

Hungarian Polyp – The Post-Communist Mafia State

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In 2001, Bálint Magyar wrote an article under the title 'Hungarian polyp – the organised over-world.' In this article, he analysed the way Fidesz was corrupting and destroying the institutional system of the rule of law. He showed how this party was spreading downward by employing mafia methods and misusing state support within the system of democratic rule. At that time, many readers doubted the legitimacy of the new conceptual approach, whose key categories were the 'organised over-world', the 'state employing mafia methods' and the 'adopted political family'. Critics considered these categories metaphors rather than elements of a coherent conceptual framework describing the system. The 2002 election defeat of Fidesz partially took the question off the agenda. In 2010, however, with a two-third majority in Parliament, the institutional obstacles of exerting power were largely removed. Just like Fidesz, the state itself was placed under the control of a single individual, who since then has applied the techniques used within his party to enforce submission and obedience onto society as a whole.

The new conceptual framework describing the system had a revelatory effect on a significant segment of Hungarian intellectuals concerned with political science, sociology and economics. Some of them went as far as to suggest that it might be possible to interpret the current Hungarian political developments by using this creative language.

This theme, together with its conceptual framework, is important and timely not only for Hungary, but also for other Eastern European countries subjected to autocratic rules. Analysing this issue may also contribute to a better understanding of the processes underway in several countries of the former Soviet Union.

At the time of regime change, it all looked clear: a single-party dictatorship characterised by state ownership was replaced by a multi-party Parliamentary democracy based on private ownership and market economy. Set by Western democracies, this model is called 'liberal democracy'. In well-functioning liberal democracies, if the normative system is damaged, certain mechanisms through institutional control and power-sharing produce a healing effect, and these 'deviancies' will not reach the critical mass to endanger the system at its core. However, if they not only appear en masse, but also embody the mainstream values and objectives of the government, these dominant characteristics will constitute a new system. Present-day Hungary is a post-Communist mafia state. In this expression, 'post-Communist' refers to the circumstances of its formation and its initial conditions, whereas 'mafia state' defines the nature of its functioning. What began under the first Fidesz government between 1998 and 2002 has been consummated since 2010, and this system can best be compared to those operating in the majority of countries that once belonged to the Soviet Union. However, as opposed to the successor states of the Soviet Union, the up-and-coming Fidesz moves in a roundabout way towards the model that can be characterised by a joint concentration of power and personal wealth. While in the post-Communist systems of the former Soviet republics a certain segment of the Party and secret service became the elite in possession of not only political power but also of wealth, Fidesz, as a late-coming new political predator, was able to occupy this position through an aggressive change of elite. To achieve its goal, it had to eliminate the institutional system of liberal democracy. It is a moot question whether the Hungarian example will trigger processes in the other Central-Eastern European countries too.

Thus Hungary is not a country where democracy manifests itself in a distorted, stunted or deficient form, because that could still be called democracy, albeit limited in scope. The

present system, which we label as a mafia state equipped with distinctive system characteristics, does not fit the traditional framework that defines the relationship between democracy and dictatorship; it can only be interpreted in a new kind of explanatory framework.

What is called 'the national cooperation system' is nothing else than the vassal system first realised within Fidesz only to be imposed onto the entire society. But why call it an organised underworld or a mafia state? Because while the classical mafia as a well-oiled underworld channelling wealth and economic players into its spheres of interest by means of direct coercion, the Hungarian polyp does the same by acquiring and appropriating political power by means of Parliamentary legislation, legal prosecution, tax authority, police forces and secret service, all tailored to satisfy the demands of Fidesz and its vassals. Following the constitutional coup, new laws were passed to create the conditions for a rapid change of elite, the 'legitimate' establishment of a feudal system, a new form of nationalisation due to a lack of privatisable state assets, the expulsion of foreigners under the pretext of national freedom fight, the confiscation of private assets outside the circles of vassals, as well as the extension of the power system.

The post-Communist mafia state model attempts to focus on the system in its entirety. Its actions are led by the logic of power and wealth concentration in the hands of the clan. This goal is achieved through monopolised aggression supported by a state arsenal and a mafia culture raised to the level of central politics. In this sense, the mafia state equals a privatised form of a parasite state.

Noran Publishing House has undertaken to publish this volume of essays, with an introduction written by Bálint Magyar, who, together with Júlia Vásárhelyi, is also the editor. The volume is an attempt to discuss current issues of present-day Hungary within the new conceptual framework described above. The contributing authors are representatives of the Hungarian liberal intelligentsia: economists, sociologists, philosophers, lawyers and fact-finding journalists.

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Recommending the volume

Pál Závada (writer): The volume names 'the new political predator', 'the post- Communist Hungarian polyp' and 'the privatised form of the parasite state' with an air of linguistic sophistication. What we are discussing has by now become larger than life – shouldn't we defeat it at last?

Gati Charles (historian, political scientist, professor at Johns Hopkins University):

After this book, the West can never look at Central-Eastern Europe the same way as before. I hope that this pioneering work will attract international attention.

Ferenc Pataki (social psychologist, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

[MTA]): In Hungary, too, we bear witness to how uncontrolled individual power and a one-party system buttressing it conquer society at an ever increasing speed, while retaining a semblance of democracy. This volume is more than gripping: it is illuminating.

Imre Vörös (former Supreme Court justice, member of the Hungarian Academy of

Sciences [MTA]): This volume written by Bálint Magyar and his co-authors might be called a textbook or, if you will, a masterpiece cut with the laser blade of a brain-sur- geon, describing the Hungarian society and its conditions at large in the autumn of 2013. Thus for those of us who plan to go to the polls in 2014 in awareness of 'what's at stake', this is set reading.

Mihály Vajda (philosopher, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [MTA]):

I recommend this exciting book for those who do not think in metaphors and analogies (in other words, who do not think), but who would like to comprehend novelty as novelty.

György Konrád (writer): This insightful book by the new Budapest School of intellectuals can invigorate thinking in the social sciences.

János Polónyi (physicist, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [MTA]):

We can protect ourselves from becoming prisoners of mendacious worlds only if our ability to interpret observations is sufficiently developed through conceptual thinking, reasoning and vigilance. We owe this not only to ourselves, but to others as well.