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National Guard – 1956

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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1. Preliminaries and aims of the dissertation

It was in 2006, the 50th anniversary of the revolution of 1956, when I first encountered the issue of the National Guard. My university instructor then supervisor Miklós Horváth recommended me for a job. The Ministry of Defence sought someone to work with retired General Bela Kiraly. The task was to establish and operate a trustworthy association commemorating the National Guard of 1956.

With the support of the Ministry of Defence and that of the Military History Institute and Museum we awarded their National Guard badges to the former members of the National Guard twice a year, able to prove their activities with documents. For six years more than 300 former National Guard members was awarded their badges.

Since 2009 the Association has been conducting science promotion too. Every spring I organised conferences on the subject, whose senior protector was the President of Republic. Our objective – to invite at least one expert, historian, or archivist from each county – was achieved for five years. Every year I edited the conference contributions into proceedings.

Besides the above mentioned activities a collection work was also conducted among the members of the Association. They were requested to write down their memories which many of them did. These manuscripts, the subjective documents of that era, are currently available in the archives of the Association.

During my work I search for the answer to the question what role the National Guard played in the revolution of 1956. Did they accomplish their mission and maintain public order? Were they able to maintain law and order in a situation which was aimed at the dramatic change of social order? What was the role of Bela Kiraly in this situation? What position did he have within the regime? How much can National Guard members be identified as freedom fighters? Where are overlapping areas? Is there a significant difference between Budapest and the country in this respect?

2. Methods and structure of the dissertation

In my work I compare the information about the 1956 National Guard published on this subject in volumes that I edited; provide a comparison of the basic research involving scientific treatises and lectures of a series of conferences that I organized on this topic during a five-year period of time. I complete these findings with my own research, as well as unpublished to-date reminiscences written by militiamen. I try to present the National Guard in details by the summary and conclusions drawn from the above materials. I intend to use my work as a basis for further, more detailed research activities.

I apply source criticism mainly in the case of primary sources, that is of contemporary documents or of those created some years later. I also indicate my disagreement with the conclusions of certain special

literature. In the case of quotations from some sources I let the readers have a chance to make their conclusions about their credibility. I do so because I regard these quotations as an example of contemporary positions and attitudes with the help of which readers are able to get the general situation of the era and feel how authorities regarded both National Guard members and revolutionaries.

I begin my dissertation with the presentation of the predecessor of the 1956 organisation, the National Guard of the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848-49, outlining both the similarities and differences. This section is followed by a short historiographic overview followed by my presentation of the events in the capital, focusing on experiments pointing towards or resulting in the establishment of National Guard. Since these efforts have already been widely discussed in special literature the core of the dissertation comprises the detailed presentation of the country National Guards in county-based breakdown. After the analysis of the organisational development in the counties I summarise the common features then return to the events in Budapest, in particular to the details of the establishment of the central command bodies of the National Guard. The chain of events resulting in this episode is also highly emphasised in the dissertation. After making my conclusions and the summary my dissertation is completed with the bibliography, list of abbreviations and acronyms, index of persons, and geographic names.

3. Conclusions of the dissertation

What was not clear in the first days of the revolution is a well-known fact today – societal self-organising is able to take over public administration in a functioning way at national level. Yet, the system of national committees was set up in a few days time in an unprecedented way without any central guidelines. It was also unclear which side the law-enforcement would take. In the police and military forces this was mainly a personal issue but since neither side could have trust in the police forces, disintegrating due to the separation of state security, or in the personal opinion of military commanders left on their own due to the paralysis of the central command and control system, first the party organisations then the revolutionary/national committees also established their own armed forces. The party could rely mainly on the workers and apparatchiks. The first group – rather unexpectedly – took the side of the revolution while the second group sooner or later took refuge in their homes, requested protection, or fled as a result of the wave of nationwide protests. On the basis of their own models the revolutionary/national committees provided support to the self-organising civil law-enforcement which was named as National Guard in many places. In many cases they had a leading and controlling role in the police and military joint patrols. This process was facilitated by the fact that by late October the revolutionary military councils took over the control of military units too.

The National Guard played a significant role in the consolidation of the revolution of 1956, allowing Hungarian society, relieved of its fetters, to keep the events as peaceful as possible.

The nationwide establishment and the approval of the National Guard by the Imre Nagy Government took place thanks to the experience and ingenuity of Bela Kiraly, inseparably from his person.

The National Guard units had exclusively law enforcement functions, therefore no one expected the organisation to get involved in armed resistance to the Soviets and it was unsuitable for such actions.

In the country the National Guard perfectly completed its mission through preventing atrocities and securing public order in every settlement where it was established.

In Budapest the National Guard perfectly completed its mission through achieving that armed freedom fighters either laid down their arms or started backing the government thus securing law and order in the capital too.

On the basis of all the above statements the National Guard is one of the most important achievements and institutions of the revolution of

1956. Not in the military but the political and law enforcement sense of the word.

From the above statement comes the long-lived misinterpretation – upon the intents of Kádár – of the development processes of the revolution of 1956: it was not the politics but society that had an influence on the events. Although Kádár and his comrades tried to present the events as a result of the “error” of Imre Nagy and the other leaders, then after the regime change most of the historiography and politics placed the emphasis on the refutation of this position it is clear from the establishment of the National Guard units that in the country it was self-organisation while in Budapest it was the changes forced by the revolutionaries that comprised the moving force of the events. Of course, for Kádár and his comrades it was impossible to admit that it was society that wanted the changes and not just a few leaders. At the same time for the “average citizen” presented on the front page of a contemporary issue of Time magazine it is time to take his position both in historical interpretations and societal consciousness.

4. List of publications

BOOKS

- Gergely BOKODI-OLÁH: *Egy vezérkari főnök, két év alatt négy bíróság előtt. Proceeds against general Ferenc Szombathelyi 1944-1946.* Budapest, 2009² ISBN 978-963-06-7168-2

- Gergely BOKODI-OLÁH: *Megelevenedő történelem. Historical programs in the Hungarian Television 1957-1990*. Budapest, 2009. ISBN 978-963-06-8429-3
- BOKODI-OLÁH Gergely: *Fonyód, 1956. A local central in the freedom fight*. Fonyód (Fonyód town-government) 2011. ISBN 978-963-08-2511-5

EDITORIAL WORKS

- Gergely BOKODI-OLÁH (ed.): „*A néppel tűzön-vízen át!*” *Nemzetőrjelvény – Scientific conferece about 1956's National Guard, 2009*. Budapest (1956 NHT) 2009. ISBN 978-963-06-8637-2
- Gergely BOKODI-OLÁH (ed.): „*A néppel tűzön-vízen át!*” *Nemzetőrjelvény – Scientific conferece about 1956's National Guard, 2010*. Budapest (1956 NHT) 2010. ISBN 978-963-08-0671-8
- Gergely BOKODI-OLÁH (ed.): „*A néppel tűzön-vízen át!*” *Nemzetőrjelvény – Scientific conferece about 1956's National Guard, 2011*. Budapest (1956 NHT) 2011. ISBN 978-963-08-2910-6
- Gergely BOKODI-OLÁH (ed.): „*A néppel tűzön-vízen át!*” *Nemzetőrjelvény – Scientific conferece about 1956's National Guard, 2012*. Budapest (1956 NHT) 2012. ISBN 978-963-08-5247-0
- Gergely BOKODI-OLÁH (ed.): „*A néppel tűzön-vízen át!*” *Nemzetőrjelvény – Scientific conferece about 1956's National*

Guard, 2013. Budapest (1956 NHT) 2014. ISBN 978-963-89929-0-1

ELSE

- Gergely OLÁH: Remarks of Lóránd Dombrády's Book: Ferenc Szombathelyi at the Court. *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 121. évfolyam (2008. március) 1. szám. 96-99. o. ISSN: 0017-6540
- Gergely BOKODI-OLÁH (ed.): Győzött a forradalom – General Bela Kiraly's ideas about 1956. *Múlt-kor történelmi portál* 2009. július 24. http://www.mult-kor.hu/20090724_gyozott_a_forradalom__kiraly_bela_gondolata_i_1956rol