

## CENTRAL EUROPE OBSERVED FROM PARIS BY A HUNGARIAN: FERENC FEJTŐ, A THINKER WITH TWO HOMELANDS

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COBISS 1.02

During the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a large number of intellectuals were forced to leave Hungary for political reasons. Many of them played an important role in the cultural and political life of their new home countries. Ferenc Fejtő, who today enjoys a considerable reputation in France, was born in 1909 in Nagykanizsa, Hungary. Fejtő's family was a real Middle European family: his paternal grandfather was a German-speaking Czech Jew born near Prague. In 1849 he moved to Hungary, where he became gradually Magyarized. He entered the publishing business in Nagykanizsa and played a part in the Magyarization of the town, which at that time was inhabited mostly by Germans and Croats. His maternal grandfather, also of Jewish origin, was born in Kiskőrös, Hungary and later worked at the railway station in Zagreb (at the time Zagreb belonged to Hungary). Fejtő's mother was born in Zagreb and the maternal branch of the family was entirely Croatianized. His mother died in 1914 and his father later married a Serbian Christian, the daughter of a Hungarian father and a Serb mother. Despite her Hungarian name, at the time of her wedding Fejtő's stepmother could hardly speak Hungarian, so she spoke in Serbian and German.

In this unusually ramified family mixed marriages were not uncommon, and all Fejtő's relatives living in Zagreb converted to Christianity. The members of the family who married Croats and Italians lived in different parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They spoke different languages at home but since everyone spoke German they used it as a kind of lingua franca. Fejtő also spoke German when, as a child, he visited his relatives living in Milan and Brescia, or when he lived in the family's summer residence outside Udine. When the Austrian Empire disintegrated, the members of the family became citizens of different states, but Fejtő continued to maintain relations with them.

From 1919 Fejtő studied at the gymnasium of the Piarist order where he was confronted with anti-Semitism and Hungarian irredentist ideas. He later converted to Christianity but was unable to accept irredentism. In the early 1930s he was introduced to Marxism. He joined the Communist Party (which led to his imprisonment for a few months) and became a good friend of the greatest Hungarian poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Attila József. In 1934 they both turned against the Communists and tended instead towards social democracy. In 1938, as a result of one of his writings, he was sued for class agitation. At this point he escaped to France through Yugoslavia. Between 1944 and 1974 he worked for the AFP, commenting on the news from the Communist world. In November 1952 he was the AFP's special correspondent at the

6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the League of Communists in Ljubljana, where he happened to meet Krleža and Tito. Between 1972 and 1982 he was the director of the Soviet and Eastern European Seminary at the Institut d'Études Politiques. From 1945 he was a member of the editorial staff of the periodical *Espirit* and a contributor to other significant French and Italian journals. He also wrote several books.<sup>1</sup> Five topics from Fejtő's thinking and writings on the Central European region are presented below:

1. Fejtő won most acclaim with his book *The History of the People's Democracies*,<sup>2</sup> which gave him his first major recognition in France. This two-volume work has been translated into 16 languages and has become a standard text at the universities of five continents. The first part was published in 1952. The book was the first work to provide a comprehensive analysis of Central and Eastern Europe in the period 1945–1952. The second part – published in 1969 – dealt with the period from Stalin's death to 1968. In this book Fejtő condemns the pre-war political leadership of the countries of the region, but rejects the idea that some of the peoples of the region were collectively guilty. He considers the tragic post-war lot of this region to be the result both of expansionist Soviet foreign policy and of the carelessness of the Western powers. The author emphasizes that the Soviets reached their goals with the assistance of leaders trained in Moscow, who exercised their authority with the support of the Red Army. These countries adapted themselves to Moscow's demands in their public administration, economy and culture. This resulted in a distortion of the reforms aimed at modernizing their economies, something vitally necessary if they were to catch up with the developed regions of Europe. This initial point makes it clear that Fejtő, who considered himself a social democrat, observed the Yugoslav attempts at reform with more sympathy than those of the other socialist countries, although he was not entirely uncritical. (In this essay I deal only with those parts of the book which relate to Yugoslavia.)

Fejtő also presents the differences in the views of the followers of A. Hebrang and S. Zujović on the one hand, and of Tito, Kardelj and Kidrič on the other. He points out that Hebrang's side kept the real limits of the Yugoslav economy in view. Tito's side on the other hand regarded political considerations as more important than economic considerations. Tito did not accept the path proposed by Stalin, since this would have resulted in turning Yugoslavia into the granary of Eastern Europe and ignoring the development of industry. According to Fejtő the early differences between Tito and Stalin were already apparent when, in 1947, Tito's parliamentary speech on the Five-Year Plan only mentioned the Soviet Union once and contained no reference at all to Stalin. Fejtő also presents the circumstances of the dispute between Tito and

<sup>1</sup> Fejtő Ferenc, *Budapesttől Párizsig: Emlékeim*, Budapest: Magvető, 1990 (original title: *Mémoires: De Budapest à Paris*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Fejtő Ferenc, *A nép demokráciák története*, Budapest – Paris: Magvető Kiadó–Magyar Füzetek, 1991 (original title: *Histoire des démocraties populaires*, Paris: Seuil, 1952; 2. Après Staline, Paris: Seuil, 1969).

Stalin and the dispute between Yugoslavia and the Cominform. He considers that Yugoslavia would willingly have accepted the Soviet Union's support over the Trieste problem (the Balkan confederation case), and even over the attainment of the Five-Year Plan, but that it rejected the subordination of the Yugoslav state, police, army, foreign policy and economy to the Soviet Union.

Further on he describes the internal conflicts of the Yugoslav Communists and their unsuccessful attempt to maintain cooperation with the Soviet Union – unsuccessful, since Stalin, contrary to their expectations, opted for total opposition. This resulted in the anti-Yugoslavia Rajk Trial held in Hungary. In the light of the fact that Tito refused to appear before the Comintern, the author believes that the Rajk Trial was merely a substitute for action against Tito. At the time of Fejtó's visit to Ljubljana in 1952, Tito told the author that his co-workers acknowledged his objectivity. The Stalinist French Left, at the same time, attacked him heavily.

In the second volume of his book Fejtó describes Yugoslav attempts at reform in the 1960s. He calls these processes, which began in 1961, the 'second Yugoslav revolution'. Fejtó mentions the government crisis, unprecedented in any Communist country, that broke out in Slovenia in 1966 when Prime Minister Janko Smole lost his majority in Parliament and was left with no choice but to resign. His resignation was not withdrawn until Parliament and the Central Committee reached a compromise. Although the background of this event is not clarified, because the description is much too brief, this piece of information deserves attention since it is not even mentioned in, for example, Milan Predan's book on the governments of Slovenia.<sup>3</sup>

Fejtó considers that in the late 1960s divisions were perceptible among the authorities but that simultaneously, with the support of the army, Yugoslavia was turning into a presidential republic, with the result that, for a while, the army became the symbol of unity of the state. He also considers that the survival of the Yugoslav state could only be achieved through the radical reform of the institutions and the elimination of centralism. He points out that the nations of Yugoslavia had reached a level of development that was already dissonant with paternalist patronage.

The 1991 Hungarian edition of the book contains an epilogue written in 1989. Here, Fejtó analyses the problems of the self-governing system, stresses the necessity of political reforms, and takes note of contemporary processes in Slovenia. He believes that the army refused to employ force against the Albanians and made efforts to prevent conflicts between the Serbs and the Albanians. In his view the headquarters of the army wanted to stay neutral in the conflict between the nationalities, and remained faithful to the idea of the federation. He recognizes the nationalist quality of Milošević's politics, but expresses his hope that it was not Milošević's intention to stir up the conflict between Serbs and Croats, and that he did not want the Slovenes, who had the most realistic possibility of becoming economically independent, and the Bosnians and Macedonians who were protesting against the Serbian hegemony, to turn against him.

<sup>3</sup> Milan Predan, *Vse slovenske povojne vlade*, Maribor: Založba za alternativno teorijo, 1990.

2. Fejtő finished his monumental book on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1988.<sup>4</sup> He considered it his second main work. At the time he was accused of showing a too ideal picture of the age of the Dual Monarchy. Fejtő admitted that he felt a certain nostalgia for the age in which he had grown up but elsewhere stated that this nostalgia was for the missed opportunity that the Monarchy represented. The book, in any case, is very critical in tone. Fejtő criticizes the behavior of the land-owning class as well as autocracy and anti-modernization. He also mentions the misery of the peasants and anti-Semitism. It is true, however, that in his opinion the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was a state with a more liberal system than that of the regions to the east of it. According to Fejtő the Monarchy, despite all its problems, underwent significant social, political and economic development.

Two themes from the book, which studies the life of the Monarchy from several points of view, are particularly worth underlining: these are the question of national conflicts and the problem of disintegration. Fejtő blames Hungarian politicians for believing themselves superior and despising non-Hungarians. This led to a situation in which they opposed Vienna even when it was right. Fejtő also criticizes the Hungarian influence on the foreign policy of the Monarchy. As a matter of fact Hungarians were sympathetic to the Prussians, because they considered them a remedy for the centralism of Vienna. They thought that without the Austrian defeat at Königrätz, the Dual Monarchy, which was advantageous for the Hungarian ruling class, would not have come into existence. They admired Prussia's military organization, its school system and its technical advances. They tried to find support in the anti-Slavism of Prussian politicians in order to maintain their power over the Slavs.

The Hungarian political élite was to blame for the failure of Vienna's attempt to federalize and democratize the Monarchy. This became obvious in 1907 when Vienna introduced universal suffrage in the perpetual provinces and the Hungarian ruling class refused to accept this reform. They were afraid that the radical and national opposition, already represented in Parliament, would join forces with the social democrats, Slavs and Romanians, and that the land-owning class would lose its dominance. Fejtő, considering the attempts of each nation of the Monarchy, believed that though disruptive forces were undeniably present within the Monarchy, considerable cohesive forces were also in operation. In his opinion the collapse of the Monarchy was not accidental since its dismemberment was already decided a year and a half before the end of the war. There were alternatives to disintegration, such as the federalization of the Monarchy, which appeared to have supporters at the Imperial Court of Vienna after the death of Francis Joseph.

On the one hand Fejtő stresses that the Hungarian and Austrian ruling classes which refused to grant equality of status or the right of self-government to the other nationalities, and which clung to their privileges, had a large share of the responsi-

<sup>4</sup> Fejtő Ferenc, *Rekviem egy hajdanvolt birodalomért: Ausztria-Magyarország szétrombolása*, Budapest: Atlantisz, 1990, 1997 (original title: *Requiem pour un empire défunt: Histoire de la destruction de l'Autriche-Hongrie*, Paris: Lieu Commun, 1988).

lity for the war and social problems. On the other hand he believes that the fate of the Central European nations was determined not by themselves (since no-one cared for their opinions), but by Western statesmen, who considered the Austro-Hungarian Empire a reactionary, clerical, anti-democratic and aggressive formation of states and a prison of nations. In this context, alongside the introduction of historical relations and personal connections which influenced historical events, he emphasizes in particular the role of Clemenceau, whom he considered chauvinist. Vienna's growing aggressiveness towards Serbia made the previously pro-Austrian Clemenceau a relentless enemy of Austria. Clemenceau's view of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was that the ruling circles of Vienna 'with the object of winning in the East, lost the West'.

Fejtő also considers important the anti-Monarchy activities of Masaryk and Beneš, whom he called geniuses of propaganda. He points out that Beneš, who referred to the principle of the nation's right of self-government, ignored without hesitation this policy, designed to protect the legitimacy of the successor states, when he wanted to abolish the historical borders at the expense of Hungarians in order to have a common border with Yugoslavia. Fejtő emphasizes the fact that the new states were no less ethnically mixed than the Empire itself. This means that the victors did not adopt Wilsonian policies. He writes that 'it was clear even before 1918 that in the case of dividing the Empire the coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks, Germans and Hungarians, Serbs and Croats, and Hungarians and Rumanians – even in the case of democratic conditions – would be far less easy than the coexistence of Czechs and Austrians in the days of the Hapsburgs'. In his epilogue Fejtő stresses that his conclusion (that Austria-Hungary did not disintegrate but was forcibly dismantled), is of no practical importance at all. Thus without actually stating it explicitly, he disassociates himself from those who call for a revision of the borders.

3. Fejtő considers himself Central European, which is to be understood in a quite complex way. He claims to be Hungarian and a meta-nationalist, and the simultaneous advocate of federalism and regional cooperation. He says that while he also enjoys living in Italy and New York he has two homelands: Hungary and France.

'I consider my Central European self-consciousness more valuable than the various rival national prides represented in this region just as I consider Europe more important than Central Europe or Euro-Atlantic integration more important than the still unorganized Europe.' Geographically, he regards the former Hapsburg-dominated region as the hub of Central Europe. Fejtő draws attention to the number of different cultures and mentalities that exist in this area and regards the long-lived imperial administrative system as its main feature. This system has left its mark on the buildings as well as on moral norms.

Fejtő belongs among those who count the region's coffee-house culture, gastronomy, the popularity of opera and operetta, and the middle-class way of living, rooted in the *Biedermaier* style, to be among the collective characteristic features of this

area. He belongs among those who claim that Jews and Germans, everywhere present in the region, were one of the factors of integration. He writes that due to their common traditions the inhabitants of the area were different from those who lived in the territories of the former Byzantine or Turkish empires. He thinks that, after Yalta, the definition 'Eastern Europe' swallowed up the concept of Central Europe.

At the same time Fejtő gives utterance to the belief that despite the fact that Central Europe is no longer a factor of power and politics, it could become one in the future. As regards a solution to the Central European problem, he considers three principles important: freedom, democracy, federation. This is the reason he criticizes the failure of the European Union and the USA to reorganize the region's circumstances with respect for the principle of democracy, and their toleration of the establishment of intolerant, nationalist/Communist dictatorships.<sup>5</sup>

4. It is clear from all of the above that Fejtő, who knew the region very well, was keenly concerned about the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the reaction to this disintegration in France. He felt that the USA and the countries of the European Union committed a serious error in deluding themselves for so long that Yugoslavia could remain intact. He was very harsh in his condemnation of the French politicians who supported Milošević because they were afraid that Croatia and Slovenia, after attaining independence, would join the German sphere of interest, resulting in a modification of the status quo.

In 1991 he blamed President Mitterand, in a public letter, for his bias in favor of the Serbs. In as early as 1992 he hoped that the western countries would realize that the war could only be stopped by armed intervention. In about the middle of 1993 he stated that the West was wrong if it did not admit that the Yugoslav problem could not be solved piece by piece and that a total solution needed to be found which included the Kosovo problem. In his view armed forces needed to be deployed against the Serbian army in order to make it clear to the Serbs that they could not continue with their policies. With attacks against their armories, war factories and heavy artillery their capitulation should be obtained and the country occupied. He claims that the concept demanded by the Slovenes and Croats well before the death of Tito, that of a true federation, must be realized, but that democracy must first be restored in each of the republics.

In order to realize this concept – and here Fejtő refers to the German situation after the war – a strait-jacket needs to be put on the Serbs. Subsequently they should be taught the coexistence of nationalities and coexistence with minorities. Fejtő believes that this federation needs to be realized even if the nations involved do not want it. He does not mention whether the Slovenes are expected to participate or not. The question is what the 'West' wants and not what the countries involved want, since

<sup>5</sup> Fejtő Ferenc, *Hova repül az idő? Beszélgetések Jacqueline Cherruault-Seperral*, Budapest: Belvárosi Könyvkiadó – Cserépfalvi Könyvkiadó, 1996 (original title: *Où va le temps qui passe?*, Paris: Éditions Balland, 1991. The Hungarian edition was rewritten by Ferenc Fejtő).

these countries will need the support of the 'West' in their reconstruction. Therefore the 'West' must now (i.e. in 1993) dictate the conditions. With this in mind he condemned the Vance-Owen negotiations in Bosnia. According to Fejtő the solution should have been based on the principles of the Badinter committee accepted in 1991. These principles are not to be discussed with the Serbs, they must be forced to obey them. He was scathing in his criticism of the Western Powers because they lacked the necessary consensus to make a strategic decision.

Following NATO's intervention in Kosovo Fejtő stated that the Balkan mentality dated from the 19th century when the disintegration of the medieval empires was followed by the rebirth of new nation-states, like Greece, Italy and Germany. With the conservation of the Serb hegemony in mind, Milošević disrupted Yugoslavia, which was, according to Fejtő, an artificially formed state. He felt that it was impossible to dissuade Milošević from his plan to secure a Serbian hegemony, and that armed intervention was therefore unavoidable.

The refusal of intervention would have meant the loss of the moral authenticity of Western politicians.<sup>6</sup>

5. None of this, however, means that Fejtő ignores the nations and their own will. In his opinion the concept of the 'nation' is a fundamental fact of the modern age, a vital element of self-awareness which directly follows membership of a family and precedes belonging to a social class or religion. He follows Hungarian-born philosopher Aurél Kolnai in considering there to be three sorts of nationalism: the nationalism of the imperialist states, ethnic, autonomist or separatist nationalism, and racist, segregationist, 'purging', intolerant nationalism. He agrees that nationalism represents the desire to promote a nation to the dignity of a state, but also acknowledges that all nationalisms carry the seeds of imperialism and homogenization. He believes that the nationalism of countries which respect the right of minorities living in their territories to use their own language, cultivate their own traditional education and participate in governing their homeland, is undoubtedly legitimate.

Given that the issue of nations 'with' and 'without' history is still under discussion,<sup>7</sup> I find it a little strange that Fejtő should talk about 'historical' nations. Still, he makes the interesting point that the nationalist movements of the historical nations – like the Slovenes, the Croats, the Czechs, the Hungarians, the Bulgarians, the Baltic peoples and the Ukrainians – aiming at independence are legitimate. His position with regard to the nation and the independence of the nation is quite close to the

<sup>6</sup> Vitézy Zsófia, Beszélgetés Fejtő Ferencsel: Miért késlekedünk?, *Magyar Hírlap*, 12 December 1992; Fejtő Ferenc, Nem megvitatni, kikényszeríteni, *Magyar Hírlap*, 22 May 1993; Szalay Hanna, Fejtő Ferenc új jugoszláviai föderációt ajánl: »A szerbek vesztek«, *Magyar Hírlap*, 14 June 1993; Nem az ENSZ a felelős, *Magyar Hírlap*, 2 August 1995; Huszadik századi utazó: Fejtő Ferenc az otthonról, a háborúról és az optimizmusról, *168 óra*, 8 July 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Fran Zwitter, *Nacionalni problemi v habsburški monarhiji*, Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1962, 32–37 (also in French: Fran Zwitter, *Les problèmes nationaux dans la Monarchie des Habsbourg*, Belgrade 1960, 19–21).

viewpoint put forward in the early 1990s by Slovene intellectuals and politicians (Peter Jambrek, Tine Hribar, Dimitrij Rupel). Fejtő mentions that the nationalism of the state, the sovereign nation, must and can be overcome if the state has already gained true national independence. In a certain sense integration must be preceded by disintegration. Integration can only be certain and free, when it is based on the consensus of independent nations. If this is lacking then certain countries could become victims of separatist and oppressive nationalisms.

This is the reason Fejtő writes so reprovingly of the condescending tone of the West as it comments on the defensive and offensive nationalisms which have appeared in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of the Communism. This condescending tone is all the more incomprehensible if we consider the fact that even the countries of the West are struggling to overcome their own nationalism. This has proved very apparent in the process of European integration. The 'old demons' have not disappeared in the West either.<sup>8</sup>

In 2000 Ferenc Fejtő was awarded the Prix des Ambassadeurs for his life's work. This prize has previously been awarded to prominent French intellectuals such as André Maurois, André Malraux, Simone Weil, Raymond Aron and Georges Duby.<sup>9</sup>

## POVZETEK

### SREDNJA EVROPA S STALIŠČA MADŽARA V PARIZU: FERENC FEJTŐ, MISLEC Z DVEMA DOMOVINAMA

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*Ferenc Fejtő se je rodil leta 1909 v Nagykanizsi na Ogrskem. Člani njegove družine, ki so živeli v različnih delih takratne avstro-ogrske monarhije, so po razpadu le-te postali državljani različnih držav. Iz političnih razlogov je moral Fejtő leta 1938 pobegniti iz Madžarske. Od takrat živi v Franciji, od 1944–1974 je bil sodelavec tiskovne agencije AFP, od 1972–1984 pa je bil direktor oddelka za sovjetske in zahodnoevropske zadeve v Institut d'Etudes Politiques v Parizu. Od 1945 je stalni sodelavec revije Esprit pa tudi mnogih drugih francoskih in italijanskih časopisov. Razen tega je avtor številnih knjig. Leta 2000 je dobil nagrado veleposlanikov, akreditiranih v Franciji.*

*V knjigi Zgodovina ljudskih demokracij, ki jo je objavil leta 1952, je kot prvi napisal obsežno zgodovino držav srednjevzhodne evropske regije med leti 1945 in 1952. Čeprav je bil proti komunističnemu režimu, je razmere v Jugoslaviji analiziral*

<sup>8</sup> Fejtő Ferenc, Nemzetek, kisebbségek, Európa, *Európai Utas*, 1994/3.

<sup>9</sup> Illényi Balázs, Fejtő Ferenc életműdija: Egy független utazó, *Heti Világgazdaság*, 1 July 2000.



dovolj objektivno, da to so opazili tudi Titovi sodelavci. Drugi del te knjige je bil objavljen leta 1969. Procese v Jugoslaviji od leta 1961 Fejtő ocenjuje kot drugo jugoslovansko revolucijo. Kot zanimivost omenjam, da piše tudi o odstopu Janka Smoleta leta 1966, o katerem ne najdemo podatka niti v knjigi Milana Predana z naslovom Vse slovenske vlade. Fejtő je mnenja, da se je Jugoslavija s pomočjo JLA postopoma formirala kot predsedniška republika. Ugotavlja, da so narodi Jugoslavije dosegli takšno stopnjo razvitosti, kakršna ni bila združljiva s paternalizmom. Čeprav je opazil nacionalistične težnje Miloševića, v madžarski izdaji iz leta 1990 goji upanje, da Milošević ne bo do skrajnih meja provociral drugih narodov Jugoslavije.

V knjigi z naslovom Rekviem za nekdanjim imperijem obširno analizira politično življenje Avstro-Ogrske in vzroke razpada. Ostro obsoja ravnanje vodilnih madžarskih politikov, med drugim predvsem zaradi tega, ker niso imeli posluha za nacionalne zahteve nemadžarskih narodov. Kljub temu je mnenja, da so bile v okviru monarhije prisotne ne samo sile razdora, pač pa tudi sile sloge. Po mnenju avtorja Avstro-Ogrska ni razpadla, temveč so jo razrušili. Za to so krivi predvsem Clemenceau, Masaryk in Beneš. Poudarja, da se vodilni politiki velesil v resnici niso ozirali na to, kar so želeli narodi te regije, kot tudi ne na to, da so bile novonastale države prav tako etnično mešane kot nekdanja Avstro-Ogrska.

Fejtő je pristaš ideje Srednje Evrope, federalizma in metanacionalizma. Po njegovem mnenju se zaradi skupnih zgodovinskih in kulturnih tradicij narodi, ki živijo v tej regiji, razlikujejo od narodov, živečih na Balkanu. Zahodnim silam očita, da so po letu 1989 zamudile z urejanjem političnih razmer te regije v duhu svobode, demokracije in federalizma. Sam je že precej zgodaj izrazil mnenje, da morajo zahodne sile regulirati Miloševića tudi z vojaško intervencijo.

Fejtő meni, da je nacija pomemben ustvarjalni del samozavesti in da je nacionalno gibanje Slovencev, Hrvatov, Madžarov itd. legitimno. Njegovo stališče, kar zadeva nacije in suverenost, je zelo blizu temu, kar so o tem pisali slovenski intelektualci (Peter Jambreč, France Bučar in Dimitrij Rupel) na koncu osemdesetih oziroma na začetku devetdesetih let. Poudarja tudi to, da so »stari demoni nacionalizma« še vedno prisotni tudi na Zahodu.