Hungary’s Way Back to Europe
On a Bumpy Road
Ágnes Hargita

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Nomos
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No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Nomos or the author.
For my grandchildren: Samu, Zorka, Hédi and Mirkó
“The common Europe shall be created not only for the interests of free peoples, but also in order to be able to accept the Eastern peoples as well, who – after they have liberated themselves from the suppression that they are suffering from even today – may apply for admission and ask for our moral support. For many years we perceived with pain the ideological demarcation line which cut Europe into two. This was enforced by violence. In freedom it can, however, be obliterated. We think that everybody, who wants to join us in a reorganized community, is an organic part of the living Europe. We honour them for their bravery, faithfulness, and for their suffering and sacrifice. We have to show them an example with a united, brotherly Europe. Every step that we take in this direction will create new opportunities for them. They will need us in the gigantic task of readjustment. The European Community will have to create an atmosphere based on mutual understanding by respecting the differences. This will be the free basis of a fruitful and peaceful cooperation. It is the only way how a new, flourishing and independent Europe can come into being. Our task is to be ready.”

The above quotation from Robert Schuman – one of the most important “founding fathers” of the European integration – highlights his strategic thinking, the importance of Europe’s unity, the responsibility that he feels for it, and his realistic and deeply humanistic attitude expressed with words which are visionary and cautionary at the same time. In the basically bipolar world that came into being in the wake of WW2 there was no possibility for decades to realise this notion. The “velvet revolution” of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe led to the breakdown of the so-called socialist world order, and thus the time came to build up a “common Europe”.

My book is about the first phase of this process envisaged by Robert Schuman, and as part of this it seeks to give an account of the path taken by Hungary to join the EU. The book discusses the experience, which can help maintain the results of this process, and can even further develop them to achieve the objectives that the “founding fathers” set: to preserve peace in Europe, to improve the standard of living and way of life of its citizens, and to maintain the role that Europe plays in the economy and politics of the world.¹

¹ Robert Schuman (1886-1963) was a Christian Democratic politician. From 1919 on he was the representative of Lorraine in the French National Assembly for several decades, Prime Minister of France in 1947-48, then Minister for Foreign Affairs until January 1953, later Minister for Justice (1955-56) and President of the Euro-
pean Movement. In 1958 he was elected President of the European Parliament. During his term as Minister for Foreign Affairs he initiated the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community. In France Jean Monnet helped his initiative, whereas his German partner was Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. His other supporting partners in the process were: the Italian Alcide de Gasperi and the Belgian Paul-Henri Spaak. From the beginning Robert Schuman was preoccupied with the idea of the French-German reconciliation as the main instrument of creating a Europe without war.

Robert Schuman was born in Luxembourg as a German citizen, his father was from Lorraine, but due to historical events he became a German citizen. He took French citizenship when Alsace-Lorraine was reannexed to France. Due to his personal experience he was well aware of the complex nationality issues of Alsace-Lorraine and through this the fate of those who were forced to change States and citizenships. That sensitized him to the similar situation of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe – including Hungarians and that made him look for the opportunity to change these tragic situations. Also as a result of that he manifested special sensitivity, understanding and attention to the problems of Central Europe between the two world wars and following the Paris Peace Treaty. It was for this reason that he asked to be a member of the three delegations of the French National Assembly that visited Hungary for various purposes. That is how he met several leading personalities of the Hungary of those days. His last visit took place in 1937. To improve the situation in Central Europe the idea occurred to him to create a Danube Confederation. He continued to pay attention to that area even after WW2. He was interested in the situation and fate of the Carpathian Basin. He continued to sympathize with Hungarians and was in contact with the biggest Hungarian organisation in France. One of his friends, the book publisher L. Nagel (Nagel Lajos) of Hungarian origin put him in touch with Thomas Schreiber (Schreiber Tamás) – also of Hungarian origin – who edited the writings of Robert Schuman and compiled the volume For Europe. The first foreword was written by the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer. The motto that I have chosen for my book was found while Schuman’s notes were sorted out after his death, but subsequently it lapsed into oblivion for a long time. It was discovered in 2000, and was published in a study in Leuven on the 50th anniversary of the day upon which Robert Schuman announced his proposal for pooling the French and German steel industry (the Schuman Plan of 9 May 1950).

(Source: Gergely Fejérdy: "The forgotten relationship – Robert Schuman and Hungary" – a study published in the April 2004 issue of the Hungarian periodical Valóság (Reality). Gergely Fejérdy identified the 1st page of the November 1963 issue of the journal France Forum as the primary source of the quote.)
Recommendation

By December 2012 exactly ten years will have elapsed since the completion of the accession negotiations with the EU in Copenhagen, and it was eight years ago – on 1 May 2004 – that Hungary became a full member of the EU. It was a long and sometimes bumpy road that led to the accession. The time that has elapsed since then is shorter, but it already provides an opportunity for analysis. This analysis is carried out by the author, though a detailed identification and evaluation of all consequences of Hungary’s EU membership requires/will require a longer period of time.

The accession process has already given rise to several longer and shorter pieces of writings, but it would be difficult to compare them to the work in front of us. Mrs. Agnes Hargita transcends the traditional lines of division between genres. Her book is a personal chronicle and a matter-of-fact professional account of a highly experienced economist. The highlighting of everyday moments of life of a career – spanning almost five decades devoted to the external economic relations of Hungary, mainly to European integration – takes turns with the presentation of the history of the relationship between Hungary and the EU, and with the evaluation – dotted with subjective elements – of the Association Agreement, the accession talks, and of the first phase of Hungary’s EU membership. The chapter that draws up the balance sheet of the first period of Hungary’s EU membership with figures and facts facilitates the objective assessment of the Hungarian EU membership for the lay readers as well. It is certainly a respectable undertaking which fills up a gap and may provide rich material for researchers of generations to come, as well.

The author – who was one of the contributors to the different types of negotiations during over 15 years leading to Hungary’s EU membership – presents the process from her own perspective. By virtue of the almost uniquely complex character of the process this approach also means that despite the presentation of the huge amount of data, the great number of actors enough space remains for other contributors to add their own facts and new interpretations. Let us hope that one day these books will also see the light of day, but it is for sure that the work of Mrs. Agnes Hargita will
remain for long a useful source for readers, researchers, students interested in the topic, and the participants of the actual negotiations.

I have personally been dealing with European integration issues since 1991. In the 1995-2004 period I worked at the Hungarian Mission to the EU in Brussels (later Permanent Representation) as Secretary of the Accession negotiations (later as Antici diplomat) and I was close colleague of the author. So, I had the opportunity to experience the power of the ethos of the Hungarian negotiating team – basically independent from the political changes in the homeland – for advancing the negotiations – described by the author as “consensus arising from internal personnel conviction”. The reader will receive an authentic picture of all this, and the personal reminiscences portray really well some of the details of the “everyday moments” of the negotiations known only in a small circle even today, and the character and quantity of the workshop-like work in the EU Mission in Brussels. Another virtue of the book is that it documents the individual chapters of the negotiations, informs the reader on new interpretations, arguments, especially concerning chapters that directly belonged to the author.

The book also presents the fact well that amidst the unavoidable differences in positions and clashes of interests on certain issues between the actors on the side of the European Union, finally, the European Commission was the most effective driver of the whole enlargement process. Several proofs of that are presented in the content analysis of the topics, and in the description of the personal attitude of the majority of the affected EU officials. The book correctly shows the really enlargement-friendly attitude of the Swedish and Danish Presidencies, their successful activity, which indicates that smaller states also have an opportunity to shape the policy of the EU. Without their consistent efforts and unyielding conduct in the key moments the negotiations would most probably have lasted even longer. Less is said about the outstanding role of the General Secretariat of the Council and of the Enlargement Working Group of the Council, and in general about the very intensive and manifold coordination process, which, on the one hand, was conducted with the Member States, and on the other with the other candidate countries both in Brussels and in the capitals. But this could be the topic of a separate book on its own. The deepening, i.e. the development of the institutional system of the EU going on parallel with the enlargement of the EU – in strong interaction with it and partly providing one of its conditions – the transformation
of the EU system of institutions, the Amsterdam and the Nice Treaties, the European Convention, and later the creation of the Lisbon Treaty are also included in the book, though their deep analysis could not be subject of the book.

Hungary’s accession to the European Union is obviously a historic change for the whole of society, economy as well as for politics. Just like on other similar changes, posterity will pass a more precise judgement. The work of Mrs. Agnes Hargita is undoubtedly a historical document presenting the age, an important contribution to building and preserving collective memory, what is and what will be a common task and a joint achievement of all those who participated in that process. Several hundreds, if not thousands of professionals, public servants and politicians were involved in the country for longer or shorter periods of time, not forgetting the multitude of diplomats in the Member States and EU officials. They have all their own memories and stories. However, there were only few of them who saw and shaped the process in its entirety. Neither the picture, nor the Recommendation were complete without highlighting – here also as in the book - the personality of Endre Juhász, Chief Negotiator of the Association Agreement and of the Accession Treaty. He has been working as the Hungarian judge of the European Court of Justice since May 2004.

Finally I think that to conclude this short Recommendation and to give an idea of the spirit of the work, it would be difficult to find a more perceptive comment than the author’s own lines put down in the introduction: “The most important lesson is that to achieve our national goals it is always indispensable to accurately survey the domestic and international situation, to set the accurate goals that can be supported with arguments, to have the thorough knowledge of our own interests and to get acquainted with those of our partners, and to know with all details and thoroughly the domestic and international legal room for manoeuvre. This knowledge should go hand in hand with a negotiating technique, which is consistent, but ready for reasonable compromises. In the meantime the rational final limits of readiness for compromise should be gauged, and through identifying the interests of our partners we should be able to find allies… Our politicians should proceed in this spirit, and every Hungarian citizen should be trained for this from the time they go to school… The European Union is not only a community of interests, but a community of values as well, solidarity being its organic part. In the spirit of solidarity the Union helped and is helping the catching up of our country. Hungary had well
done in joining the EU, it has successfully fitted in the integration, and membership has no alternative from the perspective of the future either. The best possible utilization of the opportunities, however, requires continuous and circumspect work, strategic thinking and decision-making …"

Budapest, 17 March 2012

Dr. Tamás Szűcs
Ambassador
Head of the Representation
of the European Union in Hungary
Recommendation

Many say that a country becomes a “real” member of the European Union when it has already successfully been the rotating President of the Council. Indeed, we already know from our own experience that the tasks of Presidency pose almost superhuman challenges for the political leaders and public administration of the given Member State for at least a year. However, we should not forget – even in the wake of the successful Hungarian EU Presidency in 2011 – that the integration of Hungary into the EU was the result of a process lasting for 15 years, which was much more characterized by small steps transforming the framework of functioning of the country, than by spectacular, one-off events.

However, no comprehensive and historical work like the present one has been made until today about the long and trying accession process of Hungary, a work, which does not only discuss all the important moments of the preparation and of the accession negotiations in a factual manner, but also provides an insight into the working days of the process, introduces its most important actors, describes the environment and the atmosphere of the negotiations. This book by Mrs. Agnes Hargita is such a gap-filling basic work: factual, authentic and, at the same time it is a subjective chronicle of our accession to the EU.

This book is successfully mixing elements of different genres – offers a lasting experience for different kinds of readers. This is a reliable source of information, material for the scholar researching the legal, political process of the accession; a background material about the age for the historian, a colourful memoir for the average reader. But perhaps the most important virtue of the book is that it pays a worthy tribute to those thousands of people without whose individual and joint efforts the accession process – determining the fate of Hungary for a long term – could not have become successful.

Budapest, 5 June 2012

Enikő Győri
State Secretary for EU Affairs
Ministry for Foreign Affairs
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Introduction

I. I chose my career as an economist just a few weeks before I had to apply for admittance to university – with a sudden volte face. It was during the last months of my studies at Erzsébet Szilágyi Secondary School in Buda that I decided to go to the University of Economics in Budapest and to major in foreign trade. Before this for years I had toyed with the idea of choosing a scholar’s career: it was my cherished desire to major in a language and choose archaeology as a second major and later take up library studies as well. It was for that reason that I went to the Director of the Széchényi Library (National Library of Hungary), Mrs. Károlyné Nagy, who was pleased about my interest and asked me several questions to check the level of my knowledge. At the end of a long conversation she said that the Library would need new librarians, therefore she encouraged me to take up library studies. She asked me to go to see her after my entrance exam to the university, and proposed that I should go to the library to get to know the practical elements of the job as soon as possible. The way she received me suggested that it was more than an encouragement that everyone got who went to see her for information. Despite that I made a change.

My sudden change was caused by the fact that the Dean of the Faculty of Trade of the University of Economics held a briefing in our secondary school, and gave such an attractive image about the subjects of the foreign trade major and the opportunities after graduation that it made me think hard. I had been greatly interested in foreign languages since elementary school. I had good foundation in several languages also proven by secondary school leaving exams in English, French, Latin and Russian with flying colours. It was even a greater attraction that by using these languages I would be able to travel and see the world. The subjects of the entrance exam to the university – mathematics and history – did not pose any special difficulty for a Szilágyi Secondary School graduate. My written mathematics test was the only one on that day completed without a

2 There is a marble plaque on the wall of the National Széchényi Library eulogizing her activity.
single mistake. At the oral exam the examiners only asked questions that were not in the curriculum, the argument being that a Szilágyi Secondary School graduate should know the answer to these questions as well. So I took the first hurdle successfully, just like those in the university years, which I completed with a degree qualified as “excellent”. It was the mark four for the subject “scientific socialism “that deprived me of a degree of “summa cum laude”.

Nevertheless I did not opt for a career in foreign trade. Now being at the end of my working life, I feel that my dreams came true without exception, even more than I could imagine or hope for. I became one of those who were active and direct participants in shaping the new international economic relations of Hungary. I consider it as a unique opportunity and exceptional luck that I was able to participate in this unrepeatable and special process, which became the peak and closing act of my professional career. It was connected to the fifteen year momentous historic period between 1989 and 2004, in which our country out of its free will – after the fall of Communism – chose and realized its return to the political, security and economic system of the democratic Europe. That multi-layered process had several important stages. I was given the task to participate in the work, which resulted in our country’s becoming a member of the European Union (EU).

2. After WW2 both in Europe and in a wider circle in the world an important role was assigned to international organisations created to keep peace, promote democratic development and economic progress. It is not by accident that from the very first days of the change in the political regime in Hungary – as an important feature of returning to a democratic system and market economy – the intention appeared to become part of the Euro-Atlantic integration as soon as possible. As its practical implementation, Hungary had the objective to become a member of the European Communities and the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) as quickly as possible.

In history years, even decades hardly matter, but in human life even months can also be important, and half of a life time is a very long time. Nevertheless I feel as if the beginning were only yesterday, November 1989, when Sándor Meisel and me – as the new employees of the Ministry of Trade – being the total staff of the European Communities (EC) Section kept our fingers crossed that Hungary should be admitted into the General
Including Hungary into that system had a twofold significance. On the one hand it became possible for Hungarian goods at the border of the EEC to enjoy the same preferential treatment as their competitors from the developing countries, if the relevant quotas were not fully utilized. However, even that situation was a positive development for Hungary as it improved the opportunities to get to the EC market. On the other hand it was some kind of qualification as well, indicating how the EEC looked on Hungary.

Since then fifteen years had elapsed, which is not a long time from a historical perspective, and on 1 May 2004 Hungary became a member of the European Union: our representatives – as parties with equal rights – sit in the decision making bodies of the Union, in the European Council, in the Council of Ministers and in the European Parliament. The Hungarian colleagues took responsible positions exceeding our national quota among the leading officials of the European Commission based on their level of preparedness, successful professional and admission performance. Our European judges guard – enjoying appreciation and honour – the rule of law and legal compliance in the Courts of the European Union. Some people express indignation over the fifteen years of waiting time. As a direct contributor in the preparation and negotiating process I can say that we needed this preparation period, and I can add that the given process was not shorter for other countries with a similar level of development.

Preparation for the EU membership was also necessary because of a factor that is often left unmentioned. The Eastern and Western parts of Europe were separated for decades for political reasons. Prejudices were born on both sides. Thus the building of even modest new relations entailed difficult negotiations, because prejudices had to be eliminated first. This feeling that could also be called distrust was dissolved relatively soon among experts during the association negotiations. The accession, however, affected a much larger circle of people. We all had to understand that our partners also had their interests, and recognize also that we could rely on their solidarity at the same time, and they would receive our reasoned positions as partners. At the same time, our partners had to make...

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3 General System of Preferences: in professional circles it is abbreviated as GSP. The EEC developed that system for the developing countries to help some of their goods get into the market of the EEC with reduced duties or free of duty, in the framework of quotas or sometimes without quotas.
sure that the country that was an “enemy” yesterday, changed and it became ready and able to comply with its obligations undertaken for membership, it was ready to cooperate as a constructive partner and it was determined to act for the development of integration. This process also took time.

The fifteen years leading up to the EU membership were not spent with waiting “without doing anything”, but it was a period of gradual rapprochement, for which both parties made efforts. The road for Hungary was especially full of bumps, and required extraordinary efforts. Our country had to catch up with the requirements of an integration system in operation for several decades, at least to such an extent that with its accession it should not interfere with the operation of that system on the one hand, on the other hand it should create those conditions, which enable the country to make use of the advantages of the integration. The road consisted of several stages. On 1 January 1990 it started with a modest improvement of the EC market access. It continued with the conclusion of the Association Agreement4 which provided the conditions of free trade for all Hungarian industrial products on the markets of the EC according to a predefined schedule, and at the same time opened important opportunities for cooperation and progress in the economic and financial spheres, in education, in culture and for other areas. In the next stages of the association we achieved also that our agricultural products got the possibility to enter these markets with gradually increasing concessions. At the same time domestic preparation for membership started with the professional and financial support of the EU based on a detailed programme, containing the tasks and the deadlines. The accession negotiations started on 31 March 1998, parallel with the work in Hungary to implement the undertaken obligations according to an even stricter schedule. The negotiations ended on 13 December 2002 in Copenhagen. The next step was the wording of the Accession Treaty, the necessary approval procedures, and the control if Hungary implemented the tasks whose resolution it had undertaken by the date of accession. The Treaty was signed on 16 April 2003, and after this it was possible for the representatives of Hungary to participate as observers – that is with the right of consultation, but without

4 In its official name: Europe Agreement. During our work we normally used the term “Association Agreement”. This is the reason why the latter is used more often in my book than the Europe Agreement.
voting rights – in the work of the EU-institutions (European Council, Council of Ministers, European Parliament [EP] etc.). That marked the beginning of our learning how to work there, how to represent our interests as a member in the Union. We became a member of the European Union on 1 May 2004.

3. The EU membership for Hungary is a historic event in many ways: it determines our place in the world, assists our catching up with its developed democratic part, realises the dream of generations about freedom, democracy, welfare and fair competition. EU membership is the result of a responsible team-work of Hungarian politicians and professionals cooperating with each other and heavily striving to achieve the same goal: the EU membership. For the public opinion the process leading to EU membership – because of its intricate nature and complexity – was a series of hardly perceptible events. The short news items in the press and the statements of politicians provided little insight into the process. The negotiations – with changing intensity and a continuously increasing number of professional tasks, but still leading to momentous result – deserve also a chronicle about the details of the process, its turning points, linchpins and pitfalls, and the attitude of both sides to the talks.

Out of the several hundreds of participants of the fifteen-year negotiating process leading to the EU membership only four of us remained in the front-line throughout: Ambassador, Chief Negotiator and later on Minister for European Affairs Endre Juhász, who is currently European Judge nominated by the Hungarian Government, Secretary of State and Ambassador Péter Gottfried, currently Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister on European Affairs, Deputy State Secretary and Ambassador Egon Dienes-Oehm, currently judge of the Constitutional Court, and the author of this book, former Director-General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Councillor and, Head of Section at the Brussels Mission of Hungary to the EU and at present a silent observer who evaluates the events of the Hungarian-EU relationship and transmits the experience in writing and by giving university and other type of lectures. Out of the four of us I was born first, so I retired the earliest. It was for this reason that I have the opportunity to be the first to write this chronicle. Fate wanted that during the accession negotiations I worked in Brussels as a close colleague of Ambassador Endre Juhász, Chief Negotiator and I participated in almost all rounds of negotiations conducted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs or by their Deputies (i.e., meetings of Deputies were meetings of Chief Negotiators as called in a simplified way, with the Chief Negotiator of the