
ARGUMENT

On April 11, 1848, the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand I and in the same time Hungarian King under the name Ferdinand V, sanctioned thirty-one Hungarian laws.

An independent government, responsible to the Parliament, was established, which exercised the executive power together with the monarch. An annual Diet was to be held in Pest, which could not be dissolved by the monarch until the final accounts of the previous year and the budget for the following year had been approved. The electoral system introduced was strongly based on the principle of popular representation. The country, which had been torn apart after the Battle of Mohács, was reunited: Transylvania and Partium (ruled separately by the Habsburgs as a Great Principality) were returned to Hungary. Public taxation, the abolition of serfdom and establishing a program to adopt a modern Civil Code were all measures of modernization. The establishment of the principles of freedom of the press, the equal rights of accepted religions and the creation of the National Guard were also part of the legislative reform.

In his report of April 10, 1848, Lajos Kossuth wrote: “This is not all that would embrace the future of the whole nation, but the basis of our future development”. This was an indication that the laws were not perfect and that corrections were necessary, but that they would be the basis for future development.

The fall of the Revolution in 1849 wiped out many of the major innovations of the April Laws, but the content and spirit of these laws were revived at the Austrian-Hungarian Reconciliation (1867), and their impact proved long-lasting. The laws sanctioned on April 11, 1848 marked the end of the reform era and the birth of modern Hungary.

As the year 2023 marks the 175th anniversary of the sanctioning of the April Laws, the Legal History Subcommittee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Legal History Research Group (Hungarian Academy of Sciences/Loránd Eötvös University) and the Ferenc Mádl Institute of

Comparative Law have initiated and organized an international academic conference on 5 April 2023.

The conference aimed to examine the international context of the Hungarian reforms: what happened in 1848 in other parts of Europe, and the antecedents and consequences of the revolutionary movements of the mid-nineteenth century. This volume contains articles based on the papers presented at the conference. They are presented in the hope that examining the development and practical application of the ideas that shaped our world today is not only a task for legal historians, but also a matter of topicality.