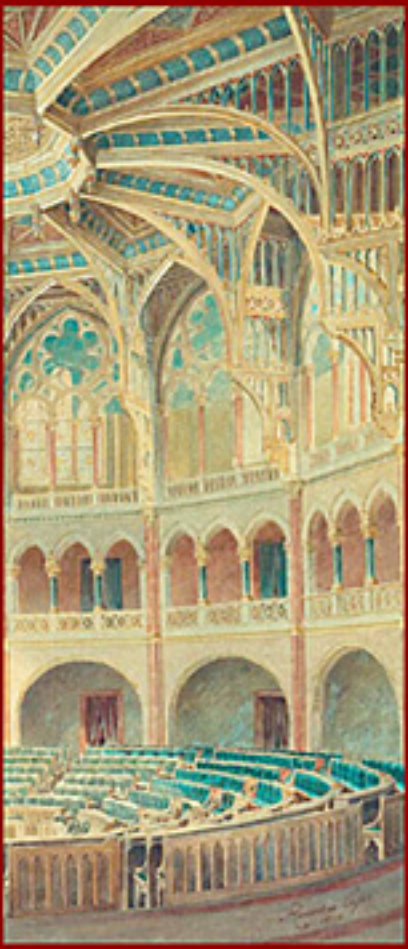

THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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Dear Readers,

The history of every democracy recounts a nation's encounters with and struggle for freedom. Throughout the centuries the Hungarian nation has come a long and trying way ever since our forebears settled in the Carpathian Basin, founded a state and then, seven years after the Magna Charta, King Andrew II issued the Golden Bull, which was the first step towards constitutionality in Hungary.

The centuries of fights against oppressors, the defence of freedom against tyranny and absolutism and, then—as from the nineteenth century—the struggle for the democratization of rights form an inseparable part of the history of the Hungarian people. A long road had to be travelled until in Budapest, which was one of the capitals of the Austro–Hungarian Empire at the time, the Parliament building, the "House of the Country" could be built in a fortunate era.

The edifice—which has attained symbolic importance—required immense efforts and expense. It was a most modern accomplishment in its time as it combined first-rate technical and artistic achievements.

The Parliament building is an ambitious vision of freedom and the service of the citizens of the nation that created it. The way the designers of the building saw it, almost every element of the Parliament—the halls where debates take place, the corridors, rooms and lounges where informal consultations and negotiations are held—is meant to remind the Members of Parliament, who act to serve their voters' interests of the grandness and importance of their mission.

This building, then, has an unmistakable spirit, which equally affects visitors, the Members of Parliament, who address public affairs within these walls day after day and the members of the personnel who work here.

The storms of history have buffeted freedom and this "House of the Country" throughout the century that has passed since its erection. It is of symbolic importance that only nowadays—after the repressive "existing socialism," which despised true popular representation—do we manage to fully restore the building from the last traces of the damage done during the Second World War and the damage on the façade caused by a volley shot at unarmed people who demonstrated for freedom and independence in 1956.

The authors of this volume wish to inform you about certain aspects of the history of parliamentarism in Hungary, the present operation of the National Assembly and the mission of this building, which has become the pride of this nation.

Please follow us during this imaginary journey.

Respectful greetings,

László Kövér
Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly

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I.

HUNGARY'S PARLIAMENT

The beginnings of parliamentarism in Hungary

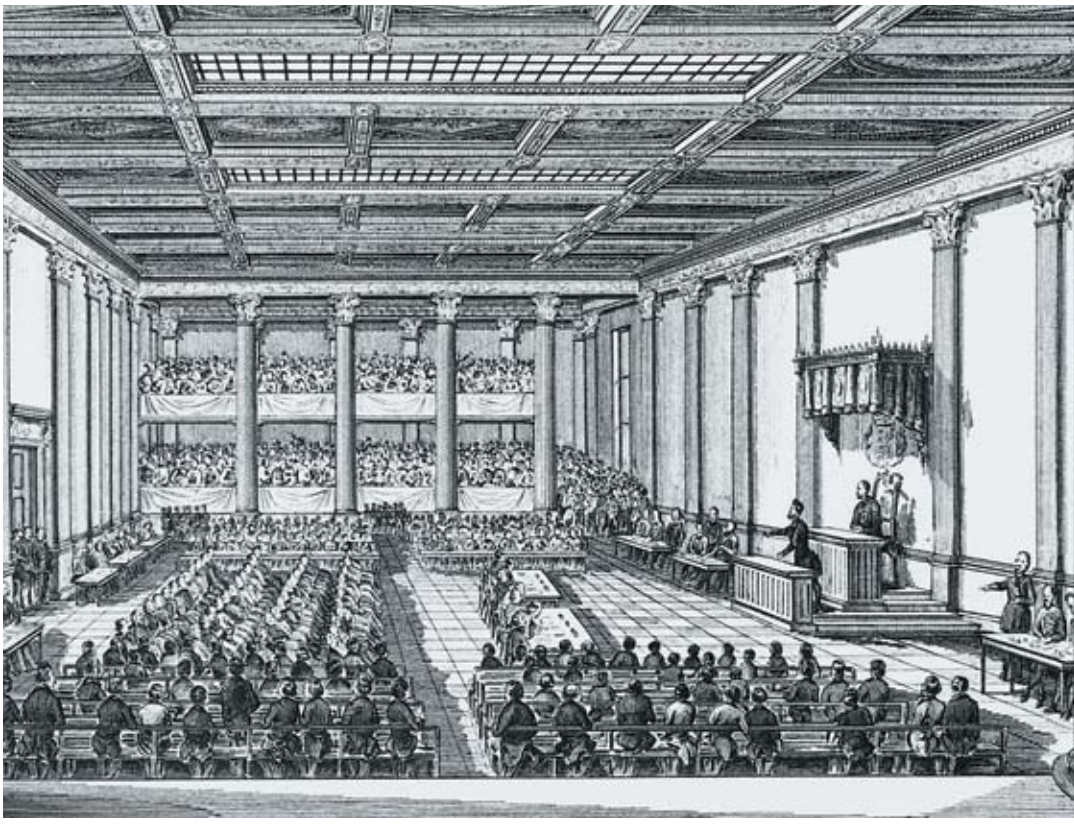
The history of parliamentarism in Hungary began in about the 13th century under the reign of Andrew II (1205–1235), when the king issued the Golden Bull (1222). In that document he promised to refrain from granting land to his supporters and involve a considerable number of nobles into governance. Even though the majority of the provisions of the Golden Bull were never implemented, the document indicated that Hungarian society had been at level with the standards of the feudal Europe of the time. The most lasting provision of the Golden Bull—which was often invoked during uprisings of the estates in the 17th century—was that inhabitants of the country (which at the time meant the class that had political rights: the nobility) were empowered to resist unlawful measures of the monarch. The Hungarian estates only renounced that *jus resistendi* in 1687.

A national assembly in the modern sense was convoked first in the 15th century. Until Matthias Corvinus' reign (1458–1490) all nobles enjoyed the right to attend in person nationwide assemblies that debated the matters of the kingdom, and were as a rule held in the field of Rákos, near the town of Pest. (Nobles enjoyed the same right in the Polish republic of nobles.) As a decision-making body the gathering was ineffective—often it was a mere occasion for magnates to show off the strength of their party. At the time of Matthias Corvinus the nobles began electing representatives from their ranks, which ended direct representation. The evolution of a bicameral Diet began. Although with time Matthias Corvinus neglected convening national assemblies, upon his death Jagiellonian kings Wladislas II (1490–1516) and Louis II (1516–1526) regularly convoked them. Present at the national assemblies were magnates, members of the nobility and of the clergy in person or represented by delegates, and representatives of the free royal towns. The peasantry was considered an underclass and lacked any political representation.

Block housing the Diet in Pozsony (now Bratislava), 19th century

Following the disastrous defeat of the Hungarian army at Mohács in 1526 and during the decades that followed the death of King Louis II, a large central swath of the country came under Ottoman Turkish occupation. Thereafter a cleavage occurred in the Hungarian political elite along partisan lines. Those two political parties had evolved during the Jagiellonian era. The party of the lesser nobility crowned John Szapolyai (John I—reign 1526–1540), the voivod of Transylvania, while the party of magnates enthroned Ferdinand I (reign 1526–1564), an Austrian archduke and king of Bohemia. A civil war was raging between the two camps for years. The Ottoman Empire joined the hostilities on the side of John I and the Holy Roman Empire backed Ferdinand I. After John I died and the Ottoman Turks took the town of Buda (1540–1541), the Principality of Transylvania was established under Ottoman dominion and organized its own national assembly. That duality lasted as late as 1848. That was because Transylvania was not united with the Kingdom of Hungary even after Ottoman Turks were driven out of Hungary (1686–1699). So there remained two independent national assemblies in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary during the Middle Ages.

After the Kingdom of Hungary came under the domination of Habsburgs, it was during the national assembly of 1608 that this institution received the format that it had roughly unaltered down to 1848. The national assembly consisted of two houses: the Lower House and the Upper House. The Upper House included the magnates (princes, barons and counts), church dignitaries (bishops) and senior public administration officials. The Lower House consisted of the delegates of counties (two for each county), delegates of Church chapters and delegates of the free royal towns (two for each of those towns). In the Lower House two envoys represented Croatia (which had its own provincial assembly); and representatives of peers who could not be present personally were also in the Lower House. The two Houses put together represented about seven per cent of the population of Hungary in an uneven distribution: about fifty to sixty families were represented in the Upper House and only some tens of thousands of members of the nobility and of the burghers of the free royal



The Upper House , meeting in the National Museum

towns were represented in the Lower House. As a matter of fact, the envoys of the free royal towns altogether had a single vote and the delegates of the counties only had one vote per county. The delegates in the Lower House had a binding mandate: they had to do what the counties and the free royal towns told them to do. The Diets of the Kingdom of Hungary were as a rule held in Pozsony (today Bratislava in Slovakia) as from 1541; at the time of uprisings by certain members of the estates and during wars of liberation, the princes of Transylvania convened national assemblies in other towns. At the time of the war of liberation (1703–1711), led by Ferenc Rákóczi II, there were four such national assemblies (in Szécsény, 1705; Ónod, 1707; Sárospatak, 1708, and Szatmár [today Satu Mare in Romania], 1711). In the period after 1711 two national assemblies were held in the town of Buda (1790–1791 and 1807).

Following 1541 the national assemblies in Transylvania did not have a permanent venue although, as from the 17th century, they were held mostly in Gyulafehérvár (today Alba Iulia) and Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, both in Romania). The national assemblies held in Transylvania were unicameral. They were attended by delegates of three nations (Hungarians, Szeklers and Saxons; two delegates for each county or other administrative unit); envoys of Hungarian territories attached to Transylvania (Partium), delegates of Transylvanian Saxons and Hungarian privileged market towns, senior officials of public administration, delegates of Church chapters, and officials of the Court who were invited by the prince of Transylvania. As from the 17th century the Romanians, who accounted for the majority of the population of Transylvania, did not have independent representation—they were only represented by a bishop of the Greek Catholic Church and county delegates of Romanian national descent.

Croatia—which was in an associated status with Hungary—had its own provincial assembly (*sabor*), which in the 17th century sent a delegation to the Hungarian national assemblies and two delegates as from the 18th century. The population of the so-called Military Border

Dome Hall

Guard Zone (*Militärgrenze*), set up at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, had no political representation. That zone was governed from Vienna directly. The Court did not consider it a part of the Kingdom of Hungary, instead it treated it as a separate military "colony".

The national assemblies of the Kingdom of Hungary opened with the reading out of the king's memorandum, which was then deliberated. In the memorandum the king defined the matters he recommended for debate. The two Houses responded in a petition which, among other things, included complaints to be rectified by the ruler. The petition also included the proposed legislative programme.

Both the monarch and the Lower House could initiate laws. For a bill to pass, it needed the approval of both Houses and of the ruler. The Upper House screened the bills to be submitted to the ruler and by the 19th century it had clearly supported the interests of the Court. When the two Houses did not concur on a bill, it was not submitted to the monarch.

The national assembly had no direct means to influence the decisions of the monarch yet it could extract certain concessions from him/her. In the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary taxes could only be imposed and soldiers recruited for the army with the participation of the national assembly. Hungary being a kingdom with elector rights, the ruler could only exercise his rights if the Hungarian national assembly decided to elect him/her king, that is, if the national assembly issued the requisite document, the king went through the coronation ceremony and took an oath to honour the laws of Hungary. Some Habsburg rulers attempted to bypass the Diets and did not convene them for decades (1662–1681, 1688–1708, 1728–1741, 1741–1751, 1751–1764, 1765–1790, 1812–1825) but those long legislative recesses often caused serious empire-wide political crises. Eventually the monarchs found themselves under the obligation of observing the constitutional rules.

Legislative chamber of the Parliament Building

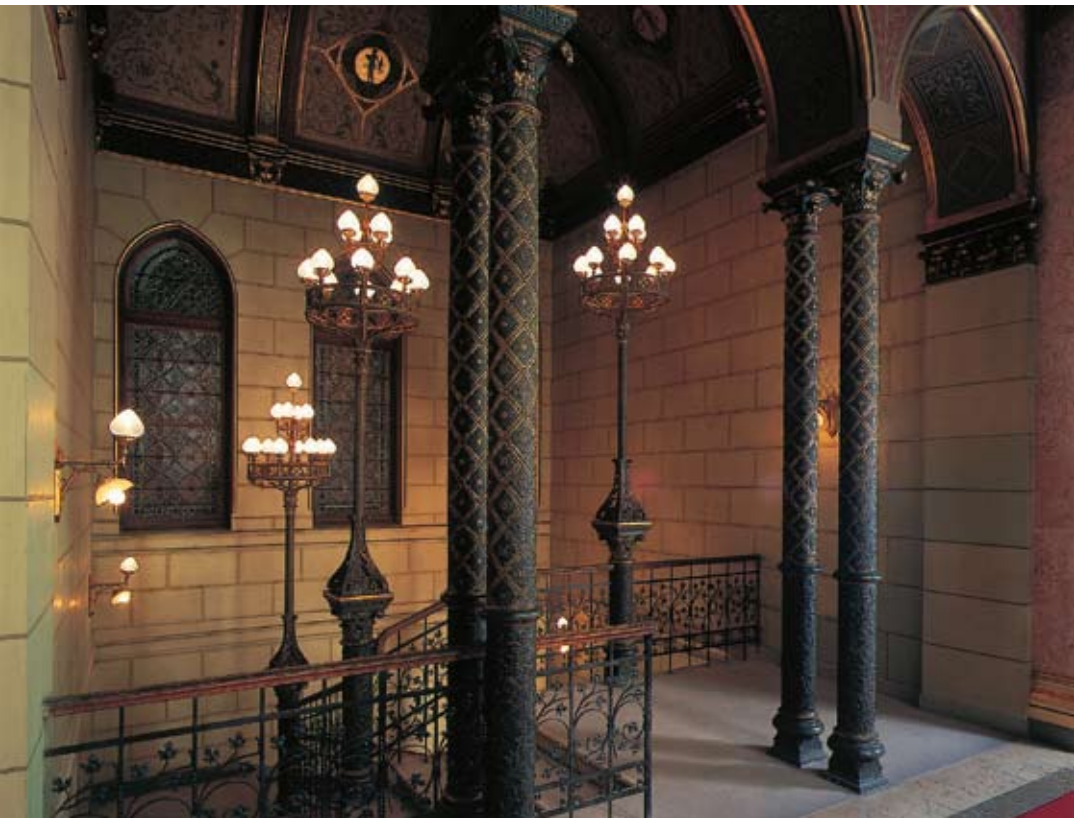
The Hungarian national assembly between 1848 and 1918

The electoral law of 1848 and the elections

The Revolution of 1848 fundamentally changed the system of political representation. For the first time since 1526, pursuant to the laws that had been signed by King Ferdinand V, separate territories of the Kingdom of Hungary were united and a larger section of the population received parliamentary representation in a modern sense. Act IV of 1848 provided that the national assembly, whose Members are to be returned in representative elections, should be convened yearly. The law also stipulated that each session should last for three years. The national assembly remained bicameral yet the Upper House lost its political prerogatives. Sittings of the national assembly became public. The two Houses were free to define their own rules and legislative programme and elect their officials. Both the Government and the Members could table bills. The Members' mandate became free.

Pursuant to Act V of 1848, representative elections had to be held throughout the country for the subsequent national assembly to be held in Pest. The law provided for the election of 377 Members in Hungary (without Transylvania) and 69 in Transylvania.

Those who were enfranchised kept their vote (people who took part in the election of deputies before 1848 in the counties and in the free areas). In addition, the right to vote was granted for those men who turned twenty, were not under any kind of guardianship, had no criminal record, belonged to any of the established religious denominations *and* possessed a house or a plot of land worth at least 300 forints in a free royal town or in a village with a proper local authority, or owned at least a quarter of a serf's plot of land or its equivalent in some other village, furthermore, craftsmen, merchants or factory owners whose permanent residence was their own workshop, sales premises or factory, and as craftsmen had



Ministers' staircase

at least one assistant; men who had a revenue of at least a hundred silver forints from their landed property or from their capital, furthermore, intellectuals without property qualifications if they had a permanent residence in the locality concerned, and finally men who were burghers in the locality concerned prior to the enactment of that law. For a man to stand as a candidate to the national assembly, he had to have turned 24 and had to be fluent in Hungarian, which was the sole language of legislative work.

On election day each voter had the right to nominate a person in his constituency. Only men listed in the register of voters could vote. If in a constituency only one person was nominated or there was a clear consensus about the nomination of a single person, the head of the local electoral committee could, after receiving an affirmative answer to his question, declare the candidate concerned elected. If however a vote was requested by at least ten voters, a vote had to be held.

Voting was open. It was conclusive in the first round if a candidate won fifty per cent plus one vote. If that was not the case, a second round of voting was held for the two candidates that won the most votes. In case a second ballot could not be finished on the same day because of the high number of voters, the second vote had to be held on the subsequent day. In the second vote a simple plurality of votes earned a parliamentary seat.

On 19 May 1848 the Government under Prime Minister Lajos Batthyány decided to convene the national assembly for 2 July 1848. Although a much wider section of society had been enfranchised (the electorate grew four- to fivefold), three-fourth of the Members of the Diet continued to be nobles. That having said, almost all of those Members belonged to what used to be the reform-minded opposition as the majority of the conservative and radical candidates dropped out. As the elections were open, there was ample scope for traditional canvassing. The ratio of Members who belonged to the national minorities was low.

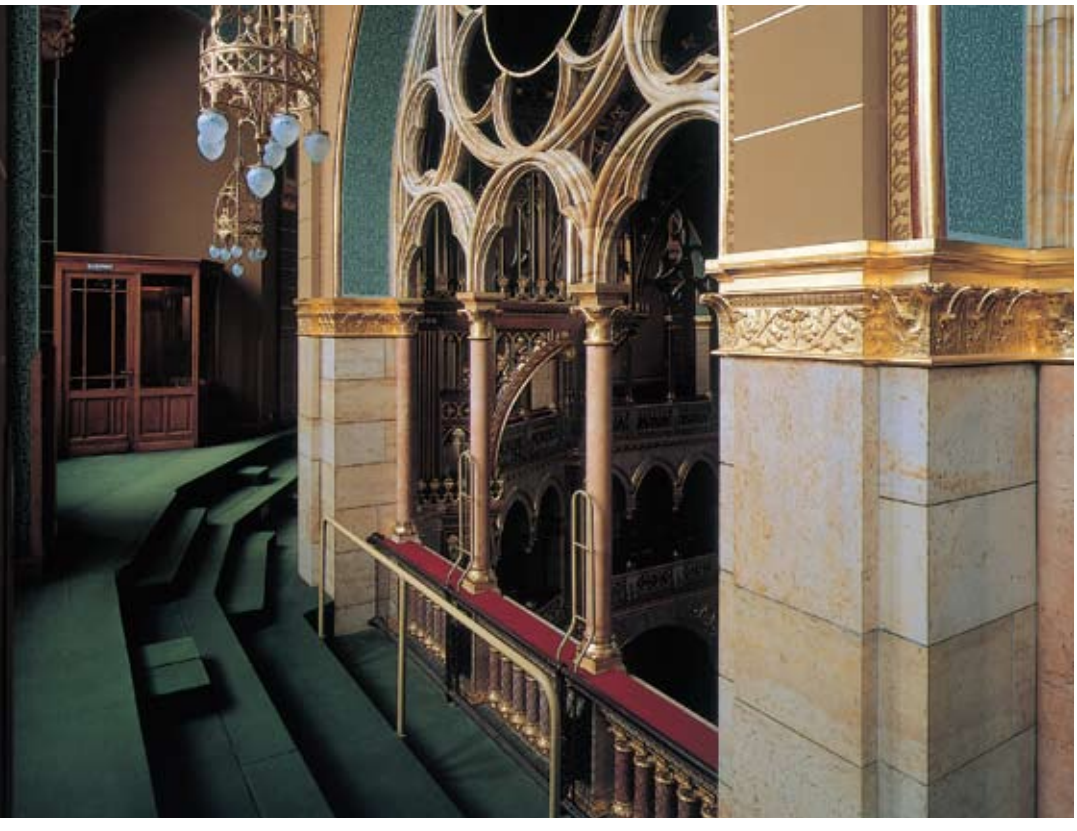
Corridor surrounding the legislative chamber

Neither Croatia, nor the Military Border Guard Zone returned deputies to the Hungarian Diet. By contrast, Romanians of Hungary and Transylvania had twenty-five Members in the Diet. Following the break with Vienna in autumn 1848, a part of the non-Hungarian Members (Serbians, Saxons and Romanians) resigned from the Diet.

The Government had a solid majority in the first representative Diet, which convened on 4 July 1848. The Diet's priority was to carry on and rectify the laws that had been enacted in April. Until late August the Diet adopted only three laws: settling Hungarians on estates that were owned by the Treasury; on the Hungarian defence forces and on the issuance of banknotes. Even though those laws did not get the monarch's approval, the Diet declared the latter two effective in autumn in view of the threats Hungary was facing.

In a royal decree issued on 3 October 1848, Emperor Ferdinand V dissolved the national assembly but the Diet declared the decree unlawful and rejected it. They argued that the royal decree lacked the Hungarian Prime Minister's counter-signature and, pursuant to Act IV of 1848, the monarch only had the right to adjourn sittings or dissolve the Diet after the national assembly had adopted the previous year's appropriation accounts and the budget law of the subsequent year. The Hungarian national assembly was in session until August 1849 (apart from brief recesses), which made it the primary institution of the legitimacy of the Hungarian state.

Prime Minister Lajos Batthyány's resignation on 2 October 1848 left the country without a Government. In a fortunate coincidence on 16 September the Lower House passed a decision on setting up a committee to inspect and assist Batthyány's measures to shore up Hungary's defence. The list of the members of the committee was announced on 21 September but until Batthyány's resignation that body was insignificant. However on 8 October 1848 the Diet resolved, first with a temporary then with a lasting effect, that this body, the

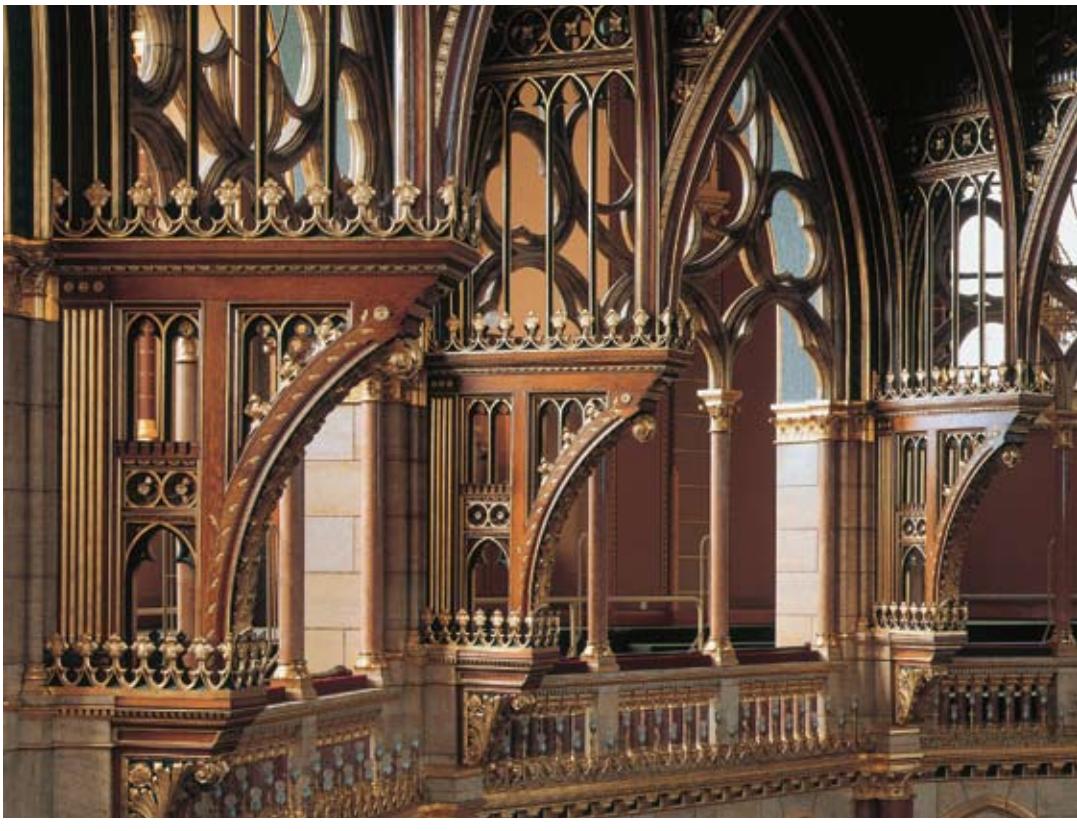


Second-floor galleries of the legislative chamber

National Defence Committee, would exercise executive power in Hungary. It was chaired by Lajos Kossuth and its members consisted of MPs from both Houses and state secretaries of ministries. In late November Kossuth attempted to transform that body into a regular ministry but to no avail. The ministries were headed by the former state secretaries and members of the National Defence Committee.

In view of the advance of troops on Pest under "royal and imperial" flags in the middle of December 1848, the Government and the national assembly moved to Debrecen on 1 January 1849. The Upper House, whose membership had shrunk as early as the summer of 1848, only held its first sitting in late March 1849; however the Lower House was in continuous session as from 8 January 1849. Members who were absent without a good reason were expelled and measures were taken to elect new ones in their stead. The most significant resolution of the Lower House occurred on 14 April 1849 at Kossuth's recommendation: Hungary was proclaimed independent and the Habsburg–Lotharingian dynasty deposed. As Hungarian troops retook Buda on 21 May 1849, the national assembly could return to Pest. Unfavourable developments in the battlefield only allowed a brief stay there: after two closed and one open sittings, the national assembly moved to Szeged.

That town hosted its sittings between 21 and 28 July. At its last sitting on 28 July it adopted a resolution with the effect of a law on the rights of the national minorities. The resolution fell short of granting territorial autonomy to the national minorities but recognized their right to unhindered national development and allowed the use of nationality languages in administrative, religious and judicial affairs. During that sitting the national assembly granted partial emancipation to the Jewish community of Hungary. The Lower House moved to Arad (today in Romania), where circumstances only allowed it to hold two closed sittings. The War of Independence was lost; reprisals followed. The Speaker of the Upper House, Baron Zsigmond Perényi and a notary of the Lower House, Imre Szacsvay were court-martialed



Cantilevers supporting ceiling, seen on gallery level

and executed. Several Members of both Houses were tried and either executed or (due to an amnesty) punished with long imprisonment.

The road to the Compromise

Hungary's drive for independence was suppressed and heavy-handed oppression followed until 1867. Emperor Francis Joseph I promised to restore constitutional governance already in autumn 1860 in his "October Diploma" and his "February Letters Patent" the next year but he demanded that the Hungarians should take part in the work of the imperial Parliament (where the Hungarian deputies would have been obviously voted down by the Slavic Members, who had a majority). Although the Hungarian political elite found that option unacceptable, the emperor convened the Hungarian Diet for 6 April 1861.

There were two parties in the Diet. The Petition Party, led by Ferenc Deák, stood for moderate opposition. It tacitly recognized Francis Joseph as king of Hungary and wished to let the monarch know of its demands in a traditional way: by sending him petitions. The Resolution Party, headed by László Teleki, was more radical. Its members had the view that Francis Joseph I was not Hungary's lawful king because he had not been crowned and the Diet had not enacted a law on his ascent to the throne. Consequently, supporters of that party intended to let the monarch know of the Diet's decisions by resolutions rather than petitions. The Petition Party wished to discuss with the ruler a return to the April Laws but the Resolution Party went further: it saw such talks a precondition for negotiations. After László Teleki's suicide on 8 May 1861, Kálmán Tisza became the Resolution Party's new leader. When on 5 June a vote was taken in the Diet on the petition tabled by Ferenc Deák, some of the members of the Resolution Party abstained or voted with Deák's party. Thus Deák's petition was adopted. The ruler however found the demands unacceptable. On 22 August 1861 he dissolved the Diet.

Ornate wooden ceiling of the Lower House

The emperor reintroduced an absolutist form of government even if with a provisional effect. In April 1865 Ferenc Deák published his "Easter Article" in a political daily in which he indicated that the Hungarian nation was ready to adjust the 1848 Laws to the Austrian Empire's security considerations. Thereafter Francis Joseph convoked Parliament for December 1865.

Of the Members, 120 were present already in the first representative Parliament in 1848–1849. The "Deák Party" mostly consisted of former Members of the Petition Party and had a comfortable majority. The Resolution Party was replaced by the Centre Left Party, led by Kálmán Tisza with 94 MPs. The Radicals had about twenty MPs, the former Conservatives 23 MPs and the national minorities of Hungary had twenty MPs in all. (When Parliament opened, no delegates from Transylvania were present.)

Francis Joseph I opened Parliament in the Royal Castle of Buda. In his speech from the throne he put forward his position on the restoration of the Hungary's territorial integrity yet he demanded that Parliament should adopt the October Diploma and the February Letters Patent and that the Hungarian parliamentarians should join the work of the imperial Parliament. He defined preconditions to the appointment of a new Hungarian Government and his coronation: the Hungarian national assembly should amend in the 1848 Laws the provisions that he and other Austrian politicians regarded as unacceptable. The Lower House politely declined his demands but the Upper House was cooperative. Two Hungarian petitions were submitted to the emperor. Francis Joseph bluntly rejected both of them, which provoked a joint protest from both chambers of the Hungarian national assembly.

The conflict centred on the following issue: the Hungarian national assembly first wanted a full return to the 1848 Laws and then, after the appointment of a new Government and the coronation of the king of Hungary, it was ready to debate the amendment of those laws. The emperor demanded a reverse order. Despite that disagreement, political work contin-

Stellar-shaped vaulted ceiling in the corridor

ued. The Parliament set up a committee of sixty-seven Members to elaborate a future dualistic system that would be based on the parity of the two parts of the empire. Then a subcommittee of fifteen Members was created to work out the final text of an agreement to be signed by the emperor and the other part of the empire, which was to become a constitutional entity. In the meantime a war broke out between Austria on the one hand and Prussia and Italy on the other, which made the situation even more complicated. Although a first draft of a compromise agreement had been finalized by 25 June 1866, the next day the emperor suspended Parliament.

Austria suffered a serious defeat from Prussia but it was victorious on the Italian front. Still Austria was forced to renounce a considerable part of the Italian territories it had controlled. Hungarian–Austrian negotiations continued. It proved the goodwill of the Hungarian side that it raised no further demands despite Austria's misfortunes in the battlefield. Parliament restarted work only on 19 November 1866. For a superficial observer the exchanges of messages between Hungary and Austria showed that both sides stuck to their guns but a compromise formula had emerged by February 1867.

Following a protracted and bitter tug of war, both sides yielded. The Hungarian side agreed to convince Parliament that foreign affairs, the government debt, taxation, monopolies, commerce and defence would be administered jointly by Hungary and Austria; and the emperor agreed to appoint a new Hungarian Government before that decision is confirmed by the Hungarian Parliament. As a major accomplishment the Austrian Government agreed that it would not submit the compromise agreement to the Austrian imperial assembly for approval. There was another important result: the emperor put aside his earlier reservations and approved that a Hungarian ministry of defence would be established. Francis Joseph had a precondition though: Prime Minister-elect Count Gyula Andrássy was to be the minister of defence.

Watercolour of the Lower House by Lajos Rauscher (1900)

Francis Joseph I appointed Gyula Andrássy Prime Minister on 17 February 1867 and three days later his ministers were also appointed. On 18 February the reactivation of the Constitution and the appointment of the Government were proclaimed in Parliament and it was received with enthusiastic cheering (but with reservation by some Members).

In subsequent weeks Andrássy pushed through Parliament laws on the recruitment of soldiers, taxation, the reorganization of counties and a provisional procedure concerning press publications. On 12 March Francis Joseph I arrived in Pest and bowing to his request and to avoid conflicts between the Court and the Government on 17 March the Hungarian Government adopted a secret regulation under which in the future the Government would request the emperor's prior approval to all important measures and proposed bills. On 30 March, following the general debate, Parliament adopted the bill on common affairs with a two-thirds majority. Following the bill's debate in detail, it was finally adopted with a somewhat smaller majority on 29 May. On 8 June Francis Joseph I was crowned King of Hungary—eighteen and a half years after he had become ruler of the empire.

The two parts of the empire could pursue a coordinated foreign policy due to the system of common affairs. The common affairs included foreign affairs, defence and the finances that covered the first two. The ministers who headed the ministries were appointed by Francis Joseph I. The work of the ministers was monitored by delegations, whose members were elected by the Parliaments each of the member states of the empire. Both Parliaments elected twenty Members from the Upper House and forty from the Lower House, so each country sent sixty members, which means the two delegations had a hundred a twenty altogether. The two delegations met once a year (in Vienna or in Pest). After hearing the reports of the common ministers, the delegations voted on the budgets of the common ministries. The two delegations communicated only in writing. If a lasting disagreement developed between them, a decision could be made in a joint meeting with a simple majority.

Watercolour of the Upper House by Lajos Rauscher (1900)

The work of Parliament during the age of dualism

As from 1867 Hungary was a parliamentary monarchy. It had almost full independence in home affairs and constitutionality was based on cooperation between the ruler, the Parliament and the Government—the latter being accountable both to Parliament and the monarch. The Government kept Parliament in due respect; the Prime Minister always attended the most important sittings, and the ministers were always present when matters in their competence were debated. The Standing Orders, which were adopted in 1848, were reviewed for the first time in 1868 and then on seven occasions until 1913. Thanks to the amendments of the Standing Orders the quality of the work and organization of Parliament improved. Prior to plenary debates bills and resolutions of the Lower House were discussed in standing committees. The Standing Orders of 1886 set their number at fourteen. Most important among them were those of justice, finance, transport, public education, public administration, economic affairs and defence. Other tasks of the standing committees covered the examination of Members' credentials, the authentication of the minutes of the sittings of the Lower House, the suspension of immunity, petitions submitted to the Lower House, the budget, expenses and the appropriation accounts.

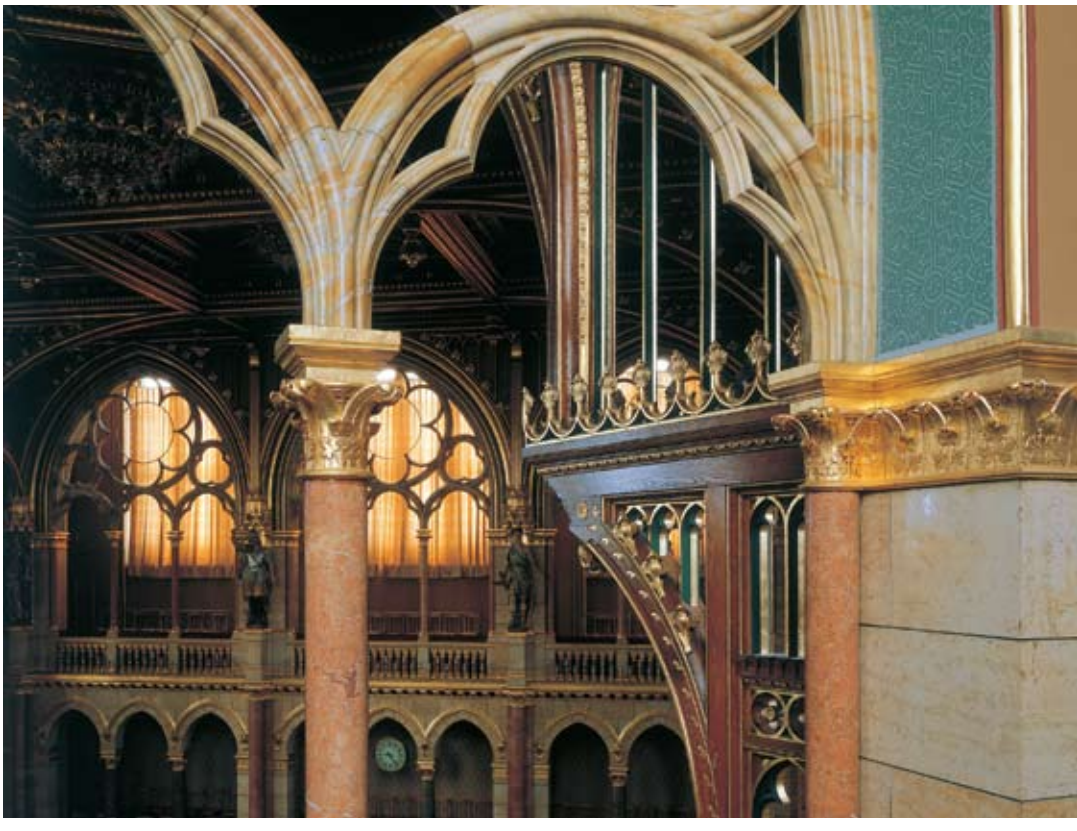
The way Parliament worked was in part similar to that in the previous era. A speech from the throne at the beginning of a parliamentary term informed the two Houses of the Government's legislative objectives. The legislative programme of the governing majority was not the only document submitted and printed—the parties and groups of the opposition and non-Hungarian Members could also table their recommendations.

Between 1869 and 1892 and between 1905 and 1918 the number of plenary sittings was about a hundred and twenty per year; between 1892 and 1905 it was between a hundred and forty and a hundred and fifty yearly. Until 1887 the parliamentary terms lasted for three

years; thereafter they lasted for five years. In principle, a budget had to be approved before the end of the fiscal year but that could not happen in 1867. The newly appointed Government lacked sufficient information about the fiscal conditions of the country; neither were levels of taxes and the debt service towards the empire determined yet. That problem was rectified with the so-called "indemnity law". That authorized the Government to make decisions about state revenues and expenses within the limits of the previous year's budget for a period of about a quarter of a year. A stopgap solution as it was first, it became established practice. Between 1867 and 1914 the Government requested the use of the indemnity formula in sixty per cent of the budgets. The reason behind that was either because the budget was not completed in time or because the opposition prevented the adoption of a budget in time by filibustering. (Obstructing the work of Parliament was a standard practice of the opposition.)

At parliamentary elections the governing parties retained majority until the beginning of the 20th century. That was largely because the electorate was narrowed rather than extended by comparison to the electoral law of 1848. In 1874 those with tax arrears were disfranchised. Introducing universal suffrage (for men) was repeatedly considered but that did not happen until the end of that era. About a quarter of the adult male population, that is 5.9 to 6.5 per cent of the total population had the right to vote.

Constituency boundaries were somewhat modified due to various causes. As a consequence of the reform of public administration, the territorial units of what used to be the "free areas" and the Military Border Guard Zone were either transformed into counties of their own or incorporated into existing counties; furthermore, the area of some of the counties were reassigned among neighbouring counties. The number of constituencies rose by three: Budapest, which became a unified capital of Hungary in 1872, received two additional mandates and the territory of Croatia was given one additional mandate. The number of



Legislative chamber as seen from the gallery

Members of Parliament, including the Croatian delegation, rose from 450 to 453. The constituencies were far from being equal in size: in some there were just two hundred voters for a mandate, in some others ten thousand. The constituencies were redrawn in 1914; their number increased by twenty-two in Hungary and by one in Croatia.

Following the Compromise the primary goal of the Government was to build and consolidate a liberal state with the rule of law. This is objective was promoted by the laws that Parliament enacted in during the first ten years of that era.

The statesmen of Hungary were of the view that every conceivable step had to be taken to avoid a repetition of the disaster of 1848–1849 when Hungarians and non-Hungarians took arms against one another. The law on nationalities, which was sponsored by Ferenc Deák and adopted in 1868, made an attempt to resolve such conflicts. Although under that law only the Hungarians could be considered a political nation and the Hungarian language was recognized as the state language, it allowed the use of nationality languages in the internal operation of, and correspondence between, the local authorities concerned, at lower levels of public administration and at courts. It was the duty of the state to ensure that each nationality should have primary and secondary education in its own language. Individuals, villages and Churches had the right to found nationality schools, cultural and economic associations. The law on nationalities was up to European standards. Regrettably, as from 1875 the Governments often made it difficult or even prevented the implementation of that law.

A compromise between Hungary and Croatia took place in 1868 in a development that was related to the adoption of the law on nationalities. The law on the Hungarian–Croatian compromise was based on four principles: the indestructible unity of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Kingdom of Croatia, Croatia's internal autonomy, the use of the Croatian lan-

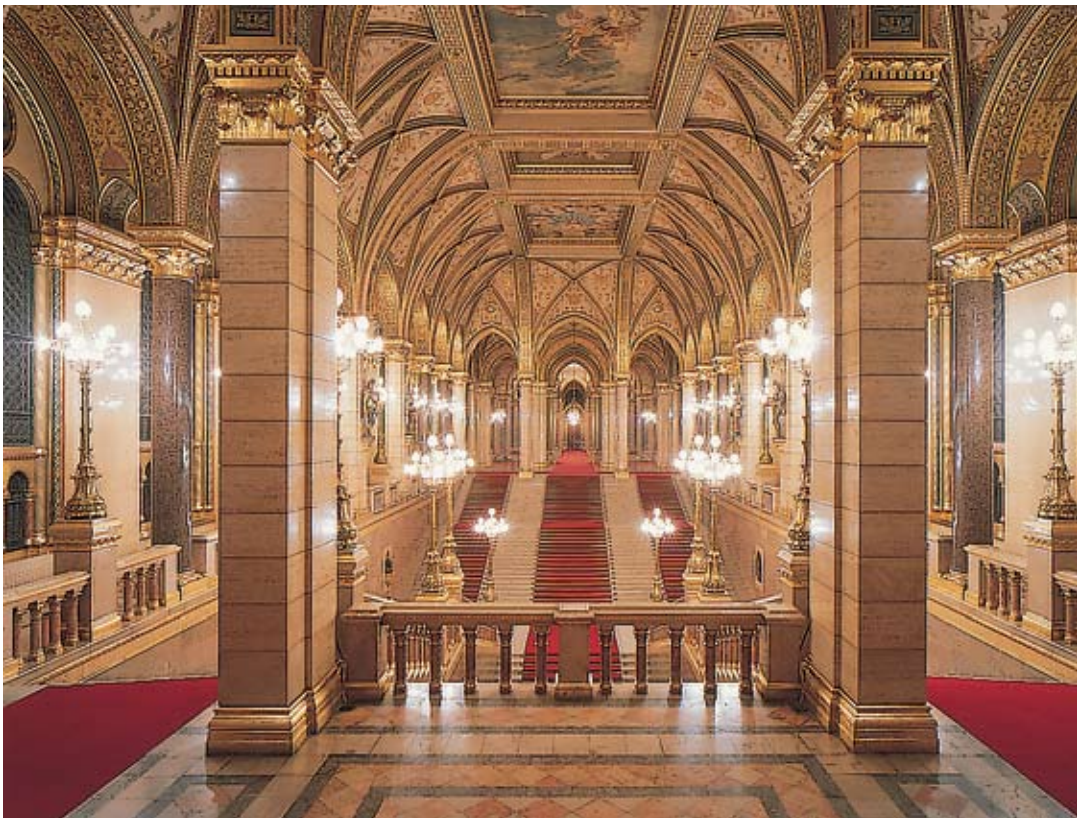
Ornate entrance to Delegation Hall

guage in the official relations between the Hungarian and Croatian Governments and the fact that Croatia would take its share in bearing the common burdens.

In 1867 the Hungarian Parliament emancipated the Jews legally and politically. Hungarians being an inclusive nation, their politicians hoped that the emancipated Jews would be integrated into the Hungarian nation linguistically and culturally. (As for the ethnic composition of the Kingdom of Hungary, Hungarians only represented a relative majority.) Between 1840 and 1871 the size of the Jewish community increased by about 300,000. That, among other considerations, explains why the Jewish religion was only emancipated in the 1890s, when several church policy laws were enacted. The expectations attached to the emancipation of Jews proved to be justified. In the course of the assimilative processes of the 19th century, the ratio of assimilation among the Jews was the second highest after the German national minority (which consisted of new immigrants and those living in Hungary for a long time).

In 1868 József Eötvös, minister of religion and public education, introduced a bill on the reform of public education. It unified public education and made school attendance compulsory for children between six and twelve years of age. In 1876 a law was adopted on public health; the health service was placed in the competence of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In the counties and towns public administration and the administration of justice were separated in 1869. In 1871 the entire network of courts and prosecution service offices of the first instance were put in place. The new Code of Civil Procedure was promulgated in 1868; the new Criminal Code—which was a remarkable legislative accomplishment by European standards—was enacted in 1878. The law on the jury system was only adopted in 1896–1897. It was among Parliament's duties to ratify international treaties that had been signed by heads of the common ministries. The texts of such treaties were made public in the *Official Gazette*.

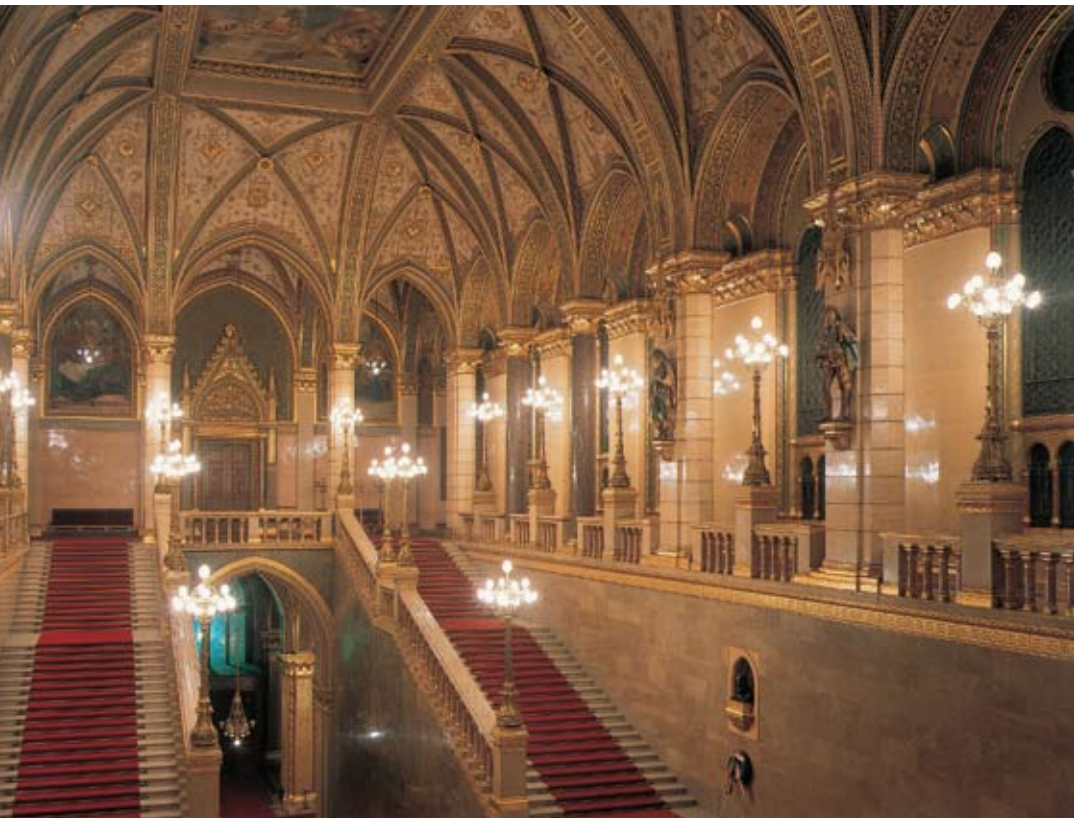


Main staircase, looking towards the Dome Hall

Although the national minorities had (some) parliamentary representation in Hungary in the era of dualism, the Members of Parliament concerned did not have effective allies either among the governing parties or in the opposition. In fact, the opposition politicians were occasionally even more intolerant with them than their political opponents. As for the emerging political parties of agricultural and industrial labourers—which called for better living and working conditions—the Government considered them as troublemakers to be treated with police measures.

The domestic political scene was marked by incessant controversy between the parties that stood for the Compromise and those advocating Hungary's independence. The public law relations of the Hungarian state with the other part of the Austrian Empire were in the focus of the debate. To explain that controversy in simplified terms: the governing parties sought to maintain the system of the Compromise while the opposition parties and groups struggled for an amendment of the Compromise in Hungary's favour or for converting Austria–Hungary into a personal union. The political parties, as a rule, did not have a permanent membership, membership dues and party organizations—they as a rule only mobilized supporters at election time.

The Deák Party won the elections in 1869 and 1872 but the party practically disintegrated after Ferenc Deák's death. In the political Left there were two parties. The '48 Party, founded and headed by Dániel Irányi and Ernő Simonyi, strove fundamentally to transform the public law system that had evolved in 1867. It wished to reduce Hungary's relations with Austria to the person of a common monarch. That party intended to reorganize Hungary's social system along democratic lines. The Left Centre Party, led by Kálmán Tisza, also advocated the idea of a personal union, an independent Hungarian national bank and a national army of Hungary's own. However it was impossible to realize those demands within the framework of that regime as Francis Joseph I rejected any change in the empire's system of public law.

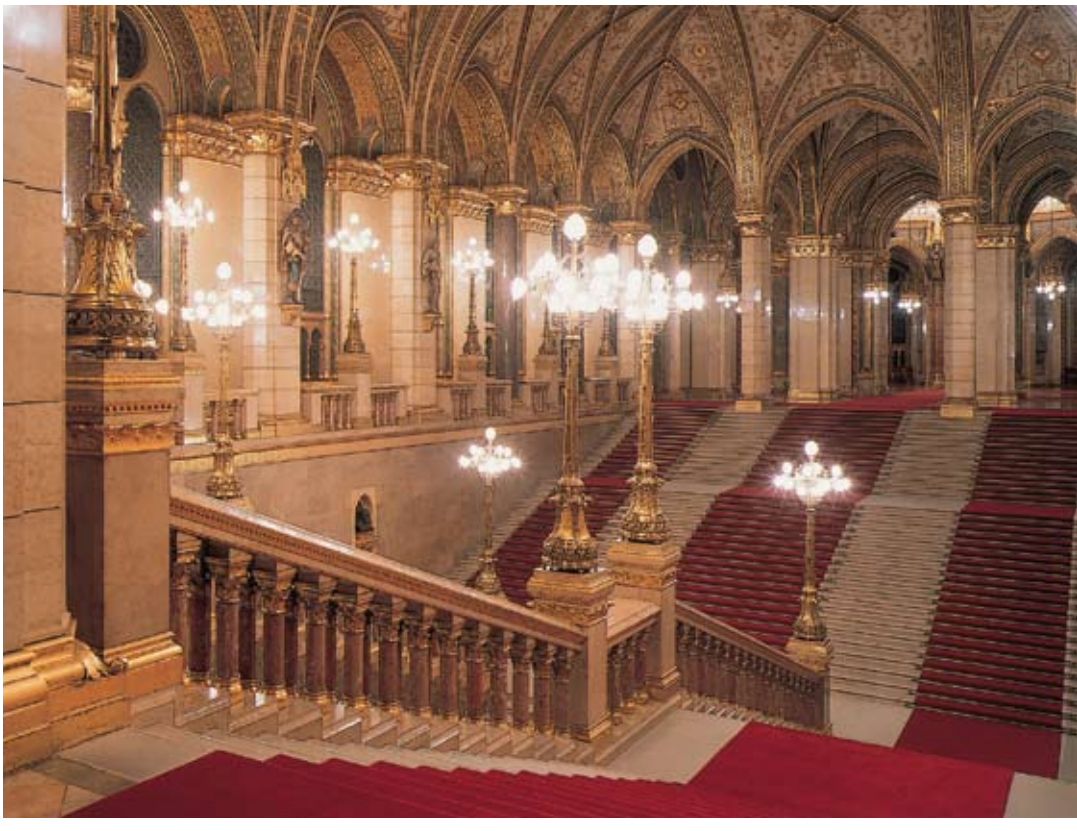


Main staircase, with the Delegation Halls and main entrance in background

The political arena was entirely transformed in 1875. Headed by Kálmán Ghyczy, a new party, called Centre Party separated from the Left Centre and braced for governmental functions. Public law radicals left the Left Centre in 1873 and formed the Consistent Left Centre Party. A year later they merged with a part of the '48 Party and established the United Public Law Opposition, which later took the name of '48 Independence Party. That party, led by Lajos Mocsáry, advocated a more tolerant line towards the national minorities.

In 1875 the remainder of the Left Centre merged with the Deák Party and the Centre Party and its members formed the Parliamentary Liberal Party. Down to the early years of the 20th century it controlled parliamentary majority. At the same time conservatives left the Deák Party and the Rightwing Opposition was formed with Pál Sennyey as its leader. In 1876 the Independent Liberal Party separated from the Liberal Party and two years later it merged with the Rightwing Opposition Party under the name of United Opposition. In 1881 they assumed the name of Moderate Opposition. The '48 Independence Party and the '48 Party merged in 1884 and formed the '48 and Independence Party.

The Hungarian labour movement became strong enough to form its own parties following the Compromise. The General Workers' Association (1868–1872) was set up as the federation of self-teaching and mutual aid associations. Thereafter the workers' interests were represented by the General Workers' Party of Hungary. The Social Democratic Party of Hungary was formed in 1890 and it soon became an important player in the country's political life. Separate organizations emerged to stand for the interests of the peasantry in general and, within that, those of the poor peasants. (Independent Socialist Party, 1897; National Federation of Navvies of Hungary, Independent Socialist Peasant Party of Hungary, National '48 and Independent Peasant Party) Most of those parties (as for example, the Social Democratic Party of Hungary) never made it to Parliament and the few that did, could only do so in 1910.



Around the main staircase

Under the Compromise of 1867 it was the right of the national governments and parliaments to augment, provide with quarters and feed the common armed forces. It vested serious monitoring duties in the two Governments and Parliaments. Pursuant to Act XL of 1868 the Hungarian Parliament determined the size of the Hungarian armed forces in every tenth year. A defence bill that was introduced to Parliament in 1888 intended to break with that practice: it provided for the recruitment of new conscripts without any time limitations. The opposition harshly criticized this provision and also the proposed new rule that the compulsory language of the examination of reserve officers would be German. Although a compromise was reached at the end of the debate, the controversy over the bill brought down Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza.

A customs union also formed a part of the system of Compromise. It was reviewed every ten years. In principle the Hungarian side could even have created an independent customs area. The extension of the customs union was always accompanied by a lengthy parliamentary debate but eventually a compromise formula was always hammered out.

Several factors obstructed the way to a reform of the system of the Compromise. The monarch's opinion had to be asked before deciding all the important issues and, for the time being, there was no legal avenue to change the composition of the Upper House. The Upper House, which consisted of state and church dignitaries and aristocrats, managed to block attempts at liberal reform. According to a bill that Kálmán Tisza introduced to Parliament in 1884 and was enacted a year later, in the Upper House only landowners who paid a direct land tax of at least 3000 forints could retain membership, the Members could elect from their ranks fifty persons serve in that House but who would not be replaced with others after their death. In addition, representatives of the established Churches were in the Upper House and fifty life peers selected by the monarch.

Corridor leading to the Upper House (today: Congress Hall) on the Danube side

We can mention two important examples for the cooperation of the governing parties and the opposition in the era of dualism. Between 1846 and 1869 the size of the Hungarian Jewish community grew twofold and in 1880 their number reached 625,000. In the wake of the economic crisis of the 1870s in Hungary, just as in many other countries, an anti-Semitic movement began. When in 1882 a Christian servant girl was murdered, accusations were made that she was a victim of Jewish culprits. A wave of nationwide anti-Semitic agitation followed. However, the Members of Parliament of both the governing parties and pro-independence opposition inside and outside Parliament rejected the anti-Semitic propaganda. A criminal trial followed and an Independence Party MP, Károly Eötvös defended the accused and he eventually secured their acquittal. Although in October 1883 the National Anti-Semitic Party was formed at managed to return to Parliament some Members, none of the other parties were ready to cooperate with them and a few years later the party dissolved.

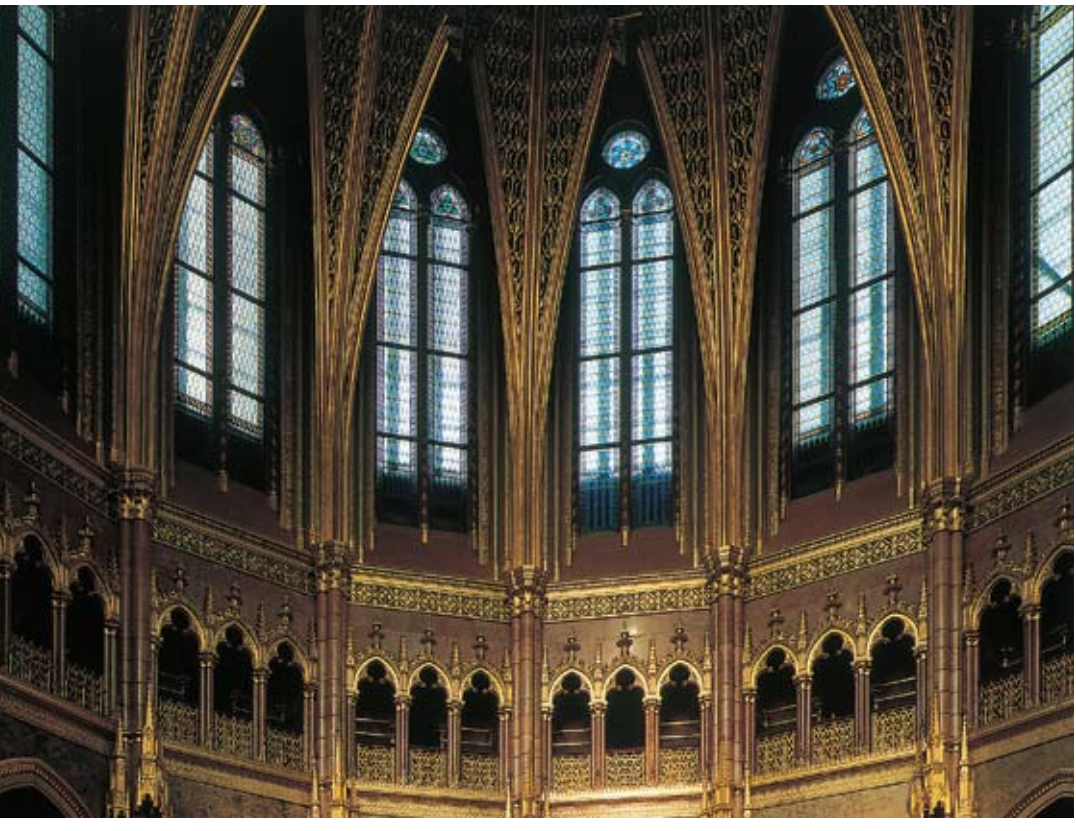
After Kálmán Tisza fell from office in 1890, Sándor Wekerle and then Dezső Bánffy served as Prime Minister. The liberal reforms continued when Parliament adopted laws on church policy. Both the governing parties and the opposition were divided on various aspects of the liberal reforms. Some of the laws that were adopted with the support of the pro-independence and pro-democracy opposition parties: on civil marriages; the registration of births, deaths and marriages by public administration authorities; the discontinuation of the compulsory requirement for parents in inter-church marriages to make a legal statement that their children can be reared in the other creed (1894); a law to recognize the Jewish religion; and a law on the freedom of religion (1895). Obstruction by the opposition often paralysed the work of Parliament at the turn of the century but in 1904 Speaker István Tisza arbitrarily amended the Standing Orders and closed the door to such tactics.

At the elections of 1905 the Liberal Party suffered a major setback and a five-party coalition of opposition parties won. However Francis Joseph I refused to let parties that were open-

ly up to transform the system to form a government. Instead, he chose Géza Fejérváry, who had been the head of his guards and minister of defence. In response the opposition called on the state authorities to refuse to pay taxes or to send conscripts to the armed forces. The conflict was so serious that Francis Joseph I was ready to deploy the army. The opposition of the counties, which was similar to events of the 1820s, was broken by government commissioners and army troops. Eventually the opposition coalition gave up its plan to transform the legal system of the Compromise, so the second Government of Sándor Wekerle could be formed from the leading figures of the opposition (1906). That Government did not last long however because it did not deliver either on its independence programme or its promised welfare reforms. As from 1910, the National Labour Party became the governing party. It was headed by Count István Tisza, son of Kálmán Tisza, and it supported the system of the Compromise.

The electoral law was amended twice in that era. In 1908 Minister of Home Affairs Gyula Andrássy Junior introduced a bill under which the universal suffrage was combined with property and educational qualifications, in other words, the wealthy and those with higher schooling could disproportionately influence the outcome of elections. An electoral bill introduced by Prime Minister László Lukács in 1912 and adopted in 1913 increased the size of the electorate by 800,000 but it considerably raised the eligible age limit from 20 to 24 years of age and defined several other preconditions. An electoral law that was enacted in 1918, in the last year of the war, increased the number of voters by nearly a million but it still stopped short of granting a universal and equal suffrage.

The outbreak of the First World War did not stop the work of the Hungarian Parliament although its sister institution, the Austrian *Reichsrat* went into recess already in summer 1914. In 1915 the Hungarian Parliament adopted a law that prolonged the mandate of the Members until the end of the sixth month following the signing of a peace treaty that concluded the



war. The seats were "frozen", which meant that vacancies could only be filled by the party to which the MP had belonged. At the interval of about five to six months the Prime Minister submitted detailed reports to the Lower House on how the Government had used the wartime extraordinary powers. Consequently, Hungary remained a constitutional monarchy until the end of the war. The Lower House held its last sitting on 16 November 1918. Then Parliament dissolved itself; the Members walked to the Dome Hall of the Parliament Building to attend a festive sitting of the National Council that had assumed executive power.

Parliamentarism between 1918 and 2010

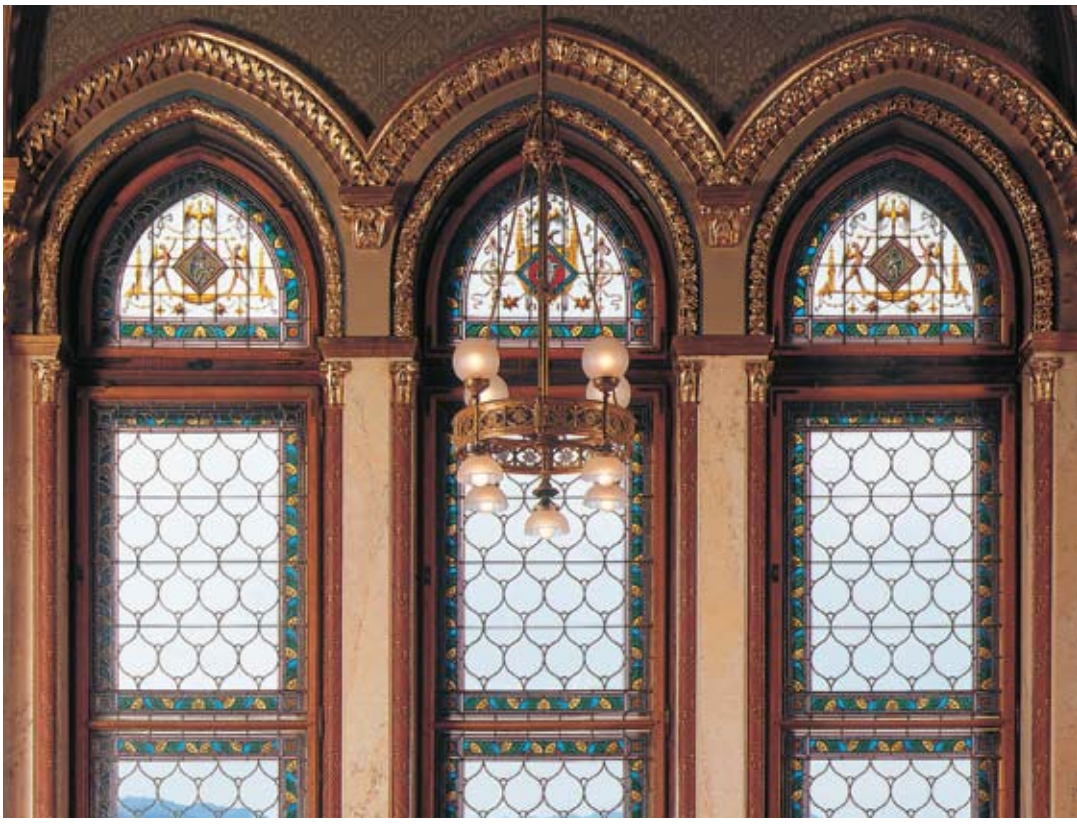
"Era of revolutions." Hungarian Parliament between 1918 and 1920

The collapse of the Austro–Hungarian Empire created a new situation in the region. On the ruins of the Habsburg Empire new states were formed.

In Budapest during the night of 23 October 1918 the Hungarian National Council was established with the support of the Károlyi Party, the Radical Party and the Hungarian Social Democratic Party with Mihály Károlyi as its leader.

At a time of a deepening power and legal vacuum during the night of 30 October 1918 soldiers and armed workers occupied strategic buildings of Budapest. That night witnessed the victory of a revolution that supported the Hungarian National Council.

In the wake of those events Archduke Joseph appointed Mihály Károlyi Prime Minister, who took the oath of office on 1 November before János Hock, chair of the Hungarian National Council. On 5 November the Hungarian National Council, the Council of Soldiers and the



Council of the Workers of Budapest issued a joint statement recognizing the Government's full power until a constituent national assembly was convoked.

On 16 November 1918 the Hungarian National Council declared Hungary an independent people's republic.

Adopting a law on universal suffrage featured high on the new Government's agenda. Act I of 1918 (23 November) provided that every literate man and woman who turned twenty-one years of age could vote. On 26 February 1919 the Government called parliamentary elections for 1 April 1919.

After the promulgation of that law, on 5 March 1919 the Government made public Act XXV of 1919 (3 March) on the Constituent National Assembly and Elections. Voting followed the Belgian model of proportional representation and relied on party lists.

In vain did the new political elite work out the rules of elections; the regime lost the strength to implement them as it had lost popular support due to external pressure and an internal power struggle.

A Hungarian Soviet Republic emerged after the communist take-over of 21 March 1919. Judging by its declarations, it planned to introduce a universal secret ballot in the parliamentary elections although those owning real estate were to be disfranchised. On 2 April 1919 the Revolutionary Governing Council issued a provisional Constitution of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and took initial measures towards holding elections for local councils. The National Assembly of Councils was held in Budapest between 14 and 23 June 1919. It adopted the Constitution of the Hungarian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic and elected the Federal Central Executive Committee. Effective power was in the hands of a narrower

group, the Revolutionary Governing Council. The establishment of the supreme legislative organ, the National Assembly of Councils meant in principle and in practical terms the negation of the Western-type of parliamentarism. After the military collapse of the regime, on 1 August 1919 the Revolutionary Governing Council resigned.

The short-lived governments that came in the wake of the Hungarian Soviet Republic gradually undid the dictatorial measures of the former regime and its consequences. Although the country was under foreign occupation, political life was revived. The political parties were re-established with new programmes. It was a sign of change that on 17 November 1919 Government decree 5989/1919 was promulgated on electoral rights concerning the parliamentary and local government elections. Pursuant to the decree the right to vote at parliamentary elections was vested into all Hungarian citizens who had turned twenty-four years of age and were citizens of Hungary for at least six years, lived in the same locality for at least half a year and had a home there. The decree also stipulated that a woman could only get the right to vote if she spoke and wrote in one of the living languages of Hungary.

A new beginning—Parliament in post-Trianon Hungary 1920–1944

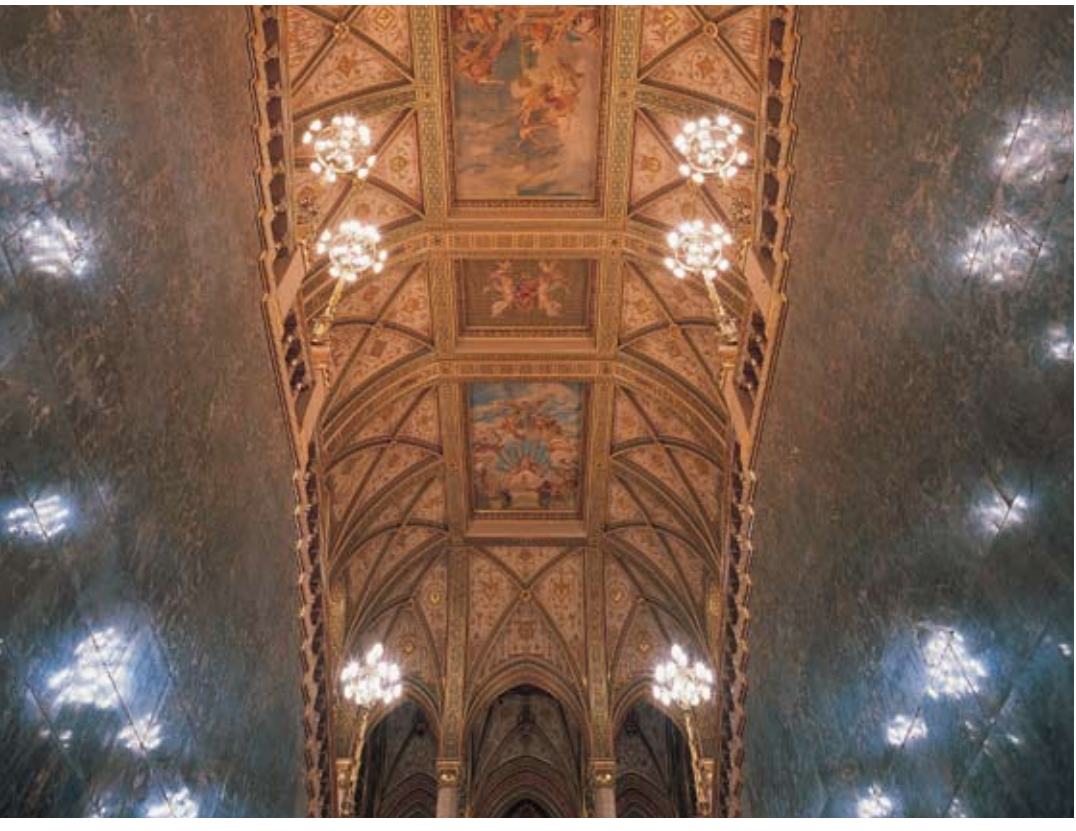
A peculiar paradox: simultaneously with the Trianon peace dictate—as a consequence of which Hungary, a country on the losing side of the First World War, lost two-thirds of its former territory and one-third of its population became citizens of some other countries—a new and independent Hungary appeared on the political map of the world. The birth of a new state involved the emergence also of a new political system, which unequivocally embraced continuity with pre-war Hungary while stroving to renew it.

Prime Minister Károly Huszár's Government was formed on 24 November 1919, which the Entente recognized as a negotiating partner until after the elections. The Government called parliamentary elections for 25 January 1920. The Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSZDP) boycotted the elections in protest over the unlawful reprisals against people who had been involved in the repressive communist regime and recalled its politicians from the Government.

Of the eligible 3,133,094 voters, 80.8 per cent turned out to cast their ballot. The National Smallholders and Peasant Party obtained seventy-seven mandates in Parliament, the Party of Christian National Association seventy-six, the Christian-Socialist Economic Party one and the National Democratic and Civic Party six mandates, plus three Members were returned who did not belong to any parties. The National Assembly was set up in accordance with the provisions of a decree; it was meant to operate on a provisional basis and yet it functioned in that form until as late as the middle of the twenties, when a bicameral Parliament was formed.

The electoral results indicated that a balanced National Assembly was born, which had a resolute political character and endeavours. The constituent sitting of the new National Assembly took place on 16 February 1920; the first Speaker was István Rakovszky, Sándor Simonyi-Semadam and József Bottlik became Deputy Speakers. The next important decision was passed on 27 February 1920 when the National Assembly adopted Act I of 1920, which provided that until the final settlement of the status of head of state, the National Assembly would elect a regent in a secret ballot. The regent received the same protection under criminal law as a king his person being inviolable.

The law differentiated between legislative and executive power. Legislative power was the privilege of the National Assembly; executive power was vested in the Regent, who could exercise it through the ministries, which in turn were accountable to the National Assembly.



On 1 March 1920 the National Assembly elected Miklós Horthy Regent.

A cup of bitterness had yet to be drunk by the National Assembly. On 15 November 1920, after issuing a solemn declaration of protest, the National Assembly approved the Trianon Peace Treaty, which had been signed on 4 June.

Provisional measures were adopted concerning the enforcement of secret ballot. The new electoral decrees and laws tended to restrict suffrage.

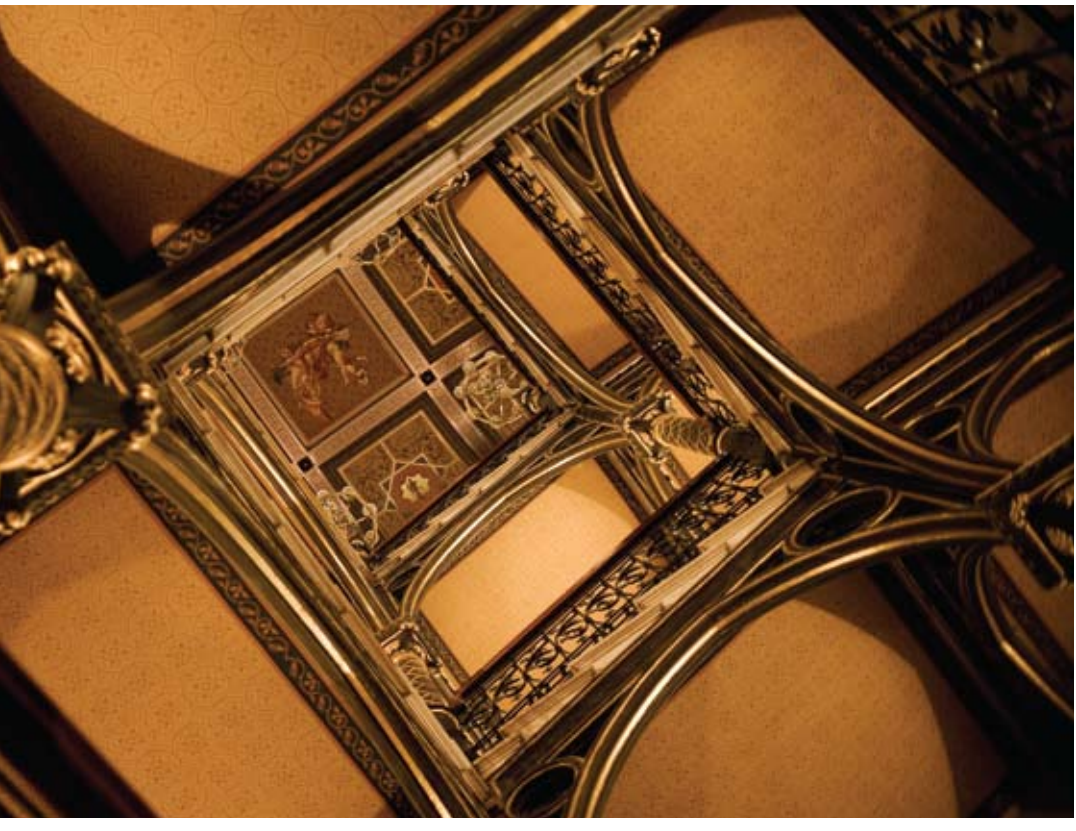
On 16 February 1922 the National Assembly terminated operation in accordance with the relevant resolution of the Regent. On 21 February a constitutional meeting opened with the Regent as chair to work out the new rules of suffrage. Such developments were on the brink of violating constitutionality. Government decree 2200/1922 on the regulation of suffrage was promulgated on 2 March 1922. The government decree defined the following preconditions for men's right to vote: twenty-one years of age; Hungarian citizenship for at least ten years; two years' of residence in the same place; completion of at least four years of primary school. Women: thirty years of age; ten years of citizenship; two years of residence in the same place; completion of at least four years of primary school; married family status, three children or the ability to fend for herself from her own income. The age limit of thirty years did not apply to women who have completed university or college.

The decree regulated the implementation of secret ballot. Open vote was restored in all localities with the exception of Budapest and major towns. Thus the decree separated the urban and rural constituencies. In Budapest and the major towns it replaced the former system of individual constituencies with voting on party lists. As a consequence, the representative system increasingly became reorganized along party lines.

The motivation behind the regime's move was evident: the electoral laws were restricted in order to ensure victory for the ruling elite. The opposition Members were present in Parliament and they could voice their opinions. So those in power could learn in the National Assembly about the most important problems of society. The regime operated almost faultlessly until 1939 when the endeavours of Hitler's empire increasingly restricted the decision latitude of the politicians of the states of the region in domestic and foreign policy alike. (Why the reintroduction of universal secret ballot in 1939 ended up in the strengthening of the far right should be considered in that light.)

As a consequence of the regulation of suffrage, the eligible electorate went down from 3,133,094 to 2,381,598 at the parliamentary elections, which were held between 28 May and 11 June 1922. The number of parties returned to Parliament considerably increased and the Social Democratic Party of Hungary became the second strongest party with twenty-five mandates. The governing party took a hundred and forty-three mandates out of the two hundred and forty-five (44.9 per cent), while the other parties won a total of a hundred and two mandates. It is noteworthy that while in 1920, 80.8 per cent of those eligible to vote cast their ballot, in 1922 the turnout decreased to 76.1 per cent.

At its sitting on 7 July 1925 the National Assembly enacted a bill that was introduced by Prime Minister István Bethlen on parliamentary elections and the establishment of the Upper House. The electoral law provided that after the subsequent elections the National Assembly would terminate its operation and a bicameral national assembly would be formed. The National Assembly adopted Act XXII of 1926 on the Formation of the Upper House on 11 November 1926. Briefly, the law provided that the competence of the Upper House would be identical with that of the House of Magnates of the past. The number of mandates in the Upper House was defined to be two hundred and forty-two.



The parliamentary elections were held on 14–15 December 1926. The number of those eligible to vote was lower than that in 1922 by a further 150,000. The turnout at the polls hardly changed.

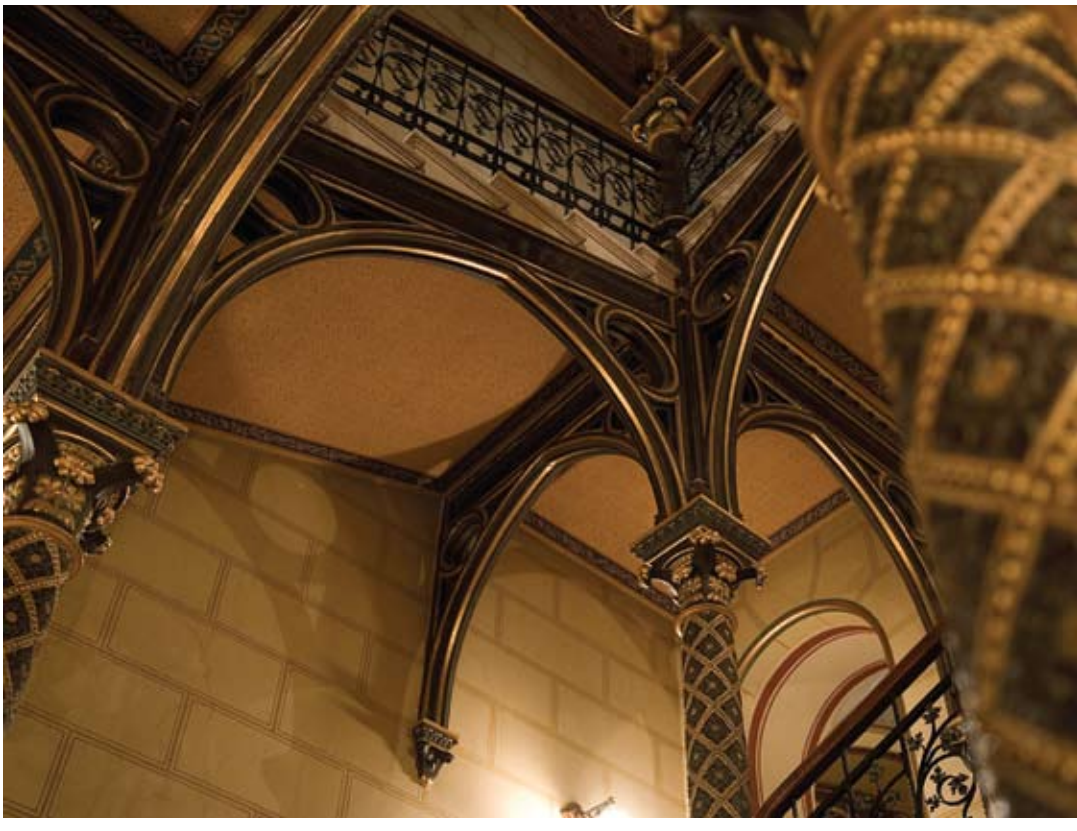
The newly elected National Assembly met on 28 January 1927; the Upper House, including thirty-eight Members appointed by the Regent, also held is constituent sitting.

As early as the end of the calendar year—on 25 November—the Upper House declared 15 March a national holiday instead of 11 April and thereby annulled Act V of 1898. A law was adopted on the undying merits of Lajos Kossuth and fostering his memory.

Members of the traditional aristocracy as well as the several corporations (*Korporationen*) and municipalities were represented in the Upper House. The Upper House only had the right to veto decisions of the Lower House twice, which meant its competence was narrower than before 1918. It was subordinated to the Lower House just as the House of Magnates during the era of Austria–Hungary. The form of state also changed. Although after the war Hungary remained a kingdom, the executive was headed by a regent not a king. The Regent was elected by the National Assembly, which created a measure of dependence—at least formally. Until 1937 the Regent had the right to deny the promulgation of laws adopted by the National Assembly once; thereafter he could do so twice. Note that Parliament regularly consulted its planned decisions with the Regent.

The room of manoeuvre of the Government was defined. The governments were accountable to the National Assembly and the Regent as the latter had inherited that royal prerogative.

The Upper House, which was subordinated to the Lower House, operated in five-year terms; and the length of debates was limited when the Standing Orders were amended in 1924.



The attitude to traditions and the ever-changing European situation was a central issue in post-Trianon Hungary. The opposition to the elite that directly exercised power consisted of three camps.

There was opposition inside the power elite and inside the regime and it rearranged its organizational form several times. Only that camp had at least in principle a realistic opportunity to assume power and exercise it directly. The power elite and its opposition inside the circles of power and inside the regime together formed the so-called new conservative anti-liberalist camp. Historians call that political force the "Christian national camp". Its position of power was solid which it ensured by establishing and reshaping the electoral system.

In addition to the above-described opposition tendencies, the regime had a legal opposition and an underground opposition.

Present in the Lower House were representatives of social democracy (with centre-right and moderate left-wing views), bourgeois liberalism and radicalism, and with time those advocating with an increasing vigour a Third Way and, behind them, those standing for a populist ideology. (The latter however has to be differentiated from the nazi ideology, which was labelled as *völkisch*.)

Alongside the consolidation of the state, opposition personalities of various views received a growing number of positions in the political and social life. Channels of cooperation were thus established between those in power and those in opposition. On the one hand that ensured the stability of the regime; on the other hand it kept a highly restricted right-wing parliamentary democracy operable. Those in power undoubtedly belonged to the political right. Relying partly on the law-enforcement agencies, they could restrict the presence of

bolshevism in the intellectual, political and social life. The political elite could neutralize radicalism both on the right and on the left until the appearance of Hitlerism. It did so partly by reliance on the parliamentary opposition and partly by granting it certain functions.

Ever since the Treaty of Trianon, territorial revision featured high on the agenda of Hungarian politics—and within that: parliamentary politics. In addition to that issue of increasing importance were social problems that accompanied the strengthening of capitalism and the land question. A special consideration was given to the Jewish question, which the regime strove to present as a welfare problem for a long time and it endeavoured to handle it accordingly, as for instance, when Parliament adopted the "Numerus clausus" law to limit the number of certain students at university, and when the so-called first anti-Jewish laws were enacted. When the nazi influence strengthened, the process ended up with the Jews being divested of all their rights.

As from the early 1920s until the regime was overthrown, the interpretation of the political rights and the regulation of suffrage were continuously a contentious issue in Parliament.

The results of the elections in Hungary in 1939—Hitler's political support strengthened—showed the strong radicalization of parliamentary politics and of political life in general. Although the governing party retained its absolute majority, the Arrow Cross Party became the second strongest party with thirty-one mandates, and it scored better than the Independent Smallholders Party (fourteen mandates), the Civic Freedom Party (five) and the Social Democratic Party (five) put together. The declining support for the Social Democratic Party, more than anything else, indicated the imminent danger.

As from October 1944 Hungary came under dual occupation. The Government of Ferenc Szálasi, consisting of politicians of the Arrow Cross Party, which took power by force as sup-

ported militarily by Hitler on 15 October, could not legitimize itself. In response to a series of lost battles, it kept retreating westwards, fleeing the front. We cannot speak of legislative work while Arrow Cross Party henchmen ran Parliament.

Promise of freedom—hopeful restart after the Second World War 1944–1948

The new Hungarian statehood was embodied by the Provisional National Assembly, which was formed with vigorous Soviet assistance in December 1944 in Debrecen, eastern Hungary, under the control of the Red Army.

It proved the need for the Provisional National Assembly that decisions had to be made for Hungary to quit the war and sign the armistice with the anti-fascist Allied Powers. Hungary made the symbolic act of declaring war on Germany. As the Red Army gave logistic support for participants to attend the Provisional National Assembly in Debrecen, the scene was set to be dominated by Communists and pro-Communists. That having said, both the Government and the National Assembly were composed by members of the left-wing opposition of the Horthy regime.

In 1945, while the number of Members of the Provisional National Assembly kept increasing, Hungary was governed with government decrees.

On 16 August 1945, Marshal Voroshilov, head of the Soviet Section of the Allied Commission for Hungary, informed Prime Minister Béla Miklós Dálnoki that under a decision of the Yalta Conference and to restore constitutional order, elections had to be held in Hungary.

During its sitting in Budapest on 5–13 September 1945 the Provisional National Assembly enacted the decrees about parliamentary elections. Men and women became eligible to vote after turning twenty and property and educational qualifications were abolished as preconditions for voting. Ballots could be cast in each constituency to party lists, and a national list of fifty names was added to those elected. The explicit goal was to create a Parliament that is established along partisan lines.

At the elections held on 4 November 1945 the Independent Smallholders Party (FKgP) won by a large margin (over fifty-seven percent). The Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) took seventeen per cent, which disappointed its supporters and leaders alike. The Social Democratic Party (SZDP) had the same electoral results, while the National Peasant Party (NPP) took around six per cent of the vote. Two other parties were allowed to run: the Civic Democratic Party (which scored 0.5 per cent) and the Hungarian Radical Party, which finished without winning any seats.

The elections rested on a clear political philosophy: there was a separate political representative body for the poor and propertied peasantry, the workers and, in principle, the intellectuals.

The elections sent an unambiguous political message: Hungarian society took a stand in favour of a Western-type democratic system that is based on property.

The steering body of the Provisional National Assembly, which was about to be dissolved, elected Zoltán Tildy, an emblematic figure of the party that had won the elections, to form a government. On 29 November the new National Assembly started working and Prime Minister Zoltán Tildy submitted the programme of his Government.

On 1 February 1946 the new Parliament abolished the kingdom, Hungary was proclaimed a republic, its first president became Zoltán Tildy and Ferenc Nagy was elected Prime Minister.

The elections created a particular political situation in Hungary: Parliament and the coalition Government did not have political opponents. In accordance with a preliminary arrangement—whose most consistent advocate was Marshal Voroshilov—all four major parties were represented on the coalition Government even though the Smallholders Party had obtained absolute majority and could have formed a government on its own.

The Communists were the principle opponents of the balance of power that emerged in Parliament and in domestic politics in general. The Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) launched repeated attacks within and outside Parliament to break the absolute majority of the Smallholders Party. Try as it might with various means, it could not succeed for nearly a year. Then MKP—which had controlled the law-enforcement agencies ever since the end of the war—resorted to the method of criminalizing politics. In early 1947 a show trial was held against a purported "Underground general command—Hungarian fraternity". The prosecution attempted to prove that leaders of the Smallholders Party: Ferenc Nagy, Béla Kovács, Béla Varga and others had conspired to overthrow the republic. In other words, those politicians were accused of plotting to oust their own parliamentary party group in order to seize power!

Thus the genre of political absurd appeared on the Hungarian political scene—and in a most ominous form.

The efforts of the Hungarian Communists received whole-hearted support from the Soviet Section of the Allied Commission, headed by Marshal Voroshilov, the Red Army that oc-

cupied Hungary and the Soviet Government in Moscow. Hungarian law-enforcement officers wanted to arrest Béla Kovács, Secretary General of the Smallholders Party (FKgP) but the Members of the Hungarian Parliament bravely rejected the demand and maintained his immunity. Then a detachment of Russian soldiers arrested and took him to the Soviet Union where he was sentenced to forced labour. News of his arrest prompted several non-communist politicians to emigrate, including Ferenc Nagy, Béla Varga and Dezső Sulyok and later on Károly Peyer and Imre Kovács. It was under such political conditions that parliamentary elections were held again in 1947 at the demand of the Communists. MKP hoped to outdo the non-communist political forces, which were in disarray, and thereby seize parliamentary majority and the right to form a government.

Even under such hostile circumstances Parliament, which was still dominated by non-communist Members, did its job properly. Laws were adopted, among other things, on the nationalization of mines, the completion of the land reform and opening colleges and universities for women.

From a legal point of view the adoption of Act VII of 1946 was the right decision: it provided for the criminal law protection of democratic public order and of the republic. Later on however a repressive regime abused the essence of that law in order to eliminate the pro-democracy political forces.

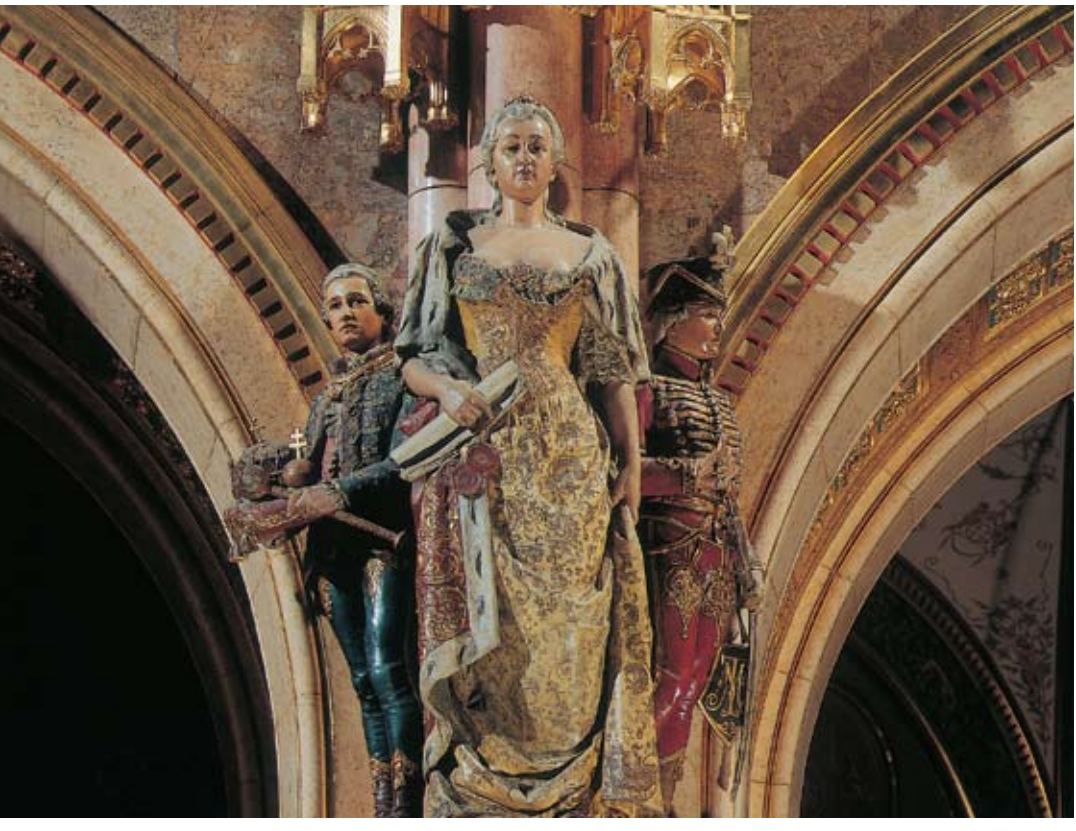
On 23 July 1947 a politically terrorized National Assembly enacted a new electoral law. Disenfranchised were the former members of a fascist party, people dismissed from work with political causes, people whose pension was discontinued and those who fled Hungary for fear of encountering Soviet troops and only returned to Hungary after 31 October. Some honest non-communist thinkers were also disfranchised. Permission to enter the elections was given, among other parties, to the Democratic People's Party (DNP), the Hungarian In-

dependence Party (MFP), the Independent Hungarian Democratic Party (FMDP) and the Camp of Christian Women (KNT). The parliamentary elections produced the following results: MKP received 24.3 per cent, SZDP 16.3 per cent, NPP 8.8 per cent, FKgP 16.5 per cent, DNP 14.6 per cent, MFP 11.9 per cent and FMDP 4.4 per cent.

In the Hungarian public mind the elections of 1947 have come down as the one when the Communists rigged the results. Although historical records show that the elections were won by the left-wing bloc of MKP, SZDP and NPP by taking 49.4 per cent of the mandates, the actual situation was more complex than that. It is unrealistic to suppose that SZDP and NPP belonged to the same left-wing bloc as many of their members were non-communists. The Smallholders Party and the minor parties received fewer votes than before owing to the aggressive electoral campaign of MKP and the Communists maximized their votes with illegal methods. Thus, although the political left scored electoral victory, the fate of political struggle was not decided between the Stalinists and non-Communists yet.

MKP was still dissatisfied with the outcome of the elections so it applied a new form of criminalizing politics. With the active participation of communist-dominated electoral courts the mandates of MFP (11.9 per cent: nearly fifty mandates) were annulled. The parliamentary vacancies were not filled in, which increased the political weight of the mandates that the parliamentary parties had obtained.

In the meantime in September 1947 COMINFORM, the Information Bureau of Communist and Workers' Parties was formed in Warsaw. It set the goal for Communist Parties to seize full power in the countries under Soviet occupation. As the Hungarian National Assembly had already ratified the armistice that ended the Second World War and that document granted legal basis for the lasting presence of the Red Army in Hungary, nothing could prevent the communist take-over. An important step for the domestic political scene was the



merger of the two workers' parties. Although there still were several parties in Parliament, the will of the leaders of the Communist Party could easily be enforced.

An ebb of Hungarian parliamentarism—Parliament as rubber stamp 1949–1956

On 1 February 1949 the provisional national council of the Hungarian Independent People's Front was formed and it soon embraced all the remainder of parties, whose members were culled and intimidated. On 12 April the president of the republic dissolved Parliament.

By then the biggest show trials that had crushed democratic public life were over: the trial of the Hungarian Fraternity, of Primate Mindszenty, of staff members of the Ministry of Agriculture and of Viktor Csornoky. On 15 May 1949 parliamentary elections were held. Turnout was at 96.04 per cent and 96.27 per cent voted for candidates of the People's Front. The new Parliament met a few days later and adopted a government reshuffle and a law on the reorganization of ministries. The next time Parliament met was on 10 August and on 18 August it adopted Act XX of 1949 on the new Constitution. Hungary's new form of state became a people's republic; the institution of the president of the republic was abolished and replaced by the Presidential Council of the People's Republic (NET).

NET had nearly unlimited rights, it could even substitute Parliament. That turned Parliament into a rubber stamp with no account. It was convoked once or twice a year for a day or two.

Memorable among the nondescript and formal parliamentary sittings was the one held on 4 July 1953 when the new Prime Minister, Imre Nagy was among the speakers. He proclaimed a policy of a "new era", which was an attempt to break with Stalinism.

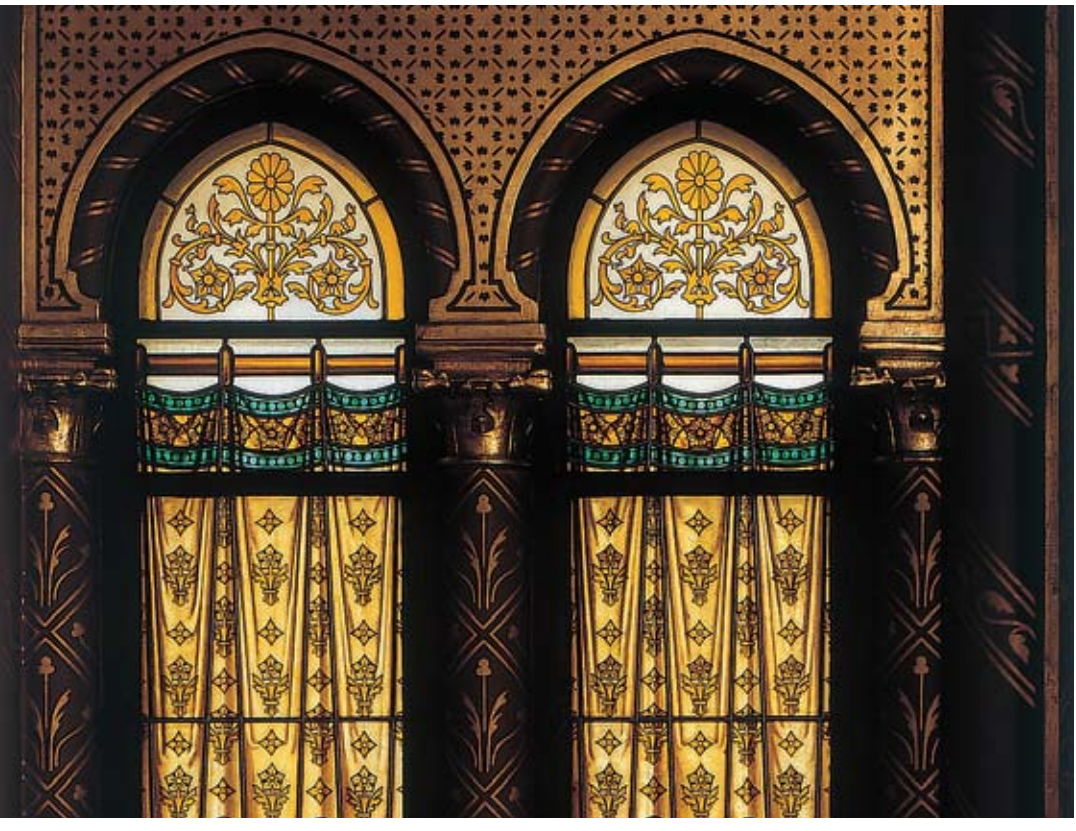
Politically speaking Parliament was dormant between 1949 and October 1956 as its powers were formal. The regime took some dispirited measures to save face: parliamentary elections were held in every five years but society knew of their political insignificance. Suffice it to consider a telling statistical figure: in that period only about fifteen per cent of the acts that by law belonged to the competence of the legislature were actually submitted to Parliament.

Parliament under János Kádár
1957–1989

After the forcible suppression of the revolution and war of independence of 1956, there was hardly any scope for a renewal of parliamentary democracy in Hungary. The so-called Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government continued the practice of its predecessor: governing with decrees. Parliament was neglected for several reasons. It was more practical to organize the post-1956 reprisals by issuing decrees and relying on the law-enforcement agencies and inquiries were held to examine the political activities of Members of Parliament during the revolution and war of independence. At its constituent sitting on 9 May 1957 Parliament elected the new Government of János Kádár and on 11 May it adopted Act I of 1957 that prolonged the mandate of Members who had been elected on 17 May 1953.

Until 1987 Parliament could not regain its political weight; it usually met twice a year to rubber-stamp laws.

At parliamentary elections the turnout was about 94–95 per cent like during the Stalinist era and 97–98 per cent of the ballot was cast in favour of the People's Front's candidates.

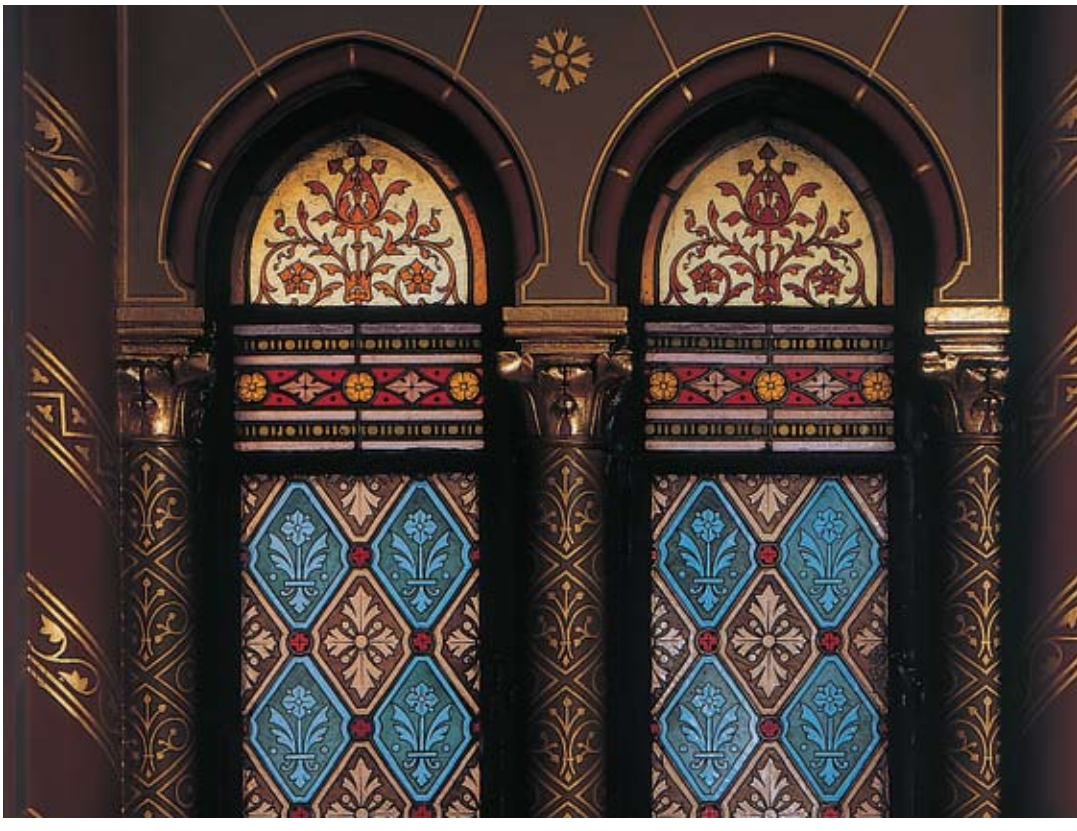


The People's Front, which in principle had a broader popular basis, had the right to put up candidates but in actual fact the candidates were nominated by Communist Party bodies. There was a rule that 70–75 per cent had to be party members with workers, peasants, intellectuals, young people and women appropriately represented.

The picture was somewhat modified after Parliament enacted Act III of 1966 on the Elections on 11 November 1966. Among other things the law provided that the system of party lists was replaced by a system of individual constituencies, however the nomination of candidates remained the same, so it was not more than window-dressing.

The Government took a half-hearted step toward democracy when in the early seventies it allowed nominating more than one candidate yet left the method of selecting candidates unaltered. Records indicate that there was a single instance in a Budapest district when the authorities failed to prevent that three candidates were nominated and the third one, unsupported by the People's Front, made it to Parliament (but only for a single term). To illustrate the political character of the regime, let it suffice to quote a statement by Gyula Kállai. A well-known politician of the era, who held various senior positions in that regime, described it as a breakthrough of democratization that while he was Speaker of Parliament, it was allowed to make interpellations. He did not disclose who wrote and approved those interpellations.

As from the middle of the eighties opposition voices of various ideological content became louder. Step by step that ferment found its way to Parliament. Alongside law-decrees, a growing number of laws were adopted to promote the transformation of the social and economic life and in 1989 reform-minded laws already dominated the legislative output. The first time the Members of Parliament felt the winds of change was when, at the initiative of the emerging democratic parties some Members were recalled. The institution of re-



call was originally installed by the regime to keep Members under control. In the late eighties the instances of recalling meant an open challenge to monolithic communist power.

"Wanderers of Freedom"—an independent, democratic state under the rule of law

The demonstrations that marked 15 March 1989 made it clear that Hungary was facing epochal changes. The political sphere clearly split into two: supporters of the regime versus those standing for a change. The battle of the opposing political views took place at the National Round Table, whose idea was first put forward by the Independent Lawyers' Forum on 22 March 1989. Following months of preparations the national consultations opened in the middle of June 1989 and were concluded on 18 September. It was a series of expert negotiations on the democratic transformation of the operation of the state. The issues covered included the role of the political parties, the technicalities of elections, the freedom of information, the exclusion of the use of force, the reform of ownership, land ownership, competition law and the conditions of monopolies.

Eventually agreement was reached on the most important questions of a peaceful transition. The negotiating sides agreed on the amendment of the Constitution, the establishment of a Constitutional Court, the operation and finances of political parties, parliamentary elections, the amendment of the Criminal Code and criminal procedure and the setting up of a State Audit Office.

It was agreed that the accords covered the period until the constituent sitting of the new National Assembly, which was to be set up by way of fresh parliamentary elections. In the light of the accords it was clear that the would-be Parliament was facing massive challenges.

Until the new Parliament started working, the "old" one had important tasks. It amended Act XX of 1949 as agreed at the National Round Table. Act XXXI of 1989 served as the transitional Constitution of the change of political regime. It stipulated, among other things, that Hungary was a republic and that its goal was to build a multi-party system, a parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and a market economy with a welfare system.

Then on 23 October 1989, the new national holiday to perpetuate the memory of the revolution and war of independence of 1956, the Republic of Hungary was proclaimed and its new form of state enacted in Parliament.

Act XXXIV of 1989 carried provisions on the free elections: the new electoral system was of a mixed type, partly majoritarian and partly proportional. A decision was made on that there would be three hundred and eighty-six Members in the new Parliament: a hundred and seventy six elected in individual constituencies, a hundred and fifty-two on regional party lists and fifty-eight on the parties' national lists.

Eighty-eight parties entered the first free elections. Officially the election campaign began in January 1990. The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) sought to retain certain institutions of the old regime and the opposition parties of the time were divided on ideological issues. Observers noted that what used to be opposition ideological tendencies in Hungary before the Second World War had re-emerged. Present in the election campaign were traditional, historical parties and their modernized counterparts.

The Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz) was formed. Speaking on behalf of young people, embracing a clear-cut national programme and committed to strengthening the middle class, that party added a new colour to the Hungarian political spectrum.

The first round of parliamentary elections took place on 25 March 1990 with a turnout of 64.4 per cent. The second round occurred on 8 April with a turnout of 45.5 per cent. That indicated uncertainties in voter attitudes.

In the first freely elected Hungarian Parliament the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) won a hundred and sixty-four mandates, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) had ninety-four, the Smallholders Party (FKgP) had forty-four, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) had thirty-three, Fidesz had twenty-two and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) had twenty-one. There were eight independent Members of Parliament.

The new Parliament held its constituent sitting on 2 May 1990 and on 3 May it approved the maiden speech of the centre-right Prime Minister, József Antall. On 12 December 1993 József Antall died and his successor was Péter Boross. The first President of the Republic of the independent and free Hungary was Árpád Göncz, György Szabad was the Speaker of Parliament.

The Parliament of the newly independent country carried out an immense work: in four years' time it adopted two hundred and nineteen new laws, two hundred and thirteen law amendments and three hundred and fifty-four parliamentary resolutions. Among other issues, laws were adopted on the National Bank of Hungary, on the compensation of people who suffered a variety of grievances and/or loss of property in previous decades, on returning real estate to the Churches, on data protection, citizenship, ethnic minorities, national defence, the police and the Academy of Sciences. Parliament abolished the dissemination and public use of symbols of authoritarian regimes and Hungary's relations to neighbouring countries were placed on a new foundation.

During the first four years both Parliament and the Government faced massive challenges in creating the conditions for a democratic political life. Those activities extremely sharpened conflicts between the parliamentary majority and its opposition. Moreover unity was broken also among the governing parties—for instance, during the debate on the privatization of state assets through partial compensation—which left its marks on parliamentary work. The problems of privatization accompanied the entire first four years of Parliament's activities. Due to the various controversies, MDF, the leading force of the coalition, had lost nearly twenty per cent of its Members by the second half of 1993. The political strength of MDF was weakened when quite a few of its Members switched parties or were expelled. Spectacular among such phenomena was when the radical MIÉP (Hungarian Justice and Life Party) separated itself from MDF.

Despite various difficulties, parliamentary democracy was born in Hungary; the several divisions of power were clearly separated and the inspection mechanisms operated.

By spring 1994 it had become clear that the balance of power would change at the subsequent elections. Although the party spectrum was very colourful, it was clear that there were three main tendencies: liberalism, conservatism and social democracy, which mixed with communist components and nostalgic emotions.

For a party to enter the elections, it had to satisfy the preconditions of the electoral laws of 1990—except that the parliamentary threshold was raised from four to five per cent.

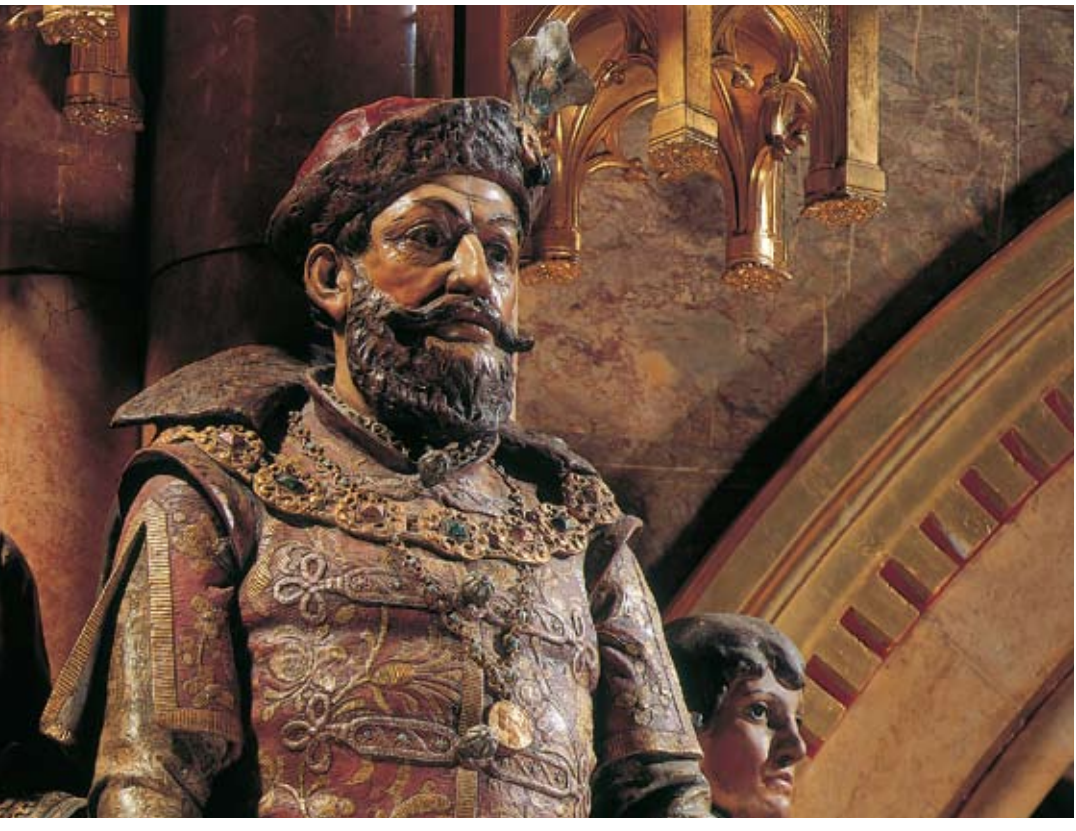
Fifteen parties managed to set up national lists and there were a total one thousand eight hundred candidates.

The first round of parliamentary elections took place on 8 May 1994 and the turnout was 68.91 per cent (5,480,056 persons). The second round took place on 29 May. Due to the elections Parliament's composition considerably changed. MSZP won the elections with two hundred and nine mandates; SZDSZ won seventy, MDF thirty-seven, FKgP twenty-six, KDNP twenty-two and Fidesz twenty mandates. The results showed that the Socialists scored a clean victory; the former coalition suffered a serious loss, while the third force, the Liberals, consolidated their position in the political sphere and in parliamentary politics by forming the government coalition with MSZP. (The number of their mandates decreased from ninety-four to seventy.) Fidesz remained the only independent force. Neither a party-state past nor mistakes committed during the government period of conservative parties burdened its image.

Under such circumstances the President of the Republic, Árpád Göncz commissioned socialist Member of Parliament Gyula Horn to form a Government. Acting on behalf of his party on 24 June 1994 Horn signed a coalition agreement with the leaders of the liberal SZDSZ. As a result, a socialist-liberal coalition was formed. Controlling a majority of seventy-two per cent in Parliament it could set out to work.

Although in its programme, approved on 15 July, the new Government committed itself to continuing the transformation that began in 1989, the opposition unanimously voted against it.

Relying on its two-third majority at the end of September the Government amended the laws on local government, electoral law, the status of mayors and provisions on how to amend the Constitution.



It was clear that the most important issue was handling the inherited crisis that burdened the country. Both the Government and the Members of Parliaments in the governing parties had to realize that a uniform programme was missing. There were major strategic disagreements between the Socialists and the Liberals and, moreover, even the Socialists were not of the same mind as for the political line to be followed. The package of measures introduced with reliance on the massive parliamentary majority by Finance Minister Lajos Bokros brought about a major change in the situation. In the public mind this package of measures became synonymous with restrictions. A radical change has also occurred in privatization policy. The Government decided to spend privatization revenues on repaying external debts and it extended privatization to major new areas, including the banking system and the energy sector.

On 19 June 1995 Parliament re-elected Árpád Göncz President of the Republic with two hundred and fifty-nine votes. (The candidate of the opposition, Ferenc Mádl, received seventy-six votes.) The parliamentary commissioners (ombudspersons) were elected during the same sitting. The institutional system that monitors the work of the executive power became complete in principle.

Relying on a solid parliamentary majority the Government concluded a basic treaty each with Slovakia on 19 March 1995 and Romania on 16 September 1996 on the framework of cooperation. These foreign policy steps of the Government created a storm in Parliament. Time has since proved that the opposition's contention that signing the basic treaties could not guarantee their honouring was justified.

An important development occurred in the political life in 1997 when Viktor Orbán, leader of Fidesz, made it clear in a document entitled "Opposition Manifesto" that at the next elections his party would challenge the socialist-liberal coalition on a national-conserva-

tive platform. MDF and KDNP being occupied with internal strife, Fidesz became the spearhead of the opposition.

Internal controversies apart, the MSZP–SZDSZ Government, led by Prime Minister Horn entered the election race with the firm conviction of winning, as illustrated by the slogan: "MSZP has no reasonable alternative". The rules of the elections of 1998 were identical with those four years earlier. The first round took place on 10 May 1998 with 1,604 candidates, and the results of the first round promised unexpected changes. The Socialists took first place on the regional lists (32.75 per cent), by collecting 1,257,000 votes, Fidesz tripled the number of its votes in four years' time. The two parties that engineered the political transition in 1990 were the victims of the elections. The incumbent SZDSZ received only eight per cent and opposition MDF took 3.12 per cent.

It was a new component of the election campaign that the leaders of the two major parties met in a televised debate on the programmes of the two parties with five million viewers glued to the screen. The unquestionable winner of the debate was Viktor Orbán, who proved his youthful vitality and announced a programme of renewal. Horn's voter base expanded by 5.8 per cent after the debate but on hearing the words of Viktor Orbán, 7.4 per cent of the undecided voters made up their minds to vote for Fidesz. As a consequence of the televised debate, the turnout was higher in the second round than four years earlier (1990: 45.4 per cent, 1994: 55.18 per cent and 1998: 57.01 per cent).

Fidesz won the elections by taking one hundred and forty-eight mandates, MSZP took a hundred and thirty-four, FKgP forty-eight, SZDSZ twenty-four, MDF seventeen and MIÉP fourteen. It could be seen already at the elections of 1998 that two major parties began to dominate the political field: Fidesz and MSZP. The elections showed that the two parties that were the architects of the political transition of 1990 may disappear unless they can re-

The republic was proclaimed from this balcony in 1989

new their tactic and message. SZDSZ, which in principle represented the liberal traditions of the interwar years, won ninety-four mandates in 1990, seventy in 1994, twenty-four in 1998, and twenty each in 2002 and 2006. The same tendency could be seen with the other party that spearheaded the political transition, MDF, which was populist and conservative in the Hungarian interpretation of those terms. In 1990 MDF won a hundred and sixty-four mandates, in 1994 thirty-eight, in 1998 seventeen, in 2002 twenty-four and in 2006 eleven. In 2010 neither SZDSZ nor MDF made it to Parliament.

When viewing the results and nothing else, it seemed as if by the end of 1994 MSZP had overcome its political crisis of 1990 (when it took thirty-three mandates). During the second free elections that party collected two hundred and nine mandates, and in four years' time that decreased to a hundred and thirty-four. Fiasco at the elections indicated that the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition was ridden by internal contradictions. Despite that fact, MSZP counted as an important political force which had a weighty presence in parliamentary politics.

In 1990 Fidesz—despite its popularity among members of the public—was considered a marginal political force as it only had twenty-two seats in Parliament. It could not make a breakthrough in 1994 either (twenty mandates). However, by 1998, at the cost of internal rivalries, it managed to define the criteria of self-identity ever more clearly and to present the population a platform that had public appeal. (The programme of MSZP had less appeal and MDF and SZDSZ put forward programmes that had no appeal at all.) Fidesz won the elections of 1998 (by taking a hundred and forty-eight mandates).

After the expiry of the second term of Árpád Göncz as president, Ferenc Mádl followed him, who was elected by the new parliamentary majority.

The elections of 2002 and 2006 brought very close results. It became ever more evident that, despite their electoral victories on two occasions, there were increasingly sharp disagreements within the MSZP–SZDSZ coalition Government both on issues of day-to-day politics and strategy. The consequences included the mid-term changes in the Prime Minister's post—Ferenc Gyurcsány replaced Péter Medgyessy, later Gordon Bajnai replaced Ferenc Gyurcsány—and the mid-term break-up of the ruling coalition.

The power tensions within the Government did not explicitly show in parliamentary work—with the exception of the election of the President of the Republic. In 2005 Katalin Szili became MSZP's candidate for that post. László Sólyom, former president of the Constitutional Court, was elected President of the Republic. He received votes in Parliament not only from the parties that shared his political views.

While on the political left there was a major political realignment and repeated organizational splits due to the dwindling popularity of the Government, on the political right the power conditions became crystallized. The programme and goals of Fidesz attracted a growing popular support. Pursuing a carefully engineered policy of alliances, the Fidesz–KDNP party union managed to integrate the former membership of middle-class parties and a colourful intellectual heritage.

The elections of 2010 took place in such a social climate. The elections yielded a resonant victory of the Fidesz–KDNP party union. The majority these two parties have in Parliament is even somewhat more than two-third, which is needed for the amendment of the Constitution. On 14 May 2010 Parliament held is constituent sitting and Viktor Orbán was commissioned to form a Government. The new Government was announced on 30 May. On 29 June Parliament elected Pál Schmitt new President of the Republic. Since 22 July 2010 the new Speaker of Parliament has been László Kövér.

II.

ORGANIZATION, FUNCTIONS AND OPERATION OF PARLIAMENT

The Republic of Hungary is an independent, democratic state, operating under the rule of law. Hungary has a parliamentary Government. Parliament, literally: the National Assembly, is the supreme body of state power and popular representation. It is in continuous operation; it ensures the constitutional order of society and determines the organization, direction and conditions of the work of the Government. Upon the transition to multi-party democracy in 1990 Parliament regained legislative power, political authority and a central role in public affairs. The Government is accountable to Parliament and governs relying on the confidence of the majority.

The Parliament building is rated among the most magnificent parliamentary buildings in the world, which is proven by the hundreds of thousands of tourists visiting it annually. Important legislative activity takes place behind its walls. It is worth finding some time to study the organization, functions and operation of Parliament because its decisions, the laws that it adopts are of decisive importance for the everyday life of Hungarian society.

Electing Members of Parliament

The Hungarian electoral system is one of the most complicated ones in Europe. Its majoritarian component ensures governability; its proportional component ensures fair representation. In this mixed electoral system six parliamentary elections have been held since 1990.

Any person entitled to vote in the elections is eligible to run for a seat in Parliament. During elections each voter gets two ballot papers. One of them is used to vote for a candidate in their constituency and the other for the regional list of a party. Voting for party lists only occurs in the first round. A party may get into Parliament if it receives at least five per

Members of Parliament who were elected from the parties' national lists receive their credentials

cent of the votes cast to regional lists. If no candidate wins a mandate in an individual constituency in the first round, a second ballot takes place. For candidates to enter the second round, at least fifteen per cent of the votes must be received, but the three candidates with the most votes certainly qualify. In the second round the candidate winning the majority of votes wins.

Voters do not cast their ballot directly to candidates who are on the national party lists. There the mandates are distributed according to a certain set of compensation rules. At each parliamentary election 176 Members are elected in the individual constituencies. The number of Members elected on regional and national lists varies but they always add up to 210. At the parliamentary elections of 2010 the following five parties won mandates:

Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) (joint list)	263 MPs
Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)	59 MPs
Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)	47 MPs
Politics Can Be Different (LMP)	16 MPs
Independent	1 MP

At each of the four-yearly parliamentary elections 386 Members were elected for the unicameral Parliament since 1990. In May 2010 however Parliament amended the Constitution in the following manner: as from the parliamentary elections of 2014, the number of Members will not exceed 200 and a further 13 Members may be elected to represent the national and ethnic minorities.

Senior Chair János Horváth (in centre) conducts Parliament's constituent sitting. Parliament's newly elected Speaker, Pál Schmitt standing on the rostrum (in front of him)

The Organization of Parliament

The powers of the National Assembly are exercised by the plenary sitting. The plenary sitting debates the motions submitted and resolves to pass or reject them: it enacts laws or passes resolutions. The work of the plenary is conducted by the officers of Parliament elected from among the Members: the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers chair the sittings with assistance from the notaries. Plenary sittings are prepared by the House Committee under the guidance of the Speaker, and the House Committee makes motions as to the order of the day of Parliament. The House Committee, together with the Speaker, is responsible for the normal functioning of Parliament. Deliberation of the submissions on the order of the day is prepared by the Committees. The Members' preparation and contributions in Parliament are coordinated by the parliamentary party groups (also called factions). The material and technical conditions for Parliament's work are ensured by the Office of Parliament.

Forming Parliament

Parliament opens its work at the constituent sitting. That is when the mandate of the previous Parliament (and of the Members) terminates. The constituent sitting is convened by the President of the Republic within one month after the elections. Following the parliamentary elections of April 2010 Parliament held its constituent sitting on 14 May.

At the constituent sitting Parliament establishes the fundamental personnel and organizational conditions for its operation: it adopts the reports on the elections, attests and verifies the mandates of the Members, who then take the oath of office, and elects the officers of Parliament. During the same sitting Parliament usually forms the standing committees.

The Members of Parliament during the constituent sitting

The key personnel and organizational decisions of the constituent sitting, including the election of the officers of Parliament and the composition of the committees, are based on a political agreement between the parliamentary party groups. Ever since 1990, that system had ensured that decisions on major organizational issues should be made by consensus rather than the will of the majority.

The senior chair and junior notaries

At the constituent sitting of Parliament, the Speaker asks the eldes Member to carry out the duties of senior chair and the four youngest Members to carry out those of junior notary. The senior chair presides over the constituent sitting until the officers of Parliament are elected. A further key duty of the senior chair and junior notaries—as mandate review committee—is to assess the validity of each Member's letter of mandate.

The senior chair then drafts a report to the National Assembly. The work of the senior chair has been carried out by the following MPs: Kálmán Kéri (MDF) in 1990, Dr. László Varga (KDNP, later Fidesz) in 1994, 1998 and 2002, and Dr. János Horváth (Fidesz) in 2006, 2010.

Forming the Government

The mandate of the outgoing Government terminates once the new Parliament is formed but it remains in office as a caretaker until its successor is set up. The President of the Republic puts forward a recommendation on the new Prime Minister during the constituent

Prime Minister-designate Viktor Orbán presents the Government's programme

sitting. The President commissions the nominee of the party that wields the requisite parliamentary majority to form the Government. Before doing so, the President consults the leaders of the parliamentary parties.

Ever since 1990, the Government has always been formed by the Prime Minister of the party that won the elections. Between 1990 and 2008 coalition Governments were formed, which means they included ministers of two or three parties.

Parliament elects the Prime Minister and accepts the Government's programme in the same vote. The ministers are appointed by the President of the Republic at the Prime Minister's recommendation. The nominees for ministerial posts are heard by Parliament's standing committees, which decide whether or not to support their appointment. The Prime Minister takes an oath of office after his or her election; the ministers do so after their appointment. The oaths of office are taken at the plenary meeting of Parliament. The law that lists the names of ministries is enacted or amended by Parliament.

Viktor Orbán, Chairman of Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union, formed a Government with politicians of Fidesz and KDNP on 29 May 2010, for the second time since 1998. The Government led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has only ten members including the Prime Minister, and no other government had so few members since 1990. Two ministers act as Deputy Prime Ministers. The ministers are as follows: Minister of Administration and Justice (Deputy Prime Minister), Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of National Development, Minister of National Economic Affairs, Minister of National Resources, Minister of Rural Development and the Minister without Portfolio (Deputy Prime Minister). In Parliament the Government has over two-thirds majority (68 per cent).

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán takes the oath of office before members of the National Assembly

Officers of Parliament

Parliament elects a Speaker, Deputy Speakers and notaries from among the Members by secret ballot. There is no constitutional provision about the number of Deputy Speakers and notaries. That is always subject to a political agreement among the parliamentary party groups at Parliament's constituent sitting. In 1990 and 1994 Parliament elected three Deputy Speakers and eight notaries, in 1998 three Deputy Speakers and ten notaries, in 2002, 2006 and 2010 five Deputy Speakers and ten notaries. These offices are related to parliamentary party groups and they are terminated if officeholders resign, leave their parliamentary party group, are expelled from their party group or if the party group concerned terminates operation.

The Speaker

Of the officers of Parliament, the Speaker plays an outstanding role, just as in many other parliaments.

The main tasks of the Speaker are to

- see to the preservation of the prestige of Parliament, the maintenance of its order and security and the organization of its work;
- represent Parliament in its international relations;
- represent Parliament in its relations with other state organizations and with social organizations;
- convene parliamentary sessions and individual sittings during sessions;
- open and chair the sittings impartially;

Ministers of the Government of Viktor Orbán take the oath of office

- comply with the provisions of the Standing Orders and maintain the order of the sittings;
- convene and chair the House Committee meetings;
- coordinate the work of the committees;

László Kövér, Speaker of Parliament, and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán attend Parliament's consultation meeting on European Union affairs

Speakers (1990–2010) *György Szabad (MDF)*

Zoltán Gál (MSZP)

- approve the draft budget of Parliament and monitor its implementation;
- direct the work of the Office of Parliament and appoint the heads of its subdivisions.

The Speaker is the third highest dignitary in Hungary after the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister similarly to many other countries.

The Speaker discharges the functions of the President of the Republic (within certain limitations) if the President of the Republic is temporarily unable to act or his/her mandate expires early.

The House Committee is not the only parliamentary body that the Speaker chairs. The other bodies are as follows: the so-called consultative meeting that discusses issues which are on

János Áder (Fidesz)

Katalin Szili (MSZP)

Béla Katona (MSZP)

Pál Schmitt (Fidesz)

the agenda of the European Council, the Forum of Members of Parliament of the Carpathian Basin, the Forum of the National and Ethnic Minorities of Hungary and the National Council of Sustainable Development. The Speaker has the right to convene above bodies, take part in the preparation of the agenda of their meetings and chair their meetings.

The Speaker of Parliament is a senior and influential politician of his/her party; occasionally he/she holds a senior office in his/her party and plays role in formulating party policy. The same applies to other officers of Parliament.

Speakers are not party politicians when they discharge the functions set down in the Standing Orders. They act in the interest of the National Assembly when they ensure the exercise of the rights of the National Assembly and protect its renown, order and security. They negotiate on behalf of the National Assembly when they represent Parliament at home and abroad.

László Kövér (Fidesz)

Ever since 1990 the largest governing parliamentary party group has nominated one of its politicians to the post of Speaker: in 1990 it was György Szabad (MDF), in 1994 Zoltán Gál (MSZP), in 1998 János Áder (Fidesz), in 2002 and from 2006 to September 2009 it was Katalin Szili (MSZP) and from September 2009 to May 2010 Béla Katona (MSZP).

At its constituent sitting in May 2010 the present Parliament elected Pál Schmitt, an MP of Fidesz, Speaker. In August Parliament elected Pál Schmitt President of the Republic. Since then László Kövér (Fidesz) has been the Speaker of Parliament.

The Deputy Speakers of the National Assembly: István Jakab, István Újhelyi, Sándor Lezsák, János Latorcai, Zoltán Balczó

The Deputy Speakers

The main duty of the Deputy Speakers is to chair the sittings of Parliament alternating with the Speaker. When chairing Parliament, the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers have equal rights. At times the Speaker convenes the Deputy Speakers for meetings where ways of formulating a uniform practice of chairing parliamentary sittings can be discussed. The Deputy Speakers do not have other independent powers but the Speaker may from time to time charge them with various tasks. That typically involves international relations (heading delegations that travel abroad or receive visiting delegations). The Deputy Speakers substitute the Speaker in functions defined by him/her. In case the Speaker cannot act for a considerable time, he/she is substituted by the Deputy Speaker who belongs to the biggest parliamentary party group.

The Standing Order stipulation to chair sittings impartially and pursuant to the Standing Orders has to be separated from the Speaker's and Deputy Speakers' political role. In case they wish to make a substantial contribution to a discussion, they have to pass the chair to the Speaker or a Deputy Speaker, and during later stages of the deliberations and voting they may only act as chair if they get prior approval from Parliament.

The notaries

The work of notaries is mostly connected to plenary sittings. They provide assistance to conducting the sittings and they attest the records of the parliamentary events. They follow what is happening in the legislative chamber and take part in deciding the order of the oral contributions. They authenticate the verbatim minutes of the plenary meetings and Parliament's resolutions. Their tasks include reading out parliamentary papers, political declarations and the text of the oaths of office. When voting is secret, they count the ballots cast. They monitor the order of voting and record events in minutes. In the event of a recorded

The notaries: Balázs Lenhardt, Mrs. Lóránt Hegedűs, Attila József Móring, István Nyakó, István Göndör, Norbert Erdős, Lajos Szűcs, Gyula Földesi, Péter Szilágyi, Richárd Tarnai

vote (which is also called a roll-call vote) the notaries invite the Members to vote and then they calculate the results of the ballot.

Of the ten notaries five are Members of the governing parties and five of the opposition. At plenary meetings one notary for the governing parties and one for the opposition work simultaneously.

The House Committee

The House Committee consists of the Speaker, the Deputy Speakers and the leaders of the parliamentary party groups. It is not a forum to discuss bills and other motions; its mission is to ensure Parliament's normal operation, the requisite negotiations and planning the business of Parliament.

The House Committee makes motions for the agenda of the plenary meetings and as to when and how the various submissions should be discussed. It can recommend that Parliament should discuss certain submissions at variance from the Standing Orders or according to a particular timetable.

The House Committee takes a position on the work schedule of sittings (proposing, for instance certain days for plenary and committee meetings). In the absence of agreement on that issue among the parliamentary party groups, the question is decided by Parliament at the beginning of sessions in February and September.

Further tasks of the House Committee also serve Parliament's unhindered work. During its sessions parliamentary party group leaders prepare and discuss Parliament's major organizational and personnel decisions. The House Committee shapes the principles of Parliament's budget, takes a position on the media publicity of parliamentary work and on the

László Kövér, Speaker of the National Assembly, conducts a meeting of the House Committee

organization of international relations; it prepares festive events in Parliament and formulates an opinion about noteworthy petitions submitted to Parliament. It discusses every issue that is submitted to it by the Speaker and the parliamentary party groups.

The House Committee meets weekly in one of Parliament's most exquisite halls, called the Hall of Delegations. The Speaker convenes and chairs its sittings. The House Committee also has to be convened if any of the parliamentary party groups so requires (and defines an order of the day). If warranted, it may meet during a plenary sitting.

The fundamental principle of the operation of the House Committee is that a position should be taken on the basis of consensus. Only leaders of the parliamentary party groups have the right to vote. In the absence of agreement, the Speaker has the right to make decisions and recommendations. A representative of the Government regularly attends sittings of the House Committee with the right of consultation. His/her positions and opinions represent a key consideration in developing the draft order of the day.

The Committees

The efficiency of the work of Parliament requires that plenary sittings and the decisions taken there should be prepared by sectoral bodies, the committees.

Representatives of the parliamentary party groups and of the Government attend a meeting of the House Committee

The Committee on Audit Office and Budget in session

According to the Standing Orders, there are two main types of parliamentary committees: *standing* committees and *temporary* committees.

Standing committees

At its constituent sitting (or at the one following it) Parliament formulates the pattern of committees: what standing committees should be in operation, what they should be called, how many members they should have and it also elects the members and officeholders of the committees. The Standing Orders state that it is compulsory to establish standing committees on legislation on the Constitution, the Budget, foreign affairs, defence, as well as immunity, incompatibility and mandates, and European Union affairs.

The standing committees are bodies of Parliament to take initiatives, formulate opinions, put forward motions and participate in the supervision of the work of the Government.

The activities of the committees and thus their duties are tied to the primary functions of Parliament. However the emphasis laid on legislative work versus that of monitoring the Government differs in the individual standing committees. The committees can address all issues that they consider important in the activities of state and society.

The system of standing committees changes from one parliamentary term to another in terms of the number and in part the functions of the committees.

Numbers of standing committees 1990–2010

Term	*At constituent sitting*	*At end of term*
1990–1994	14	18
1994–1998	17	19
1998–2002	22	23
2002–2006	25	25
2006–2010	18	18
2010–2014	19	20*

**January 2011*

The Committee on Sustainable Development in session

In the present term Parliament has set up the following standing committees:

Name	*Number of members*
Constitutional, Judicial and Standing Orders Committee	27
Economic and Information Technology Committee	27
Committee on Audit Office and Budget	27
Committee on Local Government and Regional Development	25
Committee on Youth, Social, Family and Housing Affairs	24
Committee on Health Affairs	21
Committee on Human Rights, Minority, Civic and Religious Affairs	21
Committee on European Affairs	21
Defence and Internal Security Committee	21
Committee on Foreign Affairs	21
Committee on Agriculture	21
Committee on Education, Science and Research	21
Committee on Employment and Labour	18
Committee on Consumer Protection	18
Committee on Sustainable Development	18
Committee on Cultural and Press Affairs	18
Committee on Sport and Tourism	18
Committee on National Cohesion*	12
Committee on National Security	12
Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Mandate	8

**The relations between Hungary and Hungarians living beyond Hungary's borders belong among the competence of this committee.*

The Committee on Education, Science and Research in session

Only Members may be officeholders and members of the standing committees. Each Member must have the opportunity to be involved in the work of a standing committee. Members who are also ministers or state secretaries may not become members of the committees as participation in the supervision of the work of Government is one of the most important duties of the committees.

Parliamentary party groups may delegate members to the committees in proportion to their presence in Parliament. It has to be ensured however that each parliamentary party group can delegate at least one of their members to each of the standing committees. Though in this term the proportion of opposition Members in Parliament is lower than one-third, said rule is observed in the committees in order to guarantee that their motions for amendments could receive the required ratio of seconding votes, which is one-third of votes in a committee.

The same number of governing and opposition party Members are appointed to the Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Mandates and as a rule to the committees of inquiry. (These are known as parity committees.)

Standing committees set up subcommittees to attend to their specific tasks. Each standing committee has to establish a subcommittee for monitoring the implementation of Acts of Parliament falling within the committee's competence as well as their social and economic impact. The majority of the standing committees set up a subcommittee on European Union affairs. The officers and members of standing committees are due remuneration for their work.

The Committee on Local Government hears Sándor Pintér, candidate to the post of Minister of Home Affairs

Temporary committees

There are two types of temporary committees: *ad hoc committees* and *committees of inquiry*.

Parliament sets up an ad hoc committee to settle matters to which it wishes to pay special attention and which cannot be resolved by a standing committee. In the previous term for instance such matters were tasks related to consumer protection, the review of governmental measures to combat the use of narcotic drugs and defining related further tasks, and the promotion of scientific research and development. Since 1990 a total of 19 ad hoc committees have been set up and operated. In the present term the most important ad hoc committee is the one charged with preparing a new Constitution.

Parliament forms a committee of inquiry to examine a particular issue that as a rule also raises the question of Government accountability (or that of a minister). Between 1990 and 2010 Members proposed setting up 125 committees of inquiry, 90 of them were moved by opposition Members. Eventually Parliament established 26 committees of inquiry, 17 of them seconded by the opposition Members, eight by governing party Members and there was one backed by both sides. A committee of inquiry must be set up if the motion is supported by one fifth of the Members, but not all such proposed committees of inquiry are set up.

Both the ad hoc committees and committees of inquiry submit a report about their work to Parliament, which discusses it and decides on whether or not to accept it. Only Members can serve as officers or members of committees of inquiry. By contrast, non-Members may also serve on ad hoc committees but they may not vote. No remuneration is due for work done in temporary committees.

The Committee on Employment and Labour in session

Other committees

Parliament occasionally forms *nominating committees*. Examples of these include the Nominating Committee for Constitutional Court Justices, the Nominating Committee for the President and Vice-presidents of the State Audit Office and the Nominating Committee for the Members of the Media Council.

So-called *interparliamentary joint committees* are formed on the basis of agreements between the Hungarian Parliament and some parliaments abroad. Half of their members are Hungarian MPs and half foreign MPs, and their work is overseen by co-chairpersons. Agreements between the respective two parliaments govern their tasks and operation.

The operation of committees

Standing committees hold regular meetings (generally one per week), sittings are convened by the committee chair. Expediency (when for instance two committees are supposed to hear the same person) can prompt holding *joint* sittings.

Like in the case of plenary sittings, the agenda has to be approved at sittings of committees. For a committee to have a quorum, over half of the members must be in attendance. If a committee member is absent, the Standing Orders allow appointing another committee member as a proxy. The Standing Orders make it possible for the committee to appoint another committee member in the event that a committee member is absent. For a committee to be able to work, over a third of its members must be in attendance, but the number of members present is only checked if that is moved by any of the committee members. It is a fundamental condition of committee work for representatives of the Government (and/or

A meeting of committee chairpersons

the ministries) to attend when certain order of the day items are being discussed. When discussing certain issues, committees may invite the heads of various social organizations and interest associations. Experts can also be involved in committee work. Committee sittings are open to the media, but a committee may order a closed sitting to protect either state or official secrets of specified data. (Certain committees have closed sittings, such as the National Security Committee and the Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Mandate.) A position is approved or a resolution is passed as an outcome of committee meetings. Verbatim minutes are prepared about the committee sittings and those covering public sittings can be accessed on Parliament's website.

The meeting of committee chairpersons

The weekly sittings of the Meeting of Committee Chairpersons play a key role in laying the groundwork for plenary sitting and coordinating the activities of the committees. The Meeting makes recommendations to the House Committee on items for the orders of the day at the next two plenary sittings and on which committees the Speaker should select to discuss submissions. All issues are discussed at these meetings that affect the operation of all committees, for example, the allocation and spending of funds for experts and operations, international relations and the development of the committee homepages. At times the Meeting takes a position on controversial issues that affect the operation and procedure of committees; and both the Speaker and the committees accept and implement those positions in their daily activities. The Meetings of Committee Chairpersons are convened and chaired by the Deputy Speakers.

Parliamentary party groups prepare Parliament's constituent sitting

The Parliamentary Party Groups

The formation and role of parliamentary party groups

The political parties carry out their constitutional duties and the will of the people through the parliamentary party groups operating in Parliament. (The Hungarian word *frakció* is sometimes translated into English as faction.) At least ten Members are needed to form a party group in Parliament. It is possible also for fewer Members to form a party group if their party has won seats on the national list (the party has crossed the five per cent threshold) on the condition that all the Members concerned belong to that party group.

A Member may belong to one party group only. A Member may leave a party group and a party group may decide to expel any member. A Member who has resigned or been expelled must be considered to be an independent and may only join another party group after six months have elapsed. This tightening of the rules was introduced in the 1994 Standing Orders with the intention of making the party groups more stable by making it more difficult for Members to switch. (During the 1990–1994 term the seating order shifted by 21 per cent as Members changed or left party groups.)

New party groups may form during each parliamentary term while other party groups may be dissolved. Even parties that did not run in the election may form a party group in Parliament.

János Lázár, leader of the party group of Fidesz

Péter Harrach, leader of the party group of KDNP

The party groups from 1990 to 2010

At the constituent sitting for the *1990–1994* term, six party groups announced their formation the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), the Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party (FKgP), the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP)). MDF, FKgP and KDNP formed party groups as parties of the governing coalition, while SZDSZ, MSZP and Fidesz set up opposition party groups. Later the FKgP party group split (with 36 members remaining in the governing party group and twelve formed a dissenting faction; the latter later dissolved). Toward the end of the term Members who quitted (or were expelled) from MDF established a new party (Party of Hungarian Justice and Life (MIÉP) and a new party group.

The *1994–1998* term saw the same six party groups (MSZP, SZDSZ, MDF, FKgP, KDNP and Fidesz) begin their work in Parliament. Then—after certain Members had formed a new party: the Hungarian Democratic People's Party—a new party group span off from that of MDF. Toward the end of the term the KDNP's party group was dissolved and some of the Members who had been expelled joined the Fidesz party group. The opposition party group Fidesz, that had been the smallest at the start of the term, turned into the strongest one among the opposition party groups with the most members.

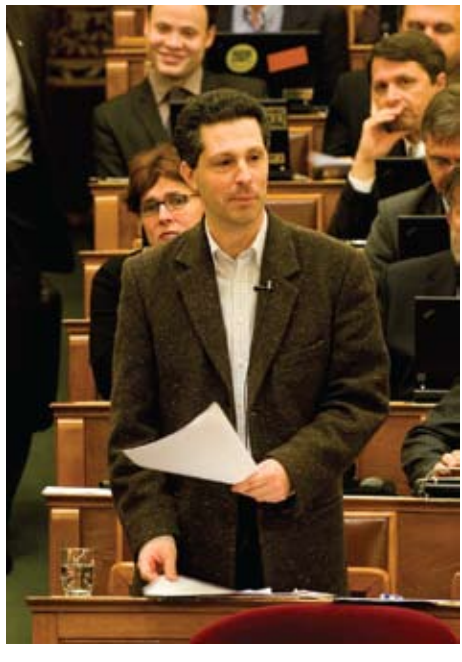
At the constituent sitting for the *1998–2002* term it was again six party groups that announced their formation. In that term the KDNP did not make it to Parliament. However, MIÉP could once again form its party group, this time thanks to its electoral results. As for the other five parties, it was their third consecutive term in Parliament. In conformity with the makeup of a coalition government, Fidesz, FKgP and MDF formed the governing party groups and MSZP, SZDSZ and MIÉP the opposition ones. Since 1990 this was the first time when the distribution of party groups was sustained from the constituent sitting until the end of a term. No other party group was formed, nor were any dissolved.

Gábor Vona, leader of the party group of Jobbik

Attila Mesterházy, leader of the party group of MSZP

At the constituent sitting for the *2002–2006* term only four party groups announced their formation (two governing party ones: MSZP and SZDSZ and two opposition ones: Fidesz and MDF). Though there were resignations and expulsions, these four party groups remained in operation until the end of the term.

At the constituent sitting for the *2006–2010* term five party groups announced their formation: two governing party ones (MSZP and SZDSZ) and three opposition ones (Fidesz, KDNP and MDF). In 2008 SZDSZ left the Government and that converted its party group into an opposition one. In March 2009 the party group of MDF, which had been operation since 1990, was dissolved.



András Schiffer, leader of the party group of LMP

As a result of the parliamentary elections of *2010* five parties could form party groups in Parliament. The number and size of party groups as of February 2011 are the following:

Governing party groups	*263 members (68%)*
Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Union	226 members (58%)
Christian Democratic People's Party	37 members (10%)
Opposition party groups	*123 members (32%)*
Hungarian Socialist Party and Independent MPs	58 members (15%)
Movement for a Better Hungary	46 members (12%)
Politics Can Be Different	15 members (4%)
Independent	4 members (1%)

The Office Building of the National Assembly. It houses the offices of MPs and parliamentary party groups

The Movement for a Better Hungary and Politics Can Be Different are newcomers in Parliament; they had the opportunity to form a parliamentary party group for the first time.

The organization, duties and operation of party groups

The Standing Orders only set down basic provisions for forming and dissolving parliamentary party groups. The detailed rules on organization and operation are laid down in the by-laws of the party groups themselves. Party group leaders are elected from among the ranks of the party group members as are others charged with party group business (deputy party group leaders and/or a party group director).

In contrast with plenary and committee sittings, the party groups hold closed meetings. It is at party group sittings that they plan for plenary sittings, establish their positions on various parliamentary topic areas and debate organizational and personnel issues. The major party groups develop parliamentary motions in working groups that correspond to the parliamentary committees and they draw up and agree on amendment motions and plan for committee sittings. In minor party groups Members cover one or more areas, as assisted by experts.

In plenary (and committee) debates, the party group generally act in political unison; in backing or rejecting bills and other motions, the party group take a stance and their members are to vote more or less expected accordingly. Discipline within a party group is guaranteed in various ways.

The party groups and their leaders have a set role in the numerous important issues in parliamentary work, for example in nominating parliamentary officers and members of com-

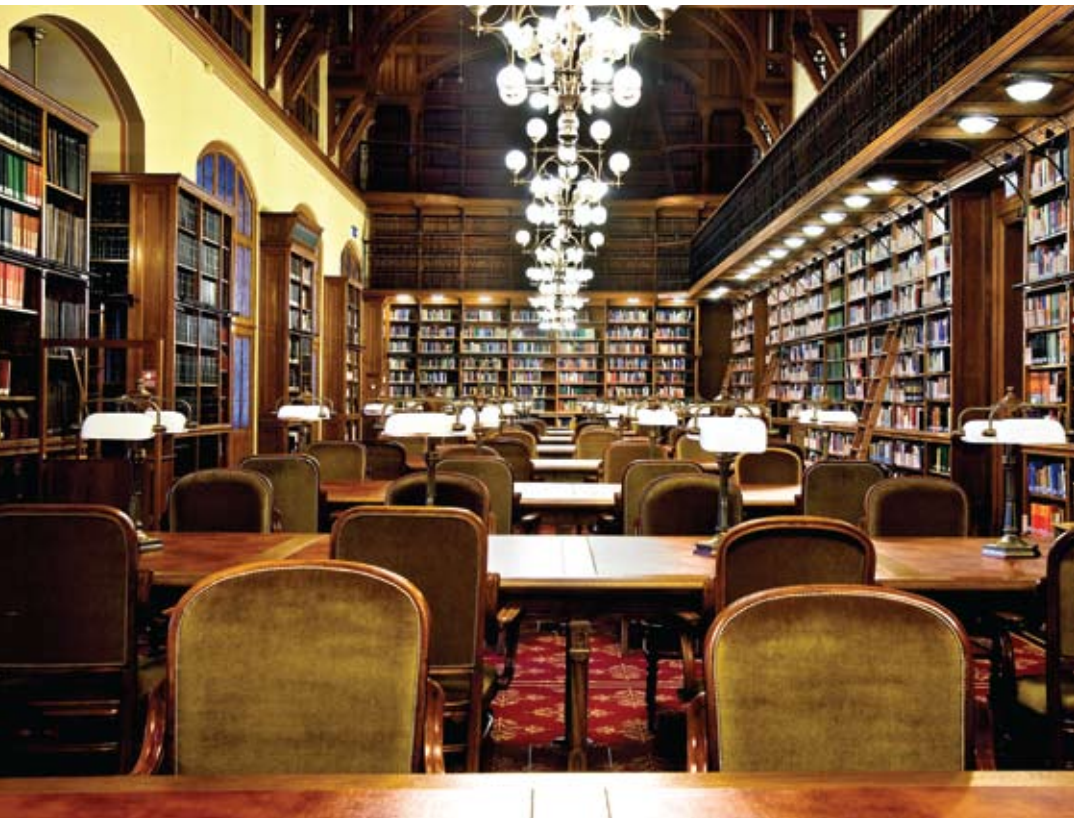
The Information Centre for Members of Parliament

mittees and in working through the orders of the day for the plenary sittings. The Members take part in the work of the parliamentary committees as delegates of the party groups. The rules of debate for the plenary sittings are built on the party group divisions. Accordingly, the floor must always be given to a Member from a party group other than his/her own, alternating between the governing party and the opposition; and when the time is limited for a debate, those getting the floor alternate between governing party and opposition. The party group leaders take part in the work of the House Committee with the right to vote; they may speak in plenary sittings prior to the topics on the agenda and they may select the Members who put prompt questions during plenary sittings.

Allegory of jurisprudence

Independent Members

Any Member who has not joined any of the party groups must be considered an independent in Parliament. An independent Member is one who ran in the election as an



The main reading room of the Library of Parliament

independent candidate or won a seat as a candidate of a party but is now either on his/her own or perhaps among several other Members of the same party but there are too few of them to form a party group.

The Standing Orders state that a Member who has resigned or been expelled from a party group must be considered independent. That Member may only join another party group after six months have elapsed.

Members of Parliament

The legal status of Members

The basis for the legal status of Members in Hungary as in many other countries is the free mandate. They formulate their positions as dictated by their conscience and conviction and vote accordingly. They may not be recalled because of their activities or votes. Social control over the work of the Members is ensured by way of maintaining relations with their voters and through the fact that the Members' mandate is relatively short. The Members are required continuously to prove their suitability for their post.

The preponderant majority of the Members belong to some parliamentary party group. They won their parliamentary seats as candidates with the support of some party (or parties). As in many other countries, in Hungary the "party principle" determines the political structure of Parliament, the activities of the Members and their perception of their role. If however a Member resigns from a party group or the party group expels the Member from its ranks, he/she does not have to resign from his/her seat.

The National Assembly through children's eyes (Drawing by Bendegúz Tóth Tardos)

The Constitution and the Act on the Legal Status of Members of Parliament are in unison in their regulation of the legal status of Members. However both the Constitution and some laws include provisions that only vest certain powers in the leaders of parliamentary party groups. It follows from the principle of Members of Parliament being equal that each Member has to be ensured the opportunity to take the floor in plenary sittings of Parliament, join committees and form a party group.

The majority of rights are vested in all the Members (they may submit bills, move interpellations, take the floor in debates, etc.). There are rights that may only be exercised by several Members collectively (for example, at least ten Members are needed to second a motion to amend the order of the day, fifty to treat a matter as urgent business and one fifth of the Members to introduce a motion of no-confidence in the Government or to convene an extraordinary plenary sitting.)

It is a fundamental right and duty of the Members to participate in the work of Parliament in a proactive manner. Over a certain level of unjustified absence from the sittings (more than one-third of the voting times) the Members are penalized by the withdrawal of a proportionate part of their remuneration.

Immunity

As with other parliaments, Members in Hungary are due special protection, that is, immunity, in order to carry out their activities without any interference. Immunity is meant to protect Members from any unjustified persecution or harassment by authorities that they might be subjected to because of their work as legislators.

György Rubovszky, chair of the Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Mandate, presents the opinion of the committee

Immunity takes two forms: exemption from liability and inviolability. It is a guarantee of freedom of speech that Members and former Members may not be held accountable for any statements, speeches or votes during their mandates (exemption from liability). According to the law, Members may only be detained if they are caught *in flagrante delicto* and proceedings may only be launched or conducted against them for a criminal offence or administrative infraction with Parliament's prior approval (that is with the suspension of immunity), nor may emergency provisions of criminal procedural law be applied without such prior approval (inviolability). Except in a proceeding for an administrative infraction, Members may not waive their immunity. Parliament may only suspend a Member's immunity with a two-thirds vote of the Members present at a plenary sitting. Once a Member's mandate expires, he/she is not protected by immunity any more; which means he/she may be subjected to legal proceedings and be called to account.

Incompatibility

The Constitution, the Act on the Legal Status of Members of Parliament and other laws set down rules on incompatibility for Members. Their purpose is to guarantee the independence of legislators' work and to forestall unwanted influence and the intertwining of various offices and positions.

Laws, the Act on the Legal Status of Members of Parliament in particular, list all the positions Members may not hold: public posts, offices, leading positions at either state-owned or municipality-owned companies, etc. They also set down cases in which a Member becomes unworthy of being a Member of Parliament. The Act on the Legal Status of Mem-

Zoltán Balog (Member of Parliament, Fidesz) submits his declaration of interests

bers of Parliament was amended in 1997 and the amended law extended the list of causes of incompatibility. Accordingly, the rules that apply to the sphere of the economy are now stricter. A Member is under obligation to end the cause of the incompatibility within a set of period and if he/she fails to do so, Parliament may declare the case of incompatibility and deprive him/her of his/her seat. Anyone may make a report of a case of incompatibility and any Member may launch an incompatibility proceeding.

The declaration of interests and other disclosure obligations

In Hungary the Act on the Legal Status of Members of Parliament permits Members to enter or retain jobs (apart from cases of incompatibility). It is another question that the Members' busy schedule prevents them from holding down various jobs with set working hours. Any employment, independent business ventures, involvement in foundations, membership, posts and stakes in various companies, cooperatives and public corporations and any income derived from them must be disclosed to the Speaker.

Members are under further obligation of disclosure and declaration. That is meant to guarantee the transparency of their ties to assets, income and financial interests. This obligation includes their spouse as well as children living in the same household. The law also obliges Members to declare what kind of subsidies they were granted by the Hungarian state or by the European Union for the business organization owned by them or their family members. The declarations of interests have to be made public. Since 2005 they can be seen on Parliament's website.

Tools of authority at the presiding officer's disposal

Members' remuneration

When, as a result of free elections in 1990, Hungary's multi-party Parliament was formed, its operation and order of sitting fundamentally changed. Accordingly, the requisite circumstances had to be ensured. In a similar manner to other parliaments, the financial independence of Members is guaranteed by an act of Parliament.

Between 1990 and 2009 Members were due remuneration and reimbursement of expenses. Remuneration consisted of a basic pay and additional pay. Tax and social security contribution were deducted from the Members' remuneration. The (flat rate) reimbursement of expenses covered the costs incurred while Members carried out their official duties, and a tax of 15 per cent was deducted from it in the year 2009. No account had to be given of the flat rate reimbursement of expenses.

In 2008 a referendum was initiated to change the rules that refer to the Members' reimbursement of expenses. Supporters of the referendum were of the view that the Members should only be entitled to reimbursement concerning expenses about which they produce receipts. Parliament did not wait for the outcome of the referendum and amended the relevant law: it transformed the system of the Members' remuneration and terminated the system of reimbursement of expenses in its earlier form.

As from 1 January 2010 the Members are entitled to monthly *remuneration*, from which income tax and pension insurance and health insurance contributions are deducted.

The components of the remuneration are as follows: pay (basic pay and additional pay), constituency supplement and housing subsidy.

Members in the legislative chamber

The basic pay is six times as high as the basic salary of civil servants, HUF 231,900 (EUR 828). (These figures refer to gross sums, that is, before tax.) An additional pay of HUF 162,330 (EUR 580) is due for committee membership.

The law defines the constituency supplement in the percentage of the remuneration, depending on the distance between Budapest and the seat of the Member's constituency. The lowest rate is 60 per cent for Members who live in Budapest and the highest rate is 160 per cent for those where the above-described distance is over 300 km. Accordingly, a Member who lives in Budapest receives a constituency supplement of HUF 236,538 (EUR 845) and Members who commute between Budapest and their home from the farthest afield receive constituency supplement of HUF 630,768 (EUR 2253). When we add the remuneration to the constituency supplement, it will be HUF 630,768 (EUR 2253) for Members who live in Budapest and HUF 1,024,998 (EUR 3661) for Members who live at the longest distance from Budapest.

The housing subsidy amounts to 50 per cent of the remuneration but that is only due for Members who declare officially that they have no residence in Budapest.

As far as the remuneration and the constituency supplement are concerned, Members have a choice: they may cover their expenses with receipts or opt for a flat rate 10 per cent reimbursement of their expenses. In the latter case, they do not need to submit receipts but they pay tax and social security contributions after 90 per cent of their full remuneration.

In case a Member's mandate ends when a parliament's term of office expires and he/she is not re-elected, he/she is entitled to a severance pay corresponding to the average of six months' remuneration.

The Speaker of Parliament wishes a Happy New Year to staff members of the Office of Parliament

Parliament ensures Internet access for the Members as that is a precondition for telework. Telephone and postal services that Members use in their office and which are related to their work are free. In addition, Members are entitled to event and news analysis, information and documentation services free of charge.

The Office of Parliament

The National Assembly, the officers of Parliament, the House Committee, the committees and, in certain duties the Members are aided in their work by the Office of Parliament. In addition, the parliamentary party groups run their own party group office, whose size corresponds to the number of Members in each party group. The Office of Parliament has close to 900 employees, including the party group offices and the staff of the Library of Parliament. The Speaker manages the work of the Office of Parliament. He/she appoints and relieves the heads of the subdivisions of the Office of Parliament.

The requirement, which is also enunciated in the law on the Civil Service, is doubly true of the employees of the Office of Parliament: they have to work in a manner that is worthy of their position, in an impartial way and beyond any outside influence.

The law on the remuneration of Members permits each MP to hire an employee. The officers of Parliament, the committees and the parliamentary party groups may hire experts.

The constituent sitting of the committee in charge of preparing a new Constitution

Duties of Parliament

According to the Constitution, the National Assembly of the Republic of Hungary is the supreme institution for state authority, which, in excercising the rights that originate in popular sovereignty, provides consitutional order for society and determines the structure, direction and condition of governance.

The most important duties of Parliament are to:

- frame the Constitution,
- enact laws,
- enact the state budget and monitor its implementation,
- approve the Government's programme and elect the Prime Minister,
- elect the President of the Republic, the president of the Supreme Court, the justices of the Constitutional Court, the parliamentary commissioners and the Prosecutor General,
- decide about a state of war and about peace, declare a state of emergency or a state of martial law,
- conclude the most important international treaties,
- exercise powers that are related to local government authorities,
- announce national referendum,
- grant general amnesty.

The most important task of Parliament is creating laws and monitoring the work of the Government.

Framing a new Constitution

The National Assembly not only has legislative power in Hungary but it also has the power to frame the Constitution. (In numerous countries the two functions are separated as the latter is vested in a constituent assembly.)

The Committee charged with preparing a new Constitution conducts a public hearing on the concept paper of the new Constitution. László Salamon, chair of the committee, at the rostrum.

The vote of two-thirds of all the Members of Parliament is required for the adoption or amendment of the Constitution.

In Hungary it is not legally required to hold a referendum for the confirmation of the Constitution. However, Parliament may decide to hold a referendum on the Constitution, or its amended text (just as in the case of any other act of Parliament), before they are promulgated.

In autumn 1989, as an outcome of the political agreements reached at the National Round Table of the ruling Communist Party and the new opposition parties, Parliament thoroughly reformulated the Constitution of the communist regime. Although the structure of the old Constitution was retained, qualitatively new norms were elaborated, ones that rested on the ideals of a democratic state operating under the rule of law; the public law foundations of a republic were laid down and full-scale guarantees for human rights were ensured. That Constitution however was meant to be a provisional instrument. It was planned to be the task of the new Parliament, which was to start working following the free elections of 1990, to enact a new Constitution. That new Constitution did not take shape however. Instead, the Constitution has been undergoing a continuous process of amendments. Over the past twenty years the Constitution has been amended 34 times. (Nine amendments took place during the past six months.) Parliament that began operation in May 2010—in which the governing parties have a majority of more than two-thirds—has set the goal of adopting a new Constitution. Parliament has therefore set up a committee charged with the task of preparing it. In December 2010 that committee submitted a concept paper (regulatory conception) of a new Constitution. Parliament will first debate and approve the key principles of the Constitution. Then it will debate the draft law to be worked out on the basis of that set of principles. Voting on the new Constitution is scheduled to take place on April 2011.

Of all the bills, the one on the budget requires the longest debate in plenary and committee year by year

Legislative Work

Historically, legislation has been the most important task of parliaments. That was especially true of the Parliament that began working on 2 May 1990. The historical task brought by the transition, the need to develop and consolidate the institutional framework of a state operated under the rule of law, and of a market economy; to create new foundations for the legal system and to transform it on an ongoing basis, put legislative work in the foreground. Indeed, the intensity of legislation did not diminish in the subsequently parliamentary terms either.

	Number of Acts of Parliament passed		
Term	*New*	*Amendment*	*Acts total*
1990–1994	219	213	432
1994–1998	264	235	499
1998–2002	273	191	464
2002–2006	262	311	573
2006–2010	263	328	591
1990–2011 total:	1281	1278	2559

Parliament (acting typically at the Government's recommendation) may extend legislative regulation to new social and economic fields. Once an area is covered by law, the relevant rules may only be amended by another law. The Constitution explicitly names the subjects that may only be regulated with acts of Parliament. Parliament's so-called exclusive legislative competence grants Parliament an extremely strong role in legislative activities.

The vote of at least two-thirds of the Members present is required when Parliament intends to enact laws that regulate human rights and fundamental institutions of the state (as the

The Constitutional, Judicial and Standing Orders Committee debates a bill

courts, the prosecution service, the police, the armed forces, national security, local government authorities, etc.). The Constitution requires two-thirds majority with reference to over thirty legislative subjects.

The legislative process

According to the Constitution the President of the Republic, the Government, every parliamentary committee and any Member of Parliament may initiate a law. The Government introduces the majority (55 per cent) of the bills, the other entities being (in order of frequency) the Members (45 per cent) and the committees (5 per cent). The presidents have very rarely exercised the right to initiate legislation.

As in other parliaments, in Hungary the process and methodology of legislation rest on centuries of experience. Essential components include the preparatory role of the committees and the method of plenary debate being divided into a general debate and a debate in detail; the right to move draft amendments, which is due both committees and Members, and voting in two rounds (the first ballot is about the proposed amendments and the second one is about the bill as a whole). Such a method makes it possible to correct whatever mistakes occur in the course of legislative work.

In the course of legislation the phases of plenary and committee debate follow one another in a set order.

Preparatory phase in committee. The Speaker designates a bill for debate in one or more committees. Parliament is under obligation to debate bills submitted by the Government, the President of the Republic or the committees. In the case of proposals submitted by Members, the designated committee decides whether or not it will be debated by Parliament at all. (In other words, whether or not it will become part of Parliament's legislative programme.) In case a proposal has not won the support of the committee concerned, the party group that seconds the proposal may request a decision from Parliament.

Tibor Navracsics, Minister of Administration and Justice (Deputy Prime Minister), delivers an introductory speech during the debate on a bill

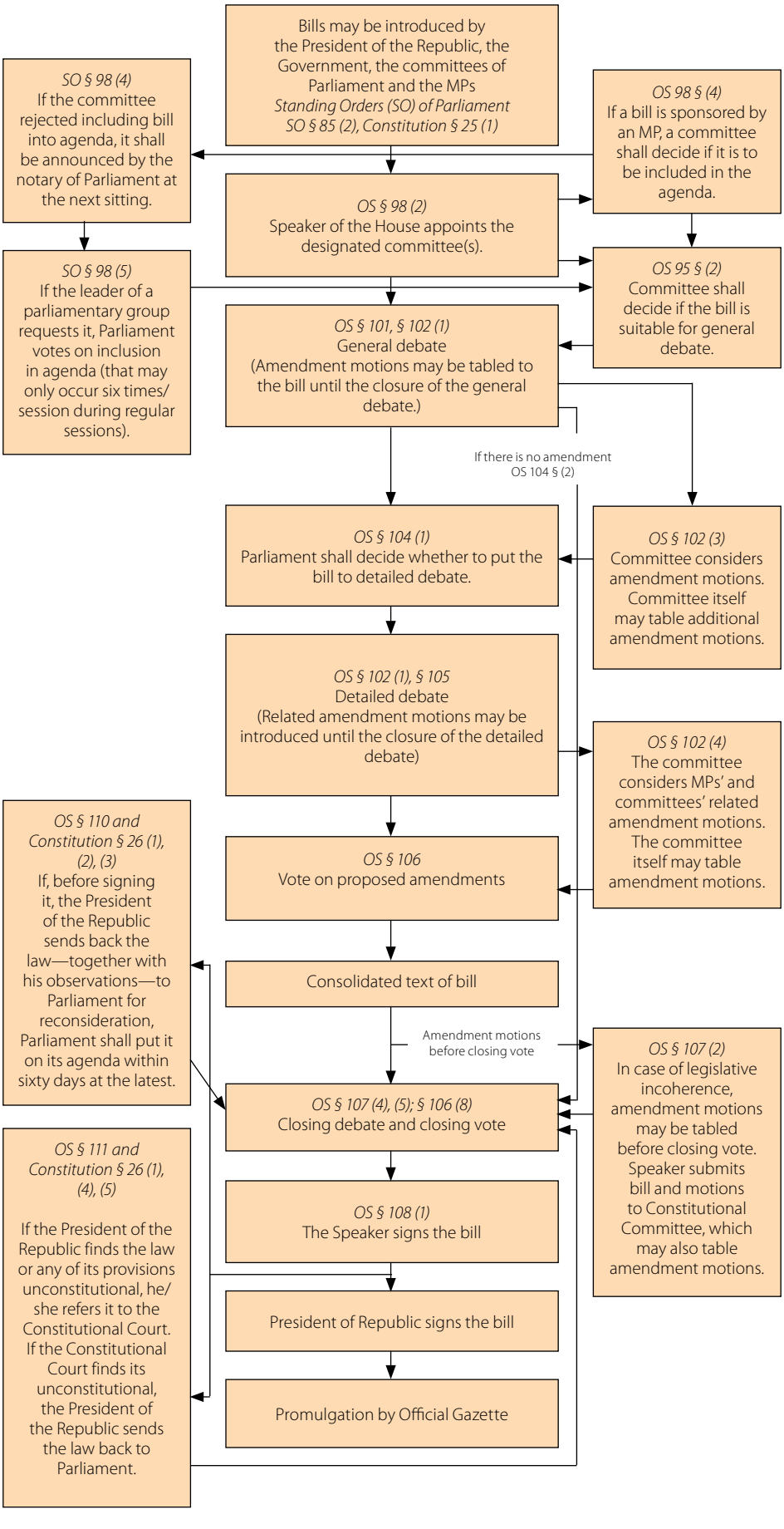
Every plenary debate phase is preceded by a preparatory stage in a committee. The designated committees first establish their position on whether a bill is suitable for a general debate. After the general debate the committees express their opinion on the draft amendments submitted by Members; then after a detailed debate, they express their opinion on any additional draft amendments as well. If committees consider it necessary, they can also submit draft amendments.

Plenary phase. The Members debate the necessity of the bill, the purpose of the regulation and its principles in the course of the general debate. The first to get the floor is the bill's sponsor. Then—if the bill is not sponsored by the Government—a representative of the Government puts forward his/her position; then the designated committees' position is spelled out by committee members in charge of the subject and, whenever that applies, the minority committee opinion is also aired. In each of the party groups the floor is given to the keynote speaker in charge of the subject concerned. After that any Member may contribute to the debate. As a rule Parliament set a time limit to contributions. At the end of the general debate the bill's sponsor responds to what has been said before. Amendment motions may be tabled up to the closure of the general debate.

The details of the text of the bill and the amendment motions are in the focus of the debate in detail. In that phase it is only the amendment motions or the parts of the bill's text affected by the amendment motions that may be addressed with arguments for or against.

Voting phase. After the debate in detail a vote is taken on the amendment motions. As a general rule a vote must be taken on an amendment motion that has won the support of at least one-third of the members of the designated committee. A vote on amendment motions is followed in the subsequent sitting by a final vote. The Constitutional, Judicial and Standing Orders Committee plays and import role in correcting whatever legislative errors occur. That committee puts forward its findings. Such amendment motions are also debated in a plenary sitting (during the final debate); a vote is taken about the amendment motions and, finally, about the bill as whole.

The following diagram is an effective introduction to the legislative process:


Bills may be introduced by the President of the Republic, the Government, the committees of Parliament and the MPs
Standing Orders (SO) of Parliament
SO § 85 (2), Constitution § 25 (1)
SO § 98 (4)
If the committee rejected including bill into agenda, it shall be announced by the notary of Parliament at the next sitting.
OS 98 § (4)
If a bill is sponsored by an MP, a committee shall decide if it is to be included in the agenda.
OS § 98 (2)
Speaker of the House appoints the designated committee(s).
SO § 98 (5)
If the leader of a parliamentary group requests it, Parliament votes on inclusion in agenda (that may only occur six times/session during regular sessions).
OS 95 § (2)
Committee shall decide if the bill is suitable for general debate.
OS § 101, § 102 (1)
General debate
(Amendment motions may be tabled to the bill until the closure of the general debate.)
If there is no amendment
OS 104 § (2)
OS § 104 (1)
Parliament shall decide whether to put the bill to detailed debate.
OS § 102 (3)
Committee considers amendment motions. Committee itself may table additional amendment motions.
OS § 102 (1), § 105
Detailed debate
(Related amendment motions may be introduced until the closure of the detailed debate)
OS § 102 (4)
The committee considers MPs' and committees' related amendment motions. The committee itself may table amendment motions.
OS § 110 and Constitution § 26 (1), (2), (3)
If, before signing it, the President of the Republic sends back the law—together with his observations—to Parliament for reconsideration, Parliament shall put it on its agenda within sixty days at the latest.
OS § 106
Vote on proposed amendments
Consolidated text of bill
Amendment motions before closing vote
OS § 107 (2)
In case of legislative incoherence, amendment motions may be tabled before closing vote. Speaker submits bill and motions to Constitutional Committee, which may also table amendment motions.
OS § 107 (4), (5); § 106 (8)
Closing debate and closing vote
OS § 111 and Constitution § 26 (1), (4), (5)
If the President of the Republic finds the law or any of its provisions unconstitutional, he/she refers it to the Constitutional Court. If the Constitutional Court finds its unconstitutional, the President of the Republic sends the law back to Parliament.
OS § 108 (1)
The Speaker signs the bill
President of Republic signs the bill
Promulgation by Official Gazette

The Committee on European Affairs conducts a hearing

Monitoring the Work of the Government

In addition to adopting acts of Parliament, another important duty of Parliament is to monitor the work of the Government and the agencies of public administration under its direction. Monitoring is basically aimed at determining whether the will of the legislators has been implemented and the Government is operating in compliance with the laws.

The parliamentary function of monitoring executive power derives from the political responsibility of the Government. The Government is accountable to Parliament for its operation and it is under obligation to provide a regular accounting of its work. Parliament may withdraw its confidence from the Government. One-fifth of the Members of Parliament may submit a motion of no-confidence and if that motion is adopted, the Government loses its mandate.

Parliamentary monitoring of the work of the Government may be exercised by the plenary sitting, the committees and individual Members. Such monitoring may also be done through specialized agencies operating under parliamentary supervision, as for example, the State Audit Office and the parliamentary commissioners (ombudspersons).

Monitoring by the plenary sitting

Discussing and approving the Government's *reports* is an important component of monitoring the Government's work. The Constitution and several laws specify the obligation to issue detailed accounts on a broad circle of matters. Parliament primarily monitors the work of the Government but its supervision also extends to all institutions that have an obligation to report to Parliament. The heads of most of those institutions are elected by Parlia-

The Defence and Internal Security Committee conducts a hearing

ment. Examples include the State Audit Office, the ombudspersons, the National Council of Justice, the Prosecutor General and the Media Council.

Following Hungary's transition to multi-party democracy Parliament launched the institution of the so-called *day of political debate*, which may be initiated either by the Government or one-fifth of the Members. On such a day the opposition may also select the subject of the debate even if it only wields a minority in Parliament. When a subject is selected under the above circumstances, Parliament must include it in its programme. A total of seventy-five days of political debate have been held in Parliament since the transition in 1990. Such debates are typically held about the realization of the Government's programme or certain fields of government policy that are considered as controversial. Examples include the economy, the state of the health service and the social security institutions, the local governments, agriculture, rural development, the conditions of children and young people and the Government's restrictive measures. Seventy per cent of the days of political debate have been initiated by opposition Members.

Monitoring by the committees

Debating the various detailed accounts, reports and briefings represents an important area of monitoring by the committees. The committees may submit draft resolutions to Parliament in which they make proposals to determine measures to be taken and duties to be performed. Every standing committee must set up a subcommittee that monitors the execution and socio-economic impact of laws. Before minister-elects are appointed, committees must hear them and a vote is taken there whether or not their appointment is supported. Year by year the committees require that the ministers should report about the work they have done. In definite subject areas it is sufficient for two-fifths (a minority) of the committee members to initiate the hearing of ministers and heads of central agencies of public administration.

Zsolt Semjén, Minister without Portfolio (Deputy Prime Minister), responds to an interpellation

Parliament may establish committees of inquiry for the purpose of probing into the responsibility of the Government in certain matters or for other reasons.

Monitoring by individual Members of Parliament

At plenary sittings of Parliament traditional means of monitoring that are available for individual Members include interpellations, questions since 1987 and prompt questions since 1994. When a Member tables an interpellation, he/she not only requests an explanation about a matter from a minister but he/she also urges measures to be taken in order to solve the problem concerned.

An interpellation has special weight in that Parliament takes a decision on whether or not it accepts the response made (in case the sponsor of the interpellation has not accepted the minister's answer). If there is a "no" vote, the interpellation is addressed against before the plenary sitting of Parliament in the form of a report following a committee discussion. Interpellations may only be addressed to members of the Government. Questions that are submitted in writing in advance and verbal questions (prompt questions) may be addressed, in addition to the members of the Government, to the Prosecutor General, the president of the State Audit Office, the parliamentary commissioners and the president of the National Bank of Hungary. Parliament does not need to pass a decision on the answers given to such questions.

There are other means available to Members to monitor the work of the Government. These include taking the floor outside the order of the day; especially the version of this that is broadcast by television: having the floor prior to the order of the day. This latter option is due to parliamentary party group leaders (their deputies) while any Member may speak after the order of the day. Members of the Government may respond to such contributions

Visitors at the Holy Crown in the Dome Hall of the Parliament

but they are not under obligation to do so. The Prime Minister and the ministers may also take the floor outside the order of the day and the party group leaders have the right to respond.

László Domokos, President of the State Audit Office, participates in the debate on the budget

Parliament's monitoring institutions

State Audit Office

After a lapse of forty years, as from 1990, Parliament once again has its own financial and monitoring institution, independent of the Government. It is called the State Audit Office. Its most important tasks include monitoring the finances of the executive and the agencies of public administration. It formulates an opinion about the draft of the Budget Act and monitors its implementation; it works out a report about the appropriation accounts, which Parliament debates alongside the draft of the Budget Act. The competence of the State Audit Office covers all management activities where public moneys are used and all institutions that handle public assets. The State Audit Office may carry out inspection at all levels of the state machinery, including the local governments.

László Kövér, Speaker of the National Assembly, conducts a plenary sitting

The parliamentary commissioners (ombudspersons)

In 1993 Parliament enacted a law on the parliamentary commissioner for human rights—an institution that not only protects the rights of individuals but also serves to monitor the agencies of public administration. The same law also provides for a parliamentary commissioner for the rights of national and ethnic minorities, a parliamentary commissioner for data protection and freedom of information and a parliamentary commissioner for future generations. The institution of ombudspersons is meant to protect the fundamental constitutional rights of citizens and the monitoring of the work of the agencies of public administration. It is the task of the parliamentary commissioners to launch inquiries into irregularities that affect constitutional rights and to initiate general or specific measures with the purpose of remedying those cases. Anyone may petition the parliamentary commissioners to launch an inquiry. It is the prestige of the institution of parliamentary commissioners and the strength of the public opinion that make it more probable that the authorities respond to the measures and recommendations of the ombudspersons.

It was for the first time in 1995 that Parliament elected the parliamentary commissioner for human rights, the ombudsperson for national and ethnic minorities and the data protection ombudsperson, while the ombudsperson for future generations was elected for the first time in 2008. Each of those acts occurred at the recommendation of the President of the Republic.

The president of the State Audit Office and the parliamentary commissioners report about their work to Parliament each year. In their reports and/or inquiry briefings they come forward with recommendations for Parliament to adopt a new law or amend existing ones. It is in the Government's or the parliamentary committees' competence to decide whether

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, addresses a plenary meeting of the National Assembly

or not they intend to carry on those recommendations and develop them into bills for submission to Parliament.

The president of the State Audit Office and the parliamentary commissioners may attend and address the plenary sittings of Parliament and sittings of the parliamentary committees.

The Operation of Parliament

Parliament is elected for (approximately) four years. Its mandate begins at the constituent sitting and lasts until the same of the next Parliament.

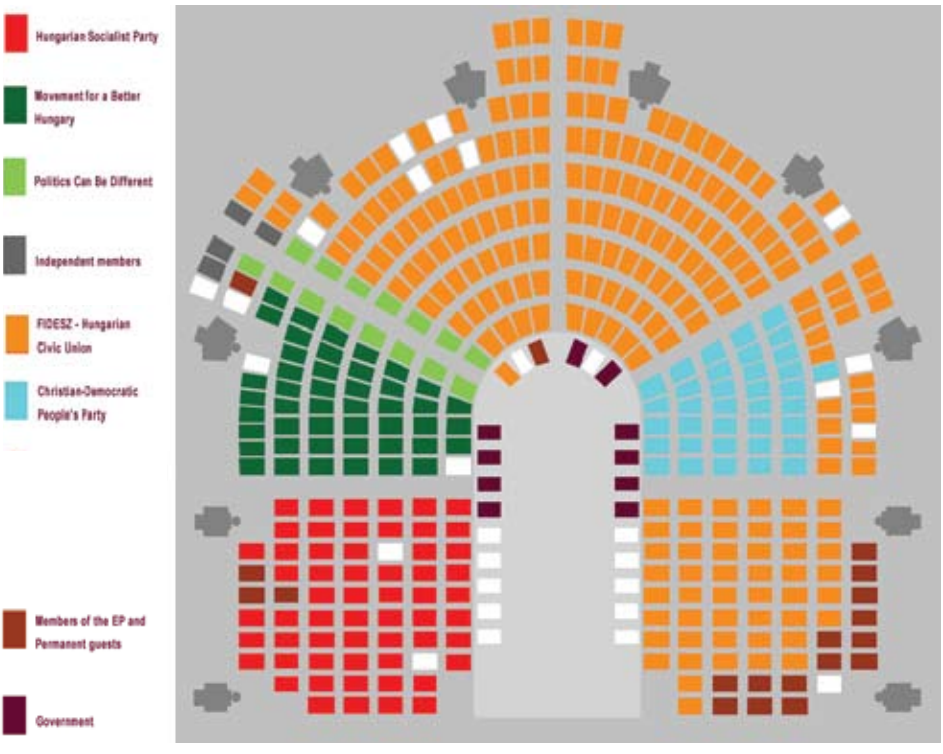
The President of the Republic may dissolve Parliament in cases defined by the Constitution (if attempts at forming a government fail or confidence is withdrawn from the Government several times). Parliament may also dissolve itself.

The Constitution lays down the fundamental rules that guarantee the functioning of Parliament and Parliament's Standing Orders set forth the detailed rules of its operation. A two-third majority of the Members present is required for the adoption of the Standing Orders.

Sessions and sittings of Parliament

Parliament holds two regular sessions yearly:
- from 1 February to 15 June and
- from 1 September to 15 December.

An extraordinary session or sitting has to be convened at the request of the President of the Republic, the Government or one-fifth of the Members.



When in session, Parliament holds sittings weekly. Sittings are convened by the Speaker. A motion is moved with regard to the order of the day by the House Committee or, if there is no agreement among the party groups, by the Speaker. The order of the day may be amended if such motion wins the support of at least ten Members. Parliament votes about the order of the day; it passes with a simple majority. For a quorum in the plenary sitting of Parliament over half of the Members has to be present.

The plenary sitting is the highest forum of the National Assembly; all of its key powers are related to the plenaries. It is the plenary sittings where the debates on motions culminate and only the plenary has the right to pass binding resolutions.
Important political issues may be debated before scheduled parliamentary business (Early Day Motions). The order of the day may include debates and voting on bills, reports and other motions as well as interpellations and questions.

As in the case of most other parliaments in Europe, the work of the Hungarian Parliament is marked by lively, occasionally heated debates between Members of the governing parties and those in opposition. That is the normal state of affairs because, in addition to its legislative and other constitutional duties, Parliament has the function of providing a forum for the most important political views and opinions held by members of society. Heated as debates can be in Parliament, they take place with adherence to definite rules and in a procedural order that ensures unrestricted debate.

Motions are first considered by the committees and then introduced to the plenary sitting where a vote is taken on their adoption or rejection. Bills are debated in several plenary sittings: general debate, debate in detail and, occasionally, a closing debate. Voting consists of two stages: first about amendment motions and then on the entirety of bills.

Children's Christmas party in the Parliament Building (with Speaker of Parliament László Kövér in centre)

Voting in the National Assembly may be open or secret. Open ballot it usually taken by using a vote-counting machine. In exceptional cases (as for instance, when a vote takes place on the order of the day or a motion of order) voting is by the show of hands. The recorded vote is rarely used version of the open ballot: Members vote standing at their seat in an alphabetical order. Personnel decisions are as a rule passed with a secret vote. (Such cases include the election of the President of the Republic and the officeholders of the National Assembly.)

As in most modern Parliaments, the legislative chamber of the Hungarian Parliament is semi-circular, which is ideally suited to the practical considerations of debates. In most of the cases government party Members and opposition Members are seated facing one another.

If the President of the Republic and members of the Government attend a plenary sitting, they sit in the row that is in front of the Members' seats in a horseshoe shaped space.

Openness of Parliament

Openness is a crucial requirement of the operation of Parliament.

Although it is only a hundred years old, the Parliament building has become a symbol of the country. It is a prominent tourist attraction receiving more than half a million visitors yearly. The symbols of Hungarian statehood, the Holy Crown and the coronation regalia are on display inside the building.

The *sittings of Parliament are public*, closed sittings may only be held in exceptional cases, those defined by the Constitution. (Over the past twenty years it only occurred on three occasions.)

Verbatim minutes are kept of the sittings, which are made publicly available on Parliament's website. The public service television broadcasts the sittings live on Mondays in a three-hour programme and on Tuesdays in a five-hour programme. The public service radio broadcasts the sittings from beginning to end. Moreover, live webcasting covers the entire working days on Parliament's website. As from 2003 sign language interpreters ensure that the most important debates should be available also for people who live with impaired hearing.

Parliament's *website* (www.parlament.hu) offers a comprehensive insight into what Parliament does. Visitors can read all the documents submitted to Parliament and learn what Parliament is debating at any time; how bills are adopted, what questions and interpellations are tabled by the Members and whether or not a vote has already taken place about this or that submission. The website also offers information about the Parliament's past, current and forthcoming events. The minutes of both the plenary sittings and those of the committees can be seen on the website.

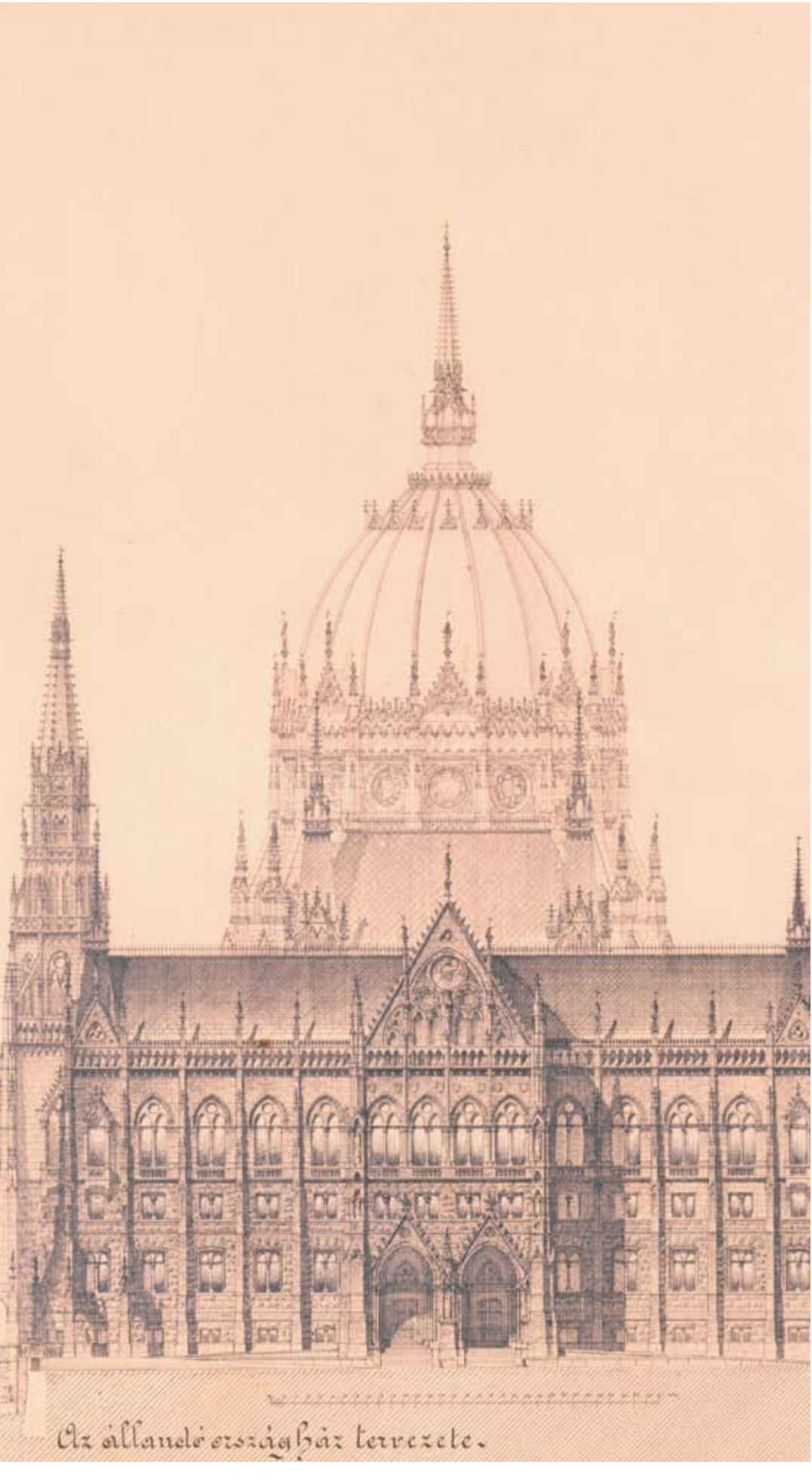
The Information Centre of Members of Parliament operates a *telephone line* and an e-mail service (ktk@parliament.hu) for citizens. Inquires can be made there about Parliament's organization and operation.

The committees of Parliament have established wide-ranging contacts with various social and civil society organizations. The Open House Programme of committees is an efficient method *outreach*. It is intended to offer a forum for civil society organizations to air their views and conduct consultations with Members about issues that fall in the competence of the committee concerned. Between 1990 and 2006 the outreach programmes were the responsibility of a separate committee of Parliament, the Committee of Social Organizations. Today the Committee on Human Rights, Minority, Civic and Religious Affairs is charged with that function. Parliament's Social Relations Office also plays an important role in liaising with civil society organizations and in getting a feedback on what members of society think of Parliament.

The Parliament building is not only the venue of parliamentary work—it is indeed the "House of the Country" and at the same time the "House of the Nation". Throughout the year it houses various forums, domestic and international conferences and cultural programmes. A variety of social organizations, interest associations and civil society organizations hold their conferences in the Parliament building. The Parliament building is also the venue where celebrations are held, decorations and prizes are conferred and related receptions are held. Concourses and hallways of the edifice are often the sites for exhibitions.

The *Library of Parliament* is a specialized national library that covers law, the political sciences and social sciences in general. Its specialist holdings, databases and parliamentary documents support the work of both users inside Parliament (such as Members, committees and experts) and the needs of library users from outside who visit the library to study or do research. Year by year thousands of students, teachers, researchers and people of other backgrounds visit it.

Several books and booklets have been published in Hungarian and in foreign languages about the complex activities and past of the Hungarian Parliament as well as its international relations. For a list of those publications, one is advised to visit Parliament's website.



Az állandó országház tervezete.

III.

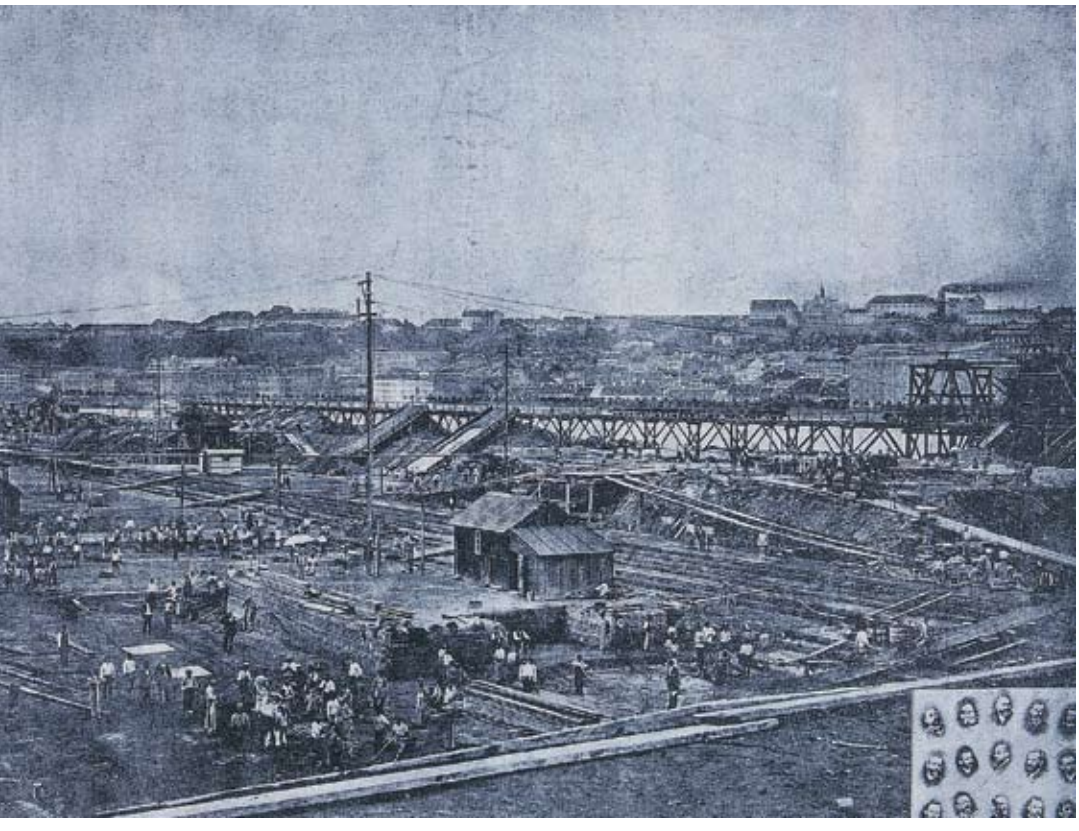
THE PARLIAMENT BUILDING

The Parliament Building in Budapest is the home to the Hungarian legislation and it houses offices of public dignitaries. Decorated with many statues and paintings, the magnificent building is worthy of the outstanding role it plays in the life of the Hungarian state also as a work of art. It was built in a single period about one hundred years ago.

Design and Construction

Bids for designing a permanent Parliament Building were invited in early April 1882, and the deadline for submitting the designs was 1 February 1883. It was decided that the building would be erected along River Danube, but the bidders were practically given a free hand regarding the architectural style. The invitation envisaged that four equivalent prizes would be awarded. Although officially speaking, bidding was international, under the pressure of Hungarian architects, the call was only published in Hungarian specialist journals and newspapers. Consequently, the event became a competition among Hungarian and—to a smaller extent—Viennese architects. Only 19 designs had arrived by the time limit.

The designs prepared by Imre Steindl, Alajos Hauszmann, Albert Schickedanz and Vilmos Freund, as well as Otto Wagner et al. were awarded by the committee in charge of handling the competition. Of these designs, only Steindl's was neo-Gothic, and the other winning bidders submitted designs of a neo-Renaissance or a neo-Baroque building. The committee decided that the Parliament Building should be built in a neo-Gothic style, which in effect meant that Imre Steindl's design was accepted (with some modifications). The neo-Gothic design was mainly supported by (former Prime Minister and former Austro-Hungarian foreign minister) Gyula Andrássy, an influential member of the committee, as he dreamt of a parliamentary building similar to that in



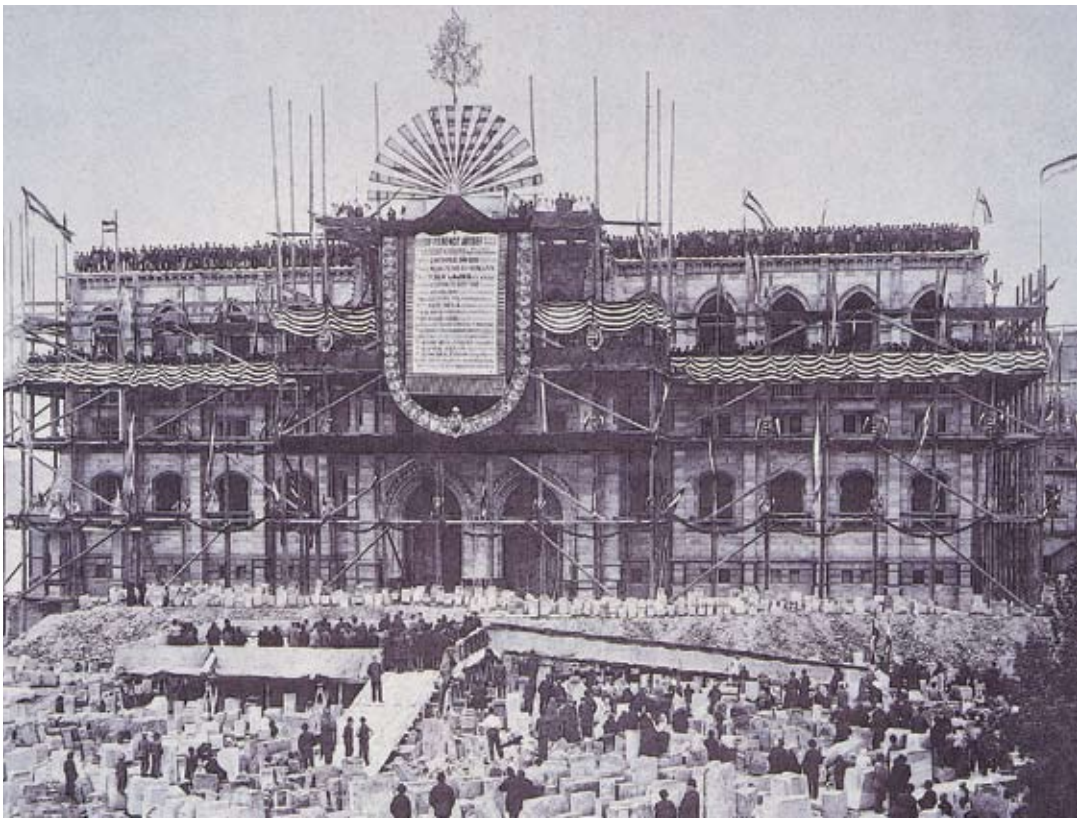
Laying the foundations

London. Imre Steindl (1839-1902), a professor at the Budapest Technical University and a prestigious and dedicated expert on neo-Gothic style, was ideal for Andrássy's vision.

Then Steindl turned the bidding design into a final as-built design, which took almost a year. On the blueprint the location of the building was shifted northwards, its length reduced and a mezzanine inserted between the ground floor and the first floor. It has been beneficial for the design that pointed spires replaced domes on the two main towers of the façade and on the twice four towers that surrounded the two assembly halls.

The general public also had an opportunity to have a look at the revised design. As expected on such occasions, newspaper articles to describe and criticize the building were published immediately. The question of the style had also provoked strong emotions: there were people who expressed aversion to the Gothic style, believed by many to be German and clerical.

However, the real assessment of the design did not take place in the press, but in chambers of the Hungarian Parliament. Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza submitted a bill on the construction of the building on 13 March 1884. The Lower House conducted a heated and acrimonious debate about the bill for three days. The huge cost of the building was the target of biggest criticism, and many people spoke against the style of the building. Government party deputies defended the project by referring to the representative task of the building, its role to be played in the Millennium celebrations, and its function as a symbol of the Hungarian state and the Constitution. On the last day of the debate, the Lower House had approved the construction with a relatively small majority. The debate in the Upper House took place in a single day. Act XIX of 1884 on approving the construction plans of a permanent Parliament building and on the execution of construction was endorsed by the monarch on 22 May 1884.

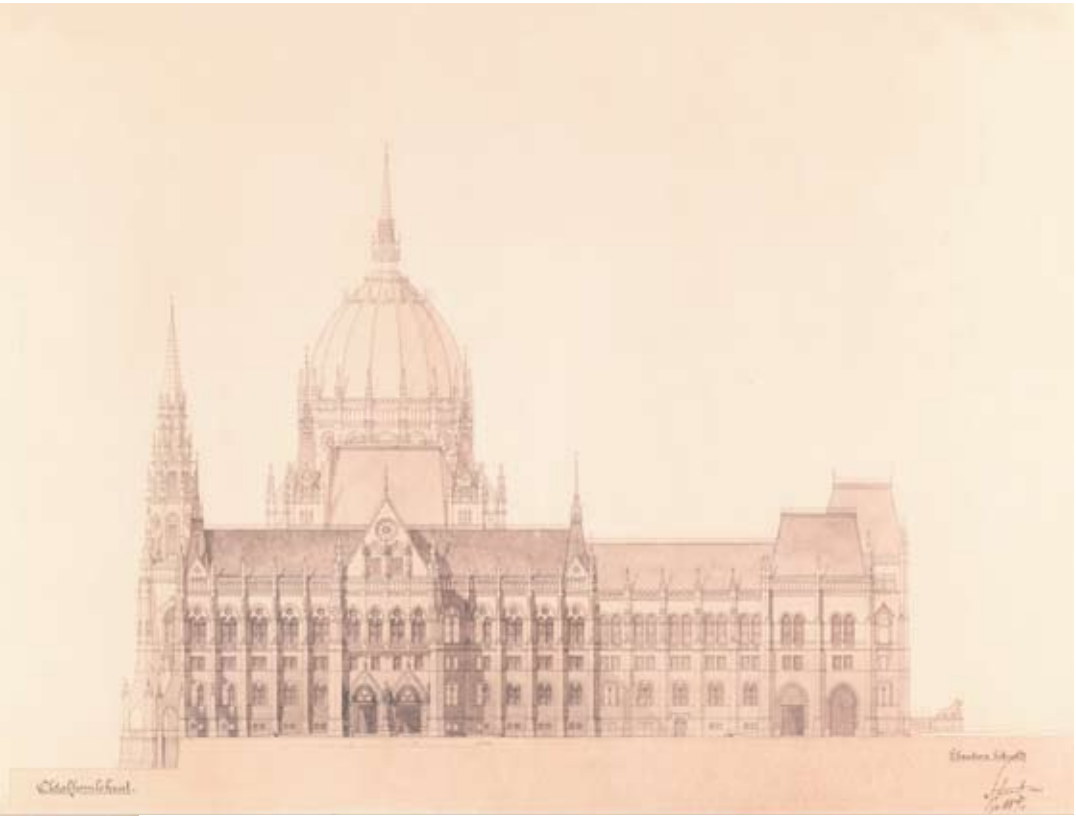


Topping out ceremony, 1894

Then the management organization of constructing Parliament Building was set up: there was a construction council, headed by the Prime Minister of the time for handling the daily affairs, and immediate supervision was assigned to a narrower body, the Parliament Building construction executive committee. Chair of the latter was Count Lajos Tisza, who had gained distinction earlier as royal commissioner during the reconstruction of the city of Szeged. A work contract was concluded with Imre Steindl on 5 March 1885. The architect was instructed to draw up the detailed designs, make a proposal on the appropriate materials, supervise the work of the contractors and scrutinize their invoices. Steindl appointed Ottó Tandor as his deputy, and Ernő Foerk was requested to design the furnishings. Headed by the ministerial counsellor Béla Ney, a technical supervisory group was set up by the government to safeguard accurate compliance with the contract.

Laying the foundations began on 12 October 1885, but it was soon found out that it would take more time and cost more than expected. That was because the intake wells, pipes and lines of the waterworks in the construction site had to be relocated first. Until finishing those activities, construction had to be suspended.

No matter how painful the delay must have been, it allowed further maturing of the design. It was then decided that—contrary to the original conception—it would be unnecessary to break the longitudinal axis of the envisaged building to follow a slight bend of the river. Steindl had drawn up the amended designs by 1886. A further delay of the work enabled Steindl to change the design once again in 1888. In the spring of that year, a wooden hut was erected in the construction area, where a 1:20, i.e. 5 by 14 metres plaster model of the building was put on display. Many large-size building models have been registered in the history of architecture, but it can hardly be doubted that the model of the Parliament Building in Budapest was one of the largest ever made. In addition to finalizing the details, the purpose of making the model must have been providing information to members of



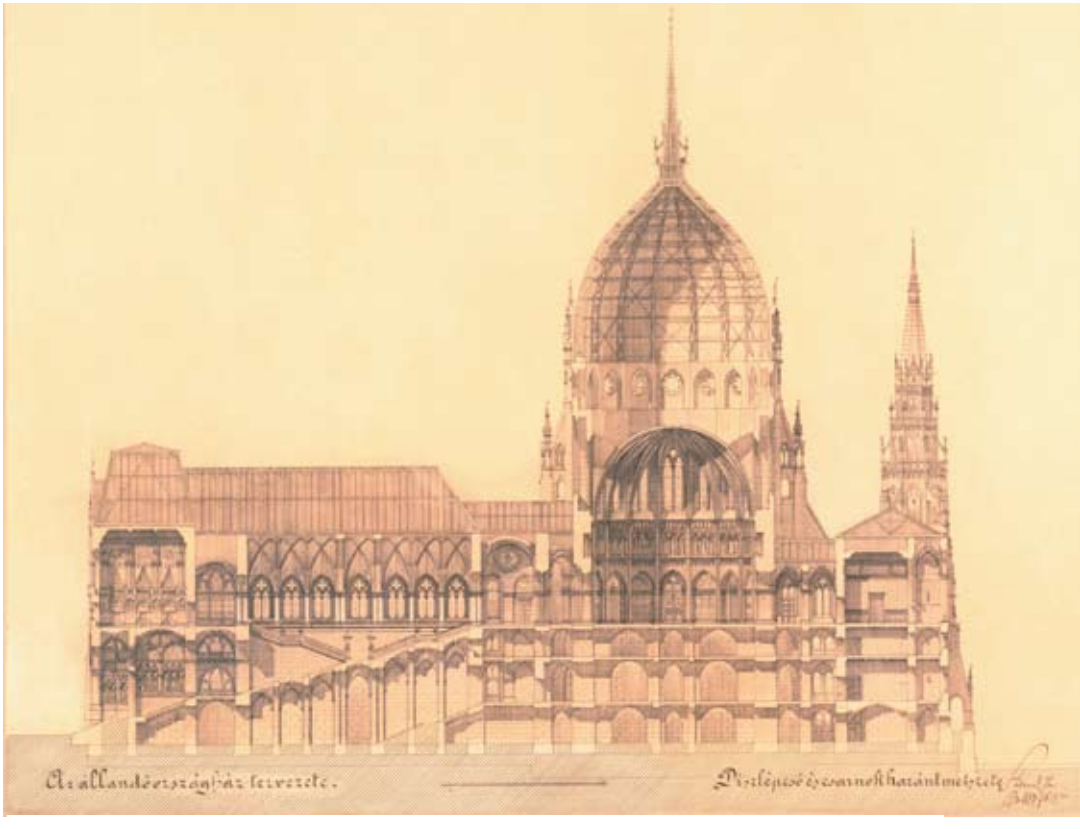
Imre Steindl's design of the southern façade

the public and keeping up enthusiasm. However, Hungarians had to wait eight more years for the ambitious project to be completed, at least externally.

After a suspension for several months, construction resumed on 25 October 1886. Using huge spotlights, hundreds of people worked on the construction site even at night. The soil had been removed to provide space for the foundations by 31 August 1887. In the meantime, the laying of the foundation had started. Due to the vicinity of River Danube, a coherent layer of concrete was made, with an average thickness of two metres. Once the concrete work had been completed, erection of the walls started.

A special technique was used in the heating system. The building had district heating for which steam boilers were installed 150 metres from Parliament Building in a separate house (currently 1-5 Balassi Bálint Street). The hot steam generated by the boilers was supplied via a properly insulated underground pipeline to the Parliament Building, where compartments for distributing hot air were built underneath the large halls. That heating system was considered to be the largest and most advanced in Europe at the time.

In spite of speeding up the work, it had become obvious by 1892 that, contrary to the original intentions, the building would not be ready by the Millennium celebrations of the Hungarian land conquest. Therefore, the construction executive committee instructed Steindl not to attempt to complete the whole building but concentrate instead on finishing the external parts, the hall under the dome and the main staircase by 1896. On 5 May 1894, the topping out ceremony was held. Traditionally it means that the walls were erected up to the main cornice, i.e. that masonry work was ready. An almost unbelievable quantity of construction materials was used: approximately 40 million bricks for building the walls and 30,000 m3 carved stones for the coating the building.



Cross-section of the main staircase and the dome by Imre Steindl

The complete roof structure, including the skeleton of the dome, was made from rolled and riveted iron by the Schlick factory of Budapest. The roofs were covered with slate and copper sheets. The last arch stone of the inner dome was laid on 16 May 1895, and the scaffolding was removed from the façade in December 1895. On 8 June 1896, which was the 29th anniversary of the crowning of Francis Joseph of Habsburg as king of Hungary, the two Houses of Parliament held a joint festive session. For that occasion the Holy Crown of Hungary and the other regalia were brought there. However, the Parliament Building could only be commissioned six years later, on 8 October 1902. Imre Steindl could not enjoy the glory of that day, as he had passed away a few weeks earlier, on 31 August. The activities in the interior were still not finished then and continued until the end of 1904. The total construction cost was officially more than 37 million kronas. That was about double the cost calculated for the final design and four times the budget envisaged at the time the bids had been invited!

After it was commissioned, the Parliament Building came into the limelight again. Nobody remained neutral when seeing the building; words of praise and censure were both heard. However, Hungarians could be content to know that they had one of the largest buildings in the world. As such, it was one of those structures built by Hungary to commemorate in 1896 the one thousandth anniversary of the Hungarian land conquest. The massive size of the building provoked the criticism of contemporaries already at the turn of the 19th century, although at that time Hungary's territory was three times as large as today.

The Exterior of the Building

The building consists of a long block along River Danube, and a cross wing joining this block perpendicularly from the back. When looking at it from the river, the long block is absolutely symmetrical. In the centre there is the dome, in front of which a pair of towers rise

The view of the Parliament Building from the Buda side

towards the sky. To the left is the former Upper House, and to the right there is a block of buildings that house the Lower House. At the two ends of the long block, a slightly lower roofing was built over the offices of the two Houses. This means that the blocks of building, starting from the two sides, rhythmically and gradually rise, to reach their peak at the dome. By the varied, in fact, dramatic grouping of the blocks, the architect has successfully avoided the inevitably threatening monotony of such a large building. The dimensions of the Parliament Building are impressive indeed: the length is 265 metres, the largest width is 123 metres and the height of the dome from the level of the paving is 96 metres.

Steindl made sure that the two views of the building should be well distinguishable: viewed from the river (western side), the building is less formal but more richly ornamented, whereas the side towards the city (eastern side) is formal and strict. There is a line of arcades on the Danube side: on two sides it proceeds along the ground floor and in the centre it rises to the level of the first floor, so as to emphasize further the priority role of the dome. There are no archways in the side blocks and at the two sides of the central projection, where thick—although functionless—flying buttresses are used. The alternation of arcades, flying and standard buttresses contribute to the versatile, vibrating impact of the main façade, just like the windows in the upstairs sections, which are densely used and richly decorated with crockets and finials.

On the city side of the cross wing, there is a triple gate at the main entrance with thick columns and pilasters. On the two sides of the cross wing, there are further entrances opening from the driveways; altogether 17 gates are available to enter the building. The too short façades are dominated by pedimented central projections, on the ground floor section of which a further driveway entrance is located. The deepened location lends a special dimension to that part of the building.

Roof details

Parliament Building owes its liveliness mainly to the versatility of its roof profiles. The 16-sides plan, ribbed, steeply rising dome sits on a drum, and is surrounded by flying buttresses, and its rise leads to the pointed and serrated finial. The two main towers are neo-Gothic structures worthy of attention: the fairy-tale effect of their block slimmed in three phases is emphasized by the many turrets and waterspouts and the copper flag bearer statues. The roof structures emphasizing the locations of the chambers consist of steeply rising main blocks, which are surrounded by four corner towers with pointed ends. The bottom part is embraced by a moulding richly serrated with turrets. All roof ridges are crowned by an artistic wrought iron handrail, which eases the sharp contours. The effect is further improved by the great many small turrets, finials and traceries of the roof.

The façades are decorated by as many as 90 stone statues. They portray outstanding personalities of Hungarian history; in fact, the idea of a Hungarian national Pantheon does not appear in such a dimension anywhere else. The figure of Prince Árpád stands on the central pillar on the north side, and the south side is decorated with the statue of King St. Stephen. At the third most important part of the building, above the main entrance, the figures of two noted kings, Louis I (Louis the Great), and Matthias Corvinus represent the might of medieval Hungary. When proceeding from north to south in the section of the building located along the Danube, the figures of Hungarian monarchs can be seen in a chronological order. There is nothing "Gothic" in the style of the statues, as they are characterized by the realism widely used at the end of the 19th century. Steindl demanded a uniform appearance in style, formal positioning and historical accuracy. Although 23 sculptors, including some of the most outstanding Hungarian artists of the era, made them, they share the same style. They are integrated in the architectural whole.

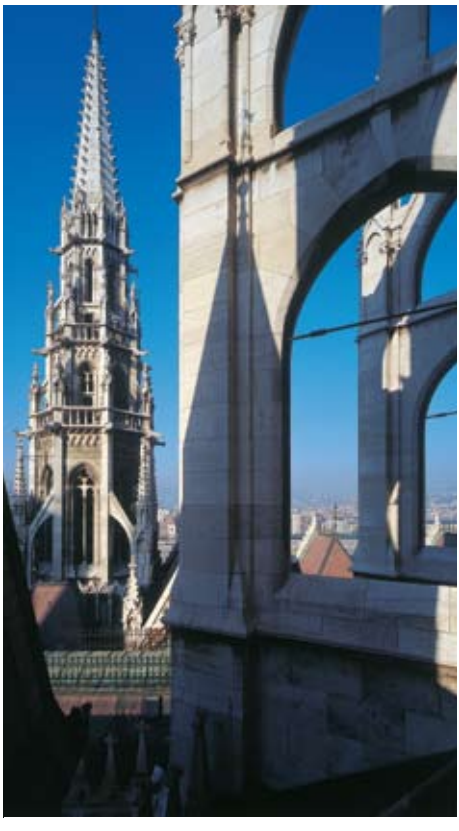
Coats of arms have a prominent role. Above the main entrance, the central pediment features the angel-carried (historical) coats of arms of Hungary and its dominions; and below

theme along the eastern side of the building, there is a long row of coats of arms of towns and counties.

There are two impressive "sitting lion" statues in front of the main entrance. They are large-size counterparts of lion figures that safeguarded churches in the Middle Ages. They are the work of Béla Markup. In front of each of the two pillars of the entrance, there is a nicely decorated lamp, and behind them the entrance arches feature a wrought iron gate—made in Gyula Jungfer's workshop.

As described, the arrangement of the blocks within Parliament Building is symmetric and yet dynamic, which mostly recalls the architectural principles of baroque in the 17th-18th centuries. However, the architecture of the façades is similar to medieval Gothic. Hungarian historicist architecture reaches its high point in the Parliament Building. Even if some of its characteristic architectural forms are similar to Friedrich Schmidt's works (he was Steindl's master in Vienna), it has such a picturesque system of towers, the dome, pilasters, turrets and stone carvings that, overall, it is unique.

It is worth comparing Parliament Building in Budapest with other parliamentary buildings abroad. The riverside location of the Houses of Parliament in London (1835–65) and its elongated block has obviously served as an example for designing its Budapest counterpart. The neo-Gothic style of the two buildings—even if they represent different variants of the same style—is another common feature. On Parliament Building in Vienna (1873–83) there are porticoes to indicate the location of the central hall and the two chambers, but neither the tower, nor the dome provide vertical emphasis. The Reichstag in Berlin (1882–98) is topped by a dome-like structure of a square plan, but in that case a bicameral system is not involved. The block of buildings of the Washington Capitolium (1792–1827, 1850–63) is identified by the two chambers located symmetrically and also by a dome rising in the

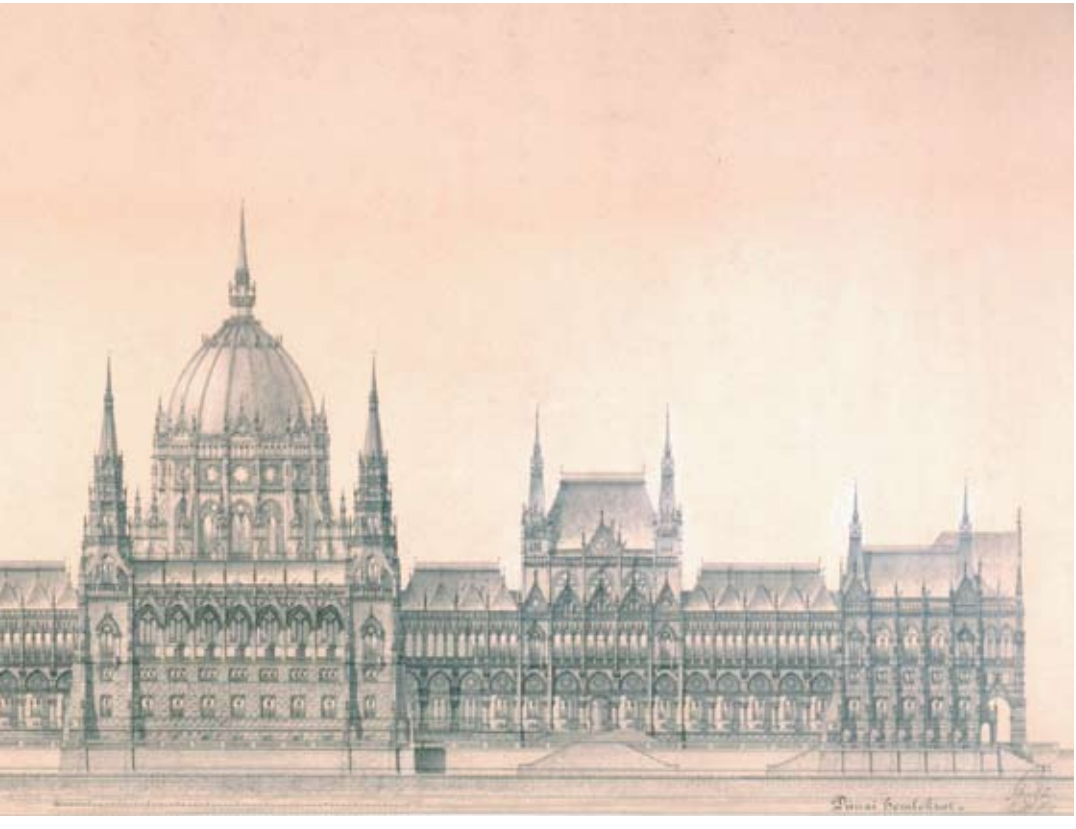


centre, which makes the two parliamentary buildings very similar. However, there is a basic difference in style: the American Capitolium is a Classicist building. The Canadian Parliament Building in Ottawa (1859–67) is noteworthy for Hungarians because it is also neo-Gothic and has a round hall under a dome. However, the latter is a separate unit and houses the Library of Parliament. It is only in Budapest that the two chambers of legislation and the central dome are connected, receive an external emphasis and form a neo-Gothic building. The spatial system, the arrangement of the blocks and the style of Parliament Building in Budapest rely on experiences of the construction of the Parliaments in Europe and North America. It combines and summarizes a fifty-year development process.

As a result of its location, the Parliament Building is a central, decisive component of the Budapest cityscape. It is not by chance that today it appears as a symbol both of Hungarian statehood and the Hungarian capital. The overall impression of the giant building—rising with it buttresses and external steps from the lower embankment—has become inseparable from River Danube, a part of which it majestically dominates. Ideologically and architecturally, the home of Hungarian parliamentarism counterbalances the neo-Baroque building of the former royal castle, which sits on the other side of the river. On the Pest side, Parliament Building is surrounded on three sides by Kossuth Square, the venue of noted historical events. Statues of historical themes adorn the square.

Inside the Building

The ground plan of the Parliament Building is characterized by symmetry and a clear-cut layout. The wings of the building embrace ten courtyards, all in different sizes, and the communication among the various parts is provided by a system of seemingly endless corridors. The chambers of legislation are located on the first floor, along with other halls and



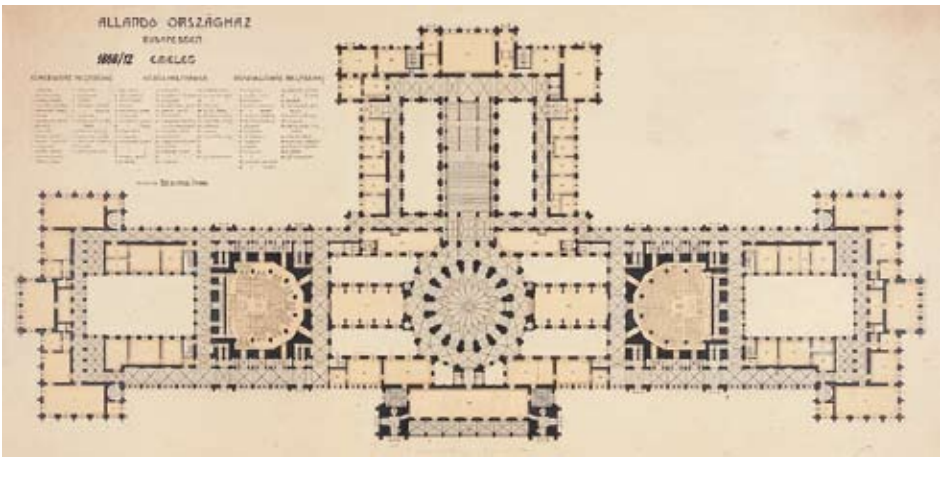
Design by Imre Steindl

offices of priority importance. The interior of these halls is of an especially high standard as they are richly adorned with works of art. As these halls were in part open to the public, they had a dual function: serve the legislature and illustrate Hungary's wealth.

The ground plan of the main spaces of the Parliament Building—similarly to the Houses of Parliament in London—forms a cross, with a hall under the dome in the intersection. The southern part of the longitudinal axis comprises the premises of the Lower House, the northern part features the halls of the former Upper House, the short axis includes the former Hall of Delegations and the ministers' studies, the grand staircase and a restaurant.

The middle part of the cross wing is occupied by the grand staircase. As the main halls of Parliament Building are located higher than what is customary in parliamentary construc-

Design by Imre Steindl



Dome Hall with the Holy Crown in the centre

tion, such an impressive staircase cannot be found in other Parliaments. Its ribbed vault apart, the grand staircase is not gothic, instead, it is reminiscent of Baroque palaces. Unlike the monochrome exterior of the building, the grand staircase is highly colourful. The lower sidewalls of the staircase are covered with dark brown marble, the upper sidewalls with light brown marble, parts of the balustrades with yellow marble (all from [Mária]Gyüd, southern Hungary), and the balusters are made of marble from Vaskoh (Vaşcău, Rumania). Every effort was made to use domestic building materials and the products of Hungarian manufacturers. In case suitable materials were not available from Hungarian sources, they were imported. The pillars supporting the vault were made of yellow marble from Girolamo, the eight monolithic columns standing between them were made of reddish brown Swedish granite, and the banisters are carved of marble from the Karst Region (today in Slovenia).

Four coloured statues of pages, cast from zinc, stand at pillars of the hall. The pages hold the Hungarian coronation regalia in their hands. The vaults feature decorative painting in Renaissance style, and flowers are drawn between grotesque motives. It is known from Steindl's inaugural address at the Academy of Sciences that he intended to lend a national character to the building that way. Similar motifs appear in several places—all made by Róbert Scholcz, a noted painter of the era. A coloured glas swindow was fitted at the top level of the staircase from the renowned workshop of Miksa Róth. Róth's windows, some of them ornate, others simple, appear in several corridors and some of the halls.

One of the finest Hungarian painters of the era, Károly Lotz, who had already proven his talent by decorating the Opera House, painted the frescoes of the staircase. The ceiling of the staircase consists of three fields, where Lotz had to express in pictures two important ideas of the building's art scheme: *The Apotheoisis of Hungary* and *The Apotheosis of Legislation*. Between them he painted coats of arms of Hungary and its dominions, angels and the coro-

The Holy Crown and the coronation regalia

nation regalia. Painted in tempera, the frescoes exude light lyricism. The figures are imaginary and are shown from a bottom view perspective.

Three arches connect the staircase and the Dome Hall, which is the Parliament Building's high point physically and spiritually. The impressive dome rests on sixteen massive pillars. Attached to them are bundles of columns, which in turn unfold into a fabulous pattern of star vault and lierne vault. Coloured zinc statues of respected Hungarian monarchs and statesmen adorn the pillars, thereby turning the Dome Hall into a national Pantheon. Their period apparel, weapons and majestic posture are similar to those of the statues on the exterior of the building. The gallery of statues starts opposite the staircase with Prince Árpád (9th century), and then proceeds in a chronological order to the right ending with Leopold II of Habsburg. The hall is the venue of festive events. Since 1 January 2000—the one thousand years' anniversary of the Hungarian Christian State—the Hungarian crown and the coronation regalia have been kept there.

The Dome Hall is flanked by the lounges of the two legislative chambers. The two lounges have a similar architectural style and decoration. The barrel-vaulted spaces, and the fresco on the ceiling that evokes the sky, have a baroque atmosphere. There are statues representing various trades along the columns. Wearing medieval attire, the naturalistic figures are coloured ceramics, produced by the Zsolnay Porcelain Factory in Pécs.

The legislative chambers, the venue of the activities of the National Assembly, are located beyond the lounges. The dimensions of the two halls are identical, and the architectural design and decoration are much the same, but in certain details the former Upper House is more ornate. Two corners of the chambers are rounded because their ground plan follows the horseshoe layout of the rows of benches. A combined framework placed on struts and well-known from the architecture of the late British Gothic style joins the traceries in the

Chamber of the Upper House

halls of the upstairs sections, and the coffered ceiling shows similarities with the world of Renaissance. The wooden ceiling and the benches in the chambers were made by Endre Thék and the plant of Alajos Michl, using the best Slavonian oak. The chambers are not very large and they are partitioned yielding the additional benefit of good acoustics.

In the chamber of the former Upper House, behind the chairman's pulpit, a row of painted shields of the Hungarian monarch families are fitted, and in the centre the shield of Hungary and its allied countries at the time is featured. Next to them on the two sides Mátyás Jantyik made wall paintings in different longitudinal fields. The scenes composed in a theatrical way, but very cleverly, emphasize the historical role of the nobility. The subject of the painting on the left-hand side is the *Proclamation of the Golden Bull of Hungary,* i.e. the scene in which King Andrew II issued in 1222 the statement which reinforced the privileges of the estates; the right-hand side picture shows the *Vitam et sanguinem* scene in Bratislava, 1741, when the Hungarian nobilities offered their lives and blood to Queen Maria Theresia.

In the chamber of the Lower House, the same shields which featured in the Upper House are used behind the pulpit. On the two sides, the longish tempera wall paintings made by Zsigmond Vajda: *Opening of Parliament Building in 1848* and the C*rowning of Francis Joseph* can be seen, recalling two important events of Hungarian history.

The so-called delegation corridor, which is wider and more richly decorated than the other corridors is located in the east end of the cross wing. The one time studies of the ministers are accessible from here. Reference to this is made by the wall paintings of the corridor because the subjects are *Going to war, Religion and culture, Law enforcement, Agriculture, Industry* and *Trade*. In a creative way, the painter Andor Dudits shows in the picture well-composed scenes about the subject, instead of allegoric figures. In the Delegation hall accessible from the middle of the corridor, the MPs of the Vienna and Budapest Parliaments discussed mat-

The Prime Minister's study in Parliament Building in 1902 and the renovated interior in 2001

ters of joint interest at the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. On the long side above the entrance, there is a huge and yet inert wall painting made by Andor Dudits: *Franis Joseph's sword stroke at the time of his crowning*. This reminded people in the hall about a ceremonial event that took place at the time the dualist state was set up.

Accessible from the hall below the dome, in the direction of the riverside, there is a longitudinal restaurant or better known as the Hunters' Hall. The speciality here is the number of wall paintings in many subjects and styles. The two shorter sides feature the tempera paintings of Aladár Kőrösfői-Kriesch. The subjects—as shown by the plaques below—are: *Fishing in Lake Balaton in the 15th century* and *Bison hunting, Etele saves Buda* but in a general interpretation the two ancient activities of Hungarians, fishing and hunting, are depicted. The Art Nouveau paintings are full of motion and represent a colourful spot in the academic-historicism world of the Parliament Building. On the side opposite the windows, some famous castles of historical Hungary (Vajdahunyad [Hunedoara – Rumania], Visegrád, Árva [Oravský Podzámok], Trencsén [Trenčin – both Slovakia], Klissza [Klis – Croatia]) are shown in the paintings of Béla Spányi. These works of art had to be repainted because the original paintings were destroyed during the Second World War. On the ceiling, there are three illusionist allegoric paintings by Viktor Tardos-Krenner: *Harvest, Abundance* and *Grape harvest,* which refer to the function of the hall.

In the south end of the longitudinal wing, in the halls of the former Speaker of the House, there are several works of art worthy of attention. Perhaps the biggest painting in Parliament Building is placed on the long wall of the Prime Minister's reception hall, the oil painting *Conquest* by Mihály Munkácsy. The painting shows the scene, in which Árpád and his escort receive the surrender Slavic envoys. In the former Speaker's Office of the Lower House, wall paintings were put on the walls of the large hall in 1929. One of them shows János Hunyadi before the castle of Nándorfehérvár (today Belgrade)—this is why the name of the hall is Nándorfehérvár.

The painting entitled Conquest in the hall named after Munkácsy

When leaving the colourful and gilded inner world of the upstairs section, which is richly decorated with wall paintings and statues, the yards designed with more simple materials offer a refreshing sight. The wall planes are made of light colour, moulded bricks. The crowns and inserts depict flowers and fruit grown in Hungary—sweetcorn, sunflower, tobacco, oak leaf and tulip, by which the architect intended to emphasize the national character. The ledges are closed by a frieze borrowed from the Gothic style of Venice and consisting of pointed elements. At certain places the frieze is supplemented by fantastic masks.

Because at the end of the Second World War the two-chamber parliamentary system was replaced by a single chamber one in Hungary, the functions of some inner spaces had changed. The chamber of the former Upper House is used for various meetings, and it is called the Congress Hall since 1945. Until recently, the suite of the President of the Republic was for a long time located at the southern end of the longitudinal wing. For that reason, the suite of the Speaker of the Lower House—today's National Assembly—was transferred to where it is today: in the cross wing. In 2003 the President of the Republic and his aides moved to the Alexander Palace (Sándor-palota) on Castle Hill. The Alexander Palace is consedered as a symbol of Hungarian statehood. In the northern end of the longitudinal wing, where the halls of the Upper House were located earlier, committee offices were set up.

Since—due to the need to speed up work—many elements on Parliament Building's façade were carved of semi-hard and soft limestone, this material had started to crumble quickly after the commissioning of the building. The replacement of stone units had to be started already in 1924. The building had suffered war damage in 1944–45, but this was repaired in a few years, even if temporarily. In the early 1970s, a programme spanning many decades and aimed at a restoration involving the complete replacement of stones started. As a result of renovation and continuous maintenance, the interior of the building exudes its splendour of old.

IV.

THE PARLIAMENT BUILDING WITHSTANDING A CENTURY OF STORMS

When Imre Steindl designed the Parliament Building at the end of the nineteenth century, he had in mind the constitutional arrangement of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then at the height of its power. The political characteristics of the country could be seen on the ground plan of the edifice as there was a Lower House and an Upper House, both of which were domestic representative bodies of Hungary, there was a Hall of Delegations that served the joint work of the Parliaments each in Budapest and Vienna, and the symbolism of the decorative elements served the same purpose. A delicate political balance was sought at the works of art that were put on display at key places of the House. For instance, on the one side of the legislative chamber of the Lower House a painting showed the coronation of Francis Joseph, which occurred in 1867, after the Compromise, but facing it on the other side was a scene from the revolution of 1848: the constituent sitting of the first representative national assembly. This latter painting showed Lajos Kossuth, leader of the independence movement, but the central figure in the picture was Archduke Joseph, Palatine of Hungary, who opened the sitting.

With the disintegration of the Empire the dualist system came to an end but in formal terms the constitutional arrangement of the country remained the same. Hungary remained a kingdom and its Parliament bicameral. There was no more need for the Delegation that consisted of a total of a hundred and twenty Members of the two parliaments and monitored the common affairs of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Consequently, the Hall of Delegations lost its original function.

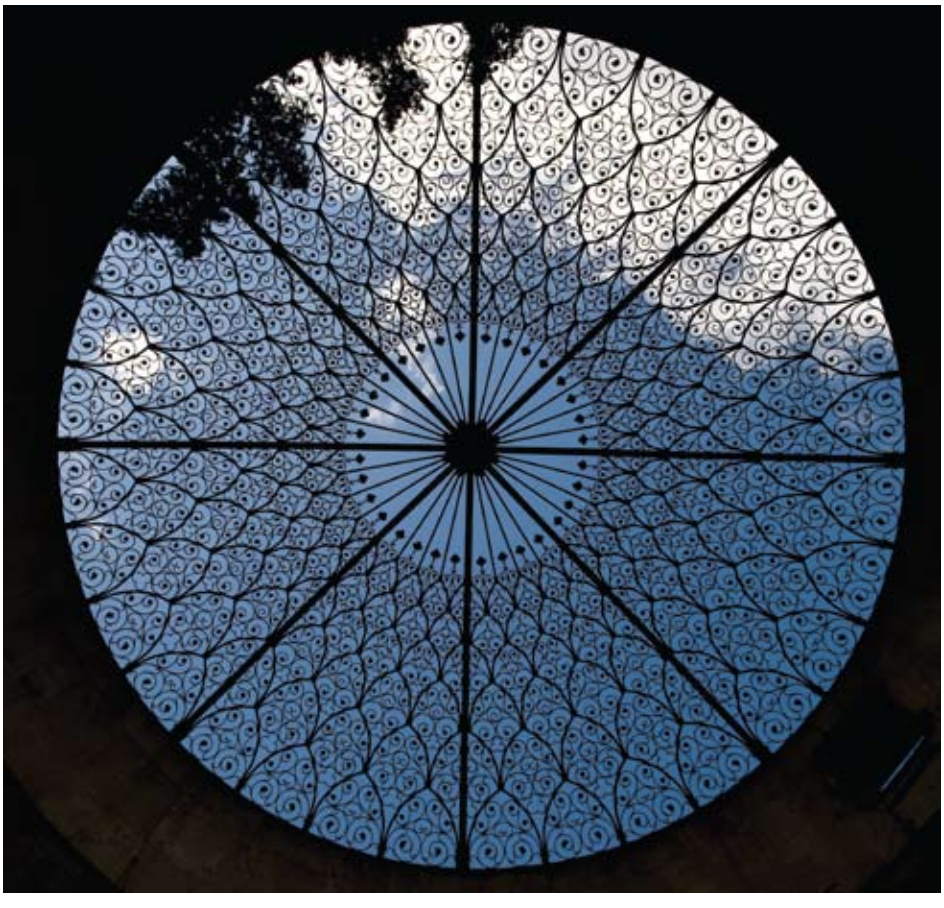
Otherwise the Horthy regime did not take away anything from the symbolic works of art that adorned the House and even made additions whenever political changes so required. The results of that attitude included naming the square in front of the building after Kossuth in 1927 and placing a statue of Kossuth and Rákóczi in two focal points of that square.

Both statesmen strove to defend Hungarian independence against the Habsburgs. Rákóczi was immortalized on a plaque in the Dome Hall and a fresco was dedicated to Miklós Horthy in the Nándorfehérvár Hall. Those minor gestures of courtesy apart, the Parliament Building was treated with appropriate respect during the Horthy regime.

Later on however the edifice faced difficult times. During the Second World War the siege of Budapest caused massive damage in the Parliament Building. The "House of the Country" shared the fate of the nation: bullets and shells damaged its facade—and some of the damage can still be seen—a part of the dome fell and Soviet soldiers took the bronze lions that had flanked the main entrance. Reconstruction began after the war and a considerable part of that work had been completed by the late 1940s.

The marginalization of the National Assembly began when the establishment of a repressive communist regime got under way. The function of the building transformed and that change still partly applies. At the end of the nineteenth century those who created the Parliament Building wanted the House to accommodate the legislature only and they employed architectural means to demonstrate the separation of powers. Although next to the Hall of Delegations several members of the Government had offices, they only used them during parliamentary sittings and their staff did not move in. The House only provided quarters of a high standard for the legislature and its personnel.

That principle was dishonoured almost immediately after the Second World War. Hostilities were still underway in Budapest when the Provisional National Assembly in Debrecen decided that the institution of the Upper House would be abolished. Thus offices that lost their original function near the legislative chamber of the Upper House were handed over



to the staff of the Prime Minister. (The seat of the Government, the Alexander Palace in the Castle District on the Buda side was ruined during the siege of Budapest.) As the House was unfit to providing quarters for the ever growing staff, the elegant studies on the ground floor and mezzanine were partitioned into small rooms. The more repressive the regime became the less political weight the legislature wielded and the less space was granted for the staff that directly served legislative work. There was a period when staff members working for the legislature were even moved to an office block in Andrássy Road and only the legislative chamber of the Lower House was used to serve as scenery for the rare sittings of the Parliament. The move aptly symbolized the Government's attitude to the Constitution under that communist regime. At that time the building was only used by the staff of the Prime Minister and the Presidential Council, the latter even usurping the right of legislation.

Beginning in 1947, the increasingly powerful Hungarian Communists sought to adjust the symbolic works of art of the Parliament Building to their ideology. The most spectacular such move was mounting a large red star onto the top of the dome. When illuminated after sunset, it could be seen from most parts of the capital. That massive out-of-place metal structure dominated the Parliament skyline until early 1990. During the revolution of 1956 several shots were made at that red star and a zealous young worker spent days trying to saw one of its pylons. After the revolution the red star was dismounted for a brief period, restored and hastily returned to its place. It was only removed once and for all after the proclamation of the Republic of Hungary in 1990.

Most of the historical crowned coats of arms that used to adorn the House were replaced with the socialist coats of arms of the People's Rj76epublic. Of the coats of arms, those in the legislative chamber of the Lower House received the harshest treatment: all of them

were daubed over and replaced by the coats of arms of the communist state. The coats of arms of the kings that once ruled Hungary were painted over and replaced by a curtain motif that displayed the hammer and the sickle. In the legislative chamber of the former Upper House that procedure was less consistent. The original decoration was fortunately retained behind a wooden panelling so later the original decorations could be restored. The wooden panelling was removed in 1978 when the Holy Crown was returned to Hungary. The coat of arms of the people's republic was even installed in some places of the Parliament Building where such decorations could not be found before: on stained glass windows of the main staircase and replacing ornaments and figurative paintings above the main entrance.

The regime saw it as a priority to remove all symbolic works of art that reminded one of the Horthy era, which it entirely rejected. Of the frescoes in the Nándorfehérvár Hall that showed three regents that once ruled Hungary (János Hunyadi, Lajos Kossuth and Miklós Horthy), the latter was painted over not once but twice. First it was replaced by a socialist realist painting that depicted a land distribution scene. Then—perhaps because its theme was in such a sharp discord with the other works of art in the hall that it became an embarrassment even during the Kádár regime—a fresco was placed there that depicted Tamás Esze and Ferenc Rákóczi. From a plaque in the Dome Hall the name of Miklós Horthy was removed even though he had ordered its installation. From the Corridor of Delegations a plaque of István Tisza was pulled even though he played an important role in the construction of the building. In a similar manner, a bronze plaque commemorating the heroes of the First World War was taken off from the same corridor. Even a statue of Kossuth that was erected during the Horthy regime was removed from the square in front of Parliament Building and was replaced by another one that better expressed the communist artistic preferences.

The iconoclastic zeal was not content with removing symbolic works of art of a political character. In the Hunters' Hall there are mural paintings of historical Hungarian castles. The Hungarian place names were painted over before a meeting of COMECON, the economic integration organization of communist countries, lest those place names could hurt the alleged sensibilities of politicians who came from the successor states.

When the change of political regime occurred in 1990, Parliament was immediately restored to the centre of political activities. As the Prime Minister's Office still occupied a considerable part of the building, several parliamentary committees and the offices of numerous Members of Parliament had to be housed elsewhere. The building chosen for the purpose was a block that had served as the centre of the Communist Party and which residents of Budapest called the "White House". Between 1998 and 2002 the Government had the Alexander Palace—once the Prime Minister's seat—in the Buda Castle District reconstructed so that the Parliament Building could exclusively serve the legislature. Following a change of government in 2003 however a different decision was made: the President of the Republic and his staff moved to the reconstructed Alexander Palace, which means that the spatial separation of the legislature and the executive did not take place.

Following the change of political regime, throughout the successive parliamentary terms, those in charge of maintaining the Parliament Building have always approached the building's original technical and artistic qualities with respect. Instead of propagating their own political preferences, they strove for restoring the original state. That could of course be only done in case of the works of art and structural elements that have been reserved on photos or drawings. Once the external restoration of the edifice is completed, this palace on the Danube embankment will once again show its original glory, true to Imre Steindl's dreams.

COVER ILLUSTRATION
WATERCOLOUR BY LAJOS RAUSCHER
THE LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT
(DETAILS—1900)

THE PHOTOS ON PAGES 22, 29, 30–53, 55, 119–123
SHOW DETAILS OF THE PARLIAMENT BUILDING.

PHOTOS
ÁGNES BAKOS, ZSUZSA PETŐ, BENCE TIHANYI,
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