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The Hungarian Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Liberal International Order. Balancing between Global Powers and National Interest

Abstract. This study is aimed at exploring the recent shift in the Hungarian foreign policy, which was called the Global opening policy. Hungarian foreign policy has been based on three interrelated principles in the post-1989 world order, which have been challenged by a wave of crises within the European Union. Hungary has realized that an alternative world order is under evolution, in which emerging countries like China and India, and old partners, like Russia are equally important stakeholders. The Global opening is a foreign policy objective, with which Hungary tries to balance among the major players in World politics: the US, the EU, Russia, China and India.

Key words: Hungary, liberalism, foreign policy, Eastern opening, Global powers.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to address the impact of the current transformation of the global politics on Hungary, a country in the heart of Europe. Several scholars have recently pointed out the phenomenon, what is called as the crisis of the liberal international order. G. John Ikenberry, a renowned scholar of International Relations, in a recently published article wrote that the liberal international order, which was based on the United States hegemony is now in crisis. He refers to the Trump administration, which is hostile to liberal internationalism. The Brexit and the European uncertainties are part of this crisis (Ikenberry 2018). Ikenberry argues that a global transformation occurs, in which maybe the hegemony of the United States will be inherited by other states or group of states. The rise of the new form of authoritarianism is also a characteristic of this newly evolving global order. Not only Ikenberry, but other scholars put an emphasis on the crisis of the liberal international order. John J. Mearsheimer, who is a founding father of the offensive realist theory claims that it is not Trump who is responsible for the crisis of the liberal international order, however more complex underlying structural factors alter the status quo (Mearsheimer, 2019). Mearsheimer argues the hyper-globalization has caused trouble for the liberal states themselves, namely growing inequalities, unemployment, and financial crisis in Europe.

The European Union has witnessed multilayer crises, which prevent the integration to serve as a competitive player in global politics. The sovereign debt crisis, the migration crisis of 2015 and later as well as the Brexit are all part of the same phenomenon, which questions the utility of a deeper integration. It is a contradiction that the liberal international order calls for opening up the national borders and for creating a more multicultural community instead of the myth of an ethnically and religiously homogenous nations state. Conservative scholars like the recently died Roger Scruton has call for strengthening the nation states and borders against an unpredictable wave of events, which make the states vulnerable (Scruton 2004).

Hungary as a country in Central Europe has a short history as part of the liberal international order. Given the fact, that Hungary has become a member of the former Soviet bloc after World War II until the collapse of the bipolar world order in 1989. When Hungary has become part of the liberal international order, it has soon begun to decline. Hungary after a long accession legal and political process has joined to the European Union as a full member in 2004, to the NATO in 1999 at the eve of the Kosovo War. This year Hungary commemorates the so-called Trianon 100th anniversary, which still shapes the collective memory of the nation regarding the territorial loss of the country. Trianon is an important formulating element in the foreign policy thinking of the leaders of the country.

This study is aimed at investigating the recent trends in the Hungarian foreign policy given a special focus to the balancing among the global players. Hungary is a small country in Central Europe, which tries to balance the national interest and the global ambitions of the United States, the major European countries, plus those of Russia and China. Historically, Hungary has served as a bridge between East and West and the famous Hungarian poet, Endre Ady used the term, 'ferry-country' to describe it. This ferry-country syndrome shapes the perception about world political changes and the identity of the post-1989 elite generations as well (Kovács et al. 2011).

Principles of the Hungarian foreign policy and the New World Order

Hungarian foreign policy was completely challenged by the collapse of the bipolar world order, when the state found itself in an entirely new international environment. The former superpower, the Soviet Union has started its disintegration already in 1989, which forced the former countries of the Eastern bloc to redefine the foreign policy goals. Due to the limitations, we cannot narrate the whole history of the system change in 1989, but we try rather to have some general remarks. Hungarian foreign policy has been based on three interrelated principles in the New World Order. **1.** The principle of Euro-Atlantic integration means that Hungary's aim is to join to the most relevant European and transatlantic international organization, namely the European Union and NATO. **2.** Hungary's goal is to enhance the cooperation with neighbouring countries. **3.** Hungary's aim is to protect the Hungarian minorities living abroad.

The three principles of the foreign policy have mutually complemented each other as having good relations with neighbours and thus realising the protection of minorities living outside the country. Or joining to the European Union reinforces the integration of the Hungarian minorities in the European public sphere. The post-1989 Hungarian governments have been balancing among these principles with a slight difference. While the first democratically elected government, the Antall government (1990–1994), underlined more the importance of the Hungarian minorities and the neighbourhood, the Horn (1994–1998) government focused more on the accession talks with the European Union instead. The first Orbán government (1998–2002) has adopted the status law, which offered the Hungarian citizenship to the Hungarian minorities living outside the mother country. During the first decade the Hungarian foreign policy has mainly neglected the former ties with the post-Soviet territories as well as with Asian and African countries. Hungary have had mainly transatlantic oriented, pro-United States, pro-European Union foreign policy with which,

the country was a keen promoter of the values acknowledged as the principles of the liberal international order.

However, in 2008, with the spill-over effect of the global financial crisis, small countries like Hungary have found themselves in a situation, in which the results of the democratic and economic transition of the 1990-s seemed to be in danger. There is a proverb in Hungary about the dependence of the country's economy: 'If Germany sneezes, Hungary catches cold'. Approximately two-third of the export of the Hungarian economy is being directed to the member states of the European Union, and among them Germany has the largest percentage. As the EU has been severely hit by the financial crisis, the Hungarian economy had a shrunk between the years 2008 and 2010. Another crisis had a direct impact on Hungary, when the Middle Eastern, mostly Syrian, refugees started crossing the country in 2015. That was the alarm bell that the European Union cannot provide a short-term solution for this issue. This is the perception, which shaped the recent shift of the Hungarian foreign policy, that the country in an age of uncertainty can only build on 'self-help' and not on the international organizations. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Rome Statute, which established the predecessor of the European Union, prime minister Orbán argued: 'If we would like to achieve a secure Hungary, then we should rely on ourselves, we should make it secure... nobody will do the work on our behalf, and neither any ceremonial declaration won't change it.' (Magyar Nemzet 2017) This above-mentioned perception is important to emphasise in order to understand so-called Eastern opening foreign policy of Hungary.

An alternative world order?

The Eastern and southern opening of Hungary

The crisis of the liberal international order has a direct impact on the world view of the ruling elite in Hungary and in the neighbouring countries. As a victim of the Cold War and the oppressive socialist system currently suffering from the impact of the multi-crises of the European Union, Hungary has decided to diversify its foreign trade. Hungary has also realized that with the rise of East Asia and the more active engagement of Russia in World politics, a small state cannot neglect the transformation of the international order, in which the European Union is a less competitive stakeholder, and the United States lose its hegemonic position. Official documents in Hungary simultaneously use the terms 'Global' and 'Eastern' opening strategy. Hungary has adopted the New Széchenyi Plan in 2012, which included a new foreign trade strategy called as the Eastern opening. The aim of this economic strategy is to diversify the Hungarian export-import structure, especially with a special attention to the emerging Asian markets, namely China and India. The Plan

does not mean to completely switch the directions of the Hungarian economy, but rather to complement the dependence on the European economies while increasing the economic cooperation with China, Russia and other countries from the non-Western World (Bernek 2018: 123).

Another document, which was adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2011 is entitled as *Hungary's Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union*. This strategy starts with a general introduction of the recent political and economic changes in world politics referring to the "relative decline" of political and economic power of the West in World politics. This strategy calls for a global opening of Hungary prioritizing the World regions into concentric circles, in which the region, and the regional cooperation is the most important principle (Hungary's Foreign Policy, 2011). The reformulated Hungarian foreign policy should put into consideration the emerging economies of India and China as well as other important non-Western powers like Russia.

A new National Security Strategy which redefines the national security threats in the neighbourhood of Hungary has been adopted in 2020. The document stipulates that an 'alternative World order' is under evolution, which shapes the global context of the national security. Hungary should mainly concentrate on the following new security threats: illegal migration, cyber security and global health issues among others. It calls for an engagement with Russia and China based on mutual economic and political benefits (National Security Strategy 2020).

The Eastern opening policy has been introduced in two phases. The first was mainly oriented towards major Asian powers — China, India and Russia — strengthening political dialogue and signing bilateral agreements. The second phase — called as the Southern Opening which was launched in 2015 is aimed at enhancing the cooperation with African and Latin American countries, where Hungary has strong historical connections and presence. In April 2019, Hungary has adopted its Africa strategy as part of the Southern opening policy. Hungary had a very low-profile cooperation with major African countries after the system change in 1989, and the country has closed many of its diplomatic missions due to the lack of financial assets. With the new strategy, Hungary tries to act as a medium power in Africa, calling for a more comprehensive strategy on African development within the European Union as well (Hungary's Africa Strategy 2019).

This new approach of the foreign policy does not aim to neglect the major European or Western allies, but it realizes of the complexity of the World order, in which a small country should balance. In one of the speeches Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán argued: "... the Hungarian diplomacy has a system of

orientation: ...Istanbul, Berlin and Moscow”. Hungary should escape participation in - or being driven into - any anti-Turkey, anti-Russian or anti-German alliance (Lendvai 2017: 220). As the EU has many political tensions both with Turkey and Russia, this geopolitical foundation of the foreign policy means to adhere to the ‘ferry-country’ status between the European Union, Turkey and Russia.

Relations with global powers – a shift in the foreign policy?

The basic principles of the foreign policy have not entirely changed; however the country should have adopted to a new reality of world politics. Hungary as a member of the NATO alliance and the European Union tries to set the agenda in many international organizations. Part of this strategy is to have a close cooperation with the three major power centres: the United States, Russia and China.

Regarding Russia, Hungary is in a very sensitive position in many ways. Politically, Hungary criticizes the sanctions, which have been imposed by the European Union on Russia due to the crisis in Ukraine. On the one hand Hungary adheres to the sanctions of the European Union, but on the other hand, the country has initiated a political dialogue between President Putin and PM Orbán. Annual summits of the two leaders strengthen the bilateral relations, which provoke criticism within Hungary and in Brussels. With the Hungarian minority living in Ukraine, Hungary has adopted a balanced approach, which based on the principles, which we analysed at the beginning. Hungary has used its veto in NATO preventing Ukraine’s accession due to the law on education. Hungary and Russia in 2014 has signed an agreement to extend the Paks nuclear power plant (so-called Paks II) by 2023 with the financial and technological help of Moscow. The agreement is important for providing electricity; however it was opposed by some political parties in the opposition due to its effect on the environment and the growing economic dependence on Russia.

As far as China is concerned, the 17+1 Initiative is a key tool for Beijing to cooperate with countries in the Eastern part of Europe. Hungary has played a pivotal role in the 17+1 Initiative, and Budapest has signed a strategic partnership agreement with China. The aim is to upgrade the cooperation to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership. Hungary is an important partner in the Belt and Road Initiative, the most important project is the Budapest-Belgrade railway line, which is under construction. In 2017 Hungary has joined to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and it would welcome more Chinese banks in the near future.

One may ask the question, what is the relevance for the two countries, China and Russia to cooperate with a small country like Hungary. It has often been argued that global powers could use small countries as a ‘Trojan horse’

to advance their national interests. It is under debate whether Hungary is an asset in the hands of the Russian and Chinese politicians to influence the European Union, which does not have a common voice related to foreign policy.

The third country which should be taken into consideration is the United States, an important ally of Hungary. Hungarian-American relations basically are positive, however certain political tensions exist. In the US foreign policy towards the Central-Eastern European region, Hungary is not strategically the most important country. Despite the fact that the PM made clear during the US election campaign that he supports Trump's election, a major breakthrough in the relation could not be observed. The issue of the Central European University as well as concern about Hungary's democratic political system have weakened the Hungarian-American relations. In 2019 PM Orbán made a long-awaited visit in the White House as the fourth leader from the V4 group. The advancement in the talks about an arms deal made the summit possible. It was interesting to observe the press conference, in which Trump referred to the US – China trade war. And it seems to be a major challenge for countries like Hungary. As previously the PM mentioned, it would be not in the interest of Hungary to take part in a cooperation, which is anti-Chinese, and anti-Russian etc. Hungary should always have to balance among the global players.

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Внешняя политика Венгрии и кризис либерального международного порядка. Баланс между мировыми державами и национальными интересами

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Аннотация. Это исследование направлено на изучение сдвига во внешней политике Венгрии, который получил название «Глобальная политика открытия». Венгерская внешняя политика изначально была заложена на трех взаимосвязанных принципах мирового порядка, установившегося после 1989 года. В недавнем прошлом он подвергся угрозе из-за кризисов внутри Европейского Союза. Под их воздействием Венгрия осознала, что мировой порядок находится в стадии эволюции, где развивающиеся страны, такие как Китай и Индия, и старые партнеры — Россия, являются не менее важными партнерами. Глобальное открытие — это внешнеполитический инструмент, с помощью которого Венгрия балансирует между основными игроками мировой политики: США, ЕС, Россию, Китай и Индию.

Ключевые слова: Венгрия, либерализм, внешняя политика, открытие на восток, мировые державы.