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**BRIDGE BUILDING AND POLITICAL CULTURES:
HUNGARY AND FINLAND 1956-1989**

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Editors' Introduction**Anssi HALMESVIRTA — Heino NYSSÖNEN**

This collection of studies is a by-product of the research project *Kádár's Hungary – Kekkonen's Finland, c. 1956 – 1989* financed by the Academy of Finland (2000 – 2003). It is mostly based either on original archival research and hitherto not consulted material and tries to approach the subject-matter from fresh point of view. Although historians have completed comparative studies¹ and scholars from various disciplines have published essays on almost every aspect of contacts,² an opportunity to dig deeper and encompass wider issues had arrived with a rise of a more critical attitude and freer access to the relevant archives in both countries. A more general rationale behind the research has been that the relations of small capitalist and socialist countries such as Hungary and Finland during the Cold War era are still a largely neglected field of historical study.³ They seemed to remain in the shadows of Great Power politics and ideological arms-wrestling over world supremacy. Hungary and Finland have been deemed as suitable examples of 'politics of survival' since both of them had not only a special *modus vivendi* relation to their big neighbour, the Soviet Union, but had cherished traditions of co-operation in many scholarly fields, broken only during and after World War II. Until 1956 contacts had already been revived and their extension was motivated by a pragmatic policy: the Hungarian leadership strived for more room to manoeuvre while showing off loyalty to Moscow whereas Finnish leaders struggled in between 'finlandization' and *Realpolitik*. Kádár's and Kekkonen's tasks were not easy ones, and they

understood each other's difficulties well. In spite of being geographically situated in very different European spaces and political cultures, Hungary close to the middle and Finland in the far north, they soon found common political, scientific and cultural interests. The endless mission to build paternalist socialism in Hungary and the steady 'progressivism' of the Finnish democracy did not, after all, seem altogether antagonistic. In both systems the rule of reason over the people (population) and environment signified expansion of rational control and social policy. Modern methods of persuasion and indoctrination were applied in education and socialization. It was as if Hungarians and Finns could learn something from each other. The latter part of the old saying 'next to knowing yourself is to know your enemy' was gradually transformed to '[...] to know your friend'. In this spirit, the concepts of 'peaceful co-existence', 'bridge-building' and 'progressivism' could be given new content and more accurate and many-faceted meanings. They seem to characterize the period from the year 1956 to the 1980s which was deemed a natural but critical time span for the purpose.

In the Cold War era there was at times high tension in Europe and in the wider world, and it could be lamented that the urge of different zones, peoples, blocs and generations to understand each other was doomed to failure because there was no common language. Keywords such as 'democracy', 'freedom', 'human rights' meant different things for different ideologies. It was only gradually that the idea of dialogue between the East and the West became marketable. The Helsinki Summit of 1975 did not – albeit Kádár and Kekkonen felt it was the climax of their careers – abolish the 'Jalta-Europe'. In the end it was Hungary that had been seeking for more room of manoeuvre and credit from the West whilst Finland remained more independent and could start steering towards European economic integration. These concomitant efforts and the common aim at securing 'peace in Europe' – the Helsinki Summit of 1975 was regarded as a success by its promoters Kádár and Kekkonen – gave a special direction to the co-operation of the two countries which, after all, was of minor political impor-

tance than usually proclaimed in official meetings of the statesmen. However, was quite exceptional that constructive bridge-building could be pursued between Hungarians and Finns. It was all very practical at first, Hungarian communists realizing the usefulness of the old idea of 'kinship' (finno-ugric origin) in their propaganda work, and magyarophile Finns, Kekkonen as their patron, enjoying cultural and scientific exchange opportunities. The parties involved benefited from cooperation in multifarious activities from the diplomatic level to individual contacts. It was only the bilateral trade that did not prosper and remained so insignificant that its analysis has here been spared for future economic historians.

In stead of a very carefully thought-out research plan, we entertained a few general ideas around which to build the research framework. In the first chapter Heino Nyyssönen studies political cultures in Kekkonen's Finland and Kádár's Hungary but not in their 'traditional' contexts. In stead of taking political culture as stable or of being in a constant change, it offers different perspectives on both societies. A new 'historical' definition of political culture is delineated, when Nyyssönen argues that the ways in which a nation or groups of people deal with their past also belong to a political culture. Priority of foreign relations in both countries made an impact on domestic politics as well. It leads us to study also history and commemoration and to focus on a few 'peculiar features' in both countries like the 'personality cult' of Kekkonen and the images in Finland on Hungary and vice versa.

In the next three chapters the political relations and images of the countries are analyzed from three different and complementary angles; the external Western, the high politics (state visits) and the internal (diplomacy) ones. First Juha Pohjonen explores the background of the 1940s and first of all how Finnish diplomats saw the current political situation and Finnish-Hungarian relations from Budapest until the late 1960s. Next Vesa Vares compares images of Kekkonen and Kádár, basically defined by the strategies in the Cold War. As years went by, both improved from the image of 'an old foe' to an astonishingly similar mixture of some sort of appreciation, satisfaction and

respect. As Mari Vares reminds us, in 1963 Kekkonen was the first Western leader, who visited Hungary after the uprising of 1956. Nevertheless, Kádár's trip ten years later was not less 'historical' as it was his first visit to a capitalist country.

The second part of the book concentrates on cultural and scientific relations, which deserve their own extensive treatment because they brought in tangible, but at times contradictory achievements and opened unexpected vistas of co-operation and dialogue. They also show some of the tensions between the two systems, conspicuously in the use of 'propaganda' and 'know-how'. But as usual in Hungarian-Finnish relations, the co-operation also of cultural and scientific elites was not seriously disturbed by the contradictions between the values of the capitalist and the socialist system. This is typically 'liberal' attitude which largely ignored or found its way around marxist criticism thus avoiding open confrontation.⁴ The marxists, for their part, did not want to force the issue and make the kind of politics of science that would upset or estrange their partners. As Anssi Halmesvirta and Raija Oikari show in their articles, co-operation went on surprisingly smoothly. Psychology and its applications to control human behaviour in society's sore points were equally useful in both countries. In cultural contacts, for the Hungarian intellectuals who felt stymied at home, Finland occasionally gave some breathing space. A few Finnish suspicious critics and journalists learned from them about the less respectable aspects of the Hungarian cultural politics. However, the power structure embedded in the discourse of cultural relations usually limited the ways how 'things could be said and done'.

Finally, in the third part of the book two case-studies, comparative and specialized, have been included which, if taken together, demonstrate differences and certain out-of-context similarities between the two societies. As Péter Porkoláb's comparative article about Hungarian and Finnish village farming shows, people still found ways to go around the restrictions or live with them. In both countries the state let the peasant live, but in Finland the smallest farmers left their homesteads for good, and in Hungary all of them, huge or small, were called to collective work. In Finland, as Jari Ojala's special article on agri-

cultural 'evolution' testifies, the development has led towards specialization and to building of ever bigger production units.

What was common to the two systems, socialist and capitalist in the 1960s – 1970s was the belief in the secular religion called 'progress', be it evolutionary or marxist. In that they rivalled: human reason was promiscuously applied in regulating human affairs and cultural and natural environment. The control of populations was rationalized and conscious planning of social policy was to be based on sociological and psychological knowledge. These remained ideologically different in socialist Hungary and capitalist Finland – at times the Hungarians complained of the expansion of American values and culture in Finland, too. Propaganda-makers exploited modern mass-media. Psychologists who would not study social structures and milieu as deeply as individual behaviour became useless. In Finland canvassing and 'policy of satisfying' directed at the consumer appealed to irrational traits of the man, in Hungary irrationalism was to be rooted and a 'new, really social man' was to be created. Both systems were wary of stagnation and in the 'progressive' atmosphere social engineering was not only a matter of adjusting of this or that minor problem in social adaptation, it had to cater for overall social development. In its name, in Hungary during the whole period under scrutiny and in the late 1960s and 1970s also in Finland,⁵ 'reactionary' ideologies were deemed futile.

In its due course, as the coercive nature of total social planning and control became transparent, rude 'progressivism' was exhausted. The uncontrollability of huge social processes – forced industrialization and urban development in Hungary, the plight of the countryside and migration waves to south and Sweden in Finland – was gradually understood. Corrective control took their place, for instance, when such phenomena as unemployment, crime and booming traffic with its terrific accident numbers started to worry the decision-maker in both countries. In scientific and technical co-operation between Hungary and Finland quite a few common problems were found and up-to-date correctives were applied to the advantage of both sides. In

certain fields of culture, technology, science and scholarship – the traditionally dominating finno-ugric studies were challenged by ‘new, hard’ and social sciences – quite successful common projects were launched.

Now that both Finland and Hungary are members of the European Union, they may realize that political and scientific-technological co-operation of small countries is paramount in preserving and promoting their common interests. In science, the political leadership tries to prepare the ground for joint European projects and promote tighter co-operation of higher education and administration which is a precondition for freer movement of ideas and people. In this ‘movement’ the Hungarians and Finns have cherished a well-established tradition of their own: the flow of delegations between the countries was already in the 1960s so steady that the Hungarian Foreign Ministry at times wanted to restrict it.

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NOTES

- ¹ *Hungarian and Finnish History*. A multimedia CD-rom. Zentrum für Hungarologie im Institut für Finnougristik der Universität Hamburg, 2002; *Hungary and Finland in the 20th Century*. (Eds.) Olli Vehviläinen and Attila Pók. *Studia Historica* 68. Helsinki: Hakapaino 2002.
- ² János Nagy et al. (eds.), *Friends and Relatives: Finnish-Hungarian Cultural Relations*. Budapest: Corvina 1984; Yrjö Varpio – Lajos Szopori-Nagy, *Suomen ja Unkarin kirjalliset suhteet vuosina 1920–1986*. Pieksämäki: SKS 1990.
- ³ For a far more ambitious enterprise, see *Deutsch-ungarische Beziehungen in Naturwissenschaft und Technik nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Herausgegeben von Holger Fischer. *Südeuropäische Arbeiten* 103. München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag 1999.
- ⁴ Cf. Michael J. White, *Political Philosophy. An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Oneworld books 2004, 7.
- ⁵ Jukka Relander, 'Jäähvässet Snellmanille'. *Suomen kulttuurihistoria 4*. Eds. Kirsi Saarikangas, Pasi Mäenpää & Minna Saarentola-Weiss. Helsinki: Tammi 2004, 138-167.