

Research note:**Between multilevel governance and urban foreign policy - Budapest and the Pact of Free Cities in Central and Eastern Europe**** Ilona Pálné Kovács,  Balázs Brucker** 

ELTE CERS Institute for Regional Studies, Hungary

Abstract: This article examines the emergence of the Pact of Free Cities (PFC) as a form of politically engaged city diplomacy in Central and Eastern Europe. Drawing on the literature on multilevel governance, city diplomacy, and new municipalism, the study analyses how Budapest and other opposition-led capitals transformed domestic political conflict into transnational municipal cooperation after 2019. The paper argues that the PFC represents a distinctive form of paradiplomacy, through which cities seek to counterbalance the increasing domestic centralisation and political marginalisation by strengthening their international presence and European networks. Based on document analysis and elite interviews, the study highlights both the political significance and the structural fragility of the initiative. While the Pact has successfully articulated a normative agenda centred on democracy, human rights, climate policy, and local autonomy, its informal structure and dependence on individual political leaders limit its long-term institutional sustainability. The findings contribute to debates on the changing role of cities within European multilevel governance systems.

Keywords: multilevel governance, city diplomacy, Pact of Free Cities, new municipalism, Central and Eastern Europe

Introduction

The literature on city diplomacy and multilevel governance (MLG) has increasingly emphasised the growing political role of cities in both domestic and supranational arenas. Within this framework, local governments are no longer seen merely as administrative implementers of national policy, but as autonomous or semi-autonomous actors capable of engaging in transnational cooperation, policy advocacy, and symbolic political action beyond state boundaries (Kübler & Piliutyte, 2007). However, the American city movements have highlighted that the interests and political values of central governments and local governments often come into conflict (Emanuel, 2020; Leffel, 2018). This shift reinterprets the original function of paradiplomacy, which assumed that it serves to support and complement national

 ELTE CERS Institute for Regional Studies, Hungary; e-mail: rucker.balazs@krtk.elte.hu

foreign policy objectives; instead, the movements of local governments and regions are becoming increasingly autonomous within the diplomatic arena. The sensitive connections between the local and international levels of governance are referred to in the literature as “intermestic diplomacy” (Gutiérrez-Camps, 2013). It is visible in Europe as well, where urban actors increasingly participate in governance networks (Messina, 2011), policy diffusion mechanisms, and advocacy coalitions that transcend national hierarchies (Acuto, 2013; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009)

The deepening of European integration has been particularly conducive to the expansion of the international room for manoeuvre of subnational actors under the umbrella of MLG narrative (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). The institutional development of the European Union – especially the establishment of the Committee of the Regions and the partnership mechanisms embedded in the cohesion policy – has gradually formalised the participation of local and regional actors in European decision-making (Brucker, 2022; Brucker & Finta, 2023).

In the Central European context, this process has unfolded within a distinct political and institutional environment. The post-socialist decentralisation processes, European integration, and the intensifying political polarisation of recent years have all contributed to the transformation of cities’ international role perceptions (Swianiewicz, 2014). This research posits that municipal diplomacy in Central Europe is gradually moving beyond the classical bilateral twin-town model towards increasingly network-based, policy-oriented, and politically structured forms of cooperation, which are at times driven by actors’ own interests and political values.

The expansion of city diplomacy has not eliminated tensions between governance levels. On the contrary, it has often generated new forms of political conflict between national governments and subnational authorities, especially in contexts where ideological divergence and institutional centralisation coincide (Hooghe et al., 2016; Kamiński, 2025; Mocca, 2023; van der Pluijm & Melissen, 2007; Sellers & Lidström, 2007; Szpak, 2025). In such settings, international municipal action can become an extension of domestic political conflict, rather than a neutral form of cooperation supporting national geo/political interests.

This research note analyses the emergence and evolution of the Pact of Free Cities (PFC), a transnational municipal network founded in 2019 by the mayors of Budapest, Warsaw, Prague, and Bratislava. The central implication of this initiative is that the Visegrad cooperation was originally established by the national governments of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Czechia on the basis of shared historical and regional interests within Europe. By contrast, the PFC appears to adopt a stance opposing these nationally led and increasingly Eurosceptic “mother countries”, in response to domestic processes of centralisation and political polarisation. This case may be interpreted as a form of what we term “non-parallel diplomacy”, whereby local and national levels of governance move in opposing directions.

The analysis is based on document analysis (official statements, press releases) and policy sources, as well as elite interviews with actors involved in city diplomacy. The research was based on nine semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between April 2024 and May 2026 with professionals working in city diplomacy units in Budapest and the other three Visegrád Group capitals, staff of their Brussels representations, political advisors, and representatives of transnational grassroots and partly municipal movements. Given the study's focus on Budapest, the respondents associated with the Hungarian capital were somewhat overrepresented in the interview sample.

Table 1. Interviews

Name (monogram)	Institution	Role	Date
MG	Representation of Budapest to the EU	Policy Officer	9 April 2024
JB	Representation of Budapest to the EU	Head	10 April 2024
KJ	City Diplomacy Unit of Budapest	Head	10 April 2024
MK	International Cooperation Office	Deputy Head	23 April 2024
CV & KL	Delegation of Prague to the EU	Policy Officers	25 July 2024
FV	City Diplomacy Unit of Bratislava	Head	25 July 2024
TK	Committee of the Regions	Chair	9 October 2024
SzP	City Hall of Budapest	Policy Advisor	6 March 2026
GE & BE	Fearless Cities Movement	Policy Officers	22 May 2026

Source: own compilation

Given the study's focus on Budapest, the analysis primarily examines the Pact of Free Cities through the perspective of the Hungarian capital and its city diplomacy. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive account of the network as a whole, but rather to explore how participation in the initiative has shaped and reflected Budapest's international political engagement.

The central research question is how and under what conditions capital cities in Central and Eastern Europe – particularly Budapest – transform domestic political conflict into transnational municipal diplomacy, and what the limits of such strategies are within multilevel governance systems. This focus is motivated by the fact that Hungary, under the Orbán government in office until spring 2026, implemented one of the most far-reaching centralisation reforms in the region during the study period, significantly reshaping the scope of local government autonomy.

While the trajectory of future institutional reforms remains uncertain, emerging patterns in the relationship between central government and municipalities suggest a potential reconfiguration towards a more cooperative, partnership-oriented approach, in which local governments may be increasingly framed less as political adversaries and more as governance partners.

The study combines literature on city diplomacy and new municipalism (Acuto, 2013; Barber, 2014; Curtis, 2016). This latter phenomenon appears to resemble cities' efforts to resist nationalism, populism, and processes of centralization (Mocca, 2023). It is argued that while cities are increasingly acting as political agents in global governance, their effectiveness remains heavily conditioned by domestic political and institutional contexts.¹

1. Multilevel governance, Europeanisation, and the rise of urban foreign policy

The multilevel governance model has long provided a conceptual framework for understanding the dispersion of authority across European political systems (Bache & Flinders, 2005). Initially developed to describe EU cohesion policy and structural fund management, MLG assumes that governance authority is shared across supranational, national, and subnational levels in non-hierarchical ways. In this model, local and regional authorities are not merely policy recipients but also participants in decision-making processes through institutional channels such as the Committee of the Regions and various consultative mechanisms (Piattoni, 2010).

However, the evolution of European integration has revealed significant asymmetries in the implementation of MLG principles. While regionalisation was initially promoted as a cornerstone of the “Europe of the Regions”, many Member States resisted deep decentralisation, leading to a gradual reconfiguration of governance priorities (Hooghe et al., 2016). Apparently, in recent years, cities have increasingly replaced regions as key interlocutors of EU urban policy, especially through initiatives such as the Urban Agenda for the EU (2016), which explicitly recognises cities as central actors in addressing climate change, mobility, housing, and social inequality. The European cohesion policy has been trying to strengthen the role of cities, also.

This shift has been particularly significant in Central and Eastern Europe. Although post-socialist states initially adopted decentralised governance models in the 1990s and early 2000s, EU accession did not produce a uniform trajectory of regional empowerment. Instead, several countries have experienced renewed

¹ This analysis is embedded in a broader four-year interdisciplinary research programme (2024–2027) conducted at the ELTE Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Institute for Regional Studies, funded by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Fund under the Ministry of Culture and Innovation.

tendencies toward centralisation, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Hungary represents one of the most pronounced cases of recentralisation in the region, where structural reforms after 2010 significantly reduced municipal competences and fiscal autonomy (Pálné Kovács et al., 2016).

Within this context, cities have increasingly turned to internationalisation as a compensatory strategy. The expansion of city diplomacy does not only reflect functional needs – such as knowledge exchange and funding access – but also political motivations linked to domestic marginalisation.

As global cities literature suggests, metropolitan actors often develop external relations when national frameworks constrain their autonomy (Acuto, 2013; Curtis, 2016). This broader structural transformation is also reflected in the rise of “new municipalism”, which frames cities as democratic counterweights to centralised or populist national governments (Mocca, 2023; Russell, 2019; Thompson, 2021). In contrast to traditional municipal internationalism, particularly in the form of city twinning, new municipalist movements and networks are explicitly normative, with a focus on democracy, inclusion, climate justice, and social rights. These actors frame cities as political agents engaged in global struggles over governance models rather than neutral service providers (Mocca, 2023).

At the same time, city diplomacy remains uneven in its institutionalisation. While some networks – such as Eurocities or C40 – benefit from strong organisational structures and policy integration with EU institutions, many emerging initiatives – at least during the first few years following their establishment – remain informal, personalised, and dependent on political leadership continuity (Acuto & Rayner, 2016) although the institutional background capacity seems to be crucial in success (Lecavalier & Gordon, 2020). This institutional and structural fragility is central to understanding the trajectory of the PFC.

2. Budapest, the pact of free cities, and the limits of non-parallel diplomacy

Following the systemic transition of 1990, Hungary initially developed a relatively decentralised local government model. Municipalities gained significant autonomy over public services and local development, while EU accession further reinforced principles of subsidiarity and partnership in territorial governance (Bachtler & McMaster, 2008). However, after 2010, Hungary underwent a profound centralisation process, which included the redistribution of competences, the nationalisation of key public services, and increased fiscal control over municipalities (Kákai & Pálné Kovács, 2023).

Budapest occupies a structurally unique position within Hungary’s multilevel governance system. The capital and its metropolitan area roughly account for a quarter of the country’s total population. While the capital enjoys a special legal status, its governance structure remains highly fragmented.

The reforms after 2010 significantly altered the balance of power between the capital and the central government. Despite its economic weight and demographic importance, Budapest became increasingly constrained in its policy autonomy.

The election of opposition mayor, Gergely Karácsony, in 2019 marked a turning point in Budapest's political and international orientation. While earlier municipal administrations primarily focused on domestic governance, merely symbolic international relations, and EU financed projects, the post-2019 leadership developed a more explicit foreign policy dimension (SzP interview, 6 March 2026). This included the reorganization and strengthening of the dedicated City Diplomacy Unit (formerly: International Relations Office) and the strengthening of the Representation of Budapest to the EU in Brussels, originally established in 2003 (MG interview, 9 April 2024; JB interview, 10 April 2024; KJ interview, 10 April 2024).

The institutionalisation of Budapest's international engagement reflects both functional and political drivers. On the one hand, the city faces global urban challenges – climate change, mobility, housing, and social inequality – that require transnational cooperation (UN-Habitat, 2020). On the other hand, increasing domestic fiscal and political constraints imposed by the central government have incentivised the city to seek alternative channels of influence, particularly within EU institutions (JB interview, 10 April 2024; KJ interview, 10 April 2024).

Budapest's city diplomacy strategy thus combines formal institutional presence with informal political networking. Key actors include the Representation of Budapest to the EU in Brussels, political alliances in the European Parliament (S&D, Greens/EFA, Renew Europe), and transnational municipal networks (e.g. Eurocities) (JB interview, 10 April 2024). The leadership role of figures such as the head of the Brussels office and a former deputy mayor of Budapest, who has served as President of the Committee of the Regions since 2025, has further strengthened Budapest's European embeddedness, particularly in climate and cohesion policy debates (JB interview, 10 April 2024; TK interview, 9 October 2024).

Within this evolving framework, the PFC emerged as a symbolic and political response to perceived democratic backsliding and centralisation in Central Europe. Founded in 2019 by the mayors of Budapest, Warsaw, Prague, and Bratislava, the network embodies both ideological convergence and pragmatic cooperation among opposition-led capitals (Matthes, 2023; Szpak et al., 2023). It positions cities as defenders of liberal democratic values, including the rule of law, human rights, and European integration (Gadzala, 2020).

However, the PFC differs significantly from other urban networks. Unlike Eurocities or C40, it explicitly embraces political positioning vis-à-vis national governments and draws on the "Visegrad spirit", understood as closer cooperation among the formerly Soviet-influenced countries of Central Europe. This draws it closer to new municipalist movements which frame urban cooperation as a form of political resistance. At the same time, the PFC articulates a broader normative and policy agenda centred on the protection of liberal democratic values, human rights,

social justice, tolerance, and cultural diversity (FV interview, 25 July 2024). Its objectives include the promotion of subsidiarity and local self-governance, the exchange of best practices in sustainable and socially conscious urban management, coordinated advocacy for stronger city representation in EU policymaking, and the pursuit of more direct EU funding opportunities for cities, particularly in areas such as climate policy, social inclusion, housing, transport, and cohesion policy (Pact of Free Cities, 2019). The PFC is also active in the field of environmental sustainability and climate policy, particularly through efforts to coordinate cities' pathways toward climate neutrality (JB interview, 10 April 2024; KJ interview, 10 April 2024). It has, furthermore, taken a public stance on human rights and democratic governance issues, including issuing a joint statement condemning the imprisonment of the mayor of Istanbul, thereby emphasizing the political independence of democratically elected local leaders (Pact of Free Cities, 2025). In addition, the network consistently advocates for cities' more direct access to European Union funding mechanisms, as well as for a stronger role of local governments in EU-level policy-making processes.

At the same time, the PFC remains structurally fragile due to its informal organisation (Lecavalier & Gordon, 2020), which lacks a permanent secretariate, fixed budget, and formal institutional hierarchy (MK interview, 23 April 2024). While this flexibility enables adaptability and responsiveness, it also limits long-term continuity and institutional consolidation. In response to these challenges, the Pact has initiated a light institutionalisation process aimed at strengthening its operational capacity and long-term effectiveness. Within this framework, the establishment of a joint permanent secretariate in Budapest was discussed at the Bratislava Summit in May 2026, six and a half years after the founding of the Pact (Pact of Free Cities, 2026).

Membership is tied to individual mayors rather than cities as institutions, making the network vulnerable to electoral turnover. The 2023 electoral defeat of Prague's mayor – one of the founding members of the network – illustrates this vulnerability (CV & KL interview, 25 July 2024).

Empirically, the network has expanded beyond its founding members, reaching around 49 cities by 2026 (Pact of Free Cities, 2026). However, this expansion has diluted its original ideological and geopolitical coherence also, as membership now includes a more diverse set of political contexts and spaces. Whereas the PFC was initially composed primarily of cities led by opposition mayors – most notably from left-wing, liberal, and green political backgrounds – its membership today also includes several cities by pro-government (e.g., Olivera Injac in Montenegro, Rafał Trzaskowski in Warsaw since December 2023, etc.) and/or centre-right mayors (e.g., Bohuslav Svoboda in Prague, Katrin Albreister in Neu-Ulm, etc.).

Table 2. Members of the pact of free cities

Continent	Cities
Europe	Budapest (2019 – founding city), Warsaw (2019 – founding city), Prague (2019 – founding city), Bratislava (2019 – founding city), Amsterdam (2021), Athens (2021), Barcelona (2021), Florence (2021), Frankfurt (2021), Gdansk (2021), Ljubljana (2021), London (2021), Mannheim (2021), Neu-Ulm (2021), Paris (2021), Podgorica (2021), Rijeka (2021), Stuttgart (2021), Tirana (2021), Ulm (2021), Vienna (2021), Zagreb (2021), Berlin (2022), Brussels (2022), Hamburg (2022), Kyiv (2022), Milan (2022), Riga (2022), Rome (2022), Vilnius (2022), Munich (2023), Lviv (2023), Sofia (2024), Kharkiv (2024), Reykjavík (2024), Timisoara (2025)
North America	Los Angeles (2021), Beaverton (2026), Boston (2026), Chicago (2026), Cincinnati (2026), Cleveland (2026), Montgomery (2026), Oklahoma City (2026), San Antonio (2026), San Diego (2026), Seattle (2026)
Asia	Taipei (2021), Taoyuan (2021)

Source: Pact of Free Cities (<https://www.pactoffreecities.com/>)

This raises questions about the long-term identity of the network and its capacity to sustain a coherent political agenda. Such concerns are reinforced by the Pact's organisational structure: summit meetings continue to rotate among the founding capitals, while the founding cities retain a central role in the admission of new members and the strategic direction of the network (KJ interview, 10 April 2024). The cooperation among the four initiating capitals also appears fragile from a geopolitical perspective, as it remains closely tied to shifts in the political leadership of the Visegrád states. At present, for example, Polish–Hungarian relations at the intergovernmental level have strengthened following the outcome of the Hungarian parliamentary elections (Lepiarz & Gaal, 2026), thereby reducing the salience of the initiative's non-parallel and demonstrative character. These developments raise broader questions about whether the Pact of Free Cities can evolve into a more autonomous and institutionalised form of transnational municipal cooperation or whether its relevance will continue to depend on specific configurations of domestic political conflict.

Budapest's role within the PFC is particularly significant. The city did not only co-fund the initiative and will host headquarters in the future (Pact of Free Cities, 2026) but it also uses it as a platform to amplify domestic political grievances at the European level. Yet, this strategy has limits. While international visibility increases political leverage, it cannot fully compensate for domestic fiscal dependency or institutional constraints, the EU money gained directly by Budapest so far is very little.

The post-2024 political environment further illustrates these tensions. Despite continued electoral success at the mayoral level, financial pressures from the central government persist. This reinforces the structural asymmetry between symbolic international influence and constrained domestic governance capacity. It

should also be noted that the parallel initiative aimed at establishing a coalition of Hungarian “free cities” has likewise lost momentum, indicating the limited willingness of municipalities to engage in sustained intermunicipal cooperation (Tóth, 2024).

Ultimately, the case of Budapest and the PFC demonstrates that while cities can act as political agents in multilevel governance systems, their effectiveness depends on institutional depth, resource availability, and sustained political coalitions. Without these, urban diplomacy risks remaining episodic and personality-driven.

Conclusions

International city movements are highly important, as they operate in support of political values and policy objectives that are often neglected by national governments; that is, they are not aligned with dominant prevailing trends (Pluijm & Melissen, 2007). At the same time, such forms of “resistance” require enhanced capacities.

Our case study illustrates how capital cities in Central and Eastern Europe initiated PFC may convert domestic political conflict into transnational municipal engagement. However, it also demonstrates the limitations of such strategies and design. While the informal structure of PFC enables rapid mobilisation, visibility and adaptation to ideological changing positioning, it also generates organisational weakness and dependence on individual political leaders/mayors; as a result, its long-term sustainability remains uncertain. Another important lesson is that collaborations operating primarily within the public sphere and personal activity of mayors tend to rest on a more fragile foundation than international urban movements such as Fearless Cities, which are more strongly rooted in bottom-up forms of organization, involving civil society actors as well (GE & BE interview, 22 May 2026), while also breaking with the conventional practices of “tie diplomacy” in their modes of interaction.

More broadly, the findings suggest that multilevel governance in Europe is increasingly shaped not only by institutional design but also by political contestation between levels of government. As already evident during the rise of European regionalist movements (Aldecoa & Keating, 1999), it is now clear that cities are no longer passive actors in this system; they actively seek to reshape governance arrangements and influence supranational agendas. However, their capacity to do so depends on the alignment between domestic political conditions and international opportunity structures.

Future research should investigate the factors that shape the long-term trajectories of transnational municipal networks, including their capacity to survive changes in local political leadership, shifts in national political contexts, and fluctuations in external funding opportunities. Particular attention should be paid to

the conditions under which city diplomacy evolves from symbolic cooperation and political signalling into more institutionalised forms of governance and policy coordination.

From a policy perspective, stronger support from European and international institutions – for example through the Committee of the Regions – may contribute to a win–win dynamic by strengthening collective municipal action at the European level while also enabling cities to articulate and pursue their own policy interests through transnational networks (Kihlgren Grandi, 2020).

Acknowledgement: Project no. 146411 has been implemented with the support provided by the Ministry of Culture and Innovation of Hungary from the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund, financed under the K-23 funding scheme.

References

- Acuto, M. (2013). The new climate leaders? *Review of International Studies*, 39(4), 835–857. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000502>
- Acuto, M., & Rayner, S. (2016). City networks: Breaking gridlocks or forging (new) lock-ins? *International Affairs*, 92(5), 1147–1166. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12700>
- Aldecoa, F., & Keating, M. (Eds.). (1999). *Paradiplomacy in Action: The Foreign Relations of Subnational Governments*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Bache, I., & Flinders, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Multi-level governance*. Oxford University Press.
- Bachtler, J., & McMaster, I. (2008). EU cohesion policy and the role of the regions: Investigating the influence of structural funds in the new member states. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 26(2), 398–427. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c0662>
- Barber, B. R. (2014). *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*. Yale University Press.
- Brucker, B. (2022). Az Európai Parlament szerepe a szubnacionális érdekek képviseletében [The role of the European Parliament in the representation of subnational interests]. *Politikatudományi Szemle*, 31(1), 99–124.
- Brucker, B., & Finta, I. (2023). Perifériák az Európai Unió perifériáján? Avagy a szubnacionális érdekérvényesítés keretei és korlátai EU szinten [Peripheries on the periphery of the European Union? Or the frameworks and constraints of subnational interest representation at EU level]. *Tér és Társadalom*, 37(3), 32–52. <https://doi.org/10.17649/TET.37.3.3505>
- Curtis, S. (2016). Cities and global governance: State failure or a new global order? *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 44(3), 455–477. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816637233>

- Emanuel, R. (2020). *The nation city: Why mayors are now running the world*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Gadzala, Ł. (2020, February 13). *Prezydenci wyszehradzkich stolic chcą bezpośrednich funduszy europejskich dla miast* [Mayors of Visegrád capitals call for direct EU funding for cities]. *EURACTIV*. <https://www.euractiv.pl/section/grupa-wyszehradzka/news/prezydenci-wyszehradzkich-stolic-chca-bezposrednich-funduszy-europejskich-dla-miast/>
- Gutiérrez-Camps, A. (2013). Local efforts and global impacts: A city-diplomacy initiative on decentralization. *Perspectives: Review of International Affairs*, 21(2), 49–61. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=244758>
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2001). *Multi-level governance and European integration*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hooghe, L., Marks, G., & Schakel, A. H. (2016). *The rise of regional authority: A comparative study of 42 democracies*. Routledge.
- Kákai, L., & Pálné Kovács, I. (2023). Cui Prodest? Why Local Governance Came to a Deadlock in Hungary. *Politics in Central Europe*, 19(1), 21–42. <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2023-0002>
- Kamiński, T. (2025). Subnational dimensions of the EU's de-risking strategy in relations with China. *Asia Europe Journal*, 23(4), 509–517. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-025-00746-z>
- Kern, K., & Bulkeley, H. (2009). Cities, Europeanization and multi-level governance: Governing climate change through transnational municipal networks. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 47(2), 309–332. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2009.00806.x>
- Kihlgren Grandi, L. (2020). City diplomacy: A strategic choice. In *City diplomacy: Cities and the global politics of the environment* (pp. 1–22). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60717-3_1
- Kübler, D., & Piliutytė, J. (2007). Intergovernmental relations and international urban strategies: Constraints and opportunities in multilevel polities. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 25(3), 357–373. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c0637>
- Lecavalier, E., & Gordon, D. J. (2020). Beyond networking? The agency of city network secretariats in the realm of city diplomacy. In S. Amiri & E. Sevin (Eds.), *City diplomacy: Current trends and future prospects* (pp. 13–36). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45615-3_2
- Leffel, B. (2018). Animus of the underling: Theorizing city diplomacy in a world society. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 13(4), 502–522. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-13040025>
- Lepiarz, J., & Gaal, F. (2026, May 19). Hungary's new Prime Minister Magyar seeks to fix Poland ties. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/hungarys-new-prime-minister-magyar-seeks-to-fix-poland-ties/a-77215714>

- Matthes, C.-Y. (2023). The Pact of Free Cities – Addressing rule of law problems from a local perspective. *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 52(Special Issue), 27-40. <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy202351>
- Messina, P. (2011). Policies for strategic territorial development. Inter-municipality association as a form of network governance: The Italian experience. *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, 2(1), 111-128.
- Mocca, E. (2023). *Cities in search of freedom: European municipalities against the Leviathan*. Bristol University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781529216325.001.0001>
- Pact of Free Cities. (2019, December 16). *Founding Declaration*. <https://archiv.budapest.hu/Lapok/2019/szabad-varosok-szovetsege.aspx>
- Pact of Free Cities. (2025, March 26). *Statement by the Pact of Free Cities on the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu*. <https://www.pactoffreecities.com/articles/statement-by-pact-of-free-cities-on-arrest-of-istanbul-mayor-ekrem-imamoglu>
- Pact of Free Cities. (2026, May 13). *Transatlantic expansion at the Pact of Free Cities Bratislava Summit*. https://www.pactoffreecities.com/articles/transatlantic_expansion_at_the_pact_of_free_cities_bratislava_summit
- Pálné Kovács, I., Bodor, Á., Finta, I., Grünhut, Z., Kacziba, P., & Zongor, G. (2016). Farewell to decentralisation: The Hungarian story and its general implications. *Croatian and Comparative Public Administration*, 16(4), 789–816. <https://doi.org/10.31297/hkju.16.4.4>
- Piattoni, S. (2010). *The theory of multi-level governance: Conceptual, empirical, and normative challenges*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199562923.001.0001>
- Russell, B. (2019). Beyond the local trap: New municipalism and the rise of the fearless cities. *Antipode*, 51(3), 989–1010. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12520>
- Sellers, J. M., & Lidström, A. (2007). Decentralization, local government, and the welfare state. *Governance*, 20(4), 609–632. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2007.00374.x>
- Swianiewicz, P. (Ed.). (2014). *Territorial consolidation reforms in Europe*. Open Society Foundations.
- Szpak, A. (2025). *Global city diplomacy and international law: Legislation and implementation*. Edward Elgar Publishing
- Szpak, A., Gawłowski, R., Modrzyńska, J., & Modrzyński, P. (2023). Pact of Free Cities – A new form of European cities’ cooperation. *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 52(1). <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy202308>
- Thompson, M. (2021). What’s so new about new municipalism? *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(2), 317–342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132520909480>
- Tóth, Á. (2024). Szabad Városok Szövetsége: Az elúszott lehetőség? [Free Cities Alliance: A missed opportunity?]. In Á. Tóth (Ed.), *Vár állott, most..., Merre tovább*,

önkormányzatok? [Once a stronghold stood here..., Where to next, municipalities?] (Jelen bookazine – 3, pp. 156–159). Liberty Press Kft.

UN-Habitat. (2020). *World cities report 2020: The value of sustainable urbanization*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr_2020_report.pdf

van der Pluijm, R., & Melissen, J. (2007). *City diplomacy: The expanding role of cities in international politics*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/city-diplomacy-expanding-role-cities-international-politics>