

Béla Pomogáts

Vision of the Nation and National Strategy

Three Foreign Policy Priorities

Hungarian foreign policy and, consequently, Hungarian geopolitical thinking rest on three main principles, all of which were declared right after the change of regime: European integration, co-operation with neighbouring countries, and the safeguarding of interests of Hungarian minorities beyond the borders. All democratic governments have been committed to observe these foreign policy principles, although certain shifts in stress have been perceptible. The former socio-liberal government, for example, had undoubtedly relegated solidarity toward minority Hungarians somewhat in the background, which the succeeding government had to amend.

The threefold foreign policy system of requirements seeks to focus on several strategic interests. The first among these is that Hungary should integrate into Europe as soon as possible and as well-prepared as possible. This strategic criteria is to be met through integration efforts and policies concerning the neighbouring countries, which aim at the elimination of national conflicts in the region. Another endeavour of foreign policy (geopolitical) strategy is to reduce effectively and permanently those historic losses and collective grievances that the Trianon Treaty of 1920 and its confirmation in 1947 caused to Hungarians (as a whole).

Remedying the losses and grievances caused by Trianon has always been a demand expressed by most of the Hungarians, and it figured as the main priority of Hungarian foreign policy between the two world wars. Unfortunately, it was considered more important than the protection and preservation of national sovereignty; and more important than the modernisation of society. In the end, the grievances could not be remedied, national sovereignty suffered serious damages, and the imperative modernisation of Hungarian society failed to come about as well. Consequently, society faced the dictatorial takeover following 1945 defenceless.

The territorial revisions of 1938–41 cannot be considered unfair. Although the territories it re-annexed to the enlarged Hungary were home to some 1 million Romanians, 450,000 Transcarpathians, and 350,000 Serbs, these revisions were still more fair than the Trianon settlement, which placed some 3.5 million Hungarians under the jurisdiction of foreign governments. However, the territorial settlement achieved on the wake and at the beginning of the Second World War could not be lasting, since it was connected to the politics of the defeated axis powers and because Soviet politics prevented every attempt at border changes in favour of Hungary. The fate of territorial settlement, which would have best suited the ethnic structure of the Carpathian Basin, was doomed for two reasons. First because

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it had been decided by the defeated powers. And second, because of the erroneous strategic decision with which the government of Miklós Horthy enlisted the country in the Second World War.

In the past decades, whether we like it or not, history swept away every opportunity to remedy the injustice suffered in Trianon. The great powers that decided the fate of the world do not want any revision that would alter the borders of Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, the rest of Yugoslavia, and the independent Ukraine. In this respect, the geopolitical objectives of the former Soviet regime and, currently, that of the US and the EU administrations, are practically the same. The status quo established in 1920 and 1947 could be altered, if at all, with the change of the status of Kosovo, which could come about because of the “ethnic cleansing” and genocide committed by the Serbs and because Albanians make up the majority of the population in the territory.

Chances for a territorial revision that seemed clearly logical in 1947 have disappeared in the past fifty years primarily because of the ethnocentric minority policies of the neighbouring countries that transformed the ethnic structure of the Carpathian Basin profoundly. The formerly German and Hungarian ethnic character of Pozsony (Bratislava) was altered between the two world wars; the Beneš policies eliminated the majority of the Hungarian population of Kassa (Košice) following the Second World War; the relative Hungarian majority of Ungvár (Uzhorod) and Újvidék (Novi Sad) disappeared during the urbanisation that followed the Second World War; the Hungarian majority in several Transylvanian cities, like Kolozsvár (Cluj), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare), and Arad disappeared because of the forced settlement policies in the 1960s and 70s; today, the elimination of the Hungarian majority in Marosvásárhely (Targu Mures) and Szabadka (Subotica) is on the agenda as well.

Consequently, the Hungarian ethnic character has been preserved in Csallóköz and Mátyusföld in Slovakia, Beregszász (Berehove) district in Transcarpathia, the border region of Bihar (Bihor) and Szatmár (Satu Mare) counties (and Székelyföld (Secuimea), which is situated far from the Hungarian border) in Transylvania, and some northern and other districts by the Theiss in Voivodina. Most of the Hungarian minority population now lives in a diaspora, which is a clear threat to their ethnic identity and culture.

The protection of these diaspora Hungarians has to be a strategic task of national policies, since the number of these Hungarians amounts to several hundreds of thousands, if not more than one million in the Carpathian Basin only (Hungarian diaspora are present in Western Europe, North and South America, and Australia as well). After all, it is a diaspora we have to conceive of in terms of all the small towns and villages in Transylvania, Upper Hungary, Transcarpathia, and Voivodina, in which no Hungarian school, society, and not even a Hungarian church operates any more. These diaspora communities are threatened to face spontaneous or, in cases, planned and institutionalised (or even forced) assimilation. Hungarian national strategy is to provide for their protection as well.

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The rather disputed Status Law (officially: Benefit Law) is to cater for the protection of the Hungarian diaspora communities. In reality, I expect this Law and its clever and conscientious implementation to bring positive changes in the situation and opportunities of the Hungarian diaspora in the Carpathian Basin. Only the opportunity to study and receive training in Hungary, as well as health care and travel assistance can help a lot in the preservation of diaspora communities. For this reason, it is in our national interest to protect the most important measures, the essence of the Status Law, in the future, and make the institutions of the EU approve of the solidarity that becomes manifest in the Law. I would like to believe that the present Benefit Law is only the first step in the implementation of all the tasks to be achieved by national policy. For the Hungarians who live in diaspora would have to be maintained and protected where they live, which involves the transformation of national education outside the schools, and the development of Hungarian parishes and societies in these diaspora areas.

Regionalisation and Integration

This requires us to rethink and reformulate the regional identity and strategic objectives of Hungary. This reformulation is a must for two reasons: first, we have to get rid of the political and emotional consequences of the losses suffered in Trianon; the collective frustration that leave their mark on the democratic system and the European integration process. Second, we have to acknowledge that we cannot hope for a territorial revision, no matter how distressing this may be especially for the Hungarian communities struggling with their undeserved minority status. Territorial revision has become an illusion, which we have to renounce completely should we want to promote the development of the Hungarians sentenced to a minority status and the cause of Hungarian integration. Instead of revision, we should focus on European integration and make this a national strategy that can effectively serve the reunification of the Hungarian nation, divided by the Trianon Treaty.

In reality, we either try to perform ballet dancing in a straight jacket, or look for another stage, where we can move freely at last. This other "stage" cannot be but Europe and Central European integration, accompanied by European and Central European regionalisation. Integration and regionalisation are interrelated and complementary processes with respect to Western (Northern, Southern) European development. In the context of Western integration, traditional geographic, economic, and cultural regions have revived and territorial units, which had once been divided by state borders resulting from former peace settlements, have developed closer ties once more.

The first development could be characterised by the decentralisation of the administration in Spain, which granted autonomy to the province of Catalonia (and even Basque Country and Andalusia). The traditionally centralised French state set out on a path of decentralisation and the development regional formations as

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the examples of Bretagne or Corsica indicate. There are fine examples of the reorganisation of regions formerly divided by borders as well, especially in the geographic, economic, and cultural framework that we call “Euro-regions”. This resulted in the development of closer relations between South Tyrol in Italy and the Tyrolean provinces in Austria. That both territories have German-speaking population and culture greatly facilitated this process. Similarly close relations have developed between Alsace in France and Württemberg in Germany; the former border along the Rhine is not an obstacle of connections any more.

The evolution of Euro-regions is a useful and promising supplement to a more comprehensive integration in the continent (naturally, in greater dimensions as well, as is the case of the Benelux Alliance, the regional co-operation system of the Scandinavian states, or the German-Austrian-Czech economic ties). In reality, the geopolitical strategy of integration and regionalisation, which would have to be asserted jointly, could shape the desirable Hungarian “vision of the future” (as well). The role that awaits Hungary in the proportion of this dual (and mutually reinforcing) process is certainly a “European mission”, similar to the historic role of the “European border fortress” centuries before. At the same time, it would offset those losses and remedy those collective frustrations that the decision in Trianon triggered some 80 years ago.

For this reason, it would be very useful to include the new regionalisation and integration system in the vision of the country. Hungary could be a workshop and Hungarian scientific and cultural life a laboratory of this system, which embraces the Central European countries and cultures and, at the same time, entertains close connections with the endeavours of European regionalisation and integration (the formation of Euro-regions, and the enlargement and strengthening of the European Union). It was this “workshop role” that those 20th century Hungarian thinkers promoted, who were trying to establish the regional commitments (to put it more pathetically: mission) and geopolitical tasks of the country following Trianon. These thinkers included Oszkár Jászi, László Németh, Gyula Illyés, Zoltán Fábry, Edgár Balogh, and István Bibó.

Traditionally, Hungary has always been constrained to accept the role of a “bridge” or, in more unfortunate times, as it is expressed by the ominous metaphor of Endre Ady, the role of a “ferry country”. This “ferry country” role strands to denote actual historical and geopolitical defencelessness. As Ady put it: “Ferry country: it could only drift from one shore to the other even in its most vivid dreams: from East to West, but preferably the other way around.” The role of a “bridge” is more promising but only if it is well-constructed, connects regions, peoples, and cultures, just as Hungary has always connected the East with the West. We, Hungarians are the most Westernised in the East European and the most Easternised in the Western European region. All this could be another fragment of the new Hungarian vision, which offers a new role, suggests a new self-consciousness, and develops a new national policy based on geopolitical and historical circumstances.

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There are – there have to be – permanent factors in the life of a nation and, thus, policies that establish the framework of this life. Requirements have to be met, and not daily politics or the prevailing power structure should establish them but history itself; they cannot be and must not be subordinated to the struggles of party politics and any game of power.

One of these relentless and unavoidable historical factors is that, following 1918, Hungarians lost the state framework that had previously united and protected the majority of the nation. Since then, Hungarians have been living in several, altogether in eight states following the recent geopolitical rearrangement of the Central European region. Among these, there is their own nation state, but there are other countries as well that have been striving to supplant the Hungarians and create ethnically homogeneous nation-states with clearly defined political strategy for several decades. From among the more or less 13 million Hungarians of the Carpathian Basin some three million live on the edge of the linguistic and ethnic continent or in a linguistic and ethnic diaspora, under the threat that they might lose their identity.

No matter what the convictions of the government are and no matter what economic and social policy prevails in Hungary, the Hungarian communities on the edges or in diaspora have to be protected and maintained. Accordingly, the morals of national solidarity need to be sustained, or rationalised and made more effective. This moral commitment shall not be diluted by the integration of the country into the European Union either.

Minority Hungarians need constant reassurance that the Hungarian state takes the responsibility for their future. The indifferent mentality and elusive behaviour that prevailed during the decades of the Kádár regime cannot return ever again, because the Hungarians of the neighbouring countries are too weak and unable to establish or strengthen on their own those institutions that the development of a desirable self-governmental system (minority autonomy) would require. The Hungarian minorities suffered losses and became so powerless in the 4–5 years that preceded the change of the regime that they are dependent on Hungarian assistance, otherwise they just scrape along. In this latter case, it is expected that either masses will leave their homeland, which is undesirable because of the state of Hungarian economy and the strongly limited capacity of the country to take them in. Or, masses might choose assimilation, which would be a real national tragedy, as it would decrease the numbers of the Hungarians in Central Europe by the hundreds of thousands.

Minority Hungarians expect the solidarity of the Hungarian state, society, and the whole spectrum of the Hungarian political spectrum deservedly, for they cannot expect solidarity from anywhere else. The democratic forces of the majority nations have not yet reached the level of development to notice the historic opportunities inherent in minority autonomy in the consolidation of the state structure they

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themselves support and the promotion of European integration. The public opinion and the institutional system in Europe have just recently begun to acknowledge that laying down the satisfying legal and political foundations of minority autonomy can be the most important factor in ensuring the stability of the Central European region.

Consequently, Hungarian minorities find that universal Hungarian solidarity is their only support and resource, which, needless to say, has a bearing on foreign and educational policy. Accordingly, the international support of their autonomy, the financial support of their institutions, and the co-operation (to be) developed with the neighbouring governments is to be subordinated consistently to the vital interests of minority Hungarians. Hungarian governments, as another must, will always have to be consequent in representing the interests at the European fora, including the interests of those Hungarian communities that will become part of European integration only later on. Accordingly, we will have to demonstrate at all times that the institutional framework of national solidarity, that is, the Hungarian public foundations (Illyés, Apáczai, and Új Kézfogás Public Foundations) set up to promote assistance to Hungarian communities beyond the borders will remain strong and operational. In our opinion, every political force and Hungarian government has to recognise, appreciate, and endorse this requirement.

Integration Hopes and Paradoxes

Hungary is on the threshold of European integration, a step away from institutional integration. Not much, only about three steps away there is Romania and, together with it, the Hungarians in Transylvania. Clearly, no similarly interesting and promising historical moment has happened to us since the change of the regime. Our hopes have naturally keyed up our expectations, since it is the second time since Trianon (the first only lasted four years) that we face a situation that no strictly controlled frontier will separate the Hungarians in Budapest and Kolozsvár. This might be a time when the promise of Bucharest to “sublimate” the Hungarian–Romanian border, which was mere propaganda back in the spring of 1945, may come true at last.

However, the longed-for accession and its even more longed-for results do raise a few questions worthy of consideration. The reason is that marked paradoxes lie hidden in the European integration process with respect to the Central European region, more exactly Hungary and Romania. These paradoxes have to be studied and, possibly, resolved in order that the accession process could be successful.

The first paradox can be found in the “reflexes” of Hungarian public opinion and politics. For Hungarian public opinion is convinced that Romania will not be able to adapt successfully to the legal, political, and moral (I could even say: spiritual) norms as long as a radical democratic change fails to occur; a change that would bring about the radical transformation of the *raison d'état* and minority policies in Bucharest. Hungarian public opinion nevertheless approves of, hopes for, and urges the integration of Romania into the European Union. This is due to the recognition that only integration can protect the decreasing Hungarian population in

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Transylvania from the consequences of assimilation (and continuous migration a way from their birthplace). The shocking results of the last Romanian census are warning signs in so far as they indicate that the national institutional system, education, and cultural of the Hungarians in Transylvania can be effectively protected in the framework offered by the European Union only. Furthermore, this is the framework that could best promote the development of their cultural autonomy and the national integration they are to establish with the whole of the Hungarians.

The second paradox is to be found in Romanian political culture and public opinion. Romanian intellectuals, who play a leading role in political and intellectual life, seem interested in the successful European integration of the country. Hungarians need to maintain continuous discussion and look for ways of co-operation with these intellectuals, and help their endeavours. At the same time, it might seem that another (who knows what) proportion of Romanian intellectuals, and the economic and political elite is averse to the political and moral norms of the European Union, and would probably prefer to get round these instead of complying with them. It is hard to conceive that the remnants of the Communist system, the economic and political stratum so used to eastern-style corruption and representative of traditional Romanian chauvinistic mentality, can actually transform itself into a stratum of EU citizens in less than three years.

At last, the third paradox can be found in the policies and public opinion of the EU, which will soon go through enlargement with the countries of the Central European (post-communist) region. The Western European nations and their governments accept the Central European countries which, not long ago, were ruled by dictatorships and have been carrying the burden of inherent contradictions of democratic transformation, with some distrust, suspicion, and aversion. This could be felt during the difficulties of the negotiation talks or, recently, in the case of the much-debated measures that reduced agricultural subsidies considerably. At the same time, the member states of the EU know that they do not have another choice but to integrate the states and nations of this traditional crisis zone into the Community. This integration is desirable not only because of the recent experiences in the Balkans or the several times perceived signs of instability in Russia, but also because of the anti-Western political processes that have been evolving in the Arab–Persian world.

European integration is, therefore, filled with paradoxes and uncertainties concerning three dimensions: with respect to Hungary, Romania, and the European Union as well. Yet, we must hope that integration will be successful. After all, the integration of the Portuguese, the Irish, or the Greek was not easy either; those processes had their paradoxes as well. And just to mention one more paradox: Norway, the richest country in Europe has remained outside EU integration to the present day. At the same time, the accession of those poorer countries that recently joined the EU (especially Ireland) was an enormous success. Virtually, they managed to multiply their national revenue, raise the standard of living, and advocate their national culture and cultural identity.

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For this reason, I am confident about the European integration of the Central European region and, therefore, Hungary as well as and Romania (and, with it, Hungarians in Transylvania). The institutional system of Hungarian–Hungarian relations and, naturally, Hungarians in Transylvania can profit from the successful European integration of the region. We might even have the symbolic benefit of being able to travel from Budapest to Kolozsvár without a passport.