

Relations with the Global South, solidarity and pragmatism in Hungarian foreign policy since the 1960s – a focus on Africa

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Abstract

The paper provides an analysis of certain key notions, such as solidarity and pragmatic solidarism in Hungarian foreign policy especially towards Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular during Communist times, as well as pragmatism as such, both during the Soviet period and in the post-Communist era. This will be contextualized in the gradual build-up of the Global South since the Bandung Conference of 1955. Special attention is provided to underscore the importance of education and government scholarships – as successful soft power tools – in fostering long-term relations with an enhanced interest in deepening economic cooperation. The article offers an analysis of the unfolding of the Hungarian Africa policies/strategies as a case study, but in the broader regional context of the Visegrad Four. The contribution of this paper to the field is that it broadens the relatively scarce literature on CEE foreign policies, in general, and on the Africa-policies, in particular, and offers a documented overview to better understand the Hungarian case, which has normative relevance for EU policies and geopolitics.

Keywords: Hungary-Africa relations, pragmatism, university scholarships, V4, EU geopolitics

Introduction

Around and after 1955, when the Bandung Conference was held with great enthusiasm, tensions all across the globe were intensifying. As Umut Özsu indicated,

The Cold War was in the process of establishing itself as an abiding phenomenon, reaching deep into newly liberated states and non-self-

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governing territories alike. [...] The Algerian struggle for independence was already under way, and would soon be joined by the Vietnam War. By the end of 1956, British, French, and Israeli troops were marching into Egypt to restore Western control of the Suez Canal, and the Soviets were busy crushing the uprising against the Stalinist regime of Mátyás Rákosi in Hungary (Özsu, 2017, p. 296).

These were coupled with other ‘scrambles’ of the two major powers of the day, as both had similar approaches towards Africa, for instance. As Lise Namikas underlined,

Both the United States and the Soviet Union wanted to carve out a new role for themselves in Congo [too]. [...] The Soviet Union had the advantage of goodwill, growing anti-imperialism and, for a while, the prosocialist sentiments of the Non-Aligned Movement. Both were *heavily paternalistic* and felt they had a lot to teach the Africans (Namikas, 2013, pp. 31-32). (stress added by the authors)

As early as during the Bandung Conference, it was particularly Hungary – together with other Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) – which was mentioned with regard to colonialism, as John Kotelawala of the then-Ceylon referred to, “new forms of colonialism”, in his conference speech:

Are not [these satellite states under Communist domination] colonies, as much as any of the colonial territories in Africa and Asia? And if we are united in our opposition to Colonialism, should it not be our duty to openly declare our opposition to Colonialism, should it not be our duty to openly declare our opposition to Soviet colonialism as much as to Western imperialism? (quoted in: Dirar, 2017, p. 358).

Obviously, a lot of debate followed, but from the perspective of the present analysis, later on, ‘the Hungarian question’, as it was referred to in the United Nations (UN), became part of a more global set of issues of solidarity, freedom and self-reliance, articulated clearly by the Bandung participants. For them, self-reliance was the ultimate way by which they sought to escape the shortcomings of bipolar rivalry (Tarrósy, 2011, p. 18). As Harbeson argues, “born into the Cold War world, African countries and their leaders [...] allowed countries of the two Cold War blocs to compete in offering them aid and investment without committing themselves to either side” (Harbeson and Rothchild, 1995, p. 5). The ideas of self-reliance and non-interference rather became cornerstones of both rhetoric and policy.

Following the change of the political systems that swept across the region of the former Soviet Bloc toward the end of the 1980s, ex-satellite states’ foreign

policies were mostly directed towards the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined NATO in 1999 and, together with Slovakia, went as the Visegrad Four (V4) countries, and other five from the ex-communist camp plus Cyprus (in total 10 countries) joined the EU in 2004. Almost the entire post-Eastern Bloc has kept echoing the slogan “Back to Europe”, showing a longing for the community of the West. Nearly a decade later, all these countries began to talk about adapting their foreign policies to the new realities across the world. New foreign policy chapters were formulated, and another slogan emerged: “Back to Africa”. Hungary’s government published its Africa-strategy in April 2019, defining plans for developmental assistance, technology transfer, a wide-scale scholarship program and export trade diplomacy. All V4 countries also emphasized economic diplomacy and encouraged investments and business-to-business cooperation. They have also shown interest in participating in peace operations across the continent (Besenyő, 2020).

The aim of this article is to provide an analysis of certain key notions in Hungarian foreign policy especially towards the Sub-Saharan African macro region, such as solidarity and pragmatic solidarism, in particular, during Communist times, as well as pragmatism as such, both during the Soviet period and in the post-Communist era. Special attention is provided to underscore the importance of education and government scholarships – as successful soft power tools – in building long-term relations with an enhanced interest in deepening economic cooperation. This is especially crucial to notice as in path dependent, former Communist CEECs, the Communist background did influence their development policies in the past, as well as their development assistance strategies as EU members (Szent-Iványi and Tétényi, 2008). In this context, Szent-Iványi underlined that “international development policy [also] seems to serve Hungary’s external political and economic interests” (Szent-Iványi, 2012, p. 51). It is true, as of today, that a change occurred “in rhetoric concerning development aid in the Visegrad Group, as a result of the migration crisis in Europe” (Mazur and Banach, 2021, p. 182), and more attention is paid to assistance for African actors – so that they could keep their populations at home, and that people could find opportunities in their home countries rather than abroad. In a rather confrontational picture of different policy solutions connected with the crisis – both in the V4 and at the EU level as a whole –, it has become evident that “the V4 are willing to finance humanitarian projects in developing countries regardless of the volume of migration” (Mohay, 2021, p. 782).

The paper provides an analysis of the unfolding of the Hungarian Africa policies/strategies as a case study, but with an eye on other former Soviet satellites, with whom the country forms the V4 group. It aims to answer the following research questions (RQs): RQ1: What political and economic factors have been motivating Hungary’s engagements with the African continent since the 1960s? RQ2: What kind of pragmatism characterized Hungarian Africa-policies during the Communist era and since the political changes of the 1990s? RQ3: What is the role of education in

foreign policy aspirations to build lasting relations with African countries? And finally, RQ4: What is the normative relevance of such Hungarian and other Central and Eastern European policies for the European Union and European geopolitics?

The mixed methodology used for the study includes a comprehensive desk research and archival research and, therefore, the paper is based on content and discourse analysis. The Hungarian National Archives and the Archives of the University of Pécs were searched for so far unpublished government documents and government-to-university correspondence. In addition, news analysis has also been included as for the coverage of some significant events. Relevant literature is reviewed in the various sections with the intention to support the arguments put forward to capture an important European reality in terms of foreign policy. The contribution of this paper to the existent literature in the field is that it broadens the circle of relatively scarce published works on CEE foreign policies, in particular, Africa-policies, and offers a documented overview to better understand the Hungarian case. It is part of a series of articles by the authors revealing Hungarian foreign policies and geostrategies towards the African continent and certain African states based on archival research first and foremost; therefore, it can add to the global knowledge corpus on Hungary and its external relations during Soviet and post-Soviet times. The first section deals with Hungarian foreign policy after the 1956 revolution and highlights the ‘first turn towards Africa’. Section 2 briefly looks at the interconnecting notions of solidarity and pragmatic solidarism in relation with the potential of the mutually beneficial first connections between Hungary and many of the newly independent African states, and other such countries of the Global South. Section 3 discusses the significance of cultural and educational exchanges via one of the first major cases to offer training to young Africans, the Medical University of Pécs of the time. Section 4 reviews the ‘turn away’ from Africa and other formerly friendly partner regions of the Global South with the arrival of the regime change and new foreign policy priorities at the end of the 1980s and then, Section 5 analyses the ‘(re)turn back to Africa’ as part of the policy of Global Opening, and in particular, Southern Opening lately. Section 6 concludes the paper.

1. Hungarian foreign policy after 1956: From isolation to proactive diplomacy and the first turn towards Africa

The communist takeover fundamentally transformed Hungary and its foreign policy, basically making the country a Soviet satellite state (Solymári and Tarrósy, 2021, p. 152). Hungary was rapidly ‘Sovietized’, Stalin controlling the country’s state-party secretary general through the foreign affairs department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In Hungary, it was Mátyás Rákosi, General Secretary, later Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People’s Republic of Hungary (between 1945 and 1956 under different titles), and Ernő Gerő, first secretary of the Hungarian Workers’ Party (in 1956), who were in the positions via which the

‘Hungarian foreign policy’ was managed, meaning that they fully executed the orders come from Moscow. These derived from the Zhdanov Doctrine (see in cvce.eu) (a response to the Truman Doctrine) constructed by one of Stalin’s major ideologists, Andrei Zhdanov, “which divided the World into two camps, [and] made it difficult to deal with countries that were not part of either bloc” (Békés *et al.*, 2015).

After Stalin’s death, First Secretary of the CPSU, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev introduced the ‘active foreign policy’ doctrine, “by which the other members of the Soviet bloc were encouraged by Moscow to play a more proactive role in international politics” (Békés and Vékony, 2018, p. 275). This embraced a flow of intensive political and economic partnership-building and links especially with the newly emerging and independent countries of the Afro-Asian context of international relations. In particular, after the bloody crushing of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, which isolated Hungary internationally, Budapest laid emphasis on a “diplomatic offensive to convince Third World nations to support the removal of the Hungarian question from the UN General Assembly’s agenda” (Ibid, p. 277). In addition to aligning the country’s foreign policy with the general policy directives of Moscow and also, for instance, in supporting the Non-Aligned Movement, which presented not only ideological grounds, but also pragmatism in the development of relations, Hungary made the first significant attempts to open globally via nearly its 90 new diplomatic missions established with African, Asian and Latin American countries. This met with openness for cooperation across the global South as “the political assertiveness of a new generation of leaders [in these countries advocated] schemes of enhanced self-reliance” (Hout and Salih, 2019, p. 116).

“After 1963, the country’s room for manoeuvre increased significantly” (Békés and Vékony, 2018, p. 289), and János Kádár’s government set the main principles of the new foreign policy at the 9th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party in 1966: peaceful coexistence, universal peace, the development of economic and cultural connections, supporting the independence movements of the Third World, cooperation with the newly decolonized states. Frigyes Puja, the Foreign Affairs Minister for almost ten years, summarized the essence of proletarian internationalism:

the principle of the foreign policy of the Hungarian People’s Republic is the principle of peaceful coexistence of countries with different social systems; an interstate relationship in which the parties renounce war, respect each other’s sovereignty and consider this as a general norm in their bilateral relations (Puja, 1981, p. 55).

Behind this explicitly open-minded, proactive foreign policy, which no longer reflected the retaliatory, unyielding worldview of Mátyás Rákosi’s Hungary between 1940–45 (Balogh, 1982, p. 68), was partly political pragmatism and partly the political ideology of the Communist Bloc. Put into a bipolar context, the world could witness a

“state-socialist globalization project” (Mark *et al.*, 2020, p. 4) – an alternative to the one driven by the Global North –, which fostered as well as was built upon:

alliances between European socialist states and newly independent states in the Global South [...] [with] emphasis on national self-determination [...] a shared sense of peripherality and backwardness [...] reconnecting to anti-imperialism; a shared respect for culture or tradition; and the struggle for equality and recognition on the global arena (Ibid, pp. 6-7).

At the same time, after Moscow went into open confrontation with China, Hungary felt obliged to give China the cold shoulder, even though, earlier on, the Chinese government had supported János Kádár in his consolidation attempts (Vámos, 2017). For Hungary, a unique geopolitical situation, in which the country intensively turned towards Africa, emerged and this was rather positively supported by Moscow.

2. Sovereignty, solidarity, pragmatic solidarism

The 1960s provided the ground for the new Hungarian way, which set the respect for other states’ sovereignty as a general norm, in both bilateral and multilateral contexts. The weight of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in managing all foreign relations increased, in particular, when Endre Sík – a trained Africanist academic – began his term as a minister in February 1958. In his memoir, Sík underlined how important it was for Hungary “to offer ideological help to African nations in their struggle against the neo-colonialists” (Sík, 1970, p. 218), in order to strengthen their national identity and further build their self-esteem.

A crucial angle of Hungary’s proletarian internationalist foreign policy, therefore, covered the development of foreign relations with African, Asian and Latin American countries as a primary goal. “By this time, the country clearly had its own set of interests – including [also] a gradual opening to the West, especially in the economic field” (Békés and Vékony, 2018, p. 278). A pragmatic view over trade-dominated diplomacy represented added value to the other ideological dimension of solidarity and support against the neo-colonial struggle of countries of the Global South, across the African continent, in particular, which became a focal region of the Hungarian engagements. From the Global South perspective, drawing upon Aalto’s work, there are several pragmatic roles within foreign policy, played by different actors of the international system: non-alignment is among the five Aalto mentions.

It is designed to preserve sovereignty and territoriality. It involves active diplomacy that may also translate to a capacity for mediation but is more designed to prevent one from becoming overrun by any colonial, imperial or hegemonic aims of great powers or of any such threats ensuing from their mutual management (Aalto, 2011, p. 121).

From the Hungarian perspective, we may recall what Bellamy explains about ‘pragmatic solidarism’, which “holds that under specific circumstances it is possible to establish cross-border communities that hold common ideas about a ‘basic floor’ of humane governance that relates to conceptions of legitimate statehood and informs political action in particular situations” (Bellamy, 2002, p. 474). All these can be considered legitimate references of a gradually widening and pragmatically enhanced framework of bilateral collaborations between Hungary and the emerging states of the decolonizing world of the era. At the same time, one may look into the very nature of this ‘solidarism’: whether or not, and the extent to which it may be evaluated as ‘shop window solidarism’, by which we mean well-grounded national interests represented in a mutually acceptable way so as to achieve win-win situations.

As for the ideological context of enhanced collaboration with the newly independent African countries, for instance, Benkes underscores that first-generation African leaders were searching for anti-capitalist alternatives, which resulted in many different “African socialisms” – in plural (Benkes, 2006, pp. 26-31). At the same time, they intended to integrate their own socialisms – Nkrumahism, Ngoubaism, Cabralism, or the Nyerere-led Ujamaa – into the socialist world order, and for that purpose (too), intensive exchanges with countries of the Soviet Bloc were viable manifestations of their willingness to build their new countries and identities. Some independent African countries were open to socialist ideas and accepted the (predominantly ideological) help offered by the Communist Bloc countries. As Fage and Tordoff wrote:

In the independent countries, there was a rapid shift from pluralism to the centralization of power (power was usually concentrated in the hands of a single party) and a kind of socialist approach. However, only eight African countries have officially announced a socialist government program. By the 1970s, only a handful of African leaders identified with orthodox Marxist views. Instead, most of them adapted Marxism and other ideas to the African conditions. The ‘socialist umbrella’ in Africa was so broad that even the Kenyan and Senegalese leaders who pursued capitalist-type policies could fit in under it (Fage and Tordoff, 2002)

When talking with these leaders in person at the UN General Assembly and, later on, during his first visits, Endre Sík confirmed (again in his memoir) that they were seeking for support (also) from Hungary to “get rid of the ideological confusions and insecurities” (Sík, 1970, p. 218).

3. An important dimension of cooperation: cultural and educational exchanges, state scholarships – the case of the Medical University of Pécs

As part of Hungary's enhanced engagements with the African continent, the first (mainly) Sub-Saharan tours of Hungarian party leaders happened to present growing opportunities on both ends. After the delegation led by Gyula Kállai (who first, between 1961 and 1965, served as a deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, i.e. deputy prime minister, then, chairman, and prime minister from 1965 until 1967) paid a visit to Guinea, Mali, Dahomey, Ghana, Nigeria, Algeria, and Morocco in December 1962, the government proposed to initiate a number of lasting projects in the fields of infrastructure development, water management, technology transfer, as well as training and education. One of the decisions of the government (source: Hungarian National Archives, No. MNL OL XIX-A-83-b, pp. 6-7) was to offer 137 scholarships to African countries for the 1963-64 Academic Year (and increasing this number following the construction of new student hostels from 1964-65). An experimental – as indicated explicitly in Kállai's proposal – English-language program for a group of foreign students (mostly Africans) was initiated at the Medical University of Pécs. Yet another English-language program for future sports coaches, particularly for Guinean students, was initiated at the College of Physical Education.

In addition, further internationalization was planned by launching a degree program in International Relations at Károly Marx University of Economics in Budapest. For the sake of learning and understanding more about Africa, the different ethnic groups, cultures and state developments of the continent, the government decided to establish a Department of African Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Lóránd University (this ceased to exist by the early 2000s and there is currently no such individual university department in operation in the country – although there are plans to launch programs of African Studies at different higher education institutions). Finally, Kállai – in concert with foreign affairs minister János Péter - who served the government in this position from 1961 to 1973 – raised the issue to establish an African Scientific Institute, with the involvement of the African-Asian Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. All these were coupled with the support for scientific publications, as well as with sending books to the friendly African countries and music teachers, especially to Ghana, while Budapest encouraged African cultural professionals to pay a visit to Hungary. The Ghanaian connection was especially important due to the fact that “both countries sought to lever Western economic dependency during Cold War détente” (Ginelli, 2021).

The Medical University of Pécs played a key role in putting Hungarian higher education on the map of the country's widening linkages with countries of the then Third World. From the official correspondence between the management of the university and the respective ministries it is clearly seen how challenging it proved to be to create the required physical infrastructure for the incoming student population, particularly in terms of their lodging. The university was first asked by the government

to create an offer for tuition fee-paying students (not scholarship-holders). In his detailed letter to the Ministry of Health on 20 February 1963 (source: Archives of the University of Pécs, No. of letter: 138-855/1963.), rector László Cholnoky wrote that the institution calculated a 100 USD annual tuition, which accounted for only 40 % of the total sum paid at Western universities, also including a 50 USD monthly fee for housing and allowance, another 20-25 USD for personal expenses, plus the cost of the books and learning materials. The university assured the ministry that it was capable of and ready for teaching all the relevant courses in the English language in addition to the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) for non-native speakers; also, the opportunity to learn and master the Hungarian language was also available. The only tangible shortcoming seen by the university was the insufficient student residence availability; therefore, the management requested that, in the forthcoming five-year plan, the government prioritize the building of a new 400-bed dormitory in the close vicinity of the campus (not on-site lodging). It took years to finally get the approval of the necessary financial means of the government: this happened in December 1967. The dormitory opened its doors with 388 beds in 1972. This experimental program has proven to be highly successful, contributing to decades of recruiting international students for the fully English-taught medical training, in addition to which, later on, yet another language appeared to be attractive, i.e. a fully German-taught degree program in Medicine.

The case of the University of Pécs well illustrates how seriously the Hungarian side considered the training and even integration of foreign professionals into the Hungarian labour market, particularly those from the friendly countries of the developing world. In addition, it also urged international framework agreements on the reception of Hungarian professionals abroad from a technology transfer point of view and, therefore, concluded several trade and technical-scientific agreements, as well as cultural and scientific agreements with African countries. To be able to professionally coordinate and implement all these agreements, a government agency named TESCO (the International Technical and Scientific Cooperation and Trading Office) was also created in 1962. It was in full operation until the end of the 1980s, when fundamental political changes were sweeping across the bloc. While transferring knowledge and technology in the areas of community service, education, healthcare, agriculture, as well as water conservation and management, TESCO was entitled to help expand the overall Hungarian export volume. Numerous trustworthy and highly appreciated products spread on the African markets, such iconic brands as the Ikarusz-buses, the Glóbusz canned foods, the Ganz railcar engines, the Hajdú washing machines, the Elzett-locks and fasteners or the MEDICOR medical technology tools and devices. By the end of the 1970s, these Hungarian products became well-known and renowned in the Sub-Saharan African macro region (see more: Tarrósy 2018). Long-term commitments on both sides were explicitly seen, for instance, in the form of joint ventures – good examples can be the MEDICOR Nigeria Limited Company, or the Videoton Nigeria Ltd., specializing in television set assembly. These obviously did not

come out of the blue, neither can be interpreted on grounds of solidarity, but rather by acknowledging the “increased importance of Nigeria’s potential as an oil-producing country, [which] also attracted the interest of the Comecon [Council for Mutual Economic Assistance] countries” (McMillan, 1987, p. 143).

4. After the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc: a turn (away from Africa) in Hungarian foreign policy?

After the political transformation of the late 1980s, the most important foreign policy objective for the former members of the Eastern Bloc was to quickly acquire EU membership. Hungary identified three major pillars of its post-communist positioning: Euro-Atlantic integration, including 1. joining the EU, 2. entering the security and defence alliance of NATO, and 3. focusing on the Hungarian minority communities, the autochthonous Hungarian diaspora in the Carpathian Basin. While especially paying attention to the first two priorities, Hungary actually withdrew from Sub-Saharan Africa and from partner relations with other countries of the Global South. It substantially reduced its official diplomatic presence, which resulted in a much smaller number of foreign missions across Africa: by 2010, only 2 embassies were operating in Nairobi, Kenya, and Pretoria, South Africa. Moreover, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and all the political changes in the former satellite states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the fear of further marginalization in African countries due to the global shift of attention from Africa to CEE – both in terms of working capital, investments and development assistance – started to grow. As underscored earlier in an article in the journal *Twentieth Century Communism* (see: Tarrósy, 2018), for the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, in the midst of modernization, economic transformation, and searching for new markets, the Hungarian-African relations before the change of regime were only partially replaced by pragmatic economic relations because the Hungarian economic actors showed a decreasing interest in the many unstable African countries. Instead of official state-level ties, the majority of relations were dominated by the activities of NGOs. With the strengthening of the multi-faceted process of globalization, the notion of civil society was viewed in an entirely different light. This also provided a clear opportunity for Hungarian civil organizations to find and build new partnerships with African NGOs. The first decisive turn for African organizations (such as the AHU, the Foundation for Africa, Taita, and the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta) was Hungary’s accession to the EU. The Hungarian civil society’s knowledge could be seen as part of the ‘transition–integration know-how’ that could represent a kind of product in (re-) building external relations across Africa, too. In particular, as a result of ill-performed privatization in many cases, former trustworthy and good quality products were no longer available for trading purposes (as the companies that had been producing them ceased to exist, obviously meaning the end of production), and thus this specific Hungarian post-socialist transformational knowledge and democratization

experience seemed to be a credible ‘product.’ The possible revival of the previously well-functioning scholarship scheme had been mentioned at numerous meetings and discussion fora, but were not yet in a reachable distance for the new foreign policy did not place any emphasis on that.

5. New foreign policy chapters in the post-Soviet era: Hungary’s Global Opening and the second turn towards Africa (Southern Opening)

After finishing the six-month presidency of the EU in the first half of 2011, it was time to reformulate the Hungarian foreign and European policy in the context of the interconnected global realities of the 21st century. The concept of ‘global openness’ gained momentum in Hungary in 2010 when an independent deputy state secretariat within the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established: the Deputy State Secretariat for Global Affairs, headed by a specialist career diplomat responsible for bilateral relations with Asian, Australian, Pacific, and African states. The interpretation and enhancement of the country’s global presence can be seen as a revelation across the governments from 2008 on, when a separate government strategy emerged. The relevance of the country’s in-depth interest in clarifying its intention to define Hungary’s long-term actions in transnational global reality is indisputable (Tarrósy, 2018, p. 103). In five years’ time, a new foreign policy chapter was introduced: the so-called ‘Eastern Opening’ (Turn towards the East). This calculated with the enhanced presence of Eastern actors across the macro region of Hungary, such as Chinese expansion in Central and Eastern Europe (Vörös, 2020).

In yet another year, from 2016, the Southern Opening became the strategic direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Hungarian government. The budget planning document of 2015 submitted to the Hungarian Parliament argued clearly: “Given the growing political and economic influence of the developing regions, which comprise also target countries of the Southern Opening, it is essential for Hungary to revive, consolidate, and bring fresh ideas to its relations with the states of the aforementioned area.” Therefore, the (re-)opening of embassies, the consolidation and extension of a wide honorary consular network, trading houses, high-level visits (again) and continuous bilateral exchanges were supported and organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other governmental units, agencies – all with the major focus on export diversification and entering new (in this case, African) markets (Neszmélyi, 2017, p. 123).

While in its first years of existence, i.e. after the collapse of the Soviet Union, even the new Russia considered African partnerships in a marginal manner, since the 2010s, every country of the ex-Communist Bloc, including the Russian Federation itself, fosters pragmatic foreign policies with African regions and states, too. Although the Sahara desert obviously signals (also) a geopolitical cleavage for them, and the distinct Mediterranean connections with the Northern African countries prevail, increased attention is (again) paid to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This is of

particular significance as the EU European Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen was acknowledged as a “geopolitical Commission committed to sustainable policies,” which also strives for the EU “to be the guardian of multilateralism” (European Commission, 2019). Asserting an increased role in the external actions of the EU has not fully manifested yet, but there are important steps taken in terms of climate change, for instance, or in the context of EU–Africa relations.

Concerning the V4 countries, as of today, the Czech Republic has 12 embassies in the continent altogether, 8 in Sub-Saharan Africa; Hungary has 11 embassies, 6 of which are resident in SSA countries; Poland runs another 11 embassies, 7 in SSA countries; and Slovakia has 6 embassies across the continent, 4 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Policies also reflect increasing Central European–African engagements that obviously take into account the commitments the EU has identified by its Member States. In July 2015, the Czech Republic published a foreign policy concept with a pragmatic framework for all Czech engagements, followed by a strategy for relations between the Czech Republic and the states of Sub-Saharan Africa in 2017. Though Poland and Slovakia do not have separate Africa-strategies, both have been running numerous projects across the continent, such as Poland’s Go Africa-project and its high-level meeting series of the Poland–Africa Congresses. Its foreign policy strategy for 2017–2021 includes considerable security and economic angles in Africa. Slovakia’s international development agency, SlovakAid, has also been managing several projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hungary’s government published its 22-point Africa-strategy in April 2019¹, which illustrates both the rising global profile of Africa and the increasing Hungarian interests to engage with the continent (Marsai, 2019, p. 48).

The strategy connects Hungary’s newly enhanced engagements with the African continent to international migration and states that Hungary should contribute to African development so as to foster on-the-spot involvement, which can result in people not leaving their home countries. The overarching framework of the strategy is largely driven by security and economic considerations. Two countries are referred to in particular, i.e. Côte d’Ivoire (point 12), where the establishment of the post of trade attaché should be proposed, and the Republic of South Africa (point 13), with which a comprehensive intergovernmental commission should be launched. At point 14, the government mentions the importance of African Studies at Hungarian universities, and at point 9, the extension of the so-called Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship scheme toward companies is referred to, therefore, the mutually beneficial connections between foreign graduates and Hungarian companies should be encouraged. The strategy highlights the Budapest Africa Forum (BAF) (point 20), which it intends to organize biannually. Back in June 2013,

¹ Gov.decree No. 1177/2019 (IV.2.) of Hungary about the Africa strategy, Magyar Közlöny, (2019), 65, 1861–1864 (retrieved from <http://www.kozlonyok.hu/nkonline/MKPDF/hiteles/MK19056.pdf>).

when the BAF was launched, the African Union Chairperson of the day, Nkosazana Dlamini, as a keynote speaker of the event noted that:

Hungary and other Central and Eastern European countries played an important role during [Africa's] anti-colonial struggles and [their] early years of nation-formation and state-building in the development of African human capital, with many of [Africa's] leaders and professionals passing through [the region's] universities (AU Press release No. 63/2013).

Globally, it is clearly seen that education, research, and culture are extremely important dimensions of pragmatic foreign policy thinking. The increased competition among universities “in the global knowledge space to ensure that [they] are well-positioned” (Császár *et al.*, 2022, p. 2) is of geopolitical importance for governments. State scholarship programs, therefore, can lay the foundations for long-term sustainable bilateral relationships by keeping students who have already obtained a degree in the system as ‘cultural ambassadors’ after graduation. Young people who spend years in different higher education institutions in other parts of the world partly build up an attachment, create strong bonds with the country where they spend several years of studying, which can be used smartly by the actual government to strengthen relations with the student’s home country in the field of commercial, economic, scientific, and other types of cooperation. In 2013, the Hungarian Government launched the above-mentioned Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program, which was basically a revival of the one during socialist times, but which obviously had a touch of our global era. It is undoubtedly a very successful foreign policy instrument, certainly a soft power tool (Kacziba, 2020, p. 82), which, as its mission statement goes, intends “to promote the internationalization of the Hungarian higher education and to attract top foreign students from all around the world who can establish personal and professional attachments to Hungary while enjoying high quality education in the heart of Europe.” Over 11.000 scholarship holders from 80 countries studying in 600 study programs at 29 universities of the country truly represent a wide basis to possibly nurture future linkages with origin countries of the students – again in a pragmatic manner.

Prospects for the future – concluding thoughts

Concerning the four research questions of the paper, we can first of all underscore that, by the end of the 1950s, a unique geopolitical situation emerged for Hungary (and, later on, for other countries of Central and Eastern Europe). No longer reflecting a retaliatory foreign policy, by the early 1960s, an explicitly open-minded, proactive approach took shape in Hungary, which was characterized by both political pragmatism and the political ideology of the Communist Bloc. As for Hungary’s engagements with the African continent since the 1960s, we can conclude that the

main principles of the new foreign policy underscored the importance of peaceful coexistence, the development of economic and cultural connections, and mutually beneficial cooperation with the newly decolonized states. In addition to the ideological dimension of solidarity and supporting the fight against neo-colonialism, a trade-dominated diplomatic stance also showed its pragmatic face in the Hungarian-African system of relations. This trade/export-based collaboration has been revisited by the Hungarian government in its ‘Global Opening’ foreign policy doctrine, and especially, its Southern Opening chapter.

With the new context of dynamically evolving international relations of the global age, in particular, after Hungary’s accession to the European Union in 2004, new geopolitical situations, together with demands, pressures and opportunities emerged for Hungary, as much as for countries of the Global South. Drawing upon the Southern Opening policy, Hungary’s government published its Africa-strategy in April 2019, defining a number of domains of partnership and engagement ranging from development assistance, technology transfer – even in a triangular manner –, a wide-scale scholarship program to export-oriented trade diplomacy. This latter one, however, is not at all unique as, basically, all four Visegrad countries lay emphasis on economic diplomacy and the encouragement of investments and business-to-business (B2B) cooperation. As an extra dimension to all these, there has been a rising interest of all V4 countries to participate in peace operations across the continent. We agree with Besenyő who states that “it is important for V4 countries with an otherwise low African presence to become more actively involved in African peace operations in order to carry out and achieve their national and [potential shared macro regional] interests” (Besenyő, 2020, p. 16).

Education and research play an essential role in the reshaping of Hungary’s African, and in general, global presence, which can be a basis for further cooperation in the long run. Bilateral educational, cultural, and scientific agreements have been of great importance for Hungary for decades. The Stipendium Hungaricum public scholarship program thus represents one of the most significant tools for the pragmatic foreign policy of Hungary. It is basically a revitalization of the scholarship program of the country’s immediate past. By developing the Stipendium Hungaricum program as a soft-power tool, Hungary’s main goal is to be able to develop economic relations and increase its economic strength. In a dynamically changing international environment, “rational decision-making remains a key feature of pragmatism for governments” (Tarrósy and Vörös, 2020, p. 115). Hungarian foreign policy via a number of key actors and regions of the world shows how Hungary relates itself to all of these in the above-discussed pragmatic manner. Countries of the Global South have undoubtedly become significant entities for Hungary to (re-)position itself in this multi-vector inter-polar space. It always remains a basic question how far countries of the Global South can use the newly defined relations and linkages for their better positioning. Pragmatism with its enhanced set of soft and smart tools offers opportunities on both ends.

The Central and Eastern European experiences of the immediate Communist past about the region's countries' positioning themselves during the bipolar world, together with the policies managing their connections and engagements with countries of the Global South can add to the EU's pool of geopolitical knowledge. This is especially relevant when the incumbent European Commission wishes to foster new actorness that might make the EU a more decisive geopolitical (and geo-economic) entity in the global arena – something yet to be taking a tangible shape. From a pragmatic perspective, in light of the current context of resilience, a “clear paradigm shift in the EU's external policy” (Simionov *et al.*, 2021, p. 257) has been taking shape, which can also utilize all the experiences the former Soviet Bloc countries, EU Member States today, have gathered, many of which truly represent borderline and transition know-how.

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