

Hungarian Politics v. Globalism

Printout of the blog at

<http://pgabor.com/blog/hunpol/>

Gabor Por

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Introduction

This is a temporary blog for explaining and commenting on Hungarian responses to issues of globalism. It is part of my Honors contract for professor Juergensmeyer's **Global Conflict** course at UCSB. Here is the official text of the contract:

I will write at least 3 blog entries a week on Hungary's responses to global issues, including but not limited to European Union, terrorism, US politics, Russian politics, Middles-East oil, Chinese economy ... At the end of the quarter I will collect and print these entries.

<http://honors.ltsc.ucsb.edu/curriclm.php#contract> Honors Contract

<http://www.global.ucsb.edu/faculty/juergensmeyer.html> Professor Juergensmeyer

10/1/2005

Background information

My primary focus will be on how Hungary responds to global issues, but as most of the Hungarian political discourse is directed to internal issues I feel it necessary to provide a quick sketch of the contemporary political landscape. There is no singular, undivided reaction to any issue; therefore it is useful to show a wider spectrum. Due to lack of space, time and energy I will limit myself to the major forces, the parties represented in the House.

The communist system crumbled in 1989 and the following year Hungary saw the first free elections. The House, referred to as Parliament, has one level (unlike in the US) and its members are elected every four years. The party that gets the most seats is asked by the president to form the government. The president is elected by the House every five years. So far, the

people voted out every four years the previous government. Thus in 1990-1994, 1998-2002 Hungary had right wing government, while in the interim a left-wing. Regarding the president, we had liberal one from 1990 to 2000, a conservative from 2000 to 2005, and the latest one, Laszlo Solyom, who was elected a few months ago seems to be a moderate conservative.

These terms (left/right) however have eroded in the last 5-6 years, and they do not necessarily correspond to their traditional meaning. Currently there are four parties in the House:

- The Hungarian Socialist Party technically formed from the ashes of the old communist party. A lot of people on the right cannot forgive them this and simply equate them with the Party of the old regime. They are considered the left wing party even though they seem to represent better business interests, than do unions. Currently they are the governing party; they provide the majority of the members of the cabinet and the Prime Minister too. They are a large size party, attempting to represent a wide scope of interests. This backfired on them when last year they had to let go their own prime minister, due to internal struggles within the party. The current Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsany, is a businessman of considerable wealth.
- The Hungarian Liberal Party's origins go back to illegal opposition of the 1980s. Once political freedom was achieved, largely due to the efforts of the people associated with this party, they formed the "Free Democrat Party." Earlier this year they changed their name to the Liberal Party. They attempt to represent liberal values, e.g. they defending most vocally minorities, including homosexuals, gypsies and women. However in 1994 they formed a coalition with the Socialists to govern and by allying with the political descendents of their former enemy they lost credibility in the eyes of a lot of people. At the last election they barely got 5% of the votes, the minimum required to get seats in the

house. Currently, just like in 1994-98, they are the smaller of the two governing parties, the other being the Socialists. (Disclaimer: In the 1980's, in my formative teenage years I was on the fringe of the circle of people, known as "democratic opposition" who later formed this party. I was even briefly a member. My own personal views most resemble the ideals of this party, even if I often disagree with the way they apply them.)

- The larger right wing party is called Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Union. They formed in 1988 as "Fidesz" (an abbreviation for the Association of Young Democrats) and changed their name to the longer version in 2003. In the intervening years they turned from an aggressive liberal youthful organization to a wide coalition of conservative forces. They claim to represent traditional family values, the interests of the nation (i.e. they are overtly nationalistic), and often refer to Christian principles in their rhetoric. During their governing years (1998-2002) they amassed a host of smaller parties. At the same time they also weakened some of democracy's institutions, according to their left-wing critics. Unlike the other parties, Fidesz is lead by a single charismatic leader, Viktor Orbán, and as the party is rather unified in supporting him, much of the power is in his own hand. To get wider support Fidesz attempted to gain the confidence of far-right people, by appealing to their chauvinistic and anti-semitic tone.
- The smaller right wing party, the Hungarian Democratic Forum clearly reflects Christian Democratic principles. This party formed the first free government in 1990. Since then support for them greatly decreased. They attempt to be the voice of moderate, conservative reason. They struggle to retain their independence from Fidesz, with whom they formed coalitions in the past.

Having introduced the key players a few additional words are needed about the political climate. I mentioned what the two major sides accuse each other of. This kind of division existed throughout the last 15 years of freedom, but strengthened after 1998. That's when Fidesz won the election, playing up to people's anti-communist sentiments. Having found this tool working they decided to continue to use it. The Socialists, being in opposition did not hesitate to point out all the mistakes the right wing made and became involved in an escalating war of words. This polarization was somewhat parallel to what happened in the US at the 2000 and 2004 elections. The country was virtually divided into two exclusive parts, where one can belong only to one side. This divisiveness dominates the discussion, even when the issues are not internal. Therefore the opinions I will share and comment upon will almost always be representative of only one side, one party, or sometimes one person. It can never be taken as the opinion of the whole country, although the government's position is official in foreign matters.

As I plan to write mostly about current global events I need to introduce Hungary's foreign policy too. Hungarians voted in 1998 for the country to join NATO and next year it did. Similarly Hungary joined the European Union in 2004, after a successful vote the previous year. The EU's currency, the euro, however cannot replace the Hungarian Forint, until the economy solidifies enough for the EU's standards and expectations. Estimates for that to occur vary between 2009 and 2016.

http://www.mkogy.hu/parl_en.htm The House of the Nation

http://www.keh.hu/index_en.html President of the Republic of Hungary

<http://www.fideszfrakcio.hu/index.php?MainCategoryID=54&SubCat=37> Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union

<http://www.mszip.hu/> Hungarian Socialist Party (No English version)

<http://www.szdsz.hu/> Hungarian Liberal Party (No English version)

<http://www.mdf.hu/> Hungarian Democratic Forum (No English version)

<http://www.meh.hu/english> The Hungarian Prime Minister's Office

10/1/2005

Bulgaria and Romania into the EU

Last Monday (September 26) the House voted to accept Bulgaria and Romania into the EU. The two countries were approved by the same vote: 257 for, 6 against, and one abstained. Romania is Hungary's southeast neighbor. There is a longstanding territory debate between the two countries over Transylvania. After World War I it was taken away from Hungary, who was on the losing side of the war, and was made adjunct to Romania. The population of Transylvania is mixed and includes ethnic Hungarian, Germans, Jews, Gypsies and Romanians. For a considerable period of time it was more or less an autonomous principality.

Most people accept the new borders as historical reality and value peaceful relations over a demand for a revision of this decree. A small, but vocal minority, however, dreams of regaining the distant glory of "greater Hungary", by annexing Transylvania. More moderate voices, including all 4 major parties, are looking for ways to support ethnic Hungarians living there. Earlier this year Fidesz (the conservative party) wished to grant Hungarian (dual with Romanian) citizenship to Hungarians outside the border of Hungary. That referendum did not pass. Therefore this time, when most Fidesz representative voted to include Romania in the EU, their far-right allies considered them to be traitors. According to the nationalistic ideology, the House should have voted no, in order to exclude Romania, as a punishment for their treatment of Hungarians in Transylvania. According to Fidesz, however, to include them in the future EU

means that Transylvania will eventually belong to Hungary in a way, because it will be part of the same entity, namely the EU.



The far-right's sentiments were demonstrated just minutes before the vote was cast on Monday. From the balcony of the House one person started to shout, "Hungarians, the future of Transylvania is in your hands." Then he threw flyers into the room with the colors of the Hungarian flag (3 horizontal stripe of red-white-green). Finally he hung a sign warning the representatives not to become treasonous. Then he was escorted out and order was restored.

In summary, every parliamentary political force in Hungary agreed with the idea of expanding the EU. In the 3 hour debate preceding the vote some quoted political reasons, others appealed to ethics ("we were accepted, we don't have the right to exclude others"), and some economical concerns ("In order for Hungary to maintain beneficial trade relations with these countries they need to be in the EU.")

<http://tinyurl.com/886ox> House meeting minutes of the vote (in Hungarian)

10/4/2005

Turkey joining the EU

By Tuesday dawn the EU officially started the dialogue with Turkey about its eventual integration into the EU. I searched hard and long to find Hungarian reactions to this news, but found few. The major newspapers and portals mentioned the news event, but none of the major parties issued any official statement or commented on it. Going back in the past however, I found that the Christian Democrats opposed the talks last December. They believe that Turkey does not

fit geographically and could not fit Christian Europe culturally. They also mentioned Amnesty International's report on women's rights issues in Turkey. They would support closer economic ties with Turkey, but not full integration.

On the Socialist Party's website I could find only excerpts of a speech given by the Prime Minister last December. He said it is in Hungary's and the EU's best interest to reinforce the EU's political, economic and cultural power. One way to ensure this is to extend the EU into countries that may not fit the mold yet. He said that the talks with EU should be flexible and open ended to ensure that these discussions would strengthen the EU and not drive it apart.

The freshest opinion from the liberals came in June in the form of an essay by one of their representatives (István Szent-Iványi). He stressed that Turkey's eventual join would help the EU in its problems of demography (aging) and dwindling energy supply. He also believed that the promise of joining would be beneficial on the development of democracy and judicial system.

In general one can say that the conservative party was forming its opinion based on values, while the liberals and socialists are on specific issues and perceived interests. However this issue is so remote (the earliest date for Turkey to join the EU would be 2013) that there is no extensive conversation about it yet.

<http://tinyurl.com/74ma3> Christian Democrats' opinion (in Hungarian)

<http://tinyurl.com/agx6e> Socialists' opinion (in Hungarian)

<http://tinyurl.com/agx6d> Liberals' opinion (in Hungarian)

10/7/2005

Presidential meeting

Hungary's prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsany met today with President Bush in the White House for fifty minutes. This has been in the making for some time. The previous Hungarian government, being of conservative persuasion, desperately tried to arrange a meeting between Mr. Bush and Viktor Orban, the prime minister between 1992 and 2002. They intended to show that the conservative government is supported by the similarly conservative US administration, which would have resulted in political benefits, which would have been considerable for the Mr. Orban's political supporters. That meeting did not materialize and the current, socialist administration is rubbing it under the conservative noses that they did manage to push a meeting through.



In the joint press release of the heads of states after today's meetings Bush was pleased with Hungary's economic development, legal stability and contribution to the US military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also acknowledged Hungary's concern about visa policies. (US citizens don't need visa to visit Hungary, but Hungarians need visas to come to the US, a cumbersome process guaranteed to humiliate.) Gyurcsany, speaking in Hungarian, emphasized that the two countries are allies and friends, and expressed hope for more and closer economic ties. Answering questions they said that they established a roadmap to resolve the visa issue. However Bush was not at liberty to say whether he can accept Hungary's invitation next year for the ceremonies celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution.

Hungary is a small country with a population of about 10 million and about the same size as Indiana. Changes in US political and economic policies towards a country of this size could have significant effect. The EU has the primary influence on Hungary, by virtue of proximity, but the U.S. cannot be disregarded. This is the major reason that Hungarian politicians of all kind wish to maintain good relationship with U.S.. I said "all kind" but in reality some on the right side cannot be very open about it. Those who put a heavy emphasis on nationalism are likely to oppose capitalism. They view it as a perpetuation of the American system. It is interesting to observe how the far right and the far left are coalescent in their contempt for this. The former is also tinted with anti-Semitism and because their regard of the US a supporter of Israel (some believing in the exhorting power of a Jewish lobby) gives them another reason to hate/oppose the US. Mainstream politicians however are fully aware that they cannot risk angering the US.

Gyurcsany visited a newly opened Hungarian Cultural center in New York. There he was met with a small group of Hungarian right wing activists, shouting slogans accusing him of treason, because of his past affiliation with the Communist party, not wanting to take back Transylvania for Hungary, and in general just not being on their side. I mention this incident to show how lively the political process is in Hungary and among the Hungarian expatriate community.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/20051007-1.html> Press Release

<http://www.kuruc.hu/?q=gyurcsanynewyorkbanmenekult> About the demonstration (with pictures, in Hungarian)

10/10/2005

Budapest is a good city to live in

A few days ago, the prestigious, London based, Economist Intelligence Unit issued its annual “Livability Ranking” report. While I don’t have access to the full report, here is an excerpt from the press release: “The three cities in eastern Europe with the best livability indices (Budapest, Bratislava and Prague) are found in EU accession countries. Factors such as improved transport and communications infrastructure along with greater availability of goods, services and recreational activities have played a part in slowly bringing these cities into line with the west.” Practically all the Hungarian media outlet covered it with some pride. But only a few mentioned that on the actual list of 127 cities Budapest is #57, just one step ahead of Prague and Milan who tied at #58. The same company also supplies, twice a year, a comparative list on the most expensive cities to live in. The latest one, issued this summer, Budapest was the 75th most expensive one out of 130. This corresponds to jumping 12 steps up on the list.

Reactions in the press showed that Hungarians love this kind of external validation. They take pride when examined at judged favorably by an independent source. On the other hand they can be sour and antagonistic upon receiving sour news of being an expensive place to live in. Whichever party is in opposition is always using the former data to attack the government on inflation. On the other hand the current government takes responsibility for positive data, independently whether the reasons are to be attributed to their actions and policies or not.

http://store.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=pr_story&press_id=660001866 EIU press release

Some reactions in Hungarian:

<http://index.hu/gazdasag/vilag/bp8862/>

http://www.pestside.hu/archives/eiu_to_prague_rome_bp_smokes_your_overrated asses_too001568.php

10/14/2005

Harold Pinter's Nobel prize

Yesterday the Swedish Academy announced that this year's Nobel prize for literature will go to Harold Pinter. It is a popular sport in Hungary to boast nationalistic pride by referring to the large number of Hungarian Nobel-prize winners. (It is "large" relative to the country's size in the whole world.) However most of those who pay attention to such things count people who are ethnically Hungarians, came from Hungary, despite that they themselves worked outside the country and often do not consider themselves Hungarians.

Pinter, the British playwright, has a name that is a common in Hungary, therefore some, who may have never heard of him in the past, immediately wanted to add him to the prestigious list. However he is most likely not ethnic Hungarian, but possibly of Portuguese origin, and is certainly Jewish. This factoid hurt the feelings of those who were disturbed by the choice three years ago: Imre Kertesz. He is a Hungarian Jew, who wrote several books on the Holocaust. Those who were waiting for a Hungarian Nobel prize winner for literature would have preferred somebody who is not Jewish. In their mind a non-Jew be qualified more Hungarian. They also wish to push the burden of representation on the writers (i.e. somebody who would paint a positive picture of Hungary and Hungarians would deem more worthy for international fame.)

Pinter is not Hungarian, and so they did not go after him as hard as they did for Kertesz. The Hungarian right-wing media paid noticeably more attention than mainstream media to those critics who voiced their disagreement about giving Pinter the prize. They quoted his political activity as a reason to exclude him. I wonder though whether they would have been much

happier with the strongest contender: Philip Roth, whose grandparents were Hungarian Jews, and whose views and writings are just as controversial.

<http://www.haroldpinter.org> Pinter's site

<http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/2005/index.html> Nobel-prize notification

10/20/2005

News sources about Hungary in English

This may be useful for non-Hungarian speakers as a list of online news sources in English about Hungary.

- The **Budapest Sun** was the first English language weekly in Hungary, when it started 13 years ago. They became the de facto paper for foreigners in Hungary to stay on top of the Hungarian news. The paper has sections for news, business, style, sports, movies, and classifieds. Their website, besides posting all of the above has travel tips and various guides, covering restaurants, real estate, nightlife and so on. I found their news section provided a balanced coverage of what's going on in Hungary, despite a slight conservative bias. Being a weekly they do not attempt to reflect on every minor issue on the political landscape. Instead they provide in-depth analysis and explanation each week on a few select issues. The archive goes back to 1998, thus it is a good research tool.
- For Hungarian professionals **HVG** is the best weekly paper to read. Its name roughly translates to Weekly World Economy. Its primary focus is indeed the economy but it is covering the political arena as well. The online version of the paper has an English section with one or two articles published a day. Only half of the topics are directly business oriented, the rest mostly is on Hungarian political issues. Again, the advantage

here is more in-depth analysis than the dailies offer. The orientation is, as it should be at this kind of a paper, what is good for business. As such they do not seem to be partial to any of the major parties. The website has a minor usability problem: the wording for the link leading from the intro blurb of the articles to the full length version is in Hungarian (“Reszletek”) instead in English. Please don’t be afraid to click on it though. Similarly the link to the archives at the bottom right of the page spells “Archivum” instead “Archives.” Its free version goes back to one year. The paid version may include more.

- **MTI**, the Hungarian News Agency also has an English section. It provides access to three or four news items a day in each of these categories: News, Politics, Diplomacy, EU, Defense, Hungarians, Abroad, Economy, Culture, Sciences, Health/Environment, Law/Order, Miscellaneous, Sports, and Weather/Traffic. To gain full access to more and older items one has to pay a fee. MTI does not provide any commentary; just reports the news as an independent agency.
- Pesti Side is the most popular English language Hungarian gossip blog. It is edited and written mostly by American expatriates, although they prefer the term “internationals” or “cosmopolitans.” From its 20+ sections, politics and business might be of interest here. They post a few items each day in the former, and a bit less frequently in the latter. The pieces are sharp often funny and free spirited commentaries on the absurdities and peculiarities of Hungarian life. They are valuable when an outsiders’ point of view is needed.
- Only one of the two largest daily papers has an English version online. The right-wing **Magyar Nemzet** (“Hungarian Nation”) provides English translations of two of their shorter articles each day. While the quality of the translations is not the best, it still allows

a peak into what the conservative readers have a chance to read. I find their reporting not just distorted, but their use of inflammatory language inciting. They have lost over 100 legal cases in the last few years, because the people who they attacked sued them and proved that they regularly print fabrications. Unfortunately **Nepszabadsag** (i.e. “Freedom of the People”), the most influential daily paper--due to its highest circulation and quality of content--has nothing online in English, thus those who do not read Hungarian cannot compare. I also checked the other two nationally distributed dailies, (both of them are openly left wing) and no luck there either.

- Last but not least I have to mention **Google**'s News service, currently in beta. Searching there for Hungary or Hungarian would yield hundreds of results, culled from thousands of sources, clustered by topics, listed chronologically, the latest being on top. This may or may not provide the most accurate picture and is not entirely focused on politics. Nevertheless it is the most comprehensive and easy-to-look-through site for the latest updates.

While I was working on this summary I found a few more sites with which I was not familiar, and seemed worthwhile to check out. The list includes the weekly Budapest Week, Budapest Business Journal, Budapest Times, and the quarterly Budapest Index.

<http://www.budapestsun.com/> The Budapest Sun

<http://hvg.hu/english.aspx> HVG

<http://english.mti.hu/> MTI

http://www.pestiside.hu/archives/cat_politics.php Pesti Side

<http://www.mno.hu/index.mno?&rvt=48> Magyar Nemzet

<http://news.google.com/news?tab=wn&q=Hungary+or+Hungarian> Google's News search

<http://www.budapestweek.com/> Budapest Week

<http://www.bbj.hu/> Budapest Business Journal

<http://www.budapesttimes.hu/> Budapest Times

<http://www.budapestindex.com/> Budapest Index

10/27/2005

Bush, Gyurcsany, Orban, and Csurka

For over two weeks one of the main topics in Hungarian political discourse was about the existence and content of a few secret telegrams sent in 2001. Upon his return from the U.S., Ferenc Gyurcsany, Hungary's current prime minister, mentioned in the house that George W. Bush still thinks badly of the previous Hungarian conservative prime minister, Viktor Orban. The alleged reason for this is that after 9/11 Orban did not disassociate himself and the government from one of his ally's position. Istvan Csurka, the leader of the far right, nationalistic MIEP party, who in 2001 still had a few seats in the house, said after 9/11 that, "American global politics is responsible for the attacks. It is a direct consequence of what is happening in Palestine and Israel." According to Gyurcsany's speech of October 10, Bush remembered this incident and expressed that it left a bad taste in his mouth. However, the next day Gyurcsany's spokesperson acknowledged that in the meeting between Bush and Gyurcsany the latter brought up the topic and Bush showed little interest in it at all.

In the next round of the polemics Gyurcsany wanted to prove that the US government did have hard feelings about Orban's non-disassociation from Csurka therefore they asked for Orban's approval for declassifying the telegram exchange between the Hungarian embassy and the Hungarian government following the days after 9/11. Fidesz, Orban's party, first denied the

existence of the telegrams. They also pointed out that Orban did disassociate himself from Csurka. According to the Socialists he did it ambiguously at best and too late. Later Fidesz said there was nothing discriminating in the telegrams, but it could potentially be harmful for international relations and people still involved in politics to declassify them. At the same time they accused Gyurcsany of using his meeting with the US president to petty internal goal, to try to blacken Orban by using a quote from the authoritative voice of “the leader of the free world.”

Mr. Jeszenszky, who was the Hungarian ambassador in the US in 2001, said after the above shots were fired, that he never had any hint that US government would have expressed concerns about Orban’s non-disassociation. He explained that he does not have the right to quote from the telegrams, as they are still classified and are at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, not in his possession. He also pointed out that the diplomatic relations between the two countries did not sour at this point. That happened just a few months later when Hungary, in search of the best deal for buying fighter planes for protection, decided to go with Swedish Gripens and not with the American F-16s.

Members of the Foreign Affairs committee of the Hungarian house visit every fall Washington. Amongst other politicians they met with Paula J. Dobriansky, the Under Secretary, Democracy and Global Affairs. According to the Fidesz member of the committee, Dobriansky said that the US does not wish to get involved in Hungary’s internal affairs and they expect Hungarian politicians not to use the bilateral relations for this kind of purpose. On the other hand, according to the Socialist members of the committee it was the Fidesz member who brought up the topic and Dobriansky only gave diplomatically polite answers for his provocation.

Upon their return to Hungary the members of the same committee asked and got permission to read the disputed telegrams from the Ministry. The documents were not

declassified though. Accordingly the committee did announce that at least in one telegram Csurka was mentioned. At the same time the Ministry declassified and had even put up on its website the report about the American-Hungarian relations, prepared by the Hungarian ambassador at the time. This is read differently by the fighting parties. Fidesz saw it as a proof that Gyurcsany lied again. The Socialist found their proof that the US government was not satisfied with Orban's reaction or lack of it.

This whole affair went on for weeks and took a lot of energy and time for both politicians and the public. The fact that such a minor and old issue could take up prime time shows the desperate nature of Hungarian politics. Politicians on both sides try to get any grip they can on the other side. I recognize that this topic has little to do with global issues, of which this blog is supposed to be about, but when Hungary is preoccupied with such an issue to this extent I find it relevant to report on it.

The sources for this series of events in chronological order, all in Hungarian:

<http://index.hu/politika/belfold/parlam1010/>

<http://index.hu/politika/belfold/gyffidesz051/>

<http://index.hu/politika/belfold/gwbgyfov2349/>

<http://index.hu/politika/belfold/1019wshngtn/>

<http://index.hu/politika/belhirek/?main:2005.10.21&240787>

<http://index.hu/politika/belfold/ujcikk9390/>

<http://index.hu/politika/belfold/tvairatok051/>

<http://index.hu/politika/belhirek/?main:2005.10.27&241500>

The Ambassador's report:

http://www.kulugyminiszterium.hu/kum/hu/bal/Aktualis/Miniszteri_beszede/051027osszefoglalo.htm

11/1/2005

Hárskút – renewable energy centre

Today a “Renewable Energy Exhibition Park and Education Centre” opened its doors in the small mountain village of Hárskút. Next year they will start building 25-30 windmills there. Until then visitors can learn about solar and biomass-based energy. The English section of the village's website is a bit sparse on details, but the Centre's is not. The picture and the introductory article reflect the sense of excitement that must have prevailed there.

I attempted to research how many windmill plants are now in Hungary. I was not surprised to learn that the first one was built in 2001 at Kulcs. I knew that the country was lagging, but not to this extent. The good news is that windmap of Hungary has been finished earlier this year and this development should speed up the deployment. As of now there are over 60 windmills functioning in the country and another few dozen are being built. The most comprehensive source for information about renewable energy in Hungary is zoldtech.hu (“green tech”.)

To put the issue of renewable energy production in a larger context I looked for European directives. This is what I found the European Renewable Energy Council's May 2004 policy review:

“Hungary has to comply with the EU renewable energy source directive. The EU goal is to increase renewables as a share of the total primary energy supply energy to 12% and as

share of total electricity to 22% by 2010. Individual countries in the EU have been allocated individual targets. ... Under this agreement the national indicative target of Hungary is to double the present share (3.6 %) of renewables in the TPES (Total Primary Energy Supply) . In accordance with the EU directive 77/2002 Hungary intends to increase the share of renewables in electricity production from the present 0.5 % to 3.6 % until 2010.”

It is clear that Hungary is on the path, but because of the relative lack of fresher information I suspect it is not moving very fast. At least the baby steps have been done; I just hope they are not too late in the process of switching to renewable energy sources before the traditional ones became extinct or prohibitively expensive.

<http://www.megujulo.info/menu.php?l=en&p=1> The Hárskút Centre’s site

<http://www.nol.hu/cikk/382597/> Introductory article (Hungarian)

<http://www.harskut.hu/en/> Hárskút site

<http://www.winfo.hu/> Windmill at Kulcs (Hungarian)

<http://zoldtech.hu/rovatok/szelenergia> GreenTech on windmills (Hungarian)

<http://tinyurl.com/dh7yv> EREC Policy review

11/8/2005

Nuclear meltdown

Hungary has one nuclear powerplant, outside the city of Paks. It produces 15% of the electricity needs of Hungary and some to export. There are three intertwining issues surrounding its operation. Its originally designated usage of 30 years will expire soon. There is a proposal in front of the house extending its usage for another 20 years. A group of 80 citizens, mostly artists,

signed yesterday a public memorandum urging the house not to do so, at least until they have access to all the necessary information to make an educated decision. Furthermore they pointed out that there is consensus about the issue in the general public and the representatives should consider this in their decision making process. Finally they made they emphasized that an independent, environmental study is in the works about the long-term effect of the extension. The findings will not be published for another year or so. Thus the house is making a decision without having a clear sense what they are talking about. The memorandum accused the energy lobby of exercising too much influence on the process.

The lack of information refers to the secrecy surrounding an accident in April 2003. According to the Hungarian branch of Greenpeace this was the most serious one in Europe since Chernobyl. Greenpeace lost a legal case against the powerplant this September and the details of the accident and the cleanup efforts are still not public. What we do know is that the radioactive material leaked out in one of the blocks of the plant and it is still not cleaned up. A ruling for a second Greenpeace v. Powerplant case was made last week in favor of keeping classified the details of the plan on how to reclaim the damaged block.



A group of Greenpeace activists today spread 25' by 25' radioactive sign, saying "Stop Paks" on the staircase of the House as part of their protest against the undue process. 16 of them were arrested, because they did not have permission for the demonstration there(, they had it for a nearby square) and did not vacate the premises when the police warned them to do so.

The third issue, not discussed right now by either parties is what to do with the nuclear waste. Hungary has to find a location within its borders where it would be safe to store it. A close geologist friend of mine has been working on this project for years and she told me that all the potential locations they surveyed had some drawbacks. She has mixed feeling about the project, because on one hand she hopes her team would find a suitable place; on other hand as soon as they do her personal income will significantly decrease.

The production and consumption of energy is a huge and important global issue. Hungary doesn't have the answer yet. On its smaller scale it is working on the same issues as other countries do. It is complicated with the mindset inherited from the Communist time that encourages on the government's side to be as secretive as possible. For example Chernobyl happened 3 days before my high school graduation and I practically learned about it that day. As part of the ceremony we were all carrying large bouquet of flowers. As we walked through the rooms of our old school and passed by our physics teacher he measured the level of radiation and because he found the flowers highly radioactive. He suggested to get rid of them as soon as we get home. We didn't know about the accident and its severity earlier then because of the Soviet reluctance for disclosure and we don't know the details know for similar reasons.

<http://www.npp.hu/index-e.htm> Paks Nuclear Power Plant (English)

<http://index.hu/politika/belfold/atkialt1107/> The artists' memorandum (Hungarian)

http://www.greenpeace.hu/home/story/story_245.html Greenpeace's page on it (Hungarian)

11/16/2005

Is there a CIA prison in Hungary?

On November 2nd the Washington Post had an article which claimed that the CIA is keeping and interrogating 30 members of Al-Quaida (and 70 other suspected and potential terrorists) in secret, unknown prison in Eastern Europe, codenamed “black sites.” According to the Post the program for these prisons, outside the boundaries of US and international law, was started eight years ago and one of the countries involved is Hungary. The CIA and the White House denied the allegations. So did the Hungarian Interior Minister, Monika Lamperth, and the Ministry’s spokesperson, calling it “nonsense.”

However next day photos surfaced on the internet showing an unmarked plane belonging to the CIA landing at the Budapest airport October 3. “Spotters”--whose hobby is to watch, identify and collect information about airplanes--shared the photos. Following the pictures disclosure in the mainstream media Hungary’s national security advisor acknowledged that the plane was in Hungary. According to him there were only five American citizens on the plane, no passengers and they spent only one night in the country. However the custom officers and border patrols could not confirm any of this information.

The November 12 issue of the Magyar Nemzet (right-wing daily) quoted Cheriff Bassiouni from the Italian paper Il Manifesto saying those there were/are secret prisons in Eastern Europe, including Hungary and prisoners were tortured in them. Reacting to this accusation government officials tried to contact Bassiouni, an UN's representative in Afghanistan, to ask him what he based his statement on, but apparently did not manage to do so. Meanwhile there was pressure building in the EU to launch an EU level investigation in the issue. But “EU Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini told Members of the European Parliament that it was up to individual governments to investigate the claims.” By today it seems clear that

Romania and Poland are likely to be more heavily involved than Hungary and this development decreased the pressure from the Hungarian government.

I suspect that we will never know the full truth, but I hope that Hungary will not get more entangled in the issue. There are many Hungarians who are concerned that Hungary can become a target for international terrorists. These voices would prefer to renegotiate our alliance with the US for the same reason. The actual Hungarian troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are rather small, but even that symbolic gesture can deem Hungary a worthy target, they fear.

<http://tinyurl.com/9s5cj> Washington Post article

<http://index.hu/politika/kulfold/blacksites/> First Hungarian reaction

<http://mn.mno.hu/index.mno?cikk=318627> Magyar Nemzet article

11/20/2005

Hungarian? Philanthrop

Hungarians like to keep track of famous people of Hungarian origin even if those people don't consider themselves Hungarian. One of their favorites is **George Soros**. On one hand it appeals to them that he "made it", he is richer than anybody in the country. The same fact supplies reasons for envy. A lot of people, particularly the liberals appreciate how much he supported Hungary and the whole of Eastern Europe the move toward an "open society." According to Business Week he spent 5.4 billion dollars since 1979 on philanthropy. The magazine just published its annual list of top 50 philanthropists and Soros is #4 on the list. The list was based on the amount they spent between 2001 and 2005, and Soros spent half of that amount mentioned above in those years.

If anybody is, Soros is a figure of globalism. Some say that the Berlin Wall was brought down by the fax and Xerox machines. Those enabled a free flow of information in the Eastern block. Most of them were brought by money provided by Soros while the Communist governments tried to ban and confiscate them. He wrote several books and was active in spreading his notion of “open society.” His critics on the other hand point out that through financial dealings he broke the Bank of England and brought down the currencies of nations like Malaysia. He was convicted of insider trading in France and accused of supporting money laundering by having his fund registered in an off-shore tax haven. Some Israelis consider him a self-hating anti-Semitic Jew because of his open criticism of Israeli politics. The lesson we can learn from his example is one of the increasing amount of power one person can hold. Through the accumulation and concentration of wealth he alone is richer than quite a few small countries. On the other hand the way he uses his power and money can have positive influences throughout the world.

(Side note: I met Soros only once, when studying at a rabbinic seminary in London. He was pleasant and direct, we chatted a few words in Hungarian. He was at the school, accompanying the Archbishop of Canterbury.)

http://www.businessweek.com/premium/content/05_48/b3961607.htm Business Week article

<http://hvg.hu/vilag/20051120filantrop.aspx> Hungarian coverage

eu accounting

Madar influenza