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Right Way or Dead End: What Kind of Turning Point is the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867?¹

The Compromise of 1867 is one of the most controversial events in the dualist period, an event that has provoked extremely conflicting judgments in Hungarian historiography, and, more broadly, in Hungarian historical public opinion. The Compromise has been discussed in books, articles and historical essays to fill a whole library. And both as a cause of and background to the „good old peace-time days” or the „dungeon of peoples”, the dualist monarchy is still alive and intensely debated in every-day historical public thinking.

Paging through a library of literature², the historian coming from another field of history is, first, surprised and envious: why is there so great interest extending way beyond both the strict and broad confines of the profession? He is, then, somewhat perplexed, for on his first inquiry, it becomes clear what elicited and still elicits the unusual interest is only in a very small part the spectacular ceremony of crowning Franz-Jozef King of Hungary; or the operation of the political-constitutional system created by the Compromise; or the success or failure of economic modernization extending up to World War I. After he has delved thoroughly in it, he will,

1 Paper written for American Hungarian Educators Association 39th Annual Conference, 8-10 May 2014. University of Florida, 215 Dauer Hall, Gainesville, Florida, USA

2 Endre Kovács (ed.), *Magyarország története 1848–1890* [History of Hungary 1848–1890] Budapest, 1979.; Péter Hanák (ed.), *Magyarország története 1890–1918* [History of Hungary 1890–1918] Budapest, 1978.; Erik Molnár (ed.), *Magyarország története II.* [History of Hungary] 5–360. Budapest, 1964.; Gusztáv Gratz, *A dualizmus kora – Magyarország története 1867–1918* [The Age of the Dual Monarchy – History of Hungary 1867–1918] Budapest, 1934.; József Galántai, *Az 1867-es kiegyezés* [The Compromise, 1867] Budapest, 1967.; József Galántai, *A Habsburg-monarchia alkonya: Osztrák-magyar dualizmus, 1867–1918* [Decline of the Habsburg Monarchy–Austrian-Hungarian Dualism 1867–1918] Budapest, 1985.; Éva Somogyi, *Abszolutizmus és kiegyezés 1849–1967* [Absolutism and Compromise 1849–1867] Budapest 1981.; András Gergely – Zoltán Szász (eds.), *Kiegyezés után* [After the Compromise] Budapest, 1978.; András Gergely (ed.), *19. századi magyar történelem* [Hungarian History in the 19th Century] Budapest 1998.; A Történettudományi Bizottság vitája a dualizmus kora történetének egyes kérdéseiről (1960. december 19.) [Debate on specific questions of the Age of Dual Monarchy in the Committee of History of Hungarian Academy of Sciences]. = *Századok*, 1962. 1–2. 206–239.; Péter Hanák, *Magyarország a Monarchiában* [Hungary in the Monarchy] Budapest, 1975.

however, realize that he has entered one of the mythic halls of mirrors in the edifice of Hungarian history where the pieces of furniture are not identical with themselves, but everything has a symbolic meaning, too, moreover, the objects reflected by the mirrors hanging on the wall show new dimensions revealing their hidden relationships.

1 THE SYMBOLIC STRATA OF THE MEANING OF THE COMPROMISE

One group of the symbolic meanings of the Compromise in Hungarian historical thought emerged from the close association of the Compromise, the Reform Age and 1848/49, the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence. When assessing the Compromise, the Hungarian historian cannot go around the question which of the Reform-Age political programs offered good realistic responses to the serious challenges of the transition to capitalist market-economy, the renewal of social and national self-determination and to the challenge of the reshaping the relations to the Danube-valley peoples and to the whole of Europe and to catching up with the general western development. *Because one point of comparison for the assessment of the Compromise is which Reform Age political program is considered positive (realistic, manageable) on the basis of one's own value system.* The historian will evaluate the Compromise according to how it related to the Reform-Age program deemed positive by him. The relationship of the Compromise to 1848/49, as well as to its specific stages (1847, April of 1848, and 1849) or to the politicians personifying those stages (Széchenyi, Deák, Kossuth or even Petőfi) is the symbolic manifestation of the above value-judgment³.

3 Gyula Szekfő, A tizenkilencedik és a huszadik század [The Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries] In: Bálint Hóman – Gyula Szekfő (eds.), *Magyar történet VII.* [Hungarian History] Budapest, 1933.; Erik Molnár (ed.), *Magyarország története I.* [History of Hungary I. vol.] 408–551. Budapest, 1964.; Gyula Mérei (ed.), *Magyarország története 1790–1848 I–II.* [History of Hungary 1790–1848] Budapest, 1980.; and chapters by Tamás Dobszay, Zoltán Fónagy, András Gergely, Gábor Pajkossy In: András Gergely (ed.), *19. századi magyar történelem*; György Spira – Jenő Szűcs (eds.), *A negyvennyolcas forradalom kérdései* [Questions of the Revolution in 1848] Budapest, 1976.; *Vita Magyarország kapitalizmuskor fejlődéséről* [Debate on Hungary in the age of capitalism] Budapest, 1972.; András Gergely, *Egy nemzetet az emberiségnek* [A Nation for Humankind] Budapest, 1987.; András Gerő, *A magyar polgárosodás* [Hungarian Bourgeois Transition] Budapest, 1993.; Iván Zoltán Dénes (ed.), *Szabadság és nemzet* [Liberty and Nation] Budapest, 1993.; György Szabad, *Kossuth Lajos politikai pályája* [Lajos Kossuth's political carrier] Budapest, 1977.; János Varga, *Helyét kereső Magyarország* [Hungary seeking her role] Budapest, 1982.; Domokos Kosáry, *Újjáépítés és polgárosodás 1711–1867* [Reconstruction and Bourgeois Transition 1711–

Another group of hidden meanings of the *Compromise* is constituted by *its relation to the Trianon Peace Treaty*. How far is the Compromise, and the political-constitutional structure created by it responsible for the disintegration of the Monarchy and in this way for the subsequent disintegration of historical Hungary? How far did the system, the integrated market of the Monarchy provide favourable or unfavourable conditions for the balanced growth of Hungarian economy and society, and for the development of a national-middle class society that permitted the prevalence of national interests? To what extent was the development in the dualist period successful/unsuccessful, that is, did Hungarian economy and society get any closer to the level represented by Western Europe? If there were successful growth elements in the period of dualist Monarchy, the question arises, whether or not the „lawful revolution” of 1848 or the Compromise is to be credited with providing the conditions? The researcher in the field of the Compromise will address these questions even if he does seemingly not articulate them⁴.

Behind the two major groups of the meanings of the Compromise beyond its own significance there looms a whole series of basic issues of modern Hungarian history:

Were there (are there) any alternatives in Hungarian social development or do regional factors, backwardness carried on since medieval times demarcate a compulsory pathway? Had there been and when any chance for western-like and democratic development, for catching up with Western Europe, or for a break-out of the peripheral

1867] Budapest, 1990.; László Csorba–Ferenc Velkey, *Reform és forradalom 1790–1849* [Reform and Revolution] (Debrecen, 1998.

4 Iván Berend T. – György Ránki, *A magyar gazdaság 100 éve* [A century of the Hungarian economy] Budapest, 1972., Iván Berend T. – György Ránki, *Európa gazdasága a 19. században* [European economy in the 19th century] Budapest, 1987.; Iván Berend T. – Tamás Csató, *One-and-a-Half Centuries of Semi-Successful Modernization (1848–1989)*. Social Science Monographs, Boulder, Colorado & Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc., Highland Lakes, New Jersey, 2002.; György Kövér, *Iparosodás agrárországban: Magyarország gazdaságtörténete 1848-1914* [Industrialization in a rural country - Economic history of Hungary 1848-1914] Budapest, 1982.; György Kövér, *The Economic Achievements of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: Scale and Speed*. In: Ger András (ed.) *The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy Revisited*, Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2009. 51-83.; Péter Hanák, *1867 – európai térben és időben* [1867 – in European space and time] *Beszélő*, III. ser. II., 1997. November, 11.; Ignác Romsics, *Clio bővületében. Magyar történetírás a 20. században – nemzetközi kitekintéssel*. [Clio spell. Hungarian historiography in the 20th century – with an international outlook] (Osiris, Budapest, 2011.

state of backwardness? Had there been a reconcilable and balanced solution to the questions of national self-determination and the regional and/or European integration and which answer was realistic or unrealistic and when? As a consequence of the aforesaid, was there (is there?) a room for manoeuvre resulting in a real change of course and what is the responsibility of the Hungarian political elite and its leading personalities?

2 THE TYPES OF EVALUATING THE COMPROMISE AND THEIR ARGUMENTS

Within our limitations we must confine ourselves to the discussion to the dominant or most influential *typical positions and the lines of reasoning brought forth in support of them* that shaped thinking in specific periods. The sketchy nature of this presentation offers, however, the advantage to perceive trends and relationships spanning over longer historical periods.

2.1 THE GROUNDWORK

The first debate about the Compromise had started before the deal was struck. *Ferenc Deák*, who had done the preparatory work, and his friends had been shaping, since the Parliament of 1861, the position which in their view would lead to a compromise between the Hungarian nation and the ruling dynasty and which is capable of obtaining a settlement of interests and a balance between the two hegemonic nations of the Habsburg Empire without having to give up on the achievements of 1848, that is, on the already attained state of national self-determination and the fought-out reforms. In the view of the Deák camp, the dualist reorganization of the Monarchy along Deák's line would consolidate the whole Monarchy in such a manner that it would facilitate the restoration of Hungarian historical statehood and the hegemony of the leading Hungarian political elite. The dominant legal philosophy of the dualist period naturally regarded the dualist Monarchy a personal union in which the sovereignty of the two states of equal status was not limited and their unity was only embodied in the identity of the ruler.

In Deák's position, the Compromise was thus a realistic one which, apart from the above mentioned, offered a chance to block the economic decline of the historical landed class, and to preserve its social and cultural positions and also to occupy the bureaucratic posts in the Hungarian state administration and even offered a chance for the restoration of the political hegemony. Among the arguments of the Deák camp one can find the one

that the long-term destabilization of the Monarchy would, in case of the success of German and Russian-Pan-Slavic unification attempts, break into pieces Saint Stephen's Hungary by encouraging the break-away of national minorities. The unity of the Deák camp was not undermined by the fact that the „grand old men” of the Compromise, e.g. Ferenc Deák acclaimed as the „Sage of the Nation” or József Eötvös back from emigration, regarded the Compromise but the first step from which to move on to the further realization of the program of the Reform-Age liberal opposition. While the younger „more pragmatic” generation in this camp – among them the first responsible prime minister of the new era, Count Gyula Andrassy – viewed it as a guarantee of keeping the nationalities at bay, that is, as an instrument that enables Hungary, otherwise too weak for separate existence, to consummate Hungarian statehood mutilated in medieval times, and to restore her regional power status she used to have at the time of the reign of King Mathias – albeit as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. *The mutual enactment of the Compromise in the now two countries of the Monarchy and the spectacular reconciliation between Emperor Franz-Josef and the „Hungarian Nation” at the magnificent crowning ceremony in Pest-Buda on June 8, 1867, appeared entirely to validate the realistic nature of the Compromise.*

The descendants of the Reform-Age *conservatives* were less eager to disturb the success of Deák, their former liberal opponent. In fact, they were really not in a position to do so, for they had also been backing a power-based compromise between the Hungarian political elite and the dynasty and consistently rejected political solutions based on self-determination especially if it offered a chance for the application of the principle of public representation which the lower classes and the national minorities could take part in without limitation. They were not in a position to argue against the concrete form and legal system of the Compromise, since it was one of their leaders, Count György Apponyi who first published the idea of the dualist reorganization of the Habsburg Monarchy in his own journal in 1862. In this manner, as supporters of the Compromise, they acted only as silent partners to the deal and they were only saddened by the fact that the deal they had invented was not struck with them, for the simple reason that the conservatives who were referred to in public life as „guides of the Muscovites” had no significant social influence at this time.

Relevant contemporary criticism of the Compromise was given by *Lajos Kossuth* in emigration and his followers. Kossuth considered it a

tragic compromise and had listed his counter-arguments to his former comrade, Deák, well before the actual compromise was contracted. Kossuth discarded the Compromise primarily because he believed it to be a waiver of rights: waives those rights once achieved by the 1848 transition, which secured constitutional statehood based on national self-determination. A waiver of the legal system that secured the basic civil liberties to all, regardless of nationality or religious denomination. According to this critique, Deák gave up on these principles they jointly represented in the Reform-Era and in 1848. Moreover the Compromise was not one between the Cis-Leithan nations, and the Hungarian political nation, but a deal struck with the leadership of the absolutist Empire that oppressed the aspirations of nations. As he wrote: „It is the alliance of the conservative, reactionary and seemingly liberal Hungarian element to the freedom-hating Austrian Germans aiming at the oppression of other nationalities and ethnic groups”.

Kossuth finds the move a *tragic mistake* from the viewpoint that it lengthens the existence of an empire that has outlived itself both in its principles and in its structure, at the expense that the Hungarians will find themselves on the side of the Monarchy at the time of its collapse, sinfully pitched against the peoples of the region. Additionally, in the view of Kossuth and his supporters the consolidated Monarchy functioning as a „lightning conductor” second-rate power will not be able to bar the German and Russian expansionism (pan-German and pan-Slavic menace) let alone facilitate the realization of Hungarian dreams of attaining regional great power status.

Kossuth criticizes the Compromise also because it „isolates from the world” by artificially encapsulating a microcosm, where the major trends of Western-European growth cannot be felt and they cannot exert this influence. His critique of the Compromise also includes the argument that the legally masterful and balanced political construct has the obverse side of functioning as a rigid institution in which it becomes impossible for the Hungarian governing elite to accommodate to the changing political requirements.

In answer to the counter-argument that he is unrealistically exacting for the Hungarian political leaders, and there is hardly any chance for their real-political materialization, Kossuth says „We are not calling upon Deák to take charge of a revolution, but to help the Nation keep the door open on the future”.

Kossuth's real „counter-argument” to the contention that he had no real alternative was his Danubian Confederation Plan. The plan that replaced power-based compromise by an alliance of the peoples in the Danube valley based on the principles of national self-determination and equality, which in his view offered a better chance for catching up with the more developed Western half of Europe than that offered by the, in his view, improbable independent Hungarian nation-state or by the Habsburg Monarchy surviving as a second-rate European power based on obsolete principles.

The fact that the Danubian Confederation was not embraced by the political leadership of any one of the involved nations, nor by any of the major European powers, did in fact seem to substantiate that the Compromise was an act of ‘realpolitical’, a good deal. And also that the critics of the Compromise were day-dreaming prophets who needed to be respected but was a mistake to believe them.

2.2 THE „FIRST GENERATION” OF ASSESSORS OF THE COMPROMISE IN HUNGARIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Kossuth's view was hardly shared by others than his surroundings in emigration and a few steadfast and marginalized supporters at home (László Böszörményi, János Vidáts and the poet János Vajda). The leaders of the left-center party who showed the flag with Kossuth's name on it and tried to round up the masses that awaited „our father Kossuth” back, did not either question the basic principle of the Compromise. Their approach is characterized by Baron Frigyes Podmaniczky's derisive response to Kossuth's confederal ideas: „If even Kossuth thinks, that we cannot stand alone on our own, then I prefer to turn to the Germans in Vienna rather than to the Serbs (‘‘rácok’’) in Belgrade”. Kálmán Tisza and his circle criticized the given construction of the Compromise by dusting off the weapon of grievance politics skilfully used by the liberal opposition, they put forth such demands that are more suitable for securing political hegemony both in relation to the other half of the Empire and the national minorities at home. After the 1875 party fusion, the left-centre actually merged into Deák's party, making the majority of former critics the mainstay of the Compromise.

In this way the independent grievance based criticism of the Compromise set off on such a path of development, where it opt farther and farther away from Kossuth's views that extended national self-

determination to the domestic nationalities as well as to the neighbouring peoples. Same as from steadfastly demanding Reform-Era liberal representational democracy.

Apart from the methodological schools in Hungarian historiography two characteristic groups had taken shape by the turn of the century and by the early 20th century: one was a pro-Compromise group that gathered around the Academy and was loyal to the Viennese Court; the other was that of the *pro-Independence one under the leadership of Kálmán Thaly* whose favourite topic was the 16th–17th century Hungarian freedom-fights and could pride himself upon considerable results in publishing the sources of those periods. Their short-term retrospective opinion clearly illustrated the ultimate course of the independence-grievance position: *In their view the Compromise was a bad deal, almost treason, the abandonment of Hungarian statehood and independence. The Compromise, in their view, drifted the country into colonial status and deprived the government of the ability to take stronger action against the demands of the national movements. This confronted the principles of the Compromise with the principle of independent Hungarian power status.*

Although their phraseology was almost identical with that of Kossuth, their freedom-fighter style, romantic approach, the aspects of national self-determination and democracy were subordinated to the aspect of pro-independence nationalism while almost entirely oblivious of the decisive factors in the regional or general European situation.

At the turn of the century the former pro-Compromise school of historians were not able to react in a relevant manner to the strengthening of the radical anti-Compromise criticism of the nationalist-romantic historiography. The leading group that in the post-1867 decades included Mihály Horváth, Ferenc Pulszky, Pál Gyulai and Ferenc Salamon disbanded by the turn of the century. And the younger generation of historians spinned off this school into the conservative, the liberal democratic and then the radical middle-class lines. Among the causes the most important, by all means, is the gradual emptying and weakening of liberalism, of noblemen origin and limitations, which was increasingly unable to offer explanations, let alone solutions, in circumstances that had remarkably changed by the turn of the century.

The disgruntled social groups, adversely influenced by the actual realization of modernization or by the growing social and nationalist tensions wanted new political tendencies to represent their interests more effectively.

The same processes were found in the background of the strengthening of the (new) *Hungarian Conservatism* lacking social or political influence in the Reform-Era and at the time of the Compromise. As early as the 1870s and 1880s a greater impact was exerted by *János Asbóth*, who, apart from his publicism wrote a monograph on Hungarian conservative politics, and it deserves special mention that the phrase and the analytical construct „three generations” was first used by him. Asbóth, dusting off the set of arguments of the Reform Era young conservatives – Aurél Dessewffy and his friends –, and that of the post War of Independence pamphlet literature – including the writings of Zsigmond Kemény, Károly Vida, and also Pál Gyulai – he pointed out the nature of liberalism that is alien to the Hungarian people’s mind, the radical solutions of which drives into revolution in juxtaposition to the idealization of the wise conservative reforms. It was first in Asbóth’s writing that the approach and method that transformed the problems of Hungarian social and political development into dichotomies of which only the conservative solution was to be effective, and national. Confronted peaceful and fruitful reform (conservative) with destructive revolution (liberal) on the one hand and the doctrinaire ideological program adaptation (liberal) with the organic, constructive, wise and patient realism (conservatism). Legal scholar *Mihály Réz* also followed this trail who, in his work on the constitutional relationship between Austria and Hungary, published in 1910, put forth his idea on the basis of the increasingly widespread conservative thought that the Compromise was the culmination of centuries of development of Hungarian Statehood, an act of ‘realpolitical’ the greatest achievement of 19th-century Hungarian politics.

In the early 20th century only the conservative group of historians were willing and able to defend the Compromise (and the values it represented).

Undoubtedly the most outstanding personality of the Hungarian conservative historiography of growing influence, *Gyula Szekfű*, was under the influence of the German school of history of ideas. Nevertheless, he strove consciously to oppose the pro-independence school of historiography which he found below standard and harmful. His first publication of importance „The exiled Rákóczi” stirred up a storm of the independents’ emotions based on the insurrectionist freedom-fighter mythology. He presented the life of the exiled prince not only in an idealized manner but its shady and degrading aspects as well based on sources. As early as the publication of this piece he betrayed his incredible

creativity in processing special constructions. While relying on the Asbóth-tradition of conservatism he contrasted the emigration's distorted picture of the situation with the wise realism of those staying at home, the politically unrealistic day-dreaming with the nation-saving role of the conservative historic compromise. The dichotomies are provided with their embodiments: Rákóczi versus Károlyi. His work, „The Biography of the Hungarian state”, (first published in German in 1917) was followed by perhaps his most influential work: *The Three Generations*. The approach of the book published in 1920 already bore the imprints of the shock of the dissolution of historical Hungary. With Szekfű, the unfairness of the Trianon Peace Treaty, rejection of the actual (mutilated) form of Hungarian Statehood appeared to substantiate retrospectively the correctness of the main justification of the Compromise: the Monarchy was the only vehicle for the survival of historical Hungary.

That is why *the Compromise* in Szekfű's great analysis looking back on the long 19th century *is a realistic deal*, „'48 made real” the materialization of the wise, foresighted plans of the conservative reformers of the Reform Era. His pro-compromise answer to the key questions of the Hungarian development in the 19th century is offered by synthesizing the previous historiographical achievements and conservative thinking in a single construct. This construct is the three generations also in the title of his great work which symbolizes the tripartite composition of 19th century Hungarian History. The first generation, that of the Reform Era, are the ones who first respond to the challenges of modern western development. With bold movements Szekfű retailored the main front-line of the Reform Era that consisted, on the one side, of the liberal factions which offered a chance for modernization by means of self-determination, and the unification of interests as well as by aligning to the dominant tendencies, in Western Europe while engaged in harsh polemy with each other, whereas, on the other side, it consisted of the authoritarian, „cautiously progressing” conservatives. The lack of popularity of the Reform Era conservatives and the posterior unacceptability of a part of their views made Szekfű render Széchenyi a basis of comparison. Széchenyi's polemy in the 1840s, his individual views about the appearance of mass-politics and the feature of representative democracy facilitating the forming of government-opposition wagon-circles and his fears of changes getting out of control and turning into a destructive force provided the basis for a conservative reinterpretation of Széchenyi in Szekfű's construct „the greatest Hungarian” and not the Reform Era conservatives ridiculed

as the Habsburgs' "yes-men" could represent the right response to the challenge of western development. In this way the patient and cautious Széchenyian reforms were authenticated alternatives to the illusionary and doctrinaire radicalism of the liberal opposition. And to popularize it, Széchenyi, „the greatest Hungarian” was compared with Kossuth. Széchenyi authenticates Szekfű's cornerstone thesis: Conservative reform is the norm of modern Hungarian development, the only possible framework for it is the Habsburg Monarchy while the road to European integration is the alignment to the Christian–German cultural community. *That is why the Compromise was an act of 'realpolitical' and in this sense the realization of the wise conservative reforms of the Reform Era, therefore it is „the feasible '48” as against the real 1848.*

If this is so, how does Trianon follow from this, that is, the disintegration of historical Hungary? Szekfű's genius – and the meaning of the tripartite construct – is truly manifested in the solution of this question. The last political figures of the first generation and the better part of the second one that aligned to the former made the compromise while the opportunities offered by it were dissipated by the wrong decisions of the dualist era political elite – Szekfű points out. The wrong decision was in fact the adoption of reform-age liberal traditions and the rejection of the conservative solutions. This is how the constituent Hungarian element of Hungarian background fell into the background vis-à-vis the economic flourish of the superficially assimilated ethnic groups; the Hungarian country vis-à-vis the „alien” city. The consequences of the dominance of liberalism is highlighted in extreme fashion by the outrageous circumstance, that the two greatest Hungarians of the first decades of the 19th century who, in Szekfű's view, wanted the same thing – turned against each other in a tragic way. *It was, thus, not the Compromise, but the rejection of principles and solutions incorporated in it that lead to Trianon – goes the Szekfű solution.*

Szekfű's volume became the most essential book in inter-war Hungary. It justified for a whole epoch the exclusively beneficial nature of conservative real-politics. His methodological tool of condensing the diversity of development into such dichotomies that presents one solution as impossible while the other one is made absolute; along with the personification of these dichotomies Széchenyi or Kossuth? Who was right? Who is Hungarian? A lasting imprint of his questions are still to be found when we take a walk in the streets of our towns: in the Catholic „pro-Austrian” (*labanc*) Trans-Danubia the answer lies in the names of

streets and main squares, and reading the inscriptions on the statues, it is Széchenyi. Same is the answer with Kossuth in the Trans-Tisza region of Protestant and insurgent (*kuruc*) tradition and partly in the region lying between the Tisza and Duna rivers.

2.3 THE „SECOND GENERATION”

The most eminent among Szekf's critics was *László Németh*, the trend-setting leading personality in the group of *populist writers*. On the pages of journal *Tanú* (Witness) he drew up his critical position in a major article bearing Szekf's name in its title. *László Németh's* approach is based on a cultural history viewpoint. His approach is determined by a certain fatalism, primarily the fate of falling behind western development. And that he considers the most critical problem of all-time Hungarian development the parting of ways between popular/folk culture and elite/high culture. This led to the situation that elite/high culture, having lost contact with its roots, became diluted or thin, and had got confused in a centuries-long process. In this manner the „result” of 19th century modernization was that an elite/high culture, separated from its historical traditions and popular/folk culture, got into a prevalent and ruling position that controlled „national culture” while popular/folk culture became minority culture in its own land and was gradually forced outside the scope of the self-assessment of elite/high culture. *László Németh's* explanation for this fateful deformation is that Hungarian society emerged from centuries of Habsburg oppression with a deformed and racially diluted leading elite in the period of modernization. Thus the Hungarian political elite did not manage to rise to truly leading positions of Hungarian society. Short of a sufficiently high standard leading group what happened in 1867 was inevitable. *In László Németh's view the Compromise of 1867 was a national tragedy*, a surrender which accomplished and finalized the former deformations and placed the future development of Hungarian society on a deterministic track. Although pro-independence terminological elements can be found in his phraseology, his line of argument essentially differs from the anti-Compromise criticism of the romantic nationalists. In his view, the real curse of 1867 was not the lack of nation-state independence, the „three-fourths dependence” but *that the Compromise was a moral trap*, with no way out of it. The moral trap of the dualist structure brought about the further moral decline and dilution of the Hungarian leading groups, while

the Hungarian people could not – in spite of modernization – become a middle-class society. *Németh's* premises that one cannot entirely reconstruct from his analyses, arguments or conclusions cannot be fully linked back to the early archetypal evaluations of the Compromise, nor to the later spin-off positions. As an intellectual and thinker of his contemporary middle-class he registered the one-sidedness of the genesis of Hungarian popular culture of his own description, with the exclusion of Hungarian peasant society from economic modernization, from middle-class well-being and civilizational achievements and, as numerical majority, from the political decision-making system of society, too, behind the one-sidedness. *His cultural and social history inquiries are to seek explanations with moral motivation for the – in his views – harmful phenomena. Criticism – as compensation – for the unfairness of history. He also derives his intellectual mission from peasant-folk society that is incapable of asserting its claims, its historical interests.*

Since Németh is also looking primarily for answers in the past for the issues of his day he – not unlike Szekfő – also engages in historicizing. Thus, despite his harsh criticism – he points out first Szekfő's anti-liberalism, his commitment to the Habsburgs, and the conscious narrowing of European cultural development to the Christian-German cultural community – his analysis betrays a great deal of similarity to Szekfő's constructs. His concept of „fateful tragedy” conceals the tendencies contrary to the manifest one and excludes raising the question whether or not there were crossroads, alternatives in modern-age Hungarian development. His diagnosis of the disorders of Hungarian intellectual culture and the problems surrounding the birth of national culture is thorough and profound as well as thought-provoking. His insightful approach to cultural history was shifted to the plane of social-history in a short-circuited manner. So his own critical views also include the converted *Szekfűist* contrasts: instead of „small Hungarian–great Hungarian” or „insurgent–loyalist” (kuruc–labanc) contrasts, his dichotomy is „thin(diluted)-Hungarian–deep-Hungarian”. László Németh's critique is consummated by his concept of Eastern Europe. In contrast to the imperial Compromise based on power logic and meant to preserve hegemony, he considers the East-European peoples' community of fate a morally viable alternative for self-determination that makes it possible for the small nations even with the Christian-German sphere of interest to develop solidarity and establish links beyond the confines of the German cultural community.

Among the opinions formed between the two world wars there is one, the shaping and transfigurations of *the Marxist position* that needs to be looked at not at all because of its contemporary impact or its quality, but owing rather to its later official, compulsory status. The later ill-famed József Révai, regarded, in his articles written in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, *the Compromise as a realistic deal. Thus the first Marxist standpoint was very similar to the conservative one.* Among these articles the one titled „Marx and the Hungarian Revolution” deserves special mention. His arguments rely mostly on those of the „classics” of Marxism who considered the intra-Monarchy compromise a „closing the 1848 revolutions from above” in accordance with the interests of the Austrian and Hungarian ruling classes. However they regarded this „class-compromise” positive on at least two counts: first of all, it opened up an avenue for economic growth and industrialization while, in turn, capitalism, would, as a rule, lead to the most advanced stage, i.e. communism by the creation of a working-class. Secondly, it consolidated the Habsburg Monarchy through settling nationality problems, and in this way helped contain the expansion of despotic czarist Russia. Toeing that line of logic Révai found 1867 a compromise which, though favored the ruling classes, was realistic, because it was consistent with the level of development of contemporary Hungarian society and its balance of forces. The pendulum swung in 1848 and the Compromise represented the „middle line” according to Révai. Relying on the Marxian anti-Russian argument prompted by the actual super-power constellation in Europe, Révai considered even Kossuth’s Danubian Confederation Plan such that would ultimately have a reactionary role.

A remarkable shift had taken place in Révai’s position by the late 1930s. It is not hard to identify the impact of the advance of fascism and the opening of the popular front by the communist movement. From 1938 on, his article „Marxism and populism” suggests that although he still considers the deal of 1867 a realistic compromise, great emphasis is placed on the fate of the middle class and the peasant masses, formally ignored by the Marxist approach. The negative side of the Compromise is that it was conducive to a kind of development in which the middle class remained subordinate and the peasant class turned out to be the loser. *From the point of view of the solution of the social problems – from the viewpoint of social revolution the Compromise could thus only partially solve what 1848 offered to solve completely. Around 1941, however, he finds it opportune to rehabilitate Kossuth as one who was among the first*

to realize the significance of the Hungarian–Slavic anti-German alliance.

After 1945, with the disappearance of the menace of fascism the shift became a complete turnaround: 1848 as a real social revolution was contrasted with 1867 as the restoration of treasonable landed aristocracy. The subtler fuent stream of romantic pro-independence historical approach could now join the rising tide of Marxist historiography with an upside-down perspective. Hungary was again in a „semi-colonial” position in the post-Compromise Monarchy.

Another shift of emphasis occurred in 1948 on the first centenary of the 1848 revolution: with the institutionalization of proletarian dictatorship in Hungary now on „remote control” from abroad the emphasis on national independence had to be removed only to be replaced gradually by stressing the virtues of social radicalism. The progressive nature of the Kossuthist liberal opposition that was unable to step out of their „class confnes” and were replaced by the „plebeian” youth placed among the historical heavy-weight Jacobean and the banner of program was carried by „revolutionary” Pet f.

By this time the principles of national and social self-determination as well as the principle of „lawful” reform had been replaced by the norm of Bolshevik-type revolution inflated to mythic dimensions. Instead of the legislation of April, 1848, March 15, 1848 became the official symbol contrasted to the Compromise. The aspect of catching up with developed Europe and western development had been replaced in Hungarian historiography by the mandatory requirement of „teaming up” with the Slavic peoples.

2.4 THE „THIRD GENERATION”

Failed as the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was, it ushered in a new era in the evaluation of the Compromise, and meant the emergence of a „newer generation” in Hungarian historiography. The slowly increasing tolerance of the Kádár restoration was being tasted and tested – excluding the questions of the legitimacy of system and its relations to the Soviet Union – by groups of younger historians.

The mainly *young economic historians affiliated with the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy* benefited from the research findings and methods in the west while they did not question the basic tenets nor the hegemony of the Marxist theory. As a result of their research work, however, they came forward publicly with their revision of the

Compromise. First at a conference in 1958 and then, two years later, at a debate organized by the History Commission of the Academy. *György Ránki and Iván T. Berend* and others took turns to prove the dynamism of capitalist economic growth after the Compromise, the results of the unfolding industrial revolution, and that Hungarian economy, after centuries of lagging behind the European development centre, managed to get onto such a modernization orbit that again offered approximation or catching up. *The Compromise was therefore a positive step; it opened an avenue for Hungarian economic modernization.*

Another direction or line of economic history research yielded internationally acknowledged results in the clarification of the European and regional determinations of Hungarian economy, the regionally differential sets of conditions of industrialization and modernization. It was pointed out as a summary of all this, that the pre-19th century backwardness and peripheral regional position were the reasons for not having developed sufficient internal conditions for a capitalist market economy and industrial modernization simultaneously with its first wave in Western Europe or even the Cis-Leithan region. The missing conditions were allowed to develop by the integration of Hungarian economy into the imperial market with the help of „comparative advantages”. *Thus the Compromise was not merely a positive step but also a realistic deal which had no real alternative.* This school, besides breaking with the traditional political history focus of Hungarian historiography and evaluating the Compromise from a constitutional-legal point of view. Also, while they utilized the results of international historical research, they presented a new and higher level of professional expertise as a requirement for the Hungarian historians.

The younger historians teaching at ELTE University and elsewhere intended to revise the approach of the Rákosi period by returning to the European norms of social development. György Tolnai's research on peasant textile industry in the Highland-region and the concept of „independent capitalist development”, and the debate on the national issue hallmarked by the name of Erik Molnár then *György Szabad* and co-workers made their name by their research on the Reform Era and Kossuth that facilitated the formation of a school that, engaged in polemy with the economic history school, *intended to restore the significance of the principle of national self-determination in evaluating all-time Hungarian historical development.* According to this school the liberal opposition in the Reform Era was able to harmonize the requirement

of national self-determination and that of European realignment into a program. Reconciling homeland and progress, national self-determination and economic development would have led to a balanced, western-type „middle-class development”. 1848 was a decisive step in this direction. *1867, however, opened the gate for a one-sided economic modernization in which significant groups of Hungarian society were not able to participate in the industrial growth, in forming a capitalist market. The Compromise was, therefore, a giving up of the Reform-Era principle of reconciliation, in fact, backing down from 1848 and loosing the chance for a balanced national-democratic development. This was the basic conclusion of this school.*

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed an unprecedented upswing of specialized research in Hungarian historiography. This was significantly encouraged by the decision to publish a new 10-volume History of Hungary. The deepening expertise of research and the refinement of positions in the debates between the two schools seemed to hold out the promise which the published volumes of the 10-volume synthesis have not been able to deliver: the value points of the present are overshadowed in the historical research on the 19th century and the Compromise also fades as an emphatic element of national mythology.

However, the political developments at the end of the 1980s placed those core issues of Hungarian social development which generated the debates on the assessment of the Compromise high on the agenda of the day. The fall of the socialist system, the democratic transition opened new vistas. After the 1989-90 democratic transition we are living in a new generation of debates on the Compromise, but these debates are now on the political scene, partly outside of the historiography, yet. And, however, historians are taking part in debates rather as politicians than scholars.

I think that coming years bring up the rebirth and reinterpretation of myths that could lead to an interpretation of the newer generation in assessment of the Compromise.

SUMMARY

The complicated inter-relatedness of the Compromise and its close links to the fundamental modern-age issues of Hungarian historical development explain the intense professional as well as the broader public interest in it. The repeatedly erupting debates about the assessment of the Compromise

indicate, as it were, when the answer to be given to the fundamental questions became current concern time and again in Hungarian political life. On the whole, this is how the evaluation of the Compromise became part of the national historical mythology and the assessors of the Compromise most often offered a straightforward or oblique clarification of their own value system and their self-definition by taking positions in relation to modern-age Hungarian social development.