

Prof. Dr. Dr.h.c.mult. György Jenei: Laudatio and Introduction

Professor Dr. György Jenei is the doyen of Central and Eastern European Public Administration. He, if anyone, is the leading figure of the field in our entire region; he personifies it; he has preserved it during darker times and has led it again to prominence since 1989, with persistence, integrity and style. He has done so both in form and in contents – the former both at his home, Corvinus University of Budapest, which together with Tallinn University of Technology and the University of Ljubljana is also the leading respective institution (and with which we have several strong cooperative exchange and research programs), and in his many leadership functions in professional and scholarly associations, including the recent NISPAcee Presidency during the crucial years of the height of the crisis. As a scholar, he is one of the small, 25-people cadre of scientific leaders in the region. And he truly did carry the torch of Public Administration during the times when its inefficiency was not an accident, but a core part of the local system; Professor Jenei's early work on Max Weber was undertaken at a time when this was a politically highly incorrect thing to do.

His more direct merits for Tallinn University of Technology's Public Administration department lie, for instance, in an unwavering, active support looking out for the very best interests of the department and its members, junior and senior, and providing wise counsel. This includes his much-valued aid in the smooth transfer of the department, in essence, from Tartu to Tallinn in 2006-2008, as regards networks and organizations, such as the European Master of Public Administration Program (EMPA). He has been in Tallinn, at TUT, and at the Department of Public Administration many times, for instance as a keynote speaker of the 1st EGPA-NISPAcee Trans-Atlantic Dialogue on the Neo-Weberian State in early 2008, and he serves, for example, on the Advisory Board of this journal.

But György Jenei has been and remains an active and highly appreciated counsel in political and administrative matters as well. In fact, he has had a historical impact that in the end has affected all our lives. As a principal advisor to Hungarian Prime Minister Miklos Németh during the fateful summer of 1989, and as one of a group of six men to finally decide on the issues of the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian border and on letting the East German refugees in to leave Hungary for the Federal Republic, he truly grabbed the coat of history. His personal resolve and courage, based on knowing what is right and what really matters, contributed directly to the triggering of the great revolution of the late 20th century and the collapse of the Soviet Empire and its colonial system, including the Estonian Republic's regaining of independence.

One may and should, in this very context, add that György Jenei's diplomatic skills and unwavering courteousness, which never loses sight of the goal – *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo* – are a joy to experience and a model for anyone's conduct. Indeed, Professor Jenei embodies not only the notion of the effective academic manager and modern researcher – which is not so rare after all – but also the older idea of the intel-

lectual, highly educated and genuinely cultivated scholar and indeed of the Central European Gentleman who represents a civilization, and a culture, that predates, and still serves as a counter-model against, the horrors of the 20th century, which he helped his country first to navigate through as calmly as possible and then to overcome.

In sum, for our field of Public Administration, all this means managerial, scholarly, political, and personal excellence of the highest order. Tallinn University of Technology and its Faculty of Social Sciences, upon recommendation by its Department of Public Administration, have therefore conveyed upon him the *doctor honoris causa*, which was awarded during the University Day on 16 September.

Modest as he is in matters that truly matter, Prof. Dr. Dr.h.c.mult. György Jenei, as he now is – this is his third honorary doctorate – had previously not talked or written about the events of 1989. It is our pleasure and privilege that for an open departmental lecture on 15 September 2011 that preceded the University actus, he for the first time addressed these events in detail, and they are published here for the first time as well. This is particularly intriguing because György Jenei not only narrates the events he was involved in – he does so in a classical policy-analysis framework, making this a fascinating case study and impressively showing the layers of connection of policy and policy analysis.

Wolfgang Drechsler

The Opening of the Hungarian Border for the East German Refugees in 1989: A Public-Policy Analysis of a Key Decision

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ABSTRACT

This essay deals with the key public-policy decision by the Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh to open the Hungarian border for the East German refugees in 1989. It is written by one of his two main advisors at the time, who analyzes the event and its contents and background within a public-policy framework. First, the essay analyzes the process of how the issue developed; then it deals with the content of the decision. It also opens up an academic perspective via the analysis of the outputs and outcomes and by outlining the roles of rationality and intuition in the decision. The closing section contains conclusions and lessons for the future.

Keywords: decision-making; public policy; Hungary; East Germany; 1989; refugees; Miklós Németh

1. Introduction

It is always a hard task dealing with events in which one was personally involved, but it has the advantage of a perhaps biased but certainly close acquaintance with facts and context. Fully aware of the problems with subjectivity, participant observation and self-analysis, I will nonetheless try, after kindly having been urged to do so many times, to not only tell the story of an event in which I had the fortune of being involved in and which may surely be called historical in the national and even international context, but also to analyze it from a classical public-policy perspective. The event was the opening of the Hungarian Border for the East German Refugees in 1989 by Miklós Németh, the Prime Minister of Hungary in 1988-1990, which, most historians would say, was the beginning of the Fall of the Iron Curtain and the re-emergence of Central and Eastern Europe from the Soviet Block.

As a preliminary note, some background information about my involvement in politics during the years of 1988-1990 may be in order. In November 1988, the Hungarian Parliament elected a new Prime Minister. A young economist, Miklós Németh – at that time he was 40 years old – was inaugurated. I had met him already in the mid-sixties at the university where I was an assistant professor, and he had just started his studies. Soon the professor-student relationship turned into a good, genuine friendship, which has passed the test of time until today. As Prime Minister, he asked me to be his special assistant and advisor, and I accepted his invitation without hesitation. My prime qualification according to him was, and I quote: “There are not many people in the administration I can trust, but you are one of those few I really can.”

We had a personal conversation at that time. I said that I could see an opportunity for Hungary to get out of the Soviet Block and to create the legal-institutional framework for a market economy and a multi-party democracy. He answered that he had accepted his assignment precisely because these were his objectives. And he added a warning: “Our task is to manage the beginning of transition. Afterwards, in case we will have been able to complete our term successfully, leading the country to a free election, we will have to step back. And in spite of the success, we shall be blamed for all the shortcomings and crimes of the previous political system. Are you ready to take this risk?” My answer was that I was. (I may add now that Németh was too pessimistic, and that in Hungary, respect and appreciation for his administration has, if anything, risen with the years gone by.)

This assignment provided me with a unique opportunity – “Not just talk the talk but walk the walk.” As Mr. Németh’s special personal assistant and advisor, my responsibilities covered four broad areas:

- scheduling and attending important meetings and preparing follow-up memoranda;
- tracking and monitoring the in- and out-flow of all papers and important phone calls;
- attending all important activities, including cabinet meetings, travels with him to almost all domestic or international discussions and negotiations, making records and supplying staff support for various negotiations at higher-level meetings;

- supervising some units within the Office of PM, including the press and communication unit.

My involvement in politics meant that I did not take into consideration the warning of the famous policy analyst Dye, who argued that social scientists should not actively engage in politics, because “policy advocacy and policy analysis are separate endeavors.” (Dye 1976, 3)

I left the academic world and became an actor in policy-making. When we make a clear distinction between analysis of policy and analysis for policy, then the requirement of the Prime Minister was of course a “for-policy” approach. The understanding of policy was not enough; the main task was to improve the quality of policy.

According to the typology outlined by Hogwood and Gunn, there are several varieties of and approaches to a critical policy analysis. (Hogwood and Gunn 1984) In this essay, following their typology, I will first provide an analysis of the policy process in which attention is focused on the influence of different actions on the development of the issue. Second, I will try to focus on the content of the policy decision. And third, I will deal with the policy outputs and outcomes, i.e. the impact of the political decision. Then, I will consider some lessons of all this from an academic perspective. And finally, I will formulate a few evaluative remarks for the present.

2. Analysis of the policy process

The process we are considering had three phases, phases of the historical development of and in Hungary at that time. The first phase was the dominance of “proletarian internationalism”. The second phase could be characterized as a “schizophrenic duality”. And the third phase was a legally based, genuine duality. In that third phase, three entrepreneurial decisions of the Prime Minister had a decisive influence on the development of the refugee issue. The first decision was the creation of a legal duality, the second was the demolition of the Iron Curtain, and the third decision was the “independence proclamation” of the Prime Minister from the Communist Party. Without these decisions, it would not have been possible to make a decision in favor of opening up the border for the East German refugees.

Although this essay cannot recount all the historical details and assumes that the reader will be familiar with the context, let me note, because this is not always taken into consideration, that the refugee issue had already emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in Hungary. The practice was simple. Foreign citizens coming from other socialist countries who tried to stay in Hungary and asked for “asylum” were transported back to their homelands. This happened even in those cases when students, having spent five or six years in Hungary at a university and the Hungarian way of life being attractive to them, also had to leave Hungary. This shameful practice was stemming from the principle of Soviet-Block “proletarian internationalism”, an overruling value orientation which had a monopolistic position at that time.

The vast majority of the Hungarian population strongly disagreed with this prac-

tice, especially with regard to ethnic Hungarians from Ceausescu-ruled Romania who wanted to stay in Hungary because of their persecution at home. But in the Hungarian political system, which was an authoritarian one at that time, the so-called “gate keepers” strongly regulated the flow of demands in the political arena. Actually, they oppressed the demands, not providing them opportunities for articulation.

But in early 1988, an old ethnic Hungarian man who was to be transported back to his home country of Romania died of a heart attack at the border. The result was the emergence of a “schizophrenic duality” in Hungarian policy-making. The value of “proletarian internationalism” was still an integral part of the official Hungarian political strategy, but ethnic Hungarian Romanians, and Jews as well, were now not in all cases transported back. Sometimes either they stayed in Hungary as unofficial refugees or they were allowed to leave for a Western country that would accept them.

This was the situation at the end of 1988, when the Németh government began its term. In principle there were two options at that time:

- maintaining the “schizophrenic duality” between ideological requirements and practical needs, or
- looking for an appropriate legal background for a change of practice, which was not harmonized with the principle of “proletarian internationalism”.

The Prime Minister had an entrepreneurial choice. In early 1989, the government signed the UN Geneva Accord of 1951 and the New York Protocol of 1967. By this action, we established the legal international background for decisions meeting the standards of the democratic political systems and did not implement the principle of “proletarian internationalism”. We created a legal-based, genuine duality as the legal background for the decisions on the refugee issue. The legal duality meant that we did not confront the principle of “proletarian internationalism”, but rather opened up the way towards the implementation of internationally accepted democratic principles.

I have to add that these steps were taken because we wanted to find an internationally accepted solution for handling the problem of the refugees coming from Romania, and, of course, these steps were supported by the vast majority of the Hungarian population. At this stage, the German refugee issue did not yet appear on the horizon. But the signature of the UN Geneva Accord of 1951 meant that the Hungarian government was authorized to officially call Romanian citizens seeking exile in Hungary “refugees”.

The second entrepreneurial decision in this process happened in May, when we physically demolished the “famous” Iron Curtain. This decision was a transparent illustration of a thesis broadly shared by policy analysts. According to this thesis, actions are not only consequences of decisions, but in many cases, actions or practical needs generate or prepare decisions.

What really happened? The Iron Curtain regularly required a general renovation. In May 1989, this was well overdue. Renovation was a customary action on the political agenda in the socialist countries. We answered this practical need in an entrepreneurial way, which was a clear-cut deviation from the general practice of the other socialist countries. It was decided not to proceed in the “normal” manner, but

to act in a way which immediately ignited sharp criticism from the communist countries, especially from the GDR (“German Democratic Republic” – East Germany) – and this was simply not to renovate the physical, non-metaphorical Iron Curtain, i.e. the border fortifications, but to let it deteriorate. The Minister of Defense of the GDR visited Hungary two days after the decision, asking for an explanation. He got it. The explanation was that Hungary was a poor country with serious debt and simply could not afford the renovation of the system. We avoided the trap of an ideological debate this time as well.

The consequences of the decision were quite clear. It ended the continuity of the Iron Curtain. It increased the international position of Hungary, and it strengthened the interior position of the government at the same time because this step was made with the full approval of the Hungarian nation and without the full-scale flight of our citizens. Other countries – like East Germany or Romania – proved less fortunate. By the beginning of August, over eighty thousand East Germans had gathered in Hungary. The nightmare of the GDR’s Minister of Defense became true. The physical sign of the separation of Europe had disappeared in Hungary, and it was a clear contrast in the eyes of the East German citizens to their seriously guarded border at home. At this stage, the issue of the GDR citizens directly appeared on the political agenda.

The third entrepreneurial step took place in May 1989, when the Hungarian Prime Minister declared that the Hungarian Government was not responsible to the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party anymore but it had become fully responsible to the Hungarian Parliament and to the nation. From that time on, the political decisions of the Hungarian Government were not discussed with and approved by the Central Committee or the Politburo of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party anymore. This decision was not directly connected to our present topic, but it was of substantial importance. It meant that the Hungarian government no longer accepted the totalitarian or authoritarian power of the communist party.

Let me remind you that, following World War II – it is an interesting historical coincidence – Europe was severed along the Elbe-Saale and the Leitha Rivers, following the borders of the Carolingian Empire which existed more than a thousand years ago. Before 1989, Europe was divided for more than 40 years; its Western part lived in greater or lesser symbiosis with the United States, while its Eastern part had a similar relationship with the Soviet Union. In the area of the Soviet Empire, the political system was basically a party-state or state-party system. It meant that an overlap existed between the power of the party and the state. Of course, the Eastern European country models differed from each other. For example, Romania was a totalitarian “police state”; Poland was an authoritarian system with one-party dominance within a formally multi-party system; Hungary was an authoritarian one-party state providing a limited role for market incentives in the economy and limited autonomy in culture.

But the very essence of the different political systems was their totalitarian or authoritarian nature with a blurring borderline between the communist party and the state. With its May 1989 entrepreneurial decision, the Hungarian Government became completely independent from the party. The party-state had collapsed in Hungary, and party and government became separate. The political model of “real

existing socialism” did not exist anymore in Hungary with this “declaration of independence”.

What was the “real existing socialism”? It is perhaps best expressed by two Hungarian jokes of the sixties at the time of initiating market incentives within the command economy. The joke goes as follows: One man asks the other: “What is socialism”? The reply: “Socialism is the longest and the most painful road that leads from capitalism to capitalism.” The second joke is this: “What is the difference between a crocodile and a lizard?” The answer: “Essentially nothing. But the lizard – quite voluntarily – has chosen the communist way of development.” Anyway, the “real existing socialism” did not have much to do with social values and ideas, instead it was a bureaucratic tyranny with a new elite and privileged class under the veil of a new religion.

The attempts to homogenize the Soviet-Russian Empire were inseparable from “real existing socialism”. To what extent this was artificial, to what extent the organic roots were missing, to what extent this was an external development or a pressing clasp on the body of the individual national societies is best shown by the rapidity with which the countries of the region wishing to become independent put an end to this political system: They did so in a matter of seconds, like a snake when it sheds its skin. It meant that the period of a historical experiment was over. It showed that it was impossible to create a “homo sovieticus” to replace “homo sapiens”.

After May 1989, the Hungarian government implemented the “declaration of independence” of the Prime Minister through a series of decisions in the economic and social areas. But the declaration was implemented through and connected to the German refugee issue as well.

On 19 August 1989, the so-called “Pan-European Picnic” was organized under the patronage of the late Otto von Habsburg and with the involvement of the Hungarian government. At this event, the Hungarian border was opened up for a few hours, and several hundred East German refugees took the opportunity and left the Communist world. It was a test of the final decision.

3. Analysis of the content of the decision

In this part of the essay I am dealing with two issues:

- how the decision was made and by whom;
- the measurement of domestic and international risks.

To begin with: A meeting was held in Budapest on Tuesday, 22 August, with attendance restricted only to six people, including myself. But this meeting was preceded by a month of deliberations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice, with strong coordination by the people working closely with the Hungarian Prime Minister in his office. In the course of the deliberations, we weighed the domestic as well as the international risks related to opening up the Western border of the country. This possibility arose as a perfectly obvious one to us. The idea, in and of itself, was not an extraordinary one; the true problem was how to implement this idea.

Having measured the domestic risks, we could count on strong support, since

- such a decision would be favorably received by the Hungarian population,
- the Hungarian political parties (the opposition parties as well as the leadership of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) would be certain to agree to such a decision, and
- the border could be opened up, as the Hungarians, as mentioned before, did not want to leave their homeland. (This was a crucial difference compared to other socialist countries, because the Hungarians had the opportunity – a regulated and somehow limited opportunity, but still – to travel to the West.)

The conclusion was: Such a decision would basically further strengthen the government's political position domestically.

Of course, we evaluated the strength of the possible oppositional forces as well. There were not only roughly 80,000 Russian troops in Hungary, about which more later, but also some fundamentalists of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party were against such a decision. And they were backed by the so-called "Workers' Militia", a paramilitary unit of the Communist Party consisting of roughly 60,000 troops. The result of our evaluation was that

- the fundamentalists in the Communist Party were weak;
- the Militia was not able to initiate a military coup, because the leadership of the Hungarian Army backed the government, basically due to the fact that nearly thirty old Generals had been sent to pension before August.

Based on the evaluation of the domestic risks, we came to the conclusion that the support of the decision was much stronger than the opposition.

The situation was somewhat more complex from the foreign-policy side. The question that had to be asked was: to what extent can criticism or actions, even brutal ones, be expected from the Warsaw Pact countries? (We had vivid memories from 1956. I was 14 years old at that time, living in Budapest, being in the street, looking at dead bodies lying on the street. I drew a lifelong conclusion: There is no difference among people in the genuine nature of human blood. It is fluid.)

It was determined that on the basis of international law, our action could not be faulted if just two or three paragraphs in the Annex of the contract of the bilateral co-operation treaty between the GDR and Hungary were suspended. (We actually did just this, just after we met Chancellor Kohl in a meeting I will describe below.) We avoided the trap of an ideological debate again. We were not openly confrontational. We only suspended the three paragraphs instead of abolition. But it is also true that we suspended them without mentioning for how long.

The more serious problem was the anticipation of the probable behavior of the Warsaw Pact countries. In the case of the Soviet Union, we anticipated the reaction to be neutral, i.e. a simple acknowledgement of the decision. On the one hand, this was based on the fact that Gorbachev had given up the Brezhnev doctrine on limited

sovereignty. (Gorbachev confirmed this to the Hungarian Prime Minister in March 1989 during their private meeting.) On the other hand, we also took into consideration the fact that the concerns – by Ceaușescu and shared by Honecker, Jakes and Zhivkov, with regard to the so-called “socialist achievements” becoming endangered in Hungary and in Poland, raised at the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact in Bucharest in the summer of 1989 – were not shared by Gorbachev. Consequently, we believed that we could count on an acknowledgement of the decision on the part of the Soviet Union, unless a military coup were to topple Gorbachev. We did not, however, consider this possibility to be realistic at that time. (We were collecting information on the probability of this.)

At the same time, however, we were counting on sharp criticism from the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, but we did not consider them to constitute any direct threat without the support of the Soviet Union at a time when increasingly stronger opposition forces were attacking the existing regimes in these four countries. Ceaușescu proposed that a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee should be called in Bucharest in October or November 1989 for the purpose of discussing the measures to be taken in connection with the events in Hungary and Poland. (Gorbachev sent us a copy of Ceaușescu’s letter. So we had quite relevant information.) This meeting never took place, and our decision contributed to that. *In this situation, it was in the direct interest of Hungary to contribute to the weakening of the existing regime in the GDR and in other socialist countries.*

Following the deliberations of these domestic and foreign policy risks, the Hungarian Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs agreed in the morning of 22 August to call a meeting for that same afternoon, with the attendance of the Minister of Interior Affairs, the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Justice and the Prime Minister’s two special advisors. (These were the six persons I mentioned earlier.)

During the course of the meeting, analyses were presented on

- the foreign policy issues by the Minister of Foreign Affairs,
- the domestic policy consequences by the Minister of Interior Affairs, and
- the international legal requirements by the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Justice.

Having listened to these, the Prime Minister announced that he had decided in favor of opening up the Western border for the people who had been staying in Hungary as unrecognized refugees from East Germany.

The Minister of Interior Affairs asked whether this decision also meant that we stood on the side of West Germany in the conflict between them and the GDR. The Prime Minister answered, “Yes, that is precisely what this means.” (We can say that with this decision we crossed the Rubicon.) The Minister of Interior Affairs only wanted to clarify the situation with this question. It was simply a factual issue. He did not oppose the decision, and all participants agreed with the decision of the Prime Minister.

In the course of the meeting, it was also decided that we would inform the leadership of West Germany about the outcome of the decision, since the estimated

number of expected refugees was between 60 and 70 thousand, for which the appropriate reception facilities had to be established within West Germany as well. On 25 August, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the two special advisors to the Prime Minister therefore traveled to West Germany on a special flight. At Schloss Gymnich, we met Chancellor Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Following the meeting, we returned to Budapest on the same day. The Prime Minister told me later that Chancellor Kohl had been extremely moved and had told him with tears in his eyes: “The German people will never forget what you have done by making this decision.” We also agreed that, following the establishment of the required facilities, the Germans would notify us; we would announce the date of the opening the borders only after this notification. A communiqué was released later regarding this visit.

Only after having arrived back to Hungary were the members of the government and the President of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party informed on the decision that had been made. This happened only after the decision based on the “declaration of independence” of the Prime Minister in May 1989. The Hungarian Foreign Minister traveled to the GDR to present the decision there as well. The reason he traveled alone was that the Prime Minister of the GDR was reported to be sick.

When the West German government announced that the facilities for the reception of the refugees had been established, the Minister of Foreign Affairs made a television announcement on behalf of the Hungarian government and declared the date for opening the borders. To sum it up: the decision was made by the Prime Minister and the date of the “exodus” to West Germany was announced by the Foreign Minister. This is the story in a nutshell.

4. The output and the outcome of the decision

Every public policy decision has outputs and outcomes. The difference between them is well-known: Output is the direct consequence of a decision and outcome is the medium-term or long-term impact.

At that time, we could naturally only partly evaluate the consequences of this decision. From the output perspective, it was a good decision because we had a clear value orientation (human rights), and it was satisfactory for the Hungarian people and for the Euro-Atlantic countries at the same time. It strengthened the prestige of Hungary in the West and perhaps with this decision, Hungary became the front-runner on the prestige-scale among the Central and Eastern European communist countries including Yugoslavia. It was our calculation, and this vision came true. It was the output side of the coin.

But we could not forecast the outcomes. On the one hand, with this decision, we strengthened a process – starting in September and ending in December with the death of the Romanian dictator, Ceaușescu – of instability in the Central and Eastern European region. We contributed to a process leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall and leading to the collapse of the oppressive regimes in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania as well. It meant that we Hungarians were not alone anymore on the way to a transition towards market economy and democracy. It meant that we made a Hungarian contribution to the peaceful reunification of Germany.

But ironically, it also meant – on the other hand – that we lost a strategic advantage in the transition process and that Western support had to be divided among the countries that began the transition process. We could not forecast these events in the days of the decision-making.

From a public-policy approach, therefore, this decision had advantages and disadvantages. We can once again draw the lesson now that one has to be realistic and that there is no optimal decision in the public-policy-making process. With every public decision, we solve some problems, but we create new ones at the same time. And the criterion for a good decision is that it solves more problems than it creates.

5. Lessons from an academic perspective

This part focuses on two issues:

- the role of rationality and intuition in the decision;
- the relationship between values and interests.

According to the early theory of Herbert Simon – the theory was outlined in the book entitled *Administrative Behavior* first published in 1945 – a decision is rational and optimal when it involves the selection of alternatives which are conducive to the achievement of certain objectives. According to Simon, a rational and optimal decision should involve three steps:

- the listing of all the alternative strategies
- the determination of all the consequences that follow upon each of these strategies
- the comparative evaluation of these sets of consequences (Simon 1945, 67)

It is quite obvious that we could not meet these requirements. We simply did not have enough time to list all the alternatives and to determine all the consequences.

Faced with this problem, political obstacles were apparent and the Hungarian Prime Minister focused on two alternatives:

- first, to comply with the Hungary-GDR cooperation and friendship treaty, but that would have meant forced transportation of the refugees back to GDR, and
- second, on humanitarian and political grounds, to open up the borders and let the refugees go.

The choice is now common knowledge: The Hungarian Prime Minister opened up the border.

According to Herbert Simon, the decision-making person should maximize his or her values in the decision. At that moment, the decision maker had to choose between two controversial values, namely between

- compulsory cooperation and friendship, called “proletarian internationalism”, or
- the value of humanism and human rights.

It is quite clear that the Hungarian Prime Minister’s decision was the implementation of human rights. But apart from this clear value orientation, interests also motivated the decision. The interest of Hungary was to weaken the opportunity of a coordinated attack from the side of the other communist countries. The time constraint was one of the reasons why we had to focus on two main alternatives, and thus this decision was made under “bounded rationality” – this idea was elaborated in the later work of Herbert Simon (Simon 1957, xxiv) – instead of under a rational-comprehensive model. We did not examine all possible alternatives but simply chose the alternative which was satisfactory, which was good enough.

Apart from values and interests, extra-rational elements also motivated the decision. While making the decision, we remembered the events of 1956, when the Hungarian freedom fight was oppressed by the Red Army. In our calculation, Gorbachev was not ready to repeat this oppressive step, but the political stability of Gorbachev himself was in question, because we had information from intelligence that there was a growing dissatisfaction with him among the leadership of the Russian Army. But how strong was this dissatisfaction? Who knew that? At this point, we had to follow our instinct and intuition according to the theory of Dror. We had to “combine realism and idealism” (Dror 1964, 157), and we had to apply extra-rational elements in the decision-making process as well. In other words, we had to fill in the gaps of rational-comprehensive knowledge with creative intuition.

We experienced in practice that public policy involves a course of action or a web of decisions rather than one action or one decision. The second point in our current evaluation is that we could keep the balance in the course of the whole process between a decisional top-down perspective on policy and an action-oriented bottom-up perspective. The third point is that we acted in the process not only as technicians or traditional politicians, but under the pressure of constraints and demands, we became entrepreneurs on improving the quality of policy.

6. Conclusions for the future

Today, with the benefit of hindsight, I can state with confidence that the decision was a good one, albeit having created many new challenges and problems for us, which had to be faced.

At that time, we were convinced that Europe had come to a historical turning point and that the new opportunities offered in 1989 should not be allowed to slip through our fingers. There was the chance to begin the transition to market economy, to a multi-party system and to a legal state, to a “*Rechtsstaat*”, and to terminate the “ideological war” and to put an end to division on an ideological basis. We, with our participation in the events, wanted to contribute to that.

In the course of the fall of 1989, the political systems in different Central and Eastern European countries collapsed. Secondly, I can confirm now that our decision supported those countries in managing the first step toward the transition. And we

were able to contribute to the peaceful reunification of Germany as well. It was confirmed by Chancellor Kohl during the celebration of the unification of Germany, when he said, and I quote, “The soil under the Brandenburg Gate is Hungarian soil.” These are flattering words, but knowing the facts, I can say that we have largely contributed to the pulling down of the feared and hated Berlin Wall, considered the symbol of Europe being divided along ideological barriers.

But now, at the beginning of the 21st century, I assess that we have been facing some old and new challenges again.

The Cold War has already become history; the old portraits of the enemy have faded away. “Eastern block” and “iron curtain” are anachronistic phrases by now, but peace has not yet been established in the different regions of the world. I hoped at that time that the era of ideological wars has ended. We had more than enough of them, since they were more devastating than the religious wars of the Middle Ages. I had illusions at that time. But I have to add that illusions are always better than any kind of nostalgia.

But today, I can hear again the voices of false and lying superiority, which does not get us anywhere; neither do the claims of supremacy and the endeavors of nationalism. Moreover, it seems that those old voices are being revived dramatically, and they might send the regions of the world to anarchy and chaos. Therefore, it is the obligation of all responsible political forces to prevent the drama from being transformed into a Greek tragedy of destiny.

Last but not least, at that time, we hoped that within two decades, we could put the national and local communities in the center, replacing the position of the state, and with this shift, we would complete the transition. I did not have in mind any kind of neutralization or sterilization of national interests, values or worldviews, nor was I thinking of societies of robots with a highly developed technology, nor did I visualize a certain type of new internationalism, under which the nations could be tightly squeezed. Contrary to that, our conviction was that in this changing world, each nation has to find its new identity and new ways of cooperation.

This task has not been completed yet. We have been facing an increasing level of international terrorism, with the dangers of various waves of a worldwide economic crisis and unexpectedly great social burdens on communities and individuals. These problems cannot be solved with short-term measures in the framework of a four-year “business cycle”. We need a strategic solution. The requirements of this strategy are clear: To create viable communities – among the nations – in which the people are free to dispose of their own lives in politics, in their workplaces, at home. Only a tolerant and pluralistic society may provide the key to overcoming a state dividing the regions, drowning all progressive initiatives in abject hatred and unfruitful arrogance.

And perhaps we can use the lessons from our 1989 decision regarding the East German refugees as well, to overcome current dangers and challenges.

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