

SOVIET RELATIONS WITH HUNGARY

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In contrast to other East Central European countries, Russian/Soviet relations with Hungary have been especially tense, due to such factors as Hungary's monarchical past, historical rivalry with the Russians over the Balkans, Russian invasion in 1848, Hungary's alliances in both world wars against Russia/USSR, the belated influence of Communism in the inter-war period, the Soviet invasion in 1956 to crush the nationalist revolution, and Hungary's vastly different language and culture in general.

No part of Hungary had ever been under direct Soviet rule. Instead, Hungary formed part of the Habsburg Empire, extending over more than 675,000 square kilometers in central Europe. Both empires - the tsarist and Habsburg – fought for hegemony over Balkan territories. The Habsburg empire included what is now Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, as well as parts of present-day Poland, Romania, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In July 1848, the Hungarians, led by Lajos Kossuth, fought for liberation from Austria. However, upon the Austrians' request in 1849, Tsar Nicholas I sent Russian troops to crush the rebellion. Nevertheless, Kossuth's initiative paved the way for the compromise in March 1867 (known in German as the *Ausgleich*), which granted both the Austrian and Hungarian kingdoms separate

parliaments with which to govern their respective internal affairs. It also established a “dual monarchy,” whereby a single emperor (Francis Joseph I) conducted the financial, foreign, and military affairs of the two kingdoms.

By the late 1800s and early 1900s, ethnic groups within the empire clamored for self-rule. On June 28, 1914 Gavrilo Princip, a member of a secret nationalist movement, Mlada Bosna ("Young Bosnia") shot Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, thus precipitating World War I. Austro-Hungary fought with Germany against Great Britain, France, and Russia. Throughout the fall of 1918 the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed as its armies retreated before enemy forces.

On March 21, 1919, Béla Kun established a communist regime in Hungary that lasted four months. Given their monarchical past, Hungarians resented communists, who seized their farms and factories and sought to form a stateless society. After a brief transition, Admiral Miklós Horthy became Regent of Hungary, heading a new monarchy that lasted for twenty-five years.

Defeated in World War I, Hungary lost more than two-thirds of its territory in the 1920 peace settlement (“Treaty of Trianon”). In 1914, Hungary had 21 million inhabitants; Trianon Hungary had less than 8 million. German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was able to coax Hungary to fight on the Axis side in World War II by promising the return of some of the territory Hungary lost in 1920. Despite its gradual alliance with Germany and Italy against the Soviet Union in the war, the German army (Wehrmacht) occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944. Hitler put Ferenc Szálasi (leader of the fascist Arrow Cross Party) in charge as Prime Minister. By mid-April,

1945, however, the Soviet Red Army expelled the Germans from Hungary. The Soviet troops remained in Hungary until 1990.

Another element of Hungary's particularly anti-Soviet history is the belated influence of communism in the interwar period. While most other East European countries turned authoritarian after 1935, Hungary remained relatively liberal until 1944. After a short democratic period, the communist party took over in 1948. The Hungarian Communist Party never did win an election, but gained control due to the presence of Soviet troops and their hold over government posts. Its first secretary was Matyás Rákosi, a key figure in the international communist movement who had returned with other Hungarian communists from exile in the Soviet Union. These include Imre Nagy (later prime minister during the Hungarian revolution in 1956) and József Révai who became the key ideologist in the 1950s. Other communists remained in Hungary and organized the communist party illegally during the war, such as János Kádár (who became General Secretary after 1956) and László Rajk (the first key victim of the purges in 1949).

The Soviet Union also established its hegemony over Eastern Europe in commercial and military spheres. In 1949, Stalin had established the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (CMEA or Comecon) to counter President Truman's Marshall Plan, which Stalin prevented Hungary and other East European countries from joining. In Comecon, the member states were expected to specialize in particular industries; Hungary focused on bus and truck production, for example.

The East European “satellites” were expected to copy the Stalinist model favoring heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods. In doing so, Rákosi's economic plans contradicted Hungary's genuine interests, requiring as they did the use of obsolete Soviet machinery and old-fashioned methods. Unrealizable targets resulted in a flagrant waste of resources and the demoralization of workers.

Meanwhile, fearing a World War III against its former ally, the United States, the Soviet leadership encouraged the Hungarian army to expand. Having failed to prevent West Germany's admission into NATO, the USSR established the Warsaw Pact on May 14, 1955, which subordinated the satellites' armies to a common military command. Austria was granted neutrality in the same year. In 1956, the first major anti-Soviet uprising in Eastern Europe - the Hungarian revolution - took place. It is not surprising that Hungary, given its history, culture, and language (a non-Slavic tongue: Magyar), was the first "satellite" to challenge Moscow directly by declaring neutrality and withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact.

Despite the restlessness of the population after the crushed revolution and the repression of 1957-1958, Kádár's regime after normalization differed sharply from Rákosi style of governance. Kádár's brand of lenient (“goulash”) communism earned grudging respect from the Hungarian people. Kádár never trumpeted his moderate New Economic Mechanism (NEM) of 1968 - as a socioeconomic model for other satellites, lest he irritate Moscow.

Hungary's overthrow of communism in 1989-1990 and independence today proves that the nationalist spirit of the revolution was never extinguished. The Soviet collapse

in 1991 led to the demise of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. In March 1999, NATO admitted Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic as members.

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