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## Political geographical research of the Balkans in Hungary

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### **Abstract**

The Hungarian research on the Balkans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was devoted to the complete peninsula in its geopolitical frame. The internal problematic was studied from a historical and political perspective. The intention to formulate the presumptive interests towards the Balkans by the Hungarian state, economy and society was in the political geographical research always present. In this paper three characteristic periods of the research on the Balkans (out of five distinctive) by the Hungarian political geography were focused upon. They are characterised by historical events and changes of the Hungarian state borders. The political geographical research adapted itself to a significant extent to the historically circumstances within the society. Often financial opportunities played a significant role.

**Keywords:** political geography, historical geography, Hungary, the Balkans.

## Introduction

The historically changing structural relationship between Hungary and the Balkans was the most comprehensively expressed by the historian Makkai. »For a whole millennium Hungary played the role of a gate between the Balkans and Western Europe: there were times when the smaller states of Balkans found their political survival under the shelter of the Hungarian empire but anyhow Hungary was always an important factor in their lives. During the first half millennium of our history it often seemed that the Balkans could belong to Hungary, yet during the second half of the millennium the Balkans invaded Hungary several times«. (Makkai, L. 1942, p. 71.)

Hungarian Balkans-research has a long history and changed several times radically as a result of the reorganising relationship of Hungary and the Balkans. It started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century »The Hungarian Balkans-research is almost as old as the Hungarian historiography« in 1942 (by Gál, I. ed. 1942, p. 4.). The Hungarian historiography maintained its engagement towards the Balkans until present times. However, the field of research became more complex; first ethnography, philology and since the 1830s the evolving Hungarian natural science joined.

Several excellent Hungarian scientists considered the Balkans research as one of the main scientific activities of their lives. Kánitz, F. F. (1829-1904) – an artist, cartographer, geographer - internationally known as 'Columbus of Balkans', the historian Thallóczy (1856–1916) – who at the same time was the governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina – received the title »Mobile Balkans Institute« from his contemporaries. The geologist, ethnographer and geographer baron Nopcsa (1877–1933) earned from his contemporaries the title »Geologist of the Balkans«, since he played an especially important role in the investigation of Albania.

The modern Hungarian economic expectations towards the Balkans were defined in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and they were enfolded in connection with the canalisation of »Iron Gate« and the control of the Lower Danube. The railway constructions were accompanied by significant debates between Hungary and the Balkans as regards both, the direction of the tracks and the quality of linkages.

The Hungarian political geographical Balkans-researches until 1990 – depending on the arrangement of bilateral relationships – at least can be divided into five periods:

- the first period until 1918, when the political geographical research was inspired by imperialistic ambitions based on some historic legal foundations,
- in the second period between 1918–1945 preliminarily the elaboration of the consequences of World War I. and the tasks and opportunities, deriving from the new situation determined the main trend and aspirations of political geographic research,
- in the third, short period between 1945–1948, when the democratic development opportunities were partly still open, the investigation of long term co-operation was launched.
- the fourth period is a time of sharp opposition between the Yugoslavia and Hungary (1949-1959), after June of 1948, the declaration of COMINFO on Yugoslavia, and formation of political division of Balkans,
- the fifth period is a research period of politically divided Balkans (1957-1990).

The Hungarian Balkans research has reached its most important results in the first three periods, therefore we examine these periods in detail.

## Imperialistic efforts within the Hungarian political geography

Modern Hungarian geography was institutionalised since the 1860s. One of the first tasks of the new discipline was to draw the new country image and within this field the exploration of the geographic situation and the environment of the country. One of the founders of the Hungarian geography, Hunfalvy, J. (1820–1888) analysed the natural geographic relationships of the country and drew the conclusion, that: »The Hungarian empire is located in the south-eastern part of Europe...« (Hunfalvy, J. 1863, p. 53). The logic behind this definition is practically that the territory of the historic Hungary was significantly larger (325.400 km<sup>2</sup>) than at present (93.000 km<sup>2</sup>) Hungary at the time comprised several Balkans elements. The definition of the macro regional location of Hungary was also influenced by the fact that Hunfalvy followed the spatial approach of German geography.

The most significant personality of the imperialistic Hungarian political geography towards the Balkans was Havass, R. (1852–1927). The informed public considered Havass by 1913 as »the eager and destined champion of Hungarian imperialism« and in fact, this title was meant positively. Havass was not occupied in science but in the private sphere. He was wealthy and trav-

elled several times around the Balkans and Asia Minor. In 1887 he was elected as the vice president and later, in 1916 as the honorary president of the Hungarian Geographic Society. He devoted a significant part of his means to the development of Hungarian geography and to publishing scientific works (Havass, R. 1889, 1902, 1906, 1911, 1912, 1913).

Havass himself exercised an extremely wide scale of scientific publishing activity and besides that he was the first realising the significance of the political impact of daily papers and periodicals. Havass believed that as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy Hungary was not able to follow a colonial expansion policy overseas similar to e.g. England, France or Italy. Therefore the Balkans seemed to be the right economic and political expansion space for Hungary, since Hungary ruled before 1526 the Northern part of the Balkans anyway and this fact equipped the strengthening new Hungary with natural historic rights and responsibilities.

The development of the Adriatic and the seaport Fiume/Rijeka as well as the consideration of the chances for economic position building in the region and later the re-annexation of Dalmatia by Hungary exercised Havass at the beginning. Later on he focused on the whole Balkan region. In 1912 Havass became the president of the Economic Geography Section of the Hungarian Geographic Society and therefore he had better opportunities to disseminate his views on the Balkans. By refining the programme of the section he set the target of the regular scientific geographic research on the Balkans. As Havass formulated: its geographic location, the advantageous transportation tracks on the Danube and by railway nearly serve us the economic hegemony on the Balkans on a silver plate.

The Hungarian economic circles saw the Balkans as a vital interest both before and after the War. The Museum for Trade launched in 1914 a series of 20 volumes (entitled »Balkans markets after the War) with the intention to prepare for the post-war situation and deepening the commercial relations. The published volumes described cities, regions and countries in detail.

Count Teleki (1879–1941) – the founder of modern Hungarian geography – facilitated a significant scientific activity on the Balkans. In 1914, following his recommendations the Hungarian Academy of Sciences set up the so-called Eastern Committee with the responsibility to investigate the Middle East and the Balkans. Under the leadership of Teleki an independent Balkans sub-committee was established within the Committee and its most important task was to research the Balkans. The committee financed significant research activities in specific areas of the Balkans. These researches were in a peculiar

way not interrupted by the World War I. and until the summer of 1918 the already running natural scientific work was continued in the Serb territories occupied by the Monarchy.

In 1916 Teleki had the intention to launch an independent scientific periodical entitled »The Balkans Research«. Together with Cholnoky, J. Teleki formulated in a memorandum the necessity of establishing an Eastern Committee of the Hungarian Geographic Society with the preliminary task to explore the lands of origin of the Hungarians, the eastern roots of the Magyars, the eastern space and the Balkans (Teleki, P. – Cholnoky, J. 1916).

During the war Györfly, I. synthesised the historic and political geographical inheritance of Hungary's old Balkan policy and its presumed than impacts (Györfly, I. 1916). The Hungarians represented the Roman Catholic Church and for centuries mediated European impacts towards the majority of the Balkans. Györfly considered this mission as realistic and desirable for the future and he believed that the Magyars »... deliver the culture for the Serbs, that they actually need more than a Large Serbia« (Györfly, I. 1916. p. 37.).

A Balkans Research Bureau was set up during the war in Temesvár, which considered the research on the Balkans and the comprehensive analysis of the Hungarian–Balkans relationship as its essential task. Among the geographic publications of the bureau two papers by Fodor, F. – than being active as secondary school teacher in Karánsebes – stand out (Fodor, F. 1917/a, 1917/b). Encouraged by Havass, Fodor turned to the intensive investigation of the political geographic issues of the Balkans.

Since the 1910s the Hungarian Geographic Society continuously initiated the publication of a foreign language volume describing Hungary comprehensively and realistically. The volume was completed and published but only in Hungarian by 1918 (Lóczi, L. ed. 1918). The book elaborated the historical Hungary with a rather legal – historic approach and defined in territorial terms the following categories:

- Hungary as Motherland,
- Fiume (Rijeka),
- Associate countries: a) really united, integrated associate countries (Croatia–Slavonia), b) not integrated associate countries (Dalmatia)
- Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The volume was rather moderate in comparison with the than nationalist even chauvinist mentality of the era. There are no extremist formulations in the volume yet it consistently enforced the historical-legal approach and attitude.

## Period between the two wars

The Peace Treaty of Trianon in 1920 not only disconnected Croatia from Hungary (the majority of the Hungarian political elite agreed anyway that Croatia had the right to decide on its own whether it wished to maintain the common state with Hungary or to join the new Yugoslav state formation) but significant parts of the Motherland were annexed to the new Serb–Croatian–Sloven Kingdom. Besides areas with the majority of Yugoslav population, territories settled exclusively by Hungarians were annexed too.

Within the newly drawn state borders, the issue of launching the Balkans research was first raised in Szeged. In 1920 the University qualified Fodor as the honorary lecturer of the University in the topic of »economic geography of Hungary and the Balkans«. Fodor started his university lectures, yet he soon went on with them in Budapest since his habilitation was extended to the newly organised Faculty of Economics in Budapest too.

After World War I, Hungarian science continuously emphasised the importance of the Balkans research. The general opinion was that the Hungarians must arrange their relationships with the neighbouring countries. The Review of Foreign Affairs published a special edition on the Balkans in 1922. The studies of the special edition approached – covering almost all possible fields – the internal issues of the Balkans and the possible components of the relationship of the new Hungary and the new Balkans based on the new general situation.

The Eastern Commercial Academy founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was integrated in 1920 into the newly organised Faculty of Economics and operated until 1931 as an independent »Eastern Institute«. The institute mainly carried out partially linguistic and partially economic education yet Teleki lectured also on political geography.

By 1937 Fodor already formulated his opinion according to which time had come for a Hungarian-Yugoslav rapprochement. Alongside the opinion of Fodor the necessity of rapprochement was realised in both countries. The rapprochement was also pushed and encouraged by historical, political and economic factors (Fodor, F. 1937).

From among the representatives of the Hungarian geographic science Szabó, P. Z. investigated the Balkans issue, the Croatian – Hungarian relationships, and the Balkans mission of some Hungarian cities (like Pécs and Szeged). The bases of Szabó's approach, which were published several times were that »the Carpathian or Magyar Basin and the south Slav Balkans are one geographical unit«. In the interest of this he pushed the establishment of a

South Hungarian Research Institute. The task of the institute would have been to explore the geographic, historical, linguistic, ethnographic, etc. relationships and mutual impacts between the Carpathian Basin and the Balkan (Szabó, P. Z. 1942).

Szabó elaborated his plan on the South Institute and the South Association supporting the institute in detail (Szabó, P. Z. 1942). In the interpretation of Szabó the South Institute would have functioned as a historical–political geographical research institute. Its research field would have covered the Carpathian Basin and the entire Balkans. The headquarters of the institute would have been in Pécs. A special objective of the Institute should have been the long-term strategic foundation of Hungarian foreign policy.

In the autumn of 1942 in Újvidék (Novi Sad) the Eastern Commercial College was established as a strategic institution of long-range preparation of Hungarian eastern trade. The Department of Geography led by Kádár carried out at the same time economic and political geographic education and research. The geographic training was focused in the first two semesters on the Balkans in the last two semesters on the Middle East. The independent Balkan Institute was established within the College with the target to introduce separate courses on the Balkans (Kádár, L. 1945). The Balkan Seminar announced by the institute elaborated the problematic of the Balkan throughout four semesters.

In 1940 the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society set up within its own frameworks the so-called Balkans Committee, prior to the outbreak of the war against Yugoslavia. According to the programme of the Balkans Committee approved at its foundation the committee should have been engaged with scientific research, with special emphasis on the investigation of geographic and political geographic processes. In 1941 the Balkans Research Institute was established at Budapest as a basic institute of regional political research.

Unfortunately in 1941 Hungary joined the military actions against Yugoslavia (though only formally after their end). Teleki as Prime Minister could neither support nor identify himself with the action and finally he committed suicide. Hungary was the first to acknowledge the independence declared by Croatia and strove for close relationships with its new neighbours.

The activities of the Balkans Committee of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Society – due to the outbreak of the war actions – shifted towards daily politics and propaganda. The »Balkans Booklets« published by the Committee could have grown into a scientific periodical, yet due to the difficulties caused by the war it could never become a really significant scientific platform.

The volume summarising the long-range Balkans tasks of Hungarian science was published during the World War (Gál, I. ed. 1942). Its primary statement was, that: »Hungarian intellectual life and especially its scientific quality achieved more in the field of investigating the Balkans than any other nation« (Gál, I. ed. 1942. p. 3.). The Hungarian science was motivated to research the Balkans mainly by national political questions, yet the changes of the political courses naturally influenced the opportunities and frameworks of research.

Szabó summarised in 1943 the results of his political geographic studies on the Balkans, and drew the geopolitical system of political power relations of the Balkans. The most important axis of power of the Balkans runs between Zagreb and Istanbul dividing the peninsula into two different territories with different characters and interests. The Northern part has rather central European interests while the southern territories show a Mediterranean character (Szabó, P. Z. 1943).

## **Studies on the Balkans between 1945 – 1948**

Following the loss of World War II, the Hungarian – Balkans interstate relationship system found itself in a new situation. The new Hungarian government (despite the massacre by Yugoslav partisans against the Hungarian population of the Voivodine) strove for the improvement of its relationship to Yugoslavia. The Southern part of Hungary was occupied by Soviet, Yugoslav and Bulgarian Armies.

After signing the Peace Treaty of Paris in 1947 it was clear to everyone that the growth of the territory of the country prior to and during the war became null and void. The need of the new foreign political orientation was formulated: »The Hungarians used to believe to have a mission towards the West. Now they have to realise and believe that they have a mission towards the East too« (Elekes, D. ed. 1947, p. 7.).

The country had to define its own spatial character in a complex political space: Danube-Valley, South-East-Europe, East-Europe and Europe. The Hungarian scientific and political literature elaborated preliminary in the frameworks of the macro-region of the »Danube-Landscape« (Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania and possibly Bulgaria) (Radisics, E. ed. 1946). Yet there were attempts to think in terms of the region of East-Europe and South-Europe too.



South Europe appeared in the Hungarian political approaches after the World War mostly in the spirit of historical living together, yet this spatial category had other elements too: »In South-East-Europe almost all neighbouring countries dispute the key position (of Hungary). Yet it is inevitable that Hungary is the most central space which is surrounded by the rest like a wreath« (Elekes, D. ed. 1947, p. 16.).

According to the interstate relationships the opportunities of scientific research were modified too. In the new situation research had to redefine the geographic and political situation of Hungary. »Hungary is in terms of its geographical situation a Danube state, therefore it is both military and from the perspective of transportation a transit country: yet its culture prior to the Christian culture binds it to the East. Therefore due to its geographical and ethnological location and with its western Christian culture Hungary is located at the border between the East and West« (Gáldi, I. ed. 1947, p. 241.).

The research of the relationship between the Balkans and its nations and Hungary was placed in the system of relationships of a larger geographic unit (East-Europe) (Gál, I. ed. 1947). At this time the take-over of power by communists was not yet fulfilled in Hungary yet the political transformation affected the research in a new way. The investigated space of relationships was wider than the zone occupied by the Soviets.

In the new situation the papers analysing historical, literal, and cultural relationships emphasised the positive impacts of the historical living together, the enrichment of each others cultures in terms of Hungarian – Russian, Romanian, Austrian, Bulgarian, Serb, Croatian, Slovene, Albanian, Turkish, and Greek relationships.

The Balkan Research Institute facilitated in 1948 a national scale and significance series of lectures entitled »Economic relationships of the Balkans«. The lectures covered almost all branches of economy. In the post-war situation especially the heavy industry expected good opportunities in the establishment of Balkans markets. The leadership of the Hungarian steel industry expected, that the Balkans will be an unlimited market for Hungarian steel products, since the steel production of the Balkans with a population of 60 Million fall short of Hungary's counting only eight Million inhabitants (Tánczos, L. 1948, p. 3.).

Mendöl, T. - professor of human geography of Budapest University and at the same time President of the Hungarian Geographical Society - published in 1948 the first modern Hungarian geographic monograph on the Balkans covering almost all issues of the region (Mendöl, T. 1948). The Balkans appeared

for Mendöl in its natural, historical, social, economic and political complexity at the same time.

## **Opposition towards Yugoslavia's geopolitics (1949-1957)**

In the summer of 1948 the Information Bureau of the Communist Parties condemned the internal and foreign policy of the Yugoslav Communist Party, and through this action it suddenly interrupted the development of Hungarian-Yugoslav relationships. Following the announcement published in the scientific periodical of the Party of Hungarian Workers the publication opportunities of scientific research was eliminated, and from this time on only political pamphlets opposing Tito and Yugoslavia were published.

In 1949 the Hungarian Geographical Society was prohibited because of its political and scientific activity between the two wars period. Most of the researchers of political geography had to change their scientific carrers (had to turn to be a physical geographer) or were dismissed from the research institutions and universities. Direct consequence of these dismissals was the complete paralysis of the Hungarian political geography.

The rudest "scientific analysis" was published in 1952 - probably partly translated from Russian - (ANON. 1952, pp. 187-195), in which Yugoslavia was named a Fascist state, and Tito a Fascist. The text is full with emotional, direct political elements. Compared to the analyses of the state and their leader Tito, the peoples of Yugoslavia in this work gets a very positive record.

We can not see these publications as "scientific analyses", just as political provocations in the bilateral connections, and specially in the Hungarian social life, with special influences on the south Slav minorities.

In the autumn of 1956 - because of the kidnapping of leaders of Hungarian Revolution the bilateral connections turned very bad. There were only very low level political and economic connections between the two countries left. The "scientific discussion" was much more calm compared to the former period (Kovács, J. 1957).

About the socialist transformation of Bulgaria and Albania positive geographical papers were published in these years. These countries were taken forward ahead of capitalist, imperialist Balkan states.

## Political geography of the divided Balkans

After 1957 the level of direct political influences on geography decreased. The political geography in Hungary turned to be a "Marxist political geography", under the leadership of Radó, S. The most correct physical, economical and political geographical analyses on the Balkans were published in 1968 in the Hungarian geography (Marosi, S. - Sárfalvi, B. eds. 1968).

In the absence of significant political geographical research - except for a few single Balkans countries - it was modern history and political science which examined the questions of the XIX-XX. century transformation of the modern Balkans (Niederhauser, E. 1972).

## Conclusion

The Hungarian Balkans research within geography approached the whole of the peninsula and its internal problematic from a historical and political perspective. The intention to formulate the presumptive Balkans interests of the Hungarian state, economy and society was always present in the political geographical research. The three characteristic periods of the Balkans research of the Hungarian political geography were determined by historical events and the changes of the state borders. Therefore the political geographical research adapted itself to a significant extent to the historically changing conditions and financial opportunities.

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## Geopolitične študije Balkana na Madžarskem

### Povzetek

Madžarske raziskave Balkana so bile v 20. stoletju posvečene celotnemu polotoku oziroma geopolitični stvarnosti, ki se je intenzivno spreminjala. Problematika držav in družbenih sistemov je bila obravnavana skozi prizmo zgodovine in obdobje politične realnosti. V celotnem obdobju se je izkazoval poseben interes do dogodkov na Balkanskem polotoku. Madžarska država, njena ekonomija in družba so vzpodbujali tovrstne raziskave. Vendar je bil izražen interes vedno selektiven - pač glede na družbene razmere, ki so vladale na Madžarskem in v sosedstvu. Načeloma lahko geopolitične raziskave Balkana razdelimo v pet obdobji od katerih smo podrobneje obdelali tri: (1) obdobje pred 1. svetovno vojno, (2) obdobje med obema svetovnima vojnama in (3) obdobje uniformne sovjetske ideologije med leti 1945 in 1948. Gledanje na razmere na Balkanu implicirajo v glavnem zgodovinski dogodki in razsežnost madžarskega državnega teritorija. Geopolitična znanost se je prilagodila, oziroma kar isto- vetila z zgodovinskimi danostmi družbe v kateri je delovala. Pogosto pa so tudi finančni razlogi določali smer raziskovanja.