

Eugene Havas and an Early Attempt at Personal Diplomacy to Normalize US-Hungarian Relations, 1960-1964

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ABSTRACT

After the fall of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, communist Hungary had struggled to break out of diplomatic isolation. The government formed by Secretary General of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party János Kádár had not been recognized by the Western powers, including the United States of America. American-Hungarian bilateral relations, therefore, were rather strained, and before the restitution of Hungary's full status in the United Nations Organization, the US minimized the communication between the two countries. To change this, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Intelligence Service working under the aegis of the Ministry of Internal Affairs endeavored to engage expatriates—more or less famous or well-known professionals who still had some family connection to Hungary—as amateur go-betweens and semi-assets in order to find channels of communication with the American political elite and thus, via personal diplomacy, foster better relations between the two countries. The essay discusses the case of Eugene Havas (1899-1967), American economic expert and journalist of Hungarian descent. The representatives of the Kádár regime had great expectations towards him as an intermediary, this notwithstanding, as the essay will conclusively demonstrate the effect of Havas's activities remained rather limited. (IP)

KEYWORDS: American-Hungarian relations, period of normalization, Eugene Havas, Hungarian intelligence services, Kádár regime



At the low tide of US-Hungarian relations following the 1956 Revolution and War of Independence, Eugene (Jenő) Havas, an American economic expert and journalist of Hungarian descent, attempted to foster better relations between the two countries via personal diplomacy. He first contacted the Hungarian Legation in Washington, D.C. and visited Hungary several times between 1960 and 1964. During his trips he met many prominent Hungarian leaders and, on returning home, published articles in the *Economist* and the *Nation*, praising new developments in the country of his birth. For reasons unclear, the Hungarian intelligence service had disengaged him by 1964, and he never again returned to his native Hungary. In the absence of American intelligence archival materials, his story here is told based on Hungarian state security, intelligence, and foreign ministry files.

US-Hungarian relations after 1956

Following the Soviet repression of the 1956 Revolution and War of Independence, relations between the Hungarian People's Republic and the United States of America became as hostile as they had been in the early 1950s, when Robert A. Vogeler, the American director of the Standard Electric Company of Budapest was jailed and held hostage for 18 months.¹ Washington questioned the legitimacy of the new administration led by János Kádár (1912-1989) and reduced diplomatic representation to the lowest possible level (*charges d'affaires ad interim*). Hungary's membership in the United Nations Organization (UNO) was suspended. Moreover, bilateral relations were further complicated by the fact that Cardinal József Mindszenty, prince primate of Hungary, archbishop of Esztergom, leader of the Catholic Church in the country, had requested, and contrary to previous practice, was granted refuge at the Legation of the United States in Budapest. Kádár, the Secretary-General of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), reckoned that as long as Cardinal Mindszenty enjoyed the hospitality of the US mission in Budapest, Washington would not sever diplomatic ties with Hungary. For the same reason, American officials also realized that they needed to maintain their presence in Budapest: they regarded the Cardinal as a symbol of resistance.²

In 1959, however, a series of events contributed to the thawing of tensions between the two countries. The Soviet-American Summit of the same year produced a more favorable international atmosphere, while in Hungary the aggressive post-revolutionary reprisals subsided, gradually giving way to the consolidation of the Kádár regime. Western politicians and journalists permitted to travel to Hungary reported a more favorable state of affairs than what they had experienced in Czechoslovakia and Romania. Poland, arguably America's perennial favorite in Central Europe, also received more critical remarks about the standard of living than Hungary. Hungary had already embarked on a policy to normalize its relations with Italy and France, while Great Britain also displayed a more accommodating approach towards Hungary.³

Budapest needed to consolidate its relationship with the United States as well, since Western loans were required to uphold the Kádár-compromise: a relatively high standard of living in return for no open resistance on the part of the people. Although bilateral relations remained strained, secret negotiations between the two governments started in 1961. Two partial amnesties were followed by the "general" amnesty of 1963 (which still left many 1956 revolutionaries in jail), and the "Hungarian Question" was

formally removed from the UN agenda. Budapest signed an accord with the Vatican to settle church-state relations. Meanwhile, in February 1962, during a government-sponsored “spontaneous” demonstration against the Vietnam War, “outraged international students” broke into and ravaged the building of the US Legation on Szabadság tér in the heart of Budapest. After the tenth anniversary of 1956 passed without incidents, in November 1966 diplomatic relations were finally raised from the lowest to the highest level. The first US ambassador, Martin J. Hillenbrand, arrived in Hungary in 1967.

But back in 1960 there seemed no real hope for any improvement, thus the Kádár regime endeavored to mobilize all the accomplished Hungarian professionals in the West, who were assumed to have had some influence on the decision-makers. One of them was economist Eugene Havas of Washington, D.C., who, as editor of economic journals, could be in touch with the American political elite. The following analysis offers more insight into what role, if any, Havas could play to affect positive changes in the relationship between Hungary and the United States.

Havas enters

In the early 1960s, Budapest tried to seize the initiative: the first goal was to get the Hungarian question off the agenda of the United Nations. At that time, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) attempted to recruit famous Hungarian-Americans who were not involved in politics, for example, artists or Nobel-prize winning scientists, expecting that their statements could improve Hungary’s image in the eyes of the political elite of the United States. As these endeavors generally proved to be futile, the MFA, together with Division II/3 (Intelligence) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA),⁴ tried to approach less exposed Hungarian-American professionals, who visited their native country to meet relatives and whom Division II/3 considered to be relatively close to the American decision-makers.⁵ This is most likely how and why Oxford-educated Hungarian economist Havas became a person of interest for the MFA and the Hungarian intelligence service as well.

Havas was born in Zenta, Hungary (now Serbia), in 1899. For a while he served as the Budapest correspondent of the British weekly *The Economist* and was arguably the first advocate of Keynesian theory in Hungary.⁶ In 1960 he approached the Hungarian Legation for a visa to visit, together with his wife, a relative, the widow of Henrik Balla, then living in District 7, the traditional Jewish quarter of Budapest.⁷

On April 13, 1960, Tibor Zádor, the Hungarian *chargé d'affaires* in Washington (and longtime co-optee of the Hungarian state security apparatus), informed Foreign Minister Endre Sik that Havas, who had emigrated to the United States in 1938, inquired about the possibility of a visit to his native country.⁸ Not long after the first conversation, Zádor had lunch with Havas and learnt that before leaving Hungary he had worked as an economic journalist for *Pesti Napló* and in the 1930s he had become an economic advisor to the Hungarian Legation in Washington on financial issues and probate matters.⁹ Following the Hungarian declaration of war on the United States (December 12, 1941), he was employed by the Swedish Embassy to handle individual Hungarian cases. When the number of such cases declined dramatically, his employment was discontinued in July 1943.¹⁰ His contact with Hungary was reestablished for a couple of short consultations in 1947, when Endre Sik acted as *chargé d'affaires* in Washington. Havas maintained an active working relationship with a variety of economic journals and was on good terms with the editor of *The Washington Post*, though most of his articles were published in *The Nation*. As for the purpose of his trip to Hungary, Havas declared to Zádor that he also wanted to study economic developments during his two-week stay, and his findings, therefore, could be used to refute overtly hostile press accounts in the West about Hungary. In order to achieve his goal he wished to consult with responsible people holding positions in the government or in the economy. He also pointed out to the *chargé d'affaires* that there were ongoing probate actions that could be resolved favorably towards the Hungarian People's Republic. Zádor deemed the attitude of the economist—who had been trying to improve the image of Hungary in the US during the 1930s by writing articles for *The New York Times*¹¹—loyal to his native country. Therefore, he thought that in case of a successful visit to Hungary, Havas could become a valuable “social contact” for the Legation, while also providing the Hungarian Ministry of Finance with useful information. The *chargé d'affaires* also believed that the expatriate economist could and would write positive reports on Hungary. Thus, besides granting the visa, Zádor also proposed that the Press Office of the MFA organize his program during his sojourn. Havas was to depart on June 4, 1960, from New York, and was expected to arrive in Budapest between June 20 and 25.¹²

Taking into consideration the fact that the Eastern Bloc legations had been kept under close surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from the 1950s to the end of the Cold War,¹³ Havas was very likely to have been interrogated by agents of the FBI Washington, D.C. Field Office,

and his case was most likely passed to the State Department, if not foreign intelligence. American foreign policy-makers surely knew, and most likely trusted, the economist who became an American citizen in 1944—the year of the Holocaust in Hungary.¹⁴ On account of his close ties to the Rockefeller Foundation (an agency known for promoting American ideas and values abroad) both as a grantee and a financial supporter,¹⁵ Havas was seen as a staunch advocate of the Anglo-American worldviews.¹⁶ Thus, the Department of State was very likely to request Havas to come up with ideas on the possibilities for the improvement of the bilateral relations should he encounter some important Hungarians whom he might know from the old pre-World War II days.

Havas in Budapest

On June 28, 1960 in Budapest, Havas first met Péter Várkonyi, then head of the press service of the MFA.¹⁷ He reiterated what he had already told Zádor that from 1926 onward, he had been a contracted employee of the press office of the Bethlen administration. At the same time, Havas presented his letter of reference from the editor-in-chief of *The Economist*, which requested those in charge in Hungary to make it possible for him to explore Hungarian economic life. Havas also tried to demonstrate his loyalty to Hungary by citing a statement he made before the American court in 1941 verifying that a Hungarian asset of half a million dollars borne prior to the war constituted the property of the government of Hungary. The economist wanted to negotiate this as well, since he had been subpoenaed by the court because a Hungarian individual living in America (who later turned out to be Móric Kornfeld)¹⁸ had litigated the US Treasury. Appreciating the positive remarks on Hungary's economic achievements Várkonyi suggested that Havas should talk to some staff members of the Institute of Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and of the National Planning Bureau and also visit the construction of housing estates in Budapest and in Sztálinváros (Dunaújváros, an industrial town in Hungary founded in 1951). Várkonyi considered Havas to be a cunning intermediary who did not let others talk, but eagerly managed conversations in a way to leave certain questions open for a future encounter.¹⁹

Havas accepted Várkonyi's proposal but also expressed his desire to continue political discussions as well, so Foreign Minister Sik invited him for lunch. The financial expert recalled that in the late 1920s he had been on good terms with the American Legation Staff in Budapest, and he had also acted as an intermediary at the request of the executive of the Press Bureau of the

Prime Minister's Office. Várkonyi, the chief of the Press Office, and József Bíró, the minister of foreign trade, were also present at the lunch on July 2, where the conversation revolved around Hungarian-American relations.²⁰ First of all, Havas was curious as to what was meant by "mistakes of the past" (a common reference in communist public speech to the abuses before 1956), what the essence of the policy of the Party was, and why the Hungarian People's Republic applied for a twenty-million dollar aid package from the US.

At the meeting Havas also told his hosts about the conversations he had with the American *chargé d'affaires* Garret G. Ackerson, former second secretary under John. F. Montgomery from 1934 to 1941,²¹ who spoke rather critically of communist Hungary, which, as he had recently explained to Havas, was tightly controlled by Moscow. Ackerson adversely declared that he had been posted to a police state and complained about being constantly monitored (which, in fact, was true). He also voiced his concerns related to the travel restrictions enforced upon Western diplomats and noted that only half of the invitees tended to show up at the receptions at the American Legation, depending on the instructions they had received. Ackerson also believed that he had negotiated in vain with Hungarian authorities about the future of Mindszenty, because the Cardinal had not been allowed to travel to Rome for the Conclave (the College of Cardinals). The only thing the American diplomat was satisfied with was the lifting of travel restrictions on American citizens. On this Havas noted that if improvements were to be forthcoming in US-Hungarian relations, the initiative, he advised, needed to come from Budapest—a gesture which would be favorably received by the Americans.

Havas tried to further enhance bilateral relations and recommended lifting travel restrictions imposed on Western diplomats or to confine the restrictions to military attachés only. By making this concession, he argued, Hungary would not only win the support of prestigious American journalists, first and foremost of Michael Händler, the Vienna correspondent of *The New York Times*,²² but it would also encourage the selection of the American minister before the elections and the coming of the new administration. The American economist reckoned that it would be more advantageous if the normalization process started during President Dwight D. Eisenhower's tenure, since the hint of bipartisan support for a rapprochement with the Hungarian People's Republic would mitigate the pressure exerted on the incoming administration by hostile Hungarian émigrés. Havas also added that the proposed measures would ease the situation of those in Washington who

believed that there was no point in maintaining worse relations with Hungary than with Czechoslovakia and Romania.

Várkonyi in turn complained about the quality and the behavior of the staff of the US Legation and made the following remark: "If the U.S. Legation is reporting from Hungary what they told me, then I understand why Washington is so uninformed." Havas suggested that during the upcoming Fourth of July reception he would propose a private conversation with the American *chargé d'affaires*, but Várkonyi turned down the idea and explained that the MFA had been ready, but in vain, to talk to Ackerson for over a year. (Havas passed a critical comment on him when he said that Ackerson did not belong to the group of most talented American diplomats, otherwise he would have been posted to a more prestigious mission at his age.)

Havas's rather positive comments on the developments in Hungarian society also served his cause. When on July 7 Havas consulted the director of the Csepel Iron and Metal Works in the presence of Bíró, he mentioned that he had encountered ordinary people in Lillafüred, a holiday resort in northeast Hungary near the industrial city of Miskolc, which would have been unthinkable in 1938. The American guest hereby referred to the fact that organizing package holidays had become a priority in the new welfare policy of the Kádár regime.²³ During their conversation, Havas did not bring up any provocative issues, and he praised the results of the company. During lunch the American financial advisor summarized his favorable impressions and, in particular, acclaimed the disappearance of the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the social classes. Havas also declared to György Sugár, Deputy Director of the Institute of Economics, that in addition to his experiences, he would inform the readers of *The Economist* and *The Nation* that the financial consolidation of the country was feasible without loans from the United States. The following day Havas briefed Ackerson on the conversation with Várkonyi, and upon this the *chargé d'affaires* remarked that it might be possible to establish "correct relations behind the Iron Curtain" without nominating a minister. Havas made a gesture to his host by saying that he was more inclined to understand Várkonyi's concerns regarding the unilateral concessions, that is, termination of travel restrictions, for this could just as well be exploited by Western powers. Havas also ventilated that Ackerson regarded himself as a representative who was carrying out the policy of the United Nations in Hungary. When Bíró asked Havas whether he thought that Ackerson believed what he had said, Havas responded that Ackerson was one of the Americans who identified the United Nations with the United States.

Bíró and Havas said farewell to each other in a friendly manner, as the American guest predicted that he would come back in a year or two. At the same time, he invited Várkonyi and Bíró to call on him if they ever visited Washington.²⁴

Following his return, Havas reported about the conditions in Hungary favorably, and the Hungarian Legation received corroborating evidence for this from various sources. His remarks elicited a positive response even among well-known Hungarian emigrants. Zádor reported to Sik that Havas would be pleased to come to Hungary again, but he did not desire to have a prescribed program, although on the basis of his statements it could be taken for granted that he would be happy to meet again the officials he knew from the MFA. The Legation suggested that they should pay attention to Havas, who could prove useful for Hungary following his return to Budapest.²⁵ On June 19, 1961 Division II/3 of the Ministry of the Interior reported to its superior that they considered the economist a person of interest based on his loyal political stance and his network of friends in American economic life.²⁶ This meant that the Hungarian intelligence service contemplated the recruitment of Havas, which was to be built on his loyalty to his native country. The only question is: to what extent was the expectation well grounded?

Back in Budapest

On June 27, 1961, Ottó Beöthy, president of the Hungarian World Congress (HWC) received Havas in Budapest. It was immediately evident that they easily understood each other. They had numerous common acquaintances including high-ranking ones but at the same time critical communist author Iván Boldizsár (1912-1988), editor-in-chief of the freshly launched *New Hungarian Quarterly*,²⁷ and Miksa Fenyő (1877-1972), writer and the founding editor of *Nyugat*, the first Hungarian literary weekly publishing modern literature,²⁸ whose son, Iván Fenyő, accompanied the American guest to the meeting. Earlier that day Havas had met Professor József Bognár (1917-1996),²⁹ whom he held in high esteem. Beöthy personally knew the late József Vágó (1877-1948), former editor of the economic section at *Pester Lloyd*, whom Havas used to be on very good terms with in his youth. It also turned out that Beöthy had been a high-school classmate of the mathematician János Neumann, the founder of modern computer technology,³⁰ and at school sat next to Péter Domony, who later became a lawyer in the United States. This connection later proved, or appeared, to be a lucky coincidence, since a couple of months prior to his second trip to

Budapest, Domony approached Havas on behalf of Alfonz Weiss and Móric Kornfeld, arguably the two most prestigious tycoons of interwar Hungary: he wanted to elicit a statement from Havas on their assets, with an estimated value of half a million dollars, that had been seized by the American government. Havas, who (as has been pointed out) was the liquidator of the Hungarian Legation before the war and the State Department's expert in matters of sequestered Hungarian assets, refused to accept the argument put forward by Domony, namely, that Weiss and Kornfeld were persecuted individuals by the Nazis and the Hungarian Arrow Cross (before the German occupation), and thus the economist provided his advisory opinion during the first years of World War II based on insufficient information. Havas told Domony that "if that half-million-dollar-asset was Hungarian property in 1941, then it is Hungarian property in 1961. I cannot take into consideration my friendly relationship with Móric Kornfeld."³¹ It is probable that Havas refused to support the claim in question because he was aware of the financial burdens that had been placed on Hungary after the war. The reparations that the Armistice Convention of 1944 imposed amounted to 300 million dollars,³² but in the context of the Soviet Union, this finally reached approximately 600 million dollars owing to the expenses of the Red Army troops stationed in Hungary, the disadvantageous commercial contracts forced upon Hungary, as well as the augmented military spending in the 1950s.³³ At the same time, it must also be noted that Havas could have been holding a grudge against the Weiss family, because he felt that as beneficiaries of the Kasztner Rescue Action they had failed to display solidarity for their less fortunate Jewish brethren.³⁴ Domony received the statement reluctantly and admitted that it was his wife, the daughter of ophthalmologist Emil Grósz (1865-1941),³⁵ who urged the claim towards the Hungarian government.

During their conversation Havas praised the rapid development of Hungary and the improvement in social welfare and acclaimed the child care system as a model that should be followed by other countries as well. He also confided to Beöthy—as a gesture to the hosts—that he found the dissatisfaction of the people he could talk to a bit exaggerated,³⁶ and furthermore he informed Beöthy that foreign visitors were speaking highly of the friendly approach of the Hungarian authorities (phasing out the barriers to tourism had already been part of the consolidation of the Kádár regime),³⁷ although his personal experiences contradicted this statement. An incident actually occurred to Havas in Sopron, where an official of the Customs Service insisted that the American take his luggage to the office and

refused to carry out the examination at the car. Havas also requested a favor for Mrs. Alfréd Babecz, the widow of the former director of the Credit Bank (Hitelbank), because her husband used to support his parents (the Havases) until mid-1944. The elderly woman, whose properties must have been nationalized and the incomes from them strictly restricted, worked as a contracted lector at the Hungarian Fine Arts Fund, so Havas tried to lobby for additional orders for her. The president of the HWC did not exclude the possibility of assistance, for he thought that such a gesture would enhance the friendly relationship between Havas and the Hungarian World Congress.

The American guest recommended that the HWC invite a wider scope of Hungarian émigrés to visit Hungary as long as it could promote good relations between Hungary and the American public. Havas pointed out that he was not lobbying on behalf of the likes of the writer Sándor Márai (who declared that he would not come home as long as Soviet troops were stationed in Hungary),³⁸ but there were other writers and artists living in America who were dreaming of returning to Hungary, among them, for example, Lajos Zilahy, one of the most popular writers before the war.³⁹ Havas also mentioned the possibility of taking care of the elderly Miksa Fenyő, whom he believed to be a potential candidate to be approached about returning to Hungary. Havas learned from Iván Boldizsár that the *New Hungarian Quarterly* had paid Fenyő \$50 for an article on the life of Lajos Hatvany, which was meant to be a gesture of assistance towards him. Along with such influential friends as the former pro-Anglo-Saxon diplomat of the pre-war Ministry of Foreign Affairs Aladár Szegedy-Maszák,⁴⁰ Havas was taking steps to silence Béla Fábrián, the former parliamentary representative of the liberal National Democratic Party,⁴¹ for the latter's vehement anti-communist diatribes seemed to have done more harm than good. The majority of the leaders of the Hungarian émigré organizations, as well as members of the Kennedy Administration, realized that—the otherwise justifiable—criticism of the Kádár regime would be more plausible if it remained factual. (The concessions that had already been achieved in Hungary should be recognized while the ruling party was to be warned of its serious debts toward the society.)

The head of the HWC had a positive overall impression of his guest: Beöthy deemed Havas to be an educated, broad-minded, apt, self-confident, humble, introverted, and slightly sentimental man, who wanted nothing else but to demonstrate his goodwill. "I owe the ten million Hungarians and this country," Havas stated. The president of the HWC concluded that if Havas harbored bad intentions, he could be far more dangerous than the openly

hostile émigrés with their limited scope of action. It was suggested that the Consulate and the Hungarian professional community of economists should pay attention to Havas, and as a token of their good relations the HWC was prepared to mail some books and journals to him.⁴²

Follow-up to the second visit

Beöthy saw some possibility in the exploitation of the friendship with Havas for political purposes since he remembered some American newspaper articles that described how well Havas was embedded in the financial circles of New York as an expert on the taxation of railway companies.⁴³ As the Hungarian Intelligence Service devoted more importance to Havas, in the fall of 1961 Police Captain Imre Borsányi assigned the cryptonym “DANIEL” to the American economist.⁴⁴

Havas could draw on his favorable relations and tried to support some causes of charity as well to advance the relationship between the two countries. Towards the end of 1961 Havas wrote a personal letter to the President of the Hungarian World Congress and asked for the duty-free status of charity packages containing second-hand clothes and tropical products arriving in Hungary. This concession could have been utilized once a month by elderly people with a monthly income of less than 1,500 Hungarian Forints. Havas argued that many people had no or limited access to these packages, even though these shipments did no harm to the Hungarian Treasury and did not compete with the authorized “Foreign Trade Action” (IKKA) packages. In fact, it was the Hungarian Legation in Washington that referred the economist to Beöthy, who reckoned that it was the renowned investment banker and philanthropist Cyrus S. Eaton who first urged such action. Eaton had repeatedly attempted to put forth similar proposals in order to improve Hungarian-American relations.⁴⁵

The delivery of packages was again the subject of discussion in November 1961, when Havas entertained Hungarian diplomats in his apartment in Washington. During the conversation, Havas emphasized the humanitarian aspects of the project, but he also emphasized that such a permissive measure would have a positive impact on the American decision-makers. Representing the *chargé d'affaires*, two people from the Legation explained the prevailing customs decrees to Havas, while advising that he forward his ideas directly to Budapest through the Hungarian World Congress. As a response, Havas openly stated that before accepting the advice of the legation staff, he would consult those in charge of Hungarian affairs at the State Department, or at least inform them subsequently. Thus,

although there was a working relationship between the legation and the economist, he now clearly demonstrated that he would not accept the official Hungarian line. Therefore, Zádor conclusively suggested that the relatively cordial relationship with Havas be maintained through the contact with the HWC instead of more frequent personal encounters with diplomats.⁴⁶

Disengage or not? The Hungarian dilemma

In March 1962, police lieutenant Lajos Varga of the Intelligence Service headquarters in Budapest declared that the Washington residency of Hungarian intelligence had not kept in touch with “DANIEL” at all. Considering that Havas was not planning to travel to Hungary in the near future, Varga submitted a motion to drop the case and close the file immediately.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Attaché Sándor Czottnér of the Hungarian Legation in Washington⁴⁸—whose cryptonym was “Czakó”⁴⁹—reported on Havas to the Intelligence Department in the fall of 1962 that State Department leaders such as Robert Vedeler, Harold McGhel, and Robert McKisson were also on friendly terms with the economist. Havas repeatedly explained to Czottnér that he was requested—by the State Department and the leaders of the Hungarian émigré organizations—to communicate to him certain ideas, such as the planned visit of Tibor Eckhardt to Hungary and the initiative that a body of loyal—or at least not openly hostile—exiles should be formed based on the Polish example. Havas mentioned that a growing number of leading émigrés had become disenchanted with the official organizations of the emigrant community. István Barankovics,⁵⁰ for example, allegedly made a statement that he would consider returning to Hungary if he were invited. In addition to this Havas also showed to Czottnér the first part of a report on the situation of the steel industry in Hungary that he had compiled at the request of the US Senate.⁵¹

A third trip to Budapest and its follow-up

On January 15, 1963, Czottnér met Havas for a briefing on the latter’s journey to Budapest in August 1962. Havas reported that on the introductory visit of councilor Turner Shelton dispatched to the American Legation in Hungary, he met Zádor, who invited him for lunch. Zádor regretted that they could not move forward with the normalization of relations between the two countries with the exception of the question of amnesty. Havas had positive impressions about his stay in Hungary the previous August since he had managed to talk to two key department leaders of the Hungarian National Bank: János Fekete and József Bognár. In the matter of the establishment of

a Polish-type loyal émigré organization Havas recommended approaching Ferenc Nagy or Barankovics, for he thought that Tibor Eckhardt, another possible candidate, was unfit for this role because of his extravagant life and vanity.⁵² In reality, Eckhardt maintained his markedly anti-Soviet stance until the end of his life.⁵³ Nor was Barankovics a suitable candidate, since the former president of the Democratic People's Party, who defected to the US in 1949 after he had been the last to dissolve his Christian Democratic political organization, refused to take into consideration that the acceptance of the Kádár regime had been increasing both inside the country and internationally.⁵⁴ Although Ferenc Nagy, together with a significant part of the émigré community, was delighted by the improvement of living conditions in Hungary and was supporting the normalization of the relations between Budapest and Western capitals, he still could not be engaged to come up with bolder initiatives.⁵⁵ Havas complained that during his trip to Hungary he could not get in touch with János Kövesdi, whom he had known from Washington. Incidentally, Kövesdi was consciously avoiding any encounter with Havas: since 1958 he had been the resident officer of the Hungarian intelligence service in Washington, so it is obvious that the Ministry of Internal Affairs attempted to obscure the true nature of his actual commission under all circumstances.⁵⁶

When the new American *chargé d'affaires* to Budapest, Horace G. Torbert, visited Havas in his home in Washington, D.C, he confided to the economist that he did not expect to have enough time in Budapest to normalize bilateral relations. He also praised the performance of János Radványi,⁵⁷ the new Hungarian *chargé d'affaires* to the US. Unlike on previous occasions, Havas did not urge him to meet János Fekete, which implied to the Hungarian intelligence service that (from) this time (on) the State Department did not intend to use the economist as a go-between in communicating with Hungarian leaders. "Vándor" and "Zalai" (namely, police majors Gyula Rontó and Endre Szluka) did not initiate further talks with Havas.⁵⁸

Havas and Mindszenty

In March 1963 Kádár proclaimed a "general" amnesty for the participants of the Revolution of 1956, which nonetheless excluded those who were not convicted of political crimes. The United Nations promptly took the "Hungarian Question" off its agenda; but the Mindszenty case still remained unresolved. Referring to the Cardinal, Secretary of State Dean Rusk advised his Hungarian counterpart János Péter that "we should get rid of this

old bone that got stuck in our throat.”⁵⁹ On January 17, 1964, the Catholic weekly *The Commonwealth* published an article by Thomas Weyr titled “The Mindszenty Tragedy,” which, according to both Havas and Paul Ward of the *Baltimore Sun*, was in line with Rusk’s stance and the opinion of the liberal circles of the Catholic Church. On February 6 Havas hinted to the Legation staff that it would be expedient to provide Mindszenty with a (presumably international) guarantee that he would not be detained if he left the Legation of the United States. He also suggested that the Cardinal be allowed to return to Esztergom for a few days in order to leave Hungary as a dignitary of the Church and not as a criminal. *Chargé d’affaires* Radványi combined this piece of advice with the opinion of editor Ward, who asserted that with such a step more cooperation could be expected from the United States. A few days later English and Italian papers trumpeted the commencement of official negotiations between Hungary and the Vatican. Havas inquired about these events from Radványi, Varga, and Dénes Polgár, the Washington correspondent of the Hungarian News Agency,⁶⁰ and conveyed to them the message of State Department Division Head Robert McKisson, who considered this event a breakthrough.⁶¹ The news proved to be true: on September 15, 1964 the Hungarian People’s Republic and the Holy See came to a concordat, which failed resolve all the issues but at least created a *modus vivendi* between the Hungarian government and the Roman Catholic Church. In the end, on September 29, 1971 Mindszenty left the (by then already) U.S. Embassy in Budapest and departed for Rome via Vienna.⁶²

Conclusion

The story of Eugene Havas and his individual attempts to improve bilateral relations between his old country and new home represent a hitherto neglected aspect of US-Hungarian relations. He was one of the many expats that the MFA and the intelligence service picked upon in the hope that he might help address their most immediate concern: ending Hungary’s isolation from the West and removing the “Hungarian Question” from the agenda of the UN General Assembly. In the period between 1959 (the Soviet-American agreement) and 1963 (the “general” amnesty in Hungary) he proved to be a useful semi-asset, but when relations began to return to normal channels he was gradually disengaged. In the absence of American sources we may only assume that he was perhaps also used as a casual informer by the Federal Bureau of Investigation or as an agent by the Central Intelligence Agency. He had no vested financial interest, nor was there a chance to improve his economic journalistic credentials, so his efforts seem genuine. Havas died in

1967 and thus missed out on the “normalization” of bilateral relations (strictly to be interpreted in the Cold War context [1969-78]), and the recovery of full Hungarian independence in 1989.

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Notes

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¹ Unless otherwise noted this summary is based on László Borhi, *Dealing with Dictators: The United States, Hungary, and East Central Europe, 1942-1989*, trans. Jason Vincz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2016) 138–83.

² Margit Balogh, *Mindszenty József: Élet-Kép Sorozat* [Joseph Mindszenty: Life-Sequence of Pictures] (Budapest: Elektra, 2002) 188–263. Hereafter cited as Balogh, *Mindszenty*.

³ Tamás Magyarics, “Az Egyesült Államok és Magyarország, 1957-1967” [The United States and Hungary, 1957-1967], *Századok* 130.3 (1996): 580; Lajos Arday, *Az Egyesült Királyság és Magyarország: Nagy-Britannia és a magyar-angol kapcsolatok a 20. században* [The United Kingdom and Hungary: Great Britain and British-Hungarian Relations in the 20th Century] (Budapest: Mundus Magyar Egyetemi Könyvkiadó, 2005) 154–57.

⁴ Mária Palasik, “A BM II/3. (Hírszerző) Osztály,” *A megtorlás szervezete: A politikai rendőrség újjászervezése és működése 1956-1962* [The Organization of Retaliation: The Reestablishment and Operation of the Political Police 1956-1962], ed. Gergő Bendegúz Cseh and Imre Okvách (Budapest: Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára-I?Harmattan, 2013) 47–49.

⁵ Confidential information from a former Hungarian intelligence officer not to be named. 13 Nov. 2017.

⁶ His most relevant works include *Az angol szakszervezetek és az általános sztrájk következményei* [The British Trade Unions and the Consequences of the General Strike] (Budapest: 1927) and *Hungary's Finance and Trade 1927* (London: General P, 1928).

⁷ 3.2.4 K-833/T [Havas Jenő], Tárgy: A 4/20/1960. sz. jelentésből kivonat, Budapest, 17 June 1960, 3 (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára [Historical Archives of State Security: The Personal File of Jenő Havas]). Hereafter referred to as ÁBTLL.

⁸ On Zádor's ties to the intelligence service see his agent file 3.2.1. BT-12-10-69675/50: “Arnold Péter” [The Agent File of Tibor Zádor], Tárgy: Zádor Tibor (“Arnold Péter”) beszerzése–Jelentés, Budapest, 3 June 1950 (ÁBTLL) 15–17. His report on meeting Havas, 3.2.4 K-833/T, Tárgy: Havas Jenő közigazdász Magyarországra való utazása, Washington, 26 Apr 1960, 16 (ÁBTLL).

⁹ On Havas's ties to the Washington legation between the world wars see United States of America Department of State Foreign Official Status Notification, 9 Jan. 1941, *The Papers of Jenő Havas 1942-1945*, 14–15. Item 11/d, Fond 9, the Papers of the Washington Legation 1921-41, K 106, Hungarian National Archives [Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL)]. Hereafter cited as *The Papers of Jenő Havas*.

¹⁰ Washington, 6-14 Aug. 1943, *The Papers of Jenő Havas*, 91–100.

¹¹ See for example Havas, “The Situation in Hungary. Dissolution of Parliament Not Prelude to Fascist Regime,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 1935, 14.

¹² 3.2.4 K–833/T: Tárgy: Havas Jenő közigazdász Magyarországra való utazása, Washington, 26 Apr. 1960, 16–17 (ÁBTL).

¹³ William C. Sullivan, *The Bureau: My Thirty Years in Hoover's FBI: The Untold Story of the Life at the Top of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, by the Former Assistant to J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: Norton, 1979) 175–79.

¹⁴ Petitions for Naturalization, Comp. 1824-1991, New York. Alphabetical Index to Declarations of Intention of the U. S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, 1917-1950. Surname: HAVAS. Immigrant Name: HAVAS, EUGENE. Roll 094: 490212, Record Group 21, M1675, National Archives and Record Administration (NARA).

¹⁵ *The Rockefeller Foundation: Annual Report 1943*. Gift from Mr. Eugene Havas. 45/252. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.

¹⁶ 9 Jan. 1941, *The Papers of Jenő Havas*, 12.

¹⁷ Péter Várkonyi (1931-2008) was a historian by qualification and a high-ranking communist official by profession. He served in many key functions in the HSWP leadership, then became foreign minister (1983-89) and the last communist ambassador to the USA (1989-90).

¹⁸ Móric Kornfeld (1882-1967) was a Hungarian tycoon, banker, and member of the Upper Chamber of the Hungarian Parliament before 1944. He had been forced to resign from his position due to the German occupation and was arrested by the Gestapo with all of his family members. Finally they found asylum in Switzerland and Portugal but were never to return to their native country.

¹⁹ 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], Feljegyzés, Budapest, 29 June 1960, 4–5 (ÁBTL). Unless otherwise noted, the subsequent summary of his visit is based on this report.

²⁰ 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], Ebed Havas Jenővel. 335/1960. Feljegyzés, Budapest, 4 July 1960, 5–7 (ÁBTL).

²¹ Tibor Frank, *Discussing Hitler: Advisers of U.S. Diplomacy in Central Europe, 1934-1941* (Budapest: CEU P, 2003) 56–67.

²² Yale Richmond, *Practicing Public Diplomacy: A Cold War Odyssey* (New York: Berghahn, 2008) 62–66.

²³ Péter György, *Apám helyett* [In Place of My Father] (Budapest: Magvető, 2010) 168–72.

²⁴ 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], Tárgy: Újabb beszélgetés Havas Jenővel. Feljegyzés, Budapest, 12 July 1960, 9–10 (ÁBTL).

²⁵ Tárgy: Havas Jenő magyarországi utazása. Washington, 24 May 1961, 44–45. 004916–215/1961: Szigorúan titkos [Top Secret], Item 118, Box 25: XIX–J–1–j–USA 1945-1964, MNL OL.

²⁶ 3. 2. 4–K–833/T–[Havas Jenő]–Tárgy: Havas Jenő ügyében FELJEGYZÉS, Budapest, 19 June 1961 (ÁBTL).

²⁷ “Boldizsár Iván (1912-88),” *Új Magyar Irodalmi Lexikon I. A-GY*, ed. Péter László (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994) 255.

²⁸ Fenyő Miksa, *Önéletrajzom* [My Autobiography] (Budapest: Argumentum, 1994).

²⁹ Rezső Nyers, “Bognár József egyenes életútja a kacsaringós magyar politikában” [József Bognár’s Career in the Sinuous Hungarian Politics], *Társadalomkutatás* 15.1–2 (1997), 138–42.

³⁰ László Ropoly, “Előszó,” *Neumann János válogatott írásai* [The Selected Writings of János Neumann] (Budapest: Typotex, 2003) 17–45.

³¹ Havas Jenő látogatása Beöthy elvtársnál [Jenő Havas visits comrade Beöthy]. Budapest, 3 July 1961, 38–39. 004916/1: Magyarok Világszövetsége [Hungarian World Congress]. 19389/1961, Item 118, Box 25, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USA 1945-64, XIX–J–1–j: USA 1945-1964, MNL OL. Hereafter cited as Havas Jenő látogatása Beöthy elvtársnál [Jenő Havas visits comrade Beöthy]. Budapest, 3 July 1961. On Beöthy’s life see Jónás Károly, “90 éve született Beöthy Ottó könyvtárigazgató” [On the 90th Birthday of Otto Beöthy], *Könyv, könyvtár, könyvtáros* 3.11 (1994): 62–64.

³² Ignác Romsics, “A State Department és Magyarország 1942-1947,” *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében* [Our Place and Fate in the Danubian Basin], ed. Gábor Luca (Budapest: Osiris, 1996) 292–93.

³³ László Borhi, *Megalkuvás és erőszak: Az Egyesült Államok és a szovjet térhódítás Magyarországon 1944-1949* [Appeasement and Violence: The United States and the Soviet Conquest in Hungary 1944-1949] (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Könyvkiadó, 1997).

³⁴ Szabolcs Szita, *Aki egy embert megment–a világot menti meg: Mentőbizottság–Kasztner Rezső–SS-embervásár 1944-1945* [Who Saves a Life, Saves the World: The Committee for Escape–Rezső Kasztner–SS-Slavemarket, 1944-1945] (Budapest: Corvina, 2005) 130–35.

³⁵ Imre Bíró, “Adatok az újkori magyar szemészet fejlődéséhez” [Facts on the Development of Modern Hungarian Ophthalmology], *Tanulmányok és arcképek a magyar medicina világából* [Studies and Portraits from the World of Hungarian Medicine], ed. József Antall, Győző Birtalan, and Emil Schulteis (Budapest: Medicina Könyvkiadó, 1988) 96–97.

³⁶ Havas Jenő látogatása Beöthy elvtársnál [Jenő Havas visits comrade Beöthy], Budapest, 3 July 1961, 38–40. Unless otherwise noted, the following summary is based on this report.

³⁷ Zsolt Krahlucsán, “A BM KEOKH és Útleveosztályának szervezettörténete, 1956-1962” [Organizational History of the Foreigners’ Control and Passport Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs], *Befekintő* 5.4 (2011): 1–20.

³⁸ Tibor Mészáros, *Képek és tények Márai Sándor életéről* [Pictures and Facts about the Life of Sándor Márai] (Budapest: Helikon-Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2006) 106–30.

³⁹ Éva Standeisky, “‘Honvágy és szabadságvágy szorításában’: Zilahy Lajos hazacsalogatása: kísérlet és kudarc” [Wedged between Homesickness and the Longing for Freedom: Trying to Lure Lajos Zilahy to Come Home: An Attempt and a Failure], 2000: *Irodalmi és Társadalmi Havi Lap* 14.7–8 (2002): 95–111.

⁴⁰ Marianne Szegedy-Maszák, *Csókolom a kezét* [I Kiss Your Hand Many Times] (Budapest: Libri, 2014) 5–425.

⁴¹ “Fábián Béla (1889-1966),” *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon: Harmadik, kiegészítő kötet A-Z* [Encyclopedia of Hungarian Biography: 3rd and Supplementary Vol. A-Z], ed. Ágnes Kenyeres (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1981) 203.

⁴² Havas Jenő látogatása Beöthy elvtársnál [Jenő Havas visits comrade Beöthy], Budapest, 3 July 1961, 41–43.

⁴³ John H. Fenton, “New Heaven Line to Buy Debt From Dumaine, Its President,” *The New York Times* 13 Apr. 1950: 41.

⁴⁴ 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], Tárgy: “DÁNIEL” fn. tipp ügyében. Budapest, 29 Sept. 1961, 12 (ÁBTL).

⁴⁵ Havas Jenő levele. Budapest, 1961. XII. 11, 34–37. 004916/2: Magyarok Világszövetsége [Hungarian World Congress]. 25194/1961, Item 118, Box 25, XIX–J–1–j:

USA 1945-1964, MNL OL. Cyrus S. Eaton (1883-1979) was a Canadian-born American businessman and philanthropist, who sought better East-West relations during the 1950s and received the Lenin Peace Prize from Moscow for his efforts in 1960.

⁴⁶ Havas Jenő levele. Washington, February 25, 1962, 33. 002876–63/1962, Item 118, Box 25, XIX–J–1–j: USA 1945-1964, MNL OL.

⁴⁷ 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], “DÁNIEL” fn. tipp ügyében, Javaslat. Budapest, 20 March 1962, 13 (ÁBTL).

⁴⁸ *Diplomatic List, January 1963* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963) 28.

⁴⁹ Orbán-Schwarzkopf Balázs, “Egy elnök halála: Egyiptom az 1970-es 80-as évek fordulóján a magyar hírszerzési iratokban, különös tekintettel az iszlám szélsőségesek tevékenységére” [Death of a President: Egypt in the 1970s and 80s in Hungarian Intelligence Files with Special View to the Activities of Islamic Extremists], *Arv és álarc* [Face and Mask] 1–2 (2018): 144–45.

⁵⁰ István Barankovics (1906-1974) was a prominent Hungarian journalist, publisher, and politician. When his party was forced to dissolve itself in 1949, he emigrated to the United States. On his political ideas see István Mészáros, “Mindszenty és Barankovics: Adalékok a ‘keresztény párt’ problematikájához,” *Magyar egyháztörténelmi nézetek* 19.3–4 (2007): 233.

⁵¹ 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], “Czakó” kapcsolatairól JELENTÉS. Budapest, October 8, 1962, 14–15, ÁBTL.

⁵² 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], 1/9–“B”–1963. számú jelentés. Tárgy: Beszélgetés Havas Jenővel. Washington, 15 Jan. 1963 (ÁBTL) 28–29.

⁵³ Katalin Kádár Lynn, *Eckhardt Tibor amerikai évei: 1941-1972* [The American Years of Tibor Eckhardt 1941-1972] (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2006) 132–90.

⁵⁴ Gyula Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció életrajza 1945-1985* [A Biography of the Hungarian Diaspora, 1945-1985] Vol. 2 (Budapest: Európa, 1989) 12–14. Hereafter cited as Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció életrajza*.

⁵⁵ Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció életrajza* 151–52.

⁵⁶ 2.8.2.1–69, The Personal Index Card of János Kövesdi, 7–16 (ÁBTL).

⁵⁷ Telegram from the Department of State to the Legation in Hungary, Washington, 20 Oct. 1962. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vol. XVI, Eastern Europe; Cyprus; Greece; Turkey (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1994) 15.

⁵⁸ 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], 1/9–“B”–1963. számú jelentés. Tárgy: Beszélgetés Havas Jenővel. Washington, 15 Jan. 1963, (29–30 (ÁBTL).

⁵⁹ Balogh, *Mindszenty*, 297–306. See also András Miklós Deák, Ádám Somorjai, OSB, and Tibor Zinner, eds., *Menedékben. Amerikai diplomaták Mindszenty bíborosról, 1957-1970* [In Refuge: American Diplomats on Cardinal Mindszenty, 1957-1970] (Budapest: Magyar Napló, 2019). An English version is forthcoming in 2020.

⁶⁰ Dénes Polgár, *Egy POLGÁR a nagyvilágban* [A Citizen in the World] (Budapest: Atlantic P, 2009) 37–63.

⁶¹ 3.2.4 K–833/T [Havas Jenő], 139/SZT: Tárgy: “The Commonwealth” c. folyóirat Mindszenty cikke. Washington, 18 Feb. 1964, 38–39 (ÁBTL).

⁶² Mária Pallagi, “‘Egy becsületbeli ügy’: Franz König bíboros látogatásai Mindszenty József hercegprímásnál (1963-1971)” [An Affair of Honor: Cardinal Franz König Pays a Visit to Prince Primate József Mindszenty], *Nemzetek és birodalmak: Diószegi*

István 80 éves [Nations and Empires: István Diószegi is 80 Years Old], eds. Háda Béla, et al. (Budapest: ELTE, Új-és Jelenkori Egyetemes Történeti Tanszék, 2010) 507–25. For the American sources on König's visits see the documentary reader cited in note 59 above.

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