



DOI: 10.18427/iri-2016-0097

Changes in the Regent's Image in Hungary, in the 1930-ies and 1940-ies

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In the new system unfolding after World War I, the significance of public representation and the image of the head of state increased with respect to political legitimation and the social acceptance of the elected regent. As a result of the socialising effect of the World War, for wide layers of the population, it became more important than before to participate and be informed in public life, or at least to get to know the country's leaders closer. In earlier centuries, ordinary people never saw the ruler or the members of the government closer; they knew almost nothing about their lives. In the new era, in the 20th century the mass events, the increasing role of media, their broadcasts received by more and more people, the introduction of public people, and the information related to their lives, plans and daily activities made it possible to experience citizenship more deeply and to strengthen the feeling of personal relationship. All this increased trust and acceptance towards the state's institutional system and the leaders of the country (Sipos B, 2011:83-86; Gyáni, 2006:62-66).

In the 1930-ies, the impact of political messages distributed by state propaganda on public opinion got appreciated. In the meantime, the uniform language of mass media, the applied solutions, and the technical devices also became more modern and professional. The government made endeavours to influence public opinion more efficiently in order to set off radical views spreading widely in Europe and to strengthen the existing constitutional parliamentary system and to increase the head of state's popularity. In addition to the head of state's representation earlier mostly linked to national holidays and more important public events, the number of everyday news concerning the regent had increased. The name of Miklós Horthy similarly arose in each field of life, in relation to political, economic, social, and cultural questions. Through the press, the radio, the newsreel, and books published about the head of state, the regent had become the easily identifiable manifestation of political stability, and the economic and cultural results for more and more people (Szabó, 1984:497).

They regarded it an important aspect that the No. 1 representative of power appeared in people's everyday life in addition to the sphere of administration. Streets, squares, and new residential areas were named after Miklós Horthy in almost all of the towns and cities of the country.

Educational institutions took his name, starting from schools among ranches to the Szeged University. All over the country, several public institutions, army bases, the hospital of the Hungarian Railways in Budapest, the therapeutic institution of MABI, the National Sports Hall, and the bridge at Boráros Square (now Petőfi Bridge) wore his name. Foundations, scholarships, funds, and sports events were named after him. It happened several times that the public identified with him institutions that were not made for him. The navy memorial standing at the Buda side of the Miklós Horthy Bridge was only called by everybody as Horthy Memorial, despite the fact that in reality it had been built as a memorial to the Monarchy's navy (Pótó, 2003:38-39).

By the end of the 1930-ies, the number of books describing the head of state's life, career and political activities had increased. During the period of World War II, there were 54 respective works and even a bigger number of local publications, brochures, and offprint's published. In addition to representative writings with several hundreds of pages, shorter and cheaper publications also appeared that could get to all layers of the population, to the schools and family homes much easily. Frigyes Véssey's 31-page work was made for the Regent's 75th birthday. It was published in a pocketbook format, in 200,000 copies, most of which was distributed among schoolchildren for free. Based on similar considerations, a large number of posters, and reproductions were printed about the Regent, which were mainly put on the walls of cultural institutions, schools, and buildings of associations. Public offices and military facilities were obliged to display the image of the head of state in their offices and boardrooms and on holidays, Horthy's portrait was also displayed in the shop windows of most of the shops (Véssey, 1943:1-31; Dömötörfi, 1990:25).

The stamp and the coin issued with the Regent's portrait also enhanced the perception of a personal contact and the head of state's permanent presence. In 1940, a series of stamps consisting of 3 parts was issued, in the worth of Filler 6, 10 and 20, which recorded the appearance of the commander-in-chief in 1919, his activity between 1920 and 1940 as the head of the state, and the country enlargement of year 1939. Already in 1930, silver Pengő 5 coins were issued with Miklós Horthy's portrait on them. They were only commemorative coins also suitable for shopping, which were issued for the 10th anniversary of the Regent's election as the head of state. In 1939, new silver Pengő 5 coins were issued with the Regent's portrait on them, what was done already in accordance with the general standard of currency issue and resembled the rule of thumb of foreign monarchies. In 1943, in honour of the Regent's 75th birthday, newer, aluminium Pengő 5 coins were issued with Horthy's portrait, in 2 million copies. As a result, the Regent's person, and image could get into each family homes and became part of their everyday life regardless of the personal political conviction (Rádóczy, 1984:122-125; *Függetlenség*, 24. 02. 1940:3).

By the second half of the 1930-ies, the content and tool set of the Regent's image appearing in front of the general public had changed considerably. In the chaotic situation after World War I and the

revolutions, the most essential message emphasised by political propaganda on Horthy's commander-in-chief then regent operations was: creating the state's stability, re-establishing law and order, and guaranteeing public security. Horthy's social legitimation was primarily given by the "nation saviour" role at that time. By the 1930-ies, however, higher and higher emphasise was put on the "nation-builder" activity, ensuring the conditions of economic growth and peaceful development. Maintaining order by hard hand kept on being an essential aspect, but at public appearances and in the media the image of a statesman improving the economy, acquiring international reputation, and maintaining social peace with appropriate social sense got more and more in the forefront (Szabó, 1984: 497-498; Turbucz, 2009:159, 165).

In 1940, Horthy's 20-year-long operation as head of state was recorded in a respective law by the Parliament. They identified "the preservation of ancestral traditions and wise governance fostering future progress" as his greatest merits. With reference to the legal rule, the governmental propaganda especially highlighted that nobody else could have performed these tasks with so much success. Initially, Horthy was a committed soldier to recover the nation and since that time it succeeded, he had been taking care of the country with proprietary solicitude. In connection with the anniversary, István Bethlen said that Horthy had also understood the endeavours of the radical political groups, but he warned them to be patient, because he did not want dictatorship. In this way, both the radicals and the moderates accepted his leading role. According to the appreciation expressed by Gyula Kornis, a pacificator soldier was needed in the chaos spreading in 1919. Later on, however, consolidation of the country and ensuring economic growth required a wise statesman - and Horthy was perfectly suitable for both roles (Gróf Bethlen, 1940:7-9, 12-13; Kornis, 1940:388-390).

At the end of the 1930-ies, a more intense task was given to the head of state because the German influence strengthened and the local extreme right wing stepped up more and more radically. This task occurred in the fields of protecting the constitutional parliamentary structure, maintaining the plurality of public life, and moderating war efforts. Horthy's public appearances and the image transmitted about him primarily served this purpose. In contrast with the characteristics of modern European commander-in-chief cults, in his head of state representations, the traditional ruler's externalities of the turn of the century manifested. Unlike ringleaders' expressive styles, Horthy founded himself on traditions well-known to the Hungarian society. The image created about the Regent was aristocratic and consolidated in contrast with the revolutionary mass cults of dictatorships. The uniform language of communication was defined by traditional historical and cultural elements; the messianism, typical of totalitarian systems or the symbol system of radical movements was not characteristic of it (Szabó, 1984:497; Dömötörfi, 1990:26).

The Regent really did not endeavour to play the role of a dictator. Building on traditional, conservative ideals, he claimed the power and

reputation of former Hungarian kings, while he also accepted its constitutional limits. It resembled a ruler's role that there was no term determined for the Regent's tenure. At the beginning, it was not fixed because this position was temporary, but later the government rejected its regulation by referring to its stabilising function what meant that the head of state post was guaranteed for life to Horthy, similarly to the occupation of a throne. Several expansions of the regent's scope of authority made it possible that Horthy exercised almost all regale of Hungarian kings. Similarly, it also suggested a ruler's role that in 1937 the right of recommending a successor ensuring legal succession to the regent was enacted, then the post of the deputy regent was established in 1942, to which post Miklós Horthy's elder son, István Horthy was nominated, former president of the Hungarian State Railways (Püski, 2006:29; Olasz, 2009:129-130, 134-136).

It served the Regent's authority - that was similar to that of kings - that he was frequently compared to great rulers of the Hungarian history. The country's recovery from the crisis situation caused by the lost world war, the two revolutions, the foreign occupation, and the Trianon Peace Treaty was frequently measured to Béla IV's rebuilding work after Tartar Invasion. Starting from the date of establishing the regent's post, they often drew a parallel with the Hunyadi's, what became especially emphasised in 1940, on the 450th anniversary of King Mathias' death. It was highlighted on several forums that the Horthy family was not only a role-player of the country's prosperity at the current time, but it could also be an important factor even in the future, especially after the Regent's son was elected as the deputy of the head of state. In relation to this, they often referred back to the Hunyadi-parallel, namely that János Hunyadi, the regent unfolded from a soldier, who had recovered the country, was followed by his son (Mátyás), who was later on crowned as a king (Kornis, 1940:404-406; Herczeg, 1939:224-228).

The ruler's character of the head of state representation was strengthened by the externalities going together with the Regent's post: residence on the Castle Hill, the summer residence in Gödöllő, maintaining a cabinet office and a military office, providing the guard of honour, the guards, the adjutants, and the compulsory forms of compliment. In contrast with the generally symbolic commander-in-chief posts of the European heads of states, Horthy, as the warlord, had real rights with regard to the army's organisation, commandment, and staff. The Hungarian Army made an oath for the Regent's person, too. From 1938, in addition to the state's coat-of-arms, that of the Horthy family was also included in the army's flag. In certain cases, and documents, the Regent used royal plural. Based on all the foregoing, even foreign observers stated that Horthy practically fulfilled a ruler's post (Püski, 2006:30; Rutter, 1939: 345).

Holidays tied to his activities and person supported the Regent's prestige and his role recalling that of the Hungarian kings. On 1st January the establishment of the Hungarian Royal Army, while on 16th November Horthy's entry to Budapest in 1919 was recollected. These anniversaries

were considered not only as military, but also a kind of social, public events. The whole country celebrated the Regent's birthday and name day. The two family events, just like those of the king, were regarded to be military holidays at the army. On these dates, there was music alarm, the guards were in full dress, the buildings were decked with flags, and there were church services on the army bases. On the occasion of his birthday, the head of state was greeted by 24 cannon-shots from the Fortress of Citadella. The Parliament held a festive commemoration, while the Prime Minister greeted Horthy in a radio speech. On the name day of the head of state, there was a special gala performance in the Opera House. The general staff held a Miklós-day gala dinner, while the Gallant Order honoured him by a celebration. In order to counterbalance the attacks started against Horthy on behalf of the extreme right wing, the pro-regent national organisations organised annual "loyalty processions" on the Castle Hill from 1938 (Dömötörfi, 1990:25; Romsics, 2008: 234).

A particular duality characterised the news related to the person of the head of state. While they emphasised the Regent's natural notability, ruler's capabilities, the royal-like scope of authority and externalities, the propaganda kept on emphasising the Horthy family's medium landowner roots that the Regent did not break away from the society, he preserved his direct relationship with people and despite his high position he lived a moderate life. Although due to his office, he got accommodation on the Castle Hill, he did not move into the royal apartment; he only used 9 rooms from the palace's 814 rooms. When state affairs allowed him, he withdrew to his family estate at Kenderes to rest. By demonstrating all this, governmental propaganda wished to strengthen the Regent's social acceptance (Szilágyi, 1943:16; Doblhoff, 1941:10).

During 1930-ies, as a result of changes in the European balance of forces, the international acknowledgement of Hungary increased, what was regarded to be due to the personal worthiness of the head of state by the propaganda. Although the Regent had not been abroad until the middle of the 1930-ies on any official visit and he had not received other heads of states either. After this period, his diplomacy activity perked up: between 1936 and 1938 he visited in Italy, Austria, Poland and Germany. On his trips abroad, Horthy was received with pompous externalities that significantly exceeded obligatory protocols; with honour that rulers deserve. In the meantime, the President of the Republic of Austria and the King of Italy visited Hungary. In 1938, the 34th International Eucharistic Congress was organised here, on which several leading personalities of the Catholic Church appeared, including Eugenio Pacelli cardinal-state secretary, the later Pope Pius XII (Asztalos, 1940:32-34; Sakmyster, 2001:184).

Emphasising international prestige gained an important role during the time of the Regent's 20th anniversary, too. The government's propaganda especially detailed foreign congratulations and acknowledgements received by Horthy. The foreign ambassadors handed over their head of state's greetings to the Regent on the eve of the anniversary, 29th February. The Swedish, Norwegian, and the Danish kings, or the Italian,

the Yugoslavian, and the Bulgarian rulers gave high awards and medals to the Hungarian head of state. George VI British ruler and Roosevelt President of America sent dedicated photos as personal gifts to Horthy. Telegrams with greetings arrived from Pope Pius XII, the Italian, German, Japanese, Spanish, French, Dutch or Brazilian heads of states. The world press also expressed their honour, several French, Swiss, British, Swedish, Dutch or Turkish newspapers had been dealing with Hungary and the Regent's anniversary for several days (Sakmyster, 2001:226; *Függetlenség*, 29. 02. 1940:4, 02. 03. 1940:1).

By the 1940-ies, to some extent, there had been a shift in how the Regent's military past and relationship towards the armed forces were demonstrated. In the head of state's representation, the role of commander-in-chief played in internal pacification gradually got into the shade, while the question of national independence became more and more emphasised. Even writings looking back to 1919 highlighted one by one that Horthy was preparing in reality to confront with foreign occupation troops, the Rumanians. The political activity of the armed forces also got another perspective. In order to dispel uncertainty caused by the Anschluss in the neighbouring Austria, on 3 April, 1938, Horthy had a radio speech, in which he declared that soldiers should not interfere in political processes. With this statement, actually, he also questioned his own earlier action (Unger, 1979:250; Turbucz, 2009:156).

Territorial re-annexations played a significant role in the Regent's evaluation. Thanks to celebrations, parades under arms, media, and propaganda publications, Horthy - for a short period of time - appeared again in a military role, as a "nation enlarging" head of state. During the re-annexation of Highland or North-Transylvania, however, his entry on a white horse did not recall already the heavy-handed commander-in-chief of 1919, but indicated the arrival of a statesman announcing co-operation under the auspices of Saint Steven's idea. In the cases of Subcarpathia and Southland, the pompous entry had been cancelled. In Subcarpathia, the Regent only visited a few military units, and he visited Southland only several months after the re-annexation. The propaganda highly appreciated the role of the Hungarian Army in the revision and it highlighted as the Regent's personal merit that the re-annexations required almost no bloodshed (B. Kalavszky - Illéfalvi, 2007:106; Thardy, 1941:145).

After the country entered the war, despite the overwhelming war propaganda, the Regent appeared in the media rather as a head of state than a war-lord. He rarely showed up among soldiers; generally, someone else represented him at the reception of troops arriving home from the front. Although the country's involvement in the war was interconnected with his person, he did not deal with concrete military affairs. In this way, he could simultaneously identify himself with the Hungarian Army and the society at home who waited for the soldiers to come back home, so people saw the main manifestation of not only the war efforts but also the desire for peace in him (*Képes Vasárnap*, 18. 08. 1942:538, 23. 03. 1943:177-178).

At the end of the 1930-ies, news reports also emphasised that the Regent paid special attention on the material growth of the country. He supported new initiatives: he was interested in oil exploitation, sea shipping on the Danube, transportation and industrial facilities being under construction, the investments of the capital city, the watering affairs of the Great Plain, and other important developments. In relation to this, the media often referred to the Horthy family's own farmlands, that the Regent himself also took part in managing his estates. This news suggested that he cared about the country's growth with the same diligence as he cared about his own farmland. They frequently quoted Horthy's statements that farming activities were also similarly important as public roles. That was why the youth of the middle classes had to be educated with economic interest so that they did not only seek their future in office careers (Dessewffy, 1940:39-42; Temesy, 1941:163-165).

The Regent's family got an important role both from the point of view of indicating its close relationship with the society and strengthening the ruler's image. The family members' public appearance, the appropriately filtered, but authentic looking demonstration of their private life only brought the head of state closer to people. As compared to the superhuman figure of lonely dictators, the Regent who lived a traditional family life rose trust in the members of the society. Especially due to the fact that the family members not only appeared in the media in relation to their public activities, but people could find out more about their personal things, homes, relationships, and their free time activities. The Regent's wife (Mrs. Miklós Horthy) mainly called people's attention to herself by her social activities. She played a role as the leader or patron of several social organisations, provident societies, various charity actions, mostly in supporting families living under difficult conditions. With her moderate style, family orientation, sense of duty fitting her status, she achieved broad scale sympathy within the society (Szilágyi, 1943:15; Sipos P, 2000:23-24; B. Kalavszky - Illéfalvi, 2007:94).

The Regent's elder son, István Horthy was elected as the deputy of his father in February 1942, and a lot of people saw in him the next head of state. The young Horthy was not so popular as his father. However, most of the political forces acknowledged that he might have a decisive role in maintaining the constitutional parliamentary structure. In some social circles, the Horthy name and the conservative education, for others western orientation and his openness towards reforms made his person acceptable. The broader society, however, mostly evaluated him based on the news broadcasted by the media. His gorgeous wedding, his son's birth, his election to be the deputy regent, his voluntary front service, and then his tragic death on 20th August, 1942 created a real cult around him (*Képes Vasárnap*, 26. 01. 1941:52, 18. 08. 1942:531).

During the years of the war, especially after István Horthy's death, the Regent's daughter-in-law (Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai) took over the public role earlier played by the head of state's wife. In addition to her social activity, she also took part in the medical attendance of injured soldiers as a Red Cross nurse. Furthermore she also served at an operations area for

a short period of time. At the beginning of her marriage, due to her wide range of interests, open spirituality, public activities, a lot of people saw the example of a self-conscious, modern woman in her, but after his husband's death, in front of the public, she had become the symbol of sacrifice, fulfilment of duty, and national inherence (*Függetlenség*, 10. 10. 1942:3; *Országépítés*, 15. 10. 1942:1).

By the period of World War II, the head of state's image, the cult being built around the Regent had gained a political role more important than before. The increasing weight of public communication and that media consumption became overwhelming offered wider opportunities to forwarding political messages towards the society. The image created in connection with the head of state served not simply the increase of the Regent's popularity, but also concrete political purposes, first of all the strengthening of the existing constitutional parliamentary structure.

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