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FIGHT FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF THE USSR AFTER THE DEATH OF STALIN AND THE RUSSIAN PROVINCE

Annotation. The problems connected with the aggravation of the struggle for power after the death of IV Stalin are discussed. It is emphasized that the unique historical moment for the country's modernization was not used. All the planned changes were to take place in the «modernized Stalinist system», but without the vices of the «cult of personality» identified by the party. Mass political campaigns in the regions, presented on the materials of the Gorky region, revealed yet another detail. The Russian province could not and did not initiate modernization. But it could not be otherwise, the Stalinist heirs in the center and on the ground, firmly holding the main levers of power, did not represent a different path for the development of the country. This approach had fatal consequences. Unable to change the direction of development after the death of the «leader of the peoples», the leadership of the CPSU doomed the USSR to a subsequent stagnation, crisis and the collapse of the socialist system.

Key words: *modernization of the country, struggle for power, adventurer Beria, anti-party group, cult of personality, inviolability of foundations, not reformed system.*

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FLEEING FROM THE EASTERN BLOC TO THE WEST – BY TRAIN FROM THE TOWN AND THE NEIGHBOURHOODS OF SOPRON BETWEEN THE YEARS OF 1945 AND 1960

Annotation. Since 1876, the Railway of Győr–Sopron–Ebenfurt (abbreviated in Hungarian as GYSEV) has been the only private railroad company to have survived the turbulent eras of the Hungarian history – it never merged with the Hungarian State Railways (abbreviated in Hungarian as MÁV). From 1897 on, the company operated Fertővidék Local Railway, too. Under the Treaty of Trianon parts of both of its lines were given to Austria. Following World War II, it was divided not only by the country frontier but by the border of the two world orders as well. The Iron Curtain built as its consequence meant a clear and palpable possibility to those fleeing to the West. This study is a review of the railway company's operation, its international traffic and, mostly, the documented cases of those wishing to flee

to Austria.

Key words: *railway, iron curtain, fleeing, GYSEV, Fertővidék Local Railway.*

Introduction

In 1876, the Railway of Győr–Sopron–Ebenfurt (GYSEV) started to operate as a private railway company of the Austrian–Hungarian Monarchy and Hungary. The break-up of the Monarchy and the peace dictate of 1920 following World War I, however, redrew the map of Hungary. Some two-thirds of the territory of the country were disannexed, which indeed curtailed the previously built Carpathians' railway system that perfectly matched its natural structure. GYSEV that had also been operating Fertővidék Local Railway (Pándorfalu [Parndorf]–Eszterháza–Fertőszentmiklós–Kiscell) since 1897, also became a victim of the forced border removal. From 4th July 1920 on, the company and both railways belonged to two countries: Austria and Hungary. By mid-20s, the railway and the company had been operating uninterruptedly through an interstate contract. Following World War II, however, another new process started. The iron curtain descending since 1949 as well as Hungary's Sovietization made GYSEV's life and operation harder and harder: it did not only belong to two countries, but to two world orders as well. Its operation was subject to strict rules and its passenger traffic also suffered restrictions. Later on, the incidents of 1956 led to further increase of severity that made relations between Hungary and Austria almost impossible whereas border control became even stricter. It was the railways that meant the only crack in the iron curtain, which did not cease to operate despite restrictions. Furthermore, not only legal, but illegal traffic (smuggling, defections [Violating the country's laws leaves his home land or flees]) was also operating on both aforementioned railways. It was only the second half of the 1960s that the situation started to ease. This study intends to examine the period falling between the years 1945 and 1960 of GYSEV and the two railways belonging to it – focusing especially on their international traffic and the fleeing's.

The Iron Curtain falls

The end of World War II did not mean the start of a new and peaceful era. Until 1947 relations among the victorious powers became more and more tense. Both parties announced their own cold war doctrines: on behalf of the USA this meant both the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, whereas on the Soviets' side it was the so-called „two camps” theory by Zhdanov–Stalin. Moreover, the war was not closed by the general peace settlement made as a result of the victorious powers' agreement. In 1947, with regards to the most important question, that is the German one, the agreement failed to be concluded in Paris. As a consequence, there was a sort of distancing of interests between the two great powers, which actually

ripped Europe in two. Stalin found it impossible to reconcile the multilateral co-operation led by the USA necessary to rebuild Europe and the Soviet control over the Central-Eastern-European region. So this part of Europe refused the Marshall Aid, too, and, in the spirit of building Stalin's empire, it turned into a homogeneous „Soviet bloc” separated artificially and isolated from Western Europe and, through it, from the USA, by the iron curtain. The establishment of the „ruble bloc” started and Comecon (The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) became its most important link. Hungary's fate, as an important western foreground of the Soviet Union was sealed.[1]

After the devastation of World War II scheduled and regular, but not frontier traffic of the two railways at Hungary's western border belonging to the two countries (Austria and Hungary) could commence: the trains of Fertővidék Local Railway could start on 6th May 1945, whereas those of GYSEV could leave the station on 20th July 1945. By 1946, the difficulties the railways had to face had somewhat eased, the former schedules had been restored as well as the frontier traffic between Sopron and Ebenfurt had been started.[2] Still the very same year the responsible heads of the Hungarian railways were urging the nationalization of GYSEV. The reason why it could never happen was that, pursuant to the Tripartite Pact (also known as the Berlin Pact), the shares in German possession, i.e. the 39.9% of the total amount of shares had been given to the Soviet Union, meaning that the country could exercise exactly the same rights as the ones that, under the prevailing Hungarian laws, were due to shareholders.[3] 1947, however, proved to be a disastrous year. The number of both civil and Soviet transportations fell suddenly, cereal and sugar-beet yields were low due to drought, and, in Austria, inflation got to its peak.[4]

In Hungary the period between 1946 and 1949 were the years of adopting the model of the Soviet socialism.[1] Therefore, in the spirit of Sovietization, the new shareholder delegated six (6) Soviet representatives to the board meeting in 1947.[5]

Two years later, pursuant to the Act XX. of 1949 (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Hungary), The soviet Union transferred these shares to the state.[6] As a consequence, state influence increased considerably at the company. On 15th November 1947, competent authorities ordered strict closing of the frontiers because of both smugglers ravaging at the western border and unauthorized crossings of the frontier. From that moment on, each and every vehicle and passer-by was asked to prove their identity at the border and 15 kms from it by the police and border guards. Besides, raids were maid at farmsteads, roads were closed and the surroundings combed. [7] So, from that moment on it was not that easy to cross the border or carry anything to the other side. The town of Sopron (where alcoholic drinks

had already been prohibited and freedom of movement restricted)[8] and its surroundings were enticing both (man-) smugglers[9] and those fleeing the country because of the railway traffic to Austria. As Sopron lay only 3 kms from the border, several opportunities including Fertő lake presented themselves for unauthorized border crossing.[10] Furthermore, the town was considered as an Austrian station lying out of Austria.[11] It was only from 1947 that Soviet authorities allowed border-crossing traffic using Fertővidék Local Railway between Mekszikópuszta and Pamhagen. Until then trains had been permitted to run only in the Hungarian and Austrian parts, respectively. The so-called „Puszta Expressz” running from 1948 and taking passengers from Fertőszentmiklós through Parndorf to Wien Ostbahnhof was considered as curiosity.[12] It was then when those „sneaking home” showed up. They were (often SS and Volksbundist) Swabians deported from Sopron and its surroundings. Notwithstanding, 10–20 kms after crossing the border they would jump off the trains deporting them to Bavaria from 1946 on, and would then hide at Austrian farmers. After two or three months' stay they were provided legal entry permits by the authorities with the help of which they would return to the town of Sopron three-four times to dig their properties out and take them back to Austria.[13] Trains were running uninterruptedly – joining the two countries. As on the railways of GYSEV train forwarding service was provided by Hungarian staff in Austria as well, these people would frequently cross the border there and back with proper documents. This practically made illegal smuggling impossible to prevent even before 1949. From 1948 on the number of illegal border crossers asking for railway employees' or the railways' help. Most frequent attempts included hiding in the engine tenders, fuel oil tanks as well as on goods trains or jumping on trains leaving for Austria.[14] The authorities visibly failed to prevent further unauthorized border crossings despite the strict defence of the frontiers and anti-West propaganda (unemployment, slums, starvation wages, etc.).[15] By 1949 physical obstacle had also been present: at the western borders of Hungary the iron curtain had been built, followed by a minefield in 1952.[16] Such actions were not appreciated by Austria that reacted with deliberate destructions and blowing ups.[17] The descending iron curtain was then physically restricting the movements of those intending to flee through the „green border” and, at the same time, new alternatives were being offered by the railways as the trains kept on crossing the border at Sopron and Mekszikópuszta.

On 20th August 1949, People's Republic was proclaimed in Hungary – meaning total nationalization at the same time. The defence of the western border got stricter due to growing fear of espionage from Austria and the West towards Hungary.[18] In order to defend the frontier, border guards

linked to the State security Authorities since 1949[19] asked for railwaymen's help, too. Furthermore, patrol services were established: GYSEV trains were accompanied from 31st August 1950 on, whereas the service concerning Fertővidék vicinal line or local railway started on 23rd July 1951. Each and every train leaving from Sopron and Fertőszentmiklós would be followed by a patrol. The trains were examined once more – it was only then when it was allowed to enter Austria. Entering trains were searched through at the border then were followed to the final stop in Hungary. Such actions were meant to hinder people from jumping on and off the trains.[14] As a result, it became practically impossible to maintain relations, Austria and Hungary became estranged. From 1950 on, personal contacts among the inhabitants as well as tourists' traffic ceased to exist; even armed incidents took place at the border. From 1952 on, entering the 20-km-zone of the border was only possible with permits. Soon after that trains leaving from and arriving in Austria were separated from the rest. As a result, a new customs inspecting building was established in 1953 in order to separate native and foreign passengers (this building existed until winter of 2007, that is time of entering the Schengen Area[20]), however, problems did not cease to exist. Serious restrictions were also introduced on Fertővidék Local Railway. As the atmosphere grew tenser between the Western and Eastern blocs, Hungarian customs and border guard organs were retrieved from Pamhagen to Mekszikópuszta.[11] On 14th May 1955 Hungary also signed the Warsaw Treaty[21] definitively binding itself to the Soviet bloc. Austria, however, changed directions and became neutral[22] giving way to a radically different economic and social development – it was not only a simple border running between the two countries but also a censorship separating the two world orders. As a consequence, frontier passenger traffic on Fertővidéki Local Railway stopped on 22nd May 1955.[12] Notwithstanding, some kind of ease could be sensed between the blocs of the two world orders. The four great powers (USA, Soviet Union, Great-Britain and France) expressed their opinion that obstacles put to impede international industry, agriculture, commerce, scientific, technical, cultural and tourist relations had to be eliminated and all kinds of relations between the East and the West improved.[23] Due to foreign exchange needs, it was both Hungary's and Sopron's interest to increase inbound Austrian tourism. Therefore, as a sign of softer border defence, mine blockade was raised by the autumn of 1956. This, however, never got great publicity because parallel to this act, the number of those emigrating through the „green border” tripled. Strict border guarding activity did not cease to exist. Attempted escapes or defections were considered as political crimes that would be punishable by strict imprisonment.[16] In summer no signs of the autumn revolution could be seen or expected, what is more, the

railway junction of Sopron was getting prepared not only for the increased export and import transportations, but also for the autumn peak traffic caused by the harvest.[24] The improvement of Austrian–Hungarian relations had become perceptible by this time, which met the Austrian Chancellor, Raab's happiness who believed that – following the destruction of the iron curtain – it would be possible to restore relations originating from the two countries' common history.[25] Hungarian, and especially borderland society had been fed up with being hindered from visiting their relatives living in Austria and frequently expressed their dissatisfaction through the press, too, hoping for further ease.[26]

The revolution and war of independence broken out on 23rd October 1956, however, completely rewrote Hungary's future. The events made border guard's operation impossible. From 1953 on, the border guards had become an organ of the Home Office. As such, its independence was only formal and was tied to the ÁVH (Államvédelmi Hatóság – State Protection Authority) by a thousand threads.[19] Those responsible for defending the border, had left the station. The train escort service had also ceased to exist. Both Hungarian and Austrian passengers could freely get off the trains and have a chat on the platforms of the Sopron railway station.[14] At the same time waves of refugees were leaving the centre of the country towards the Western border and on 3rd November the complete staff of the border guards of Vienna escaped to Austria, leaving the border without any defence. There were refugee camps and trains in Austria waiting for the emigrants.[27] As a consequence of the Soviet attack fugitives swarmed onto the trains of GYSEV, but many of the staff also left the country.[4] In reply to this, on 4th November the Soviet authorities ordered the closing of the border between Mekszikópuszta and Pamhagen.[12] Austria acted likewise, so all kinds of railway traffic were stopped. After the tension had lessened, in December 1956 representatives of the socialist countries in Budapest agreed on the renovation of both the international passenger and goods traffic. Transit traffic from the Soviet Union to Austria was temporarily diverted towards Czechoslovakia.[28] It was on 17th December when passenger traffic could start again on GYSEV railways towards Ebenfurt.[4]

By 1957 the situation of the country had sort of returned to normal. Independent of this, illegal migration towards Austria would not stop. László Pál, 52, motor engine driver, for example, followed his family previously fled to the Western neighbour instead of attending control in Budapest. Notwithstanding, he was arrested by the Austrian authorities.[29] Once an Austrian engine driver did not stop before leaving the border, so two accompanying Hungarian border guards had to jump off the train in order to avoid illegal border crossing. Hungarian authorities immediately treated the

case as an attempted kidnap.[30] Another case that has few rivals happened when a family, planning to emigrate to Australia, fled to Austria leaving their 7-month-old baby behind. However, the mother was not able to leave the baby with a light heart. For the sake of the baby's escape the father kept travelling for days on a train that passed through Hungarian parts (Harka–Sopron), too. After waiting for several days, in an unguarded moment he might have thrown out the message that was eventually found by the addressee. Then the father stood on alert for several days to get the baby. Finally, on the tenth day, a Hungarian man wearing a fur-cap brought the baby wrapped up in a black cotton shawl. Through good offices of the railway staff (i.e. the train was slower than allowed) the father managed to catch the baby and flee abroad.[31] During this time aiding Hungarian refugees was causing more and more troubles to Austria as they meant more severe political and financial burden.[32] Furthermore, the uncoordinated activities of the too many voluntary aid organizations led to riots in the refugee camps.[33] For the sake of stabilization, the Hungarian government ordered strict border defence again from 8th January on, and no later than 24th January a decision was made on restoring the technical closing of the frontier. Mine blockade was also laid. Through Austria's neutrality it was when this area became a real border between the western and eastern worlds.[20] After 1957, due to the painstaking work of the Hungarian border guards (in fact belonging to the Home Office)[19] the number of those fleeing decreased whereas that of the arrested increased.[34] It became clear that it was possible to travel to the West for which a passport was needed. First it had to be applied for at the competent police station, soon after that at IBUSZ offices, and the documents were finally issued in Budapest. At that time only visits to close relatives were permitted. Besides, travellers had to make a statement that they would not pay for the railway ticket in Hungarian Forints, but the receiving relative(s) would transfer the price in foreign currency to the Hungarian National Bank. [35] With the above regulations authorities made it rather difficult to travel to the West as well as to keep in touch with relatives living there. Relations between the two countries became tenser, a new era of estrangement started. [36] However, it could not be seen in the operation of GYSEV. On the contrary, from 1958 on, as an important transit route of exchange of goods between the East and the West, GYSEV considerably increased its traffic. [37] At the company the railwaymen travelling abroad were allowed to do their work on the other side of the border only if they were in possession of a special permit. Until the end of 1980s, when crossing the borders, only „passenger trains” leaving from Fertőszentmiklós and taking railwaymen to Austria every day were running.[11] Easing of tensions between Austria and Hungary commenced only in the 1960s, which, however, did not hinder those

wishing to flee the country from leaving for West by train. Some succeeded, some did not.

Conclusion

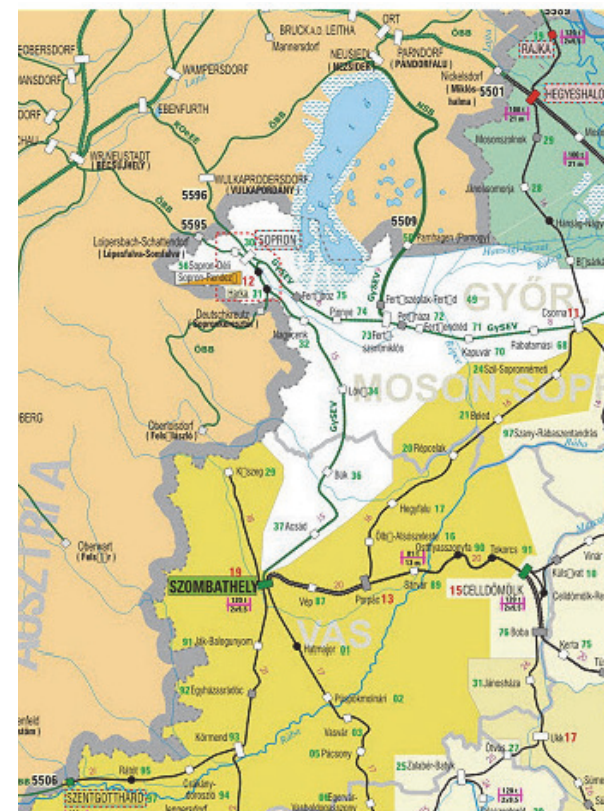
On the whole it can be ascertained that both GYSEV and Fertővidék Local Railway were considered as unique occurrences with regards to the examined era because they remained in the possession of two countries (Austria and Hungary) meaning that they did belong to two world orders, both the socialist and capitalist camps. From Sopron to Ebenfurt and from Fertőszentmiklós to Parndorf, with the exception of a brief pause, bordercrossing traffic was practically continuous throughout the era. This, however, provided unique opportunity for unauthorized crossings of the frontier. Those fleeing the country included not only ordinary people but railway employees as well. They did sacrifice and risk a lot so as to be able to flee to the West, often even leaving their families behind. It was not until the 1960s when tense relations between Hungary and Austria started to ease, which was facilitated by GYSEV as well, because, on the one hand, the company's operation required compromises and, on the other hand, a part of the Hungarian employees could legally enter the neighbouring country on work with the help of which human relations could live on.

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Region of Sopron with railway lines, border and the Iron Curtain
http://cdn.blog.hu/ho/hovamegyavonat/image/biciklisbakter/Hatareset/terkep_ausztria.png (downloaded 2018. 02. January, 17:29)