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## **PROPOSITIONS**

of the PhD Dissertation

*Chapters from the History of British-Hungarian Diplomatic  
Relations (1979-1984)*

by Gábor Török

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Budapest, Hungary

2015

## *I. Prelude to research, issues posed*

Anglo-Hungarian diplomatic relations came to the forefront of my attention as an English-History student during the year of 2004. Margaret Thatcher's 1984 visit was the central event on the basis of which I started research on bilateral relations during the "*Iron Lady's*" tenure. At that time it seemed that this was the biggest diplomatic event in relations between the two countries in recent times. (Partly) because of the relatively short time which has passed since, diplomatic relations during this period are a kind of "white spot" on the map of historiography, which legitimised my choice of topic. My 2005 thesis was prepared by examining Hungarian primary sources and covered Anglo-Hungarian relations under Margaret Thatcher's tenure at Downing Street until the year of 1984, or more precisely up to the British PM's visit to Hungary. My research continued under the wings of the Doctoral School of History. My topic remained unchanged, the main reason being that the central questions/problems were only partly or deficiently answered due to the fact that primary sources were only available from the Hungarian side. Getting acquainted with British primary sources (see research methodology) showed me a new direction, along with providing compact and quality information. Due to this new wave of information and content constraints the Prime Minister's visit became the cut-off period for my research and thus my dissertation. The central question of Anglo-Hungarian relations during 1979-1984 is how important an event was the Downing Street 10 tenant's visit to Budapest. Diplomatic relations between Hungary and the United Kingdom reached their apex during this period, but this is only part of the story. The fact that the head of government of one of the most powerful – nuclear armed – member's of the Western Alliance paid a visit to Hungary, a member of the Socialist alliance, during one of the most tense periods of the "Second Cold War" or "Small Cold War", also proves the topic's credibility from a historiography viewpoint. Maybe even more fascinating is that not only one of NATO's most powerful prime minister's honoured Budapest with a visit, but it was also this same country's characteristically and vociferously anti-communist, first female prime minister who departed for Hungary. A nice cover page for the events is provided by the honey and spices purchased and paid for in Hungarian forints at the Central Market.

From a historian's viewpoint the main issue naturally is what causes lead to the visit, since such grand events do not tend to organically develop by themselves without any antecedents.

We cannot find a completely satisfying explanation for the British Prime Minister's visit by starting out from the relations of the two countries during the 20th century. Events in the 1950's, the Standard-case and expulsion of diplomats following from it, the closing of the British Council's Budapest office, all-in-all the Rákosi leadership's irrationally anti-English policies – mainly aimed at exterminating the Social Democratic Party – pitted relations to an all-time low. One of Great Britain's most inglorious events of the 20th century, the Suez invasion chronologically coincided with events of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence. The fact that London originally did not even bother to analyse the events and along with her allies continued the hardly comprehensible Egypt campaign, shows that the United Kingdom had far more important matters to deal with, than what was unfolding in Hungary. In this period the lack of priority for Hungarian and Eastern European events was a rule with few exceptions. After the II. World War the British Empire, formerly ruling over more than a quarter of the world – a lot less than that after 1947 – had to realise that she no longer had the power to significantly influence events in the Eastern part of the Old Continent.

This was not always the case during the 20th century, seeing that England played an important role during some of Hungary's most critical periods, and in those times Hungarians always had an eye on London. The United Kingdom should share a rightful portion of the blame for the Treaty of Trianon as during the Paris Peace Conference she did not stop France and the soon-to-be formed Little Entente from dominating proceedings, what is more with a passive and sometimes active role Britain sanctified the whole procedure. Having said that after the Treaty Great Britain defended Hungary on several occasions to balance the Little Entente whom had the support of the French. During the 1930's England's waning global influence showed up as in the wake of Rome and Berlin influence London could not provide an alternative option for Budapest. Significant Hungarian political groups sought English help before and during the II. World War especially from 1941 onwards. The so-called anglophile Hungarian political forces presented a wide political spectrum. But due to the Red Army's march and the Balkans landing being forever postponed, there could be no powers, including the English, who could stop Hungary from becoming part of the Soviet sphere of interest. The Standard-case and the relative British disinterest shown during 1956 was a symptom of the underlying fact that Hungary and Eastern Europe was basically only a red spot on a world map where London's influence was ever decreasing. Relations between Hungary and England

virtually ceased to exist in the period after 1956. Trade withered away during Rákosi's tenure and this did not change in the first few years of Kádár's vengeance.

During the start of the 1960s there was a slight wind of change in Great Britain. Loss of the world empire became so obvious that first and foremost Western Europe, and to a smaller extent Eastern Europe bore more and more importance to the English. The new phase of relations between Great Britain and Europe did not start smoothly due to the veto exercised by French President Charles De Gaulle, who blocked the United Kingdom's access to the EEC.

On the other hand Anglo-Hungarian relations "rebooted" in 1964 when Edward du Cann, Minister of State at the Board of Trade toured Eastern Europe, including Hungary. János Péter Hungarian Foreign Minister visited London in 1965, which started a period of frequently exercised, relatively high level diplomatic relations. Economic relations also began to develop during the 1970's at the peak of *détente*. In the summer of 1975 Secretary of State, James Callaghan visited the Hungarian capital.

Despite the fact that Callaghan became Her Majesty's Prime Minister a year later, the visit to Budapest did not show Hungary's priority in Britain's Eastern Europe policy. A good example of this is that during this period, Anglo-Romanian relations were realised at the highest level. World opinion of Nicolae Ceausescu was of course different in 1975 than in 1989 but an answer is missing to the question of why the British Prime Minister celebrated human rights being exercised in Romania and not Hungary. The timid-looking, hardly systematic Eastern Europe policies of the United Kingdom could well be summarised by Peter Carrington, later to-be Conservative Secretary of State's comments on British policies (or the lack of) in Suez. "*Nobody seemed to have a consistent idea of what the whole thing was intended to achieve.*"

Whilst events leading up to 1979 cannot be completely ignored, they do not provide a guideline as to how Anglo-Hungarian relations would proceed under the new Conservative government formed in 1979, with the leadership of a Prime Minister who emphatically denounced Communism. With the knowledge in our grasp, we know that events up until 1979 do not show how and why relations reached their peak in the period after that year. What were the *real* causes that lead to this apex in relations? How did Hungary reach the top of Eastern European tree? What *really* happened between 1979 and 1984? Many British Secretaries of State, many English ambassadors, many diplomatic missions, a near Hungarian bankruptcy, József Marjai, a secret seminar, Geoffrey Howe, a preparation that would be fitting for a soap-

opera in the middle of the Small Cold War. These key words and themes raise questions that demand answers to be found.

Although during the composition of my thesis I came much closer to answering the main questions thanks to the Hungarian primary sources, the central untackled issue was why the raising of relations to the highest level was desired from the Conservative government's viewpoint, at a time when a vociferously anti-communist politician stood at the helm of government. These issues could not be completely solved thanks to the Hungarian primary sources and it soon became clear that the English primary documents held the key. The British Isles documents released at the latter stages of my research (see II. Research Methodology) broadened my horizon and historical perspective for several reasons. Material born in Budapest, with a slight exaggeration, could only show one side of the coin. The fuller picture being revealed after analysing documents written in both countries showed a relatively coherent whole.

Besides these facts it must be pointed out that the geopolitical situations of the United Kingdom and Hungary obviously differ from each other. So to utilise the dangerous tool of oversimplification, it can be pointed out that the main tendencies in Anglo-Hungarian relations have been dictated by London, not Budapest. This was the case in 1919, in 1920, and in the majority of the 1930's and 1940's. Naturally, there were periods which brought exceptions, for example when Mátyás Rákosi (and the Soviet Union supporting him) determined the main tendencies in bilateral relations. Having said that the Standard-case is a good example showing the fact that it is the greater powers that pull all the strings. (For example Edgar Sanders was released due changes in the international situation and Soviet politics). So the country with the greater political influence by default possesses the materials which bring us closer to finding the answers, rather than the documents of the country with the smaller influence on events. I attempted to answer the most critical issues posed and written in this section with the use of methodology elaborated on in the next section below.

## *II. Research Methodology*

Analysis of the KÜM TŰK (Secret Documents of the Foreign Ministry) documents from the National Archives of Hungary, Nationwide Archives section (former name: Hungarian Nationwide Archives) that have been opened up for research comprise one of the pillars of my work. During the compilation of my dissertation I examined and consistently utilised the KÜM TŰK papers ranging from 1979-1984. Due to reasons elaborated on below the material I read between 1985 and 1990 may provide help with my future work. My carried-out tasks in the archives also meant analysing the relevant minutes of the Political Committee and Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (HSWP).

Two major Hungarian language pieces appeared during my research period with relevance to my topic. These delve into Anglo-Hungarian relations during the 1980's. Lajos Arday's book titled "*The United Kingdom and Hungary, Great Britain and Anglo-Hungarian Relations in the 20th Century*" mainly compiles articles written prior to 1990. The book thoroughly examines the diplomatic relations of the two countries until the end of the 1970's. At the same time Arday delves into several topics involving Margaret Thatcher's time in power. The author partly looks into Anglo-Hungarian bilateral relations during the 1980's through smallish articles. Arday's works provided smaller assistance in regards to the 1980's due to the fact that they were written before 1990.

The two peaks of diplomatic relations between Hungary and Great Britain during the period I researched were Margaret Thatcher's visit to Hungary in February 1984 and the return visit made by Kádár János to England in October 1985. Géza M. Szebeni analysed the trips made by the two leaders in his work "*Kádár and the Iron Lady*". This appeared in two parts in 2009 and 2010. This appearance occurred 4 and 5 years after my thesis which had utilised Hungarian sources. M. Szebeni used all available Hungarian sources for his works covering the two diplomatic summits. By mainly utilising the Hungarian Nationwide Archives KÜM TŰK documents the author summarised the Thatcher and Kádár trips (the latter did not form part of my 2005 thesis and my current dissertation) along with the domestic politics prelude in a precise, professional historian manner.

On the other hand Géza M. Szebeni's articles did not show the unearthing of British primary sources. This is not by accident, as London papers regarding the period have a 30 year

moratorium restricting them. So in 2009, these could not be used to analyse the 1984-1985 years. Some leeway is provided by the “*Freedom of Information Act*” of 2000 as it allows certain documents to be made available to the public. If these documents do not harm public, national or other interests, they can be opened on specific requests. Requests are adjudicated by the given English authorities.

In 2009, I contacted Mr. Chris Collins from the Margaret Thatcher Foundation. With his friendly and generous assistance I got access to relevant primary documents made open to the public thanks to such “*Freedom of Information*” requests. Material from the British Isles shed completely new light on certain questions and thus the advice of Mr. Collins played a crucial role in a process, the consequence of which I could delve deeper into English documents.

Searching for further answers I wrote “*Freedom of Information*” requests myself to the British authorities, most which received an affirmative answer. There was occasionally a negative answer, or at least no material could be found regarding my request. On top of this, some of the documents had dark spots on them shading out certain information but this did not influence the overall picture. By the time my research reached the final stage, new material became open to the public, thanks mainly to the Margaret Thatcher Foundation website. I could utilise these materials before finishing off my dissertation, the main, final direction of which could be seen after analysing English documents. My aim was to present Anglo-Hungarian relations during the period in question mainly based on examining primary London sources, due to the constraints in attaining this material there is a bigger chance that a historical review of their content could potentially mean new information to the readers. All of the reasons above – namely the fact that my thesis was based on Hungarian sources, Arday and to a greater extent M. Szebeni had already touched on the Thatcher visit based exclusively on Hungarian sources – resulted in the fact that most of my propositions came to being as a result of the English primary sources and my dissertation was compiled with the help of this material.

Due to time and form constraints, after assessing and summing up the primary sources, the chronological frame of my topic needed to be curtailed. During this process I arrived at the ending point mentioned in section I (Thatcher visit in 1984) and the content structure of “*Chapters From the History of British-Hungarian Diplomatic Relations (1979-1984)*” was also finalised. My dissertation wishes to present interesting aspects of bilateral relations under “*The Iron Lady*” up until Margaret Thatcher’s visit in 1984, because after assessing all the material at hand I came to the conclusion that the Prime Minister’s visit meant a sharp border,

a turning point in the history of both Anglo-Hungarian and British-East-European relations (See section III). The other main reason for this curtailment is that primary English documents relating to events up until 1990 will most probably only likely to be opened to the public up until the year 2020.

Despite having to curtail the dissertation's time frame, it is important to note that my work could not possibly present the whole picture of British-Hungarian relations between 1979-1984 (let alone the period of 1979-90, Margaret Thatcher's three terms at the helm). The examined sources showed that discussing notable interesting details of certain chapters lying within this period completely saturates the boundaries of the dissertation. Hence the primary goal of my work is to present the main points of interest in diplomatic bilateral relations in the period of 1979-1984, to which the English – recently opened formerly declassified – sources shed light on. These are events which lead to answers to questions posed and issues raised in section I above. During the compilation of my work, in the interests of showing the whole picture, naturally the aid of all the previously mentioned Hungarian primary sources (Hungarian National Archives KÜM TÜK, Political Committee and Central Committee of HSWP material) and secondary English and Hungarian sources were utilised.

Regarding my secondary sources, Oxford professor Archie Brown's article was of outstanding value. His work titled "*The Change to Engagement in Britain's Cold War Policy: The Origins of the Thatcher-Gorbachev Relationship*" thoroughly describes a 1983 secret seminar, which was held at the Prime Minister's summer residence. Margaret Thatcher, Soviet specialists invited by her, prominent players of her Cabinet and members of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) met at a seminar where for the first time Thatcher showed genuine interest in Eastern Europe. Archie Brown wrote a comprehensive article on the seminar, which amongst others includes a chronology of events there, but he also played a crucial role in unearthing events with his "*Freedom of Information*" requests, the consequence of which British authorities opened up previously classified key documents of the seminar. These documents were made public thanks to the Margaret Thatcher Foundation on its website. Without this chain of events and these primary documents being made public, elaborate discussion of this key meeting in Anglo-Hungarian relations would probably have to have waited until 2014. What is more the Soviet expert Brown participated at the seminar as an invited guest and partly thanks to this, he could reconstruct events with the help of most of the personnel present at the event.



As far as English secondary literature is concerned, extremely valuable help was provided thanks to memoirs written by main political players of the examined period. Works of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Foreign Secretaries Peter Carrington, Francis Pym and Geoffrey Howe provide a quite bias viewpoint thanks to the specialities of the genre, but with appropriate “source critique” their importance is almost up there with the primary sources.

The same could be said of interviews with political players of the time. In certain parts of interviews, Richard Parsons (Budapest Ambassador from 1976-1979), John Coles (Margaret Thatcher’s Private Secretary), Charles Powell (Margaret Thatcher’s Private Secretary), Bryan Cartledge (Budapest Ambassador 1980-1983) provide insight into their experience and involvement with Hungary.

Schöpflin György or George Schopflin is given a mention amongst the English participants. In the period examined in my dissertation, as a University professor he served as an adviser to Thatcher. Currently known for his political role, the historian honoured me with an interview in a very friendly environment on September 17 2009, after which a new spectrum opened up for me.

The Margaret Thatcher Foundation website’s role regarding primary sources has been mentioned. On top of the extremely large document database, vital basic information can be found on the website – amongst many others – regarding Margaret Thatcher’s political career and her achievements.

As far as traditional British secondary literature is concerned, it was mainly two comprehensive article collections which gave a guiding direction. Inside the compilations “*Foreign Policy Under Thatcher*”, edited by Peter Byrd and “*Soviet-British Relations since the 1970s*” edited by Alex Pravda and J.S. Duncan it was works from one of the biggest British Eastern-European experts, Michael Clarke which were of the greatest relevance to me. To put it mildly, Margaret Thatcher is not judged unanimously by British historians. Hugo Young’s Thatcher biography provided me with a view of someone who did not judge the western world’s first head of government positively overall, yet Young presented his outlook in a historian-like, professional manner.

Relevant Hungarian secondary literature, apart from the aforementioned works of Lajos Arday and Géza M. Szebeni came through pieces written by Endre Aczél, Rezső Bányász and Tamás Magyarics. In his pre-1990 articles Endre Aczél primarily examines British domestic politics and not Anglo-Hungarian or English-Eastern-European relations. For some time Rezső Bányász, former London ambassador’s books provided the most detailed account’s of

the British Prime Minister's visit. His work from 1993 "*Material missing from the ciphers*" is rich in behind the scenes events from his diplomatic service years, including his stint in the British capital. His 1988 book titled, "*Downing Street 10. Prime Ministers from the Second World War until the Battle of the Falklands*" was written in the old system, yet political history gains a greater emphasis here and thus from this perspective it is more valuable than his 1993 work. Bányász wrote a separate chapter on Thatcher's trip to Budapest. The former ambassador could not and did not give account of the primary sources of which he partly wrote himself and ones which, according to my opinion were oddly, written in a more interesting way than his books. A comprehensive type overview article written by Tamás Magyarics, titled "*Great Britain's Central-Europe Policy from 1918 until Today*" partly covers Anglo-Hungarian relations after 1984, but the author wrote little about Margaret Thatcher's 1984 visit or the years leading up to the event.

Because of the relatively small mass of secondary literature and its lack of utilising English material due to them still being encrypted, along with all the reasons above strongly motivated the process where "*ad fontes*" became the main principle of my dissertation. Due to all of the reasons above this credo of reaching back to primary sources, in my work more-or-less means a principle of reaching back to British sources of this kind.

In summary, my research methodology and compass directing the dissertation came to fruition during the research years. Secondary literature described above which hardly utilised English primary sources in the period under scrutiny meant my placing these at the forefront. With the aid of these I attempted to examine the process and trends that took place in Anglo-Hungarian relations under Margaret Thatcher, where relations gradually grew to a level where the British gave Hungary special status. Thus in the process one of the western world's leading politicians visited Budapest. In my opinion the period placed under the microscope here can only exclusively be understood in its full depth through sources created in Great Britain. Without materials of this kind, the grand picture would only have been a partial one for me.

### *III. New results in the dissertation*

In the points below I will present my propositions, following the order of my dissertation's chapters and chronology where possible.

1. Whilst Anglo-Hungarian relations developed during the course of the 1970's, especially in the field of trade, the United Kingdom's Eastern Europe policies showed great inconsistencies during this decade, on the basis of which it was far from decided or planned that Hungary would soon be Great Britain's most important partner in the region. A good example of this is that in 1975 Prime Minister Harold Wilson visited Bucharest and not Budapest. Wilson emphasised the importance of human rights with Nicolae Ceausescu and not János Kádár. Margaret Thatcher also visited Romania twice as Secretary for Education and as an opposition MP, yet she never visited Hungary during this same period. Examples above are symptoms which prove that during the 1970's Budapest was far from the most interesting destination in the region for London. I believe all this proves the special importance of Anglo-Hungarian bilateral relations under Margaret Thatcher's tenure, since in this period Hungary unambiguously became (for a while) the most important Eastern European partner for politicians in the United Kingdom. All this is especially interesting in light of Margaret Thatcher's political life prior to her becoming Prime Minister.
2. In his farewell letter as ambassador to Budapest in 1979, Richard Parsons wrote a manifesto of sorts in regards to policies towards Hungary. In his letter, full of praise but remaining objective at the same time, he tries to present why and how Hungary could become important to the English. According to Parsons' chain of thought it would be too dangerous to try to destabilise the region, but the challenge has to be taken up in ideology, because the western lifestyle is attractive to people living under totalitarian systems. According to the ambassador, the East should be given as much exposure as possible to the western way of thinking because in the long term western lifestyle is in a more favourable position. Whether he meant it or not, Richard Parsons

provided the FCO with a document out of which several ideas were realised. According to my opinion his thoughts could be of potential interest in the context of British-Hungarian-, and most probably in East-West relations too, due (amongst others) to the fact that it was all put to paper in 1979.

3. The first Thatcher government's foreign policy or at least its Eastern Europe policy cannot be understood without its peculiar nature, the end result of which was that bilateral relations under the "*Iron Lady*" gradually grew in intensity despite the fact that this was not the specific desire of the Prime Minister herself. The head of government concentrated on domestic politics and basically allocated this segment to the Foreign Office, despite the fact that this part of the government, including the Foreign Secretary did not have the full backing of the Prime Minister. Peter Carrington to a certain extent and Francis Pym especially interpreted several questions in a totally different manner, which came mainly as a result of the difference in personality between the Prime Minister and the two Foreign Secretaries. Anglo-Hungarian relations slowly but surely started growing in stature under the first Thatcher term in office which was possible despite the fact that the "*Iron Lady*" showed almost complete indifference to the issue. This was possible because the two Conservative leaders of the FCO would like to have increased the intensity in relations. In my opinion this paradox or issue, which is crucial to Anglo-Hungarian relations, can only be understood by delving deeply into and understanding the relationship between the FCO and the Prime Minister.
  
4. Peter Carrington's visit to Hungary was a prominent step in the road to development of bilateral relations. First of all, the leader of the FCO visited Budapest in autumn 1980; not even 12 months had passed since NATO's famous dual-track decision in December 1979. or the Soviet Union's Afghanistan intervention in the same month. So the visit was executed in one of the most important periods of the Cold War, or in a narrower context, the "Small Cold War". The fact that the openly anti-détente Margaret Thatcher government's Foreign Secretary visited a country behind the Iron Curtain is in itself a noteworthy episode in the new chapter of relations. If we add the fact that inside the United Kingdom FCO documents there is a big resentment towards Hungarian Foreign Secretary Frigyes Puja (the Foreign Secretary's trip was in danger

because of this), then this factor increases the value of Carrington's visit even further. Therefore I believe Peter Carrington's days in Hungary were an important if not integral event in the process leading up to the Margaret Thatcher visit.

5. The Frigyes Puja visit to London in January 1982 was also a critical event in relations between the two countries. At first sight it seems that the trip was just a formal reciprocation of the British counterpart. After closer examination though we can see that Peter Carrington would have liked to have met Puja on three occasions during his trip, which showed the prominence of the event. Whilst analysing this diplomatic event we cannot go by the fact that due to the African disappearance of her son, Margaret Thatcher could not fulfil the commitment and obligation of a meeting with Frigyes Puja. We know from the British sources that the disappearance and not some other reasons were behind the meeting being cancelled, the result of which could have significantly influenced the Prime Minister's opinion of Hungary, either for or against. Due to this according to my opinion, the Hungarian Foreign Minister's trip to England with all its events and non-events influenced the outcome of further proceedings of diplomatic relations.
6. Further events in 1982 also determined the Thatcher trip and development graphs of diplomatic relations. At this time, senior FCO members Julian Bullard and Malcolm Rifkind showed an especially high interest and friendship towards Hungary. They both played a role in the event where new Foreign Secretary Francis Pym wrote a letter to the Treasurer where he requested further financial help for Hungary. The most important bilateral chain of events in the early 1980's was probably Great Britain's support for Hungary's accession to the IMF in 1982. British banks and financial institutions played a critical role in securing certain loans which meant a lifeline for Hungary. I believe, the events of 1982 which can be best understood through British primary sources, are paramount in understanding the breakthrough year of 1983.
7. The most important diplomatic event of the first half of 1983 was the March trip to London made by Vice Prime Minister of Hungary, József Marjai. The excellently planned visit (including good planning from the Hungarian side) bears great importance despite the fact that the Vice-President of the Council of Ministers

virtually left the British capital with empty hands. This is because the March visit was the first occasion where the British Prime Minister could meet a Hungarian politician in a prominent position. According to London decrypted summaries, the English thought Marjai was interesting, which may sound strange to Hungarian ears. What is even more important than this is that Margaret Thatcher with her vociferous anti-communist reputation had an emphatically positive view of the meeting with the Hungarian politician during and after the meeting. The main reason for this was according to her opinion Marjai's thoughts "*could have been made in one of my own speeches*". This line is not only written in primary sources of the time but also in Thatcher's 1993 memoirs depicting her career as role of Prime Minister. This cannot be disregarded in knowing that getting a mention in the book is itself a noteworthy achievement, to get in there with only positive adjectives and thoughts surrounding the given person is something that was a bridge too far for most politicians, including Ronald Reagan, who was so dear to Thatcher. József Marjai's visit, according to my opinion, bears great significance for the following reasons:

- a, The first occasion where Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher met a Hungarian politician on a higher level produced a positive result surpassing all expectations.
- b, The exchange of views was the first event where the Prime Minister paid unambiguous attention to Hungary. We have to evaluate this with high value seeing that this first experience was unanimously positive, along with the notion that the Downing Street 10 tenant did not always shun personal feelings.
- c, The Marjai-Thatcher meeting gave great impetus to bilateral relations, which should be highlighted, amongst others because of the upcoming Chequers seminar.
- d. Without the Marjai-Thatcher meeting in March 1983. it is not certain that Thatcher would have visited Budapest, because up until this point the "*Iron Lady*" had shown minimal interest in Hungary.

A less successful or unsuccessful meeting with Marjai could have meant that diplomatic relations might not have taken such a positive turn. Due to this József Marjai – completely independently from his political career up to this point and from this point onwards – played a main role in moving British-Hungarian relations in a forward direction.

8. The secret seminar, which took place in September 8-9, 1983 at Chequers, the Prime Minister's summer residence, was an outstanding event in the history of British-Soviet and Great Britain-Eastern European relations. It was here where the United Kingdom decided that it would open towards the Eastern part of the Continent, with the Prime Minister's participation. These facts are known since Archie Brown's aforementioned article, just like the notion that Hungary played a central role at the secret meeting. Having said that, Budapest received such favourable judgement here, that the seminar cannot be responsible for this alone. In other words, it was not the Chequers seminar (alone) which brought a change in Anglo-Hungarian relations in itself but the events gathering in the years preceding the meeting. It was mainly the FCO opinion and experience which had been brewing over the years that resulted in Hungary playing such a pivotal role at the September 1983 secret seminar. This opinion is a new perspective because the Prime Minister and many participants generally understated the role that the FCO played at the meeting, whilst overstating the role of the invited experts. In my opinion the FCO played a dominant role in the forming of events and its results even if their weight was not rated by, amongst others, Margaret Thatcher. Because of this, without the positive Anglo-Hungarian bilateral events under Thatcher's first tenure and the FCO's general view of Hungary, the defining Chequers Seminar could have turned out differently, which would have had a big effect on the future of relations.
  
9. Geoffrey Howe's appointment as Foreign Secretary was an important moment in the British change of attitude to Eastern Europe. British media used the term "*Howe Ostpolitik*" to coin Great Britain's growth in Eastern-European activity. The term "*Howe Ostpolitik*" over exaggerates, just as Margaret Thatcher overstated her – and her advisor's – role in bringing about the change in attitude. Cooperation resulted in the decisions of Chequers and the Foreign Secretary played a main role in the synthesising process. According to my opinion Geoffrey Howe's most important contribution to the opening politics sanctioned by the Chequers seminar, was that he played a sort of mediating role between Margaret Thatcher and the external experts invited by her, and he played this role with the FCO apparatus as well, who had looked upon the external experts with little interest. At this particular period Thatcher still fully trusted Howe, who could successfully mediate the knowledge of the FCO he

lead towards his Prime Minister, even though knowing the differences between Thatcher and the FCO. What is more Howe reacted positively to the invited experts despite knowing the differences between them and the FCO. By accepting all three major participants (Thatcher and her Private Secretaries, the invited experts, the FCO), by compiling his diplomatic memo's he created or at least helped create a working atmosphere where decisions could be made with a consensus. This agreement could be seen to be one where the Prime Minister could be rest assured that the main guidelines were created by her, without the help of the FCO, whom she did not rate. According to my opinion the new Foreign Secretary's achievements of this kind need to be emphasised when discussing the British policies towards Hungary after September 1983.

10. Geoffrey Howe paid a visit to Budapest in September 1983. The Korean Airlines airplane was shot down by the Soviets at the start of this very month and key players of NATO planned to vote on Western European deployment of USA missiles this very season. So, in his first trip outside the NATO alliance, Howe visited Hungary at a time when international opinion was focusing on one of the most critical periods of the "Small Cold War". On top of this it was paramount that Howe presented a cool, calm and restrained stature in Budapest. He did not get involved in heated debates with the Hungarian leadership, including Kádár and the new Foreign Minister, Péter Várkonyi, even though both Hungarian politicians tried to defend something that was not defensible, namely the Soviets shooting down the Korean aircraft. Perhaps an even more important moment came when in front of Her Majesty's Government Cabinet; Howe did not report on the negative side of Hungary's politicians but instead attempted to present the Budapest leaders in a favourable light. Margaret Thatcher's growing positive interest in Hungary could be maintained in this manner. According to my opinion Howe's steps, not just his trip to Budapest, but also his conduct in the Hungarian capital and after returning from there supremely paved way for a potential trip by the Prime Minister.

11. Due to tensions in multilateral relations the Soviets would like to have blocked the Margaret Thatcher trip announced in autumn of 1983. In the "debate" on the issue, Hungarian leaders, superbly equipped with speaking in contradictions and



incomprehensible sentences argued for and against the visit taking place. Whilst the Hungarian go-ahead was provided, throughout the process the British had great expectations of Prime Minister Thatcher's first trip behind the Iron Curtain. Several interesting items appear in London's preparation material, such as the English plan for Thatcher to discuss the potential German unification (and its problematic nature) with János Kádár. Knowing that at this time it was the turn of 1983/1984 and the end of the Cold War seemed rather distant, potential raising of the topic could seem sensational to today's readers, knowing that German unification was the Cold War's central issue. According to my opinion, the adventurous topics appearing in the decrypted files prove that London was very serious about the upcoming Hungary visit and did not mean that to be a mere PR trip.

12. According to the meeting notes, Margaret Thatcher presented an incredibly calm and restrained style in Budapest. In her exchange of thoughts with János Kádár and György Lázár it seemed that the side of the "*Iron Lady*" who had previously shaken the basic principles of *détente* in such a big manner had "stayed home". The English Prime Minister had gone to the capital to open up relations and not to stir conflicts, so her conflict-avoiding attitude was mainly a tactical one. At the same time it must be said that the fact that nor János Kádár's, nor György Lázár's line of thought could "evoke" a spark of Thatcher's old, anti-*détente* political views, screams for further explanation. I believe a certain factor can provide some sort of an explanation to Thatcher's attitude. This can be read about in a 1984 recollection (opened to the public in 2014) written by the private secretary who had a great influence, John Coles. Coles believed that Thatcher's energy levels severely dipped during 1983/1984, especially from the second half of 1983. The drop in energy levels did not mean that the British Prime Minister had reduced the amount of meetings, because these followed each other in a rigorous manner, but it could have meant that the tone of the Prime Minister's attitude could have altered slightly. Thatcher did not change her views, but to me it seems hard to comprehend that the "old Thatcher", the 1975 politician who appeared in public with such a vociferously anti-communist style and who even in 1982 was still churning out anti-communist slogans, could let pass certain views of György Lázár or János Kádár. According to my opinion this could only have happened

because from a certain perspective, namely the dynamics and energy levels, Margaret Thatcher was slightly different after all in 1984, than before that period.

13. At the meetings in Budapest, Margaret Thatcher talked about few things in a critical manner. One of these was rather surprisingly the United States of America, which given the historical context – amongst others, the special relationship between Great Britain and the United States and between Thatcher and Reagan – could seem rather interesting. According to the British minutes, Thatcher said that the United States are the land of the free, but the Americans don't always acknowledge the history and sophistication of the rest of the world. I believe we cannot go past the fact that the Prime Minister of the biggest ally of the United States, in one of the most critical periods of the "Small Cold War" echoed one of the most frequent accusations against the United States to a leading member of "the enemy", all by her initiation. It is true, that the British Prime Minister went to the Hungarian capital partly to reduce international tension, but this sentence was rather strong, viewed in the given context and even today. It would also probably surprise those who accused Thatcher of her allegedly one-eyed views on the USA.

14. Margaret Thatcher's trip to Hungary served many lasting highlights for future generations and the British Prime Minister thought likewise. *"I visited Budapest's large central covered market, talked to stall holders and shoppers and bought honey, pimentos and spices. Huge friendly crowds gathered, in spite of the intense cold. The market was better stocked than I imagined it would be. But what remains in my mind even to this day was the warm, even passionate, welcome from the crowd of shoppers"*, wrote Her Majesty's first female Prime Minister. As written in her memoirs, critics of the *"Iron Lady"* malignantly stated that the Prime Minister discovered at that point that even the communists are normal human beings. Thatcher recollects discovering something else, namely that the Hungarians are not communists, but individuals thirsty for freedom. Whatever she really did feel in 1984, in her memoirs she always gave great significance to her meetings with the people. Thus I believe it can be stated for certain, that the people of Budapest and Szentendre played a non-insignificant role in forming the opinion of the western world's first female Prime Minister. From a historical perspective, this is what makes the – back then and

even with today's eyes – compelling scenes, the spices purchased with Hungarian forints in the Central Market so significant.

15. According to my opinion, despite the exciting scenes described above, due to the restrained, confrontation-avoiding style presented by Margaret Thatcher during her visit to Budapest, a historian perspective says that we should come to a conclusion that the trip itself was less interesting than the sum of events which lead to it. A good example of the almost too positive aura surrounding the meetings is that even Prime Minister György Lázár was cleansed of the need to radiate Soviet orthodoxy. According to the British primary documents Mr. Lázár said that he agreed with everything the British Prime Minister said about the quality of the visit and its importance. What is more, Lázár and Kádár hardly obstructed in any of the topics raised by Thatcher. In the meeting minutes one can hardly find any traces of a disagreement, even ones which would not have sabotaged the main objectives of the trip or the good atmosphere of the meetings. Resulting from this, I believe that Hungarian preparation for the Budapest visit (namely that the Soviets would like to have blocked the meetings, while the Hungarians discussed in length whether they should accept this “advice” and if not, how they were going to go against the Soviet Union’s directives) and the British preparation (interesting analysis on Budapest, potential raising of the German unification question far too prematurely, what is more the thoughts of potentially executing this on enemy territory etc.) along with bilateral events between 1979 and February 1984 result in a well-known cliché eventuating. Namely preparation for a summit, the introduction to it can be far more exciting than the event itself. A great example of this was that in the end, Thatcher did not raise the topic of German reunification in Budapest.

16. Resulting from this and because of the propositions listed above, at the end of my research I came to the conclusion, embodied in this final proposition that the period between 1979 and 1984 meant a sort of apex, or Golden Age or a lead-up to a Golden Age in Anglo-Hungarian relations. In December 1984 a politician by the name of Mikhail Gorbachev visited England where he met a certain Margaret Thatcher. From this moment onwards the later-to-be Soviet First Secretary became the most important socialist politician for the “*Iron Lady*”. With this, the Hungarian politicians and

Hungary slid down a place on the imaginary ladder. Something changed forever or to be more precise something ended in Anglo-Hungarian relations. From this point onwards Hungary was not and will probably never be as important to the United Kingdom as it was from 1979 onwards and especially between September 1983 and a part of 1984 when Hungary became the main player in Great Britain's Eastern Europe policies. Knowing the historical context, I believe that this factor alone proves the importance of the period starting from 1979, my proposition of the apex in diplomatic relations and 1984 being the end date of my work.

#### **IV. Publications related to the topic (Title translated to English in bold letters)**

Török Gábor: *Magyar-angol kapcsolatok a Chequers Szeminárium (1983) tükrében. **Anglo-Hungarian Relations in Light of the Chequers Seminar (1983)***. In Antos Balázs – Tamás Ágnes (szerk.): *Rajzolatok a magyar történelemről*. Szeged, 2010, 89-101.

Török Gábor: *Margaret Thatcher 1984. évi magyarországi látogatását előkészítő angol primer források rövid áttekintése. **A Brief View of English Primary Sources Preparing Margaret Thatcher's visit to Hungary in 1984***. In Antos Balázs – Tamás Ágnes (szerk.): *Szemelvények ötszáz év magyar történelméből*. Szeged, 2011, 145-156.

Török Gábor: *A budapesti mészáros, „The Butcher of Budapest” szalonképessé válik Öfelsége kormányánál. Kádár János kép az első Thatcher évek brit primer forrásaiban (1979-1984). **“The Butcher of Budapest” is accepted by Her Majesty's Government. A depiction of János Kádár in British primary sources born in the first few Thatcher years (1979-1984)***. In Horváth Miklós (szerk.): *A Diktatúra évtizedei. Tanulmányok, esszék, előadások*. Történelmi Ismeretterjesztő Társulat Egyesület (TITE), Piliscsaba, 2013, 341-348.

Török Gábor: *Margaret Thatcherre várva. **Waiting for Margaret Thatcher***. In M. Kiss Sándor – ifj. Bertényi Iván – Fejérdy Gergely (szerk.): *A mában élő tegnapok*. PPKE BTK, Piliscsaba, 2011, 399-418.

Török Gábor: *„Magyarország elfogadhatatlan arca” – Puja Frigyes brit megítélése Lord Carrington magyarországi látogatásának (1980) tükrében. **“The Unacceptable Side of Hungary” – British views on Frigyes Puja in Light of Lord Carrington's Visit to Hungary (1980)***. In Bank Barbara (szerk.): *Utak és útkereszteződések. Ünnepi tanulmányok M. Kiss Sándor tiszteletére*. Történelmi Ismeretterjesztő Társulat Egyesület (TITE), Budapest, 2013, 467-472.