

**PÉTER PÁZMÁNY CATHOLIC
UNIVERSITY**

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY

**WORKSHOP ON HISTORY OF
ECONOMY, REGIONS AND POLITICS**

**Theses of Ph.D. dissertation on the
relationship between the 1968 Student
Movement and the fall of General de Gaulle**

Author: Örs Kovács

Director of doctoral school:

Dr. Ida Fröhlich D.Sc.

Director of workshop: Dr. István Berényi D.Sc.

Supervisor: Dr. Máté Botos Ph.D.

Budapest, 2013

I. ANTECEDENTS OF RESEARCH

The events in Paris in 1968 and the fall of General de Gaulle have already been evaluated by many studies around the world. My dissertation intends to reveal new contexts between the two events specifically concentrating on their seemingly correlating background as far as foreign policy is concerned. The study consists of two main parts.

The first part describes the common idea behind the events, the idea originating from a worldwide "phenomenon" typical of the year 1968. So the idea itself has to be evaluated first, although this is not the main objective of the research. This part focuses on the development of ideas and draws conclusions with the help of already available studies in order to help imagine Paris in the worldwide stream of events and picture how the spirit of that age – that also involved those events in Paris, - was like. There are parallel phenomena all around the world, yet each and every event contains unique characteristics. Moreover, if we are able to discover the different intentions of accomplishing particular objectives behind these characteristics, we will find the real root cause of each respective movement. In my research I have followed this direction, concentrating on Paris.

The second, greater part of the dissertation analyzes the objectives, intentions and labyrinths of the history of French politics and diplomacy between 1958 and 1969, as this is the only way to understand the political motivation that was the cachet of the month of May, 1968. Hence, the diplomacy of de Gaulle's presidential cycle

was evaluated, focusing on those conflicts that resulted in some countries being interested in weakening or even bringing the General's regime down. I also had to use archives to get familiar with French diplomacy and find the conflicts of interest between the French and other great powers – mainly the USA, the Soviet Union, China, England, Israel and West Germany. It is indispensable to see this context to be able to get behind the scenes of May, 1968, as, apart from internal ambitions there might be factors of foreign policy also influencing the events greatly. So the question is complex from several aspects: de Gaulle, with his unique political culture distinguishing him from other politicians who did not have any perspectives, all the more so, considering de Gaulle capitalizing on his glory of being a war hero, which made him untouchable in the political field. The purpose of the research is to reveal how the internal tensions paired with the so called spirit of '68, how worldwide politics are built upon, trying to influence French politics to their own respective interests and terminating the General's ambitions that were deemed so harmful.

One of the most notable politic books representing French views is **Georges-Henri Soutou's** *La guerre de Cinquante Ans. Les relations Est–Ouest, 1943–1990* [Fayard, Paris, 2001.], which precisely and thoroughly covers all aspects of Cold War history as a textbook does, all that of course with a French eye. **Michel Winock's** *Le temps de la guerre froide. Du rideau de fer à l'enfoncement du communisme* [Seuil, Paris, 1994] contains essays and reads better. It presents the Cold War concentrating on emotions and everyday life. **Maurice Vaisse** in his book *La puissance ou l'influence. La France*

dans le monde depuis 1958 [Fayard, Paris, 2009] analyzes French diplomacy one aspect by another, the history is told almost up to our days. De Gaulle's diplomacy, his political role and his personality is covered in another book of **Maurice Vaisse**: *La grandeur. Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle 1958-1969* [Fayard, Paris 1998.]. The professor's work provides a comprehensive coverage of the history of French diplomacy during de Gaulle's presidential cycle, containing specially valuable pieces of information in regard to what the domestic views on supporting foreign policy was like, as well as the "European policy" in Europe and France's relations to the NATO, Israel and China. Though the study does not deal greatly with the events of May apart from its effects on foreign policy. The relationship with the Soviet Union can probably be understood the most deeply from *De Gaulle et la Russie* [CNRS, Paris, 2006], edited by **Maurice Vaisse** which is a collection of essays, containing a book on how the Soviet press presented the events of May and why so. Another very important work of source is **Daniel Ainson**: *De Gaulle et Israël* [Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1991.], which describes all aspects of how the two countries' relationship unfolded. **Vincent Jouvert** sets store by the deterioration of French-American and French-Israeli relationships in his work *L'Amérique contre de Gaulle. Histoire secrète 1961-1969* [Seuil, Paris, 2000.] in the light of the events of May in Paris. To get familiar with the history of ideas for my political analysis, it's worth having **Raymond Aron's** studies (*Les Crises 1966-1974*, [Tome III., Fallois, Paris. 1997.]) on our list. For better understanding the Fifth Republic it is important to know *Comprendre la V^e République*, [Presses

Universitaires de France, Coll. "Hors collection" Paris, 2010], the author is **Jean-François Sirinelli**. **Michel Winock** focuses directly on France in the 1960s in the *Chroniques des années soixante* [Seuil, Paris, 1987]. A compilation of French foreign political source works collected with the directorship of **Maurice Vaisse** is called: *Mai 68, vu de l'étranger*, [CNRS, Paris 2008.] brings the foreign political background of May, 1968 to our attention without any special analysis.

It is a really interesting collection, because it includes documents missing from the **Document Diplomatique Français 1968 I-II** (hereafter: DDF). A third one of collections, **Zoltán Garadnai's** *Iratok a magyar-francia kapcsolatok történetéhez (Documents for the history of Hungarian-French relationship)* [Gondolat, Bp., 2008.] (written in Hungarian), is a similarly useful source. Though it primarily cares about Hungarian connections, it simultaneously refers to France's political ambitions in Europe and worldwide.

A quartet of authors - **Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand** – **Robert Frank** – **Marie-Françoise Lévy** – **Michelle Zancarini-Fournel** – examine different groups all around within the French Youth, their symbols and methods which were what they had the most in common with the international movements. The title of their work is: *Les années 68. Le temps de la contestation*, [Coll. Histoire du temps, Éd. Complexe 2000.], a very useful study for my research which demonstrates the history of ideas. To understand what Catholicism has to do with May, 1968, underlying studies are **Grégory Bateau's** *Le Mai des catholiques* [Édition de l'Atelier,

Paris, 1998.] and **Monique Hébard's** *De mai 68 aux JMJ 97*, [Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1998.]. Since this part contains only a summary of the ideas of 1968, I have used many Hungarian sources: articles and essays. Most notable among these is **Jung Chang's** and **Ion Halliday's** *Mao – Az ismeretlen történet (The Unknown Story)*, [Európa, Bp., 2006.] dealing with China, from which I focused on parts on the relationship of Chinese and French foreign affairs as well as the cultural revolution. **Norbert Frei's** *1968 – Diáklázadások és globális tiltakozás (1968 - Student riots and global resistance)*, [Corvina, 2008] és **Mark Kurlansky's** *1968 – Egy év, amely felrázta a világot (1968 - A year the upset the world)* [HVG, Bp., 2006.] proved to be similarly helpful in getting a better picture of the worldwide phenomena in 1968, and in spite of their documentary style they presented the atmosphere of the era in an authentic way picking on many resistant groups from around the world. In this part I really emphasized **Herbert Marcuse's** works, the studies on him and his interviews, as his ideology must surely have affected not only the movements in Paris but all around the world.

One of the Hungarian sources I used were **Gazdag Ferenc's** *Franciaország története 1918-1995 (The history of France 1918-1995)* [Kossuth, Bp., 2011], an essential summary of the history of French diplomacy, also serving as an overview of French economic and social systems. I preferred to use the prior print to the 1989 issue which contains less information on 1968's events in Paris. **Salgó László's** studies – namely: *De Gaulle diplomáciája (De Gaulle's diplomacy)* [Kossuth kiadó, Budapest, 1972.] and *De Gaulle*

Európa-(tér)képe (De Gaulle's map/image of Europe) [In. Társadalmi Szemle, 1990/11.] - provide a contemporary summary of how the General was considered in Hungary. These works should be appreciated considering their more realistic aspect on de Gaulle's view on foreign policy as opposed to a more ideological approach so typical of previous studies. **Andrew Shennan's** *De Gaulle* [Akadémiai Kiadó, Bp., 1997.] is a work that primarily popularizes the General.

For the research I have used mostly source documents of archives of the aforementioned French Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs - **Archives de Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, (AMAE) (Paris/Nantes/Colmar)** -, respectively, volumes from **Document Diplomatique Français** (DDF), collections from professor Vaïsse from 1968 as well as reports from **Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)**. Completing the list there are also the Hungarian files: documents and journals from the MNL-OL's (Hungarian National Archive – Country Archive) foreign relations part and MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) were also processed to produce a more comprehensive overview.

II. METHODS OF RESEARCH, DIFFICULTIES

The guideline of my study is evaluating the foreign political background of the events in the month of May, 1968. Prior to going into the details, it is inevitable to try elaborating the spirit of the age, the ambitions of French foreign policy and directly place the events of May and their effects as far as foreign policy is concerned. The originality of this work probably lies in this unique vantage point, which may go hand in hand with assumptions highlighting the events of May not only as the exciting stage of internal fights but equally importantly in the light of foreign affairs, too. De Gaulle's fall and the French foreign politics becoming more and more subtle undoubtedly originated from the spirit of May, 1968.

The most difficult part of the work was the amount of secret archives. As the majority of probably the most essential documents are still encrypted, it is really difficult to determine whether or not there were any foreign organizations in the outbreak of the movement or how important role they played in funding the movement. This leads to different opinions of historians – among the few ones interested in the topic. The governing party and its supporters close to de Gaulle – including the General himself – suspected that the entire series of events were driven from abroad. SDECE documents in French archives of foreign affairs (ANF Fontainebleau) are sealed and secret (signalled: *19860074 Art 4–6 and 19830410 ART 1–3.*).

Files related to several different topics are also top secret, among which I specially noticed:

- signalled: *19890638 Art 35–36, és 44* – on de Gaulle;
- signalled: *19910194 Art 7,9,10* – on Cohn-Bendit;
- signalled: *19960325 Art 1–25 on PCF*;
- signalled: *19860146 Art 31–33* – *on the history of the directing of police, its role in the events.*

The résumé of this very last document can be found in the catalogue. It summarizes CRS' role in restoring the public order and the reports on the behaviour of the Communist Party from the police and national security.

In this short compilation you can find a good collection of what the various difficulties are that we have to face when studying the year 1968. The encryptions serving different interests may as well provide us more reasons to suspect there was a foreign thread. But they could also make us think it is only a speculation until the secret documents are released, which is unlikely to happen in our lifetime, as encrypting usually lasts for periods of 60-100 years, half of which at best have already passed. I still try to hypothesize the existence of this foreign thread, based on the available evidences.

III. STRUCTURE AND HYPOTHESES

My dissertation consists of six chapters – excluding the introduction and the final part. I must shortly introduce the Cold War environment using the well-known facts, presenting a process beginning with World War I: Europe gradually losing its role as a worldwide leader.

In the next part I elaborate the history of the ideas: the different student movements and demonstrations worldwide in the 60s had evolved separately, yet having many spiritual and intellectual similarities, and resulted in the development of a new way of life. The objective of summarizing this area is to better introduce Paris and give us a picture on the events in France in a worldwide frame.

The history of France after 1945 must also be described, especially in political, economic and social aspects and as far as de Gaulle's personal role is concerned. I won't go into too many details about the General, as his story of life is well known, and we are interested in his politics, in particular when he was a president. De Gaulle's personality and conceptions are equally interesting as his ambitions were the least commonly shared in his political era thus making himself a lot of enemies.

The following part is an analysis which is unique in its kind in Hungary since it examines Gaullist foreign policy concentrating on elements that might have incited foreign powers to capitalize on the movements breaking out in May in order to put pressure on influencing de Gaulle's foreign policy. The analysis evaluates

principals of the General's ideology concerning foreign policy and his political orientation with the countries we suspect stood behind the crisis of 1968.

Finally, I elaborate the effects of the events of May on internal and foreign affairs which forced changes to be made on foreign politics and internally, too, and led to the resignation of the president.

My initial inspiration on focusing on this type of research was finding an MNL-OL report dating from 1968. This document revealed references on foreign influence.¹

Hypotheses of research were based on:

1) The conception background of the events in Paris does not seem to reason the events of such high measures. It is likely that the majority of the participants did not understand or even read what the philosophers were writing about, but they savvied the new musical trends and social claims. The hippy movement had only a negligible effect: merging the issues on sexuality, drugs and Vietnam to the romanticism of 1968. All these are of little significance and do not explain the mass movement to measure such unexpected power. The mass movements were mostly generated by the desire of improving social and work standards. This could not have shaken de Gaulle's regime that badly as life standards were not really that bad in a solid democratic society. There could not have been such a huge rebellion without any external influence.

¹ MNL-OL KÜM XIX-J-1-j-002515/1/1968 (37. d – France)

2) The spirit of '68 swept over France almost without any warnings. A country of reasonable wealth and order created by a religious and conservative hero who was against both poles of extremities – as he was the leader of the fight against the Nazis and one of the major reasons he resigned in 1946 was that he refused to collaborate with the communists, the party that was so popular that time. This made him untouchable. This unique political capital well distinguished de Gaulle from other politics in his era. He intended to take advantage of this by returning France to her previous role in world politics, directing the operation of the Common Market and seemingly not providing any indication for a civil unrest to break out. His rivalry of course was about to weaken these aspects. My hypothesis is that de Gaulle's politics caused such resistance that led to the crisis in May.

3) Was there any chance the opposing powers took any opportunity the spontaneous movements presented in order to weaken and finally remove de Gaulle? This is really the biggest question mark: whether the USA, England and Israel as documented in archives could have had any significant role in the events of May. Why were the President's politics executed in May and what kind of benefit was the removal of the General for and of which countries? This is my point of view in analyzing French foreign policy and seeing de Gaulle off of his regime.

4) Interestingly enough, China might also have played a role in the background of the riot in May. In this case the reason China influenced the events in Paris was to gain world leadership of Mao's ideology. China's main objective was to grab the commanding role from the Soviets to lead the entire communist side – the Chinese

Cultural Revolution was actually against „the Chinese Khrushchev”. With the riots breaking out in Paris, China took the golden opportunity to weaken the French Communist Party which was taking the Soviet line. While France was one of the few countries who officially recognized China as a communist state and they lined up with Mao regarding nuclear armament, there is no wonder Mao did not really want the Gaullist foreign politics to change. On the other side China's interest was to still keep the good relationship with France.

5) The Soviet Union was a definite factor in the bipolar world. The French diplomacy – bringing their politics toward the *détente-entente-coopération* way – offered the chance to the Soviets to make their regime more acceptable in the world or even expand while catching up in their technological deficit. Christian Giraud goes even further: in his opinion the Soviets were saving the General's regime in response to de Gaulle's foreign policy which was so advantageous for them. This area is detailed in my study, too.

6) At the same time we must ask the question whether anybody at all gained anything with the removal of de Gaulle. Gaullism, not including *Mitterrand's* era has been governing continuously ever since then. One might think the real interest for France was to create Atlantist politics that the US preferred, as they had to pay attention not to allow the communists to grab the power.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

We are still not able to give a satisfying answer whether the intelligence agencies had influenced the events in Paris. The intelligence agencies had undoubtedly grabbed every chance to badly shake the General in his chair. It is also sure that although de Gaulle had had an overwhelming victory in June, his glory was "pyrrhian". The vast majority of my dissertation consists of the analysis on foreign policy, but the picture can be fully understood together with the previous chapters only.

1) People of the 1960s were looking for freedom and another industrial revolution. The Fifth Republic created a fair state of wealth and based on the election results until 1969, France's democratic model in accordance with personal dominance was accepted. There were less and less people employed in the agriculture and parallel citizenry grew: featuring such new jobs like the manager, which is already a member of a real consumption-based society. The average people could not welcome these changes in their era. They fought for human rights not to be restricted. Young girls and women joined the protestors with strong forces, emancipation became a significant factor. The "contract" between the demonstrators was the question of genders, their opposition to the authoritarian model and Vietnam. De Gaulle, together with the FCP stood against the USA and was featured by cultural conservatism. They even used censure. They were afraid of social rejuvenation which was made up by drugs, sex, rock and politicians not voting for either of the great powers in that bipolar world. There were no

shooting affrays or casualties on the streets in Paris. People got injured or wounded during some events but this was only a signal towards society. With smarter intervention from the Police, it was highly likely that the movement had not reached that many people. The answer was riots and rebellion on the streets but symbolic buildings of the state authority – Élysée, Matignon, Bourbon Palace, etc. - were never once attacked, not a single one of the public summons ever materialized. There were no real political motivation, rather, the common desire of the mass were fulfilling their ideas and conceptual changes in their lifestyle. Basically there was a new world unfolding behind the barricades: that was why they occupied factories, high schools, offices and universities, not to defend themselves and to find places they could attack the state authority from – just to mention the role of Odéon in May. Youth movements were only meant to be catalysts, they intended to help the transition to a more liberal life. Numerous small political groups existed, but as they represented only a few members, alone, they could not have broken out such a poignant movement in the streets. We have no information on whether the lack of governmental interventions were intended or by mistake, since the documents from intelligence agencies are kept secret, but we could see there are so many indirect evidences suggesting the groups of students were externally supported maybe even incited.

2) The crisis of 1968 in France was not the crisis of Gaullism, but a problem the whole industrialized world had to face. These changes happened far too quickly in the work and people's minds. The state administration in France was the stiffest among all countries, this is

the reason the movements swept across there in the most powerful way. This structure being so inflexible caused the explosion, but we could notice this is the transition of the industrial society, which was soon to continue in a more civilized manner, allowing debate. In the preceding years, de Gaulle, in spite of his flaws, had real intuitions. He recognized and unlike to him supported processes such as decolonization, the breakup of the military alliance with the USA or the "participation". De Gaulle's message was a historical landmark but his spirit was of another age. So the internal crisis itself came as a surprise, but the political and social environment in France did not reason for such an activity to come to life. In fact workers caused the trouble, they had realized they could get their salaries raised and get more benefits but this had a bad effect on French economy on a long term. The poignancy of the movement frightened the French who turned to the reliable person who could reinstate the order: de Gaulle, but the demonstrators had other future plans. As far as foreign politics are concerned, the Western Allies had different expectations.

3) Based on the relationship the USA, England and Israel had with France my dissertation proved that all three countries might have had an interest to use or even urge the riots to their own interests. In my view, all three might have influenced the movement, but did not have the intention to dethrone de Gaulle, as it could have resulted in a chaos becoming too dangerous considering the Soviet threat. They already knew de Gaulle and realized there was a capable successor in the person of Pompidou. They also knew the opposition on the left were only going to be able to grab the power together with the communists in France, in spite of there were other, more tractable

politicians. If the communists had been able to grab the power during the Cold War, it would have been the worst case scenario for democratic countries. Given his authority and credibility, the president was the only single person who could reinstate the order, but he was rather to be held back. There was an opportunity to break de Gaulle with the use of an economic detour resulted by strikes. As this would practically result in the General losing of his grandeur and adding the fact Czechoslovakia was ruining the détente of the East, de Gaulle's fall was inevitable. Virtually, he was to defeat himself with a referendum. Changing de Gaulle's politics were in the interest of all three countries only to a certain extent, just to give them more breathing space. But everyone knew France did not want to quit and realistically speaking she really could not even have quit from the western allies, the playground was all set and the General must have known he was not going to be able to jump over the fence (e.g. Nassau, Glasboro). This is why they did not really want to get rid of de Gaulle at whatever cost, but they might have been interested in affecting the events in Paris in order to limit the old General's power as well as to make sure he leaves earlier, since his electoral mandate was only to expire in 1972.

4) China could also have been a factor in the events of May, proving this hypothesis can be the phone bills of student groups. Mao used the movements everywhere in the world including France to criticize the communist parties and groups following the Soviet line. FCP was among these, too, but other small groups forming during the student movement were closer to Maoism. This must have reasoned the Chinese governance to support the students, though they did not

mean to target the fall of de Gaulle by all means, since France was among the few countries to have foreign diplomacy with China.

Other than that, because of similar intentions in foreign policy, there were still a lot of reasons to keep de Gaulle (e.g. disapproval of non-proliferation treaty). China, however, might have been bothered by the politics of "opening towards the East" as they considered the Soviets as their primary partner in Paris. This scenario might have created a competitive atmosphere and a reason to support China, should she have somehow gained proper influence in the French politics. The other reason could have been Vietnam. Mao was against the negotiations in Paris about Vietnam, he no longer wanted peace that time. China's purpose was surely to interrupt and block these negotiations on Vietnam, which can be a reason she worked in the background of the movements in Paris. All the more, we might think China to have been an instigator, considering the Maoist university groups had a major role in starting all the events.

5) The Soviet's interest in the events was seemingly fading away after France's NATO-exit. But why would they intend to rescue the General? Communists were about to follow the Soviets while the civil left tended to Atlanticism. De Gaulle had set a continuous fight against the American influence and scored full marks from the Soviets for disorganizing NATO. France's opening towards the East forced the Soviets to be cautious not to let the politics of national independency to be followed by the countries of the "peaceful side", since they were hoping the Soviets would continue to supply raw materials and energy for Europe, from the Atlantic Ocean all the way to the Ural Mountains. The Soviets did not mean to keep FCP at bay

or to urge the unexpected event of de Gaulle's defeat; neither had they had sympathy with the General's anti-communist policy especially considering the chance of them being overhauled by the Chinese communism. Their real interest was France stick to her foreign policy which was in fact guaranteed by de Gaulle himself. This would explain why the Soviets did not want de Gaulle to fall. The Soviets were not really likely to be forced to participate in the events of May as they could not capitalize on the situation, on the other hand, the General did not need them to keep his position as we have known.

6) It would have been unlike the person of de Gaulle to resign straight as a result of the events in May. The reforms after May could have provided another opportunity. There was no way to follow with his foreign politics anymore, mainly because of the economic difficulties mostly caused by the strikes and levelling up of wages. The General really could not easily handle this fiasco which was unavoidable considering political reality. He felt his chances were limited so all he could do was to force an internal turnaround. He did not feel familiar in this area, and in spite of all his efforts, the diversification of his own side caused his fall – which fate he was resigned to in a more natural way. All in all, the biggest winner was England, she profited while the Atlantic strains eased and the European integration process speeded up. Germany took over the French way of foreign policy in the eastern bloc with Brandt while the US became Israel's primary partner. The inevitable leave of the President really affected France in a negative way as de Gaulle's successors were not as untouchable or prestigious, so the grandeur

was not resurrected. France's political opposition was completely satisfied with weakening de Gaulle and creating a new centre of power within the elite authority structure more capable of cooperation in the crisis. De Gaulle used the referendum as his last attempt of trying to stop this course of events - equally well-prepared internally and externally - targeted against him but it was too late. In my judgement the participation of international networks had a lot more effect in the way things happened than one might think. With de Gaulle's leave a very strong rival was eliminated from the politics.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

ÖRS KOVÁCS: Az 1968-as párizsi diákmozgalom háttere
(Background of the 1968 student movement in Paris)

http://www.archivnet.hu/politika/az_1968as_parizsi_diakmozgalom_hattere.html 5 (2010)

ÖRS KOVÁCS : French crisis in May, 1968. - Revolution of the students?

http://www.archivnet.hu/politika/az_1968_majusi_valsag_franciaor_szagban.html?oldal=1 1 (2011)

ÖRS KOVÁCS: Chronologies divergentes. Parentés et différence dans la chronologiehistorique en France et en Hongrie In: *Les deux Europes*. (Edited by: DELSOL, Chantal –Máté BOTOS), Sandre, Paris, 2007 pp. 43-64