

In memoriam Prof. Dr. Dr.h.c.mult. György Jenei

WOLFGANG DRECHSLER, EDITOR IN CHIEF, HALDUSKULTUUR

Professor Dr. Dr.h.c.mult. György Jenei, the doyen of Central and Eastern European Public Administration, passed away peacefully on 4 February 2024; born in 1942, he was 82 years old. He was for many decades the leading figure of the field in our region; he personified it; he had preserved it during darker times; and he had led it again to prominence since 1989, with persistence, integrity, and style. He did so both in form and in contents – the former both at his home, Corvinus University of Budapest, and in his many leadership functions in professional and scholarly associations, including the NISPAcee Presidency during the crucial years of the Global Financial Crisis. 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 direct merits for TalTech's Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance included an unwavering, active support of the best interests of the institution and its members, junior and senior. This entailed 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 visited Tallinn, TalTech, and the Nurkse Department many times, for instance as a keynote speaker of the legendary 1st EGPA-NISPAcee Trans-Atlantic Dialogue on the Neo-Weberian State in early 2008 (see Jenei, 2009).

György Jenei was an active and highly appreciated counsel in political and administrative matters as well. In fact, he had an historical impact that in the end affected all of 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 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. When receiving TalTech's Honorary Doctorate in 2011, he spoke about these moments for the first time, and this chapter of European history was first published inside the covers – as they then were – of this journal (Jenei, 2011 – the present obituary is based on the introductory note to this essay).

One may and should, add that György Jenei's diplomatic skills and unwavering courteousness, which never loses sight of the goal – *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo* – were a joy to experience and a model for anyone's conduct. Indeed, Professor Jenei embodied not only the effective academic manager and modern researcher – which is not so rare after all – but also the intellectual, highly educated and genuinely cultivated scholar and indeed of the Central European Gentleman who represented a civilization, and a culture, that predates, and still serves as a counter-model against, the horrors of the 20th Century. He helped from his country

and his region to first navigate and then to overcome these horrors, even if not, as today it seems more so than a decade or two ago, for good.

Last but certainly not least, György Jenei served, for many years and until now, on the Advisory Board of this journal. This issue of *Halduskultuur*, 22.2, is dedicated to his memory. We shall not see his like again; may he rest in peace.

Bibliography

- Jenei, G. (2011). "The Opening of the Hungarian Border for the East German Refugees in 1989: A Public-Policy Analysis of a Key Decision." *Halduskultuur – Administrative Culture*, 12(2), 112–125.
- Jenei, G. (2009). "A Post-Accession Crisis? Political Developments and Public Sector Modernization in Hungary." In *A Distinctive European Model? The Neo-Weberian State = The NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 1(2), ed. by C. Pollitt et al., 55–67.