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Hungary's 1998 Transition to Center-Right Government: Impact on Security, Ethnocultural Identity, and Economic Prospects

László K. Urbán

**HUNGARY'S 1998 TRANSITION TO CENTER-RIGHT GOVERNMENT:  
IMPACT ON SECURITY, ETHNOCULTURAL IDENTITY,  
AND ECONOMIC PROSPECTS**

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## Hungary's 1998 Transition to Center-Right Government: Impact on Security, Ethnocultural Identity, and Economic Prospects.

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The central concerns facing the nations of East Central Europe consist of how they might fit into European institutions, adapt to global markets, and retain their ethnocultural identity amidst these homogenizing influences. As one of the states recently admitted to NATO and slated for membership negotiations with the European Union, Hungary is straining to adapt to multiple requirements. Budapest's long-standing aspiration to enter trans-Atlantic and European structures stems from a keen awareness that in those institutions matters of abiding national interest will be deliberated in the context of broader regional arrangements. While membership in the Euro-Atlantic community promises to enhance Hungary's security and prospects for development, her political leaders face the challenge of trying to disentangle the country's role as the "national homeland"<sup>1</sup> of *Magyars* living in the adjacent states from relations with the governments in Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, and Yugoslav Serbia.

### *Economic and Integration Policies under the Center-Left Coalition Government*

As in most formerly state-run economies, the transition to a market-based management system in Hungary exacted a steep price. In foreign trade, as Russia's second largest trading partner in the

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<sup>1</sup>Rogers Brubaker, Nationalism Reframed, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 55 and passim.

region, Hungary continued to depend on the Soviet-era pipelines for oil and gas deliveries<sup>2</sup> but had difficulties in beating the odds in agricultural competition with the surpluses of the European Union. Moreover, fulfilling the conditions stipulated for accession to EU membership compounded the pain of adjustment. Although Hungary's finances are still a long way from meeting the "convergence criteria" for the Euro-currency,<sup>3</sup> its center-left coalition government during 1994-1998 strove to upgrade the efficiency of production facilities and to modernize the infrastructure. Both required capital and advanced technology. In pursuing these domestic development goals Budapest sought to reassure foreigners, for whom the maintenance of social and political stability signifies a crucial variable whenever they contemplate investment decisions, of the country's orderly growth and regional potential.

Such an orientation required good working relations above all with the IMF and OECD<sup>4</sup> the opinions of which directly affect not just credit ratings but much more. Over the decades Budapest had become quite adept at invoking the IMF's reputation for strong-arm methods to help exculpate the government's austerity policy and deflect popular resentment over its stringent macroeconomic measures. Thus, when the current account deficit ballooned into an external debt crisis in late 1994, it was averted through the acceptance and credible promise to meet IMF's guidelines.<sup>5</sup> Hungary

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<sup>2</sup> Russia represents about 5 percent of Hungary's total exports.

<sup>3</sup> These consist of a national debt limit of 60% of GDP; interest rate not above 2% of the three countries with greatest price stability; budget deficit at 3% of GDP; inflation rate not to exceed 1.5% of the three lowest rates' average. Hungary's inflation rate was 20% in 1994; 30% in 1995; 20% in 1996; 18% in 1997; for 1998 13% was projected.

<sup>4</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is an exclusive club of the world's most industrialized states.

<sup>5</sup> The IMF prescribes austerity measures that include curtailment of imports, high interest rates and budget revenue increases which slow down the economy. With these steps domestic consumption and living standards decline but, on the other hand, macroeconomic stability and

thereupon received a confidence-boosting three-year standby loan that had been negotiated beforehand. Predictably enough, the attendant austerity program, formally launched in March 1995, dissipated the threat of foreign dissatisfaction. However, its rigors also inevitably weakened the center-left government's support among broad segments of the electorate.

Thenceforth the decisive question centered around how the government headed by Gyula Horn would manage to weather the rising discontent over the belt-tightening measures, and attendantly, whether it would be able to keep the opposition parties at bay. With the Spring 1998 elections approaching, the opposition generated its competing program criticizing the incumbents' policy. It spoke ominously of reduced real income and social services among fixed wage and salary earners. In external economic matters the center-right opposition darkly hinted that the incumbent government had bowed too readily to IMF stipulations and invited excessively large amounts of foreign capital. The center-left government, on the other hand, justified its policies by arguing that the plunge in dollar-wage rates facilitated exports, that despite declining living standards Hungary had become a member of the prestigious and influential OECD (which soon noted "dramatic adjustments,"<sup>6</sup>) and that 1997 ended with the strongest economic growth figures since 1994 while foreign investments and exports were rising. Indeed, integration in terms of regional and global transactions had been proceeding remarkably well,<sup>7</sup> although Hungary still lacked the steady markets where sufficient foreign exchange could be earned to sustain the momentum.

In short, the government's arguments aimed to convey the message that austerity and membership in regional and international organizations would help pave the way toward economic prosperity and international credibility are boosted.

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<sup>6</sup> Washington Post, 28 December 1997, p. A23.

<sup>7</sup> OECD. Economic Surveys 1996-1997: Hungary, Washington DC., pp. 63-73.

perity. The road would be long, though, since as Prime Minister Gyula Horn had noted in 1997, per capita GDP amounted to some 37 percent of the EU's average, while income levels came to a mere one-third.<sup>8</sup> In their efforts to mobilize the electorate against the incumbents, the opposition parties took the position that many of the published statistics were specious.<sup>9</sup> Given the extra incentives for posturing and deliberate distortion of facts and arguments before the elections, this all went on the whole as was to be expected. Then, in what was for formerly communist states a first-of-its-kind televised election debate on May 20, 1998, Prime Minister Gyula Horn and the opposition Young Democrats-Hungarian Civic Party<sup>10</sup> Chairman, Victor Orban, traded charges and counter-charges on a wide range of issues.<sup>11</sup> In the end, however, on foreign policy matters both candidates came out for integration into the EU and NATO.

### *Hungarian Ethnoculturalism and the 1998 Election Campaign*

For Budapest national identity problems have been more intense than those in Poland and the Czech Republic because large ethnic Hungarian minorities were left behind in adjacent states as a result of the Trianon Treaty of 1920, which awarded vast tracts of land to countries allied with the

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<sup>8</sup> RFE/RL Newsline Vol. I, No 92 Part II 11 August 1997, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> For details on privatization, banking, and trade policy, OECD Economic Surveys 1996-1997: Hungary, Washington DC., pp. 2-13.

<sup>10</sup> Henceforth: YD-HCP

<sup>11</sup> Horn provided statistics on the decline of per capita foreign and domestic debts and on the shrinking interest payment on each export dollar and cautioned against unrealistic campaign promises. Orban hinted at "euroconform," suggesting an excess in cooperative willingness at the expense of national interest--which could refer equally to domestic social policy and also signal a less patient approach to minority rights in the "near abroad." Népszabadság, May 21, 1998, and June 5, p. 12.

victorious Entente. In Europe, the criterion for membership in a nation still rests, as a rule, on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, while that of *jus soli* usually determines one's nationality in immigrant states like the USA.<sup>12</sup> Historically, Hungary's "integral nationalism" was conscious of the value of ethnocultural diversity. The *Magyar* and *magyarized* leadership traditionally subordinated the application of the *jus sanguinis* principle to the maintenance of its privileges in a semi-feudal society. But with the encroachment of administrative, financial, transport, and other types of modern-day imperatives the notion *natio hungarica*<sup>13</sup> underwent changes in accordance with European trends as the governing elite embraced a policy of inducing minorities to adopt Hungarian as the language of the centralized state machinery.

On the other hand, since at least the late 1980s it became increasingly appreciated among states trying to fit into the new Europe that authentic democracy presupposed the integration into political life of all properly established group interests. As doubts arose whether enforcement of a country-wide sense of ethnocultural identity would really make a state internally more integrated, autonomy and diffusion of central power were employed as a means of preserving political unity in ethnically mixed states.<sup>14</sup> Hence Hungary's pre-election center-left coalition leaders, several of whom had minority backgrounds themselves, had little trouble accepting that feelings of identity with a minority group need not be regarded as incompatible with civic loyalty to the state in which one lives.

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<sup>12</sup> The former traces the blood line, the latter uses the place of birth as the criterion for determining membership in a nation.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Ludányi, "Preface: The Historical Geography of the Hungarian Nation," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 1996), pp. 371-376.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Lapidoth, *Autonomy*, Washington DC, U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p. 3. For the three levels at which autonomy operates--personal, cultural, and territorial--vd. George Schoepflin, "Nationalism and Ethnic Minorities in Post-Communist Europe," in Richard Caplan and John Feffer, eds., *Europe's New Nationalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 151-168, at p. 156.

Since elites are known either to stoke or attenuate conflicts by their attitude,<sup>15</sup> this matter would seem to merit somewhat more detailed attention.

In elections to local self-governments in post-communist Hungary it is a constitutional right to claim an ethnic identity, yet there is no legal way to challenge how persons arrived at being “non-Hungarian” if they grow up, work, and pay taxes there. Even if some speak but a passable Hungarian, a stable, relatively well-off state has scant reason to fear that such groups would render the country less governable or more vulnerable to external intrigues. In Hungary the legal framework for the establishment of a system of minority self-government through elected delegates was created by the 1993 Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities Act, in accord with the ascending view that tolerant societies can preserve diversity among their citizens. Based on the principle of *personal* autonomy, it legitimated organized interest representation in a way that attested<sup>16</sup> to a consciousness of the linkage between politically salient ethnicity and the likelihood of organizing groups on such a basis.

Here it should be noted that minorities perennially fear extinction either as a result of official assimilation policy or through cultural impoverishment. Politically engaged minority elements sometimes may express exaggerated views<sup>17</sup> about the potential loss of their ethnocultural uniqueness. Nonetheless, the disadvantages of belonging to a dwindling language or religious group may

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<sup>15</sup> Michael E. Brown, “The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview,” in M. E. Brown et al., eds., Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict, Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> The national and ethnic minorities living in Hungary include Armenian, Bulgarian, Croat, German, Greek, Pole, Roma/Gypsy, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serb, Slovak and Ukrainian. “Self-government in Hungary: The Gypsy/Romani Experience and Prospects for the Future,” Report, Project on Ethnic Relations, Princeton, N.J., 1998, p. 3 and pp. 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, “Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict,” in M.E. Brown, et al., eds., Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict, p. 97.

cause genuine collective anxiety, especially among small and isolated groups. Those minorities faced with the problem of differentiating themselves from the majority may avoid locally customary lifestyles others take for granted.<sup>18</sup> Whatever specific forms ethnic self-assertion takes, it will likely be fueled in part by concern over becoming further marginalized, even if such justifications are laced by a desire for advancement in the broader political or civic society.

The above notwithstanding, the question of why the center-left government in Budapest itself encouraged minorities to form alliances<sup>19</sup> requires at least a cursory review of Hungary's record on this topic, which has been uniquely complicated by the complex ethnocultural ties with its own national minorities living in its own "near abroad."

In the wake of the June 1990 Copenhagen CSCE/OSCE meeting, where a decision was made to monitor whether minorities are assured properly recognized rights to preserve and develop their own culture, religion, and language and to organize in a manner consistent with democracy, politicians in Hungary sought to establish their credentials by stoking a vague public awareness about how their ethnic kin were treated in the neighboring states. While the fate of Hungarian minorities living in the near abroad evoked but mildly indignant emotions among the general population, the image of ethnocultural victimhood elicited strong passions among the nationalists who doubted that the 1995 Council of Europe's *Framework Convention* for the Protection of Minorities<sup>20</sup> would

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<sup>18</sup> An *ethnic* minority differs from a *national* one in that the former has neither a homeland nor a uniform standardized language. Janusz Bugajski, *Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995, p. 399.

<sup>19</sup> Magyar Hirlap, 29 January 1998.

<sup>20</sup> That is, *Framework Convention* to the European Convention on Human Rights. Human Rights Law Journal, Vol. 16, no. 1-3, 1995, pp. 92-98. At the Council of Europe's Vienna summit in October 1993 the "traditionalists" aggressively challenged recognition of minority rights, and thus the meeting ended with a *protocol* in the cultural field, *grandiloquently* dubbed "Framework Convention" that specified merely the principles governments were to respect but without

help redress the situation on the twin grounds that the document specified merely unenforceable principles which, furthermore, skipped the issue of *autonomy* altogether.

Thus, after Budapest signed treaties with Ukraine (1993), Slovakia (1995), and Romania (1996), regulating relations with ethnic brethren living in the near abroad, the government's efforts to monitor and implement them began to encounter political criticism and resistance from groups that did not want to sacrifice what they regard as vital parts of the Hungarian national heritage.<sup>21</sup> Arguing by dint of vague and stale notions plainly designed to evoke the indignation of nationalist-minded elements, their spokesmen set themselves up as repositories of historically evolved values and sentiments. Sounding rather indifferent to democracy, they routinely set their alarmist agenda so high that anything other than nationalist goals and values appeared comparatively unimportant.

According to right-of-center Hungarian opposition parties during the 1998 election campaign, the legal situation of ethnic Hungarians had deteriorated over the past years due to inequities in the *basic* and *framework* treaties, yet the government neglected to act.<sup>22</sup> The Independent Smallholders, with a legal expert in its leadership, proved insouciant to the political dismay caused among observers by staging a commemorative rally on the anniversary of the 1920 Trianon Treaty.

Hungary's Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) managed to get itself ousted from the EU's Christian Democratic group on account of its links with the far-right Hungarian Justice and

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enforcement mechanism. Antonia H. Chayes & Abram Chayes, "Mobilizing International and Regional Organizations for Managing Ethnic Conflict." pp. 178-210, at p. 188, in David Wippman, ed., International Law and Ethnic Conflict, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> This was the case especially after the Parliament's foreign affairs committee adopted the view that Hungarian ethnic organizations in the near abroad were legally competent to determine and represent their local minority interests.

<sup>22</sup> Népszabadság, September 22-23, 1997. R. Brubaker's notions of how "transborder nationalism" works seem to depict closely the conservative-nationalist position, see Nationalism Reframed, pp. 60-68.

Life Party (HJLP)<sup>23</sup> whose populist leader, István Csurka, appealed to his audience not to sign the “basic treaty” of 1995.<sup>24</sup> Not to be outdone, the Young Democrats themselves expressed solidarity with the Hungarian minorities in Transylvania--along nationalist lines advocated by Bishop László Tökés. Although great variations could be detected among right-nationalist parties on what stance to take on related matters, they uniformly managed to provide grist for the mills of nationalists in neighboring states,<sup>25</sup> thereby undermining not only cross-border efforts to reach interethnic accommodation but also the country’s hard-earned image as a regional factor of stability.

Despite its emotive domestic ramifications, this issue of ethnocultural obligation toward Hungarians living in neighboring states was handled by the center-left Horn government largely in the light of external commitments. This way of going about it rested on the plausible hunch that the involvement of Euro-Atlantic regional organizations could secure the conditions and prospects of Hungarian minorities in the near abroad in a mutually satisfactory manner. Whatever form interethnic accommodation would eventually take, however, no single formula seems likely to improve dramatically on the situation. More likely, a succession of partial solutions might chip away at specific local problems. For the lot of any minority, while never uniform, depends on diverse educational and sociological traits. Beyond that, it is influenced by where and with what nationalities they<sup>26</sup> coexist for generations because daily interactions with the locally dominant ethnic majority

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<sup>23</sup> Magyar Hirlap, July 15, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Bugajski, Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe, p. 411-12. (NATO made membership dependent upon the signing a bilateral basic treaty that “resolved” territorial and ethnic disputes.)

<sup>25</sup> Népszabadság, January 25-26, 1998. For details on the variations among nationalists, along with the international legal reasons for the government’s position, vd. Brubaker, Nationalism Reframed, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Diversity, according to Lapidoth, is determined by history, geography, tradition, economic situation, strategic considerations, the nature of the group that desires autonomy, and reason

exerts a powerful influence in shaping minority identities. Above all, the Hungarian Socialist Party-Free Democrat government's good faith assumptions about institutionally assisted accommodation in ethnocultural matters can best be comprehended by recalling that no other candidate state for EU and NATO membership had been made more aware than Hungary that smooth relations with its neighbors formed part of the basic political conditions for acceptance into a new Europe.

In an election year, however, any policy that subordinated ethnocultural concerns to the goal of Euro-Atlantic integration could not but invite being branded as insufficiently sensitive to the nation's rights and needs. To further complicate matters, the recent electoral successes of the right-nationalist Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and Jörg Haider in Austria cast a wide shadow, rendering it moot whether ethnic issues had really been settled by the treaties signed.<sup>27</sup> Although one could take the position that their domestic implementation rests in the hands of governments that should, in principle, be able to appreciate the pros and cons of discharging bilateral and international obligations, it is well to keep in mind that Hungary had until recently been locked into a vicious circle with several adjacent states wherein misfortune of one country was greeted as another's opportunity.

All the same, considering that a heavy air of uncertainty still inhibits politicians in neighboring states from committing themselves to a fixed position and furthermore, that internal conflicts tend to radiate outward, impacting thereby on the entire region's security,<sup>28</sup> the Horn government saw no viable alternative to a policy of reliance on involvement by regional and international institu-

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for the establishment of the (autonomous) regime, Autonomy, p. 179.

<sup>27</sup> For Jean-Marie Le Pen, see Mark Hunter, "Nationalism Unleashed," Transitions, Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 1998), pp. 18-28. For Jörg Haider, leader of the Austrian Freedom Party, The New York Review of Books, February 15, 1996, pp. 22-25; Washington Post, July 8, 1998, p. A21. Heti Világgazdaság (henceforth *HVG*), XXI, 10 (13 March 1999), p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Lake and Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," in M.E. Brown, et al. eds., Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict, p. 98.

tions. Most improvements in interstate atmosphere could already be tied to NATO's requirements from would-be members that include, among others,<sup>29</sup> an absence of state-to-state frictions or challenges. This heartening trend likewise had a lot to do with NATO's on-going process of transformation that would culminate in changing the 1949 Washington Treaty from a collective defense alliance against a massive external threat into being a purveyor of over-all security and internal stability. Finally, with the inauguration by NATO and its 28 affiliated member states of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which includes countries seeking alliance membership as well as several neutral countries and even former Soviet republics, the participants acquired an institutional vehicle for blending national preferences through collective effort into broadly convergent security conceptions.

In response to the terms of admittance to NATO and the EU, therefore, a situation had evolved wherein the candidate states avoided contentious stances while issuing instead promises of support for fellow aspirants to the regional structures. This new attitude became quite routine as each state wanted to be seen as a stabilizing factor helping to ease regional tensions. Nevertheless it would be a mistake not to see in these pledges of support anything more than just politically correct rhetoric. They, in fact, had already improved the official atmosphere and thereby favorably changed the modalities of an unfolding regional interstate cooperation.

Pulling these strands together, for Hungary, as well as for most states in the region, active participation in the Council of Europe and the OSCE, on top of prospective membership in NATO and the EU, has created a sense of once again being connected to the rest of Europe. Nonetheless, Hun-

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<sup>29</sup> Additional requirements are; respect of the OSCE's norms and principles; commitment to economic liberty, social justice, environmental responsibility; established democratic and civilian control of the military.

gary remained somewhat set apart from the other “invitees” by its inherent ties with ethnic Hungarians living in its near abroad, over whose destiny Budapest hopes to be consulted. Hence the belief that once inside the Euro-Atlantic institutions, ethnocultural problems would likely have a better chance of being resolved through collective endeavors.

Returning to economic and domestic affairs, years of hard-earned upgrading in international trade and financial ties had generated notions in some government circles that the problem of how to secure steady economic development may have been put behind them. However, while the reasons for incessant worry about being suddenly squeezed by a credit crunch had greatly diminished, the benefits of modernized production facilities and an invigorated macro-level economy have not yet trickled down to the wage earners and other fixed income consumers. In any well-run democracy, people expect from officials they are about to reelect or elect that they provide some kind of safety net to ensure indispensable aspects of their daily life. Such expectations highlight the lingering conflict between the socio-economic obligations that European states have customarily shouldered and the overriding current need to modernize and attract foreign direct and portfolio investors--who think it is self-evident that *their financial* interests should take priority. Not surprisingly, Prime Minister Horn’s government encountered serious political problems due to the prolonged double-digit inflation during which the population’s purchasing power did not keep up at all with nominal earnings. Hungarians living on a fixed income had obvious reasons at election time to feel dissatisfied despite the economy’s enhanced competitiveness and the receding grounds for anxiety about the country’s future.

In sum, since the 1998 Parliamentary election came at a time when for many Hungarian voters things were not going nearly as well as they had been four years earlier, the outcome turned largely on domestic conditions, primarily on the population’s response to the increased social service costs

amidst their shrinking household consumption. Political concern also played a role since many resented the government's failure to take up the cudgels on behalf of "historic interests" because, as tensions with governments in neighboring states eased, so had the governing coalition's sense of urgency about seeing lingering issues resolved. Still others remained skeptical that Euro-Atlantic integration could hold the answer to their needs. As the upshot of all this, in the May 1998 Parliamentary election that had taken place at regular four-year intervals since 1990, the swing in voters' preferences proved wide enough to remove the Horn government from power and bring back old politicians along with new ones under Prime Minister Victor Orban, Chairman of YD-HCP.<sup>30</sup>

### *Purviews on Integration, Security, and Ethnocultural Rights*

How did international and regional organizations come to exercise ever greater influence upon domestic conditions and processes in Central Europe? As administrative and evaluative institutions, the EU, IMF, OSCE, NATO, and the Council of Europe employ specialists and politicians who function as fact-finding, rule-setting, and adjudicating authorities embodying the ability either to support governments or to withhold privileges from them; thereby impacting profoundly on their fortunes. Given their interlocking nature, the linkages and divisions of labor among these institutions form an interacting network that registers a country's status and performance, constantly setting off coordinated vibrations throughout these intricately connected webs.

When it comes to the question of whether Hungary's politicians simply seized the opportunity

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<sup>30</sup> In a 386-seat Parliament, YD-HCP got 148 seats + Smallholders Party 48 = 196 + HDF 17 = 213; Istvan Csurka's HJLP got 14 seats; (which is not enough to swing parliament's basic alignment of votes). HSP obtained 134 seats + Free Dems. 24 seats = 158 seats (41% - more than enough for blocking any major legislative proposals).

presented by the end of the Cold War, one has to begin by pointing out that the conversion to new goals and means did not happen overnight. Long before the transition began, the then HSWP<sup>31</sup> had tested the limits of Soviet bloc tolerance in financial matters. Romania's favorable financial ties to the West in the 1970s and Hungary's formal acceptance into the IMF in 1982 opened the process. After Budapest's 1990 "association" treaty with the EU, then admission to the Council of Europe that November, Hungary's leaders came to rely on prospective regional institutional membership as the primary instrument for consolidating long-term development strategies.

True, for the newly formed (1989) Hungarian Socialist Party the goal of "entering Europe" was a way to shed association with the past; to erase the legacy of isolation and decay incurred during the late Soviet-bloc period; and to gain added legitimacy once inside the Euro-Atlantic institutions as a player willing to move toward novel ways of pooling obligations and prerogatives. Finally, one could detect here a competitive touch which flows from the realization that disparities in standing among applicants became itself a crucial developmental factor. In short, the outgoing Horn government's determination from the start to go along with the EU and NATO stipulations for admission rested ultimately on dogged contemplation of the ineluctable consequences of living in a single Euro-Atlantic political space that seemed increasingly poised to determine regional goals and to arbitrate in an ever wider range of matters, domestic as well as external.

The essential correctness of this way of looking at things has been borne out by the fact that the first batch of countries selected for NATO and the ongoing EU negotiations consists of relatively stable, economically sound, and ethnoculturally least heteroneneous states. As reflexive recourse to historically conditioned reasoning faded and a reliance on the exercise of vision grew, moderate

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<sup>31</sup> Hungarian Socialist Workers Party--the ruling communists' name after the 1956 revolution.

political elements with a genuine commitment to democracy and a market economy are gaining ascendancy. Several of Hungary's neighbors are installing governments committed to promote the independence of media and appear determined to grant equal rights to all citizens. With the habit of working on problems jointly at periodic meetings becoming entrenched, the importance of observing citizen-ship and minority rights also gains in acceptance. That is why conditions on the whole looked a lot more promising by Spring 1998 than they did just a few years back.

In a few troubled states, however, the leadership still faces civil disobedience on account of its autocratic ways or confronts ethnocultural problems of diverse magnitude and intensity. In those states the dominant elements eschew governing through democratic mandate because they feel perennially beleaguered and consequently in urgent need to rely on those very segments of society that remain steeped in habits, traditions, and symbols any modernizing government would rather want to shed. To outside observers, however, strong-arm methods that enforce uniformity signify not merely an instance of ill treatment but a formula<sup>32</sup> that cements the population's division along communal lines in that such a policy engenders growing bitterness among minority groups which hastens their mobilization for resistance.

To account for how a heavy-handed policy can turn counterproductive, one might set the stage with a brief consideration of several of the principles involved here: some faded, some rising, and others as yet tentatively held. Most problems that beset contemporary governance stem from the multiplicity of interpretations regarding the notion and purpose of sovereignty. Spokesmen for troubled states derive from the two-fold meaning of sovereignty (as supreme domestic authority, on the one hand, and external independence and equality, on the other) mostly *privileges* while

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<sup>32</sup> David Wippman, ed., International Law and Ethnic Conflict, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, pp. 1-21, esp. pp. 14-16.

recognizing only contractually acquired obligations. International law has indeed traditionally upheld the primacy of the unit or state over the collective such as the League of Nations and U.N. But while in earlier times the accentuation of the doctrine of sovereignty in such a way had its firm customary and empirical basis,<sup>33</sup> today few ruling elites confuse sovereignty as *prescription* with the *practical dimensions of governance*. Evidently, much hinges on a given state leadership's willingness to recognize the emerging new reference points of international interaction which contain, aside from privileges, obligations as well. Above all, the new guidelines tend to be determined only in part by the customary, *legally* framed attributes of statehood.<sup>34</sup>

As the danger of war among states receded in Europe, multi-layered practical interactions among sovereign entities came to form the heart of contemporary reality. Aside from EU, NATO and OSCE, suffice it to refer to the Central European Initiative, the Central European Free Trade Agreement, and the Carpathian Euroregion, all of which presupposes the satisfactory discharge of *domestic* programs that advance democratic reforms.<sup>35</sup> Evaluations of related matters usually center around inquiries about the rule of law and, where relevant, on whether the ruling ethnic groups actually treat their citizens and minorities according to the laws and norms formulated mostly by the Council of Europe and UN.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gerhard von Glahn, Law Among Nations, Allyn and Bacon (Simon & Schuster), 1996, 7th ed., pp. 51-2; 66-80; 92-100.

<sup>34</sup> Today, treaty texts are regarded as just one among the guides for getting one's bearing; geopolitics, economics, widely shared ideas about right and wrong blend with legal and political thinking. Tom Farer, "Conclusion," in Wippman, International Law and Ethnic Conflict, ed., pp. 326-46.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy Druker, in Transitions, Vol. 5, No. 9 (September 1998), pp. 46-53.

<sup>36</sup> The UN Charter was intended neither to shelter nor to render immune any country from responsibility in civil and minority rights matters. David J. Scheffer, "U.N. Engagement in Ethnic Conflicts," in Wippman, ed., International Law and Ethnic Conflict; pp. 147-177.

Over nearly five decades, the overlapping aspects of international human and civil rights cumulatively created a common set of ground rules, hence a common perception, that fosters and sustains a new sense of legitimacy among key players. The new guidelines seem adequate to deal with even the most complex issues of citizenship and minority rights--except in extremely aggravated instances. In consequence, ethnocultural questions have gradually ceased to be exclusively internal or even bilateral concerns. They came to be viewed increasingly as warranting much wider an application and competence, largely because the principles and rules at issue had been incrementally worked out by the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Council of Europe, OSCE, and literally dozens of others the collective purview of which derogates all European *state* interests, except the self-evident right to defend national borders. These novel collective ways of creating principles and rules regarding sovereignty, plus the interlocking nature of these institutions, helps assure their observance; more perhaps in the international arena at any given moment than within participating individual states.<sup>37</sup>

Although international conventions have neither a mandate nor intention to lay down precise arrangements, the granting of basic cultural, linguistic and political rights are ever more recognized as being essential if any government wants to forestall manifestations of dissatisfaction, whether taking the form of civil disobedience or resort to violence. Details about how the rights to self-administration of minority cultural affairs would be locally framed were thus intentionally left to the discretion of democratically elected parliamentary leaders.<sup>38</sup> This circumspect way of legislating citizenship

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<sup>37</sup> Patricia Carley, Self-Determination: Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and the Right to Secession, Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1996. Passim.

<sup>38</sup> Bugajski, Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe, p. 436; Lapidoth, Autonomy, pp. 40 & 95; Carley, Self-Determination: Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and the Right to Secession, p. 1.

and minority matters reflects an awareness of the fluid conditions existing in several troubled countries wherein any unduly rigid demands regarding implementation could still exacerbate the local leadership's problems. At the same time, available evidence suggests that where a minority does not perceive its position as being threatened, the option of secession loses its appeal. Consequently, it certainly matters a great deal whether accommodation of some sorts is desired by both sides, by representatives of the ruling majority as well as the minority.

How do institutions impact on a region's ethnocultural policy? In the past, borders served to divide, to isolate domestic politics from outside influences, and thereby to confine peoples and governments in neighboring states to their own domain. But gradually the Council of Europe and the EU brought about changes in the functioning of borders by converting them into transit points, junctions of linkage and cooperation. If anything seems predictable, it is that future state-to-state relations and the meaning of citizenship will profoundly change. The much-heralded arrival of a borderless, tariff-free, single currency Europe has already blurred, on top of security and environmental matters, the lines of sovereignty and national identity. Jointly crafted standards that guarantee equal rights to all citizens, the observance of which is independent of state-to-state relations, have managed hitherto to avoid impinging on the states' rights to pursue their own affairs, at least among those seeking affiliation with the Euro-Atlantic community.

Now to address specific Hungarian ethnocultural matters, under the conditions that had existed prior to the conclusion, signing and ratification of the *basic treaties* and *framework agreements* in the mid-1990s, Hungarian minorities residing in adjacent states were trapped in a vicious circle. Ethnic discrimination, though varying from state to state, had turned them into a frustrated underclass. And their disaffection only deepened wherever the local ruling elites voiced suspicion about their loyalty to the state. Where local nationalists regarded them as potentially disloyal, even their

legitimate aspirations for educational and cultural opportunities were interpreted as manifestations of treason. The center-right government then in power from 1990 to 1994 in Budapest, was concerned that inattention toward those Hungarian minorities might generate a sense of abandonment among them that could make them easy prey for bombastic nationalist rhetoric. Hence before the UN Human Rights Commission, Council of Europe, OSCE, and EU--galvanized by the ethnic conflicts going on in East-Central and South-East Europe--took a more active interest in minority affairs, Hungarian officials could rightfully assume that if they did not speak up for their brethren living near abroad, nobody else would. In the wake of the Dayton Agreement of November 1995, however, that kind of assumption no longer accorded with reality.

As long as Hungarian minorities faced only the options of assimilation or departure, they had every reason to feel caged in and to be concerned about their future. Where the dominant elite still interpreted territorial sovereignty as a license to deal with them over their heads, a desire to opt out formed part of their over-all psychological backlash. Over the years, however, Hungarians living in neighboring states generally came to accept their lot, more readily so in countries where they were accorded appropriate citizenship rights. Precedents, ranging from Ukraine to Slovenia, confirmed that it is possible to reconcile their situation by combining loyalty to the state they live in with participation in Hungarian cultural life.

Naturally, inter-ethnic cooperation presupposes shared expectations, which require local minority leaders to promote, aside from their ethnocultural group interests, a sense of civic responsibility that clarifies their common link with the majority population of the state they live in. Minorities need not prove patriotic affection; it should be enough if they get along communicating in the official language with the authorities under whose jurisdiction they live, fulfilling their duties

as citizens--short of participation in repressive government-sponsored actions.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, their minority language and culture taught at home, school, as well as cultural-religious occasions provide the vehicles through which their ethnic identity can be expressed and maintained.<sup>40</sup>

For Hungarian-speakers living across the state borders Hungary's attractiveness as "homeland" varies with the quality of cultural, economic and political life they experience.<sup>41</sup> Another variable emerges from these minorities' preference for the changing government in Budapest. Polls during the center-right Antall regime (1990-1994) had shown a comparatively harmonious alignment of sixty percent, which precipitously dropped to only 25-30 percent under Prime Minister Horn. This partiality may have come about as a result of perceiving the HSP-Free Democrats coalition as being just a continuation of the pre-transition communist regime which took its bearing from Soviet-inspired interpretations of international norms and laws rather than pressing more forcefully for some locally arranged mutually acceptable *modus vivendi*.

How did the security considerations of the Hungarian government accord with its twin objectives of stability and sustained economic progress? The evolving new NATO doctrine seems poised to replace the fixed frontline of a known enemy with a growing concern over rogue governments and hidden menaces like terrorism, destabilization, official corruption, organized crime, and the like. With the debate concerning NATO's expansion being over and the new members shaping up for admission, events overtook most related grounds for concern, particularly worries about its

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<sup>39</sup> On Hungarian conscripts in Yugoslav Vojvodina being sent to Kosovo, see Magyar Nemzet, 15 June 1998.

<sup>40</sup> The US supports the minorities' aspirations to preserve their cultural heritage but rejects any drive for territorial autonomy--based on ethnic criteria.

<sup>41</sup> "Magyar-magyar csúcs után," *HVG*, 20 July 1996, pp. 7ff.

impact on Russia. Especially since the Founding Act of Spring 1997 established Russia's military presence in a NATO-Russia Council at Mons, Belgium, wherein joint deliberations help further the goal of overcoming lingering distrust from the cold war period that contributes to the coordination of still varying threat perceptions. When Moscow published its revised security concepts,<sup>42</sup> its authors turned out to regard threats likewise as being more internal in origin, including such concerns as economic dislocations, ethnic and regional frictions, critical polarization among social and occupation groups, all of which overlap broadly with NATO's own doctrinal thinking.

Since Hungary needs to export its way toward sustainable development, its security considerations depend largely on non-military factors. Consequently, none of these changes in military doctrines pose a problem.<sup>43</sup> Budapest expects from NATO less a collective defense alliance than a community that helps safeguard competitive development and fruitful cooperation. Hence the newly elected center-right government will be just as anxious as its predecessor to see how far the EU is prepared to help provide markets. As regards trade with Russia, then Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov's April 1998 visit to Budapest attested to the two countries' determination to continue their economic cooperation<sup>44</sup> despite Budapest's Euro-Atlantic ambitions.

#### *Implications of the change in government*

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<sup>42</sup> Washington Post, December 25, 1997, p. A-29.

<sup>43</sup> Although Hungary has no border with a current NATO member, its proximity to the Balkans along with the country's surface transport systems makes its territory valuable.

<sup>44</sup> Yevgeny Primakov assured his Hungarian counterpart that Moscow was *resigned* to NATO expansion and would not seek to change the Euro-Atlantic orientation of Hungary's foreign policy, much to the relief of his hosts; Washington Post, 2 May 1998, p. A-14.

The new government's policy shapes up as remarkable in more ways than one. The electorate, having perceived the YD-HCP as hovering close the center, did vote in the right-of-center parties and voted out the HSP-Free Democrats but, significantly, by a very thin margin. Given the party alignment in the new Parliament, the election results signify a mere shift, rather than a turnabout which set the stage for nothing more substantial than outspokenness and a change in style toward issues awaiting resolution. For despite the mild but widespread dissatisfaction with the outgoing government, the task of framing credible and workable programs was made difficult by the new cabinet's disparate coalition partners whose tug and pull the YD-HCP leaders could already feel as they geared up for the local elections in October 1998.<sup>45</sup>

There were just too many different irons in the fire for the fruits of victory to come cheaply. As a further evidence of heterogeneity, under Orban's Premiership, unlike during the 1990-1994 Antall regime, former HSWP membership, to which over one-third of the initial government appointees owed up, poses no apparent obstacle. In reality, the new coalition's problems runs far deeper than ideological heterogeneity since beyond Orban's strategic goal of cobbling together a broad coalition of right-of center parties lies a fluid policy situation in which not even the permanence of YD-HCP alliance could be taken for granted.

Among the aligned and absorbed parties only the Independent Smallholders Party has a sizeable impact on Hungarian polity, especially when it came to issues involving minorities, land ownership,

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<sup>45</sup> The YD-HCP wanted every party not in the government to be counted among the opposition. The HSP-Free Democrat representatives objected, saying the CDPP, HJLP and HDPP could not be viewed as opposition since the HDPP received a deputy state secretaryship, the HJLP supports the new government, while the CDPP, although it gathered only 2.3 percent vote and was thus excluded from the Parliament, has prominent members currently active in the YD party. *HVG*, July 18, 1998, p. 81.

and terms of accession to the EU.<sup>46</sup> These issues are important, first, because the concerns of large-scale and small farms are plainly distinguishable and each group will likely attempt to convince the government that a crucial socio-economic sector is being threatened by entry into the EU. Secondly, the cleavage between urban and rural still means something in Hungary. Dilemmas of rural development and state protection for agricultural exports occupy both the Independent Smallholders and the HJLP who thus spearhead the collective manifestations of anxiety in the countryside.

Although the new Prime Minister exploited the bittersweet historical irony that the HSP, traditionally concerned with the welfare of the working class, had chosen to institute painful austerity measures, Orbán nevertheless realizes that any course that radically departs from his predecessor's policy line could only damage the YD-HCP's re-election prospects in 2002. Wisely focusing his coalition government's program on domestic concerns, he further restricted his purview to explaining why public security need be strengthened, the penal code tightened, and social injustice remedied. The publication on July 2, 1998, of the coalition government's legislative schedule along with Orbán's statement on domestic priorities constituted merely a set of intentions, without any specifics about their implementation. Since the population does not expect any dramatic impact from this government on the way the country is run, his policy options amounts to cautious temporising while external conditions remain in flux.

As for economic matters, the projected reduction of the income tax rate from 21 to 20.2 percent

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<sup>46</sup> Magyar Hírlap, June 9, 1998, p. 7. József Torgyán, Minister of Agriculture and Regional Development, consistently opposed foreign ownership, even the leasing, of land. RFE/RL NEWSLINE, Vol. 2, No. 159, Part II, 19 August 1998. His stance is similar to Egon Lansky's in the Czech Republic, who also wants to prevent citizens of the EU from purchasing property for a while; RFE/RL NEWSLINE, Vol. 2, No. 158, Part II, 18 August 1998. The right-wing Polish Accord movement likewise opposes Poland's accession to the EU because that threatens, in its view, farmers and surrenders Polish land and ownership to alien interests. RFE/RL NEWSLINE, Vol. 3, No. 80, Part II, 26 April 1999.

and that of social security payments by five percent, did indeed herald a real lessening of payroll deductions.<sup>47</sup> However, the promised lightening of burdens on wage and salary earners were based on assumptions that did not factor in the currency and market collapse in Russia, which by the end of 1998 gravely affected several export oriented sectors.<sup>48</sup> Obviously, the anticipated GDP growth along with the 4 percent budget deficit will have to be revised.

As these days a country's attractiveness depends on the stability of institutions, social tranquility, and astute management of external financial ties, the greatest challenge for the new Hungarian coalition will be to sustain an invigorated economy by dint of external orientation. This seems all the more crucial since in the wake of the Russian economy's collapse, some 2 billion dollar worth of portfolio investment pulled out of Hungary by the end of the summer. Although foreign direct investment is less volatile, closer attention will have to be paid to the payment balance<sup>49</sup> while coping with the consequences of lost exports.

More than before, therefore, much hinges on whether the new regime in Budapest will feel obliged to stick by its predecessor's painful course of macroeconomic policy. Thus far, the problems that had been identified during the spring election campaign are not being addressed. In fact, the government backtracks on several fronts. It has revealed that, after all, it is not quite correct to maintain that the state's share in the GDP's redistribution is too high; hence there is no need for its

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<sup>47</sup> Based on 11 percent inflation, a 5 to 6 percent growth of GDP, and a 4 percent shortfall in budget revenues; *HVG*, Vol. XX, No 36 (12 September 1998), pp. 11 and 21.

<sup>48</sup> Even though the Russian market amounted to 5 percent of total exports, the drastic reduction of delivery in chickens, *HVG*, 12 December 1998, pp. 118-119; glass jars (for preserved fruits and vegetables); *HVG* 19 December 1998, p.18; and Ikarus buses pp.109-110, puts severe financial burden on the economy.

<sup>49</sup> Ever since the early 1920s, Budapest displayed a propensity to take up money from abroad,--in contrast to the Czechs who traditionally shunned foreign credits.

drastic reduction.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the question of whether foreigners should be allowed to own land in Hungary, an issue on which the YD-HCP campaigned for a plebiscite in the pre-election period, has not yet been raised.<sup>51</sup> Instead, Orban cautiously reassured foreign investors that while his government would re-evaluate some social priorities, it would not veer from the larger economic goals. In this way he presumably would leave the previous regime's policy concerns about credibility, stability and economic progress essentially intact. Altogether, the Orban regime's economic policy seems to follow the previous government's program with the differences manifesting themselves more in terms of *tone than in the pace and direction* of it.

The main question remains therefore; what balance to strike between imports of modern technology, which aside from having a negative impact on current account deficits, could turn into a main source of pressure on the Forint, and the promise of improving the living standard, which raises the specter of increased inflation and budget deficit.<sup>52</sup> If it had been difficult to deal with this dilemma earlier, the Russian economic and financial troubles now created heightened uncertainty. On these grounds, the outlook definitely darkens when one looks farther ahead.

A predictable consequence of the new right-of-center government was a rise in the rhetorical threshold of ethnocultural grievances from which, however, responsible elements would do well to disassociate themselves. Years after signing the *basic and framework*<sup>53</sup> accords, Budapest could rightly expect the implementation of provisions intended to ensure educational and cultural rights

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<sup>50</sup> *HVG*, 1998 November 7, pp. 9-12.

<sup>51</sup> *HVG*, 1998 December 26, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Then Finance Minister designate László Urbán's interview. *HVG*, June 13, 1998, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> The European Framework Convention on the Protection of Minorities was ratified in early autumn 1998.

for Hungarians in near abroad since that is a core requirement of their continued ethnocultural existence. To help expedite that intent, most Parliamentary parties appear ready to help defray the cost of maintaining Hungarian cultural-educational institutions in Romania.<sup>54</sup> Any workable policy depends in part, of course, on being sensitive to the differences in outlook and capacities among the adjacent states involved as well as on the opportunities for economic and political cooperation. After all, a solid cooperative attitude could only develop if it rests on shared interests and joint accomplishments among neighboring states.

Members of the youthful Orban government, however, take their predecessor's achievements a bit too much for granted whenever they insist on compliance with the legal aspects of the stipulated conditions set down in the *framework* and *basic* treaties. That is why, of all the soundbites aired the strangest to date appears to be the nationalist ones. In view of how gravely this issue had bedeviled Hungary's relations with neighboring states, it is somewhat disconcerting to see the rise of a pedantic legalism since that can do little more than prompt resistance and polarize official stances. This is not merely a question of who might influence ethnocultural policy and how. It is rather a matter of balancing Budapest's position among three distinct target audiences: Hungarians at home and abroad,<sup>55</sup> governments in neighboring states, and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

In such triangular a nexus, one should not naively expect dramatic improvement in ethnocultural relations from any single accord since it is far more likely that a succession of partially executed deals will chip away at outstanding dilemmas. In fluid yet symbolically intense cases, *non-*

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<sup>54</sup> Such financial support to assure their functioning is presumably what Zsolt Németh, secretary on minorities in the Foreign Ministry had in mind. *HVG*, August 29, 1998, pp. 41-2.

<sup>55</sup> On this and related matters the HSP under László Kovács sees itself as a countervailing force to either the government or parliamentary parties whenever the latter appear wayward on some important issue. *Népszabadság*, June 5, p. 9, and September 6, 1998.

*binding* bilateral declarations can in fact bind a government if it wants to be looked upon favorably by the outside world. Thus aside from being fallacious to hanker after absolute certainty where a well-grounded hunch of having moved in the proper direction ought to be enough, challenging some laggard neighboring state might just have the unintended effect of grating on the ears of regional institutional decision-makers, with whom assertive nationalist-legalist stances never have set well. For this reason, there is ground for concern about those Hungarian right-of-center politicians today who could hardly be said to be in a reflective mood about the perils of sounding off about the “national interest.” Among the gravest offshoots is the likelihood that those very institutions upon whose mediation informed Hungarians count might not want to be dragged into acrimonious ethnic disputes, especially if governments treat their respective stances as if they represented zero-sum games.

István Csurka, founder of HJLP, to whom the government appears susceptible to the influence of “*international finance capital*” is a special case in point. While hardly a constructive suggestion, even if his economic discernment rests on the historic difference between the records of Budapest and Prague, one need not accept even half of Csurka’s reasoning to concede that he can sometimes have a point. For in a democratic political setting nationalists of every brand may set out their views in a coherent manner which may then be subjected to an open and rational debate. Though populist-nationalist manifestations are often seen as warning signals abroad, the very Parliamentary status of the HJLP presumably assures that its discourse will be public and regulated. In the light of extra-parliamentary extremism on the left and right,<sup>56</sup> Csurka’s parliamentary group might show restraint and circumspection. Thus instead of demonizing at the outset Csurka’s HJLP,<sup>57</sup> careful

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<sup>56</sup> Munkáspárt (unreformed communists) and the right-wing Magyar Népjóléti Szövetség (Hungarian Felfare Federation) in HVG 13, March 1999, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> The HJLP won 14 Parliamentary seat out of 386.

differentiation between its legitimate inputs and his uncanny ability to put his foot in his mouth might turn his party's Parliamentary presence into a contributing factor of governance.

In closing this section about the newly elected government's political objectives and style of leadership, one is reminded of how considerable a capacity elected and cultural elites have in shaping the goals, symbols, and images that constitute the foundation of any country's national identity and interests. As this brief review suggests, ruling elites employ their own vehicles to press home their points. In other words, the so-called "national struggles" to which members of the Hungarian center-right coalition like to refer are not the struggles of people at all but that of the *political elites engaged in capturing or maintaining their power*.

Since the burden of this paper was to appraise how the Spring 1998 elections in Hungary might affect foreign policy and security matters, the frequent assertions that accession to the EU remains an unequivocal and primary goal need be put in a proper context. It has been shown how and why in Hungarian foreign policy the premise of joining the Euro-Atlantic organizations has from the outset offered a clear-cut *conceptual* solution with regard to development and security. Meanwhile, as accession negotiations got under way, the *basic* and *framework* treaties began to transform state-to-state relations back to what they had been before the ethnocultural regions of Central Europe and the Balkans turned into exalted "patria"--as a consequence of which borders hardened. Still, it looks as if in Europe as a whole problems associated with stability and security may in the not too distant future also fall outside the exclusive purview of foreign relations. Of course, such a trend presupposes that the notion of security include an absence of state-to-state challenges, whether on grounds of territorial conflicts or minority related frictions. Above all, the future of ethnocultural affairs in Central Europe would seem to hinge on how balanced an interpretation the issues surrounding sovereignty and minority rights receive.

Conceivably, the Hungarian authorities could improve their position in regional matters if they were to seek out common ground with their neighboring states. Since Budapest can scarcely develop fully the country's potential unless embedded in a stable and democratic region, the leadership has a vested interest in taking a constructive part in the emergence and democratic consolidation of surrounding states. At the same time, it seems hard to envisage any satisfactory resolution of outstanding problems, including national security dilemmas, without enlisting Euro-Atlantic institutional guidance. Ever since the illusion of neutrality on the Austrian or Finnish pattern lost its topicality, Hungary's **security** policy rests even more squarely on the hitherto existing twin consciousness: recognition of its modest but valuable regional role that is commensurate with its size, location and aptitude and the need to fit in with Euro-Atlantic partners.

Yet as an October 1998 joint session of the Parliament's defense and foreign affairs committee suggests, unanimity is not to be expected over what this all means. Already over the enforcement of Yugoslav-Kosovo cease-fire by NATO warplanes, representatives of the HJLP voted against allowing NATO to use Hungarian airspace, while the HDF abstained. This may have stemmed as much from the country's susceptibility to spillover effects as from desire to strike a high political profile before the mid-October local elections.<sup>58</sup> As it happened, the electoral strength of the junior partners on the left and right drastically declined,<sup>59</sup> while the two major clusters, the HSW and YD-HCP solidified their positions.<sup>60</sup> This outcome attested to the electorate's continued wish to see younger politicians in power but without giving them the mandate to carry out extensive changes. In consequence, whatever vision this heterogenous right-of-center coalition can fashion during the

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<sup>58</sup> RFE/RL NEWSLINE Vol 2, No 199, Part II, 14 October 1998.

<sup>59</sup> *HVG*, 24 October 1998, p. 9ff.

<sup>60</sup> *HVG*, 26 December 1998, pp. 10ff.

remaining three years will determine mostly the *style* of governing since substantive decisions still require the imprimatur of a clear majority in Parliament.

In conclusion, with most everybody in Parliament accepting that Hungary's main interest lies in EU membership, there exists enough fundamental consensus to ride out economic turbulences. Given the government's precariously nuanced economic program, rancor over property rights and the free movement of labor could fuel pressures from agricultural interests bent on slowing down integration into EU. But any such rise in self-assertion, while not helpful, does not appear to be worrisome, in part because the Poles and Czechs have staked out nearly identical positions that signify deeper underlying problems than national preferences.

Moreover, integration into Euro-Atlantic structures has its cultural-emotional dimension that involves adaptation to a "we-feeling" as part of the new national identity. From a historical perspective, the whole transformation process from 1989 on means much less a milestone for Poland and the Czech Republic since these two countries had long experienced Western goodwill as bulwarks and allies prior to the communist takeovers. The Hungarian symptoms, on the other hand, involve identity questions by a people undergoing a particularly severe case of last-minute jitters. Hence the nearer and more concrete the prospect of Euro-Atlantic membership gets for Budapest, the greater is the emotional stress on account of "transiting" both historic and systemic divides.

By way of an epilogue, as a corollary of membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions, governments become increasingly less reluctant to get involved in situations and issues that earlier were considered internal affairs of states--due to an enhanced potential of immediate impact on their own country. For inasmuch as problems festering in some European states could effect others, materially and/or legally, the inclination for involvement rises, albeit with notable variations depending

on political affinity.<sup>61</sup> While such a causative link may in time become a generally recognized pattern, the coincidence of failed Kosovo peace talks in March near Paris with the ceremony of formal acceptance into NATO has created very special dilemmas for the new government in Budapest. For Hungary is the sole NATO country that has direct land and multiform transport connection with Yugoslavia's Vojvodina province where an ethnic Hungarian minority of over 300,000 (17 percent of local population) has lived in precarious circumstances ever since the revocation of regional autonomy and influx of Serbian refugees.<sup>62</sup>

Domestically, Budapest has likewise found itself in a difficult position on account of nationalists who fancy that Hungary's new status as NATO member has enhanced the government's bargaining power<sup>63</sup> try to complicate matters both by taking a holier-than-thou attitude on the stationing of NATO combat forces and by making irredentist claims.<sup>64</sup> Although poll data indicate that ca. 77 percent of the population rejected the raising of territorial demands,<sup>65</sup> the opposition HSP called on the government to disassociate itself from such irredentist proposals and demanded that no ground attack be launched from Hungary against Yugoslavia.<sup>66</sup> As a nervous uncertainty had been gripping

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<sup>61</sup> Witness the similarity of views on the Kosovo crisis between the Czech ruling socialists and the opposition socialists in Hungary.

<sup>62</sup> L. K. Urban, "Troubles in the Balkans: The View from Hungary," in C. P. Danopoulos and K. G. Messas, eds., *Crises in the Balkans*, Boulder, Col: Westview Press, 1997, pp. 241-256.

<sup>63</sup> The new NATO members are not able to reject the membership applications of subsequent invitees.

<sup>64</sup> REF/RL NEWSLINE Vol. 3, No. 84, Part II, 30 April 1999.

<sup>65</sup> *HVG*, XXI, 17 (1 May 1999), p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> REF/RL NEWSLINE Vol. 3, No. 87, Part II, 5 May 1999; *HVG*, XXI, 18 (8 May 1999), p. 9.

political leaders, Hungarian intellectuals weighed in with an appeal for a political solution.

Meanwhile representatives of all six parliamentary parties agreed that NATO's discretionary power should not be curtailed and the issue of autonomy be left to the ethnic Hungarian minority in Vojvodina.<sup>67</sup> Visits by dignitaries, like Nelson Mandela's to Budapest, are utilized to give voice to the desire for a negotiated settlement and to show sympathy for victims on both sides.

NATO decisions may be brought by consensus, which in principle gives Budapest a right to veto measures if it finds them injurious to national interest. But since it would not be in the current Hungarian government's interest to be confronted with charges of breaking ranks with NATO's unified (sic!) front, the once optimistic vision of the future suddenly became overshadowed by unforeseeable major developments over which exposed small states do not have much say.

Whatever negotiating stance NATO and the several mediators may eventually adopt *vis-a-vis* Belgrade, however, the political elite in Budapest would clearly prefer a kind of NATO peace-making strategy that does not turn the Serbs into embittered hostile neighbors.

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<sup>67</sup> REF/RL NEWSLINE Vol. 3, No. 86, Part II, 4 May; No. 93, Part II, 13 May 1999.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

EU = European Union

FD = Free Democrats (Association of)

GDP = Gross Domestic Product

HCP = Hungarian Civic Party

HDF = Hungarian Democratic Forum

HDPP = Hungarian Democratic People's Party

HJLP = Hungarian Justice and Life Party

HSP = Hungarian Socialist Party (Successor to communist HSWP of 1989)

IMF = International Monetary Fund

CDPP = Christian Democratic People's Party

OECD = Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OSCE = Organization for European Cooperation and Development (at the December 1994  
Budapest meeting its name was changed from *Conference on ECD*)

U.N. = United Nations

YD = Young Democrats (Association of)

YD-HCP coalition (The core of post-election right-of-center government)