

Chapter 5

Changing Border Situations within the Context of Hungarian Geopolitics

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A major focus of this book are recent geopolitical shifts that have not only reconfigured European borders but also transformed the nature of relationships between an enlarging EU and its immediate 'neighbourhood'. Hungary, an EU member since 2004, has undergone several dramatic transitions with regard to its geopolitical situation within Europe. Wedged between 'core Europe' and the Schengen area, on the one hand, and the emerging New Neighbourhood, on the other, Hungary's borders, and the management of these borders, will tell us much about the EU as an 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' political community. Several essays in this book deal directly with these questions, for example Béla Baranyi's which provides an overview of the evolution of cross-border cooperation at Hungary's eastern borders. In order to more clearly frame the overall geopolitical context of Hungary's 'EU-Europeanization', it is necessary to review historical developments that have affected central and eastern Europe during the past century.

Hungary's geopolitical status was fundamentally recast in the course of the twentieth century, with its territory and frontiers changing dramatically twice through war and its aftermath. This had a profound impact on its relations with its neighbours and its embeddedness in regional as well as continental power relations. After the second world war, Hungary – now as a small state – gradually adjusted to the geopolitical structures of a divided world and, within that, a divided Europe. Hungary's self-perception in geopolitical terms has also been dependent both on values promulgated by political elites and more general perceptions of 'neighbours', 'security', 'interstate community' and 'alliances'. The determinants of how a geopolitical situation is perceived domestically vary greatly from one social group to the next. The governing elite may, for instance, have a specific perception of the evolution of a country's foreign policy and its network of alliances and thus of the advantages or disadvantages of the country's geographical location. In terms of external perceptions of Hungary's geopolitical role this has entailed the evaluation of its participation in processes involving its neighbours and spatial community and in European and global trends. As Hungarian history attests, neighbouring states and European actors have several times shifted geopolitical positions and opinions on rather short notice. Hungary's geopolitical status and its changes can be examined and approached from several spatial aspects (Ring 1986; Pándi 1995;

Hajdú 1995; Romsics 1996; Pap and Tóth 1997), including 1) relations with its neighbours, 2) perception of its spatial community (for example, central Europe), 3) its functional large space (in-between Europe, a grey zone), 4) trends in Europe and 5) more global trends.

Although in terms of ethnicity, Hungary's neighbouring environment was relatively stable in the twentieth century, the importance and role of individual ethnic groups underwent dramatic changes. Voluntary and forced international migration as well as the spontaneous, often strikingly different, grassroots movements of various ethnic groups played a 'supporting' role in the transformation of the ethnic space (Kocsis and Kocsis-Hodosi 1998). In contrast, neighbouring states changed continuously, and on several occasions fundamentally, in the course of the twentieth century. New states (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union) have emerged and disappeared, neighbours have changed (Germany and Poland) and new states have become new neighbours (Slovakia, the Ukraine, Serbia-Montenegro, Croatia and Slovenia). Almost 'hidden' in the former Soviet Union, the Ukraine, for instance, hardly exerted any impact on trends in Hungary before December 1991. Since then it has become Hungary's largest, most populous and militarily most powerful neighbour. In addition, Austria's history in the twentieth century also had a major impact on Hungary's geopolitical situation (Lendvai 1997; Kissinger 1994; Király and Romsics 1998).

This essay will provide an overview of Hungary's changing geopolitical status within Europe since 1919. These changes mirror more global events that have taken place at the European level. This essay will also provide background for several case studies presented later in this book by the Hungarian authors.

Hungary and Geopolitical Determinants of the Twentieth Century

Global, continental and domestic developments as well as developments in neighbouring countries all influence the prevailing geopolitical situation of a given country and along its borders. In the twentieth century a constantly changing Hungary with constantly changing neighbours fitted in with the regional, economic and power structures in Europe. Within frequently changing European structures, Hungary and its neighbours belonged to one of the most unstable regions. With its boundaries redrawn radically and frequently, Hungary's geographical location has been defined on a number of occasions in the twentieth century and labelled as 'Eastern', 'Western', 'Southeast European', 'Balkan', 'Southern European', 'Southwest European', 'Central European', 'Central East European' and 'East Central European' (Ankler 1997; Beluszky 1995), each geographical characterization based on direct internal and external political considerations. Even Hungarians themselves were unable to arrive at a consensus on the country's geographical identity in Europe, perhaps reflecting the multifarious factors at work on Hungary's national identity.

Hungary's geopolitical characteristics changed from one era to the next in the course of its recent history, with various political ambitions proclaimed to its



Map 5.1 Hungary and its neighbours

neighbours. Before 1918, the Hungarian political elite and the rest of the society were sharply divided over the status of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (a major power vs a minor power vs a power between the two), the security of its borders and the relationship between Austria and Hungary and the individual neighbouring countries. Prior to 1918, Hungary did not have any material border dispute with neighbouring states. However, some of the latter (that is, Romania and Serbia) laid overt claims to sizeable areas in Hungary (as far as the River Tisza and Lake Balaton, respectively). The Czechs living within the boundaries of the monarchy also envisaged a nation state incorporating large areas in Hungary (stretching as far as Budapest). Under the 1920 Peace Treaty, Hungary became an independent country on one-third of its former territory, with one-third of its population incorporated into neighbouring countries. Between the two wars it publicly voiced its claims for its former territories to its neighbours. There was a contradiction between its actual status (that is, that of a minor military power, a small country with a small population and low economic performance) and the feasibility of its ambition relying on its own resources. That is indeed why alliances became more important than before.

The perception of Hungary by its neighbouring countries was also rather mixed. The one that the population, the political elite and, in part, the scientific community in the successor states had after 1920 was based on the size, importance and opportunities of the pre-1918 Hungary rather than on its contemporary status. Essentially, successor states lost sight of actual power relations in shaping their

foreign policy and were forging their alliances against Hungary. Between the two wars there emerged fundamental differences between the individual groups of pro-Italians, pro-Germans and the pro-British with regard to the perception of the country's status and the feasibility of its ambitions to annex its former territories. Though Hungary became Germany's neighbour after the Anschluss, it officially continued to lay territorial claims to Burgenland.

Before and during the second world war, parts of Hungary's former territories were annexed (the Hungarian Highlands in 1938, Ruthenia in 1939, Northern Transylvania in 1940 and the Voivodina in 1941), leading to a situation which proved transient and impaired the chances of subsequent cooperation with most of its neighbouring countries. The lack of a broad-based consensus manifested itself in rather a particular manner between 1945 and 1948, when the country, with its room for manoeuvre limited by the Russian occupation, took stock of its geopolitical opportunities. After 1949 Hungary adjusted to the Soviet sphere of interest. 'Fraternal, eternal and unbreakable friendship between Hungary and the Soviet Union' was (except for 1956) an unchallengeable tenet of official politics. Though this alliance and commitment were unacceptable for the majority of the Hungarian people, dissident ideas were repressed for decades. After 1949, furthermore, Hungary's geopolitical status was fundamentally determined by its inclusion in the Soviet alliance system in eastern Europe. The country became an integral part of the 'socialist camp', that is the Soviet sphere of political and economic interests. Surprisingly enough, it was economic relations that were first enshrined in an international treaty and institutionalized when, on 20 January 1949, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), a council to promote economic cooperation between socialist countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and the Soviet Union), was established.

Though the Warsaw Pact (1955) was supposed to be a military alliance, the military might of the minor signatories to the protocol was nowhere near that of the Soviet Union. The true underlying reason for the foundation of the pact was to enable the Soviet Union to have military control over the territories of its allies. Hungary bordered socialist countries along most of its borders (2,246 km or 84.1 per cent). From 1955, 56.9 per cent stretched along the 'borders of military alliance'. Before the Austrian state treaty was concluded in 1955, a mere 15.9 per cent of its state frontier ran along the borders of Austria, first under Soviet occupation and then a neutral nation. Under the contemporary system of values, political contiguity of this kind was perceived as favourable. (The perception of Yugoslavia or the shared borderline was far from being consistent or unambiguous at times.) In the era of bipolarity, bilateral relations between neighbouring countries were characterized by the coexistence of stability and instability. The very content of interstate relations played a key role in shaping border and cross-border relations.

In the 1950s, borders were in effect 'closed' along their entire length in terms of population relations. Differences only lay in the type and nature of the closure. After the 1956 revolution the geopolitical status quo along Hungary's borders became even more convoluted. Borders between allied countries were difficult to cross for

most of the citizens. Though the Hungarian-Russian border was the scene of heavy freight and goods transportation, and military and ideological ties between the two countries were close, a sturdy barbed wire fence on the Soviet side of the border – the iron curtain – sent the unambiguous message that the Soviet Union was less than enthusiastic about encouraging the establishment of population relations on a massive scale. (The underlying reason for this was the ethnic Hungarians living on the Soviet side of the border.) After the withdrawal of the Russian troops from Austria (1955) a marked change occurred in the perception of the Austrian border. Border control was tightened on the Hungarian side and relations between the two countries were reduced to a bare minimum. After 1948 the border to Yugoslavia was practically closed in a military sense and remained so during the rest of the decade. Though the remaining borders were formally considered to be 'friendly borders', there was no political will to shape relations with the relevant countries.

The 1960s saw some material changes along the borders. Opportunities to establish better cross-border ties improved. Decisions were made on the level of official politics 'to develop cross-border ties with neighbouring friendly countries', and so there were plans to implement such decisions. The so-called 'red passport', introduced in Hungary and valid for travels in socialist countries, except Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, allowed the majority of the Hungarian population freer movement and provided for the possibility of regular encounters and contact between Hungarian nationals and ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries. From the second half of the 1960s increasingly special importance was attached to Hungarian-Austrian relations. Both parties were ready and able to demonstrate the advantages of the policy of peaceful coexistence of different economic and social regimes. The improvement in relations was due to the fact that Hungary had become the most presentable socialist country in terms of its internal affairs.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 (with minor allies providing a helping hand) was still 'within limits' tolerable to a divided bipolar world, and no countermeasures were taken by the West in response. Hungary's participation in the invasion unfavourably affected Hungarian-Czechoslovak cross-border relations. The 1970s saw improvements in the geopolitical sphere in nearly every direction. Détente and collective security efforts suited Hungarian interests perfectly. The ratification of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975, in Helsinki, created favourable conditions for expanding manoeuvring room for Hungary's foreign policy.

Despite this, relations between Hungary and its neighbours were far from good in the 1980s. In fact, those with Romania became rather strained, mainly due to the rapid deterioration in the treatment of ethnic Hungarians (Shafir 1985). Hungarian-Czechoslovak relations also had their ups and downs, primarily because of the planned construction of a dam on the River Danube at Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros and the treatment of ethnic Hungarians (Wolchik 1991). But Hungarian-Yugoslav relations were, compared to earlier decades, relatively smooth. Yugoslavia was busy sorting out its own problems, facing the challenges and contradictions of change in the post-Tito era. In the final decade of state socialism the Hungarian economy became an

integral part of COMECON, and the Soviet division of labour in particular. Socialist economic 'commitment' was gradually abandoned through the advocacy of national interests and integration into the Western economy.

Based on total turnover the fundamental structure of Hungarian foreign trade in 1985 reflected the dominance of trade with socialist countries, and within this COMECON countries in terms of both imports (54.4 per cent) and exports (58.6 per cent); the proportion of developed capitalist countries was significant (38.5 and 30.8 per cent, respectively) while that of developing countries was low (7.1 and 10.6 per cent, respectively). For economic and political-ideological reasons Hungary's most important trading partner was the Soviet Union, having a share of 30 per cent of imports and 33.6 per cent of exports. Hungary's second-most important trading partner was the Federal Republic of Germany, with a share of 11.4 per cent in exports and 7.8 per cent in imports.

The development of cross-border ties involving areas along the western and southwestern borders in the second half of the 1980s was a new phenomenon. First as observers, then as members, the counties lying along Hungary's western border joined the Alpine-Adriatic Working Group and became increasingly involved in its activities. The significance of this working relationship was far-reaching. Attempts at comprehensively developing border and cross-border with socialist allies failed. Already by 1989 the 'non-rouble based' turnover was dominant (61.6 per cent), while the proportion of turnover settled in roubles shrank (38.4 per cent). A similar 'shift in the pattern of financial settlement' was discernible in exports, with 62.2 per cent of all exports being settled in other currencies. In 1989 the proportion of foreign trade (imports and exports) was as follows: COMECON countries, 41.8 per cent; countries of the European Economic Community (EEC), 29 and 24.8 per cent; countries of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) 13.8 and 10.7 per cent; and the rest of the world, 17.6 and 27 per cent respectively. Largely due to the Soviet Union, Hungarian foreign trade turnover was as a rule centred on neighbouring countries, hence on Europe.

As regards military structures Hungary was fully incorporated into the Warsaw Pact. In effect, it accepted the military doctrine and supremacy of the Soviet Union. With its operation subordinated to the Warsaw Pact, the Hungarian army was wholly dependent on the Soviet Union for such things as the supply of military technology and the planning of military operations. In essence, military policy in Hungary was subject to the status that it had in the territorial system of the Warsaw Pact with its perceived 'enemy image' and in Soviet geostrategy. Within the system of military alliance Hungary was classified as a Southwest European country due to its strategic location. It was not in the front line of the division between the two regimes. Rather it was defined as a country lying in 'the direction of minor military operations'. (Yet the amount of military technology amassed, discovered upon the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Hungary, pointed to meticulous preparation for major military offensives in this direction as well.)

The stationing of the Soviet Southern Group of Forces in Hungary served the purposes of not only external but also, if needed, internal oppression. The territorial

layout of the Soviet military bases unequivocally pointed to the set-up of a battle order in a westerly direction; the Russian ring around Budapest was a key component of army force allocation (possible internal oppression). The Hungarian army was larger than the Soviet forces stationed in Hungary in terms of headcount. However, it was significantly weaker in terms of fire power. The Hungarian air force was especially weak and outdated compared to its Soviet counterpart. The military structure meant that the country and the Hungarian army were both vulnerable. Hungarian-Soviet military relations remained stable until the political changeover. In January 1988 a military exercise called 'Friendship 88' was mounted with the participation of Hungarian, Czechoslovak and Soviet forces. In line with new European agreements and treaties governing issues of politics, security and military policy, observers from the West followed the exercise.

In October 1988 Budapest hosted the meeting of the Military Council of the Armed Forces of Warsaw Pact member states, which examined the possible outcome of a reduction in armed forces. The meeting was followed by a military exercise with the participation of Hungarian and Soviet forces. Observers from the West also attended the exercise. In December 1988 Mikhail Gorbachev announced at the general assembly of the United Nations that the numbers of Soviet troops in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia would be reduced. Accordingly, the defence ministers of Warsaw Pact countries afterwards only talked about 'the provision of adequate protection' at their meeting in Budapest in November 1989. This allowed for the possibility that the Warsaw Pact could actually be transformed into a defence organization. After 1988 an interaction between a protracted internal crisis in the Soviet Union with an increasingly weakening status in global politics (and also a diminished position as a superpower) and the internal transformation of neighbouring countries brought about domestic developments. This interaction opened up new possibilities for Hungary's geopolitical status to change (Agnew and Corbridge 1989).

Of all socialist countries, except for the German Democratic Republic which had a special status due to trade with the Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary was the first to realize the importance of the European Economic Community. As early as 1982 Hungary started expert-level negotiations with the EEC to improve trading conditions. The expanding EEC played an increasingly important role in Hungarian foreign trade. Hungary had a vested interest in developing bilateral economic relations in all spheres. Examined from the perspective of 'statistical ease of crossing borders', neighbourly ties reflected a particularly unique situation 'during the final years of building socialism'. Based on the average length of border per road or railway border crossing station at the end of the era and from nearly all other perspectives after 1988, the Austrian border was the easiest and the Soviet one the hardest to cross. With the introduction of the so-called 'world passport' in 1988, swarms of Hungarians went on shopping sprees to Austria. Still, Hungary was not allowed to ignore the security expectations of the 'socialist camp'. As a result it was not until the end of the era that, for instance, the 'iron curtain' was dismantled.

The two countries agreed on putting an end to the institution of sealed borders in February 1989. It only took a few weeks to dismantle them physically.

From 1986, completely lawful under the constitution, various dissident groups and organizations were established, with rethinking the country's geopolitical status as one of their major objectives. Though some still accepted the political shelter offered by the Patriotic Popular Front, manifestos concerning the country's international status contained radically new demands:

- return to the European fold (the reintegration of Hungary as an independent nation into the political, economic and cultural community of European nations);
- integration of central Europe (nations in the region should enter into economic and political alliances based on mutual advantage of their own accord and without any external intervention; this would enable ethnic issues to be solved in a democratic spirit);
- a unified Hungarian nation (all 15 million Hungarians should belong to a unified Hungarian nation; the government in office should support the cause of ethnic Hungarians on various international fora);
- an independent Hungary (based on contemporary national interests, Hungary should re-evaluate the system of international relations established during the Stalin era).

Operating as parties (the Hungarian Democratic Front, the Alliance of Young Democrats and the Alliance of Free Democrats), though not yet parties in name, social movements increasingly gained strength. These political movements were able to tackle the issue of the direction of the country's foreign policy without having to observe any past commitments. Party manifestos and official statements in 1989 centred primarily on reviewing the alliance system to which Hungary belonged as well as on the consideration of opportunities and limitations. Each major political movement faced the issue of the Warsaw Pact and COMECON. Under the *realpolitik* approach most parties set the overhaul of these organizations as a minimum goal, and Hungary's 'approved' exit from them as the ultimate objective. Most political parties were supportive of Hungary becoming a neutral state. Many articulated the need for the simultaneous dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and the establishment of a collective security system in Europe. In June 1989 the government in power and the various dissident groups started negotiations, called the National Round Table Talks, over the country's current state of affairs and future. At stake was a peaceful transformation that represented a happy medium. Though negotiations focused mainly on home affairs, the issue of the direction of the country's foreign policy was also raised.

By allowing East German asylum seekers to leave the country, the Hungarian government unequivocally abandoned an earlier practice adopted in socialist countries. Pulling down the iron curtain had international reverberations and sent shock waves through East Germany. At its Fourteenth Congress held on

6–10 October 1989, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) dissolved itself and established the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) as its successor. The dissolution of the former state party created a new situation in which the MSZP was forced to enter the political fray, encumbered by the chequered political past of its leaders. Democratic changes in the socialist countries in Europe called into question former economic, political and military structures as well as the unity of the socialist camp.

A new feature of foreign policy manoeuvring was the possibility of deepening international cooperation between Yugoslavia, Italy, Austria and Hungary. In November 1989 Austria, a neutral country, Yugoslavia, a non-allied one, Italy, a NATO member, and Hungary, a Warsaw Pact state, held high-level discussions on the possibility of closer economic and political cooperation between the countries in the region. Simultaneously with this initiative the Hungarian government submitted its membership application to the Council of Europe. In March 1990 the Hungarian and Soviet government agreed on the full withdrawal of the Soviet troops stationed in Hungary, which began almost immediately after the signing of the agreement. This sent a message to the public about home affairs before multi-party elections, namely, that the new MSZP was able to restore national independence and represent the country abroad.

Foreign policy and Hungary's potential neutral status were key issues in the 1990 election campaign. A survey of the views that the various political parties adopted on foreign policy and alliance policy reveals that they fully agreed that Hungary's independence be restored and that it had to return to the European fold. In April 1990, marking the birth of what was to become the Visegrád Group, the prime ministers and heads of state of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary held discussions on increasing cooperation between fledgling democracies. The fundamental issue was for westward-lying, more developed members of COMECON and the Warsaw Pact, the flagships of democratic transformation and with Poland as their potential leader, to concert their actions (Story 1993).

Hungary's Geopolitical Status in the 'Grey Zone' between 'East' and 'West'

In parallel with economic, social, political and power restructuring at the national level, there was a transformation of the former global status quo as well: European structures changed radically, and the socialist alliance system collapsed. The 'grey zone' in their wake meant new room for manoeuvre, some sort of freedom, responsibilities, challenges and concerns for Hungary – all at the same time (Tunander et al. 1997). The Hungarian Democratic Forum won the 1990 multi-party elections, though not with an absolute majority, and formed a coalition government. Soon after the coalition was established and before the new government took office, the new Parliament put the issue of reviewing and deciding on the future of the relationship between Hungary and the Warsaw Pact on its agenda. Parliament

dismissed a unilateral exit and requested the future government to start negotiations on Hungary's leaving the alliance.

As regards foreign policy, the government programme adopted the approach of *realpolitik* inasmuch as it declared that it would abide by earlier international treaties; at the same time, consistent with the new political status quo, it set new goals, prioritizing the issue of European integration. After the elections, cooperation in the Adriatic-Danube region (Pentagonale) was re-emphasized. This 'in-between blocs' formation played an important role in maintaining stability in the region and won direct political support from the West for a democratic changeover (Bierman and Loboda 1992; Carter 1995). Hungary joined EFTA (June 1990), established diplomatic relations with NATO (July 1990), and the European Economic Community opened an embassy in Budapest (November 1990). The establishment of diplomatic relations between NATO, the EEC and Hungary, still a Warsaw Pact and COMECON member at the time, was tantamount to the recognition of and support for the new government's foreign policy.

In September 1990 the Hungarian government approved East Germany's desire to leave the Warsaw Pact. Given the German unification, all things considered, this move was a logical one and reinforced Hungary's legal stance that it was possible to withdraw from the treaty. In October the Hungarian government confirmed its intention to leave the military organization of the Warsaw Pact (which also meant that the issue of full withdrawal from the organization had not yet been raised). In January 1991, through deploying a health contingent, Hungary participated in operation 'Desert Storm', aimed at ousting Iraqi invaders from Kuwait. Though the operation was conducted under the aegis of the UN, it drew on US military might. Through its participation in the operation, Hungary was able to demonstrate its newly gained international leeway as well as its commitment to western values (Balogh 1998; Bognár 1993).

The new government focused on the issue of foreign national ethnic Hungarians as never before. The prime minister József Antall declared that he wanted to be 'prime minister of 15 million Hungarians in spirit', which marked the beginning of a new national policy, one that foreign policy was to implement. Neighbourhood policy was nearly synonymous with addressing the issue of ethnic Hungarians, particularly those living in Romania. Diplomatic relations having been established, ties with the EEC and NATO became increasingly close. It was not an insincere policy of currying favour with both organisations but rather one of exploring new opportunities in an intricate international and domestic situation (Sisposné Kecskeméti and Nagy 1995). Neither the United States nor Western Europe had been prepared for changes of this kind and the rapidity with which they occurred in the East.

The issue of the dam on the River Danube at Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros was still haunting Hungarian-Czechoslovak relations, which further deteriorated when in January 1991 Czechoslovakia announced that it would go on with the construction. This resulted in diverting the river course of the Danube. Though the dispute was submitted to the International Court at The Hague, the court ruling alone failed to ease the tension between the two countries representing two contrasting approaches

and objectives. In February 1991 Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary signed an agreement of cooperation. Cooperation between the Visegrád countries attempted to fill a political and power vacuum. However, Poland was too weak to become an internationally recognized leader in the region.

At its extraordinary meeting in Budapest on 25 February, the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact abrogated earlier military treaties and disbanded the military organization of the pact with effect from 31 March 1991. On 19 June the last Soviet soldier left Hungarian soil. On 28 June 1991 Hungary approved the dissolution of COMECON, thereby creating new economic conditions under which to operate not only in respect of former member states but also other regions. A few days later a resolution was passed on the complete dissolution of the entire Warsaw Pact – not just its military organisation. On 1 July 1991 Hungary became an independent nation, outside any bloc, any integration and with no foreign military presence on its soil.

Rising tensions in the Balkans, compounded by signs of a civil war from August 1991, made Hungarian-Yugoslav relations even more strained. Debates were especially bitter over Hungary's arms transports to Croatia and, later, over Yugoslav skirmishes along the border (Owen 1995; O'Loughlin and van der Wusten 1993). Simultaneously with the transformation of its geographical surroundings, Hungary and the EEC ratified a treaty in November 1991, under which Hungary became an associate member. Though this did not automatically guarantee Hungary's actual membership, it could be construed as the first step towards it. An aborted coup d'état in the Soviet Union in August 1991 and the subsequent official dissolution of the Soviet Union in December that same year created a fundamentally new situation for Hungary. With the Ukraine becoming independent and a new Russia coming into existence, new state structures, power relations and spheres of interests emerged along Hungary's northeastern border and in its wider eastern region (Nagy 1995).

New priorities in neighbourhood policy were clearly reflected in Hungary's being among the first countries to acknowledge the independence of Croatia and Slovenia on 15 January 1992 and, later, to establish diplomatic relations with these two new neighbours. Though Hungary repeatedly emphasized its neutral stance in the Balkan crisis, largely due to ethnic Hungarians in the Voivodina, it effectively took sides with Croatia and Slovenia, supporting their efforts whenever possible. It was not only this siding, but also Hungary's support for the punitive measures initiated by the international community against Serbia that contributed to an increasingly troubled Hungarian-Serbian relationship. In the course of overseeing compliance with punitive measures, new relations were established between Hungary and West European institutions of integration. (Though compliance with punitive measures caused Hungary economic loss, political gains outdid it. Economically speaking, the true winners were Hungarian and Yugoslav smugglers living near the border.)

The Hungarian government sought to conclude framework treaties with its neighbours, Soviet successor states and major partner countries, to consolidate relations with them. The first treaty of the kind was the Hungarian-German framework treaty, signed in February 1992. Framework treaties followed between

Hungary and Lithuania and Hungary and Croatia. The one between Hungary and the Ukraine was highly contentious, leading to a crisis within the governing coalition, so much so that the government had to win over the opposition to get the treaty passed. The dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993 resulted in the emergence of a new state and a new situation along Hungary's northern border as well. The proportion of ethnic Hungarians in the new Slovak state grew, which, rather than easing the tension, made relations between the two countries even more discordant. All in all, the landscape of the bordering countries was fundamentally reconfigured in the early 1990s, with Hungary's position unambiguously strengthened relative to those of the new successor states. The Hungarian society and the overwhelming majority of the political elite exercised self-restraint in connection with the transformation processes in neighbouring countries. So did the majority of ethnic Hungarians living there.

The Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA) with some of the neighbouring countries created new opportunities and forms of cooperation. At the same time, however, especially in respect of agricultural exports, it was also the scene of open clashes of interests, which were rather clumsily handled. Nevertheless, CEFTA has played a positive role in the system of relations between former socialist countries, as it has been instrumental in internalizing and addressing some of the likely outcomes of EU integration.

Hungary as NATO member

Enjoying a majority in Parliament, the social-liberal coalition government, which came to power after the 1994 elections, stood for the continuation of earlier foreign policy. Perhaps the only exception were relationships with neighbouring countries, where a change in attitude materialized, if not a new trend. The new framework treaties between Hungary and Romania and Hungary and Slovakia (though not welcomed by all domestic political parties) were aimed at consolidating bilateral relations and promoting Hungary's ambitions to join NATO and accede to the European Union. The new coalition government resumed and even accelerated preparations for both NATO and EU membership (Bognár 1995; Burdack, Grimm and Paul 1998; Deák 1997 and 2004).

Given the new global and continental status quo, imminent NATO enlargement raised the issue of the security of the Ukraine and Russia. Launched in January 1994, the Partnership for Peace programme reflected a need for greater trust. If NATO were to prove that it did not perceive the two militarily strongest Soviet successor states as enemies, it had to involve them in a common security system. The special relationship with the two countries governed by the treaties granted the two Soviet successor states a minimum guarantee (Ehrhart 1997). Smaller ex-socialist countries competed with each other for inclusion in the first round of NATO enlargement. For the entrants, membership symbolized an external guarantee of security and was the high-level recognition of their internal democratisation. (Janning and Weidenfeld 1993)

The NATO decision in July 1997 to invite the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary to join the organization was the manifestation of an internal compromise reached by the then member states. Nevertheless, it was also the recognition of democratic development in the three countries. Following a successful referendum and with the ratification procedures completed, Hungary became a NATO member in the spring of 1999. Given the contemporary political and military status quo and an intricate sphere of interests, Hungary's NATO membership preceded its accession to the European Union. (At the very beginning of the internal transformation process, an opposite scenario had seemed more likely.) Hungary's status was rather special within NATO's territorial structure. It became a 'land-locked island', which meant that it had no common border with any other member state. This 'isolated' status did not create any problems at the time, since Slovenia continued to follow a NATO-oriented policy, and after the 1998 general elections, Slovakia also stepped up its preparations for NATO membership. (Domestic debates in Austria over eternal neutrality vs NATO membership will probably continue for long years to come.)

NATO's air strike against Serbia in the spring of 1999 put Hungary – a new member of NATO – in a rather awkward situation. It indirectly became party to a military intervention (in effect, an undeclared war waged without UN authorization) against a neighbouring country. However, in terms of its NATO membership, it was very direct participation. Air strikes were launched from its territory and through its air space against a neighbouring country.

Hungary is under NATO's southern command, which adds to Slovenia's importance, and is likely to have further ramifications. NATO member Hungary lies in the vicinity of the Bosnian trouble spot, with an air base in Tászár (also a major logistics centre) playing a key role in providing supplies for international forces in Bosnia. NATO membership does not formally conflict with the country's sovereignty. (Not all military and political ramifications of alliance commitment follow from the fact of being part of an alliance.) Yet in practice, under a new alliance system, relations are placed in a new perspective and issues of security are raised differently. In the course of the NATO enlargement in the spring of 2004 Slovenia, Slovakia and Romania also joined the organization. As a result, Hungary ceased to be a 'land-locked island', with the majority of its borders once more becoming 'inner borders shared with allies'. It also added to the country's security, with the majority of ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries included in the same system of alliance and democratic values.

Hungary as a Member of the European Union

The late 1990s marked the arrival of a new era in the history of the European Union. It had to address the issues of deepening integration, the introduction of the single currency and take stock of the experiences of its operation. This had to be done in circumstances where new desires to advocate national interests within the EU surfaced (Hargital, Izikné Hedri and Palánkai 1995; Inotai 1998; Izikné Hedri

1995). There emerged several scenarios of EU enlargement (in small, medium-sized or large groups) (Weidenfeld and Altmann 1995; Urwin 1999). Initially, it was the small group scenario (the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary) that looked likely. At its summit in Luxembourg in December 1997, the EU identified the first round of countries to be invited to participate in the accession talks. Hungary was involved in the five-plus-one configuration. (At the time the medium-sized group scenario looked viable.)

Not only the identity of the potential entrants but also the dates of their accession were unknown for a while. There had been several accession dates suggested during the talks before the May 2004 date was finally fixed. In practice, the large group scenario prevailed, allowing ten countries to simultaneously accede to the EU. After accession, Hungary's borders took on a dual aspect. The majority of its borders became inner borders of the EU (Hungarian-Slovenian, Hungarian-Austrian and Hungarian-Slovak); at the same time the Hungarian-Ukrainian, Hungarian-Romanian, Hungarian-Serbian and Hungarian-Croatian stretches became the EU's outer borders with all the associated legal, economic and political consequences. Romania has been promised entry in 2007, and Croatia's rapid accession cannot be ruled out either. Consequently, for Hungary outer EU borders may lose their importance.

Because the issue of Hungary's EU membership was put to a referendum, it was the voters' decision rather than the exclusive ambitions of the political elite that legitimized accession. Essentially there was general consensus on accession among voters interested in political developments. Yet the low turnout at the referendum should definitely be perceived as a warning sign for the future. As the overwhelming majority of Hungary's foreign trade relations was already EU-oriented prior to its accession, accession itself, despite seen and unseen risks facing both parties, was not a turning point in this respect. On the contrary, it consolidated the structures that had already been put in place. Even though the process of constitutional legislation in the EU had ground to a halt by the spring of 2004, compromise was reached on weighted votes in the summer. (In several countries, disputes over the need for referenda on the European constitution added further uncertainty to the process.) It is also in Hungary's long-term interests that it should participate in the integration processes of a functioning EU with a stable and transparent structure and clear objectives.

A NATO member and an EU member state, Hungary has become an undisputed part of the system of Euro-Atlantic integration and processes, thereby transforming itself from 'the West of the East' into 'the East of the West', and not just topographically. However, the historical geopolitical determinations and characteristics of the neighbouring countries will have to be reckoned with in the future. Austria is an EU member, but a neutral state. Croatia is on its way to EU and NATO membership, though the date of its accession has not yet been set. And while Serbia-Montenegro has formally declared its intention to join the Euro-Atlantic system, its accession may be a long drawn-out process. As for the Ukraine (sandwiched between the EU region and Russia), the search for political stability and good relations both to Russian and the EU could require considerable time.

Cross-Border Cooperation: Some Remarks

This overview of Hungary's changing geopolitical situation indicates that the country is a 'borderlands nation'. There is no region within Hungary that is not affected by events in neighbouring states or by cross-border flows of goods, capital or persons. With Hungary's almost total integration into 'Western' institutions and the end of regional military strife in the Balkans, Hungary's borders have not only become open but also conducive to regional cooperation. With increasing opportunities and incentives for cross-border cooperation, Hungary's desire to 'spiritualize' the dividing post-Trianon borders is now close to fulfilment.

As several essays in this book indicate (see, for example, Béla Baranyi), the development of Euroregions at macro-, meso- and microregional levels can be seen as an attempt to capitalize on new potentials for political dialogue and to more properly address questions of minority rights in central and eastern Europe. The perspectives for regional economic and social development through cross-border cooperation should not be underestimated. Complementary settlement networks and development interests as well as a common desire for greater stability and prosperity within the EU framework provide powerful incentives. Euroregions, now located along all Hungarian borders, are a further indicator of integration into EU governance structures. Initial fears that Euroregions might be used as political tools for realigning present state borders have all but dissipated. The geopolitical view has shifted from bilateral relations to a more integrating European one. The partial 'Europeanization' of national geopolitical discourses and practices will, of course, not resolve all contentious issues Hungary and its neighbours must deal with as they intensify economic, political and social interaction. However, it can be assumed that the borders will no longer play as divisive a role as in the past.

Conclusions

Hungarian foreign policy has always had to be realistic owing to the country's geographical location and the processes of global, continental and neighbourhood restructuring. Based on Hungary's national as well as domestic and foreign policy failures and tragedies in the twentieth century, one may easily arrive at the conclusion that Hungary's foreign policy has always 'erred', judging long-term developments in external conditions erroneously. However, such a judgement would only be partially true. The majority of the neighbouring countries underwent similar tragedies the past century. Hence, the true facts have more to do with regional and continental characteristics than country-specific problems (such as the incompetence or impotence of politicians or those involved in foreign policy).

Hungary's opportunities changed radically in the new status quo that had evolved by the late 1980s. In 1990 Hungary found itself in a completely new setting. With the Warsaw Pact disbanded, the Soviet troops gone, COMECON dissolved, along with internal social, economic and political changes, the dismantling of the former political regime and the political changeover, new opportunities opened up for Hungary on

shaping its internal status quo and international relations. In the course of the decade, owing to internal and external changes, state socialism was first called into question, then failed at the 1990 democratic multi-party elections. This date marks the most important turning point in the era, since it created Hungary's independence and non-alignment to military blocs.

Not only Hungary's global environment, but also its relations with neighbouring states and wider Europe have markedly changed. It established relations with West European organizations of integration well before fundamental social and political changes occurred. In the new situation the Hungarian political leadership and the general public set accession to the changing European Union as an ultimate objective and value, and started deliberate preparations for accession and an envisaged membership. The changes in Hungary's geographical surroundings were characterized by the dissolution of former socialist federations and an increasing number of independent neighbouring countries. In many respects, newly independent neighbouring countries (Slovakia, the Ukraine, Croatia and Slovenia) carried less weight than their respective predecessor states did. Owing to this, Hungary's room for manoeuvring increased. The process of the emergence of new states in Hungary's neighbouring environment caused uncertainty. In particular, civil wars in the Balkans posed challenges to security. At the same time, it was these harrowing events that accelerated the process that finally led to Hungary joining NATO.

Joining the Euro-Atlantic military alliance greatly transformed the country's external security policy conditions. Although Hungary was now under the protective umbrella of European stability, the air strike against Serbia proved that the new alliance system also carried political risks and that there were embedded limits of advocacy of interests. With its EU membership the path of integration that Hungary had previously followed took on a new meaning. However, it should also be kept in mind that accession marks the beginning of a long process of accommodation, adjustment and learning, and that, in the short term, certain sectors, social layers and groups may well be the losers of new structural changes. As for the Hungarian nation that has lived through so much, the manner of joining NATO and accession to the European Union can be judged a historic turning point. In the course of its modern history, this time it was of its own accord and with its intentions legitimized by a referendum (rather than out of necessity) that the country joined a new alliance and became part of a new integration process.