http://dx.doi.org/10.18611/2221-3279-2017-8-2-140-146

HUNGARY'S INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES IN THE LAST 25 YEARS

Tamás Szemlér

National University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary

Article history:

Received:

15 December 2016

Accepted:

1 March 2017

About the author:
PhD in International Relations, Associate Professor, National University of Public Service, Hungary

e-mail: Szemler.Tamas@uni-nke.hu

Key words:
Hungary, Euro-Atlantic integration, European Union, Visegrad cooperation

Abstract: In 1989/1990, major systemic changes have taken place in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe. These changes – as part of the fundamental changes in the world order – have also modified the international relations of most countries in the region: after having been part of the Soviet block for more than four decades, they turned towards the West, and tied themselves to different elements – integrations and organisations – of the Euro-Atlantic structure. In this article, we observe this process through the case of Hungary, presenting an overview of the country's historical and present international relations and objectives. The analysis leads us to the conclusion that the complexity of the relations justifies a transregionalist approach..

Introduction

In 1989/1990, as in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, major systemic changes have taken place in Hungary. In line with the general direction of the changes, in December 1991, Hungary has signed its Europe Agreement, creating an association between the country and the European Communities (today: European Union).

Since then we have been witnessing an increasing deepening of the Euro-Atlantic relations of Hungary, culminating in becoming a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and of the European Union. In order to be able to realise these steps, the country had to fulfil the requirements of membership of these "clubs"; especially in the case of the European Union, this has been a very complex task.

Most of the steps required in the context of integration have been in line with the country's general interests regarding its political and economic development. Thus, being mostly a "policy taker" has not caused significant problems for Hungary. Still, with gaining experiences – similarly to some other countries that have experienced a similar political and economic development path in the last quarter of a century – the need for a more active role in the design of (Euro-Atlantic) policy steps has increased.

This need for becoming a "policy maker" is an important source of some relatively new phenomena, one of the most spectacular among them being the increased importance of the

Visegrad cooperation, a potential "special club" within European integration. The objective of Hungary is the achievement of balanced relations; the complexity of the relations justifies a transregionalist approach, evaluating the real achievements and further potential in different integrations/cooperations.

In the present article, we observe this process in more details. First, we present the effects of the country's specific geographic situation – many times on the border of different worlds – in a brief (and by far not exhaustive) historical overview. After that, we provide an overview of the integration experiences of Hungary in the last quarter of a century; after the presentation of the milestones of this period, we will deal with the importance of the integrations/organisations from the point of view of different – economic, security, political – aspects. After that, we present the importance of balanced international relations for Hungary and we argue for a transregionalist approach for the evaluation of the real achievements and further potential in the complex structure of different (and overlapping) integrations/ cooperations.

On the Border of Different Worlds

Hungary is one of the oldest states in Europe, having a more than 1000-year-long statehood. During its history, the country has gone through a lot of changes regarding its territory, the ethnic composition of its population, its political and economic regime. Still, during most of all this time, Hungary has been at the border of different „worlds", cultures, groups or blocks of countries with characteristically different values and systems.[1]

In fact, this situation has already been there well before the arrival of Hungarians into the Carpathian basin. In the Roman times, empire, Pannonia has been one of the border provinces of the empire, and thus a scene of eventual conflicts with the peoples in the neighbouring territories. The geographical position of the territory has contributed to the formulation of similar situations later in history, as well. The country has intended many times to play the role of a „bridge" between different powers and cultures, but due to the uncertainties in the region, it was more a like „ferry" between two distant worlds.

Between the XVth and the XVIIth centuries, the Carpathian basin has been one of the most important scenes of the fight between the Christian Europe and the Ottoman Turkish Empire. The country has defended itself – and with it, Europe – for a long time before having been occupied by the Ottoman forces for almost 150 years.

After the end of the Turkish occupation, the history of the country has become very closely interconnected with that of the Habsburg Empire. The revolution and the war for independence in 1848-1849 have ended with a defeat, related also to the active involvement of Russian troops on the side of the Austrians. After that, a period of – gradually normalising – coexistence has followed, which lasted until the end of World War I. After World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire has been dissolved and Hungary has suffered dramatic territorial and population losses; its choice of new partners – in the hope for revision – has proved to be wrong, as it has been shown during and after World War II.

In the period of the bipolar world, Hungary has become part of the Soviet bloc; the hopes right after the war regarding the objective of becoming a country belonging to the West have been unrealistic. Hungary – after the shock of the defeat of the 1956 revolution – has become the "happiest barrack" in the Soviet bloc and introduced gradually a limited number of some (mostly cultural and economic) elements of the "Western" world.

In 1989/1990, as the systemic changes have taken place in Hungary, the country has put its cultural and historical linkages into the foreground, rapidly strengthening its ties with the West, and beginning its integration into the organisations of Euro-Atlantic political,

[1] Nyusztay presents an analysis of the modernisation of Hungary, concentrating on the developments of the XIXth and XXth centuries; he also discusses in details the changes from the point of view values and systemic characteristics: Nyusztay, L. De la modernización comunista a la modernización liberal: el caso de Hungria (From Communist Modernisation to Liberal Modernisation: The Case of Hungary) // PUENTE@EUROPA, 2012, X:(1), pp. 47-64.

security and economic integration. Like most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary has concentrated in this period on the western links, giving less attention to the relations with countries in the Central and Eastern part of Europe.

Integration: The Milestones in the Last 25 Years

The firm intention of Hungary to join Euro-Atlantic integration structures has been successful: within fifteen years from the time the systemic changes had begun to take place, the country had become a member of all leading organisations and integrations. Table 1 provides a list of these steps, together with the year of the signature of the related documents (see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Hungary: milestones of integration after the systemic changes

Year	Milestone
1991	Foundation of the Visegrad Group
1991	Membership in the Council of Europe
1991	Signature of the Europe Agreement (after coming into force providing an associated status to the European Communities (EC))
1992	Foundation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA)
1996	Membership in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
1999	Membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)
2004	Membership in the European Union (EU)

Source: own compilation

Table 1 shows how fast the integration patterns have changed in the first years of transition. In order to be able to judge the importance of these changes, we should bear in mind that between mid-1988 and the end of 1991, the status of the country regarding its relations with the European Communities has changed from discrimination to the highest possible status (associated country) without membership.

Of course, Hungary has not been the only country to make such a progress. In the first years of transition, the country progressed in its Euro-Atlantic relations together with Poland and Czechoslovakia. The cooperation of these countries has often been advised by the Western partners, and the creation of the Visegrad Group and of the Central European Free Trade Agreement has meant important steps. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the main focus for these countries (and for most of the other Central and Eastern European countries, as well) has been their integration into Western structures. Regional integration patterns have been regarded by them mostly as an instrument that can bring them – together – closer to this primary objective.

It can also be seen that after 1992, the speed of changes – at least on the level of tangible, spectacular progress in institutional integration – has been reduced. However, it did not really mean the reduction of the speed of the real changes: after a pause of almost half a century, the country has rebuilt a market economy and has proven that it is able to run a functioning plural democracy. In 1994, Hungary applied for European Union membership, and concentrated from then on to meet the criteria set by the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993. Obviously, becoming a member of the European Union has been a complex task requiring much adaptation: when we talk about the European Union, we have to bear in mind that it is not just a group of countries cooperating with each other in a couple of fields, but – despite all its shortcomings – the deepest ever integration of sovereign countries.

Thus the road towards European Union membership has been long and sometimes bumpy. However, as the tasks stemming from the obligations related to Hungary's European Union accession have been in line with the general interests of the country, the progress has also led to tangible results in the second half of the 1990's. The accession of Hungary to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development signified that Hungary has been acknowledged as a country belonging to the (broader) economic elite of the international community. The membership of Hungary in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has meant the inclusion of the country into a defence structure which has been for decades a key element of the Euro-Atlantic partnership and which, due to the changes in Central and Eastern Europe and to the end of the Cold

War and of the bipolar world order, could be extended by the accession of new members and by an enlarged cooperation involving new partners.

Looking at the integrations/organisations listed in *Table 1*, we can see that we deal with – to a great extent – overlapping structures. The main direction of the integration (who intends to integrate itself where?) is from East to West; examples of East-East integration do exist but – beyond the already mentioned objective of preparation for Western structures – they were mostly pushed into the background by a „yes, but" approach of the participants themselves.

Different Aspects of Cooperation

The cooperation in the framework of the different integrations covers different issues. One of the most important of them is economic development, a key objective after the transition from a centrally planned regime to a market economy. The main partner regarding economic development has been the European Union which has been regarded as the main modernisation anchor[2] for Hungary. The common policies, the resources available for the development and the structural adjustment of the economy, the Single Market have all been regarded – rightly – as key elements of the development of the Hungarian economy that has become closely tied by commercial and investment links to its European partners. Of course, trade and investment issues have been important with partners beyond the EU, as well, but the dominance of the linkages with the EU (and within it, first of all with Germany) has been clear.

Security has also been a key issue – after the change of the world order, the country, like many small- and medium sized countries in the region, has been looking for its place in the new structure. The military aspects of security are covered by the country's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Security also has economic aspects; these latter are mostly covered by the EU membership of the country. Regarding both aspects, the country has always emphasised in interest in the East-West dialogue – we can see here a modern form of the traditional "bridge/ferry" role.

The developing institutional relationships of Hungary have also influenced the political „style" and the practice of governance in the country. The most important effects (especially since the association, later on from the beginning of the accession talks) have come from the European Union; however, the "heritage" (a specific mix of Central European traditions and centrally planned regime characteristics) still plays an important role. Recently, we can also observe in Hungary some divergence from the traditional mainstream political style of the EU (while the EU „mainstream" seems to be seriously challenged, as well).

The issue of Hungary's relations to the neighbouring countries has also been an important one. Within this issue, there is a special topic for Hungary: that of the minorities (mostly Hungarian minorities in some of the neighbouring countries; much smaller minorities from the nations of the neighbouring countries in Hungary). The fact that Hungary and most of its neighbours have intended (and most of them succeeded) to get accession to the European Union helped considerably to handle these relations more smoothly than before.

In addition to this, the issue of an „alliance within the alliance" has also appeared. It has been widely known for a long time that (even unofficial) coalitions, interest groups, alliances can help smaller countries representing their interests successfully – even within such a deep, complex and institutionalised integration as the European Union. In the recent few years, the Central and Eastern European countries have realised the importance of this aspect, and they put more weight than before on the strengthening of the linkages between each other. The main framework for this process is the Visegrad Group; however, it has to be

[2] A modernisation anchor is an external source of modernisation; in this case, it means that the development of relations with the European Union have been a major factor in the development of the country's economy and society. Regarding this role, see e.g.: Inotai, A. The European Union and Southeastern Europe: Troubled Waters Ahead? Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007. P. 112.

noted that real, successful cooperation has to be issue-based (cooperation has a real chance only if the countries share similar interests in a given issue).[3]

The importance of the integrations/organisations presented in *Table 1* regarding the issues discussed above is shown in *Table 2*. The evaluation is provided by the author and is a subjective one; the more +-es are shown in a given cell (maximum: +++), the stronger is the effect of the given integration/organisation on the given issue. In addition to the discussion above, beyond the major effects, smaller influence has also been indicated.

Table 2

Matrix of Issues and Integrations

	Economic development	Security	Governance, political „style"	Relations to neighbouring countries	„Alliance within the alliance"
V4	+	+	+	++	+++
Council of Europe		+	++	+	
CEFTA	++			++	+
OECD	++				
NATO		+++		+	
EU	+++	+	++	++	

Source: own evaluation and compilation

Table 2 shows that it is the joint result of the integrations/organisations that has formed the position or the practice of Hungary in the listed issues. In most cases, we can identify the most important integration/organisation for the issue in question, but there are always more than one integrations/organisations contributing to the development of Hungary in the given field. We have to emphasise once again that we deal here with – fully or partially – overlapping structures; it makes the relations within (and between) these integrations/organisations highly complex.[4]

Objective: Balanced Relations

After having become a member of the European Union, Hungary – as other (then) new Member States, as well – had the intention to have more emphasis on decisions, to develop from a "policy taker" into a "policy maker".[5] Of course, this intention can realistically mean the will to become one of the policy makers, to contribute actively to the steps decided and taken by the European Union in different fields of integration.

It is well-known that the European Union has been perceived as a power multiplier; even its biggest Member States use it consciously this way (France being the most well-known example for this). On the one hand, for smaller Member States, this effect can be even more

[3] This statement is well illustrated e.g. by the summary of V4 positions with regard to recent developments in the European Union: Bilčík, V.; Dostál, V.; Kruliš, K.; Szemlér, T.;Zerka, P. Rethinking V4's Eurozone Dilemmas after the UK Referendum. Prague: Association for International Affairs, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2016.

[4] The existence of cross-border cooperation through Euroregions makes the picture even more complex; a sin this article, we concentrate on the inter-state relations, we don't get into this topic here. For more details on the experiences with this specific form of cooperation, see e.g.: Szemlér, T. Euroregionális minták és EU-források (Euroregional Experiences and EU Resources) / In: Ludvig, Zs. – Süli-Zakar, I.: A Kárpátok Eurorégió együttműködés mérlege: eredmények, problémák, perspektívák (The Balance of Cooperation in the Carpathian Euroregion: Results, Problems, Prospects). Budapest: Oktatási Minisztérium, 2002. Pp. 9-32.

[5] This change in the approach has been visible already shortly after the accession to the European Union. Some of the first tangible results of this kind of reflection is summarised by: Brusis, M.; Emmanouilidis, J.A. (Eds.) Thinking Enlarged. The Accession Countries and the Future of the European Union. Munich Contributions to European Unification, Vol. 7. Bonn: Europa Union Verlag, 2002. More specific results of such a reflection – related to the structural and cohesion policies of the EU – can be read in: Eriksson, J.; Karlsson, B. O.; Tarschys, D. From Policy Takers to Policy Makers: Adapting EU Cohesion Policy to the Needs of the New Member States. Stockholm: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2005.

important; on the other hand, they may even need a power multiplier within the EU, in order to be able to represent their interests powerfully enough within the EU. In the recent years, it looks like Hungary discovered the importance of this aspect, and tried to use cooperation between the members of the Visegrad Group for such purposes, as well.

Hungary remains interested in balanced, peaceful, prospering relations within and beyond Europe. A specifically important and delicate field in this respect is constituted by the relations between the European Union and its Eastern neighbourhood. What Hungary can add to the content of this complex relationship is its considerable experience, knowledge and understanding of the region (traditions, culture, mechanisms, etc.) – in fact, the traditional "bridge" role adjusted to the present circumstances.

Conclusions: The Importance of Transregionalism

As we have seen, the system of Hungary's international embeddedness into various integrations/organisations is a very complex one. We have also seen the overlaps between different elements of this system, both geographically and regarding the issues covered.

The complexity of these relations justifies a transregionalist approach, as the nature of relations cannot be described by in only intra-, inter-, cross-, or macro-regional terms – in fact, the system we experience is a colourful and dynamic combination of all of them.[6]

The different integrations/organisations can be conceived as elements of transregionalism. All these elements, as well as the interdependencies between them should be carefully evaluated, as missing any of the linkages in the analysis may lead to partially false conclusions. False conclusions could lead to negative practical political consequences – distortions, tensions – that would be highly undesirable for Hungary and its partners, as well. Instead of that, we should apply a transregionalist approach for the evaluation of the real achievements and realistic further potential in the complex structure of different (and overlapping) integrations/cooperations.

References:

Biluик, V.; Dostől, V.; Kruliъ, K.; Szemlür, T.; Zerka, P. Rethinking V4's Eurozone Dilemmas after the UK Referendum. Prague: Association for International Affairs, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2016.

Brusis, M.; Emmanouilidis, J.A. (Eds.) Thinking Enlarged. The Accession Countries and the Future of the European Union. Munich Contributions to European Unification, Vol. 7. Bonn: Europa Union Verlag, 2002.

Eriksson, J.; Karlsson, B.O.; Tarschys, D. From Policy Takers to Policy Makers: Adapting EU Cohesion Policy to the Needs of the New Member States. Stockholm: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2005.

Inotai, A. The European Union and Southeastern Europe: Troubled Waters Ahead? Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007.

Kuznetsov, D.A. Transregionalism: Problems of Terminology and Conceptualization // *Comparative Politics Russia*, 2016, No. 7, pp. 14-25 (In Russian) DOI:10.18611/2221-3279-2016-7-2(23)-14-25

Nyusztay, L. De la modernización comunista a la modernización liberal: el caso de Hungria (From Communist Modernisation to Liberal Modernisation: The Case of Hungary) // PUENTE@EUROPA, 2012, X:(1), pp. 47-64.

Szemlér, T. Euroregionális minták és EU-források (Euroregional Experiences and EU Resources) / In: Ludvig, Zs. – Süli-Zakar, I.: A Kárpátok Eurorégió együttmüködés mérlege: eredmények, problémák, perspektivák (The Balance of Cooperation in the Carpathian Euroregion: Results, Problems, Prospects). Budapest: Oktatási Minisztérium, 2002. Pp. 9-32.

[6] The complexity of the various terms is discussed in detail in: Kuznetsov, D.A. Transregionalism: Problems of Terminology and Conceptualization // *Comparative Politics Russia*, 2016, No. 7, pp. 14-25 (In Russian) DOI:10.18611/2221-3279-2016-7-2(23)-14-25

http://dx.doi.org/10.18611/2221-3279-2017-8-2-140-146

ИНТЕГРАЦИОННЫЙ ОПЫТ ВЕНГРИИ ЗА ПОСЛЕДНИЕ 25 ЛЕТ

Тамас Землер

Национальный университет государственной службы,
Будапешт, Венгрия

Информация о статье:

Поступила в редакцию:

15 декабря 2016

Принята к печати:

1 марта 2017

Об авторе:
PhD (Международные отношения),
доцент, Национальный университет
государственной службы,
Будапешт, Венгрия

e-mail: Szemler.Tamas@uni-nke.hu

Ключевые слова:
Венгрия, евроатлантическая интеграция,
Европейский Союз,
Вышеградская группа.

Аннотация: В 1989/1990 в большинстве стран Центральной и Восточной Европы произошли системные изменения. В результате этих изменений – которые стали неотъемлемой частью глобальных трансформаций мирового порядка – произошли перемены и в региональной системе международных отношений: после более чем четырех десятилетий пребывания в советском лагере, страны региона переориентировались на Запад и стали частью (через различные интеграционные и организационные схемы) структуры евроатлантической системы. В настоящей статье предпринимается попытка рассмотреть кейс Венгрии, исторических особенностей ее региональной стратегии, современного состояния и перспективных задач. В результате автор приходит к выводу, что сложная сеть внешних связей может быть объяснена лишь с привлечением концепции трансрегионализма.

Для цитирования: Szemlér, Tamás. Hungary's Integration Experiences in the Last 25 Years // *Сравнительная политика*. – 2017. – № 2. – С. 140-146.

DOI: 10.18611/2221-3279-2017-8-2-140-146

For citation: Szemlér, Tamás. Hungary's Integration Experiences in the Last 25 Years // *Comparative Politics Russia*, 2017, No. 2, pp. 140-146.

DOI: 10.18611/2221-3279-2017-8-2-140-146