HUNGARIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES*
1945-1959

Emőke Horváth
University of Miskolc, Institute for History

ABSTRACT

Latin America was a negligible area for the Hungarian foreign policy, but it can be clearly stated by the studying of archival sources, that from 1951 onwards, emerged an idea that a Hungarian embassy would be set up at least in one Latin American country, since Hungary was only present in Argentina. In the decade of the 1960s, after the victory of the Cuban Revolution, the (re)establishment of diplomatic relations took place with Cuba (1960), Brazil (1961) and Peru (1969). The normalization of Hungarian-U.S. relations paved the way towards Latin American countries.

KEYWORDS

Allied Control Commission, Hungary, Latin America, Cold War, Hungarian Foreign Policy, Soviet Union

INTRODUCTION

Under the armistice agreement of 20 January 1945 Hungary ended World War II as a losing country, after it an Allied Control Commission operated in the territory of the country. The Allied Control Commission was a body established by the victorious powers to enforce the armistice and to control the functioning of the governments in the defeated countries. In Hungary, the organization operated under Soviet leadership, it’s chairman was Marshal Kliment Voroshilov; the representatives of the Allied Powers received only the right of consultation within the organization. The Commission supervised the shaping of foreign relations. It was necessary to get the approval of the Allied Control Commission to form new diplomatic ties.

The Soviet control greatly contributed to the strengthening of the activities of the Hungarian Communist Party, it’s gradual expansion in the political life.

Hungary turned toward distant markets between the two world wars for to purchase raw materials and to export Hungarian products. [1] The Latin American countries provided raw materials for the textile industry, the leather industry and the tobacco

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industry, and among others, guaranteed markets for the Hungarian machinery and electrical industry (for example the locomotives of the Ganz factory).

Although Hungary's diplomatic ties were interrupted with the countries of the region during the Second World War, after 1945, Hungary tried to open toward Latin America, his hopes were based on the cooperation between the two world wars. To outbreak from the political isolation following the war, Latin America could have been an excellent terrain for Hungary. Efforts were made mainly toward Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Uruguay. [2] Parallel to economic attempts, the Hungarian-Latin American Society, which was founded at the beginning of 1946, could have provided a basis for initiating bilateral relations since besides restoring the diplomatic ties, it was one of the official goals of the organization to establish cultural and economic relations, the intention of restoring diplomatic ties, provided the Allied Control Commission authorized the opening of the Hungarian foreign policy towards the region. [3]

In case of Brazil, there was a Hungarian diplomat in Rio de Janeiro already in 1946, who - following the break up of diplomatic relations between the two states - helped the work of the Swedish Embassy which also represented Hungarian interests. [4] During the existence of the Allied Control Commission, Hungary was able to establish diplomatic relations only with Chile; the permission was granted in January, 1947. Later, in 1949 Argentinian-Hungarian political relations got normalized. [5]

In 1948 a definitive political turn around took place in Hungary, as a consequence of the manipulated elections, communist power take-over took place. In this new situation, the governement primarily focused on internal political conflicts, the Communist Party was concentrated on destroying political opponents. The economic difficulties of the country, made fellow workers of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to try to renovate the old trade relations for example with Cuba. The idea emerged at the end of 1949, at the beginning of 1950 due to the proposal from the Hungarian Embassy in Washington, since Cuba was considered to be a top dollar-paying market earlier and it was believed in 1950 that many goods could be sold to the island. Cuba's customs policy made the country a very attractive destination as well. However, the re-launching of economic relations was largely prevented by the fact that Cuba, in 1950, considered himself to be in war with Hungary. From the trade negotiations they hoped that diplomatic relations could be established between the two countries, in a way that the question is formally proposed by Cuba, because he declared war on Hungary.

[6]

In the early stage of the Cold War, the hostility between the two super powers was also evident in several international conflicts. The Berlin crisis further deepened the tensions and rivalries between the US and the Soviet Union, because Stalin wanted to include West Berlin into the Soviet sphere of influence. He thought that he could enforce his will by blocking the city on June 23, 1948, but by organizing an American airlift, the idea was neutralized, the blockade failed and Stalin dissolved it in May 1949. The Federal Republic of Germany was formed in response to the aggressive Soviet policy on 23 May 1949. Next year, the first armed conflict between the two super powers broke out in Korea. The extremely strained international political situation influenced the directions of Hungarian foreign policy as well. After the
outbreak of the Korean War, the Foreign Policy Guidelines for Hungarian Embassies, issued in September 1950, stated that the United States is feverishly preparing for the Third World War. Only in the context of the Cold War can be interpreted the Foreign ministry’s instruction, that with regard to the Latin American countries prescribed the permanent observing of the peace movements as the main goal, because the countries of the region were considered as U.S. Servants. A year later, in 1951, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked for a summary on the role of Latin America in the U.S. war plans. [7] The next world war was considered to be very real, for example during conversations between the diplomats of the socialist countries performing in Washington, the Polish ambassador (Winiewicz) declared: if war broke out, diplomats from the Socialist bloc would not have a lightweight position, as they would be arrested and interned in the United States. [8]

This time, Latin America was a negligible area for the Hungarian foreign policy, but it can be clearly stated by the studying of archival sources, that from 1951 onwards, emerged an idea that a Hungarian embassy would be set up at least in one Latin American country, since Hungary was only present in Argentina. At the beginning of next year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was partially restructured, the Anglo-Saxon department was set up which included a separate sub-department focusing on Latin America. This was the first time that a little more attention was paid to the area within the Hungarian foreign policy. [9]

The diplomatic relations of Hungary were restored with Argentina in 1949, with Bolivia in 1952, with Uruguay in 1956. Later Soviet foreign policy needs pushed the country in the direction to open toward Latin America. For the Soviet Union, the conditions were not favourable to build the relationship with Latin America in the early 1950s, as the countries of the region rejected the Soviet Union because of their positive orientation towards the U.S. This does not mean that from the 1930s the Marxist ideals would not have spread in Latin America and the communist parties in each country also strengthened. For example in Cuba in 1943-1944 the Communists were relatively strong, and class collaborationist tactics gave the party a ministerial position and control of the officially recognised Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba. [10] All in all, only a few connections existed between Latin America and the Soviet Union last but not least due to the geographical distance. During a meeting of a Soviet Councilor from the Embassy in Budapest with the Hungarian Deputy Foreign Minister, on May 11, 1956, a Soviet proposal was announced. [11] Because the Soviet Union’s relationships with the Latin American countries currently were unsatisfactory with Latin American countries, it could be appropriate for Hungary to renew its good Latin American relations in the interest of the whole socialist block. The process of shaping relations had, however, slowed down soon due to the consequences of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

Hungary became a member of the United Nations in 1955. Its accession was supported by the Latin American countries. According to the local Hungarian press, the membership provided a real possibility to “develop multi-faceted relations”. The Soviet foreign policy demand also pushed Hungary in the direction of an opening towards Latin America. Based on the negotiations with Astafyev, the councillor of the Soviet Embassy in Budapest, conducted at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it became evident for the Hungarian foreign policy in the spring of 1956 that Moscow
considers Latin America as a desirable target. [12] To fulfill its objectives, the Soviets wanted to use the diplomatic relations of Hungary (and Czechoslovakia) formed before WW2. Hungary readily served out the Soviet will, and the Political Committee of the Hungarian Workers’ Party made a decision in the first half of 1956 that the country should re-establish diplomatic ties with Mexico, Brazil and Uruguay. The plan of the normalizing relations however ran aground in October 1956. The Soviet Union defeated the Hungarian revolution, the reprisals that followed it, the execution of Imre Nagy and his companions placed the country at the center of extreme international attention rejecting the legitimacy of the new Hungarian government. The United Nations held the so-called "Hungarian question" on agenda between 1957 and 1963, and the procedure isolated Hungary internationally. The documents - which were made for the Political Committee - also referred to the problem, in 1963, a submitting from the archives of the Foreign Ministry referring to the past mentioned "The development of our relationship with Latin America was impeded by the US propaganda against Hungary in the United Nations and in other organizations in accordance with the so-called" Hungarian question. [13] Until 1961 the Latin American countries were united in the Hungarian issue with the exception of Brazil, which in 1961 represented a neutral position. [14] Most likely, as a result of the previous Soviet request, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed a special note on the issue of Latin America's policy in Hungary at the beginning of 1958. [15] The Foreign Ministry's College stated "In our foreign policy we have neglected the Latin American states, so far", even though there were serious opportunities in this area, and there were commercial interests in developing Hungarian relations with these states. [16] As a single socialist example Czechoslovakia was mentioned in the document. In Czechoslovakia there were several Latin American countries with foreign missions with which Hungary had no diplomatic relations, therefore the attention of the Hungarian ambassador to Prague was specifically called for this fact. The unwilling intention in the document was not followed by a more decisive action. [17] According to an assessment, the year 1960 was characterized by the fact that Hungary, with the exception of Cuba and Chile, had no initiation towards Latin America, but he was ready "to react quickly and positively to any constructive Latin American proposal". [18] As a stated goal, it was recorded in the directives of the Hungarian Latin-American policy: Hungary intended to support the initiatives of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Latin America and hereafter intended to intensify its economic and commercial activity in the region and wanted to eliminate the gap between the commercial and political behavior of the Latin American countries. On the basis of the documents it can be ascertained, that despite the Soviet demand, Hungarian diplomacy lost its earlier initiative towards Latin America, remained passive in the area, although responded to the initiatives, but he did so very deliberately and not very enthusiastically. Because of questioning the legitimacy of the Kádár government, Hungary turned away from the region, and was more interested in developing relationships with African and Asian countries. The effect of international rejection was intensified by the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been reorganized after October 1956. 260 members of the ministry staff were dismissed for political reasons, so the efficient rebuilding of the departments of the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs took pretty long time. [19] There was a serious lack of professionals at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was not easy to find diplomats with language proficiency and who were reliable comrades at the same time. For the above-mentioned reasons, Hungary reacted slowly to the political situation in Cuba, only on January 23, 1959, was made a formal decision that the provisional Cuban government was recognized as a legitimate one. [20] The decision was generated well after similar statements by other nations, the United States on January 7, Canada on January 8, the Soviet Union on January 10 recognized the new Cuban power. Finally, Hungary did not send its telegram to Cuba, nearly two months later, the issue was still discussed at a meeting on March 20. It was decided, that since there were no replies to similar telegraphs of the socialist countries, Hungary did not send any document. [21] In the end, the Hungarian government didn’t accept the situation, the Hungarian charge d'affaires in Washington, Tibor Zádor, was given the task to get informations in Havana. According to Zádor's report, he was the first diplomat arrived to Cuba with a formal mandate from a socialist country. He managed to make contact with high-ranking political leaders, held a personal meeting with Che Guevara and Deputy Prime Minister Martinez Sánchez and inquired about the issues of telegrams coming from socialist countries. It is imaginable that with Zádor’s Cuban journey Hungary served the Soviet interests as it could have been embarrassing for the Soviets to inquire. Cuban partners indicated, although they had not responded to the Soviet and Czechoslovakian recognitions, but they appreciated the gesture and would soon come back to the question. Zádor made a suggestion as well, primarily, he urged the establishment of trade relations between the two countries and advised to wait with creating diplomatic relationships. Tibor Zádor's visit to Havana launched a long line of negotiations on forming bilateral relations. [22]

Ernesto Che Guevara in Hungary (1960) [23]
CONCLUSION

In concluding we can say: Hungary got closer to the region only in 1959 after the victorious Cuban Revolution. Although it has to be mentioned that at the beginning Hungary was little interested in Cuba and only began steps for establishing diplomatic relations under Soviet pressure. The 1960s made it possible for Hungarian foreign policy to show up successes, opposed to the hardships of previous years. These achievements were restricted nonetheless to countries outside Europe. In the decade of the 1960s, the (re)establishment of diplomatic relations took place with Cuba (1960), Brazil (1961) and Peru (1969), and Hungary accredited an ambassador to Argentina. The normalization of Hungarian-U.S. relations paved the way towards Latin American countries.

During the years of the Cold War the basic elements of the Hungarian foreign policy were determined by three aspects: on one hand taking into account the political dividedness of the world and the fact of two opposing super powers, on the other hand, the absolute priority of the anti-imperialist struggle. As a third factor it is necessary to mention the Hungarian support for the Soviet interests, yet its extent and characteristics showed temporary differences due to adaptation to the changing political environment. The above-mentioned point of views also enjoyed priority with respect to the foreign relations of Hungary with the countries in Latin America.

REFERENCES

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