

**BALÁZS KÁNTÁS**

**NOTES FROM THE  
DRAWER  
OF AN ARCHIVIST**



**ESSAYS IN ARCHIVAL STUDIES**



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**MILITIAMEN, PUTSCHISTS,  
TERRORISTS**  
**A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE  
HISTORY OF THE ACTIVITIES OF  
RADICAL RIGHT-WING SECRET  
ORGANISATIONS AND PARAMILITARY  
FORMATIONS CONNECTED TO THEM  
IN THE FIRST YEARS OF THE HORTHY  
ERA IN HUNGARY IN THE MIRROR OF  
ARCHIVAL SOURCES, 1919–1925**

## **Introduction**

The present research article is in fact the extract of a monograph published in Hungarian by the author,<sup>1</sup> and in parallel, a summary of the second PhD dissertation of the author,<sup>2</sup> and examines the operation of the secret and semi-secret radical right-wing paramilitary movements in Hungary in the

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<sup>1</sup> Balázs Kántás, *Milicisták, puccsisták, terrorfiúk. Mikrotörténeti esettanulmányok és levéltári források a Horthy-korszak első éveiben működő radikális jobboldali titkos szervezetek és a hozzájuk köthető paramilitáris alakulatok tevékenységéről, 1919–1925*, Budapest, Művészeti és Irodalmi Jelen Kft., 2021.

<http://real.mtak.hu/123884/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://corvina.kre.hu:8080/phd/Kantas\\_Balazs\\_ertekezes.pdf](http://corvina.kre.hu:8080/phd/Kantas_Balazs_ertekezes.pdf)

1920s, closely interlinked with the regular army of the state. As it is widely known, the first years of the Horthy Era were one of those turbulent periods in Hungarian history that abounded in secret social associations, societies and alliances – mainly organised along right-wing, irredentist lines – which also had a certain influence on political life. These secret organisations sometimes had a legal front organisation (legally registered associations were not allowed to engage in party political activity under the laws of the time) in the form of a social association, but sometimes they carried out their activities informally, based only on verbal discussions and instructions between members. As Miklós Mester, a historian, a member of parliament and cultural politician, one of the great and important historical witnesses of the Horthy Era, who himself was a member of several such secret organisations, writes vividly in his memoirs:

*‘There existed a dozen secret, half-secret and very exclusive societies with exclusive memberships, in whose circles it was essentially decided who would fill the leading positions, how the governing party would be put together, who could run for parliament, who would be the lords, deputies, slave*

*magistrates, gendarme commanders, who would be included in the narrow circle of advisors to the Regent Governor.*<sup>3</sup>

The operation of the large number of secret and semi-secret, irredentist organisations and the right-wing paramilitary formations that were active in the 1920s and closely overlapping with each other can best be understood in their complexity and intricacy through concrete examples and events that can be linked to them, i.e. through micro-historical case studies. Paramilitary activities and organisations, which were present in almost all European states in the years after the First World War with varying degrees of intensity, are generally defined in the international literature on the subject as military or quasi-military organisations and actions that complemented or replaced conventional military formations. In some cases this was made possible by the temporary or even permanent disintegration of the state, in others by the state itself, and in others

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<sup>3</sup> Oral History Archives of the VERITAS History Research Centre, Budapest, Veritas OHA–45. sz. 53. Interview with Miklós Mester, made by János Gyurgyák–Tamás Varga, 1986. Cited by Nóra Székér, *Titkos társaság. A Magyar Testvéri Közösség Története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2017, 78.

by paramilitary formations acting against the existing state.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of the monograph to be summarised is to examine and present the complex and contradictory relationship between the (paramilitary) functioning of the early Hungarian radical right and the (armed) far-right organisations and the State/Government, as well as the wider socio-political context of these phenomena. Our aim is to discuss in short the history of early paramilitary far-right movements in Hungary along three major thematic units, which can best be understood along the lines of the trinity of *militiamen–putschists–terrorists* trinity in the title.

Under the title *Militiamen*, we will attempt to uncover the history of the Hungarian militia movement of the first years of the Horthy era, which can only be reconstructed in fragments, by presenting the history of the specific clandestine military formation called the Double Cross Blood

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, *Paramilitarizmus az első világháború után*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 13–32, 13–14; Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923*, Farrar, Straus and Girou, 2016.



Union, which operated as a state, or at least quasi-state organisation, and a controlling body of the Hungarian right-wing militia movement, integrating them into the Hungarian army as secret and semi-secret reserve forces.

The radical right and the various paramilitary circles were associated with a number of coup plans in the period. Most of them seemed to be ridiculous, but the coup plot of 1923 by Dr. Ferenc Ulain, a radical right-wing, so-called Race-defending member of the parliament who had left the governing United Party, and his associates, which was to be carried out in conjunction with the German National Socialist movement at the same time as the Bavarian beer coup, deserves the most attention under the heading of *Putschists*. However, in addition to the ‘Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch’,<sup>5</sup> there were also other frivolous pub-table coup plans in the 1920s, like, for example, the so-called *Három*

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<sup>5</sup> On the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch see: Balázs Kántás, *The Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch: The Szemere-Bobula-Ulain Coup Plan, 1923*, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/6, 32–45.  
<https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2217/2614>

*Kapás* – *Three Hoemen* coup plan and the *Csocsó Bácsi* – *Uncle Csocsó* conspiracy.

Closely linked to all this, of course, are the *Terrorists*, or as they were often called in the press of the time, ‘*terror boys*’, since the radical right was associated with a number of terrorist acts that attempted to shake up and undermine the consolidation achieved by the Government led by Prime Minister Count István Bethlen. The majority of these attacks originated from the paramilitary wing of the *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete* – *Association of Awakening Hungarians*,<sup>6</sup> the highly influential and increasingly violent radical right-wing organisation of the time. Among these acts, the bomb attack in Erzsébetváros on 3 April 1922, which killed eight people, the anti-Semitic assassination attempt in Jászkarajenő, which was also planned in 1922, but luckily was not finally carried out, or the bomb attack in Csongrád on 24 December 1923 in which 3 people were killed stood out. Under the heading of *Terrorists*, we will try to describe these three incidents, their protagonists and the criminal

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<sup>6</sup> On the history of the Association of Awakening Hungarian and its political activity see: Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.

proceedings that followed, with special emphasis on the highly publicised bomb outrage in Erzsébetváros, and to explore the conclusions that can be drawn about the relationship of the early paramilitary radical right-wing organisations to the Government and the Hungarian Army.

Micro-historical case studies that are necessarily fragmented, but perhaps still coherent and fit into a narrative, are followed by historical sources of almost the same length as the studies. Since the history of the early Hungarian radical right paramilitary movements can – ironically – researched the best through the archival sources of criminal proceedings initiated as a result of serious atrocities committed by individual members, a very large part of the documents published are criminal proceedings, produced by judicial bodies – police, prosecution or courts. The majority of these sources are held in the custody of the Budapest City Archives and come from the archival fonds of Hungarian judicial bodies.

At the same time, since the early Hungarian radical right-wing paramilitary movements, whose leaders included a very large proportion of active military officers, were keen to establish foreign

relations, with the knowledge and consent of the Government for a time, the archival sources of their activities can mainly be found in the Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary, mainly among the records of the Political Department of the Royal Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### **(MILITIAMEN) – The Double Cross Blood Union, a peculiar secret military formation in the 1920s**

The emergence of paramilitarism<sup>7</sup> after World War One was a natural phenomenon in the defeated states, including Hungary, which at the same time became independent of Austria, and the representatives of paramilitary activities were still primarily active or demobilised soldiers, or possibly members of other armed organisations. Such formations were closely intertwined with the new, independent Hungarian State and its strongly right-wing, authoritarian conservative Government, as

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<sup>7</sup> On paramilitarism see: Uğur Ümit Üngör, *Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.

well as with the so-called *Nemzeti Hadsereg* – *National Army*, the new, right-wing armed force of the independent Hungary. The National Army, from 1920 on, operated within very narrow limits as a result of the restrictions of armament imposed on the defeated states, and was (re)organised partly from former paramilitary formations and free corps. The *Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség* – *Double Cross Blood Union* is prominent among Hungarian free corps, because it was not just a kind of self-organising movement, a kind of veteran association, but it was rather a secretly operating state, or at least quasi-state organisation, which was established by the Government and the military leadership, partly for the purpose of carrying out military operations that did not fit into the framework of traditional warfare in the Hungarian territories annexed under the Peace Treaty of Trianon.<sup>8</sup>

Although the organisation was very much present in the public consciousness in the first half of the 1920s, and many illegal actions (e.g. political and simple robbery murders, assassinations, coup

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<sup>8</sup> It turns out from several archival sources, for example, from the documents of the Erzsébetváros bomb attack in 1922, in custody of the City Archives of Budapest. HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

attempts, etc.) were attributed to it in the press and other sources of the time, it did not produce many documents, so we know fairly little about its activity. However, this little is still much more than nothing. DCBU was, to simplify matters somewhat, nothing more than the military or paramilitary wing of the secret political organisation known as the *Etelközi Szövetség – Union of Etelköz*, although it may have been active in its own right. Despite its secrecy and secretiveness, relatively much is known about the Union of Etelköz, the right-wing political secret society of the period with extensive influence, formed in opposition to Freemasonry and functioning as a nationalist version of it, and which was a politicising secret society, mainly from the memoirs of one of its founders, Military Bishop General István Zadravec.<sup>9</sup> The Union of Etelköz, as a strongly pro-government organisation, indirectly controlled most of the Hungarian irredentist legal and illegal associations, and can therefore be considered their umbrella organisation.

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<sup>9</sup> István Zadravec, *Páter Zadravec titkos naplója*, ed. György Borsányi, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1967. The original source can be found at the Historical Archives of the State Security Services under the reference code HU-ÁBTL-A-719.

It was probably founded in Szeged in November 1919, with the participation of politicians of the right-wing, so-called Counter-revolutionary Government and officers of the National Army, its armed force. It should also be mentioned that, although the literature often refers to the Union of Etelköz far-right/radical right, the organisation itself was politically very heterogeneous. Although its objectives did indeed include radical right-wing elements, it cannot be treated simply as the peak body of early Hungarian right-wing radicalism, since its members included representatives of the moderate right wing of the governing party and the radical right as well as the legitimists and the those who wanted to freely elect a king, united by the idea of restoring the territorial integrity of a country that had suffered collapse, civil war and then severe territorial annexation. It would be an exaggeration to describe for example, Count István Bethlen, Count Pál Teleki or Count Miklós Bánffy as right-wing or radical right-wing, as they were prominent conservative politicians of the period who played a fundamentally positive role in Hungarian history and were also members of the Union of Etelköz. At the same time, the association was also led by radical

right-wing politicians such as Tibor Eckhardt, who from December 1923 also served as president of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the most influential nationalist mass organisation of the era, and was gradually taken over by Captain Gyula Gömbös, later prime minister, who left the ruling party in 1923, establishing the so-called Race-defending Party (its official name was *Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Párt – Party of Hungarian National Independence*) and was known for his political radicalism. Until the end of 1944, the Union which later numbered around 5,000 members, was run by the 7–12-strong *Vezéri Tanács – Council of Leaders* in close cooperation with the Hungarian National Defence Association (MOVE), which mostly comprised former and active soldiers, and held its meetings in its headquarters in Budapest. The Union of Etelköz sought to resemble the Freemasonry which it hated in its rites and appearance, ironically even setting up its headquarters in the Podmaniczky Street headquarters of the banned Hungarian Symbolic Grand Lodge, confiscated for the MOVE, with the *Magyar Tudományos Fajvédő Egyesület – Hungarian Scientific Association of Race Defence* as its front



organisation. Through its network of contacts, the organisation had a significant influence on political life, as its members included important political and military leaders of the time.<sup>10</sup> However, the head of the state Regent Governor Admiral Miklós Horthy, contrary to popular legends, was a pragmatic, somewhat down-to-earth politician and probably not a member of any secret societies, but since many of his confidants were members, he was able to impose his will in these organisations. Those who were invited to join the *Union of Etelköz* took a life and death pledge to serve irredentist and nationalist causes in a ritual designed for the purpose. The Council of Leaders discussed important issues affecting the fate of the country, though it may not have taken decisions directly on national matters. During the Second World War, Baron Berthold Feilitzsch, an influential background politician of the time and the chief administrator and chairman

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<sup>10</sup> On the union of Etelköz and its archival sources see: Balázs Kántás, *A magyar "főbér szabadkőművesség": Adatok és levéltári források az Etelközi Szövetség, a Horthy-korszak politizáló titkos társaságának töredékes történetéhez*, Budapest, Horthy-korszak Történetének Kutatásáért Társaság, OSZK Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár, 2021.

<https://mek.oszk.hu/21900/21979/>

of the organisation eventually came to support the Arrow Cross movement and gradually took control of the organisation, which by then had become less influential.<sup>11</sup> The house at 45 Podmaniczky Street suffered considerable damage during the siege of Budapest in 1945, so it is possible that the lack of resources relating to the association's activity is due not only to its clandestine operation but also, to a very large extent, to the wartime destruction of documents.<sup>12</sup>

That is, much is known, albeit sporadically, about the Union of Etelköz, but the situation is worse for the Double Cross Blood Union, its military wing. If the scattered sources are to be believed, the organisation was in all likelihood also set up in the autumn of 1919 to defend the counter-revolution against communist and other left-wing political forces. After the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, it also included irredentism and

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<sup>11</sup> Hungarian historian Miklós Zoltán Fodor also wrote a summarising research article on the history of the Union of Etelköz: Miklós Zoltán Fodor, *Az Etelközi Szövetség története*, Nógrád Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve, 2007/XXXI, 118–156.

<sup>12</sup> Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1914–1944*, Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó–Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, 2012, 97–100.

the restoration of the territorial integrity of the mutilated country among its aims as well. Its commander was Colonel (later, from 1923 General) Tihamér Siménfalvy, a hero of World War One and former Chief of Staff of the Transylvanian Székely/Szekler Division, who also maintained close links with far-right organisations abroad, especially the Austrian and German nationalist paramilitary movements. Furthermore, the leaders of the organisation also included notorious figures of the White Terror, such as influential paramilitary commanders of the era like First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay. Iván Héjjas was also deputy commander of the organisation in the 1920s, and other leaders may have included the later Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, László Endre, Military Bishop István Zadravec, General Károly Csörgey and Colonel György Görgey, commander of the Regent Governor's Bodyguards. The members of its militarily organised units were bound by a very strict oath, and its front organisation for a time was *the Nemzeti Múltunk Kulturális Egyesület – Our National Past Cultural Association*, which was formed much later than the secret military organisation itself, its

constitution being approved only in 1922. According to some sources, the secret meetings of the DCBU which overlapped closely with the various officer detachments (such as the military unit at the Hotel Britannia during 1920) were held in the Nándor Garrison, closely overlapping the by Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay's detachment.<sup>13</sup> The members of the DCBU were mainly gendarmerie and military officers, as well as landowners and administrative officials who had military past. In addition to the Budapest headquarters, sub-organisations operated in every major city, and its members were active in the state apparatus, primarily in the surveillance of individuals with communist leanings and the mapping of left-wing organisations. The name of the DCBU was also there behind such highly publicised crimes as the anti-Semitic motivated bomb attack on the

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<sup>13</sup> On the detachments of the Hungarian National Army see: Tamás Kovács, *A Nemzeti Hadsereg és a tiszti különítmények*, in *Csoportosulás, lázadás és a társadalom terrorizálása. Rendészettörténelmi Tanulmányok 2.*, Ed. Orsolya Ilona Jámbor–Gábor G. Tarján, Budapest, Rendőrség Tudományos Tanácsa, 2019, 151–172.

Democratic Circle in Erzsébetváros in 1922,<sup>14</sup> which claimed eight lives, the bomb attack in Csongrád in 1923,<sup>15</sup> which killed three people, and the allegedly irredentist Hungarian assassination attempt on the Romanian Royal Couple in 1923. The documents of the 1922 Erzsébetváros bombing trial are also very important archival sources for the history of the DCBU, since according to the testimony of the Minister of Defence General Károly Csáky before the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest, the organisation was really established around 1919–1920 as a paramilitary umbrella body under the control of the National Army with the aim of bringing paramilitary organisations in the capital and the countryside under unified military control and of creating anti-

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<sup>14</sup> On the bomb attack in Erzsébetváros, Budapest see: Balázs Kántás, *The Bomb Outrage in Erzsébetváros: An Action of Political Terrorism in Hungary, 1922*, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/6, 71–79. <https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2220/2616>

<sup>15</sup> On the bomb attack in Csongrád see: Balázs Kántás, *The Bomb Attack in Csongrád: A Case Study of Radical Right-Wing Paramilitarism and Political Terrorism in Hungary in the 1920s*, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/7, 31–39. <https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2226/2621>

communist law enforcement troops after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, it was indeed a secret military formation, a state organisation, even if some of its members committed serious illegal acts on their own initiative.<sup>17</sup>

All of this closely coincides with the notes written in 1948 by General István Ujszászy, later head of the Hungarian military secret service, while in the custody of the communist State Protection Authority after World War Two and the Soviet occupation of Hungary. According to these documents, in the 1920s, a group of military officers led by Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy was working secretly within the frameworks of the army, but with the knowledge and consent of the Government and the Regent Governor, to plan and carry out sabotage and subversive actions abroad, mainly for irredentist reasons. The Siménfalvy Group was based in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Buda Castle, and its activities were directed at the Little Entente States (Romania,

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<sup>16</sup> HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. The trial of József Márffy and his associates.

<sup>17</sup> HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

Czechoslovakia, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), preparing in the medium term for the possible military re-conquest of Hungarian-inhabited territories. The plans of militarily re-conquering the territories annexed from Hungary in the beginning of the 1920s were mainly concentrating on the Hungarian Highlands (Felvidék) which region was incorporated by Czechoslovakia.<sup>18</sup> The unit was later called the Press and Propaganda Department of the General Staff, and contrary to its name, it did not only serve the propaganda purposes of the Home Army, but also prepared and carried out sabotage and sabotage operations in the Little Entente states in close cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Siménfalvy Group, later the called Papp Group under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Dezső Papp which later evolved into the 5th Department of the Hungarian Defence Staff undoubtedly existed, and from their activities and from General Siménfalvy's

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<sup>18</sup> About the Hungarian military operation plans to reconquest the Hungarian Highlands see: Lajos Olasz, *Tervek a Felvidék visszafooglalására 1920-ban*, Közép-Európai Közlemények, 2020/4, 89–114.

activities as a leader and organiser we can infer either a close overlap with the DCBU or, with some simplification, a partial or complete identity of the two organisations.<sup>19</sup> The DCBU bears strong similarities to the German ‘Schwarze Reichswehr’ (‘Black Army’), whose various free corps – closely linked to radical right-wing movements, including Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist Party – were also treated by the German Government as semi-official reserve units of the restricted army.<sup>20</sup>

As for the otherwise not very abundant historiography of the early Hungarian radical right-wing secret organisations, ideologically biased Marxist historiography in the Kádár Regime tried to magnify and emphasise the importance and activities of the right-wing social associations and secret societies of the Horthy Era, which had real influence, and the paramilitary formations

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<sup>19</sup> István Ujszászy, *Vallomások a holtak házából. Ujszászy István vezérőrnagynak, a 2. vkf. osztály és az Államvédelmi Központ vezetőjének az ÁVH fogságában írott feljegyzései*, ed. György Haraszti–Zoltán András Kovács–Szabolcs Szita, Budapest, Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–Corvina Kiadó, 2007, 356–359.

<sup>20</sup> See: Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement In Post-War Germany 1918–1923*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1969.



associated with them, sometimes even portraying them as a kind of shadow government; This is no different in the case of the DCBU. For example, in his monograph on the right-wing counter-revolution, the Marxist party historian Dezső Nemes writes that the DCBU was one of the most significant secret organisations of the first period of the Horthy era, founded in July 1919 by the so-called Szeged Captains, the first detachment commanders of the National Army. The organisation was said to be under the control of the army, and its medium-term aim was indeed to create tension and rebellion in the Hungarian-populated areas annexed to neighbouring states after the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, especially in the Hungarian Highlands, which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia and where, following the outbreak of unrest, the regular Hungarian Army would have marched in to restore order and recapture the territories.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the DCBU was also engaged in counter-espionage activities and the execution of government-consented domestic

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<sup>21</sup> Dezső Nemes, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon 1919–1921*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, 155–160.

terrorist acts, and Dezső Nemes, citing the memoirs of Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, also claims that the organisation had been established before the formation of the Union of Etelköz, even though it was later somehow under its control because of the significant overlaps and the ‘secret government’ character of the UoE – with some simplification, the Union of Etelköz was the secret government of the country and the DCBU was the secret army.<sup>22</sup> Nemes makes some rather strong claims about the DCBU, but he cites few sources, so his statements have some truth to them, but they should be treated with careful and considered criticism.

The source base of the DCBU is unfortunately very scattered, and the information available to researchers on the activities of the organisation is a little contradictory and vague. However, the fact that in the 1920s, at the beginning of the Horthy era, following the civil war after the collapse of the Soviet Republic, there were a number of shockingly

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<sup>22</sup> Pál Prónay, *A határban a halál kaszája. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin Pamlényi–Ágnes Szabó, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963. The source can be today found in the custody of the Hungarian Archives of Political History and Trade Unions: HU-PIL-IV-973.

serious and sometimes fatal crimes, both secret and less secret, linked to the radical right-wing associations and paramilitary formations of the era, which received a great deal of publicity. From time to time, the DCBU was understandably associated with these in public discourse, in the press and in parliament. The most notable of these were the anti-Semitic motivated murders of Iván Héjas's paramilitary unit, the so-called *Alföldi Brigád – Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain*, the murders of social-democrat journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó,<sup>23</sup> and the crimes committed by the detachment that settled in Hotel Britannia after the National Army invaded Budapest in 1919.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, in the spirit of consolidation, the right-wing paramilitary formations and national defence militias still operating in various areas of the country, such as the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain led by Iván Héjjas and the armed units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians (ÉME) were

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<sup>23</sup> On the murder of social-democrat journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó see: Ernő Gergely–Pál Schönwald, *A Somogyi–Bacsó-gyilkosság*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1978.

<sup>24</sup> Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.

gradually regularised and partially disarmed after 1921–1922. In parallel, the *Nemzeti Munkavédelmi Hivatal* – *National Labour Protection Service*, a paramilitary auxiliary police organisation under the control of the Ministry of the Interior was established, primarily to suppress strikes and labour movement conspiracies and to provide security for the factory, which, somewhat anachronistically, could be described as a kind of white workers’ militia, and into which the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain, the national defence militias of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and other militias were absorbed – so under much tighter government control, but the organisations and their members could retain their paramilitary character and continue to operate.

### **PUTSCHISTS – The ‘Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch’ of radical right-wing MP Dr. Ferenc Ulain and similar coup plans**

The early years of the Horthy era, as we have seen above, were characterised by a social and economic situation that favoured political extremism. The various radical nationalist political groups,

dissatisfied with the work of the Bethlen Government in consolidating the country's foreign and domestic policies, and some of the paramilitary groups associated with them, even toyed with the idea of attempting a coup and taking power by force. Such an adventurous and essentially frivolous coup plan, which nevertheless attracted a great deal of political and press attention, was the one proposed by Dr. Béla Szemere, hospital director, the commander of the auxiliary police militia called *Állambiztonsági Megbízottak Szervezete – Organisation of State Security Agents (ÁBM)* (by then also under the control of the National Labour Protection Service, the right-wing strike-breaking auxiliary police force of the Government), originally under the control of the Budapest State Police Headquarters, the Hungarian-born, American architect Titusz Bobula, and Dr. Ferenc Ulain, a lawyer and race-defending member of the parliament who had left the ruling United Party and was a well-known far-right politician of the time, were planned in the autumn of 1923. Given that the three men planned to remove the Bethlen Government, which they believed to be excessively liberal and pro-Entente and pro-Jewish, by force, with the armed support of

the Hitler–Ludendorff-led German National Socialist movement, their plan of coup d'état to be carried out at about the same time as the Munich Beer Hall Putsch and dependent on its success, is perhaps most aptly termed as the 'Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch'.<sup>25</sup>

We can also infer the involvement of the Double Cross Blood Union (the involvement of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, which was closely connected and overlapping with it, can be proven), since it was the leader of the DCBU, Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, who was in close contact with the German and Austrian radical right-wing paramilitary movements with the support of the Hungarian political leadership.<sup>26</sup> Preparations for the coup plan must have begun sometime in early August 1923, when a young German man named Friedrich 'Fritz' Döhmel appeared in Budapest, claiming to be a representative of the Hitler–Ludendorff-led Bavarian National Socialist

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<sup>25</sup> See: Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér. Kozma Miklós*, Budapest, PolgArt Kiadó, 2001, 549–571.

<sup>26</sup> See: Katalin G. Soós, *Magyar-bajor-osztrák titkos tárgyalások és együttműködés, 1920–1921*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, 1967/XVII, 3–43.

movement, and, with letters of recommendation that appeared to be credible, contacted a number of Hungarian far-right organisations and public figures. One of Döhmel's first trips in Budapest was to the headquarters of the Awakening Hungarians which had previously had links with Bavarian nationalists, where he wanted to meet members of the organisation's leadership. He got to one of the association's leaders, Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, but he gave little credence to the German young man's claims. Döhmel, however, did not give up, and soon contacted Titusz Bobula, the wealthy Hungarian-born architect who had returned from the United States of America with confuse radical right-wing principles in his mind, and his friend, Dr. Béla Szemere, a hospital director. Szemere, as the de facto commander of the State Security Agents which continued to operate with some intensity, and Bobula, who provided financial support to the Hungarian far right, had been thinking for some time about how to remove the Bethlen Government, but their activities were limited to planning. The Hungarian parties believed that Döhmel was indeed an agent of the Bavarian nationalist organisation, who was visiting Hungary

to make concrete cooperation agreements with similar Hungarian far-right formations. The negotiations were conducted in German, with Bobula translating what Döhmel was saying for Szemere, who did not speak German. Döhmel asked how many people Szemere, as the former commander of the ÁBM, could call to arms in the event of a takeover attempt, to which Szemere replied that although the ÁBM had not previously been set up for the purpose of conspiring against the state at all, but rather to defend the state, there would certainly be people willing to support the cause. What is certain is that Szemere was not backed by a serious armed force, but soon afterwards the racist member of the National Assembly Ferenc Ulain, who had long been associated with Bavarian nationalist organisations and knew Hitler personally very well, was brought into the organisation.<sup>27</sup> On Döhmel's initiative, the parties also drew up a German-language agreement on how the Bavarian State (which was to be created as an independent state) and the Hungarian State

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<sup>27</sup> City Archives of Budapest, HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.



(which would be led by a new, radical right-wing government after the removal of the Bethlen Government) could cooperate in pursuing their irredentist and anti-Semitic goals. The document was drafted by Döhmel in German, and its essence was that the newly created Bavarian state would recognise the newly created Hungarian state with its borders of 1914, before the First World War and the entry into force of the Peace Treaty of Trianon. The contracting states would also try to help each other militarily in every possible way – in particular, they will join forces against the Little Entente Czechoslovakia and provide each other with military assistance if it attacks either Bavaria or Hungary. The treaty was signed by Szemere, Bobula and Ulain on 5 November 1923, and was scheduled to be signed by General Erich Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler in Munich on the German side. Ferenc Ulain left by train, but never made it to Munich and was unable to meet the Bavarian nationalist politicians who were preparing for the Munich Beer Hall Putsch at the time. Namely, at Hegyeshalom, on the Austro–Hungarian border, he was detained by the police, told that the authorities had been aware of the plot and had the parcel addressed to

Hitler confiscated. Soon afterwards, all the three conspirators were captured by the police.<sup>28</sup>

It was here that it became clear to the conspirators that the coup plan had not escaped the attention of the police, and that the authorities had been monitoring the group's activities for weeks when Ulain departed to Munich. The details of Döhmel's stay in Budapest between August and October 1923 are unclear, but it is certain that he was not the only agent of the Bavarian National Socialists in Budapest at the time. In fact, in the autumn of 1923, the Hungarian State Police identified dozens of young German men in the Hungarian capital who, as agents of the Hitler–Ludendorff-organisation, had letters of recommendation addressed to the Association of Awakening Hungarians. Most of them were finally detained by the police and deported from Hungary.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.

<sup>29</sup> A nemzetgyűlés mentelmi bizottságának jelentése lázadás előkészítésére létrejött szövetség bűntette miatt gyanúsított és tettenkapás folytán 1923. november 6-ika óta őrizetben, illetve előzetes letartóztatásban levő dr. Ulain Ferenc nemzetgyűlési

Szemere, Bobula and Ulain were finally suspected and accused of forming a conspiracy to incite rebellion, and the case of the immunity of Ferenc Ulain was discussed by the Immunity Committee of the Hungarian Parliament in the last days of November 1923, and a thorough investigation was carried out. The race-defending members of parliament tried to excuse Ulain and his associates, tried to play down the case and stressed that Ulain and his associates were victims of an agent provocateur hired by the police, and made accusations primarily against bourgeois liberal patriots, whose aim, they said, was to openly discredit radical right-wing politicians.<sup>30</sup>

On 24 January 1924, the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest pronounced the first instance verdict in the case, sentencing all the three defendants to one month and fourteen days in prison. The defendants were released on bail in December 1923, and their sentences were deemed to have been completed. They exercised their right of appeal and were

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képviselő mentelmi ügyében, Nemzetgyűlési Irományok, 1923/331, 135–142.

<sup>30</sup> HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.

acquitted by the Court of Appeal of Budapest shortly afterwards on the second instance, which was very typical of the prosecutions of radical right-wing perpetrators of the period and may lead to deeper conclusions about the links between the authoritarian conservative Government and radical right-wing paramilitary organisations closely interlinked with the state armed forces themselves.<sup>31</sup>

Although the coup plan was undoubtedly frivolous, it is ironic and at the same time somewhat frightening that the representatives of the Hungarian far right sought to contact and expect help in implementing their political ideas from the very German politician who, less than twenty years later, would become the most notorious mass-murdering dictator of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This preparation for a coup, which seemed frivolous then and there, seemed to have foreshadowed Hungary's mournful political and military involvement in the 1940s and its commitment to National Socialist Germany's policy of aggression in the Second World War. Interestingly, at an

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<sup>31</sup> HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.

individual, micro-historical level, the same can be told of the leader of the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch conspiracy: in the 1940s, Dr. Ferenc Ulain eventually joined the pro-German Armed Cross Party led by Ferenc Szálasi, which, in the final months of the war, brought a pro-German puppet government to power through a de facto coup coordinated by the occupying German forces, causing incalculable losses to the country, which was in any case losing the war.<sup>32</sup>

## **TERRORISTS – Anti-Semitic political terrorism in the first years of consolidation**

A series of events far more serious and frightening than the frivolous plan of the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch, which could be linked to right-wing paramilitary organisations operating under secrecy, disrupted the 1922 parliamentary election campaign, and at the same time gave the Government a new opportunity to take stronger

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<sup>32</sup> Balázs Kántás, *Milicisták, puccsisták, terrorfiúk. Mikrotörténeti esettanulmányok és levéltári források a Horthy-korszak első éveiben működő radikális jobboldali titkos szervezetek és a hozzájuk köthető paramilitáris alakulatok tevékenységéről, 1919–1925.*

action against political extremism, although the investigating authorities were only able to solve the case by 1924. Despite the Government's measures to disband the various armed groups in several stages, the Association of Awakening Hungarians was still operating armed paramilitary units, which were virtually without effective state control and which functioned as a paramilitary wing of the Association, similar to German free corps<sup>33</sup> and Austrian *Heimwehr* militias of the era.<sup>34</sup>

In the spring of 1922, the members of such an uncontrolled militia, the National Defence Department of District 9 of the Association of Awakening Hungarians to commit a bomb attack against the headquarters of the liberal political-social organisation Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, led by the liberal opposition Member of Parliament Dr. Vilmos Vázsonyi, at 76 Dohány Street during a large-scale event, and thus kill several people whom they considered enemies of the nation. The assassination and the subsequent

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<sup>33</sup> See: Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler's Heralds. The Story of the Freikorps, 1918–1923*, Dorset, Barns and Noble, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> See: Lajos Kerekes, *Olaszország, Magyarország és az osztrák Heimwehr-mozgalom*, Történelmi Szemle, 1961/2, 199–216.

trial of the alleged perpetrators were one of the most shocking and publicised events of the 1920s, and was largely referred to in the press as the ‘bombing trial’ or ‘Márffy trial’ after the name of the first accused, young paramilitary commander sergeant József Márffy. The bomb finally exploded at a meeting of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros on 3 April 1922, killing eight people and seriously wounding twenty-three others. During this period, there were a number of attacks on Jews and on persons and institutions perceived to be pro-Entente, including the hand-grenade terrorist attack in Jászkarajenő planned in early 1922,<sup>35</sup> but fortunately not carried out, and the bomb attack in Csongrád on 24 December 1923, which killed three people. Behind each of these events, there was the emergence of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the politically most influential far-right social organisation of the time, and the paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant

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<sup>35</sup> On the bomb attack attempt in Jászkarajenő see: Balázs Kántás, *Consolidation with Grenades, that is, the Assassination Attempt in Jászkarajenő, 1922: A Chapter of Political Terrorism in Hungary*, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/8, 26–31.

<https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2227/2622>

Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay who also acted as emerging, ambitious radical right-wing politicians.

The Erzsébetváros bomb attack was finally not tried alone, but the indictment was eventually linked it to other anti-Semitic and anti-Entente crimes committed in Budapest. The charge of the bombing of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros was thus merged with an attempted pogrom against the synagogue in Újpest, which was finally not carried out, a bomb attack attempted against the Koháry Street Courty Palace and the French Embassy, and a similar attack that was planned against the Czechoslovak Embassy, and it was only by luck that these bombs finally did not explode. Andor Miklós, a liberal journalist and newspaper owner, and Károly Rassay, a member of the parliament and well-known liberal opposition politician of the time, were furthermore sent packages containing hand-grenades that were set to explode, and it was also only by luck and the vigilance of those present that these packages did not explode. At the same time, the Budapest Commissioner of the Hungarian State Police, the Speaker of the Parliament and the French Embassy



received a life-threatening letter signed by the senders as ‘Committee 101’. The Royal Prosecutor’s Office in Budapest accused the young militiamen of ‘deviating from the central national defence objectives, preparing anti-social attacks and making it impossible for citizens of the Israelite religion to remain in Hungary by means of so-called Jew-bashing and bombings.’<sup>36</sup>

The political gravity of the bomb case is well illustrated by the fact that Minister of Defence Count General Károly Csáky and Prime Minister Count István Bethlen were also examined as witnesses at the first instance trial. As General Csáky explained in his testimony on the Double Cross Blood Union mentioned above, in the civil war after the collapse of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, the country had no unified regular army, but there were about fifty civilian militias in Budapest alone in addition to the National Army organised by Admiral Miklós Horthy and his military circle. Among these were the National Defence Departments of the Association of

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<sup>36</sup> HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. The trial of József Márffy and his associates.

Awakening Hungarian which were indirectly under the control of the DCBU. The new right-wing Hungarian Government, which was consolidating in a chaotic situation, needed these irregular, armed paramilitary units to maintain an unstable order, and the Chief of the General Staff Béla Berzeviczy sought to bring these militias under the control of the Army in 1919–20. However, it was precisely because some of its members had committed serious crimes that the government had to formally dissolve the Double Cross Blood Union in 1923. At the time of the bomb assassination Erzsébetváros, the national defence militia of District 9 of Budapest commanded by József Márffy was already operating without any serious state control or instruction, and what they did was of their own free will.

Prime Minister Bethlen himself appeared as a witness before the court less because of the political implications of the case than to clear himself as a private citizen, as József Márffy claimed that he had a personal acquaintance with the incumbent Prime Minister and his family, and that he often travelled in the Prime Minister's car. Bethlen, on the other

hand, flatly denied in court that he or any of his family members knew Márffy even superficially.<sup>37</sup>

The ‘Márffy trial’ was probably necessary primarily because of foreign pressure, in order for the Hungarian State to demonstrate to the Entente powers, especially to France that the revolutionary and civil war years following World War One were finally over, that political and social order had been restored, the Government had accepted the territorial losses recorded in the Peace Treaty of Trianon, and that the process of consolidation had finally begun. Although József Márffy was sentenced to death in the first instance, neither he nor his accomplices, who were also sentenced to death, were finally executed. The trial continued at the Royal Court of Appeal in Budapest and at the Royal Hungarian Curia (Supreme Court), and ended with much lighter sentences. The armed formations of the of the Awakening Hungarians were then however disarmed, the paramilitary wing of the association was clearly stripped of its vigilante-like authority, and the right-wing paramilitary formations, although they did not completely cease

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<sup>37</sup> HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

to exist, were brought under much closer state control and their activities were reduced.<sup>38</sup>

The Bethlen Government finally succeeded, with great difficulty, in achieving relative consolidation in the social, economic and political spheres. On 21 January 1923, Hungary was finally admitted to the League of Nations, its rehabilitation in foreign political sense was essentially complete, and from then on the Association of Awakening Hungarians was merely a kind of loyal far-right opposition to the ruling party. Although it remained a social association until its dissolution in 1945, its political influence declined significantly with the emergence of new radical right-wing parties. Between 1924 and 1945, the emergence of various far-right, Hungarian fascist and national socialist parties mainly modelled on German, Austrian and Italian movements, severely eroded the influence of the Awakening movement, and its membership declined, although there was still considerable overlap in terms of personnel between the radical right-wing parties of the 1920s and 1930s and the

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<sup>38</sup> Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*.

membership of the Association of Awakening Hungarians.<sup>39</sup>

### **Conclusions of a research – the decline and disbandment of Hungarian radical right-wing paramilitary formations after 1923**

For Count István Bethlen's Government which was striving for consolidation in domestic and foreign policy as well, the bomb raid of Csongrád on 24 December 1923, which caused a great outcry and claimed the lives of three people was one of the last drops in the glass. Bethlen promised at the parliament on 3 January 1924 that he would personally interrogate paramilitary commander First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas about the Csongrád bomb attack among other things, and if his responsibility was to be found, he would be treated in the same way as anyone else.<sup>40</sup> Héjjas was also interrogated by the police in connection with the Csongrád bomb explosion and the conspiracies of nationalist secret

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<sup>39</sup> Rudolf Paksa, *Magyar nemzetiszocialisták. Az 1930-as évek új szélsőjobboldali mozgalma. pártjai, politikusai, sajtója*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó–MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Nemzetgyűlési Napló, 1922–1926/XVIII, 337–338. Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, 36.

societies and paramilitary groups in general, in the presence of the National Police Commissioner Imre Nádosy himself, but in the end it was not proven that he was personally involved in any criminal activity.<sup>41</sup> Of course, this was certainly nothing more than a bargain between the paramilitary commander and the Government, possibly including Regent Governor Miklós Horthy himself.<sup>42</sup> Besides Horthy, Gyula Gömbös, who later, in 1932 became Prime Minister of Hungary, must have played a major role in the fact that Héjjas was never brought to trial during the Horthy Era, and was never seriously prosecuted for the acts committed by him and others under his command, even though his crimes were obvious to many people.<sup>43</sup> The example of Iván Héjjas tells us a great deal about the relationship between radical irredentist-nationalist associations, secret societies and the paramilitary units with countless links to them and the Hungarian Government. Not only did the former

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<sup>41</sup> Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, Tomus LVII, 1976, 3–60, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Béla Bodó, *The White Terror in Hungary*

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

paramilitary commander not have to answer for his actions before the judiciary system, but he later received Vitéz's title,<sup>44</sup> a kind of specific Hungarian knighthood that provided certain social advantages, earned a doctorate in law for his book on aviation law, became a member of parliament and was later a well-paid and respected official of the Hungarian State.

Of all the paramilitary commanders who shared a common past and common crimes, and once practiced formidable power, it was Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay who was the most unable to achieve any kind of consolidation. Because of his failure to show sufficient loyalty to the Regent Governor on the occasion of King Charles IV's second attempt of return, and because the brutal activities of his detachment, his arbitrary assassinations and adventurer-like political actions he became increasingly burdensome for the Bethlen Government,<sup>45</sup> and he was eventually forced to retire, become sidelined, and was also expelled from the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Péter Konok, *Az erőszak kérdései 1919–1920-ban. Vörösteror-féberterror*, Múltunk, 2010/3, 72–91, 84.

Union of Etelköz, the pro-government political secret society of the era.<sup>46</sup>

In the spirit of consolidation, the paramilitary formations and national defence militias still operating in various areas of the country, such as the Héjjas Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain and other armed units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians were then essentially disarmed and/or regularised, and their law enforcement and military powers which could be traced back to the period of the turbulent civil war, were definitely and unequivocally abolished. At the same time, a paramilitary organisation, the above mentioned National Labour Protection Service was set up under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, primarily to break strikes and labour movement organisations. It was a type of white, strongly right-wing volunteer workers' militia whose members were equipped with handguns and while on duty had the same powers of action and use of weapons were the same as those of the police, but it was rather an auxiliary police rather than a military

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<sup>46</sup> Prónay, *op. cit.* 322–324.



force.<sup>47</sup> The majority of its members practiced their civilian professions, but occasionally were called into duty.

The Brigade of the Plain, the State Security Agents and the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarians were also integrated into this organisation, so they were under much more serious government control, but could essentially continue to operate.<sup>48</sup> The Double Cross Blood Union also continued its activities within the framework of the National Labour Protection, but it is interesting to note that General Kálmán Shvoy wrote in his diary that the DCBU was founded under this name in 1923, as a kind of successor organisation to the Brigade of the Great Plain led by Iván Héjjas, and that it allegedly continued its activities under the codename *Főtartalék – Main Reserve*<sup>49</sup> as a secret special operations military unit,

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<sup>47</sup> Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary, HU-MNL-OL-K 26-XXII-6010; 5.818. M. E. számú rendelet a nemzeti munkavédelmi intézmény fegyverhasználati jogáról, 1923. augusztus 2., Magyarország Rendeletek Tára, 1923, 274.

<sup>48</sup> Rudolfné Dósa, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetesen magyar fasiszta szervezet*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972., 151–152.

<sup>49</sup> *Csak szolgálati használatra! Iratok a Horthy-hadsereg történetéhez, 1919–1938*, ed. Tibor Hetés–Tamásné Morva, Budapest, Zrínyi Katonai Könyv- és Lapkiadó, 1968, 499–500.

formally within the Ministry of the Interior and the National Labour Protection, but in reality subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. General Shvoy thus dates the genesis of the organisation itself to this period, to the end of 1923. This is evidently a mistake made by the General, since the Double Cross Blood Union really ceased to exist under its former name by 1923–1924. There is also an archival source about the integration of the DCBU into the Office of National Labour Protection: a confidential circular from the Ministry of the Interior from 1926 which forbids the members of the National Labour Protection to refer to the new strike-breaking auxiliary police force as the ‘Double Cross Blood Union’ even among themselves, as it is associated with rather bad public memories.<sup>50</sup> The National Labour Protection was a strike-breaking auxiliary police force and a de facto covert military reserve force at the same time. Although it obviously had no significant combat value, its tens of thousands of members who were otherwise civilians in their daily occupations, but

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<sup>50</sup> Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary, HU-MNL-OL-K 149-1926-6-3473.

who owned firearms and were trained and could be mobilised to a certain extent, made a significant contribution to circumvention of the serious military restrictions imposed by the Peace Treaty of Trianon. In this way, it also helped to pacify the former (in some cases irregular) soldiers of the National Army, which had once numbered over 100,000 and was reduced to a maximum of 35,000 after 1921. In this strange, voluntary auxiliary police and reserve military status many people still felt useful and being in the service of the state. That is, the Hungarian radical right-wing militia movement thus continued to exist partly within the framework of this organisation, in a, so to say, domesticated form.<sup>51</sup>

The testimony of General Count Károly Csáky, Minister of Defence in the bombing trial of József Márffy and his associates, one of the most important archival documents of the history of the Double Cross Blood Union already cited earlier also testifies that the DCBU was established after the fall of the Soviet Republic with the aim of bringing

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<sup>51</sup> Rudolfné Dósa, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetesen magyar fasiszta szervezet.* 134.

paramilitary organisations operating in the capital and the countryside under unified (state and military) control in order to restore the order, presumably sometime around 1919-1920, on the initiative of General Béla Berzeviczy, Chief of General Staff. It was then dissolved in 1923 in the form in which it had previously operated, and Minister Csáky presumably meant the integration of the DCBU into the National Labour Protection which officially took place towards the end of 1922, but in practice perhaps it happened somewhat later, in several steps.<sup>52</sup>

In parallel with the integration of the different militias into the National Labour Protection, the Government Decree No. 7502 of 19 October 1923 prohibited the participation of state employees, including members of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies to be members in associations whose activities were against or incompatible with the lawful order of the state, or which did not have a constitution approved by the Minister of the Interior. That is, it was essentially the membership in secret societies that become

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<sup>52</sup> City Archives of Budapest, HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

prohibited for state employees.<sup>53</sup> In reality, of course, it was still not easy for the state to check – if it really wanted to check in the case of right-wing, pro-government organisations – who was a member of what kind of association or with whom, how and for what purposes cooperated, especially if the given secret organisation produced no written documents for conspiratorial reasons. In this way, although the Double Cross Blood Union officially ceased to exist in 1923, its members, in some form, were still partly in the service of the state, and they could continue their activities to achieve the goals which they thought to be patriotic.

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<sup>53</sup> Budapesti Közlöny, 24 October 1923.

# **THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE HUNGARIAN ARCHIVAL SERVICE**

**Presentation at the International  
Workshop-Conference Organised by the  
National Archives of Hungary and the  
Slovenian National Archives  
Budapest, 14 December 2017<sup>54</sup>**

## **The National Archives of Hungary**

The National Archives of Hungary,<sup>55</sup> the largest archival institution in Hungary is a central and general archives of nationwide authority, possessing branch/member institutions in all of the counties, in the main administrative regions of Hungary. The central and main organisational unit of the Hungarian National Archives is the Central Archives of National Archives of Hungary, while the county archives are its branch or member institutions. The National Archives of Hungary is

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<sup>54</sup> Where necessary, the author has clarified the original 2017 text, taking into account the 2023 situation.

<sup>55</sup> See the institution's webpage: <https://mnl.gov.hu/angol>

the general legal successor of the former Central Archives of Hungary and the former county archives which amalgamated in 30 September 2012. Since 1 October 2012 the duties of county archives have been undertaken by the National Archives of Hungary. Although the modification united 21 earlier independent archival institutions, the central elements of public service have not been changed since. The Hungarian National Archives preserves the 80% of all the Hungarian archival records (307,000 linear meters of documents). The National Archives of Hungary integrated along with 20 county archives to the new institution. Their professional autonomy remained within the framework of the new system. The enlargement of the records, classifying and preserving them, publication and transfer of information, furthermore publishing books and other materials as well as professional education fall inside the line of the Hungarian National Archives' duties. The expert researchers and all those who are interested in the history are welcome in the researchers' rooms of the National Archives, but more than 10 million of documents are available through the internet as well. The developing Electronic Archives of the

Hungarian National Archives and the online databases make it possible for more and more researchers the study of the sources, documents of the last hundred years conveniently at home.

The National Archives of Hungary is a centralized government agency, under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, and the State Secretary of Culture within it. The institution is headed by a Director General, nominated by the Minister of Culture and Innovation for five years. The work of the Director General is helped by a Deputy Director. Under the Director General and the Deputy Director there are two Assistant Director Generals, one responsible for the inspection of the Central Archives of the National Archives the twenty county archives, which are member institutions of the National Archives, while the other Assistant Director General is responsible for projects and scientific affairs and management of projects.<sup>56</sup>

The Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary is the largest member institution of the

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<sup>56</sup> See the organogram of the National Archives of Hungary: [https://mnl.gov.hu/szervezeti\\_felepites](https://mnl.gov.hu/szervezeti_felepites)



National Archives, and it is headed by a director and are divided into four main departments, while there are few organizational units that are neither part of the Central Archives nor of the County Archives, but under the direct supervision of the Director General, otherwise they are located within the buildings of the Central Archives in Budapest. At first I would mention the most important ones of these ‘independent’ organizational units under the direct supervision of the Director General, and their names betray a lot about them:

- The Secretariat of the Director General, a background department that helps the daily work of the Director General.

- The Department of Legal Affairs, Human Resources and Employment Affairs.

- The Directorate of Innovation and Information Technology, headed by a Director, which consists of three smaller departments: the Department of Information Technology, the Department of Archival Reprography and the Department of Digital Service Development. By and large, this important organisational unit of the National Archives is responsible for information technology affairs and development, digitisation,

innovation projects of the Archives (mainly in the field of information technology and digitisation, of course), and the digital services of the institution.

- The Department of Electronic Records, headed by a head of department, administers the electronic administration and archival systems of the National Archives (at the moment ScopeArchiv and Tessela Preservica archival information systems), and does all tasks with the specification and development of the professional archival systems in accordance with international standards.

- The Department of Researcher Service and Library, which mainly deals with the requests made by researchers, based on the Act on Public Records and Public Archives, and maintains the Library of Archival Studies of the Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary.

- The Directorate of Financial Affairs, certainly, as all state bodies in Hungary, the National Archives of Hungary has such an important organizational unit as well to manage financial affairs.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See the Organisational and Operational Regulation of the National Archives of Hungary:  
[https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg\\_mukodes/szmsz.html](https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg_mukodes/szmsz.html)

- The Department of Culture and Public Relations, which is responsible for the organisation of events, public relations, communication and media presence of the National Archives of Hungary.

- The Customer Services Department, which is responsible, among other issues, for ensuring that the customers of the Archives should have access to certified copies of certain documents held by the Archives certifying certain rights, for example to prove pension rights, etc.<sup>58</sup>

The Deputy Director of the National Archives also supervises the department called Directorate of Professional Coordination which is divided into sub-departments, the Department of Conservation, the Department of Methodology and Vocational Training, while there is also a Department of Records Management Inspection, which operates as a public state authority and deals with the control of

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<sup>58</sup> See the Organisational and Operational Regulation of the National Archives of Hungary:  
[https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg\\_mukodes/szmsz.html](https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg_mukodes/szmsz.html)

records management at state agencies and companies (record creators).<sup>59</sup>

The Assistant Director General of Scientific Affairs and Projects administers the Directorate of Scientific Affairs which regulates and organises the scientific activity of the National Archives; inspects the GULAG-GUPVI Research Institute, a research group of historian-archivists that deals with the exploration of the crimes of the Soviet Regime against Hungarian citizens; and oversees the work of the Directorate of Projects, which administers the financial sources and realisation of different professional projects of the institution.<sup>60</sup>

As it was already mentioned above, the Central Archives of the National Archives, the largest organisational unit of the institution, is divided into four main departments which keep and preserve records:

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<sup>59</sup> See the Organisational and Operational Regulation of the National Archives of Hungary:

[https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg\\_mukodes/szmsz.html](https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg_mukodes/szmsz.html)

<sup>60</sup> See the Organisational and Operational Regulation of the National Archives of Hungary:

[https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg\\_mukodes/szmsz.html](https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg_mukodes/szmsz.html)

- The Department of Government Agencies before 1945 keeps all the historical records of the Hungarian government agencies created before the end of the Second World War, preserving about 30 linear metre of historically very valuable records

- The Department of Government Agencies after 1945 and Party Records preserve the records of permanent value created by agencies of nationwide jurisdiction in the past 70 years, including the party records of the communist dictatorship period, since the state party practiced public powers, and it certainly also takes over current records continuously.

- The Department of Private Archives and Collections, headed preserves the records that count as private records defined by law, as well as this is the organizational units that for example keeps some thematic record collections such as the collection of microfilm copies of the records of the National Archives.

- The Department of Economic and Business Agencies preserves the records created by state-owned or private business companies, and certainly,

it also takes over current records from larger state-owned and private business companies.<sup>61</sup>

The member/branch institutions of the National Archives of Hungary, the county archives are by and large at the same level in the organizational hierarchy as the departments of the Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary, they are headed by officials called directors, not heads of departments, they are nominated by the Director General for a definite period, and their role and jurisdictions are also very similar to that of the heads of department of the Central Archives.<sup>62</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that while a department of the Central Archives on the average consists of fifteen to thirty persons, the staff of the county archives usually also consists of fifteen to twenty-five persons, that is also why the role and authority of the heads of department of the Central Archives and the directors of county archives are

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<sup>61</sup> See the Organisational and Operational Regulation of the National Archives of Hungary:

[https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg\\_mukodes/szmsz.html](https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg_mukodes/szmsz.html)

<sup>62</sup> See the Organisational and Operational Regulation of the National Archives of Hungary:

[https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg\\_mukodes/szmsz.html](https://mnl.gov.hu/kozadat/tevekenyseg_mukodes/szmsz.html)

very-very similar. County archives are the general public archives in the given county, as defined by the Act. The National Archives of Hungary employs about 650 persons.

### **The Budapest City Archives**

The Budapest City Archives,<sup>63</sup> which is the second largest archival institution in Hungary, has a special situation within the Hungarian archival system, since it is a territorial (city and county) general archive, yet it is not part of the National Archives of Hungary.

The Budapest City Archives is still under the supervision of the Local Government of the Municipality of Budapest, its Director General is nominated by the Mayor of Budapest with the consent of the Minister of Cultural Heritage (Minister for Culture and Innovation at the moment) for five years, and the institution collects and preserves all the records created by government and local government agencies operating within the administrative boundaries of the Hungarian capital

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<sup>63</sup> The institution's webpage: <https://bparchiv.hu/en/18>

Budapest. Certainly, it also collects and handles current records. The Budapest City Archives keeps about 33,000 linear meters of documents. The institution employs somewhat more than one hundred persons.

The institution consists of several departments.<sup>64</sup> The scope of collection of the archives became much larger: earlier the Archives – as an office of the Budapest city municipality – had to collect the records of the local administration, from that time (as a regional archives) it was obliged to collect all kinds of council, state, co-operative and private material. The direct state supervision came to an end in 1968, and in the second half of the socialist period, from then on the Archives belonged again to the city council (the municipality). The following more than two decades brought considerable progress – mainly in staff, equipment, publishing contents and in the growth of local historical works and educational tasks, but to a certain extent at the expense of the professional

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<sup>64</sup> See the Organisational and Operational Regulation of the Budapest City Archives:  
[https://bparchiv.hu/sites/default/files/atoms/files/szmsz\\_2021\\_2\\_hatalyos.pdf](https://bparchiv.hu/sites/default/files/atoms/files/szmsz_2021_2_hatalyos.pdf)



archival work. That is why it is a great challenge now to reveal the precious historical sources in the Archives, to make the Budapest City Archives more usable and useful for the public, and also to fulfil the administrative tasks rising from the new, democratic political system and the challenges that derive from the very rapid changes and digitisation trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>65</sup>

The online database system of Budapest City Archives contains millions of archival records, and similarly to the databases of the National Archives of Hungary, this collection is also continuing to expand. The databases are accessible from the Budapest City Archives website, from the Digital Archives Portal<sup>66</sup> and the Hungarian Archives Portal<sup>67</sup> that was created by Budapest City Archives as well. The strong point of the latter is otherwise the joint search option and the advanced handling of images (including .pdf format and georeferenced historical maps). The databases make accessible mainly the data contained in archival sources that can help many researchers find out more about the

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<sup>65</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest\\_City\\_Archives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest_City_Archives)

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.eleveltar.hu/>

<sup>67</sup> <https://archivportal.hu/index.php/en/home/>

used-to-be residents of Budapest, or the built environment, providing visual information, example, about the socialist period.<sup>68</sup>

As mentioned before, there are also different smaller public and private, special state and even higher educational archives, collecting and preserving the records created by certain agencies and bodies, or created in certain fields of record creation...

### **Other Hungarian Archival Institutions**

The City Archives under the Local Governments are, which preserve the records created by agencies and bodies under the supervision of local governments:

- Archives and Research Institute of Székesfehérvár City of County Right
- Archives of Tatabánya City of County Right
- Budapest City Archives
- Győr City Archives
- Vác City Archives

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<sup>68</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest\\_City\\_Archives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest_City_Archives)

The Special State Archives are, which handle records created in certain fields/by certain agencies:

- Archives of Environmental Protection and Water Management
- Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security
- The Archives of Military History
- Semmelweis Archives of History of Medicine

From among the Special State Archives of Hungary, the most important and largest institution which I would like to highlight, since it is the third largest archival institution in Hungary, is the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security.<sup>69</sup> The Historical Archives, which is under the control of the Parliament of Hungary, houses the documents of the former Hungarian State Security Organisations dating from December 21, 1944 to February 14, 1990 and has the following tasks: to ensure the exercise of the right to the familiarization with their personal data for those represented in the documents of the state security police; to provide

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<sup>69</sup> The webpage of the institution: <https://www.abtl.hu/english-information>

data to the organizations performing fact-finding as part of the lustration process, and to ensure the pursuit of the research activity in the archives as well as conducting and publishing research on the post-war organization and operation of the political police in Hungary and its relationship to the Hungarian Communist Party, governmental organs and public security authorities as well as engaging in public educational activities. The archival material in the Historical Archives is divided into five sections: Section 1. Documents of State Security (State Defence) Organizations and their operations 1945-90  
Section 2. State security documents that do not belong to any organizational entity 1945-90; Section 3. Network, operative and investigation files 1945-90  
Section 4. Collections 1944-2007  
Section 5. Documents after the year 1990 1994-2005).

For the study of religion, Section 3, the largest section of the archives containing investigation files, operation files, work files and enlisting files is the most important. Apart from work files collecting all reports given by individual informers, all file types

contain various document types from case summaries to evaluations, action plans, handwritten or transcribed confessions, interrogation minutes, transcripts of tapped conversations, surveillance reports and confiscated materials (letters, books, manuscripts, pamphlets, images, photographs of confiscated objects, etc.). So-called operation and investigation files are diverse sources of visual and material religious items, while other file types mostly contain textual information on religious activities. The archives has very rich material on dissenting groups within the established churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church of Hungary and the activities of officially unrecognised small churches and religious communities.<sup>70</sup> The operation of the institution is regulated by the Act III of 2003 on the Disclosure of the Secret Service Activities of the Past Regime and the Establishment of the Historical Archives of the State Security Services.<sup>71</sup>

In the near past, the Archives has become the official archive of the current Hungarian secret

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<sup>70</sup> <https://hiddengalleries.eu/digitalarchive/s/en/item-set/416>

<sup>71</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A0300003.TV>;  
[https://www.abtl.hu/sites/default/files/pdf/acts/ABTL\\_4\\_2003\\_evi\\_III\\_tv\\_e.pdf](https://www.abtl.hu/sites/default/files/pdf/acts/ABTL_4_2003_evi_III_tv_e.pdf)

services as well, and preserves documents created by Hungarian intelligence and counter-espionage agencies. This is why the institution must meet with very strict confidentiality requirements as well. The Archives employs about 100 persons, and has good international relations with similar institutions of the post-Soviet states.

Ecclesiastical Archives, which preserve and keep certainly the records created by ecclesiastical organizations:

#### Catholic Church Archives

- The Archives of the Cistercian Sisters' House of the Blessed Virgin Monastery
- Archives of the Norbertine Abbey of Csorna
- Archives of the Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese
- Archives of the Eger Archdiocese
- Greek Catholic Episcopal Archives (Nyíregyháza)
- The Archives of the Diocese of Győr
- The Archives of the Hungarian Province of the Society of Jesus
- The Archives of the Archdiocese of Kalocsa
- Hungarian Franciscan Archives

- Hungarian Mindszenty Archives
- Archives of the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma
- Episcopal and Chapter Archives of Pécs
- Central Archives of the Hungarian Province of the Piarist Order
- Esztergom Primateal Archives
- Archives of the Episcopate of Szeged-Csanád
- Episcopal and Cathedral Chapter Archives of Székesfehérvár
- Archives of the Diocese of Szombathely
- Episcopal and Cathedral Chapter Archives of Vác
- Archives of the Archdiocese and Cathedral Chapter of Veszprém

#### Archives of the Reformed Church

- Archives of the Baranya Diocese of the Reformed Church
- Ráday Archives of the Danubian Reformed Church District
- Synodal Archives of the Reformed Church of Hungary
- Reformed Collections of Pápa - Archives

- Scientific Collections of the Reformed College of Sárospatak

- College Archives of the Transibiscan Reformed Church District

#### Archives of the Evangelical Church

- Archives of the Békéscsaba Evangelical Congregation

- Evangelical National Archives

- Archives of the Nyíregyháza Evangelical Congregation

- Archives of the Orosháza Evangelical Congregation

- Archives of the Ráth Mátyás Evangelical Collection

- Archives of the Sopron Evangelical Congregation

- Archives of the Szarvas – Old Church Evangelical Congregation

#### Archives of the Israelite Churches

- Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives

The University/Higher Education Archives are, certainly, they preserve the records created by the



institutions of higher educational institutions. The main such institutions in Hungary are:

- Archives of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics

- Archives of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts

- Archives of the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design

- Archives of the University of Pécs

- Archives of the University of Szeged

- Archives of the University of West Hungary

- Corvinus University Archives

- Archives of the University of Public Service

- Library and Archives of the Georgikon Faculty of University of Pannonia

- Domonkos Kosáry Library and Archives of the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences

- Semmelweis University Archives

- University Veterinary Science Library, Archives and Museum

- The Library and Archives of the University of Pannonia

All the state, local government, ecclesiastical and private archives in Hungary operate along the same standards, regulated by the Act LXVI of 1995 on Public Records, Public Archives and the Protection of Private Archives, which also refers to several other Acts that are connected to the affairs of archival service in Hungary.

# **A DRAFT ON THE HUNGARIAN LEGISLATION ON ARCHIVES**

**Presentation at the International Workshop-  
Conference Organised by the National  
Archives of Hungary and the Slovenian  
National Archives**

**Budapest, 14 December 2017<sup>72</sup>**

Several legal rules, acts and government orders regulate the field of archival service in Hungary, however, I would like to briefly speak about certain acts which contain the most important regulations, in accordance with the questions asked by the Slovenian colleagues.

First and foremost, the basic legislation in the field of archival science and information activities is conceived in Act LXVI of 1995 on Public Records, Public Archives and the Protection of Private Archives,<sup>73</sup> which also refers to several other Acts

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<sup>72</sup> Where necessary, the author has clarified the original 2017 text, taking into account the 2022–2023 situation.

<sup>73</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99500066.tv>

that are connected to the affairs of archival service in Hungary.

The Act consists of six larger chapters which deal with general provisions, public records, public archives, the use of the holdings of the public archives, and finally, it also speaks about the protection of private archives. The sixth chapter is a sort of supplement that contains miscellaneous and closing provisions.

Chapter One defines the purpose, the term of reference of the act, and gives us some evident definitions, defining the terms such as agency, public agency, record, public record, private record, current records, registry, records management, public archives, record of permanent value, competence of public archives, archival collection interests, and so on. The Act conceives that departmental control over the protection of archives shall be carried out by the Minister of Cultural Heritage – this field currently belongs to the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, and to the State Secretary of Culture of the Ministry at the moment in Hungary.

Chapter Two deals with public records, defining how state agencies should submit the

records created by them to the archives. According to the main rule, archives are obliged to take over public records after fifteen years of their creation. Records containing secret data are separately regulated, the act says that ‘undestroyable records’ created more than fifteen years before, containing state secrets, official secrets or business confidential data shall be transferred to the competent public archives by the end of the calendar year following the expiry of the closure period by the classifying authorities.

This is the point where we may speak about the Decree of the Minister for Human Resources 34/2016. (XI. 30.) on the Process and Technical Requirements of the Submission of Records Stored in an Electronical Form to the Archives<sup>74</sup> which conceives a detailed regulation how agencies should submit electronic/digitalised/born-digital records to the archives. Basically, the decree says that electronically created and digitalized records must be submitted to the competent archives in a so-called Submission Information Package the technical criteria of which are defined in detail and

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<sup>74</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1600034.EMM>

very precisely in the decree. The SIP package must contain a .txt and a .zip file, and a header, a metadata .xml file, a content-, a data- and a documentation-file within it, in accordance with international, mainly European Union standards. The archival submission of Submission Information Packages containing electronic / digitalized records may happen from:

- a record management software
- a database
- a file system
- or the organic collection of electronic records

According to the Decree, the competent archives must take over the electronic records in a SIP package from the creator at least in 15, but at most in 90 days if the package fits the technical requirements defined in the regulation. Personal data, special data, business secrets, insurance secrets, medical secrets or other secret / classified data are to be handled by the competent archives according to the regulations of Data Protection Act, and the employees of the archives are burdened by the obligation of secrecy in such a case.

The 451/2016 Decree of the Government of Hungary on the Detailed Regulation of Electronic

Administration<sup>75</sup> is also a very important legal rule of lower level as for the management of electronic records. For example, it regulates under what conditions paper-based public and private records can be electronically reproduced. The decree regulates only the technical parameters of the reproduction and authentication and the responsibilities concerning it, and basically the legal rule also supports the en-mass, multitudinous reproduction processes, and like this, the authentication can be processed upon several documents at the same time.

As for the Hungarian legal rules on the management and submission of electronic/digitalised records, we may also mention the 27/2014 Decree of the Minister of Justice and Public Administration on Requirements of Record Management Software Applicable by Agencies Fulfilling Public Functions<sup>76</sup> which defines the requirements with which the steps of the record management process must meet, such as the technical requirements of data saving, archiving,

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<sup>75</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1600451.kor>

<sup>76</sup> [https://jogkodex.hu/jsz/2014\\_27\\_kim\\_rendelet\\_9425546](https://jogkodex.hu/jsz/2014_27_kim_rendelet_9425546)

logging and the connection with other information systems, and the supplement of the decree defines in detail the describing metadata to be managed by such a record management software.

Chapter Three is on the topic and definition of public archives, and divides public archives into so-called general archives, specialized state archives, archives of local authorities by settlements, archives of public bodies, of public foundations, or of any other agencies as defined in a legal rule. Collection interests of public archives shall cover all private records of permanent value which fit into the archival holdings and enrich the archival sources kept by the public archives. The Act conceives that any entity that maintains public archives shall make sure that its archives

- have the skilled staff and technical equipment required for the fulfilment of the duties

- have a repository (repositories), that may be made inaccessible, is (are) fireproof, dry, contain the appropriate degree of humidity, that cannot be used simultaneously for any other purpose beside the custody of archives, outfitted with the storage means required for proper custody, and guarantee(s) the regular capture of records,



furthermore a reading room and other conditions necessary for its function.

- the head of a public archives shall be appointed through competition, or relieved, in the case of the National Archives of Hungary by the Minister of Cultural Heritage, while in the cases of specialized state archives as well as the archives of the county authorities, local authorities of settlements, public bodies, public foundations and other public agencies – having requested the opinion of the Minister responsible for Cultural Heritage – by the maintaining entity.

By the definition of general archives, the Act writes that the records of public agencies that do not have archives of their own shall belong to the competence of general archives. General archives may be established or dissolved by an Act, with the designation of the public archives competent to take over the holdings of the archives being dissolved. General archives are first and foremost the National Archives of Hungary as well as the public archives maintained by local authorities of the counties and Municipalities of Budapest, respectively. The National Archives of Hungary together with its county member institutions is defined by the Act as

the central general archives, and the following types of records shall fall within its competence: records of the President of the Republic and his Office, that of Parliament and its Office, as well as the offices of Parliamentary Ombudsmen, of the Constitutional Court of Hungary, the Prime Minister and his Office, the Ministries and other Agencies with nationwide competence, as well as of the institutions and the bodies of foreign representation falling under the direct supervision and direction of the above, furthermore, the records created by the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's Office, the State Audit Office, as well as the predecessors of all these agencies, and of all national public bodies and public foundations that have no archives of their own.

The county public archives and the Budapest City Archives are defined by the act as so-called territorial general archives, in the case of Hungarian county archives, they are now part, member institutions of the National Archives of Hungary, while the Budapest City Archives is still an autonomous institution under the inspection of the Local Government of the Municipality of Budapest.

The Act also defines so-called specialized state archives which collect the records created in one certain field/one certain record creator, and these archives include the Archives of War History, the Archives of the Central Statistical Office, the Water Management Archives, the Historic Archives of State Security Services (under the inspection of the President of the Hungarian Parliament, regulated by a separate act, by Act III of 2003 on the Historic Archives of State Security Services<sup>77</sup>).

Furthermore, the Act defines Archives of local authorities by settlements, and conceives that the local authority of a settlement may establish public archives with competence over the records of its body, offices and institutions, as well as over the predecessors of the above. These archives function under the direct supervision and direction of the maintaining authority, but their establishment is licensed by the Minister of Cultural Heritage.

In Hungary, there are also Archives of Public Bodies, Public Foundations and other Public Agencies defined by the law. Such organizations may establish public archives for the custody of

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<sup>77</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A0300003.TV>

their own records, and the establishment or the dissolution of such archives shall be entered in the central register of public archives. In case of dissolution of such an archive, the Minister for Cultural Heritage provides for the placement of the archives of the public body, public foundation and other public agencies.

Chapter Four of the Act speaks about the use of the holdings of public archives, defining the conditions of the access to the records of public archives. Basically, any natural person may have free of charge access to archives or may obtain at his own costs copy of records released for inspection and kept in public archives, created after 1 May 1990, or archives older than thirty years from the calendar year of their creation, archives that were created before 2 May 1990, if older than fifteen years from the calendar year of their creation, with certain exceptions, in accordance with the Data Protection Act.<sup>78</sup> Before the beginning of research, the public archives shall issue a visiting card to the person wishing to perform research in the holdings of the public archives. A very important regulation

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<sup>78</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100112.tv>

as for archival records containing personal data is that unless an Act otherwise provides, archival records containing personal data shall be disclosed for access by anyone thirty years after the year of the date subject's decease. If the year of the death is unknown, then the protection period shall be ninety years from the birth of the subject, and when neither the date of birth nor of death is known, it shall be sixty years from the creation of the record held by the archives. The body keeping the register of identity and address records shall, upon request, provide the public archives holding the records with information on the date of death of persons identifiable in archival records, in order to determine the expiry of the specified protection periods. In practice, it really means that archival records that were created at least 130 years ago may be researched by anyone. In the case of records the protection period of which has not yet expired, the public archives must authorise research for scientific purposes if the researcher submits a supporting statement from the public body carrying out the scientific research in accordance with the researcher's detailed research plan. The archives specified above shall also be open for access before

the expiry of protection period if research can be carried out through an anonymized copy of the record, if the subject, or after his death any heir or relative has consented to the research upon the request of the researcher, or if the research is required for scientific purposes, provided that the thirty or fifteen years defined in the Act have already expired, and the researcher complies with certain requirements. The researcher should in such a case attach a statement by an institute or public body performing public duties and scientific research in accordance with its designated purpose, granted on the basis of a detailed research plan of the researcher. The researcher also has to sign a written declaration accepting the limitations on handling and usage of the acquired or collected personal data in compliance with the so-called Data Protection Act, namely, the Act CXII of 2011 on the Right of Informational Self-Determination and on Freedom of Information<sup>79</sup> which says that bodies with public service functions shall promote and ensure that the general public is provided with accurate information in a prompt manner concerning the matters under

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<sup>79</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100112.tv>

their competence, such as the budgets of the central and municipal governments and the implementation thereof, the management of assets controlled by the central and municipal governments, the appropriation of public funds, and special and exclusive rights conferred upon market actors, private organizations or individuals. The act also pronounces that if the research is conducted for scientific purposes, a non-anonymized record containing personal data may be obtained even before the expiry of the protection period. It must also be stressed that based on the Act, the Government of Hungary is empowered to conclude a data protection contract with regard to handing over a copy of records containing personal data – including sensitive data to foreign scientific institute in order to display the results of researches conducted on historical events, before the expiry of protection period. Otherwise, according to the Data Protection Act,<sup>80</sup> personal data mean data relating to the data subject, in particular by reference to the name and identification number of the data subject or one or more factors specific to his physical,

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<sup>80</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100112.tv>

physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social identity as well as conclusions drawn from the data in regard to the data subject; while special data mean personal data revealing racial origin or nationality, political opinions and any affiliation with political parties, religious or philosophical beliefs or trade-union membership, and personal data concerning sexual life, personal data concerning health, pathological addictions, or criminal record; while criminal personal data' shall mean personal data relating to the data subject or that pertain to any prior criminal offense committed by the data subject and that is obtained by organizations authorized to conduct criminal proceedings or investigations or by penal institutions during or prior to criminal proceedings in connection with a crime or criminal proceeding.

As for the access of researchers to archives containing state secrets, official secrets or business confidential data or any other secrets defined in an act, researchers can only have access to such records with the permission issued by the classifiers. It is worth the speak a few words about the definition of the term classified data / classified information which is defined by Act CLV of 2009 on the



Protection of Classified Information,<sup>81</sup> and this Act uses the following definition. There are two basic types of classified information in the Hungarian legal system:

national classified information: information within the scope of public interest to be protected by classification, fulfilling the formal requirements of regulations issued under this Act and marked for classification through this Act, for which – irrespective of its form – the information classifier defined through the classification process that within the term of validity, any kind of disclosure, unauthorised access, amendment or usage, providing access for unauthorised persons or blocking the access of authorised persons can directly harm or jeopardise (hereinafter jointly: damage) public interests to be protected by classification and will limit its disclosure and access to its contents through classification;

foreign classified information: information supplied by all institutions and organisations of the European Union, as well as a Member State acting on behalf of the European Union, or a foreign party

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<sup>81</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0900155.tv>

or international organisation and transferred by an international contract or agreement promulgated by an act, which is limited in its access by the institutions and organisations of the European Union, a Member State acting on behalf of the European Union, a third country or party, and an international organisation through the process of classification.

The scope of the organs/persons empowered to classify information in Hungary are the following:

- a) President of the Republic,
- b) Speaker of the House,
- c) Chairpersons of Parliamentary Committees,
- d) President of the Constitutional Court,
- e) President of the Curia (Supreme Court),
- f) President of a Court,
- g) President of the National Office for the  
Judiciary,
- h) Supreme Prosecutor,
- i) Head of the Prosecutor's Office,
- j) Commissioner for Fundamental Rights,
- k) Governor (President) of the National Bank  
of Hungary,
- l) Members of the Government,

m) Government Commissioner, Commissioner of the Prime Minister, Head of the Government Office,

n) Head of the body operating in accordance with the procedural order of the Government,

o) Central body of the law enforcement body, and the head of the Military National Security Service, head of the body fulfilling internal crime prevention and crime detection functions as defined in the Police Act, head of the anti-terrorism body as defined in the Police Act, head of the alien policing authority and head of the refugee authority,

p) Head of the National Security Authority,

q) Head of the foreign mission of Hungary and persons with independent power of representation, delegated to any other state, international organization or regional co-operation centre for the fulfilment of commitments set forth in international agreements,

r) Persons authorized to classification by law,

s) Head of the autonomous government agency

Chapter Five of the Act deals with the protection of private archives, defining that a natural person or a non-public agency who/which

establishes or maintains an archives for the long-term custody of his/its records with permanent value being in his/its ownership or possession, and accepts to comply with the requirements defined by the Act may initiate with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage that his/its archives shall be registered as an open or private archive. The Minister of Cultural Heritage is entitled to permit placement of holdings of the 'loci authentici of the capitular and convent bodies' (ecclesiastical bodies entrusted with public notarial functions in the historical past) in the competent domestic ecclesiastical archives, and of other public records in open private archives. That, is by private records of permanent value the Act mainly means records created by ecclesiastical organizations, however, and it is also very important, that the Act conceives also that business companies operating with a permanently state-owned property share are obliged to regulate their records management in agreement with the competent public archives, to manage their records in accordance with the regulations, to facilitate on the spot information for the public archives while guaranteeing the protection of trade secrets and business confidential data, to transfer to the public

archives their undestroyable records if they are not required for carrying out the tasks. Furthermore, the act also conceives that an owner who wishes to market his / her records created further than fifty years – with the exception of public auction – shall be obliged to offer it for purchase to the National Archives or Hungary or to present it with the aim of having it declared protected. If the National Archives verifies that the presented records suits the criteria, but cannot pay the purchase price set by the owner, then it shall suggest to the Office to declare the record(s) protected.

It must also be mentioned that the Hungarian legislation on the operation and services of archives certainly fully meets with the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union,<sup>82</sup> and several major and major modifications of the concerning acts and decrees have been made in the past few years in order that Hungarian legislation should completely be in accordance with the data protection standards of the European Union.

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<sup>82</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj>

**DATABASES ONLINE  
AN IMPORTANT ONLINE SERVICE  
OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF  
HUNGARY**

**Presentation at the International  
Workshop-Conference Organised by the  
National Archives of Hungary and the  
Slovenian National Archives  
Budapest, 14. December 2017.<sup>83</sup>**

The development of Databases Online,<sup>84</sup> the online database complex/collection of the Hungarian National Archives that contains both finding aid databases and digitalised records began in 2010-2011, before the foundation of the National Archives of Hungary and the integration of the Central Archives of Hungary and the county archives in the department of the Central Archives of Hungary called Centre for Professional Coordination, originally within the frames of a pilot project. (At the moment, the responsible

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<sup>83</sup> Where necessary, the author has clarified the original 2017 text, taking into account the 2023 situation.

<sup>84</sup> <https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/>

organisational unit of the National Archives of Hungary is called Directorate of Innovation and Information Technology, Department of Digital Service Development).

The main aim of the project was to publish and present radically different types of archival finding aids and types of digitalised records by and large identically, based on the same scheme upon an online surface. As a result of this experimental project, by now about a hundred of archival databases have been published on the online surface of Databases Online made of radically different records, and the number of the databases is permanently growing. At the moment the publication of more than one hundred archival databases is in progress, selecting them from among both the records of the Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary and the County Archives.

The main record types of which the databases of Databases Online were made are among others charters, missives, the records of family archives, conscriptions, boards, the reports of the sessions of boards, but databases have also been created of such unusual archival documents like maps, plans

and designs or photographs. The surface gives the chance to the researchers that they search in digitalised records or finding aid databases; furthermore, researchers may also search based on the list of databases that can be used for, for example, the very popular purpose of genealogy, i. e., the research of family history. This free-of-charge online service of the National Archives of Hungary available on the internet to anyone gives multiple opportunities to research of both private and scientific purposes.

Beside the databases edited of records of smaller, local importance, databases created of digitalised archival records of national importance or their digitalised finding aids are also available on the surface of Databases Online.

One of the most important sources of the genealogical research in Hungary, the Microfilm Registers Database<sup>85</sup> is, for example, available through the service of Databases Online free of charge. Furthermore, the Illésy Genealogical

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<sup>85</sup> <https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/mikrofilm-anyakonyvek>



Database<sup>86</sup> and other archival sources of basic importance earlier published in a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM format, such as the so-called DLDF-Database made of the Diplomatic Archives and Diplomatic Photograph Collection of the Central Archives of Hungary,<sup>87</sup> the Nationwide Censuses of 1715<sup>88</sup> and 1720,<sup>89</sup> the Urbaria and Conscriptioes in the Central Archives of Hungary database,<sup>90</sup> or the Libri Regii: Royal Books 1527–1918<sup>91</sup> database are also available via Databases Online. Other databases were created of such important historical documents like the Military Conscription Registers between 1756 and 1942,<sup>92</sup> of the protocols of the sessions of the boards of the counties of Hungary, of the protocols of the sessions of the Government

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<sup>86</sup> <https://adatbasisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbasis/a-131-illesy-fele-csaladtorteneti-adatbasis>

<sup>87</sup> <https://adatbasisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbasis/dldf>

<sup>88</sup> <https://adatbasisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbasis/az-1715-evi-orszagos-osszeiras>

<sup>89</sup> <https://adatbasisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbasis/az-1720-evi-orszagos-osszeiras>

<sup>90</sup> <https://adatbasisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbasis/urbaria-et-conscriptioes>

<sup>91</sup> <https://adatbasisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbasis/a-57-k-19-libri-regii-%C2%B7-kiralyi-konyvek-1527%E2%80%941918>

<sup>92</sup> <https://adatbasisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbasis/katonaallitas>

of Hungary between 1867 and 1944<sup>93</sup> or between 1944 and 1965,<sup>94</sup> or the protocols of certain county and city bodies of the Hungarian Communist Party of the one-party system period.<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, two highlight a few important, interesting, special and frequently researched, popular Hungarian archival databases, I would begin with the Military Conscription Registers<sup>96</sup> that are really an important collection of Hungarian family history and military history sources. A register of personnel for the establishment or supplementation of the standing army, containing mainly documents dating from 1756 to 1918. The language of the registers is Latin, German or Hungarian, depending on the period and location. The 20th century part of the material was created by filling in the forms, but the columns were always

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<https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/minisztertanacs-i-jegyzokonyvek-1867-1944>

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<https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/minisztertanacs-i-jegyzokonyvek-1944-1965>

<sup>95</sup> <https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/gyujtemeny/partiratok>

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<https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/katonaallitas/informacio>

filled in by handwriting. In general, 6 to 10 items of information were recorded for each person in the list. In addition to the basic data (name of father, mother, marital status, year of birth, place of residence), there are also data on health, appearance or education. The summary name refers to several types of documents. A distinction is made between registers of recruitment, drawing of lots, dismissal, review, redeployment. There is a list of soldiers who have lost their titles, and there are also payrolls and requests for exemption. Unfortunately, the original documents, which were microfilmed in the 1960s and form the basis of the database, are no longer always searchable in their original location. Thus, of the military registers in the collection of the Archives of the Capital of Budapest, only the volumes from the period before the unification of Pest, Buda and Óbuda are available in the archives concerned (the registry books of the Buda district and the registry books of the Pest district, with the time range 1852–1873). In order to facilitate research, the structure of the database reverts to the original volume structure. Research can be carried out by military districts, including years.

One of the most important (collection of) database(s) of the National Archives of Hungary is the Collection of People Taken to the Soviet Union, which contains the records of both civilians and soldiers violently taken into the Soviet Union by Russian military and authorities during and after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1945. Namely, during 2016 and 2017, the Central Archives and several county institutions of the National Archives of Hungary, with the support of the Hungarian GULAG Memorial Committee, conducted research to identify the sources in their custody that provide a more accurate picture of how many people from Hungary were taken as prisoners of war by the Soviet Union during World War II, how many innocent civilians were violently deported to the Soviet Union, and how many of them were returned to their loved ones. This major work has resulted in several websites, publications, conferences and databases. In the meantime, negotiations have started between the Hungarian National Archives and the Russian State Military Archives, as a result of which an agreement was reached on 8 April 2019 to transfer digital copies of the registration files (учётная карточка in Russian) of a total of 681 955

Hungarian soldiers and civilians who were captured by the Red Army of the Workers' Peasant Army during World War II and subsequently registered as prisoners of war or interned in the Soviet Union. The copies were accompanied by a Cyrillic-letter database in Russian, containing the most important information on the registration cards relating to each individual. The first edition of the database of Hungarian prisoners of the Soviet camps, which is the backbone of this collection, is the result of the processing work that started in January 2020 and has been ongoing ever since.<sup>97</sup>

The First World War Casualty Database<sup>98</sup> is another important archival database of military history and family history. The database, which contains more than 200,000 records, contains data from the duplicate civilian death registers kept in the Hungarian National Archives and the Budapest City Archives, mainly for the territory of present-day Hungary. In the course of reviewing 8 million

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<https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/gyujtemeny/szovjetunioba-elhurcoltak>

<sup>98</sup> <https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/az-elso-vilaghaboru-vesztesegi-adatbazisa/informacio>

civilian death registers, archivists have collected and recorded in a database the data series on the military and civilian casualties and internees of the First World War. The project 'Processing World War I casualties' was running for more than four years from 2015 and its results have been processed in a large national database. The project was funded by the Public Foundation for Research on Central and Eastern European History and Society, with the approval of the World War I Centenary Commemorative Committee, and initially involved the Hungarian National Archives, the HM Military History Institute and Museum and the Department of Social Relations and War Memorials of the Ministry of Defence of Hungary as consortium partners.

Between 2016 and 2018, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the Hungarian National Archives, with the support of the Reformation Memorial Committee, implemented a large-scale project covering all archival fields in the National Archives and all county institutions, which was accompanied by research beyond the borders. In addition to the scientific research on which the project is based, the

project has resulted in numerous publications, various programmes, exhibitions, conferences and quizzes. This collection includes databases, guides, and numerous publications, resource notes and digital images published on the project website. By now, Reformation 500 database is also one of the important and popular, frequently researched database of the National Archives of Hungary.<sup>99</sup>

The Census of 1828<sup>100</sup> is also a very important, large-scale and very special database of the collection, mainly from the point of view of family history research. Namely, in 2021, the National Archives of Hungary announced a very unique paleographical volunteering project for the general public for the first time. Applicants were able to take part in an exciting 21st century project full of modern challenges. Within the framework of the European Digital Treasures international project, between 1 of October and 15 November 2021, it was possible to participate in the daily, professional work of the National Archives of Hungary. With the help of Artificial Intelligence, the transcription

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<sup>99</sup> <https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/gyujtemeny/reformacio>

<sup>100</sup> <https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/az-1828-evi-orszagos-osszeiras>

of the names of taxpayers on the census rolls of the free royal towns of the 1828 national census was completed in the summer of 2021. The National Archives of Hungary then carried out a review of the transcription with the help of volunteers.<sup>101</sup> Through the work, the handwritten text recognition capability of the software was strongly improved, and the final results became more accurate.<sup>102</sup> The Census of 1828 consists of 196,724 pages, and it contains the details of all taxable households from the first half of the 19th century, as well as the name of the head of household. This unique historical source collection contains 2,845,595 personal names from the entire territory of historic Hungary, Croatia and Slavonia, from a total of 12,688 settlements. Although only the personal names have been indexed in the database, so the chance to search is limited to them, the digitised images of the

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<sup>101</sup> On the volunteer project see the research article by Senior Archivist Ildikó Szerényi: Ildikó Szerényi, *Az 1828. évi országos összeírás feldolgozása mesterséges intelligencia támogatásával és önkéntesek segítségével*, *Levéltári Szemle*, 2022/2, 73–86.

<sup>102</sup> Ildikó Szerényi: *Paleographical Volunteers for the National Archives of Hungary*, 2021, [https://mnl.gov.hu/mnl/ol/hirek/paleographical\\_volunteers\\_for\\_the\\_national\\_archives\\_of\\_hungary](https://mnl.gov.hu/mnl/ol/hirek/paleographical_volunteers_for_the_national_archives_of_hungary)



individual documents, which contain tabular data on property and social status, are also available to researchers, bearing in mind that the census is an irreplaceable source of information for the Hungarian social and economic history of the period.

The above mentioned and outlined archival databases are only a subjective selection by an archivist, and they are examples of the many and permanently broadening, developing online archival contents of Databases Online of the National Archives of Hungary, a snapshot of the situation in 2022–2023. The archivists and information technology experts of the National Archives of Hungary are continuously and enthusiastically working on the publication of further and further archival databases that make archival resource much easier and more convenient to Hungarian and foreign researchers all over the world.

Certain databases, mainly those that may support the research of the 20th history of Hungary, may contain and of course, do really contain personal and sensitive data. The content of these records, in accordance with the Act LXVI of 1995 on Public Records, Public Archives and the

Protection of Private Archives<sup>103</sup> and the Act CXII of 2011 on the Right of Informational Self-Determination and on Freedom of Information<sup>104</sup> and the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union<sup>105</sup> can be published upon the online surface of Databases Online only with certain limitations, and such databases were published and are to be published together with these legally obligatory limitations. However, the parts of the records that cannot be openly published upon the online surface may be researched in person in the place of custody of the original archival records based on which the given database was created, in the research rooms of the Central Archives or in the county archives of the National Archives of Hungary.

All archival databases that have already been published or the publication of which is still in progress contain a so-called information page upon which a short and concise description of the given archival records and/or archival finding aids is presented in order to inform researchers about the

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<sup>103</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99500066.tv>

<sup>104</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100112.tv>

<sup>105</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj>

content of the given archival database and support the research activity as much as possible. The dynamically broadening and developing online archival database collection that contains the digitalized copies of very important historical sources and/or the finding aids connected to them, together with the many types of archival records does its best to make archival research easier to anyone, considering the challenges of the digital age, both in the fields of private and scientific historical research.

**THE SYNTHESIS OF HUNGARIAN  
ARCHIVAL STUDIES  
A SUBJECTIVE REVIEW BY AN  
ARCHIVIST ON THE HUNGARIAN  
ARCHIVAL HANDBOOK**

The 800-page-long Hungarian Archives Handbook [Levéltári Kézikönyv]<sup>106</sup>, published in 2009, 12 years ago now, under the chief editorship of Lajos Körmendy, edited by Lajos Körmendy, the then Deputy Director of the Central Archives of Hungary, was and still is a unique, synthesising work in the history of Hungarian Archival Studies. The book is divided into 7 major chapters and a total of 50 subchapters, and is the result of the contributions of 34 exigent historian-archivists and other archival specialists the complete list of whom is as follows: *Gabriella Albrechtné Kunszneri, Vilma Alföldi, Borbála Bak, Katalin Balla, Péter Bán, Iván Bertényi, Iván Borsodi, András, István Kenyeres, Lajos*

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<sup>106</sup> *Levéltári Kézikönyv*, ed. Lajos Körmendy, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2009. See online:

[https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/MolDigiLib\\_VSK\\_leveltari\\_kezikonyv/?pg=0&layout=s](https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/MolDigiLib_VSK_leveltari_kezikonyv/?pg=0&layout=s)

*Körmendy, András Körösmezői, Ferenc Künstler, János Lakos, Zsuzsanna Mikó, Éva Straub Nyulászné, Katalin Orosz, Kálmán Radics, Imre Ress, László Riedl, András Sipos, Miklós Sölch, Éva Szigetváry, László Szögi, Zoltán Szőke, István Szűcs, István G. Vass.* The writing of the book was undoubtedly a grandiose professional task, and the editor-in-chief (then Deputy Director of the Central Archives of Hungary) entrusted the writing of each sub-chapter to outstanding Hungarian experts in the field of archival science. Each major chapter does not only present the current knowledge and regulations in force, but also provides a historical perspective on the development of the given subfield, adhering to the historical cliché - which is undoubtedly true – that the present can only be truly understood by deeply knowing the past. This historical approach proves productive for the usability of the book.

At the same time, the handbook is, archivists could say, a peculiarly Hungarian work, as it does not follow the structure of the archival themes of the relatively recent French or Anglo-Saxon handbooks: It is not only a general archival theory and practice textbook, but also a textbook-like synthesis of Hungarian archival theory and history,

which, in addition to the many international examples, the necessary presentation of the theory and possible practice of archival studies and international standards, focuses primarily on the history of the Hungarian state, its institutional and administrative history and its established archival structure. The target audience is therefore basically archivists or other archival staff, or archivist students, or students in the archivist assistant OKJ programme who work or would like to work in archival institutions, archives or similar professional institutions in Hungary, or in corporate archives. The book therefore covers practically everything that an archivist (anywhere in the world) should know, but also, beyond that, specifically what an archivist working in Hungary in the 2010s needed to know in order to do his/her job effectively in the country of the creation of the book.

The first chapter, *Auxiliary Historical Sciences* presents the auxiliary sciences of history, the disciplines that support the work of the historian or other historical specialist, but are not or only partially independent. An archivist working with medieval or early modern records must, of course, know much more about typology of records,

Palaeography, Heraldry, Ssigillography, Chronology and Historical Geography than it is given in the first chapter of the handbook, since specialisation in these fields of history is the result of many years of study. However, as much as this book contains in a rather concise way, practically every single archivist should know about the auxiliary sciences of history, even if he or she will never work with documents from before the 1900s, and the chapter of about 60 pages can also serve as an excellent introduction for archivists or archivist-students who might later specialise in the processing and research of medieval or early modern documents.

The second chapter, the *History of the Governmental, Administrative and Judicial Institutions of Hungary* is the longest thematic unit of the manual with its approximately 200 pages, and also the most important, since in the course of document management the archivist is basically concerned with the history of the institutions that created the documents, and thus with the context in which the documents were created. The chapter has the great merit of not only presenting the history of the development of the institutions of the Hungarian state from the foundation of the state to the present

day, but also the history of economic, social, religious and political document-forming organisations and institutions, since the history of government and state administration is inseparable from both the history of the church (since the state and the church were not separated for a long time in Hungarian and European history) and the history of politics. For example, let us consider that in the days of the party-state, the only authorised and ruling political party was not formally a non-state body, but in fact it functioned as such and exercised considerable public power.

The third chapter, entitled *Hungarian Archival History and Archival Legislation* goes through the main stages of Hungarian archival history and attempts to place it – at least until 1949, the date of the consolidation of the socialist state order – in the wider context of European archival history. A very detailed description of the archival history and reforms of the socialist era is given in the same length as the development of Hungarian archival institutions between 1526 and 1949, and the sub-chapter points out that although the communist regime attempted to introduce the Soviet archival model, it fortunately did not fully implement it.



Although the formerly independent county archives were merged into the state archives structure and secret archives were introduced in many areas, the archives could remain under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and were not placed under the jurisdiction of the political police, as in other Soviet annexed states. It is an interesting historical fact that the archives of the state party were outside the state archives system and the development of the archives was essentially determined by political interests, but at the same time most archivists were able to keep their jobs, researchers were able to continue their research, albeit with limited access, and despite centralisation the Soviet model was only partially implemented. The chapter also describes in detail how the Hungarian archives sector and archival structure changed after 1995, and the historical part is immediately followed by the subchapter on archival law, which first provides a historical overview of the history of Hungarian archival legislation, and then presents and analyses in great detail the existing legislation, which was

codified after the regime change, mainly the 1995 Archives Act (Act LXVI of 1995).<sup>107</sup>

The fourth chapter, entitled *Document and Records Management* with its almost one hundred pages, outlines an excellent theoretical and historical overview of the process of document creation and management, introduces the reader to the rules of records management in the civil era, the great Hungarian records management reform of 1969, and the methods of records management used today, and emphasizes not only the specificities of records management in public bodies, but also the very diverse methods of corporate records management. This is followed by a detailed description of the document management process, which is obviously a process that can only be learnt in practice (reception, filing, designation of the administrator, disclosure, publication, removal from the archives and storage in archives), a description of the sorting and disposal of documents and their levels (basic, intermediate and piecemeal sorting and disposal), a description of the preparation of filing aids and a description of the process of transferring

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<sup>107</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99500066.tv>

documents from archives to archives. The chapter also describes the current Administrative Procedure Act (Act CXL of 2004 at the time when the book was written and edited),<sup>108</sup> which is essential for the performance of records management tasks, and the legal provisions on the protection of state secrets, which, in the case of the transfer of classified documents to archives, also affect the work of archivists dealing with documents of historical value, not only archivists and case managers working with living documents of administrative value.

The fifth chapter, called simply *Archival Studies* provides a really excellent theoretical basis for archival work, although the description, organisation and scrapping of documents in both archival and archival work can and should be learned primarily in practice. The chapter discusses the principle of pertinence in historical perspective, which basically means the principle of ordering documents according to their subject matter, and points out that between 1840 and 1900 the principle

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<sup>108</sup> The Act was Replaced by another Act on Administrative Procedure in 2016. See:

<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1600150.tv>

of provenance was finally adopted in archival theory and practice, according to which the starting point for the ordering and classification of archival material should be the place where the material is intended to be kept, and the material should not be separated from its organic context. As in the archival chapter, the archival chapter also discusses in great detail the ways and levels of organising archival records, the various hierarchical archival units (main group of records/section, group of records, fonds, classes, series, case file, individual document, etc., the levels of archival description in Hungarian archival practice), and the way in which they are organisms the methods and levels of culling and filing, the possibilities and rules for and researching archival records, and the tasks of archivists supporting research.

The sixth chapter, entitled *Preservation and Reprography* is a 90-page summary of the possible factors that can damage archival material and the procedures that can help to protect it from these, as well as the rules for the protection of archival material. Although it is not necessary for a practising archivist to be an expert in the field of preservation, it is essential to be familiar with the

basic preservation rules, as compliance with them may determine whether the written cultural heritage preserved in Hungarian archives is preserved intact. Reprography, the copying of archival documents to preserve the original material, also goes hand in hand with preservation. The chapter has the great virtue of not only dealing with the preservation and copying of traditional, mainly paper-based archives, but also, in the late 2000s, with the preservation of non-traditional media such as microfilm, photographic material, motion picture film, magnetic media and digital media, and also mentions the increasingly rapid growth of digitisation as a possible copying technique.

The final chapter, entitled *Archives and Archives Information Technology* is the seventh one, which gives the reader the best idea of what the archives and archivists of the future will be like, and of course it is also the chapter that, seven years after the writing of the book, can be considered partly outdated due to the rapid development of information technology and the constant changes in the current Hungarian legislation. What is certain is that the information revolution has opened up a whole new era and new horizons in the management of

documents and other media and the data they contain, and that both the theory and practice of librarianship and archival science are facing unprecedented opportunities and great challenges. The chapter introduces the reader to some of the electronic records management standards currently used in European and Anglo-Saxon archival practice, introduces the reader to the basics of database construction, digitisation and digital records management, and also contains outdated information, as the Hungarian archives have made huge strides in digital records management in the last seven years alone: For example, instead of the archival record-keeping software E-Archivum, about which the book writes, state archives are now using the Swiss-developed ScopeArchiv, the National Archives of Hungary and the City Archives of Budapest at the moment use the Tessela Preservica software for archiving digitalised and born-digital records and other archival materials, and in October 2012 the Hungarian National Archives were established through the integration of the Central Archives and the county archives, so – at least in the case of the state territorial general archives under the Ministry Culture and Innovation

– many things, including digital records management and archival records management have been standardised and specified in accordance with international standards of archival studies. The Electronic Archives Project was implemented between 2009 and 2013 with the support of the European Union, in the framework of which the Budapest City Archives and the Hungarian National Archives, as it is stated on the website of the National Archives, *‘are building electronic archival functions through their own archival systems, by connecting to a unified central infrastructure and the shared archival services operating as part of the Central Electronic Service System. The system(s) implemented since then include(s) both the management of registration and description data of paper-based traditional archival records, the management of mixed records (paper and electronic) and the tools and processing procedures necessary for the full management of electronic records.’*<sup>109</sup> So, in the last few years, Hungary has made enormous progress in the field of electronic records management, digitisation/digitalisation, en-masse electronic publication and digital searchability of archival records/documents – it is

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<sup>109</sup> [https://mnl.gov.hu/mnl/szkk/elektronikus\\_leveltar\\_projekt](https://mnl.gov.hu/mnl/szkk/elektronikus_leveltar_projekt)

enough if the author of this review cites his own article on Databases Online service of the National Archives of Hungary within the same book...

The Hungarian Archival Handbook and its chapter on archival Information Technology published in 2009 could necessarily not write about the huge international developments of digitisation which also fundamentally affected the Hungarian archival sector. Nevertheless, the book had already then played with the idea of the prospects that could be expected, and he was certainly right in that both the possibilities and the problems to be solved would be very far-reaching, and very heated but all the more fruitful debates could be expected in the field of Hungarian archival theory. The rapid expansion of digital technologies in both scientific information management and public administration is certainly a quick paradigm shift, and a relatively rapid paradigm shift in both theory and practice in the field of archives, and Hungarian archivists will have to respond to the challenges of the future, and they will certainly do so successfully. Although the editor-in-chief of the Handbook, Lajos Körmendy, retired Deputy Director of the Central Archives of Hungary, has also published a short handbook of



electronic records and archival Information Technology in 2017,<sup>110</sup> which could also be considered as a late supplement of the Handbook published in 2009, in fact, it does not make the revised edition of the Archival Handbook superfluous at all.

The Hungarian Archival Handbook published in 2009, together with its faults, shortcomings and now (of course, only slightly) outdated information content, is an excellent textbook, handbook and synthetic summary of a specific discipline, specific to a particular country, containing almost everything that practitioners of the profession of archival studies should at least know, or at least should have known. (We need not go into how incomplete the professional training of practising archivists sometimes is in reality, or how the work of archivists working in formally the same position may require very different competences.) It can be said that not only in the field of Hungarian archival theory and history, but also from an international perspective, a remarkable textbook synthesising the

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<sup>110</sup> Lajos Körmendy, *Elektronikus iratok és a levéltár*, OSZK MEK, Budapest, 2017.

<https://mek.oszk.hu/17600/17646/17646.pdf>

knowledge of the archival profession was published in 2009. And although about 80–90% of the work is still correct and current today, and we are talking about a handbook of excellent use both from a theoretical and practical point of view, the rapidly developing world, the changes in the relevant regulations and the Hungarian archival structure, as well as the rapid expansion of knowledge would justify the preparation of an improved, expanded and revised edition of the Hungarian Archival Handbook. Along with the acknowledgement, the book would also deserve a little renewal and expansion – in addition to updating the information on the changed state archival structure and its potential advantages and disadvantages, the Information Technology chapter of the handbook in particular would deserve a thorough supplement. The new edition could also include a chapter on archival sub-areas that were already missed by one of the previous reviewers of the book, the outstanding Hungarian archivist and historian Károly Kecskeméti, who wrote: the new edition could mention the training of archives and archives staff, its Hungarian characteristics and possible reform proposals (there have been and are such

reform proposals), the architectural requirements of archives buildings, the work of archives managers, and the budget of archives institutions.<sup>111</sup> This was only a subjective suggestion of an outstanding expert in 2009, but a comprehensive bibliography of the most relevant works on archival literature available in Hungarian and in Hungarian could really be added as an appendix to the future second edition of the handbook, in addition to the bibliography at the end of each chapter.

The author of the review, who is a practicing archivist himself and has learnt really much from the handbook, is also looking forward to the new, upgraded edition of the Hungarian Archival Handbook, which would meet with the challenges of the rapidly changing and digitising world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century...<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Károly Kecskeméti, *Levéltári Kézikönyv*, *Levéltári Szemle*, 2009/3, 68–74.

<sup>112</sup> Until 2023, the revised edition of the Hungarian Archival Handbook has not been published.



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