

Development of the Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Last Ten Years

A comparison of the foreign policy programs of the post-transition Hungarian governments

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the Hungarian foreign policy in the last ten years. The author states the three main thrusts of the Hungarian foreign policy: the North-Atlantic and European orientation; the regional policy; and, third, supporting ethnic Hungarians in neighboring states. These three directions are analyzed in each of the three Hungarian governments between the period 1990-2000. The author maintains that there was a continuity in matters of national interest, although small differences in the foreign policy could be observed between the three governments. The author points out the differences between the Antall and Horn governments in the policies towards regionalism. Finally, the author reviews Mr. Orbán's foreign policy, which stresses continuity in each of the three areas. The author also underlines the strategic partnership with Croatia, which thus far lacks content.

Ten years have elapsed since the political transition of 1990. Since then, we have had three free and democratic elections in Hungary, all of which resulted in a changing of the guard. The programs of the particular governments showed substantial differences in sectoral policies. There is, perhaps, just one governmental sphere where there has been remarkable continuity; and that is foreign policy. The strategic directions of the foreign policy of the Hungarian state were crucially determined by the program of the first democratic government. The principles laid down there appear to have stood the test of time. Naturally, there have been

divergences, but at that time the tripartite character of the foreign policy orientation of a newly independent Hungary - a feature that has been valid ever since - was originally drafted..

What are those three main directions? The first to be mentioned is the European - North-Atlantic orientation, which represented a radical break from the Soviet orientation of the pre-1990 period. For this to occur, the world political environment had to undergo a radical shift, which began with the Bush-Gorbachev talks of 1989 in Malta, the fall of the Berlin Wall marking one of the high points in that process. That shift was, at the same time, an expression of sovereign will, given that the Soviet Union still existed in 1990. It expressed the desire of the Hungarian people to return to where it had always belonged; namely, to the family of Western European civilizations.

The second main direction was the special focus given to the regional policy of the country. This expressed the natural attachment which had, for centuries, bound it to its surrounding neighbors. This aspiration also reflected the recognition that the country could not be uprooted from its environment, that it could not hope to prosper unless it strove to cooperate with its neighbors - neighbors with which it had frequently been in conflict in the course of history, but had, in many instances, also formed alliances.

The third direction was to embrace the cause of the ethnic Hungarian minorities living across the border, which expressed the desire of Hungarian society to redefine the interests of the Hungarian nation, residing in many countries, after almost half a century of artificial separation and a lack of communication post-1945. Here one must also take into account the circumstance that in the pre-1990 period - despite the clauses concerning the protection of minorities in the peace treaties ending World War One, and the proclamations of the principles of the "Socialist Community" (a product of the post-World War Two constellation) and of "proletarian internationalism" - there had been no general improvement in the situation of national minorities in Eastern Europe, including the ethnic Hungarian minority. All these factors engendered a demand for radical changes in this area.

The first democratic government realistically assessed and charted the foreign policy course of the Hungarian state. This is eloquently attested to by the fact that this tripartite orientation has continued to command a broad consensus between successive governments and their oppositions, and that even changes of government have not produced any seismic shifts in this regard, although there may have been certain shifts in emphasis.

In this article, I will attempt to show the similarities and differences among the foreign policy programs of the three governments, indicating the areas where the changes of emphasis have

been most perceptible. I will also attempt to draw conclusions as to which aspects - in the course of the implementation of a foreign policy strategy that has proved fundamentally correct - have proved durable and valid, and which have proved to have been mistakes and require correction. Let us then examine the programs of the particular governments one by one.

I. The foreign policy program of the Antall (Boross) government (1990-1994)

The program of the HDF-ISP-CDPP¹ government, which was known as "a program of national renewal" and which came to power in 1990 as the result of the first democratic elections may, in many respects, be regarded as the program of political transition, as it charted the main directions and priorities in the particular governmental areas and in foreign policy as well.

As in all other areas, this governmental program also represented a drastic change in the area of foreign policy, compared to the previous period, even taking into account the fact that the Németh government² (the last "Socialist" government), which was in power between 1989-90, proved very courageous in the foreign policy area. It utilized the available opportunities to expand the country's room for maneuver by forging links, for example, with countries which had previously been regarded as taboo (Israel, South Korea, Republic of South Africa, etc.) and by openly defying - based upon the interests of the country - some of its allies of that time (i.e. in the decision to release East German citizens).

The foreign policy program of the Antall government declares: "The Republic of Hungary pursues an independent foreign policy based upon the precedence of national interests, with the aim of completely restoring our national sovereignty. We intend to express and realize our national interests in harmony with European interests and values, and with international realities. Under the conditions of the political transition, on new foundations - taking into account the new requirements and opportunities arising from the altered international situation - we strive to forge and maintain a balanced system of international relations."³ To be sure, this represented a radical break with the policies pursued up to that point and with the existing alliance relations, signaling at the same time Hungary's intention to again assume its place in the family of advanced democratic European countries.

The government program identified the broadest possible involvement in the European integration processes as the top priority foreign policy goal. The reason for this was the need to ensure the foreign policy, security, and economic conditions necessary for the implementation of the comprehensive modernization program facing the country. Owing to the dramatic changes

occurring in the Eastern European region and in the European-Atlantic region - then in the process of formation - the European-Atlantic community of interests was considered pivotal for Hungarian foreign policy, and it was here that foreign policy activity was focused. Hungary was predestined to travel this road by virtue of historical, cultural, and geographical reasons, and also because its political and economic interests dictated such a course.

Within the context of this so-called Euro-Atlantic orientation, contacts were made with the European Communities (the predecessor of the European Union), and with NATO, the Western-European Union, and EFTA. A demand was also voiced for Hungary to establish institutional relations with these integration organizations. While the government program still mentions Comecon, since it still existed back then and Hungary was a member of the economic grouping of the eastern bloc, the emphasis was already on *interests*. (A short time later, Comecon announced its dissolution). In 1990, Hungary also declared its intention to leave the Warsaw Pact. Originally, a longer period was envisaged for this: i.e. the government wished to leave the military structure by December 31, 1991. That plan was thwarted by the fact that the organization was dissolved prior to that date.

The government program's enumeration of the bilateral relations which were of primary importance was also designed to indicate its Euro-Atlantic orientation. The order speaks for itself: Germany (key role), United States (special treatment), France (new stage in relations), Italy (reliable, stable partner), Austria (exceptionally good neighborly relations), Great Britain (important direction), Japan (important interests), Soviet Union (key player in the region). The desire to develop economic cooperation was given important, indeed crucial, emphasis in every single relation.

Also flowing organically from the European orientation was the re-formulation of regional policy, or "neighborhood policy", as it is sometimes called. In this area, too, the Antall government broke with the previously employed ideological clichés, placing the focus on neighborhood policy as well, and on the opportunity and the need to assert national interests. It tended to adhere to the view that since Hungary is situated midway between the West and the East, its intermediary position as a "ferry county"⁴ allows it to exploit its geographical and political situation. Also important was the fact that it lies at the juncture of the great European cultures and language families and that, as a reformist country, it had forged substantive and closer relations with the West, unlike the rest of the "Socialist" countries, while also preserving its close relations with the eastern bloc countries. Hungary's goal was to become a regional hub. To this end, the new powerholders sought

to use the pre-existent regional groupings as well as those established at that time.

For this reason, the program devoted a special section to the neighborhood, even mentioning some countries in the region by name: the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (preserving the level of relations attained, reaching a satisfactory settlement of outstanding issues – i.e. the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros hydroelectric dam project), Poland (important partner), Romania (normalizing relations), Yugoslavia (problem-free relations).

The third strategic direction defined in the government program was the ensuring of human rights, more specifically, minority rights; first and foremost, enforcement and support of the rights of the ethnic Hungarian minorities living across the border. The program noted that the Hungarian state bore a responsibility for the survival of the Hungarian nation as a cultural and ethnic community. "That is why we stand up - respecting the existing international treaties, in the spirit of those treaties and also in conformity with the promises made by the governments of the neighboring states - for the observance of the rights of the Hungarian community living beyond our borders, including the observance of self-determination (within the framework of this, the establishment of cultural autonomy)."⁵ In the interest of achieving this goal, the program also counted on the support of the European institutions. It proceeded on the assumption that, in the near future, it would be possible to find a pan-European institutional solution to the protection of the rights of minorities, including the establishment of a protection monitoring system. In the spirit of balance and reciprocity, the government program affirmed that it also accorded special attention to the issue of Hungary's own national, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities.

The program also mentioned some specific planned measures designed to serve the unity of the Hungarian nation, such as ensuring people of Hungarian citizenship the right to vote abroad and the extension of the institution of dual citizenship. This is where we come across the first use, in the language of Hungarian foreign policy, of the term "national policy", the implementation of which the government formed a special agency: the Office for Cross-Border Hungarians.

Viewing the principal foreign policy moves of the Antall government, it must be stated that it strove to implement the provisions of the government program.

1. Euro-Atlantic orientation and integration

1991 witnessed the dissolution of both Comecon and the Warsaw Pact; in fact, the latter was dissolved at its Budapest session. In 1991, Hungary signed a so-called European Agreement with the European Communities, establishing with them an asso-

ciation. In the spring of 1994, (citing the relevant "O" article of the Maastricht Treaty) it officially applied for membership in the EC. In 1993, it became a party to the NATO-initiated security policy organization, Partnership for Peace.

2. Regional policy

In 1991, it proposed the establishment of a cooperation involving Poland and Czechoslovakia, a project it launched in Visegrád, near Budapest, under the name "The Visegrád Three". It actively supported efforts to reach a negotiated settlement to the Yugoslav internal political crisis. Pointing out that the south Slav peoples had opted for self-determination, it argued from 1991 on for international recognition of the new states emerging from the ruins of the disintegrating country, and, in fact took the lead in establishing diplomatic relations with these countries. In 1992, it was an active participant in the formation of CEFTA⁶. In 1992, it signed a so-called "basic treaty" with Ukraine, and began preparations for similar treaties with Romania and Slovakia (the signing of which occurred under the Horn administration).

3. Ethnic Hungarian minorities

It established institutional relations with the legitimate organizations of the ethnic Hungarian minority living across the border. It took the initiative, within the framework of the CSCE, of extending the international protection of minorities (i.e. the dispatching of observer missions to Vojvodina and Kosovo). It signed a Declaration on the Protection of Minorities with Ukraine, to which, subsequently, Croatia and Slovenia also acceded. In 1993, the Hungarian Parliament enacted a law on the protection of minorities, which institutionalized personal and cultural autonomy.

II. The foreign policy program of the Horn government (1994-1998)

The program of the HSP-AFD⁷ government, which took office in 1994, also devotes considerable attention to foreign policy; however, while its predecessor had indulged in some lofty and occasionally grandiose statements (as the voice of the first democratic government, expressing the aspirations of a once more genuinely independent country), this document uses a far more "pragmatic" language to describe the principal foreign policy goals of the government which, incidentally, were quite similar to those of the previous administration.

It stated that Hungary was less able to shape its international environment due to the capabilities of that international environment and the changes intended to exert influence on the country. "Hence, Hungarian foreign policy must, above all, strive to use to the fullest possible advantage the opportunities arising from the

international conditions, while taking into account the objective constraints. At the same time, within the bounds of the existing possibilities, just how Hungary's relations with the states that matter to it are going to develop, whether it is able to accede (and if so, under what conditions) to the various country groupings, international organizations, and institutions, largely depends on the correct choice of emphases, the suitability of the instrumentalities, and an appropriate style."⁸

Safeguarding the security of the country, ensuring the external resources and markets indispensable to the economy, promoting the development of an authentic country image, and encouraging FDI (foreign direct investment) in Hungary are just some of the foreign policy goals the document identified. The government program reiterates, in effect, the priorities of the foreign policy program and main courses of action of the previous administration. "The government strives to ensure the close attachment of Hungary to the advanced countries and its integration into the Euro-Atlantic organizations, to forge good-neighborly relations with the states of our region, and to support cross-border Hungarians in their ambition to have their rights recognized, guaranteed, and duly observed in practice, in accordance with the international documents and norms."⁹ The government stated that there was a close inter-dependence and reciprocity among these three directions of activity; therefore, it pronounced them to be of equal importance. The Horn government also stressed the precedence of economic interests in the crafting of foreign policy.

From the standpoint of the integration efforts, the government program ascribed an absolutely crucial importance to Hungary's admittance to the European Union at the earliest possible date and under the most favorable terms possible. Until the issue of accession was put on the agenda, it set itself the goal of utilizing to the fullest possible degree the opportunities and benefits accruing from that association. The program stressed the importance of preparing the country as best it could for this accession, and it was with this aim in mind that considerable importance was placed upon increasing the competitiveness of the economy, harmonizing the legal system, enforcing the requirements of European political culture, and educating the public. The government's goal was to ensure that the accession negotiations began before the end of the parliamentary term.

It also described the achievement of NATO membership as a strategic goal. To this end, it envisaged close cooperation with the North-Atlantic Cooperation Council in the Partnership for Peace programs, considering it a prerequisite for NATO membership. The program did not elaborate on bilateral relations with the advanced countries, but it did enumerate the international integrations to which the vast majority of the highly developed coun-

tries belonged, which included the European Union, NATO, and the OECD.

Developing relations with Hungary's neighbors was identified as a priority area. According to the philosophy of the government program, this was equally important to the stability of the region, the economic development of the country, and the expansion of its market possibilities. The program stated that, unless Hungary's relations with its neighbors were normalized, there was also no opportunity for any improvement in the plight of the ethnic Hungarian minorities living there. And, finally, it also stated that the establishment of well-regulated relations was also indispensable from the standpoint of the international perception of the country and of Western support for its integration efforts. It envisaged some initiatives and announced confidence-building measures. The Horn government intended to pay special attention to relations with Slovakia and Romania, declaring its readiness to conclude so-called basic treaties with these countries. There was another neighbor that was accorded a special place in the government program, and that was Yugoslavia, with which the government declared itself ready to improve relations once the Yugoslav crisis was over. As far as relations in the region were concerned, the program also stressed here the priority of economic considerations, mentioning, at the same time, the importance of trans-frontier relations, and regional and sub-regional forms of cooperation, such as the CEI¹⁰, the Visegrád Cooperation, the Alps-Adriatic Working Group, the Carpathians Euroregion, etc.

The government intended to pay great attention to the support of cross-border Hungarians, which is the duty of every Hungarian government as laid down in the Constitution. It emphasized that, on the one hand, it supported the enforcement of minority rights and the autonomy aspirations which conformed to European norms, but, on the other hand, it considered it important that the Hungarian community beyond the border should grow stronger in economic terms as well. The government sought to advance the achievement of this goal both in the bilateral area ("dialogue with the neighbors") and in the multilateral area ("securing international support"). The Horn cabinet also considered the establishment of an effective international system for the protection of minorities to be absolutely vital, declaring that no official Hungarian position could be determined without taking into account the opinion of the organizations of cross-border Hungarians.

The Horn administration implemented in practice and developed further the foreign policy ambitions which had now been pursued over two governmental terms.

1. Euro-Atlantic integration

In 1994, the treaty of association concluded with the EC came into force, and its implementation was begun. In 1996, an agency to direct and coordinate the tasks connected with the integration - the State Secretariat for Integration - was formed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Initially, it was in charge of managing both the EU and the NATO accession process, with NATO affairs subsequently removed from its competence.) In the course of 1996-97, the government prepared the reply to be given to the EU questionnaire; as a result, the relevant agencies of the EU formed a favorable country opinion. This led to an invitation to Hungary in 1997 to participate in accession talks, which began in the spring of 1998. In 1997, NATO also decided to invite Hungary to become a member. In the autumn of 1997, a successful referendum was held, which supported NATO membership.

2. Neighborhood policy

In 1995-96, it concluded basic treaties with Slovakia and Romania, and rapidly developed bilateral relations with the newly independent Yugoslav successor states, concluding several treaties with them. It established new diplomatic missions in the region, i.e. Sarajevo, Cluj (Koložsvár). New Euroregions came into being between Hungary and Austria, and between Yugoslavia and Romania, respectively CEFTA gained new members, and it was decided to establish a strategic cooperation with Poland.

3. Policy towards Hungarians

The basic treaties concluded with Slovakia and Romania also contained some provisions on the protection of minorities. An agreement on the protection of minorities was concluded with Croatia in 1995 and another was signed in 1996 with Slovenia. In 1996, the first Hungarian-Hungarian conference occurred, a discussion forum involving Hungarian political leaders based in Hungary and their cross-border counterparts.

III. The foreign policy moves and actions of the first two democratic governments - differences and similarities

The early 1990s were characterized by great transformations and movements. It was a heady period throughout Europe, with German reunification setting the basic trend. In that rapidly changing environment, the Antall administration took a fundamentally correct view of the country's opportunities and room for maneuver when framing its principal foreign policy objectives, and went about implementing them with great enthusiasm. In 1991, the Yugoslav crisis erupted; the armed conflict was of great

significance to Hungary - history assigned to it a larger role than its size, influence, and strength would otherwise have dictated. There was a flurry of international contacts; during this period, the leaders of the major powers would regularly consult Prime Minister Antall.

Early in 1991, the new government, as a result of its speedy negotiations, concluded the association agreement with the EC, which launched Hungary's integration into the community of advanced European countries. But the burgeoning close cooperation was overshadowed by what was arguably the greatest foreign policy fiasco of the Antall government; namely, the so-called "Kalashnikov affair", the sale of weapons to Croatia. This caused revulsion in numerous Western countries, but especially among Hungary's neighbors, as it was proved that Hungary had actively interfered in the internal affairs of a neighboring country. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Prime Minister himself and certain senior politicians of the HDF made ambiguous statements open to misconstruction concerning the status and sovereignty of Vojvodina. This development was not very helpful in the international lobbying being carried out for the protection of the rights of cross-border ethnic Hungarians, and it created misunderstandings of even the most well-intentioned gestures of the Hungarian government towards its notoriously sensitive neighbors. The moves made towards Romania and Slovakia, at that time heading toward independence, did not always meet with an unqualified positive response.

Along with the Euro-Atlantic integration process - which was proceeding in a fairly smooth fashion - the Antall government took the initiative in its relations with the neighboring countries. It reinforced the Hungarian-Polish and Hungarian-Czech cooperation, both of which had historical and traditional ties. The Antall government embraced and supported the international aspirations of Ukraine, also proceeding towards independence at that time. It also made great efforts to live up to the regional hub role envisaged and undertaken in the government program, building on the leading Western nations' sympathy for Hungary, and especially on the personal support of Chancellor Kohl. But Hungary's pioneering, special role swiftly began to fade due to certain strong reactions to this ineptly articulated concept. Explaining the situation of ethnic Hungarian minorities and attempting to gain international assistance to help improve their position was getting more and more difficult. At the International Conference on Yugoslavia held in London, for instance, virtually all the efforts made towards this end proved fruitless. This prompted the government to try and attain its goals on a bilateral basis, which is what led to the Hungarian-Ukrainian declaration on national minorities, to the accession of Croatia and Slovenia to that declaration, and, sub-

sequently, to the crafting of the Hungarian-Ukrainian basic treaty and the negotiations with Yugoslavia regarding the future fate of the ethnic Hungarian minority.

Hungary's opportunities for asserting its foreign policy interests were also not helped by the return home and reburial, in 1993, of the remains of the former Regent Miklós Horthy. In spite of the government's insistence that it was a purely humanitarian act and a family affair, the attendance at the funeral of some prominent members of the government sent a wrong signal. Hungary's neighbors watched with anxiety as the Hungarian government demonstrated its solidarity with a historical personage who is deeply unpopular in the region.

In the last phase of its term, the Antall government - or rather, the Boross government, as it was known by then - once again turned towards the Euro-Atlantic integration, submitting to the EU the official application for accession.

The Horn government, which took office in 1994, also began implementing its foreign policy strategy with great energy. First, it buttressed the Foreign Ministry division in charge of directing the Euro-Atlantic integration process, establishing a special unit to oversee it. In 1996, it drafted a reply, running to thousands of pages, to the so-called "country questionnaire" of the EU. As a result of the successful preparation, the EU included Hungary in 1997 in the group of applicant countries with which it intended to begin accession negotiations. The beginning of the accession negotiations - which are still continuing - occurred at the end of March, 1998. Speaking for the Hungarian government, Minister of Foreign Affairs László Kovács declared in the so-called Opening Statement which embodied the Hungarian position: "The commencement of accession negotiations with the EU has a historic significance to the Republic of Hungary. The past, culture, and choice of values of the Hungarian people have, for a thousand years now, had a European attachment to them. (...) The political transition and the social-economic transformation that has occurred have created the indispensable political and economic preconditions of accession. According to our conviction, the historic goal which, proposed and continuously represented by the freely elected Hungarian governments, commands the consensus of the parliamentary parties and the comprehensive support of public opinion - namely, European integration across the full range - is achievable on the basis of these preconditions."¹¹

In 1996, the Horn cabinet - complying with the request of the leading countries of NATO, primarily the US, dispatched a Hungarian contingent to the IFOR, and subsequently the SFOR forces¹² stationed in Bosnia. This was a major factor in the decision to place the option of Hungary's NATO membership on the agenda in 1997. The final decision was made at the Madrid con-

ference of the NATO foreign ministers, in the summer of 1998. Prior to that, in the autumn of 1997, a successful referendum was held which produced a 75 per cent vote in favor of NATO membership. The accession document was then signed by the next government, in the spring of 1999, at NATO's 50th anniversary celebrations, in Independence, in the United States.

It is in the area of neighborhood policy that we see the most salient difference in the foreign policy activities of the Antall and the Horn governments. Here, the administration that held power between 1994-98 consciously pursued a different style and emphasis, breaking with the ideological phraseology and ambiguous utterances that had so irritated the neighbors. There was a highly conscious endeavor to settle any outstanding issues and to conclude agreements. This endeavor has enjoyed some successes and also some failures. The conclusion of the so-called basic treaties with Slovakia (1995) and with Romania (1996) must be considered a success, as they settled, in a relatively reassuring fashion, the enforcement - within the possible limitations - of the rights of the numerous ethnic Hungarian minorities inhabiting those countries, and removed the minority issue from the list of issues burdening bilateral relations. It is not too extravagant to claim that these basic treaties have played a large role in creating the kind of political climate which has allowed the ethnic Hungarian minorities to become governmental factors both in Slovakia and in Romania. The treatment of the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros dispute and the submission of the issue to the International Court of Justice in the Hague proved to be a fiasco. Prime Minister Gyula Horn was the first to have paid a visit to the newly independent Yugoslav successor states, Slovenia and Croatia. As a sign of goodwill, he also made a visit to Yugoslavia.

The government actions taken in furtherance of the interests of ethnic Hungarians living across the border were a continuation of the efforts of the previous government, and, on balance, have proved more successful. In addition to the Hungarian-Slovak and Hungarian-Romanian basic treaties previously mentioned, the government signed, in 1995, an express treaty on the protection of minorities with Croatia, and a similar one with Slovenia in 1996. These may rightfully be described as exemplary. Based upon these actions, Hungary has shown in practice that it has an interest in the stability of the region and in the mutual reconciliation of peoples, a fact that has been greatly instrumental in prompting the EU and NATO to make the aforementioned decisions.

IV. The foreign policy program of the Orbán government

The introduction of the foreign policy section of the government program called "On the threshold of a new millennium"

notes with satisfaction that “with the NATO membership, Hungary has finally obtained a place in the community of advanced Western democracies.”¹³ Referring to the other integration, it points out that “the main question of accession to the Union is whether we will succeed (...) in building a country capable of using the possibilities of the Union, or whether we allow ourselves to be pushed to the margins of Europe (...) Thus the aim of the negotiations carried on with the EU is, by now, to make sure that the assertion of our economic interests becomes the focus (...) It is a legitimate expectation that the Hungarian government should represent the national interests in a consistent and resolute manner.”¹⁴

The program makes an explicit commitment to continuity: “The government embraces as its own and carries forward the three main directions of the foreign policy ambitions adopted by national consensus after the political transition - to wit, Euro-Atlantic integration, good-neighborly policies designed to ensure regional stability, and a national policy which encompasses the support of ethnic Hungarians living across the border.”¹⁵ The government emphasized the need to balance these goals, stating that these goals presuppose each other and are closely interdependent. The document states with great emphasis that the decision on Hungary’s admission to NATO and the invitation to accession talks with the EU are the result of the consistency of the foreign policy goals and the national consensus underlying them. The government showed itself desirous of maintaining the consensus, declaring that “(...) the responsibility for building a consensus lies mainly with the government.”¹⁶

Within the three main directions, emphasis is given to the continuation of the accession negotiations, and to attempts to secure the most advantageous possible terms, with accession itself to take place in 2002¹⁷; advancing the European unification process; bolstering stability in Central and Eastern Europe; deepening cooperation among the countries of the region; respect for the basic treaties concluded; increasing regional cooperation; namely, the strengthening of CEFTA; helping the ethnic Hungarian minorities to remain in their land of birth; carrying on the institutional dialogue with the Hungarian organizations; and increasing the financial assistance being given to them.

So, in foreign policy, the Orbán cabinet placed the emphasis on continuity, embarking on its activity in that spirit. Although the last two years are not sufficient to allow us to draw any final conclusions, certain observations can be made at this early stage. It is in the realm of the integration policy that we see the continuity at its strongest, but it appears that the course being pursued in the neighborhood policy field has been fairly consistent as well. The Orbán government has made some efforts to resuscitate the

Visegrád Cooperation - which, in recent years, has been in a state of suspended animation -, and seems to be succeeding. It has declared a strategic partnership with Croatia, which, however, thus far lacks content.

On balance, it can be argued that the predictability and constructive character of Hungarian foreign policy has been of great benefit to Hungary's fortunes, as the advanced Western countries as well as our neighbors have acknowledged this trend and shown appreciation. Today Hungary is an island of stability in the region, and enjoys an orderly and developing fabric of relations with all its neighbors except Yugoslavia (due to factors outside Hungary's control). It is a member of NATO, a potential first-wave entrant into the EU, a party to nearly all the regional organizations, and the political organizations of the ethnic Hungarian minority are in power in Slovakia and in Romania. In regard to the other neighbors, we have treaties guaranteeing their rights, and institutional relations have been forged between the mother country and the ethnic Hungarians living across the border.

It is not overstating the case to conclude that Hungary's present international standing would be quite different if the three changes of government had produced a drastically or even partially new foreign policy course, disrupting thereby the processes that have survived successive governmental terms.

NOTES

1. HDF: Hungarian Democratic Forum, ISP: Independent Smallholders' Party, CDDP: Christian Democratic Peoples' Party
2. Miklós Németh became Prime Minister in the autumn of 1988, after Károly Grósz resigned as head of government
3. A program of national renewal, Budapest, 1990, p. 177.
4. It was the poet Endre Ady who dubbed Hungary a "ferry country", because, in the course of its history, it had always engaged in a two-way traffic - like a ferry - between the West and the East.
5. A program of national renewal, p. 184.
6. Central European Free Trade Agreement, which - after the breakup of Czechoslovakia - has also been joined by Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria.
7. HSP: Hungarian Socialist Party, AFD: Alliance of Free Democrats.
8. Government program, (...) p. 145.
9. Government program, p. 146.
10. Central European Initiative, formerly the Quadrigonale, Pentagonale, Hexagonale, etc.; at present, it has 16 members.
11. www.mfa.gov.hu/euanyag/SZI/eu/kulnyilol.htm. p. 1.
12. International Forces - 1996-98; Stabilization Forces - from 1998 onwards.
13. "On the threshold of a new millennium", Budapest, 1998.
14. "On the threshold of a new millennium", Budapest, 1998.

15. "On the threshold of a new millennium", Budapest, 1998.
16. "On the threshold of a new millennium", Budapest, 1998.
17. That date has, since then, lost its relevance; at present, the beginning of 2003 seems the earliest realistic date for the accession.