean by this? At this point, we invoke the concept of „triple determination" used by Csaba Békés for Hungarian foreign policy: „An evident limitation was belonging to the Soviet empire; on the other hand, the country's dependence on advanced Western technology and later on loans proved to be a similarly strong constraint. At the same time, taking the above two determinants into account, Hungarian foreign policy, from the early sixties onwards, had to manoeuvre throughout in the all-East-Central-European lobbying struggle, conducted with the active participation of all the states of the Eastern bloc, for the assertion of specific interests. For Hungarian foreign policy, this triple determination existed in some form and to some extent throughout, but from the mid-sixties onwards, the significance of the three factors became increasingly similar in weight."[6]

Alongside the international system of relations of the era, the person of János Kádár himself appears as an interesting and, in some respects, special factor in the history of Hungarian foreign policy. For he was a politician who fundamentally did not understand foreign policy and did not speak foreign languages. In time, however, he developed a feel for the importance of foreign policy and approached the world of diplomacy in a way that

included in the news agency's so-called „red-striped" or otherwise known as „red-striped confidential" press reviews.

5 Ibid.

6 Békés 2004, 135.; and Békés 2021, 29.

gradually elicited significant, growing recognition among Western leaders. This is particularly important to emphasise because after 1956, the Western press portrayed Kádár's person in the most negative context, as decidedly isolated. Indro Montanelli,[7] an outstanding figure of twentieth-century Italian journalism, who was incidentally personally present in Budapest during the days of the Hungarian revolution, wrote in December 1956 about the government he led: „no one speaks to the government. It publishes a newspaper that no one reads, issues calls that no one listens to, and convenes the working masses, who only appear to demand the government's resignation."[8] The Anglo-Saxon press was not sparing with adjectives either. An article in the *Evening Standard* of 8 October 1958, entitled „Is This New Judas a Man to Pity," also supports this. According to the article, „Judas Iscariot could have learned much from János Kádár's [...] twentieth-century betrayal."[9] From the „butcher" of 1956, the „traitor" of 1956, „the Judas of the Hungarian revolution,"[10] from the mid-1960s onwards – and especially in the 1970s – he became an East-Central European leader accepted by the West and serving as a model in many respects. The Christian Democratic Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti[11] also highlighted in connection with him on the occasion of one of their first meetings that Kádár was „a man who has suffered much and who speaks with great responsibility."[12] The Western heads of government sought to attribute a kind of bridgehead

7 Indro Montanelli (1909–2001) was an Italian journalist and publicist, an outstanding figure of twentieth-century Italian journalism. As a special correspondent for the daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera,* he reported on the Hungarian revolution from the scene. Influenced by his experiences, he wrote his play Dreams Die at Dawn, which was also made into a film in 1961, starring Lea Massari.

8 Montanelli 1989, 52.

9 MNL OL XIX-J-1-j (Great Britain 1945–64). 43. doboz. 142. tétel. 005664. Subject: R. Ardrey's play „Shadow of Heroes" at the Piccadilly Theatre. Evening Standard, 8 October 1958. F. E.: 'Is This New Judas a Man to Pity'. For more on this, see: M. Madarász 2023.

10 January 1957 news summary. Die Welt, Hamburg. In 'János Kádár' – The Opinion of the Western Press. Confidential News Agency and Correspondent Press Reviews of the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency (copies), 1956–1964. 1st file.

11 Giulio Andreotti (1919–2013) was a Christian Democratic Italian politician, a defining political figure of the first Italian Republic born after the Second World War. Andreotti held ministerial posts several times in various governments and was also the country's prime minister several times.

12 Andreotti 2021, 400/563.

role to him, with which they wished to serve the rapprochement of East and West, and to apostrophise Hungarian (foreign) policy as a „special path" policy, with which they clearly wished to drive a wedge between the countries of the Soviet bloc. In 1965, an article in *Weltwoche* wrote of this: „In the West, they like to look upon Kádár as a secret ally who sabotages communism from within, replaces communist 'tenets' with refrigerators, and paves the ideological wrong paths with prosperity."[13]

For the West, Kádár clearly proved to be a „bridgehead" politician, but what the Hungarian leader's actual motivations were in terms of why a relationship with the West – of any kind, and especially economic – was necessary is another question, and in fact, it was these motivations that can explain every single foreign policy step Kádár took.

In our summary study, we present all the steps along which, in our judgment, the Kádár system, year by year, engaged in increasingly successful political communication and economic cooperation with the West. We shed light on what possibilities, in our opinion, Hungary had to achieve its goal, and from when we can even speak of the Western acceptance of the Kádár government.

We support our claims with data and contemporary source materials. We weigh and at the same time enrich the events of the period under examination by presenting some of the more significant – and less well-known – press materials of the era.

In our summary paper, we scrutinise a process spanning more than three decades, and thus we do not focus on minute details but on an overview, on presenting the processes: we take into account the successes of the Kádár era, the achievements often reached first in the Soviet region, and we examine the process, the situations, and the perspectives that led to the breakout from isolation, and we recall the events that resulted in a turning point in Hungary's Western relations.

13 9 July 1965. 'The Three-Faced János Kádár' – (author of the article: Inge Santner). In 'János Kádár' – The Opinion of the Western Press. Confidential News Agency and Correspondent Press Reviews of the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency (copies), 1965–1977. 2nd file.

## THE THWARTING OF THE „WESTERN OPENING"

> *„Goodness may have no upper limit, but the relationship between our parties is close to this limit."*[14]
> (Frol Kozlov, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee)

The reprisal following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 led to the significant international isolation of the emerging Kádár system. A few days after the bloody suppression of the freedom struggle, UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld[15] appeared in Budapest on his return from Egypt, but the Kádár government not only did not negotiate with him but took no notice of him.[16] The late fifties and early sixties were characterised by international isolation. In its declaration of 5 January 1957, the so-called revolutionary workers' and peasants' government stated regarding foreign policy that „The revolutionary workers' and peasants' government of the Hungarian People's Republic is guided in its foreign policy activities by the securing of the nation's independence, the country's sovereignty, and the protection of the interests of the working Hungarian people. [...] The protection of national independence, social progress, the peace of our people, and the securing of the construction of a socialist Hungary guide the government when, in its foreign policy, it relies on the international solidarity of the workers and on a lasting alliance with the Soviet Union and all the countries of the socialist camp. At the same time, the basic principle of our foreign policy remains unchanged: to create a peaceful and fruitful relationship with all countries – regardless of their social system – on the basis of equality, national independence and sovereignty, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and mutual benefits.

Our relationship with the Soviet Union is presented in an unfavourable light and attacked by circles malicious and hostile towards our people and

14 Baráth 2021, 95.
15 Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961) was a Swedish politician. The second Secretary-General of the United Nations. He played a decisive role in the world organisation's establishment of a commission of inquiry into the 1956 Hungarian revolution and the Soviet intervention.
16 MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 5. cs. 2. ő. e. Meeting of the Steering Committee of the HSWP, 16 November 1956.

the Hungarian People's Republic, although this relationship has in the past and still rests on deep principled foundations. The Soviet Union was the socialist state with whose help our people succeeded in regaining their national independence at the end of the Second World War, shaking off the yoke of the Hitlerite fascists and the Horthy reaction. Now again, it was the Soviet Union that was the power with whose support our people's republic repelled the counter-revolutionary imperialist attack launched against it and defended our national independence, which had been in grave danger. In the present acute situation, the Soviet army on the territory of Hungary protects the Hungarian people against a possible military attack by external imperialist forces, and thereby ensures that our people can live in peace and devote their strength to the great cause of socialist construction and the prosperity of the country. [...] All present and future questions of Hungarian-Soviet relations – including the questions related to the Soviet troops stationed in Hungary – the Hungarian and Soviet governments wish to settle through friendly negotiations in accordance with the friendly, fraternal, and allied relationship of the two countries. The principled basis for this settlement is proletarian internationalism, declared also in the Soviet Union's declaration of 30 October concerning its relations with the people's democratic countries, respect for equality, sovereignty, and national independence, the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and mutual benefits."[17]

The preparation of this declaration and the determination of its main theses took place at the meeting of the HSWP's Steering Committee. Hungary's situation and its foreign policy can be interpreted in the light of its relationship with the Soviet Union, which, despite the government declaration, could be described as neither friendly nor fraternal.

The revolution, international isolation, and complete Soviet dependence were therefore the starting point of the Kádár era, and by the end of the „Old Man's," that is, János Kádár's, life, a peculiar, Hungarian system of foreign relations, shaped by the regime's namesake, had come into being.

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17 Declaration of the revolutionary workers' and peasants' government on the most important tasks. Népszabadság, 6 January 1957, 1–4.

Reflecting on the events of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 that broke out on 23 October, the UN Security Council convened on 28 October to discuss the situation in Hungary; however, a decision or the adoption of a resolution was not possible in this body due to the Soviet Union's veto power. The substantive handling of the Hungarian question also encountered numerous obstacles besides this. The government led by Imre Nagy[18] considered the events of the revolution to be the country's internal affair and thus sharply protested against the UN's interference in it; the outbreak of the Suez crisis[19] divided, and even diverted, international attention from the revolution; and it must also be clearly seen that the Western powers could neither slow down nor hinder the assertion of Soviet interests, either politically or militarily. The violent Soviet intervention in the Hungarian events on 4 November, however, brought a change: on 10 November, with resolution 1008/ES-II/, the II. Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly decided to place the „Hungarian question" on the agenda of the XI. General Assembly. The General Assembly, by a majority vote, passed several resolutions calling on the Soviet government to cease military actions against the Hungarian population and withdraw its troops, and to restore the Hungarian people's right to self-determination.

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18 Imre Nagy (1896–1958) was a Hungarian politician. Between 1944 and 1945, he was Minister of Agriculture. Between 1947 and 1949, Speaker of the National Assembly. From 1952 to 1953, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, then Chairman of the Council of Ministers between 1953 and 1955. In 1956, Chairman of the Council of Ministers and concurrently Minister of Foreign Affairs. Following the revolution and freedom fight, he fled to the Yugoslav legation, from where he left on 22 November 1956, although even during this period he could not move freely. He was abducted by the Soviets and transported to Snagov, Romania. On 14 April 1957, he was arrested; following a political trial against him, he was sentenced to death on 15 June 1958. For more on him, see: Baráth & Sipos 2006; János M. Rainer 2009.

19 On 29 October 1956, one of the greatest conflicts of the Cold War broke out in the Middle East. After Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal in July 1956, British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden, fearing that a new Arab alliance would cut off oil supplies to Europe, formed an alliance with France and Israel to retake the canal. Following the ill-fated invasion, widespread international condemnation from the UN, the Soviet Union, and the Commonwealth, as well as the threat of sanctions from the United States, Eden was forced into a humiliating retreat. Isolated, he resigned on 9 January 1957, and it became clear to the world that the United Kingdom was no longer the great power it once was. On the Suez crisis, see among others: Dévavári, Földváryné Kiss, Sáringer & Soós 2016.

They formulated that the holding of free elections must be ensured, the ongoing deportations stopped, and UN observers be allowed into the country, regarding which Kádár had a very firm opinion: „In the opinion of the Hungarian government, allowing observers in, besides violating Hungary's sovereign rights, would only cause unrest and contribute to the exacerbation of the situation."[20] The enforcement of the resolutions, however, did not materialise; the new Hungarian leadership and the Soviet Union disregarded them. All this contributed to the fact that the UN General Assembly, with its resolution 1132/XI of 10 January 1957, established a special committee to investigate the events of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, the Soviet military intervention, and the circumstances and activities of the coming to power of the counter-government led by János Kádár.[21] Until 1962, the UN General Assembly placed the „Hungarian question" on its agenda every year, and on every occasion, by a majority vote, they condemned the Soviet government for the aggressive intervention, as well as the Hungarian government – which also meant that until 1962, Hungary remained in a kind of „partial and relative"[22] diplomatic isolation.

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What did the problematic Hungarian-Soviet relation look like? János Kádár essentially accepted „the role assigned to him" on the condition that the newly formed cabinet would in no way be a „puppet government." This sounded good in theory, but in practice, it was not at all realised: „[…] in the first weeks of its operation, the body had only very limited sovereignty. The representatives of the Soviet army and state security organs, who had been in Hungary practically since the outbreak of the revolution, as well as the political delegates sent to Hungary by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), intervened in almost all political decisions."[23] In the opinion of Pál Pritz: „until 1956 and for a good while after, there was no, or hardly any, possibility

20 Huszár 2002, 26. János Kádár to Nehru, [30] November 1956.

21 For more on this, see: Békés–Kecskés 2006; On the report of the UN Special Committee, see: Stankovich 1989.

22 Békés 2021, 26.

23 Baráth 2014a, 185–192, 185.

of asserting national interests against Moscow, just as Hungarian foreign policy practically did not exist until 1953, and hardly at all afterwards."[24]

After the Soviet government declaration[25] of 30 October 1956, the Hungarian-Soviet relation gradually underwent a certain transformation over time: Hungary's status of direct, Soviet-related vassal dependency gradually changed, following the „Kádárist consolidation," into a kind of limited partnership status. In the words of Zoltán Garadnai: „In general, the relationship of the satellite states to the Soviet Union was influenced jointly by the Moscow Declaration, worked out between 14 and 16 November 1957, and the resolutions of the conference of communist parties held in Moscow between 10 November and 1 December 1960. As a consequence of these, the interests of the satellite countries – taking the status quo into account – could receive greater emphasis. The questions were discussed by the party leaders, but outwardly, they sought to show the unity of the socialist countries, while alongside respecting the rules, an opportunity also opened up for a certain degree of limited increase in foreign policy room for manoeuvre."[26] We can read in the work of Magdolna Baráth that: „due to their significance, Hungarian-Soviet relations outgrew the framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; almost all questions of the relationship were dealt with by higher party and government bodies, and the decisions were made at the highest forums."[27]

Overall, it can be said that „in the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, a new kind of atmosphere developed in the political relations of the Soviet Union with the 'people's democratic' countries; high-level meetings and visits by party and government delegations became regular, but discussions 'around the white table'[28] following a hunt were not rare either. In place of dictates and instructions came the exchange of opinions, consultation, and

24 Pritz 2010, 46–58.

25 "Declaration of the Government of the Soviet Union on the principles of development and further strengthening of friendship and cooperation between the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries [...]". Baráth 2014a, 190.

26 Garadnai 2010, 155–174, 155–156.

27 Baráth 2014b, 211–247, 219.

28 An example of the hunt and subsequent discussions is a letter written by János Kádár to Brezhnev in 1965, in which he invited him and Nikolai Podgorny for a several-day visit to Hungary: „Our programme proposal: a two-day small game (pheasant, hare) hunt in the countryside, as well as a small-circle friendly dinner in Budapest, where they could also

coordinated policy; their relationship was built on partnership compared to the Stalinist period."[29] This changed atmosphere in foreign policy conduct and relations was summarised by Nikita Khrushchev in November 1958 as follows: „[...] In international questions, we state our opinion, and [...] we consult. This is not direction or command, but political calculation."[30] The leaders of foreign affairs spoke of the relationship between the two countries with absolute appreciation in the era. A good example of this is the visit of the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev[31] to Budapest in June 1959: „[...] our relations are the best possible, both between our countries, our parties, and – in personal terms – between the leaders of our countries."[32] This is also supported by Miklós Mitrovits's following statement, according to which: „[...] in international relations, the countries of the socialist bloc stood united behind the Kádárist leadership [...], they contributed to the stabilisation of the Hungarian economy with significant commodity and foreign currency credits, the rescheduling of the repayment obligation of previous credits, and other concessions, and to the wage level increase and price reduction that began in early 1957."[33]

With regard to Hungarian-Soviet relations, the Kádár system throughout placed itself in the role of the „loyal, reliable, predictable partner."[34] Kádár declared on several occasions that the Hungarian-Soviet friendship was based on „firm principles" and the „common destiny" of the two countries.[35] „Hungarian foreign policy, in the field of Soviet-Hungarian relations, strove to assert the policy of constructive loyalty. The main characteristics of this conduct were, on the one hand, conflict avoidance – primarily in political matters – flexibility and continuous adaptation to Soviet demands, and a

meet with our non-hunting political committee members." Huszár 2002, 281. János Kádár to L. I. Brezhnev, 8 January 1965.

29 Baráth 2014b, 211–247, 223.

30 Ibid.

31 Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (1894–1971) was a Soviet communist politician. Between 1953 and 1964, First Secretary of the CPSU; between 1958 and 1964, Chairman of the Council of Ministers.

32 Baráth 2021, 94.

33 Mitrovits 2022, 70.

34 Békés 2004, 135.

35 Huszár 2002, 265. János Kádár to L. I. Brezhnev, 9 November 1964. Memorandum for Comrade L. I. Brezhnev.

willingness to cooperate." Hungary thus assumed a kind of „moderator role" in the Warsaw Pact, in Comecon, and „generally in multilateral consultations, in order to assert the respective Soviet position." This „constructive loyalty," however, also meant that they did not exclude the continuous expansion of the boundaries, the testing of possibilities: „the basic principle, right up until 1988, was essentially that what is not forbidden is permitted."[36] To assert the „permitted" category, it was necessary to do away with the country's political isolation and, by breaking the framework of the previously established network of relations within the Soviet bloc, to establish diplomatic relations with a series of countries that either showed and represented an opposing political conduct, or whose significance had not been considerable previously, but the prevailing international situation required that they come into Hungary's field of vision. In other words: „in foreign policy, the system slavishly adhered to Moscow's expectations, but its directors cleverly noticed that in deepening relations with the so-called developing countries, there were considerable opportunities to ease international isolation."[37] The realisation of this new political conduct was the result of a long process, and a series of decisions and events had to take place in the meantime to make all this possible.

The Soviet government declaration issued on 30 October 1956 thus essentially – for the most part – provided new routes, greater opportunities, and better conditions for the countries of the Soviet bloc in terms of movement in the world of diplomacy. This statement held its ground within the bloc – even though in the Hungarian context, the provisions of the declaration did not make their effect felt from the beginning – but this so-called positive change did not extend to the other side of the Iron Curtain. This meant that the Western foreign policy perception of the Kádár system was rather uncertain, and the country became isolated. And in this light, the main foreign policy goal for the Kádár government following the 1956 Revolution could be none other than the creation of an international set of conditions in which the country could pursue a policy in all areas that would result in stability and security, all this of course in such a way as

36 Békés 2004, 136.
37 Pritz 2004, 26.

not to harm the Soviet Union and its interests with their steps.[38] One of the biggest problems, however, was that the Western governments were not willing to recognise the Kádár government. This political decision was, however, overridden by reality over time: paradoxically, numerous countries did not close their representations in Budapest, because on the one hand, they wanted to follow the events in Hungary, and on the other, complete disengagement would have entailed more serious consequences in the long run.[39] The diplomatic presence, but at the same time the lack of legitimacy of the Hungarian political leadership, is also supported by the official statement published in *Reuters* in September 1957: „The Swiss ambassador in Moscow appeared at the airport in March to welcome the Hungarian Prime Minister János Kádár because diplomatic customs require it. The fact that the ambassador was present at the airport 'does not express any political position regarding the Hungarian regime'."[40] A curious duality can therefore be observed in relation to the countries beyond the Iron Curtain: they should be present in Hungary, and yet not; they do not negotiate with the Hungarian government, yet at the same time, it is not advisable to turn their back on the country (see: strategic, geopolitical, etc. reasons). The Hungarian question in fact became one of the political tools of American foreign policy strategy. We can read more about this in Csaba Békés's study: „From 1956–1957, one of the most important objectives of American foreign policy became the prevention of the growth of Soviet influence in the Third World and, if possible, the increase of the influence of the United States. The UN General Assembly provided an excellent stage for this [...]. During the years of debates in the General Assembly and the arguments of the parties, the Westerners were therefore not actually trying to get the accused, that is, the Soviet Union, to confess – there was no hope of this from the beginning – the goal was much more to convince the wavering 'jurors,' that is, the non-aligned countries present in ever-

38 M. Madarász 2020, 13.

39 Macher 2013, 82.

40 13 September 1957. Reuters, Bern. Official statement regarding Hungary. In 'János Kádár' – The Opinion of the Western Press. Confidential News Agency and Correspondent Press Reviews of the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency (copies), 1956–1964. 1st file.

increasing numbers in the UN, of the Kremlin's aggressive intentions, and through this, to preserve or create their Western orientation."[41]

In summary, since the Western relation became unattainable in many respects, the Kádár government had to focus on other regions.

## THE SEARCH FOR A PATH

> *„It is our opinion that it is possible and also necessary to maintain and expand economic relations between countries with different social systems."*[42]

Hungarian policy turned towards Africa, where, with regard to relations with developing countries, it was helpful for the Hungarian leadership that several states had become independent with the collapse of the colonial system. The guidelines for foreign affairs work concerning the so-called sub-Saharan African countries were laid down by the resolution of the HSWP Political Committee on 19 April 1962. According to the author duo Baráth Gecsényi, „the resolution grouped the sub-Saharan African countries according to the degree of their actual independence, which also provided an answer to why the countries classified in certain groups established relations, while others rejected them, with the socialist countries."[43] In addition, it was perfectly clear to the decision-makers that they could not maintain equivalent relations with every single country: the Politburo determined the list of sub-Saharan African countries with which diplomatic relations had to be established „either then, or in the long term." „In the selection of the countries with which they wished to develop relations, political considerations played the primary role, but Hungarian economic interests were not lost sight of either."[44]

41 Békés 2021, 26.
42 Mitrovits 2022, 72.
43 Baráth–Gecsényi 2015, 55.
44 Ibid. 56.

In October 1960, János Kádár travelled to New York for the UN General Assembly. The diplomatic isolation and rejection were very conspicuous on this occasion as well: „a two-hour walk in Manhattan was the only occasion when he could confront the United States;" he was reviled by demonstrators,[45] and "as Mr Kadar spoke, large numbers of anti-communist delegations walked from the Assembly Hall".[46] The article highlighted that "Mr Kadar's address echoed standard Communist charges of „imperialist aggression" and colonial 'exploitation' of subject peoples. However, he portrayed Hungary as a nation greatly assisted by the Soviet Union and now at peace and happily progressing toward a fuller life."[47] The Hungarian leader strove on every occasion to have the „Hungarian question" removed from the agenda, unsuccessfully.

The year 1963 was defining for Hungary in several respects. In our present study, one of the most important elements of this turning point is that the country's international situation became relatively settled. As we can read in György Földes's monograph, this can be considered the result of an American-Hungarian compromise. The so-called removal of the „Hungarian question" could only be realised in such a way that it did not cause a loss of prestige for either side. Accordingly, in line with American expectations, the Kádár government declared an amnesty; and the American delegate did not initiate the discussion of the „Hungarian question" at the next session of the UN General Assembly. [48] We consider it important to examine the individual elements of the compromise more closely. The resolution 1857/XVII/ of the XVII. General Assembly, adopted on 20 December 1962, resulted in the removal of the „Hungarian question" from the agenda of the UN General Assembly;[49] this move made it possible for the Kádár government to break out of its years of isolation, and a series

45 Gough 2012, 170–171. On János Kádár's appearance at the XV. session of the UN General Assembly, see: Máté 2015.

46 The New York Times, 4 October 1960. "Soviet Arms Plan Praised by Kadar. Hungarian Red Also Hails Khrushchev – Opponents Quit Hall as He Speaks."

47 Ibid.

48 Földes 2015, I. 58.

49 MNL OL XIX-J-1-j 1967, 2. d. 00330/3-1967, appendix. 25 May 1967. The development of the international relations of the Hungarian People's Republic from 1957 to the present day in the light of some data. 1.

of new events, which could be considered successes in international life, began in Hungarian foreign policy.

*Voting Ratios on Placing the „Hungarian Question" on the Agenda at Various UN General Assemblies between 1957 and 1962*[50]

| | For | Against | Abstained | Total UN Member States |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1957, XII. Assembly | 57 | 10 | 6 | 82 |
| 1958, XIII. Assembly | 61 | 10 | 10 | 82 |
| 1959, XIV. Assembly | 51 | 10 | 15 | 82 |
| 1960, XV. Assembly | 54 | 12 | 31 | 99 |
| 1961, XVI. Assembly | 51 | 15 | 30 | 104 |
| 1962, XVII. Assembly | 43 | 34 | 19 | 110 |

One pillar of this was that in the summer of 1963, UN Secretary-General U Thant[51] visited Budapest: „from his conduct and statements, it was clear that he had essentially come with the same purpose as that for which we had invited him, namely, that the liquidation of the Hungarian question in the UN – which had practically happened – should also take place legally from the UN's point of view. He professed as his main endeavour to obtain information and gain experiences that would help him in the complete burial of the 'Hungarian question' within the framework of the UN."[52]

We cannot outline the international events related to Hungary in 1963 without sketching a significant domestic political turn: this is the question of the previously mentioned amnesty. Attila Szakolczai aptly formulated it: „The foreign and domestic political events in 1963 made the 'great' amnesty for the '56 convicts possible. The superpowers, having overcome the Cuban

50 This table is based on: MNL OL XIX-J-1-j 1967. 2. d. 00330/3-1967, appendix. 25 May 1967. The development of the international relations of the Hungarian People's Republic from 1957 to the present day in the light of some data. 1.

51 U Thant (1909–1974) was a Burmese diplomat. The third Secretary-General of the UN between 1961 and 1971.

52 MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 32. cs. 1963. 1. ő. e. Report to the Political Committee of the HSWP Central Committee on the visit of UN Secretary-General U Thant to Hungary. Published in: Földes 2015, II, 89. At its meeting on 25 June 1963, the Political Committee discussed the draft programme for U Thant's visit to Hungary. MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 5. cs. 305. ő. e.

missile crisis,[53] were both inclined to remove the splinter of the Hungarian question, and the HSWP, having declared the laying of the foundations of socialism, could rightly see – especially in view of the overwhelming victory in the council and parliamentary elections held in February 1963 – that the time for forgiveness had come."[54] At the same time, the amnesty was very contradictory and can by no means be spoken of as a general pardon, since the freedom of numerous '56 convicts was not made possible; this could only happen later: „Although the 1963 amnesty was indeed great, as more than four thousand people regained their freedom, a good number of '56 convicts still remained in prison, who were released in the course of the 60s by individual pardon or by the general amnesty issued for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation."[55] According to László Borhi, the amnesty was the first Eastern European success of US diplomacy.[56] We have no reason not to agree with his statement.

In Hungary's Western relations – following the removal of the „Hungarian question" from the agenda – palpable changes occurred. Why was maintaining relations with the West so important? It is obvious that the country, in order to ensure normal diplomatic relations, wanted to break out of the „cordon sanitaire" drawn around it as soon as possible. At the same time, we would also like to stress that behind the Kádár government's intention to gradually develop its Western relations, economic necessity dominated above all; this relation rose to strategic importance. In practice, this meant that „the assertion of the Kádárist concept aimed at maintaining political stability and the continuous growth of the standard of living [...] was only made possible by a functioning economy that ensured continuous growth."[57] In 1964, the development of commercial relations with the NATO countries already appeared as a programme in Kádár's policy, since certain goods could only reach Hungary through these countries. The economic

53 The Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of war over the Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba.

54 Szakolczai 1997.

55 Szakolczai ibid.

56 Borhi 2010, 224.

57 Békés 2021, 30.

opening also held the hope that even the Western-Hungarian political relation could be normalised.[58]

Following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, by the first half of the sixties, foreign policy isolation had gradually ceased; the raising of diplomatic relations to a higher level, numerous important visits, the conclusion of agreements, and generally a significantly more intensive contact in the field of official and unofficial relations took place than before.[59] In practice, from the end of 1963, the raising of diplomatic relations with Western states to ambassadorial level began, and thus the status of diplomatic relations with five countries changed: the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Belgium, France,[60] and Greece. In addition to this, relations in many areas revived and developed further, both politically, economically, and culturally. Between 1964 and 1966, Hungary established representation at ambassadorial level with 11 countries; these were the following: Jordan, Canada, Kenya, Kuwait, Nigeria, Chile, Lebanon, Mauritania, Pakistan, Uganda, and Zambia. In the same period, the level of diplomatic relations changed with fifteen countries: Argentina, Denmark, Iran, Italy, Austria, Sweden, Japan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Norway, the Netherlands, Sudan, Luxembourg, the United States of America, and Iceland.[61]

*Number of Hungary's Diplomatic Relations*[62]

| | **1957** | **1967** |
|---|---|---|
| Total | 40 | 71 |
| Of which at embassy level | 16 | 67 |
| Of which at legation level | 24 | 4 |

58 Mitrovits 2022, 72.

59 M. Madarász 2020, 88. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j 1967. 2. d. 00330/7. Relations of the Hungarian People's Republic with the capitalist countries (partial material for the Politburo submission on „The foreign policy of the Hungarian People's Republic"). Budapest, 7 July 1967.

60 Raising of diplomatic representations to embassy level: with the United Kingdom on 2 December 1963; with Switzerland on 24 July 1963; with Belgium on 24 December 1963; with Greece on 24 August 1963. Baráth–Gecsényi 2015, 90, 100, 121. With France: 17 December 1963. Garadnai 2008, 565–592, 565.

61 MNL OL XIX-J-1-o KÜM Kollégium 12. d. 00330/3-1967, appendix. 25 May 1967. The development of the international relations of the Hungarian People's Republic from 1957 to the present day in the light of some data. 2.

62 This table is based on: Ibid.

Following the events of 1963, both Hungary and other countries of the Soviet bloc found themselves on the treacherous ground of searching for a path. What do we mean by this? György Földes formulated that „it became clearer and clearer: it was necessary to innovate in both domestic and foreign policy. World peace cannot be built solely on mutual deterrence, on the balance of armed forces; peaceful coexistence requires more than that: real contact between states and economies, between peoples and cultures. It is not enough to talk about how there is no compromise in ideology, that the debate between the systems continues. [...] One way forward is if the countries trying to catch up gain access to advanced technology."[63] Following this line of thought, János Kádár in fact considered the Western opening to be necessary, inevitable, and almost a requirement, both for ensuring peaceful coexistence and for economic development goals.[64]

By the mid-sixties, the idea of European unity had become a pivotal point of French policy, a process into which they wished to involve the Eastern countries as far as possible. An outstanding moment in the development of Hungarian-French relations was when, between 28 and 30 July 1966, the French Foreign Minister, Couve de Murville[65] visited Hungary (as part of a series of foreign ministerial visits to East-Central Europe at that time) and also exchanged views with János Kádár, the number one man of the HSWP. At this meeting, Kádár spoke of how „among the socialist countries, Hungary was the first to raise the issue of European cooperation", and he repeated the earlier, irrefutable statement of Foreign Minister János Péter[66]

63 Földes 2015, I. 65.

64 Ibid, 73.

65 Jacques-Maurice Couve de Murville (1907–1999) was a French diplomat and politician. Between 1958 and 1968, Minister of Foreign Affairs; between 1968 and 1969, Prime Minister during the presidency of Charles de Gaulle. As foreign minister, he played a leading role in the conclusion of the critically important Franco-German cooperation treaty of 1963; he laid the foundation for the Paris-Bonn axis, which played a central role in the building of a united Europe.

66 János Péter (1910–1999) was a member of the Hungarian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1945–1946. Between November 1949 and October 1956, Transtibiscan Reformed Church District. From December 1956, government commissioner of the Institute for Cultural Relations; from 1957, its president. First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1958 to 1961; Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1961 and 1973. For more on him, see: Diplomáciai Lexikon 2018, 668–669.

that „we Hungarians, we are also Europeans."[67] As for the relationship between the Hungarian People's Republic and the United States, consolidation was slow, but the declaration of the amnesty had a beneficial effect on this relation, and from 1966 onwards, they continued their official „dialogue" with each other at ambassadorial level. *The New York Times* also commented on the normalisation of the relationship in November of that year: „[...] the Administration decided to put aside unresolved differences in favor of developing areas of cooperation. [...] While the State Department described the move as simply a »normalization« of relations, it was privately acknowledged that an undoubtedly more important factor was a desire to »build bridges« to the East European nations."[68] The problems existing between the two countries were therefore not resolved by this. For any progress to be made on two cardinal issues, the return of the Hungarian coronation regalia and the case of Cardinal József Mindszenty, Primate and Archbishop of Esztergom, another decade had to pass.

From the mid-1960s, an increasingly intensive economic period also followed in terms of Hungarian-West German relations. How could all this have been realised in the knowledge of the international circumstances? In 1957, trade negotiations were (re)started, and indeed in 1962, the West German government conducted secret negotiations with the Kádár government (as well as with the Polish, Romanian, and Bulgarian leaderships) in order to establish a „trade representation endowed with certain diplomatic rights" in Budapest. In November 1963, the two countries established interstate relations, and a mutual agreement was reached on the establishment of trade representations – which in any case resulted in prospering economic relations.[69] The establishment of political relations, however, did not go entirely smoothly in this case either. Hungarian-West German relations were strongly influenced by, among other things, the Polish question. What do we mean by this? The fact that Kádár's circle

67 Garadnai 2008, 566., and Földes 2015, I. 75.

68 The New York Times, 29 November 1966. U.S. Upgrades Ties with Bulgarians and Hungarians. Status of Relations Raised from the Legation Level to the Ambassadorial.

69 Békés 2021, 33–34.

In the summer of 1964, trade representations were opened in Frankfurt am Main and Budapest. Schmidt-Schweizer 2021, 356. For more on Hungarian-FRG relations, see: Schmidt-Schweizer 2021, 347–378.

had to accept that in political matters, Hungary „could not agree with the West Germans without the consent of Poland and the GDR, since at that time they did not recognise either Poland's western borders or the GDR. Thus, the 'German question' became the acid test of the Polish-Hungarian relationship."[70] On 1 December 1966, a grand coalition government was formed in Bonn,[71] led by Kurt Georg Kiesinger.[72] The Hungarian position on the changing German foreign policy, which was opening up towards the countries of the Eastern bloc, was expressed in Kádár's statement: „the assessment of the coalition government in the FRG [...] this was a change compared to the previous government. In a certain sense, from our point of view, the situation changed for the worse, as the imperialist policy of the FRG gained broader support. At the same time, in our opinion, it would not be right to simplify and handle in a formulaic way the new situation that has thus developed in the FRG. [...] In connection with the diplomatic action of the Kiesinger government, frankly [...], at that time we saw it that for years we had been talking about the policy of coexistence, which creates a relationship between all states, regardless of their system. We always said that the problems of security and peace require that all governments sit down at a common table and negotiate. The socialist countries have great trust capital in the eyes of world public opinion; in the period of the Cold War, it was precisely they who belonged to those who fought for détente. It would be a mistake if we were to renounce these principles."[73]

In December 1966, the new West German government held secret negotiations with four countries – Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria – on the establishment of diplomatic relations, which also meant that the new government had abandoned the application of the Hallstein Doctrine.[74] As Miklós Mitrovits put it: „the Hungarian side followed the

70 Mitrovits 2022, 73.

71 Ibid.

72 Kurt Georg Kiesinger (1904–1988) was a German politician. Between 1 December 1966 and 21 October 1969, Chancellor of West Germany. Before that, between 1958 and 1966, Minister President of the state of Baden-Württemberg; between 1962 and 1963, President of the Federal Council. Chairman of the Christian Democratic Union from 1967 to 1971.

73 Report on the unofficial visit of Władysław Gomułka and Józef Cyrankiewicz to Hungary (Budapest, 8–9 March 1967). Published in: Mitrovits 2014, 340–341.

74 Schmidt-Schweizer 2021, 357. In 1950, Konrad Adenauer appointed Walter Hallstein as State Secretary, and he was the head of the German delegation at the Schuman Plan

usual practice: accepting the West German proposal, it prepared for negotiations with Bonn, but it also informed the leadership of the other socialist countries of this. The planned schedule, however, was upset, because Romania established diplomatic relations with the FRG without consulting the socialist countries. The determined East German and Polish response to the Bucharest move put Hungarian foreign policy on a constrained path."[75] From February 1967, the Warsaw Pact countries, under pressure from the GDR and Poland, applied a „confrontational policy" towards the FRG, which meant that they set conditions for the establishment of diplomatic relations that were impracticable and at that time unacceptable. At the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Warsaw Pact held between 8 and 10 February 1967, it was made clear to János Péter that without these conditions, Hungary could not establish diplomatic relations with the FRG. And Władysław Gomułka[76] declared that the „main aspiration of the FRG's policy is the annexation of the GDR," as well as the „changing of borders and the liquidation of the results of the Second World War."[77] In April, at the conference of European communist and workers' parties held in Karlovy Vary, this so-called „Warsaw directive" was adopted, and the Hungarian government, albeit reluctantly and giving up on many things (see: a more favourable credit system for the new economic

conference. In this post, he worked out the concept that became known as the Hallstein Doctrine. According to this doctrine, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) had the exclusive right to represent the entire German nation. With the exception of the Soviet Union, it refused to maintain diplomatic relations with states that recognised the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). In 1969, Willy Brandt became Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). His Ostpolitik (reconciliation between East and West Europe) replaced the Hallstein Doctrine.

75 Mitrovits 2022, 73.

76 Władysław Gomułka (1905–1982) was a Polish communist politician. Between 1956 and 1970, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party. Initially very popular for his reforms, in the 1960s he became increasingly rigid and authoritarian – he was afraid of destabilising the system and was unwilling to introduce or permit changes. In the treaty signed with the FRG in December 1970, at the end of Gomułka's term of office, West Germany recognised the post-Second World War borders, which created the basis for future peace, stability, and cooperation in Central Europe.

77 Mitrovits 2021, 255.

mechanism),[78] also accepted it.[79] The subsequent international events also did not help the further development and raising to a higher level of Hungarian-West German relations.[80]

* * *

According to a 1967 Hungarian diplomatic document, the background to the „détente" diplomatic relation unfolding between the countries of the two opposing camps can be summarised as follows: „Among the factors that created this, a very serious role was undoubtedly played by the failure of Cold War methods and the doctrine of liberation, and the re-evaluation of the policy of the capitalist countries, as a consequence of which – alongside the unchanged strategic goal – a sharp turn occurred tactically. This was characterised by a more differentiated policy towards the individual socialist countries, which sought to approach the old objectives through the normalisation of interstate relations, primarily through the revitalisation of cultural and economic relations, and the application of more peaceful methods of 'loosening up'. The East-West rapprochement, realised under the slogan of 'bridge-building' and other similar slogans, increased the complexity of the international situation and required new methods, a more flexible foreign policy from us as well."[81] Of course, these Western-Hungarian bilateral relations could not be realised smoothly; numerous problems and minor and major conflicts had to be faced and confronted, according to the Hungarian position:

1. „Relations with the capitalist countries are generally characterised by the fact that they take the initiative (USA, UK, France, FRG), to which

78 Mitrovits 2022, 74.

79 Schmidt-Schweizer 2021, 358.

80 Several more years had to pass before the Hungarian-FRG relationship could be settled. In December 1970, Chancellor Willy Brandt visited Poland. On the occasion of this visit, he officially recognised Poland's western borders. But it was only in 1973 that Hungary could establish diplomatic relations with the FRG. Mitrovits 2021, 226.

81 MNL OL XIX-J-1-j 1967. 2. d. 00330/7. Relations of the Hungarian People's Republic with the capitalist countries (partial material for the Politburo submission on „The foreign policy of the Hungarian People's Republic"). Budapest, 7 July 1967. M. Madarász 2020, 88–89.

we mostly only react, and in this way, the capitalist countries are able to direct the shaping and development of our relations to a certain extent.

2. The capitalist countries only strive to develop official relations to the extent that maintaining a normal relationship requires. It is characteristic that every decline in our relations has in all cases been the result of Western actions. Their aspiration is primarily directed towards the establishment of broad social relations, in order to assert or increase their influence. This effort undoubtedly brings results.
3. We have not always succeeded in pursuing a flexible policy in the face of the initiatives of the capitalist countries, and in more complicated cases we have generally represented a rigid, dismissive position [...], although with due circumspection the danger inherent in them could be reduced, and at the same time we could make use of the opportunities created by them.
4. Our relations, in the case of almost every country, fall short of the level maintained by the friendly countries. [...]
5. In some relations, the ratio of political and economic relations is not satisfactory. Alongside good economic relations, our political relations are bad, e.g., with the FRG, whereas the situation is the reverse with regard to France. So far, it has been primarily the Netherlands that has shied away from developing political relations. Our commercial relations are chronically in deficit in some relations (UK, France), while in others (e.g., Italy) the opposite is true.
6. With respect to the Western European countries, our trade turnover is greatest with the countries of the Common Market, yet at the same time, their discriminatory measures are detrimental to our industrial, but primarily agricultural, exports. [...]
7. Our contacts are most lively in the cultural field. Both the opportunities for 'loosening up' and tradition play a role in this. The biggest problem in this regard is that the boundaries between cooperation and 'loosening up' are most often difficult to separate. The channelling of social relations into the proper course, the inadequate level of our cultural propaganda, and the lack of unified cultural direction represent the main problems."[82]

82 Ibid. 89–90.

The relations with the countries of the Soviet bloc, with the West, and the relations realised with the developing countries in the period 1963–1972 showed a continuously improving trend, despite the tensions appearing in the Cold War atmosphere and the minor and major hitches and troughs. The Kádárist foreign policy worked out its steps along the principle of „being on the best possible terms with everyone."[83]

*Distribution of Diplomatic Relations by Country Groups*[84]

| | **1957** | **1967** |
|---|---|---|
| Socialist countries | 12 | 13 |
| Capitalist countries | 17 | 19 |
| Developing countries | 11 | 39 |
| Total | 40 | 71 |

In October 1964, Nikita Khrushchev was dismissed in the Soviet Union. This moment – in the words of Magdolna Baráth – „was a real epochal boundary in the political history of the Soviet Union: it closed a contradictory, often inconsistent anti-Stalinist reform period."[85] *The New York Times* also commented on the event and, in a Hungarian context, reported the following: "The view expressed by Hungarians is that Mr Kadar demonstrated courage in praising the fallen Soviet leader. Knowledgeable sources described the Premier's words as serving notice to the new Moscow leadership that Hungarian Communists had their own views on the upheaval."[86] The article quoted Kádár, who said that „his policies, which include a steady liberalization as well as efforts to improve ties with Western countries, would not change at all".[87]

83 Földes 2015, I. 71.

84 This table is based on: MNL OL XIX-J-1-o KÜM Kollégium 12. d. 00330/3-1967, appendix. 25 May 1967. The development of the international relations of the Hungarian People's Republic from 1957 to the present day in the light of some data. 3.

85 Baráth 2007, 170. For more on this, see: Ibid., and Sztikalin 2007, 213–225.

86 The New York Times, 21 October 1964. 'Kadar Hailed by Hungarians' (author of the article: David Binder).

87 Ibid.

Hungary's diplomatic relations with developing countries had already reached a level by 1960 that a series of agreements and conventions considered significant were successfully concluded. After the „Hungarian question" was no longer on the agenda, the number of treaty-based relations with Western states also increased. With regard to the countries of the Soviet bloc, there were no great changes in this respect; this relation remained constant during the period under examination.

*Treaty-based (Conventions, Agreements) Relations*[88]

| Year | Socialist countries | Capitalist countries | Developing countries | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1957 | 20 | 5 | 2 | 27 |
| 1958 | 17 | 2 | 3 | 22 |
| 1959 | 13 | 3 | 3 | 19 |
| 1960 | 10 | 3 | 8 | 21 |
| 1961 | 12 | 1 | 14 | 27 |
| 1962 | 12 | 3 | 11 | 26 |
| 1963 | 11 | 11 | 6 | 28 |
| 1964 | 13 | 8 | 12 | 33 |
| 1965 | 13 | 9 | 10 | 32 |
| 1966 | 14 | 9 | 20 | 43 |
| **Total from 1957 to end of 1966** | **135** | **54** | **89** | **278** |

And since we have touched upon the idea of European unity, it is worth digressing for a few sentences on the question of European security, a problem that accompanied international politics from the second half of the 1960s. The idea of creating a collective European security system had already emerged before our era, and from the mid-sixties, through Soviet diplomacy, this aspiration was a central problem until the mid-1970s. According to Csaba Békés, the aim of the Soviet bloc's campaign was clearly the promotion of one of its important strategic goals, namely the creation of a European security conference and thereby the validation of the post-

88 MNL OL XIX-J-1-o KÜM Kollégium 12. d. 00330/3-1967, appendix. 25 May 1967. The development of the international relations of the Hungarian People's Republic from 1957 to the present day in the light of some data. 4.

Second World War European status quo. In the meantime, however, during the intensive negotiation process, the East-Central European countries, including Hungary, strengthened their Western connections in a „legal" form, and thus acquired a negotiating routine that they had not previously possessed. All this „contributed significantly to the accelerated emancipation of these states within the structure of East-West relations."[89]

## A BRIEF STALEMATE, 1968

> „[...] *significant events taking place in any socialist country are directly connected with the internal affairs of the other socialist countries.*"[90]
> (János Kádár)

The changes in Hungary in the 1960s, the country's prospering international relations, and the relations that had begun with the West were accompanied by a stalemate in 1968. This year brought challenges for the Hungarian political leadership from both a domestic and a foreign policy perspective. As for domestic policy, the supporters and opponents of the new economic mechanism waged an increasingly spectacular struggle against each other. In a study published in 2018, Zsuzsa Varga formulated that by the end of the decade, heavy industry developments had been pushed into the background almost „on the fly,"[91] and agricultural investments had begun to grow. The battle between agriculture and heavy industry seemed to be decided in the long run in favour of the former, which the heavy industry lobby naturally resented and tried to do everything against: defamatory newspaper articles were published about the producer cooperatives. But the most significant political trump card proved to be that it was increasingly loudly voiced that the price of the upswing in agriculture was essentially being paid by the industrial working class, thus they became the victims of the reforms.

89 Békés 2004, 144. For more on this, see: Ibid., 142–156.
90 Mitrovits 2022, 75.
91 Varga 2018, 5

Kádár, due to the increasingly strong disapprovals coming from Moscow, also stopped the reforms. At the end of her study, Varga quotes M. János Rainer's statement: „The Hungarian political leadership, burdened by the 1956 syndrome, was anxious not only about the possibility of confronting Hungarian society, but also the Soviet leadership [...] the first domestic difficulties, or the first serious Moscow criticism, was enough for the opinion that everything that was objected to in the reform could easily be 'jettisoned'."[92] Through the new economic programme introduced on 1 January 1968, Kádár wished, on the one hand, to make the Hungarian economy more competitive, and on the other, to increase the standard of living of Hungarian society. According to Mitrovits, „the success of the enterprise would have required not only the approval of the Soviet Union, but also a more forceful economic integration of the entire socialist camp and the transformation of bilateral trade relations. The success of the new economic mechanism could have been increased if a similar transformation had taken place in the other socialist countries as well."[93] The reforms introduced in Czechoslovakia connect at this point with the Hungarian economic processes; a problem arose when the interests of the Czechoslovak reforms and the new leadership did not coincide with the interests of the Soviet Union and the other countries of the bloc.

In international relations, in 1968, the world, but most of all Europe, turned towards Czechoslovakia:[94] On 5 January 1968, Antonín Novotný[95] was replaced as first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CSKP) by Alexander Dubček;[96] but he was „elected without Soviet approval, so he certainly owed an explanation regarding

92 Varga 2018, 5–6.

93 Mitrovits 2012, 126.

94 At this time, the Vietnam War (1955–1975) was also still ongoing. For more on this, see: Kemény 2020.

95 Antonín Josef Novotný (1904–1975) was First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia from 1953 to 1968, and from 1957 to 1968, he also held the office of President of Czechoslovakia.

96 Alexander Dubček (1921–1992) was a Slovak politician. From January 1968 to April 1969, he was the first secretary of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) (the de facto leader of Czechoslovakia). During the Prague Spring, he tried to reform the communist government but was forced to resign after the Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968.

his future policy. But before Dubček travelled to Moscow, he indicated to Kádár that he would first like to negotiate with him. The secret [...] meeting between Dubček and Kádár took place on 20–21 January 1968 in Tótmegyer (Palárikovo) and Révkomárom (Komárno). The fact that Dubček[97] placed Kádár before Brezhnev at once shows the Czechoslovak leadership's mistrust of Moscow and its trust in Budapest."[98] The Hungarian and Czechoslovak leaderships mutually supported each other in order to carry the reforms forward. The action programme adopted by the CSKP Central Committee on 5 April was received by the leaders of the countries of the Soviet bloc: for a good number of the leaders, these changes proved to be unacceptable, and a conference was convened in Dresden. At the meeting held on 23 March, Kádár acted as a supporter of the Czechoslovaks against the Poles, the East Germans, and the Soviets. In the end, there was no open break; Brezhnev's circle assured Dubček of their support, saying they would not interfere in internal affairs.[99] The story, however, did not end there: on 4 May, the Czechoslovak leadership had to face new Soviet pressure. On the country's territory, the commander-in-chief of the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact, Marshal Ivan Yakubovsky,[100] was preparing a staff command exercise, and it was also made clear that „in the event of a worsening of events, under certain circumstances the Soviet Union would not remain indifferent, and in order to preserve a socialist Czechoslovakia, it was prepared to take the most far-reaching steps."[101] On 8 May in Moscow, the leaders of the „five," the GDR, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union, discussed the Czechoslovak situation within the framework of a joint conference. By the spring of 1968, the practice of consultations about the Czechoslovaks, without the Czechoslovaks, had developed. Kádár continued to act supportively and declared that „there is no counter-

97 Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev (1906–1982) was a Soviet politician. He led the Soviet Union as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982 and as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet from 1960 to 1964 and from 1977 to 1982.
98 Mitrovits 2018, 417.
99 Bencsik–Mitrovits 2021, 254.
100 Ivan Ignatyevich Yakubovsky (1912–1976) was a Marshal of the Soviet Union. Between 1967 and 1976, Commander-in-Chief of the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact and First Deputy Minister of Defence of the Soviet Union.
101 Mitrovits 2022, 75.

revolution there, but a struggle has begun to correct the mistakes committed in the past [...]".[102] Gomułka, in contrast, formulated that he was truly sorry, but this was the first time that he could not agree with János Kádár. He believed: „there is a counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia."[103] Kádár became increasingly isolated from the other party leaders: he did not want Dubček›s fall, and he also shied away from the idea of military intervention. The situation was further complicated by the fact that on 14 June 1968, the signing of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance treaty took place, in which it was also formulated that they would not interfere in each other›s internal affairs; then the previously mentioned Šumava military exercise also began; and indeed, another summit was convened in Warsaw, which was held between 14 and 15 July. On the day before the meeting, Kádár and Dubček met one more time, at which the Hungarian politician tried to persuade Dubček to participate in Warsaw, saying that if he did not, he would no longer be able to represent the Czechoslovak position.[104] The Warsaw meeting brought a turning point; Kádár gave up his previous policy: on the occasion of his second speech, he declared that „we are ready to participate in any joint action."[105]

On the night of 20–21 August 1968, the armies of the Soviet Union and four member states of the Warsaw Pact, including Hungary, marched into Czechoslovakia.[106] The chain of events of 1968 generated further tensions between West and East. With regard to Hungarian foreign policy, it resulted in uncertainty, distancing, and some headache for the Western political leadership, as well as a certain degree of deterioration in the relations that were already developing in a genuinely positive way. That is, thanks to the military step, Hungary's international reputation perceptibly worsened, mainly as a consequence of its participation as an occupying country in the intervention. The NATO member states agreed on the following regarding the five countries participating in the intervention: „political steps and

102 Minutes of the meeting of the government and party leaders of five socialist countries. Warsaw, 14–15 July 1968. Published in: Földes 2015, II, 270, footnote 2.

103 Ibid., 271, footnote 3.

104 Bencsik–Mitrovits 2021, 256.

105 Minutes of the meeting of the government and party leaders of five socialist countries. Warsaw, 14–15 July 1968. Published in: Földes 2015, II, 302.

106 For more on this, see: Pataky 2008.

actions will be cancelled or postponed; with regard to cultural relations, no unified opinion was formed, some proposed reducing these relations to a minimum, others thought it necessary to judge these questions on a case-by-case basis; a unified position was formed to the effect that economic and commercial relations should not be restricted."[107] Deputy Foreign Minister Vencel Házi[108] formulated the following about relationship-building and opportunities after the intervention: „I think that first and foremost we can state that relationship-building does indeed have basic pillars [...], a fundamental question is the weight, the authority of the Hungarian People's Republic, its policy, whichever country we are talking about in terms of relationship-building. As a result of the 1968 Czechoslovak events and subsequently, for example, in England our comrades working there had incredible difficulties in the line of relationship-building, of making acquaintances. Mainly because England was almost the furthest-going among the Western European countries with us, generally with the socialist countries, and perhaps the last to relax after the Czechoslovak events."[109] After the August 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia, the relationship with the Western intelligentsia also deteriorated. In the December 1969 issue of *The Times*, thirty-one writers threatened the Soviet Union with a cultural boycott in an open letter if it continued its persecution of writers and intellectuals.[110] According to György Földes: „1968 changed the world, and with it, the situation of socialism, including Hungary's position within the socialist camp. 1968 did not mean the beginning of the radical left-wing attacks against welfare capitalism at its centre, but their end. The intervention in Czechoslovakia also contributed to this, which provoked outrage on the Western left, and at the same time reduced the attractiveness

107 M. Madarász 2020, 137. Guidelines for the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 25 September 1968. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j 1968. 1. d. 003303/1. For more on this, see: Ibid., 136–144.
108 Vencel Házi (1925–2007) was an officer of military intelligence (1949); between 1950 and 1953, a diplomat at the Hungarian legation in London. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, head of the V. Territorial Department from 1964 to 1968, then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1968 and 1970. Head of the London embassy from 1970 to 1976. For more on him, see: Baráth–Gecsényi 2015, 186; and Új Diplomáciai Lexikon 2021, 483. On the British reception of the military intervention and the history of British-Hungarian relations between 1945 and 1970, see further: M. Madarász 2023.
109 MNL OL XIX-J-1-j 1971. 001460/46/1971. (2. d.) On the debate of relationship-building.
110 Kalmár 2014, 283.

of the socialist alternative, and especially of state socialism."[111] The visible impossibility of the autonomy of Hungarian foreign policy was formulated by Kádár on 24 October 1968: „The pivotal and fundamental tenet of our foreign policy is that we are advancing with the Soviet Union, the first socialist country, with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. [...] Even among the socialist countries, there are different, often opposing, conflicting opinions."[112] And in light of all this and in the knowledge of it, the most important consequence can be considered to be that: „in the autumn of 1968, Hungary was left alone with its reforms in the narrowest circle of allies. In order to be able to continue on its own path, it had to give guarantees to the leadership of the CPSU that it would not change the system, would not shift towards the West."[113] The possibilities of the Kádárist foreign policy's Western opening were still no closer; indeed, the events of 1968 pushed the country further away.

## THE „CORDON SANITAIRE" DISAPPEARS

> *„Kádár went as far as he could possibly want to go: to the westernmost borderline of the East."*[114]

In the 1970s, a further improving trend was shown in Western relations: in the preceding period, one of the goals was for Hungary to raise the level of contact and negotiations with Western countries to the level of the other countries within the Soviet bloc. „We have roughly achieved this goal: the international position of the Hungarian People's Republic is indeed very good,"[115] – formulated the Hungarian Foreign Minister János Péter in 1971.

111 Földes 2015, I. 96.
112 Mitrovits 2022, 77.
113 Földes 2015, I. 97.
114 Ibid. 348.
115 M. Madarász 2020, 168. MNL OL XIX–J–1–j 1971. 1. d. 001460/73. Minutes of the plenary session of the 1971 conference of envoys. Conference of envoys, 2–7 August 1971, plenary meeting. Speech by János Péter at the conference of envoys. János Péter: Some new

As a sign of the changing times, in March of this year, correspondents from the American news agency United Press International (UPI) conducted a lengthy interview in Budapest with János Kádár, the First Secretary of the Central Committee (CC) of the HSWP. To the UPI's question as to what role smaller countries in Europe could play in solving important European questions independently of the superpowers, Kádár replied: „In my opinion, a foreign policy activity that disregards the real situation, the factors determining international relations, let us say, is 'independent' of them, is an unreality and cannot actually be pursued. My specific answer to the question is that every small nation in Eastern and Western Europe currently has its own responsibility, and also the possibility, for independent foreign policy activity, for contributing to the easing of tension in proportion to its circumstances."[116]

Due to its isolation following the 1956 Revolution, Hungary's „foreign policy activity" was confined within significant limits. From the mid-sixties, however, a change occurred, and indeed by the next decade, Hungary's international reputation had truly changed a great deal; the „cordon sanitaire" surrounding the country gradually disappeared, and political trust in the Hungarian People's Republic was restored step by step. By the 1970s, one of the most important problems to be solved in international politics was the so-called „German question" (the Oder-Neisse border, the recognition of the German Democratic Republic, the settlement of the relationship between the two German states, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany), and in connection with this, a central question and task to be solved on the part of the Soviets was the fixing of the collective European security situation.[117] The Hungarian participation in the Helsinki process, as well as the consequences arising from the signing of the Final Act, can all be described as Kádár's successes. This result is also tangible in the visits of Western leaders to Hungary in the 1980s. Margaret Thatcher's[118] 1984 visit

phenomena in international life and our foreign policy tasks related to them. Budapest, 7 August 1971.

116 Magyarország (Hungary), 21 March 1971, 3.

117 Békés 2021, 36.

118 Margaret Hilda Thatcher (1925–2013) was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 and leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990. She was the longest-

to Budapest was in itself an outstanding event, as no British prime minister had ever visited any country of the Soviet bloc before.

Kádár's role in the 1970s and 1980s – as propagated by the West – was very aptly commented on by, among others, the West German Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher:[119] „[...] Your word and your authority are so great in the socialist camp and have such a background that they not only pay attention to it, but also reflect on it, whether it is a matter of European détente or another political question."[120] The previously mentioned British Prime Minister Thatcher also had similar views: „I would not want the moment when you lay down the burdens of daily official work to pass without being able to express my personal respect for your achievements. I recall with particular pleasure my visit to Hungary and your visit here, and our conversations. I believe these played an important role in the current improvement of East-West relations."[121]

The perception of János Kádár's person, therefore – as we have seen – showed an improving trend among Western leaders from the mid-1960s, and apart from the events of 1968, there was not really any situation that would have resulted in a break in this upward „trajectory." The director of Hungarian political life sought in every case to turn these positive value judgments to his own and Hungary's advantage in order to maintain the standard of living and economic development he envisioned. The fact that a communist leader was able to fight for such a position was also reflected in his relationship and communication with the Western press; a good example of this is the short excerpt published in the 8 December 1976 issue of *The New York Times*: „[...] Mr. Kadar recalled that he visited the United Nations in 1960, and added with a smile, »New York, I regret to say, is not

serving British prime minister of the 20th century and the first woman to hold that office. As prime minister, she pursued policies that became known as Thatcherism. A Soviet journalist gave her the nickname „Iron Lady," which is associated with her uncompromising politics and leadership style.

119 Hans-Dietrich Genscher (1927–2016) was a German politician. A member of the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP). Federal Minister of the Interior from 1969 to 1974; Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and Vice Chancellor of Germany from 1974 to 1992 (with the exception of a two-week break in 1982 after the FDP left the third Schmidt cabinet); in 1991, Chairman-in-Office of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

120 Földes 2015, I. 200.

121 Simon 2012.

a socialist metropolis«."[122] This statement encapsulates everything we have seen in connection with the Western development path of Kádár's person. In 1960, when he arrives in New York, he is rejected, there are demonstrations against him, including the walkout of many from the hall during his speech at the UN General Assembly. A good fifteen years later, however, he has such opportunities that it is even permissible for him to make a joking statement to one of the leading organs of the Western press.

In the following, we seek an answer to how Hungary, or rather János Kádár, with maximum loyalty to the Soviet Union, but at the same time taking his own goals and interests into account, tried to pursue an „independent foreign policy activity." In his speeches delivered at the most varied forums, János Kádár emphasised on every occasion that Hungarian foreign policy fully corresponded to proletarian internationalism, and in parallel with this, to the „requirements of patriotism."[123]

The international events of the post-1968 period and Hungary's Western bilateral relations are very multifaceted and diverse. In our work – due to its spatial limitations – we do not have the opportunity to make every moment of the international scene the subject of investigation, nor is this the aim of our study: it wishes to provide an overview of what the pillars of Western acceptance were (see: Western visits), how Kádár participated in the question of collective European security; how the two most important contentious issues in Hungarian-American relations were successfully resolved, and when Kádár's Hungary succeeded in joining two international financial organisations that could provide help in avoiding state bankruptcy.

122 *The New York Times,* 8 December 1976. Kadar Says He Sees No Anti-Soviet Stand Among Reds in West (author of the article: Paul Hofmann).

123 Ettore Petta: Kadar conferma la fedeltà a Mosca "Kadar confirms loyalty to Moscow", *Corriere della Sera,* 10 March 1973, https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/view.shtml#!/NTovZXMvaXQvcmNzZGF0aWRhY3MyL0AxMDA5ODA%3D (Accessed April 12, 2025)

## THE HELSINKI PROCESS AS KÁDÁR'S SUCCESS STORY

> „[...] *we sat in one room, at one table, and were able to sign one document – people of different ideologies, of different worldviews.*"[124]

A central problem of the 1960s was the German question, which had remained unresolved after the Second World War, from the perspective of both the West and the East. The FRG was by then one of the world's leading economic powers, with which, however, the countries of the Soviet bloc – with the exception of the Soviet Union – did not maintain diplomatic relations. And the GDR, which had existed since 1949, was not recognised by many countries (only Yugoslavia and the countries of the bloc).[125] „[...] the opposing great powers also return again and again to the German question, they mobilise the as yet unused reserves, and thus, even if the German question is not the number one problem of world politics, it is a constant, at times seriously disturbing factor of European security."[126] From the mid-sixties, the goal of Soviet foreign policy was „the creation of European security in line with the interests of the Eastern bloc. [...] At the centre of the problem was the German question."[127] At the July 1966 Bucharest meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact, a declaration was born that called on the leaders of the continent's countries to begin preparatory talks to organise a European security conference. The proposal, however, set conditions on the part of the Soviet bloc for future participation in the conference that were in themselves a source of tension; that is, among other things, they asked that the West recognise both German states, and that the FRG accept the eastern borders.[128] According

124 János Kádár's statement on the significance of the conference. Délmagyarország, 3 August 1975, Vol. 65, No. 181, 3.
125 Békés 2021, 36.
126 András Tömpe to János Kádár, 26 February 1968. Published in: Huszár 2002, 334.
127 Békés 2021, 36.
128 Declaration issued at the close of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact on the strengthening of peace and security in Europe, Bucharest (5 July 1966). https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/declaration_of_the_political_consultative_committee_of_the_warsaw_pact_on_the_strengthening_of_peace_and_security_in_europe_

to Csaba Békés, the Bucharest call „represented the first concrete step on the long road leading to the signing of the Helsinki Accords. The echo of the declaration was at this time not unfavourable in the West either, although most (at least publicly) could not yet accept the conditions for holding the conference, even though these essentially defensive demands were by no means unrealistic."[129] In his letter to Willy Brandt,[130] Kádár saw the FRG-Soviet relationship as follows:[131] „I hold that the improvement and many-sided development of the relations between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany is a fundamental element of the stability of the continent. In this connection, it is perhaps not superfluous to recall that in the process of consolidating peace and security in Europe, on the road leading to the Helsinki conference and the signing of the Final Act, the first concrete step forward was precisely the agreement concluded by these two countries in 1970."[132]

In June 1970, on a Hungarian initiative, a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Warsaw Pact was convened in Budapest.[133] From this time began the series of discussions that took place in order to realise the European security conference.[134] Finally, in Helsinki, at the conference declared „of historic significance"[135] by János Kádár, on 1 August 1975, the highest-level representatives of thirty-three European countries, as well as the United States of America and Canada, signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

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bucharest_5_july_1966-en-c48a3aab-0873-43f1-a928-981e23063f23.html, (Accessed: August 23, 2022)

129 Békés 2021, 37.

130 Willy Brandt (1913–1992) was a West German social democratic politician, the fourth Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

131 Hungary and the FRG signed the documents on the establishment of diplomatic relations on 21 December 1973. For more on this, see: Schmidt-Schweizer 2021, 358–361.

132 János Kádár to Willy Brandt, 31 July 1978. Published in: Huszár 2002, 512.

133 Even before that, on 17 March 1969, a meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee was held in Budapest. One of its important results was that the Budapest Appeal was born here, which urged the convening of a European security conference. „It was this initiative that led directly to the start of the process preceding the Helsinki Accords, concluded in 1975." Békés 2021, 38.

134 Békés 2021, 40.

135 János Kádár's statement on the significance of the conference. Délmagyarország, 3 August 1975, Vol. 65, No. 181, 1.

In its 8 December 1976 issue, *The New York Times* reported that Kádár „praised the results of last year's East-West conference in Helsinki, Finland, and said the parley was not »an end but a beginning«".[136] According to György Földes, „the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe [...] finally got what they wanted, and in return were willing to make a great concession: the recognition of the general validity of human rights."[137] In Helsinki, Kádár „spoke of the need to strengthen political trust, because this makes it possible to reduce armed forces and armaments. According to him, the relations between countries with different social systems must be underpinned by economic cooperation. He declared that Hungary was ready for cultural cooperation, for the expansion of information and contacts between people, and for the solution of certain humanitarian questions – but the partners must respect the country's sovereignty."[138] The events that took place in the Finnish capital were in any case a success for Hungarian foreign policy: it was here that Kádár first met some leading Western politicians, and they agreed on mutual diplomatic visits. With all this, Kádár's Western popularity also grew further: „this meeting of great significance was an occasion that everyone also used" – said Kádár – „to build many-sided relations, to take part in personal meetings. [...] I declared with a clear conscience that in Hungary there are none who would be interested in exacerbating the international situation, in the arms race, in the outbreak of conflicts. [...] our main aspiration is that there should be peace and security in Europe, and the Hungarian People's Republic also acts accordingly in all international questions."[139]

Taking advantage of the country's favourable situation, the HSWP Politburo decided that in the foreign policy of the coming years, an „offensive conduct" should be demonstrated, and political and above all economic relations with Western countries should be further developed on

136 The New York Times, 8 December 1976. 'Kadar Says He Sees No Anti-Soviet Stand Among Reds in West' (author of the article: Paul Hofmann).

137 Földes 2015, I. 189.

138 Ibid. 190.

139 János Kádár's statement on the significance of the conference. Délmagyarország, 3 August 1975, Vol. 65, No. 181, 1.

the principle of reciprocity.[140] 1975 and Helsinki were a milestone in terms of the Western opening, Western acceptance, and Kádár's recognition.

## THE PILLARS OF WESTERN ACCEPTANCE

> *„We had to strongly change the image of the enemy, in the sense that not everyone who comes in here is an enemy, not everyone is curious about what secrets we have."*[141]
> (János Pap, former Minister of the Interior)[142]

An important stage in this process was when the Hungarian party leader János Kádár arrived in neighbouring Austria for a two-day visit on 6 December 1976. The Hungarian party leader's trip – like his later official visits – was preceded by high-level preparatory talks. In the spring, the Hungarian Prime Minister György Lázár[143] visited Vienna, followed by the semi-official trip of the Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky[144] to Budapest in September.

Kádár's two-day talks in Vienna proved to be of outstanding significance in many respects, as no leading communist politician who was not a head of state or government had previously visited Austria; Kádár's trip was

140 Földes 2015, I. 191.

141 Excerpt from the oral history interview with János Pap (1987). Molnár 2004, 45.

142 János Pap (1925–1994) was a communist politician. From 1949, an employee of the Veszprém County Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party; from 1957 to 1961 and from 1959 to 1985, a member of the Central Committee. Minister of the Interior between 1961 and 1963. Subsequently, between 1963 and 1965, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and then between 1965 and 1985, First Secretary of the Veszprém County Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. An active participant in the Kádárist reprisals following the revolution. He committed suicide in 1994. For more, see: https://neb.hu/asset/phprS3MCh.pdf , (Accessed April 12, 2025)

143 György Lázár (1924–2014) was a communist politician. Between 1975 and 1987, Prime Minister of the Hungarian People's Republic.

144 Bruno Kreisky (1911–1990) was an Austrian social democratic politician. From 1959 to 1966, Minister of Foreign Affairs; between 1970 and 1983, Chancellor of Austria.

pioneering in this respect.[145] In connection with the significance of the visit, the *Corriere della Sera* highlighted that Kádár's „travels had been confined to the communist region for twenty years."[146] Of course, this visit was also reported on by the Hungarian newsreel: „The air journey is only thirty minutes between Budapest and Vienna. In that time, the special plane flew the Hungarian delegation led by János Kádár to a country with a different system."[147] In his study, Lajos Gecsényi emphasised in connection with the visit: all this coincided with the deterioration of East-West relations, and also with the again strengthening Soviet criticism against Federal Chancellor Kreisky. All this thus lent a considerable piquancy to the talks of the First Secretary of the HSWP Central Committee in the imperial city. [148] The bilateral discussions held on 6–8 December 1976 also designated the future directions of cooperation. Among other things, Vienna and Budapest unanimously confirmed that the parties agreed on maintaining the principles of the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe regarding collective security.[149] The most important questions to be answered in the economic talks were Austrian-Hungarian investments in third countries, and the possibilities for an Austrian economic presence in Hungary. From a tourism point of view, it was an incentive that János Kádár made a promise on the possible abolition of the visa requirement. And what was more forward-looking than anything else – Gecsényi recalled – was that following the Vienna talks, Budapest decided: the governmental meetings should be used to build relations with the Austrian socialists,

145 Gecsényi 2022, 401.

146 Ettore Petta: I rapporti tra Est e Ovest. Giscard a Belgrado Kadar a Vienna "Relations between East and West. Giscard in Belgrade, Kádár in Vienna", *Corriere della Sera,* 7 December 1976, 6. https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/view.shtml#!/MjovZXMvaXQvcmNzZGF0aWRhY3MyL0AxMzMxMjE%3D (Accessed April 12, 2025)

147 For the newsreel about János Kádár's Vienna talks, see: https://filmhiradokonline.hu/watch.php?id=21873 (Accessed August 5, 2022)

148 Gecsényi 2002, 401.

149 These are the following: Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty; Refraining from the threat or use of force; Inviolability of frontiers; Territorial integrity of States; Peaceful settlement of disputes; Non-intervention in internal affairs; Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; Equal rights and self-determination of peoples; Co-operation among States; Fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law. http://vienna.io.gov.hu/ebesz-tortenete

and the possibility of inviting the leaders of the People's Party to Hungary should be considered.[150] A special point of interest was that the official visit to Austria was concluded by an international press conference, at which numerous questions arose to which the first secretary had to react immediately. The correspondent of the Italian *Corriere della Sera* inquired whether Kádár shared the view that Eurocommunism was a form of anti-Sovietism, to which the Hungarian party leader only said: „I do not share this view."[151] To the question of how he judged the relationship between the FRG and Hungary, the First Secretary of the HSWP Central Committee said that relations in the economic field were of older origin, could be said to be fundamentally good, and what needed to be strengthened were the state relations, but these too – as he put it – „we can make more orderly. This corresponds to the interests of the Hungarian people and the population of the FRG."[152] And to the question of when a possible visit to the FRG could be expected, he replied suggestively and directly: „[...] people are different. I know passionate travellers. I am not one of them. But where it is necessary, when it is politically useful from the point of view of developing the relations of the two countries, I will always go there and then. This is how I have now come to Vienna, and this is how I will go to the Federal Republic of Germany as well."[153]

The next significant stop on the Hungarian diplomatic offensive was the Italian capital, Rome, where János Kádár and his entourage arrived on 7 July 1977 for a two-day official visit at the invitation of Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti. János Kádár's visit to Rome – which organically fitted into the Hungarian foreign policy concept that had strengthened by the seventies – showed similarities in many respects to his Austrian talks. Kádár's visit to Vienna was the first of the major official trips to Western Europe, and it was also the first time the First Secretary of the HSWP Central Committee had visited a country belonging to the Common Market and NATO. From a diplomatic point of view, both trips were well prepared; the Hungarian party leader's journey was preceded by visits from foreign and

150 Gecsényi 2022, 401–402.
151 Délmagyarország, 8 December 1976, Vol. 66, No. 290, 2.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.

prime ministers. When the number one man of the HSWP met the Italian President Giovanni Leone[154] on 8 June 1977, the Italian head of state even remarked that he regarded János Kádár's visit as the culmination of a long process that had begun with the official visit of the Italian Foreign Minister Aldo Moro[155] to Budapest between 13 and 15 May 1970.[156] In both capitals, the Hungarian politician exchanged views with the state and political leaders of the host country during his talks and met with representatives of the so-called fraternal parties (the Italian Communist Party and the Austrian Communist Party). The visit to Rome, like the trip to Vienna, was concluded by a press conference followed with keen international interest, at which the seemingly inexperienced Hungarian communist politician performed surprisingly well, much as he had in the Austrian capital.

As for the differences between the two visits, the first and most significant difference in terms of the success of the visit was in the protocol. While János Kádár travelled to Vienna as a party leader, the number one man of the HSWP, he visited Rome as First Secretary and as a member of the collective head-of-state body, the Presidential Council of the Hungarian People's Republic. The significance of this was that as a member of the Presidential Council, he could meet without obstacles with the Italian head of state and the leaders of the senate and parliament.[157] Of course, the talks with the Christian Democratic Prime Minister, Andreotti, in the Chigi Palace, which houses the prime minister's office, were not omitted either. The parties established that although the political systems of the two countries showed significant differences, their bilateral relations could be

154 Giovanni Leone (1908–2001) was a Christian Democratic politician, the sixth President of the Italian Republic from 1971 to 1978. Before the end of his term, he was forced to resign in the summer of 1978 due to the „Lockheed scandal," a corruption scandal that caused a great stir in the country.

155 Aldo Moro (1916–1978) was an Italian Christian Democratic politician, multiple minister and prime minister. The attempt at the so-called „historic compromise" with the Italian Communist Party is associated with his name. Moro, who was at that time the chairman of the Christian Democratic Party, was abducted by the far-left terrorist organisation, the Red Brigades, on 16 March 1978, and then murdered on 9 May. For more, see: Andreides 2019, 90–94.

156 Memorandum of the talks between János Kádár and the Italian President Giovanni Leone. Rome, 8 June 1977. Földes 2015, II, 445.

157 M. Szebeni 2010, 4–5.

said to be good, „appropriate and normal," as the note made of the meeting put it.[158] The political relations were deemed appropriate, but the economic relations were considered in need of development. János Kádár explained that the Hungarian People's Republic was also ready for cooperation with regard to Italy, and, similarly to the Austrian relation, he supported economic cooperation in third markets. Later, however, he also revealed in Budapest that the leaders of Italian economic life were less satisfied with the development of bilateral economic relations. Gianni Agnelli,[159] the chairman of the board of directors of FIAT, particularly resented that Hungary preferred to work with the West Germans rather than the Italians. In his report before the HSWP Central Committee, Kádár reacted to this as follows: „[…] a certain rivalry is also going on between them, of course. We have to take this into account and use it for the benefit of our people. I told these people that we are not supporters of monopoly here, but the truth is that the West Germans are nimbler, their proposals are better, and it follows from this that the West German relation is stronger."[160]

And as for the cultural relations, which had always been significant in the Hungarian-Italian context, the two sides agreed that they could naturally be said to be good, to which the host Italian prime minister added that „in Italy, too, interest in Hungarian culture is growing. We wish for the contacts to develop further. We also support contacts between people. There is a mutual sympathy between our peoples; let us also think of this. The public opinion of both countries is in favour of the further development of relations."[161] An outstanding moment of the visit to Italy was when János Kádár was received in a private audience by Pope Paul VI[162] in the Vatican on 9 June 1977. This was not the first time that the head of the Catholic Church had received a communist politician; before Kádár's visit, several

158 Memorandum of the talks between János Kádár and the Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti. Rome, 7 June 1977. Published in: Földes 2015, II, 439.

159 Gianni Agnelli (1921–2003) was an Italian industrialist, the head of the FIAT car factory and company in Turin.

160 János Kádár's oral report at the meeting of the HSWP Central Committee on his trip to Italy, Budapest, 22 June 1977. Földes 2015, II, 452.

161 Memorandum of the talks between János Kádár and the Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti. Rome, 7 June 1977. Published in: Földes 2015, II, 441.

162 Paul VI, born Giovanni Battista Montini (1897–1978), was Bishop of Rome and head of the Catholic Church from his accession in 1963 until 1978.

heads of state and government (Nikolai Podgorny, Josip Broz Tito, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Todor Zhivkov)[163] had paid courtesy visits to the head of the Catholic Church, and the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko[164] had also met Pope Paul VI on several occasions. There were also Hungarian precedents for Kádár's Vatican trip, as Foreign Minister János Péter had visited the Vatican in 1971, and four years later, Prime Minister Lázár.

József Orosz,[165] the first secretary of the embassy in Rome, had also warned of this, stating: „The experiences of the visits of socialist leaders indicate that the unofficial exchange of views with the Pope provides an opportunity to strengthen mutual understanding between the Holy See and the socialist countries, can advantageously influence the Holy See's international commitment in a direction favourable to us, and can promote positive development between the national hierarchies and [the] socialist states."[166] The question, therefore, was „to pay a call on the Vatican, or not to pay a call."[167] Regarding the „visit of socialist leaders," Cardinal Franz König of Vienna, following Kádár's reception at the Holy See, formulated

163 Nikolai Viktorovich Podgorny (1903–1983) was a Soviet politician. Between 1965 and 1977, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) was a Croatian-born Yugoslav communist politician, the de facto leader of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until his death in 1980. Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918–1989) was a Romanian communist politician, General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party from 1965 to 1989, and from 1967 to 22 December 1989, President of the State Council of Romania. A few days later, as a consequence of the revolution that broke out, he was sentenced to death by a military court on 25 December and executed along with his wife. Todor Zhivkov (1911–1998) was a Bulgarian communist politician. Between 1962 and 1989, General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party; from 1971 to 1989, Chairman of the State Council.

164 Andrei Andreyevich Gromyko (1919–1989) was a Soviet communist politician. Between 1957 and 1985, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union; from 1983 for two years, First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union; then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1988.

165 József Orosz (1928–?) was a special liaison person on behalf of the Party-state, as alongside his state security and intelligence post, he worked as an employee of the State Office for Church Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, shaping the relations with the Holy Seat. For more on him, see: Szabó–Soós 2006; Soós 2020. For the special relationship of the Hungarian-Holy See contact in the seventies, see: Soós 2018.

166 Soós 2010.

167 János Kádár's oral report at the meeting of the HSWP Central Committee on his trip to Italy, Budapest, 22 June 1977. Földes 2015, II, 451.

in connection with the Vatican's „Ostpolitik" that all this would only mean the beginning of a dialogue, not an alliance, between the Holy See and the communist countries.[168]

The visit between the head of the Catholic Church and the communist Hungarian politician lasted nearly an hour. Kádár later remarked on this: „After the private audience was over, papal chamberlains were standing around outside, who had escorted us to the Pope but did not participate in the discussion, and one of them says that he has been serving here for 30 years and cannot remember a private audience of such long duration."[169] This private audience in fact took on a state character, since, unlike the usual audiences, alongside Paul VI, Archbishop Agostino Casaroli,[170] the secretary of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church and the Holy See's „foreign minister," as well as his Hungarian colleague, Frigyes Puja, were present.[171]

This official visit to Italy was also concluded by an international press conference, where Kádár, with his preparedness and the thoughts expressed in a friendly tone, once again performed successfully, thereby increasing the sympathy that was developing and growing around his person in Western Europe, including Italy. With regard to his preparation, the Hungarian foreign ministry left nothing to chance. As early as the spring, the Hungarian embassy in Rome had outlined in a detailed compilation the questions that might arise at the press conference: the assessment of Hungarian-Yugoslav relations, the evaluation of the visit to the Holy See, the state of Hungarian-Soviet relations, the assessment of Eurocommunism, the current affairs of world politics, economic questions, and the cooperation between Comecon and the EEC. Most of the mentioned topics were indeed raised at the event.

168 Diaologo ma non alleanza fra Vaticano e communismo "Dialogue but not alliance between the Vatican and communism". *Corriere della Sera,* 16 July 1977, 4. https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/view.shtml#!/NTovZXMvaXQvcmNzZGFoaWRhY3MyLoAxMjEyMw%3D%3D (Accessed November 22, 2024)

169 János Kádár's oral report at the meeting of the HSWP Central Committee on his trip to Italy, Budapest, 22 June 1977. Földes 2015, II, 453.

170 Archbishop Agostino Casaroli (1914–1998), from 1979 a cardinal, was a Holy See diplomat; from 1967, secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. Casaroli was one of the most important men of the Holy See's „Ostpolitik." For more on him and the building of relations with the communist states, see: Casaroli 2001.

171 Soós 2010.

One of the most exciting questions of his visit to Italy was undoubtedly the problem of Eurocommunism, which had already been raised in several forums, and Kádár's assessment of it. On this occasion, too, the journalists were curious as to what the leader of the HSWP thought about this political idea, which was also significant in Italy. Kádár, in his characteristic cordial style, offered the following pleasantries: „Well, I went to school a long time ago and not for very long. I also studied geography. At that time, they taught that in a west-east direction, Europe extends from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains.[172] So, if we do not use an abbreviation, then a constituent element and part of the European communist movement is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Polish United Workers' Party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the German Communist Party, the French Communist Party, and so on, all European communist and workers' parties, and I would commend this to your attention. The designation Eurocommunism has recently been frequently applied to certain Western European parties. I would like to say that in our opinion, the similarity between certain parties signifies an identical situation. These parties are struggling for a socialist perspective under the conditions of capitalism, well, if I want to be entirely precise, under the conditions of the dictatorship of monopoly capital. Under the given conditions, we consider this aspiration to be natural [...] in this we do not argue, nor can we interfere, because it is within their own competence how and what path they seek forward towards the freedom of the working people."[173]

When, somewhat later, Kádár gave an oral assessment of his talks before the plenum of the HSWP Central Committee, he himself admitted: „[...] it is gratifying that our party and our country have a reputation abroad, even in the Western world, but sometimes they praise our achievements

172 Just as a point of interest, we draw attention to the fact that the rhetoric of Charles De Gaulle, President of the French Republic, repeatedly used the definition „Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals" to define the continent. The coincidence is most likely accidental, since according to the later head of state Georges Pompidou, De Gaulle was thereby opposing the American intentions to divide Europe, and Pompidou believed that this Gaullist idea questioned the very existence of the Soviet Union. Türke 2013, 38.

173 HSWP Central Committee Office, János Kádár's press conference – Rome (1977). Open-reel tape database. MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 9. 78. doboz. Recording date: 9 June 1977. (audio recording). https://adatbazisokonline.hu/, accessed 22 August 2022; For more on the HSWP and the problem of Eurocommunism, see: Simon 2016.

so conspicuously and not without allusion. They want to set our policy a little against the policy and tactics of other socialist countries, with the intention of differentiating between us."[174] And as for his talks with Pope Paul VI – about which the correspondents present at the press conference were also very curious – János Kádár explained that the Roman Catholic Church is a state with significant moral and political power. If someone arrives in Rome on an official visit, it is fitting that they pay a courtesy visit to the head of the Catholic Church. He then continued: „I gained extremely good impressions during the few hours I spent in the Vatican. [...] I thanked the Pope for his efforts, the efforts of the Vatican, which he has made in the cause of peace, in the interest of peaceful coexistence and détente, and especially in promoting Helsinki. And for my part, I asked that we should also prepare for Belgrade in a similar spirit. I was thinking of the well-known fact that more people listen to the word of the Pope and the Vatican than there are citizens of the Vatican state."[175] To all this, in his oral report in Budapest, with some additional frankness, he also added: „We roughly know the influence of the party, but we can only estimate the real influence of the churches. The churches still have influence in Hungary. Not only on clerical people."[176]

174 János Kádár's oral report at the meeting of the HSWP Central Committee on his trip to Italy, Budapest, 22 June 1977. Földes 2015, II, 451–452.

175 HSWP CC János Kádár›s press conference – Rome (1977). Open-reel tape database. MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 9. 78. doboz. Recording date: 9 June 1977. (audio recording). https://adatbazisokonline.hu/, accessed 22 August 2022. Following the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, the first follow-up conference of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe took place in Belgrade between October 1977 and March 1978. The conference ended essentially without result due to the conflicts between the countries of the Soviet bloc and the other participants regarding the topics belonging to the third basket (freedom of the press, freedom of information flow).

176 Földes 2015, II. 453–454.

## DIRECTION BONN, THEN PARIS

The new social democratic-liberal government of the FRG, formed in the autumn of 1969, pursued a „new Eastern policy" which aimed at good relations with the East-Central European countries, the normalisation of relations, and the settlement of the relationship with the German Democratic Republic. Hungarian diplomacy reacted positively to this. At the beginning of the following decade, it still found the establishment of diplomatic relations with the federal republic to be premature, but finally, on 21 December 1973, an agreement was reached between the Hungarian People's Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany on the establishment of diplomatic relations.[177]

This important agreement naturally opened a new chapter in the relations between the two countries. For the Hungarian leadership, the necessity caused by economic constraints accelerated the political opening towards the West, which was only facilitated by the renewed process of détente between East and West and the 1975 Helsinki conference, at which, among others, János Kádár, the First Secretary of the HSWP Central Committee, and Helmut Schmidt,[178] the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, met for the first time.[179] The first outstanding event of the „visiting" diplomacy, to recall the term of Andreas Schmidt-Schweizer, with regard to the Hungarian-West German relation, was the first, now official, meeting between the Hungarian party leader and the West German chancellor on 4 July 1977. As a continuation of this visit, seven years later, Helmut Schmidt visited the Hungarian capital. Both meetings took place in a „strikingly good atmosphere," and the parties also concluded numerous technical-scientific and cultural agreements. One important political result of the 1977 summer Kádár visit was that, with prior Moscow approval, in September, the radically anti-communist Franz Josef Strauss,[180] leader of the Bavarian

177 Schmidt-Schweizer 2021, 359.

178 Helmut Schmidt (1918–2015) was a social democratic German politician. Chancellor of the FRG from 1974 to 1982.

179 Schmidt-Schweizer 2021, 362.

180 Franz Josef Strauss (1915–1988) was a Christian social German politician, chairman of the CSU from 1961 to 1988, and from 1978 for ten years, Minister President of Bavaria.

Christian Social Union (CSU), who did not necessarily have good relations with the Soviet Union either, was able to make a „private visit" to Hungary for the first time, where he could hold talks with politicians such as Antal Apró,[181] the Speaker of the National Assembly.[182] A smaller, but all the more important, observation regarding the visit was also formulated by the West German chancellor himself: „Chancellor Schmidt expressed emphatically on several occasions during the visit that he greatly appreciates the visit of Comrade Kádár. He spoke with appreciation of Hungary's achievements, of Comrade Kádár's person and activities. He stressed that Comrade Kádár is highly esteemed in the Federal Republic of Germany, and that the visit was also very well received by West German public opinion and the press."[183]

During the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing[184] (1974–1981), Hungarian-French bilateral relations also reached their „peak." Although Kádár had made personal acquaintance with the French head of state in Helsinki, their first official meeting took place in the French capital on 15 November 1978, in connection with which Charles Hargrove,[185] the Paris correspondent for *The Times*, highlighted in his report „The Freest Country in the Camp" that: „the three-day official visit of the leader of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party will change the situation that has existed for nearly sixty years, that France has a cool relationship with Hungary."[186] Kádár may have felt this too, because before his departure, still in Budapest, in an interview given to *Le Monde*, he complained, among other things, that: „[...] in the course of its history, the Hungarian people have unfortunately often felt that they did not receive the expected help from official France,

181 Antal Apró (1913–1994) was a communist politician, a member of the HSWP Central Committee from 1956 to 1988, Deputy Prime Minister from 1957 to 1971, and Speaker of the National Assembly from 1971 to 1984. For more, see: https://neb.hu/hu/apro-antal, (Accessed April 12, 2025)

182 Schmidt-Schweizer 2021, 362.

183 Report to the Political Committee on János Kádár's visit to the Federal Republic of Germany. Bonn, 4–7 July 1977. Published in: Földes 2015, II, 478.

184 Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1926–2020) was a French politician, the 20th President of the Republic from 1974 to 1981.

185 Charles Hargrove (1924–2014) was a British-French journalist, the legendary Paris bureau chief of the *London Times*. For more, see: https://www.aapafrance.org/d-day-veteran-charles-hargrove-dies-at-92-2/ (Accessed August 18, 2022)

186 The Times 16 November 1978, quoted in Várnai 1989, 90.

which has always played a significant role in Europe, in their struggle for social progress and national advancement. The necessary consequence of the defeat of the progressive forces was then that the reactionary Hungarian ruling classes chained Hungary to the chariot of German imperialism in both the first and the second world wars."[187] Even before the trip, but in connection with it, the Italian *Corriere della Sera* pointed to the clear fact that the Hungarian leader's visit clearly fits into the „cautious and by no means frictionless opening policy initiated towards the West" urged by Budapest. And the relations thus established are important for the Hungarian leadership because the inadequate economic results can provide Hungary with such „new oxygen" that „the Comecon region is increasingly less able to provide."[188]

Alongside the visits described so far, Hungarian diplomacy could also count this trip to Paris as a success. Indeed – as Gusztáv D. Kecskés has pointed out – the Kádár system seemed the most stable to the French foreign ministry. Its policy, which concentrated heavily on maintaining the standard of living, and the relative Hungarian openness compared to the countries of the socialist bloc, made Kádár's person particularly sympathetic in Paris.[189] The meeting between Kádár and Giscard d'Estaing was less significant than the previous year's visits to Rome or Bonn, but it undoubtedly had substance and indicated the necessity of creating and maintaining a dialogue between different political systems and of strengthening political, economic, and cultural relations.

187 Quoted in: Földes 2015, I, 257.

188 Budapest rafforza i legami con l'Occidente. Kadar a Parigi "Budapest strengthens its ties with the West. Kádár in Paris". *Corriere della Sera,* 6 November 1978, 5. https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/view.shtml#!/MjovZXMvaXQvcmNzZGFoaWRhY3MyLoAoMzg5OQ%3D%3D (Accessed April 12, 2025)

189 Kecskés 2019, 426.

## THE RETURN OF THE HUNGARIAN CORONATION REGALIA, THE CLOSING OF THE MINDSZENTY CASE

In the 1970s, American-Hungarian relations were still overshadowed by various contentious issues. The two biggest problems were the case of József Mindszenty and the American refusal to return[190] the Holy Crown and the other coronation regalia.

As a result of a one-and-a-half-decade-long series of secret diplomatic bargains, on 28 September 1971, Cardinal József Mindszenty was able to leave the United States Embassy in Budapest. At dawn on 4 November 1956, Mindszenty had entered the building of the United States Embassy in Budapest and requested asylum there. After a few hours' wait, he received it, and subsequently lived in the embassy building for 15 years. Cut off from the outside world, he could maintain contact with very few people; even with the embassy staff, he could only interact on a limited basis during the one-and-a-half-decade-long „internal exile."

For János Kádár, Mindszenty was a kind of demon, partly because he was the minister of the interior at the time of the cardinal's arrest and conviction in a show trial, and partly because of Mindszenty's radio speech of 3 November 1956. Kádár throughout regarded the cardinal's radio speech as a conscious questioning of the system's legitimacy. Mindszenty's speech of 3 November – which was heavily „edited" and distorted by the Kádár regime's propaganda machine – remained the cardinal's „greatest sin" in János Kádár's eyes throughout. On the early morning of 4 November 1956, Mindszenty held talks in the Parliament with, among others, the ministers of state Zoltán Tildy and István Bibó. From there, he set out with his secretary, Egon Turchányi, for the primate's palace on Úri Street in Buda Castle, but the Soviet units that had broken into the city had by then already closed the Danube bridges. For this reason, the cardinal went to the American legation on Szabadság Square and requested asylum there. It is likely that the diplomats were completely taken by surprise by Mindszenty's appearance, and it can also be assumed that the minister, who had only just arrived at his post, immediately contacted the State Department in Washington,

190 For more on this, see: Glant 2018.

asking for instructions. The supreme permission for Mindszenty to receive political asylum may have come directly from the White House, from President Dwight D. Eisenhower.[191] From a diplomatic point of view, this was a rather delicate decision, since it is not the task of any legation to grant asylum to a public figure or other person who is in opposition to the government of the host state.

Subsequently, the person of the cardinal was a kind of burden in the Hungarian-Holy See-American-Soviet relation for 15 years, but also a subject of bargaining. The bargaining process, which the leaders of the Hungarian People's Republic, the Holy See, and the United States of America conducted in order to persuade the cardinal to leave the legation and to work out the circumstances of this, was also a long one. At the Hungarian-Holy See talks that began in the spring of 1963, they consulted on the person of Mindszenty on every occasion, just as this always came up in the Hungarian-American relationship. During the negotiations, in most cases, the viewpoints of the three parties were decisive, but the interest of the Soviet Union was always there in the background. Mindszenty's viewpoints mattered the least. We will not go into the individual events of these negotiations, the sometimes frozen, sometimes converging positions of the parties in the present study, but we will only allude to the fact that it was no coincidence that these consultations were so lengthy. József Mindszenty finally left the building of the United States legation in Budapest on 28 September 1971 – in accordance with the agreement concluded between the Hungarian People's Republic and the Vatican – and, travelling without any stops, left the country at Hegyeshalom. In the end, it was the Holy See that persuaded Mindszenty to give in and accept that he should leave Hungary. Mindszenty was primarily motivated by the realisation that if he remained at the legation, his memoirs could not be published, and it was in these that he wanted to recount the special ordeal that he had suffered. Alongside many considerations, this was perhaps one of the most important for him. At the same time, it must also be stated that he did not know about the bargain that had been struck behind his back, that he would remain silent, and he did not agree to it. Thus, it is no coincidence that a month after his

191 Dwight David „Ike" Eisenhower (1890–1969) was an American military officer and politician. Between 1953 and 1961, he was the 34th President of the United States.

departure for Rome, he left the Eternal City and went to Vienna on the 15th anniversary of the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution, and settled in the Pázmáneum, where he lived until his death, and the pastoral care of the Hungarians scattered around the world was the main mission of the last few years of his life.

The Hungarian coronation regalia came to the United States in 1953; the place of custody for the jewels was Fort Knox, but Hungary was only informed of this much later. In the 1970s, the withholding of the crown and the other jewels became increasingly untenable and unjustifiable. Kádár was also of the opinion that the regalia should return home to Hungary as soon as possible. Although with great difficulty, President Jimmy Carter[192] decided in favour of returning the crown. According to László Borhi, „it was not an easy decision; the president vacillated almost until the last moment, even though West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt also stood up for the handover of the crown, citing János Kádár's international political merits."[193] On 4 November 1977, *The New York Times* reported on its front page that the Carter administration, after long decades, was willing to return the coronation regalia to Hungary, since "the decision to return the crown and jewels is regarded by Administration officials as a symbol of the changes that have occurred in recent years in Hungary. Under János Kádár, Hungary in terms of internal policy has become probably the most liberal of the East European countries linked to the Soviet Union",[194] but strictly on the condition that the jewels be returned to the Hungarian people, and that the first secretary not participate in the solemn handover. On 6 January 1978, Cyrus Vance,[195] the US Secretary of State, handed over the

192 James Earl Carter Jr. (1924–2024) was an American politician. Between 1977 and 1981, he was the 39th President of the United States. He was a member of the Democratic Party. Between 1971 and 1975, he was the 76th Governor of the state of Georgia; between 1963 and 1967, a senator of the state of Georgia. Since leaving office, he has continued to be involved in political and social projects; for his humanitarian work, he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

193 Borhi 2021, 124.

194 The New York Times, 4 November 1977. 'U.S. to Return Hungary's Crown, Held Since End of World War II' (author of the article: Bernard Gwertzman).

195 Cyrus Roberts Vance Sr. (1917–2002) was an American lawyer. Between 1977 and 1980, during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, he was the Secretary of State of the United States. Before that, he was Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Johnson administration. During

coronation regalia to the Speaker of the National Assembly, Antal Apró, in a solemn ceremony.[196] The contradictory nature of the whole handover affair and the problem of legitimation was formulated by László Borhi: „It was a testament to Kádár's diplomatic sensitivity that he was willing to stay away from the handover. In the end, it would have been a gross insult to conservative America, and especially to many emigrants of Eastern European origin, if the consecrated object had been handed over to an atheist leader. At the same time, the party leader's absence was also strange, since it was his political role that they had sought to honour in Washington by handing over the crown. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the Hungarian communist party rested on the assertion that it was the representative of the will of the Hungarian people. The fact, therefore, that Kádár was left out of the handover ceremony showed the Americans' schizophrenic attitude towards the Eastern European communist regimes."[197]

*The New York Times* formulated that „now that the crown issue is being settled, it is expected that steps will be taken to negotiate an economic agreement with Hungary".[198] And indeed, this is what happened. Hungarian-American economic relations revived further, which was also supported by the fact that the USA granted „most-favoured-nation status to Hungary, which in the case of the Eastern bloc countries was considered an exceptional political and economic gesture. The most-favoured-nation status meant the lifting of restrictions on trade in goods and the application of the most favourable bilateral trade conditions in Hungarian-American commercial and economic relations. All this was also a recognition of the 1968 economic turn and the 'Hungarian path' on the part of the Americans."[199] The at times contradictory construction of the Hungarian-American relation is very well represented by the American position on the person of János Kádár. Because of his crimes of 1956, he was not accepted

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the Kennedy administration, he was Secretary of the Army and General Counsel of the Department of Defense.

196 On the handover ceremony, see further: The New York Times, 7 January 1978. 'Crown of St. Stephen Formally Returned to Hungary' (author of the article: Paul Hofmann).

197 Borhi 2015, 361.

198 The New York Times, 4 November 1977. 'U.S. to Return Hungary's Crown, Held Since End of World War II' (author of the article: Bernard Gwertzman).

199 Valuch 2021, 186.

as a legitimate political leader for a long time, and indeed the return of the crown also raised problems of legitimation, on the grounds that if it were returned to the government, it would in effect be a recognition of the political system operating in Hungary. It is also indicative that despite his numerous Western visits, Kádár never made it to Washington; when the possibility arose, and Kádár would have been happy to accept the invitation, it could no longer be realised due to the American domestic political situation, the fall of the Carter administration, and afterwards it did not come up.[200]

## KÁDÁR'S DIPLOMACY IN THE 1980S

A new low point in relations between Moscow and Washington was the Soviet war in Afghanistan,[201] as a result of which the West once again severely restricted economic relations with the countries of the Eastern bloc. We have already written about Kádár's position on the Afghan question and its perception in the Western press; the first secretary took note of the Soviet military intervention without a murmur. The party leadership was forced into a manoeuvre to ensure that the restrictions affected the Hungarian economy to a lesser extent. According to the foreign ministry's directive, commercial relations with the socialist countries are the most important, but our Western opportunities must also be exploited.[202] The regional areas for the Hungarian foreign economy's search for a way out (and a path) were the Arab countries – primarily the Arab socialist countries – but this proved to be an extremely sensitive region. The escalating Middle Eastern conflicts from the mid-seventies (the events in Lebanon, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Iran-Iraq war) posed an extremely high risk. The resulting financial uncertainty greatly affected Hungary's foreign economic

200 Borhi 2021, 125.

201 The war in Afghanistan took place between 27 December 1979 and 15 February 1989. At the height of the war, the number of Soviet troops stationed in the country reached 120,000.

202 MNL OL M-KS 870. f. 6. cs. 49. ő. e.

prospects, which had an impact on economic relations with Western countries.[203]

In addition, as Csaba Békés has also formulated: „the period between the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and Gorbachev's coming to power in 1985 brought a previously unseen dynamic development in the field of international relations."[204] In practice, this was demonstrated by the high-level visits of foreign negotiating partners to Budapest and the foreign visits of Kádár and other Hungarian politicians, at a time (see: the Polish crisis that broke out in 1981) when international tension limited the possibilities of Hungarian foreign policy, but as György Földes formulated: „the good Western opinion of Kádár that had become prevalent in the second half of the seventies stubbornly persisted."[205] The country's negotiating partners, authoritative Western European politicians, experts familiar with the Hungarian situation, and journalists still counted the HSWP as a power with real legitimacy. And the person of János Kádár gave authority to Hungarian foreign policy.[206] And as for the prestige acquired by Hungarian diplomacy, by the eighties, Budapest had become an important political destination in the world „behind the Iron Curtain." The HSWP continued to maintain intensive relations with the Western European fraternal parties, two of whose leaders – the Italian Enrico Berlinguer[207] and the French Georges Marchais[208] – had visited the Hungarian capital as early as 1977.[209] Hungarian foreign policy attached particular importance to the more-than-

203 On this, see: Soós–Hornyák 2020, No. 47, a document entitled 'Guidelines for agreements to be concluded with socialist countries'. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j 1981. 159. d. 10026. Budapest, 3 December 1980.

204 Békés 2022, 221.

205 Földes 2015, I. 311.

206 Ibid, 311–312.

207 Enrico Berlinguer (1922–1984) was an Italian communist politician, General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party from 1972 to 1984. A leading representative of Western European communist autonomy and Eurocommunism. His cousin, Francesco Cossiga (1928–2017), a multiple minister, prime minister, and the eighth President of the Italian Republic, was a politician in the Christian Democratic Party.

208 Georges Marchais (1920–1997) was a French communist politician, General Secretary of the French Communist Party (PCF) from 1972 to 1994. Under Marchais's leadership, the PCF renounced the principle of the violent seizure of power, thus moving closer to the Eurocommunism strongly urged by the Italian communists.

209 On their talks, see Földes 2015, II, 499–509, 510–518.

one-week visit to Hungary of Willy Brandt, the chairman of the German Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands). Gyula Horn,[210] who was then the deputy head of the HSWP Central Committee's foreign affairs department, recalled the visit of the social democratic politician in his memoirs published after the change of regime: „[...] it was the first time that the leader of the SPD had paid a visit to a member state of the Warsaw Pact at the invitation of a party. Willy Brandt gave us the impression of being an extremely cultured, broad-minded, openly thinking, and through-and-through humanist person. Compared to some Western European communist leaders, it was almost a refreshment to negotiate with him."[211]

In this new decade, the Hungarian political leadership continued to strive to maintain and, if possible, strengthen the country's Western connections, despite the negative changes in international politics, and to maintain the country's economic viability. Again, important visits followed one another. Of great political significance were the visit of the French President François Mitterrand[212] to Hungary in July 1982 (this was the first time a French head of state had officially visited Hungary) and the talks of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Budapest in February 1984, who arrived in Budapest at the invitation of the Hungarian Prime Minister György Lázár. János Kádár returned this visit a year later. The *Corriere della Sera*, reporting on the Hungarian party leader's London trip, formulated that „Mrs Thatcher's Eastern policy continues," within which framework „London receives the Hungarian leader János Kádár with great respect." The article, in a somewhat unconventional manner, stressed that „with Kádár, on the other hand, the regime already risks paying the very high price of technological decline for its autonomy, because Moscow reacted

210 Gyula Horn (1932–2013) was a politician, a member of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, HSWP, and then the Hungarian Socialist Party, later its chairman. From 1969, an employee of the Foreign Affairs Department of the HSWP Central Committee; between 1989 and 1990, Minister of Foreign Affairs; between 1994 and 1998, Prime Minister.

211 Horn 1991, 41.

212 François Mitterrand (1916–1996) was a French socialist politician, multiple minister, and President of the French Republic from 1981 to 1995.

to the Hungarian efforts made to designate a 'national path to socialism' by restricting the export of advanced capital goods intended for Hungary."[213]

Among the visits, we naturally highlight the short, just one-day visit of George Bush,[214] the Vice President of the United States, on 19 September 1983. The vice president arrived in Hungary from Romania, and the next stop on his journey was Austria. The US vice president also held talks with Prime Minister Lázár in Budapest, to whom the American politician, in response to the Hungarian inquiry about the most-favoured-nation principle, indicated that Hungary must show even more perceptibly and clearly the economic policy difference that had already existed between it and the countries of the socialist camp: „The more emphasis we place on the economic differentiation between your economic policy and the economic policy of your friends, the easier our job is back home in Washington."[215] In 1984, Hungarian foreign policy then conformed once more to the expectations of the Soviet Union, as Hungary, like the other socialist countries, boycotted the XXIII. Summer Olympic Games held in Los Angeles out of consideration for the Soviet Union and did not allow its athletes to compete. The only socialist country that participated in the Olympics was Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania, which ignored the message of the CPSU Central Committee in which the Soviets made it understood that they were counting on the „socialist countries to be in solidarity. We would be grateful if our friends would reach a similar position."[216]

213 Renzo Cianfanelli: Continua la ostpolitik della signora Thatcher Londra accoglie con grandi onori il leader ungherese Janos Kadar. *Corriere della Sera,* 2 November 1985, 10. https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/view.shtml#!/MTovZXMvaXQvcmNzZGF0aWRhY3MxL0AxMDgyMjE%3D (Accessed November 22, 2024). The Italian journalist's statement is somewhat unusual, since for Budapest, high-tech technology came not at all from Moscow, but from Western Europe.

214 In July 1982, Richard Nixon, the former Republican Party president of the USA, visited Hungary. During his short stay in Hungary, Nixon held talks with his inviter, Foreign Minister Frigyes Puja, and had discussions with János Kádár and Prime Minister György Lázár, as well as with the former director of Hungarian foreign affairs, János Péter, who then held the office of Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. George H. W. Bush visited Hungary again, this time as the 41st President of the United States, at the dawn of the Hungarian change of regime, on an official visit.

215 Földes 2015, I. 397.

216 Ibid. 437.

## FAILED ATTEMPTS – SUCCESSFULLY FORCED ACCESSION

The idea of joining the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank had already arisen in the Hungarian political leadership in the 1960s,[217] and indeed, there had been tentative attempts in this direction even after the Second World War.[218] The mid-1960s resulted in a difficult period for the Hungarian economy; and although the level of indebtedness was not as high as during the great economic crisis of 1929, the taking out of serious loans was necessary. „The aim of the new economic mechanism, adopted in May 1966 and introduced at the beginning of 1968, was precisely to enable the Hungarian economy to adapt to the world market, and by making corporate behaviour more flexible, to integrate the Hungarian economy into the world economy. The ultimate goal, of course, was modernisation based on Western technology and more favourable credits, which would have been the basis for a further increase in the standard of living."[219] In theory, this all sounded good, but in practice, the series of reforms would have been implemented in such a way that it would have certainly further fuelled the debt burden.

At the beginning of 1967, the Minister of Finance, Mátyás Tímár,[220] received authorisation to conduct negotiations with the IMF and the World Bank for the purpose of taking out loans. The direction of Kádárist foreign policy remained clear, which was also made obvious to the Soviet leadership: „Hungary will only turn to the capitalist countries if the economic cooperation inherent in Comecon and in Hungarian-Soviet relations is exhausted. And it seemed that in their current form, there were no more reserves in these possibilities."[221] Just like the establishment of diplomatic relations with the FRG, this too ended in failure, because „the Soviet leadership also clearly stated that Hungary could not join these

217 On Hungary's economic role, see further: Feitl 2013.

218 For more on this, see: Honvári–Torda 2009.

219 Mitrovits 2022, 74.

220 Mátyás Tímár (1923–2020) was a Hungarian economist and politician. Between 1962 and 1967, Minister of Finance of the Hungarian People's Republic. Between 1975 and 1988, President of the Hungarian National Bank.

221 Mitrovits 2022, 74.

institutions of the West, as they were afraid that IMF membership could divert the country from economic cooperation with the countries of the Soviet bloc."[222]

The possibility of joining the IMF arose again in the 1970s. On 9 September 1973, Hungary became a member of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), established in 1947. According to Csaba Torda, the accession was „forced" by the new economic mechanism.[223] Joining the IMF and the World Bank was finally „made possible" by an external event: the Polish crisis.[224] To solve the increasingly perceptible Hungarian economic problems, the government needed significant sums of money. The Soviet Union, however, precisely because of the financing of the Polish crisis and other internal problems, was no longer able to provide financial solutions for Hungary. It was then that Kádár saw the time as ripe to raise the idea of joining the two organisations again. All this, in Mitrovits's formulation: „before joining, the Hungarian economy was in the last moment before state bankruptcy. Despite this, Kádár tried to present the entry as not simply an economic question, but as part of the struggle for détente and peaceful coexistence."[225] János Kádár's Hungary, finally – after numerous failed attempts – was admitted to the International Monetary Fund on 6 May 1982, and two months later, on 7 July 1982, it also joined the World Bank.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Between 1956 and 1963, Kádár's Hungary had a decidedly bad international political reputation. The political quarantine drawn around the country remained almost unchanged until the mid-1960s. For representatives of the Western press, Hungary was still „the homeland of the 1956 Revolution,"

222 Torda 2012, 389.
223 Ibid, 390.
224 For more on this, see: Tischler 2002.
225 Mitrovits 2022, 80.

and „in some form, this association remained throughout in the European and American papers."[226] In our view, the breakout from foreign policy isolation was most needed by the person of János Kádár and his ideas about foreign policy and diplomacy. He was not a classic foreign policy politician; he had neither language skills, nor foreign policy, nor émigré experience.

János Kádár's Western opening began in the mid-1960s, with the closely related moment of the declaration of the so-called „general" amnesty and the removal of the „Hungarian question" from the UN agenda. International isolation gradually eased; the Western standard of living, if not attainable, became known to Hungary; diplomatic relations with significant European states were raised to a higher, embassy level. All this happened in such a way that the steps also corresponded to Soviet political interests. From the second half of the decade, both Western political leaders and representatives of the press wrote about Hungary in a changed, increasingly accepting tone. The image outlined in the introduction, that Kádár and with him Hungary were playing a kind of „bridgehead role" between East and West, seemed to be realised in the conceptions of the West.

The reality, however – as always – is much more nuanced than this: for Kádár did not „cling" to the West with this goal; rather, it was the increase of the standard of living of Hungarian society that was before the eyes of the Hungarian political leadership. János Kádár did not for a moment wish to pursue a special path policy within the Soviet bloc, and any confrontation with the support of his system, the Soviet Union, was far from him. In the background of his steps, consideration of Soviet interests is perceptible on every occasion, and if the situation required it, he revised his position. The economic policy, the reforms that were implemented in the country, they wanted to enforce at all costs. In this – for Kádár – the Western opening was a political and economic „tool," and international détente and the peaceful coexistence between East and West was a „strategy."[227] Foreign policy thus served economic goals, and economic policy served political goals: the domestic and partly foreign legitimacy of the Kádárist leadership.

226 Valuch 2021, 182.
227 Mitrovits 2022, 81.

The Croatian-Italian Frane Barbieri,[228] who was well-versed in Eastern European political conditions and to whose name many also attribute the coining of the term „Eurocommunism,"[229] in 1980 certainly formulated this peculiar „push-pull" policy to the point: „But what is Kádárism? […] At its base is the special ability for balance and persuasion. First, it was about convincing the Hungarians that any alternative to Kádár would be worse for the nation. Then, later, about convincing Moscow that the Kádárist line best guarantees the peaceful maintenance of Soviet interests in Hungary. And finally, about convincing the West that by supporting Kádár, it can best preserve its presence in the Soviet empire. All of them, Soviets, Westerners, Hungarians, could be convinced that in a certain sense they were both privileged and deceived."[230] Citing Barbieri, we can state that „the judgments about Kádár have always been uncertain: from the 'most skillful and cunning opponent' of the Soviets to the 'most skillful and cunning servant' of the Soviets. If one were to gain the upper hand, it would mean the end of Kádárism."[231]

* * *

If we analyse Kádárist (foreign) policy exclusively on the basis of Western diplomacy, of the value judgments of leading Western politicians, then we get a one-sided and false picture of it. It might seem that Kádár, basking in glory, acted as an exemplary leader of the long-awaited meeting of East and West, and that Hungary was a model country in this respect. The „bridgehead role" assigned to Kádár by the West, as well as the activity of Hungarian foreign policy, which the Western countries believed they saw and knew to be almost winking out of the Soviet bloc, rather distorted the real situation of both János Kádár and Hungary. István Simon aptly

228 Frane Barbieri (1923–1987). Born in Makarska, Dalmatia, Barbieri was a columnist and special correspondent for the Turin daily newspaper La Stampa from 1978. For more on La Stampa's obituary, see: La Stampa (Stampa Sera), 10 August 1987, 1. (Frane Barbieri is dead (the will to understand)).

http://www.archiviolastampa.it/component/option,com_lastampa/task,search/mod,libera/action,viewer/Itemid,3/page,1/articleid,0979_02_1987_0213_0001_18925549/ (Accessed April 12, 2025)

229 Frane Barbieri's (Le scadenze di Brežnev) appeared on 26 June 1975.

230 La Stampa, 31 March 1985, 1. (Kadar contro Kadar)

231 La Stampa, 28 March 1980, 1. (I Comunisti Ungheresi a Congresso. Equilibrista a Est)

formulated that „Kádár never lost sight of the fact that the partial interests that might be asserted could not come into conflict with the interests of Moscow or the Eastern bloc. He was a convinced communist who, of course, sincerely believed in the 'mission of socialism' and its justice. But he also believed – in the spirit of the principle 'the end justifies the means' – in the clash of open debates and the compromises resulting from them."[232] And as we have indicated before, Kádár sought in every case to turn the mediating role attributed to him by the West to his own advantage. This was also clearly shown during his various international negotiations, and he treated the question as a kind of trump card: „We had no such aspirations, but it so happened that we became a bit of a meeting point for East and West. I feel that the world needs such a country."[233]

Kádár, who had no diplomatic experience, stepped onto the chessboard of international politics as a chess piece that became almost uncapturable. The political strategy he represented successfully dismantled the walls erected around Hungary after the 1956 Revolution, and paradoxically, carrying the oppressive guilt of 1956 with him until the end of his life, he became an equal negotiating partner and almost an ally of leading Western politicians. In addition to this, however, it must also be kept in mind that the Hungarian standard-of-living policy envisioned by Kádár became increasingly untenable from decade to decade. The serious economic and financial situation pushed the country into an increasingly dependent situation, and in fact, this necessity and the need for Western credits became the main guiding principle of Western relations. The crisis became clear to everyone by the end of the eighties, but Kádár still denied this in 1988. „The increasingly obvious economic bankruptcy and the resulting social discontent"[234] had consequences: at the national party conference held between 20 and 22 May 1988, „along with several of his old faithful, he was left out of the Politburo,[235] and was given the weightless post of party president, created for him." Due to a serious illness, on 8 May 1989, he was relieved of his last post as well.[236]

232 Simon 2012.
233 Földes 2015, I. 348.
234 János Kádár, https://neb.hu/asset/phph9pkfx.pdf , (Accessed April 12, 2025)
235 This was practically equivalent to Kádár's fall, his removal from power.
236 Ibid.

The foreign policy merits achieved by János Kádár, however, cannot and should not be denied. In one of its last letters addressed to János Kádár, the HSWP Central Committee clearly highlighted his merits in this field: „domestic and international public opinion respects in your person the politician who has acquired indelible merits in the launching and consistent representation of the Helsinki process, in the unfolding of the East-West dialogue."[237] In his reply written two days later, Kádár summarised the foreign policy achievements of his past three decades, and the success of his negotiations with Western leaders: „I believe that the practice of Hungarian socialism, intended to be human-centred, has extinguished much suspicion and prejudice in our friends and ideological opponents. Our internal conditions and our external steps have certainly also contributed to the formation of a favourable image of our country in the great wide world, above all in Europe."[238]

In addition to reviewing the main junctures and turning points, the central figure of our paper was Kádár János himself, through whose person we have traced the path of the Western opening policy, which was at first unrealisable, then became a possible and in time a necessary task and strategy, while with the help of press materials and sources, we have gained a picture of how, in the judgment of the Western press and politicians, the „grand master of the tightrope walk" was born from the „Judas" of 1956, the „butcher" of the revolution.

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237 Letter of the HSWP Central Committee to János Kádár, 8 May 1989. Published in: Huszár 2002, 678.

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