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The Czechoslovak Communist Party on Hungarian Economic Reforms between 1968 and  
1989

Thesis of Dissertation

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“The socialist system over hundreds of pages confirms the thesis that internal reforms are not able to save the system, but on the contrary, they undermine its foundations. The more the pressure subsides, the more loosens the bureaucratically enforced discipline, the more the old power relations made impossible themselves.”

Kornai János: A gondolat erejével. Rendhagyó önéletrajz [By Force of Thought. Irregular Memoirs of an Intellectual Journey], p. 350

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## **Bohemia, Slovakia and Hungary in Central European Space**

The history of Hungary and Czechoslovakia is similar in many ways, the differences began to grow significantly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The historical borders of both countries were formed at the beginning of the second millennium. Bohemia as an independent monarchy was established one and half-century earlier, but its formal independence lost more than four and a half centuries earlier – since 1041 finally became part of the Holy Roman Empire. Nevertheless, there were a periods, especially during the rule of Ottokar Přemysl II (1253-1278), when Bohemian Kingdom strove for regional superpower.

The Czech and Hungarian historical relations are deep and long-lasting, even in scale of European history. During the second millennium the present-day Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary lived total of 489 years under the scepter of one monarch. The Czech Přemysl dynasty owned the Hungarian crown from 1301 to 1305; from 1419 to 1437 Sigismund of Luxembourg was king both Bohemia and Hungary; in 1438-39 Albert Habsburg also owned the crown of both countries; Laszlo Habsburg V from 1440 (actually 1453) to 1457 was king of the two countries again; Matthias Corvinus in 1469 was crowned the king of Bohemia and his title held until his death in 1490; from 1490 until 1526 the two Jagiellonian kings Wladislaw II and Louis II were masters of both countries again; finally, the Habsburg personal union lasted from 1526 until 1918.

Hungary developed comparable long-term historical relationship only with Austria. The Hungarian-Slovak relations are even deeper, they can be compared only with the Hungarian-Croatian ties. The present-day Slovakia, the historic Upper Hungary, nowadays Felvidék, belonged to the Hungarian between 1021 and 1919 continuously, Moravia, just like the Austria to river Inn, between 905 and 955 was part of the Hungarian settle area. The two countries are adjacent to each other, so they could attach some parts of the other state for varying durations. In the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Czech Hussite soldiers created almost a state in North-East Hungary and Matthias Corvinus soon occupied Moravia.

Analyzing only the Czechoslovak-Hungarian relationship, the situation is radically different. Including the seven years of disintegration during the World War II Czechoslovakia existed altogether only 74 years, while Hungary from 1001 onwards continually, but we can count the origin of the state from years 894/6 the date of coming of Hungarian tribes to Carpathian basin.

However, these historical connections of Bohemia and Hungary did not mean any kind of political or economic union at all. During the middle ages and early modern times the countries in such systems of relationship fully maintained their political, economic and social independence and separateness. There was only one short period when one of these two countries' internal political events anticipated as an event in another country. It was the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The two countries today expanded to three, while in this frame borders have not changed. In last century one of them always stood on the winning side. In the transcontinental peace treaties Czechoslovakia could preserve its millennial western borders and its ethnic boundaries were adapted to political borders fully, in the eastern part of the state there were fairly successful attempts to achieve it. For the other country just the opposite took place. Due to the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the political boundaries of Hungary do not coincide with the boundaries of the area of the tongue.

The Czech-Slovak-Hungarian co-existence is very diverse. It historically happened that among these nations were formed relationships of certain level and quality. In long term, despite living next to each other and past relationships between Czechs and Hungarians did not develop consciousness of togetherness like between Hungarians and Poles. Perhaps it can be declared that conflicts dominated rather than cooperation. Some kind of Middle European feeling was formed at most during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but only among the relatively few people and was initiated rather from Hungarian side. The Czechs themselves consider as part of Western Europe, Hungarians and Slovaks themselves as Central Europeans, but the Czechs often consider Hungarians as East or southern Europeans. This was the case during the existence of Czechoslovakia, and so is today.

If we examine the Czechoslovak and Hungarian relationships in state level, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have evolved very different system of contacts. While in first half of the century dominated the hostilities, and emphasized the differences from the middle of the century the relationship was shifted to the wide-ranging co-operation. The first sentence of chapter related to Hungarian relations in Jindřich Dejmek's book (2002, p. 197, 217)<sup>1</sup> states: „after the destruction of St. Stephanus' Kingdom in Central Europe the relationship of Czechoslovak Republic (CZR) and the Hungarian state in effect from the creation of CZR for the Czech diplomacy meant the greatest problem.” Some pages later he continues that the improvement

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<sup>1</sup> Československo, jeho susedé i velmoci ve XX. století. Vybrané kapitoly s dějin československé zahraniční politiky. [Czechoslovakia, his Neighbour and the Great Powers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Chapters of Czechoslovak Foreign Policy]

of relations happened to enforcement of the Soviet Union. It was mainly caused by world political reasons, because both states came under area of soviet influence. As well known, the socialist system expected from members more complex collaborations like the other political systems of the world. Of course, this was true for economy too. All of them had to introduce a form of collective ownership and centrally planned economy, the system's leading power, the Soviet Union, was ready to tolerate at most only minor differences. However, individual states began to develop in various ways, and the differences have become visible later. One of the most important political, social and economic differences emerged just in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. While the last one became famous as the happiest barrack or state of goulash communism the first one is well-known for the normalization and for a short time so called socialism with a human face. On analyzes of Piotr S. Wandycz (2004, p. 243) the Husákiean Czechoslovakia was the product of Brezhnev period the Kádárian Hungary still remained the Khrushchev era. The differences were already visible for the contemporaries, because the mentioned terms have been born in that era. In this dissertation I am dealing with a short period of long and labyrinthine Czecho(Slovak) – Hungarian system of relations.

The problem to be processed was chosen from discipline of economic history. I would like to answer the question how the political leadership of Czechoslovakia considered the economic reforms applied in Hungary. My goal is to explore and analyze the opinion of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia about the measures made by the Hungarian government to ease the economic problems and contradictions which became visible during the practicing of centrally planned economic system. These measures forced to do by and by both countries. The changes were often not coherent, well thought-out, well planed, but usually ad hoc decisions to solve an acute problem, and they were valid until the negative impact was not diminished or until the political system, executive officers, the apparatus, this had the will. Despite the fact that Czechoslovakia and Hungary struggled with similar problems, their economic situation was different, and their difficulties tried to overcome with various solutions. In the case of Hungary the reforms were frequent and repeated in form of wave, and also contributed to the breakdown of the socialist system. In Czechoslovakia were created less reform plans and the orthodox form of socialism were practiced until the fall of iron curtain. János Kornai, who is respected as well as among the Czech and Slovak economists, each steps of reforms in the two countries dates as follows:

Table 1: Schedule of reform measures in Hungary and Czechoslovakia

	Hungary	Czechoslovakia
The abolition of compulsory delivery system in agriculture	1956	1960
The abolition of compulsory planned economy	1968	1990
Termination of the main indicators	1968	1990
The beginning of the abolition of price control	1968	1991
The introduction of single currency course	1981	1991
Membership of the IMF and the World Bank	1982	1990
Significant facilitation in the field of entrepreneurship and private ventures	1982	1991
The adoption of the Bankruptcy Act	1986	1991, 1992
The introduction of two-tier banking system	1987	1990
The introduction of personal income tax	1988	1993
The introduction of Value Added Tax	1988	1991
Adoption of the law governing the registration of companies	1989	1991
Trade liberalization	1989	1991
The introduction of unemployment aid	1989	1991

Source: Kornai 1998, p. 98

In this work I would like to compare the Czechoslovak and Hungarian economic reforms from their first appearance in the mid 50s until the late 80s, to examine their underlying factors and as well as their results. The main research area of the dissertation is the 70s and 80s, the Husakian era or the so called period of normalization. The political, international diplomatic and cultural events, the social changes or any kind of national issues I shall mention only in required measure to explain facts related to the topic of the dissertation. However, time to time I will show the differences among the top of political leaderships within the two Czechoslovak co-nations.

In both countries wide range of literature deals with the analysis of the economic reforms. In Czech Republic and Slovakia in particular Vladimír Průcha and his co-authors,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Hospodářská politika a vývoj československého hospodářství v období od roku 1960 do 21. srpna 1968 [The Economic Policy and Development of Czechoslovak Economy from 1960 to August 21<sup>st</sup> 1968]; with Miroslav Brdek, Hana Gebauerová, Emília Krajniáková, Jarmila Petričová and Zora Urbanová *Hospodářské dějiny Československa v 19. a 20. století* [Economic History of Czechoslovakia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century]; *Ekonomický vývoj Československa a aktuální otázky hospodářské politiky* [Economic Development of Czechoslovakia and the Current Questions of Economic Policy]; with Jana Geršlová, František Vencovský, Alena Hadrabová, Lenka Kalinová and Zdislav Šulc *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa. 2. díl období 1945-1992* [Economic and Social History of Czechoslovakia 2. part 1945-1992]



Jiří Kosta<sup>3</sup> and Michal Londák<sup>4</sup> works should be highlighted, but is also interesting the literature of memoirs such as Zdislav Šulc,<sup>5</sup> but above all book of Ota Šik.<sup>6</sup> The concise history of Czechoslovak economic reforms was processed as well as by Šulc.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noted that the analysis of the reform was processed by Czechoslovak economists<sup>8</sup> already during the period of socialism. The same could be state about the Hungarian sources. Without the knowledge the works of Iván T. Berend<sup>9</sup> and János Kornai<sup>10</sup> the period could not be analysed. Taken into account that in Hungary the reform is present from the mid 1950s always, every economic historical work<sup>11</sup> devoted him considerable ground. The similar can be said about the books dealing with general history of the country.<sup>12</sup> Also interesting readings are the testimonies of persons lived in that age such as Rezső Nyers,<sup>13</sup> Sándor Kopácsy<sup>14</sup> or the above mentioned János Kornai.<sup>15</sup> In my work I shall quote continually from all sources listed in this paragraph.

In Czech Republic only one author tried to evaluate and summarize the Hungarian post war social and economic history in a long-winded academic level. Eva Irmanová is respected expert of history of Central and Eastern Europe in period of socialism, and she has

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<sup>3</sup> O pracích českých a slovenských ekonomů v exilu: 1948–1990 [On Works of Czech and Slovak Economists in Exile: 1948–1990]; K historii a koncepci československé ekonomické reformy v letech 1965–1969 [On History and Concept of Czechoslovak Economic Reform in years 1965-1969]

<sup>4</sup> Otázky industrializácie Slovenska (1945-1960) [Questions of Industrialization of Slovakia (1945-1960)]; with Stanislav Sikoral and Elena Londáková: Predjarie. Politický, ekonomický a kultúrny vývoj na Slovensku v rokoch 1960-1967 [Prelude of Spring. Political, Economic and Cultural development in Slovakia between 1960 and 1967]

<sup>5</sup> Psáno inkognito. Doba v zrcadle samizdatu 1968-1989 [Written in Incognito. 1968-1989 in mirror of a Samizdat]; Z jevište i zákulisí české politiky a ekonomiky: Vzpomínky novináře a ekonoma 1945-1995 [The Scene and Backstage of the Czech Policy: The Memories of an Journalists and Writer from 1945-1995]

<sup>6</sup> Jarní probouzení – iluze a skutečnost [Spring Awakening – Illusion and Reality]

<sup>7</sup> Stručné dějiny reform v Československu (České republice) 1945-1995 [The brief summary of Czechoslovak (Czech) economic reforms 1945-1995]

<sup>8</sup> Goldman, Josef – Kouba, Karel: Hospodářský růst v ČSSR [Economic Growth in the CZSSR]; Rozsypal, Kurt: Vývoj systému plánovitého řízení národního hospodářství v Československu v letech 1945-1970 [The Development of the System of Planning of National Economy in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1970]; Šik, Ota: Plán a trh za socialismu [Plan and Market in Socialism]

<sup>9</sup> Gazdasági útkeresés 1956-1965; Szocializmus és reform; A magyar gazdasági reform útja

<sup>10</sup> A gazdasági vezetés túlzott központositása

<sup>11</sup> Lásd pl. Csikós-Nagy Béla: A XX. század magyar gazdaságpolitikája. Tanulságok az ezredforduló küszöbén; Gunst Péter: Magyarország gazdaságtörténete (1914-1989); Honvári János: Magyarország gazdaságtörténete Trianontól a rendszerváltásig; Pető Iván – Szakács Sándor: A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története 1945-1985. I. Az újjáépítés és a tervutasításos irányítás; Ungvárszki Ágnes: Gazdaságpolitikai ciklusok Magyarországon (1948 – 1988)

<sup>12</sup> Lásd pl. Romsics Ignác: Magyarország története a XX. században

<sup>13</sup> Útkeresés – reformok

<sup>14</sup> A mi XX. századunk

<sup>15</sup> A gondolat erejével. Rendhagyó önéletrajz

publications as well as in Western Europe. Her book<sup>16</sup> was published in 1998. It is a balanced work and describes all major events and information about the almost three and half decade long Kádár regime.

I could not prepare the thesis if I have not received widespread and effective support. I have to express my thanks and gratitude to institute Doctoral School of Regional and Economic Sciences of Széchenyi István University, to its Head Professor János Rechnitzer and his colleagues, who were ready to accept this topic which not fit directly into profile of this institution and provided a framework for preparing the dissertation. I must give a special thank for financially support what I received in 2013. In early summer of that year I spent twelve days long research in Czech National Archives in Prague. I also have to express my thank to associate professor János Honvári for his wide-ranging support and above all for patience and understanding, which certified me over the five years.

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<sup>16</sup> Kádárismus: vznik the bench jedné iluze [Kádárism in Hungary: Rise and Fall of an Illusion (Kádárismus: vznik the bench jedné iluze)]

# **1. Aims, methods and hypotheses of the research**

## **1.1. Aims and frameworks of the research**

During the preparation of the dissertation I have tried to take into account some consideration. The most important thing was that the research would fit into profile of the institution which enables me to complete it. It was important that the dissertation besides questions of economics, social and historical issues of economic history should deal with the problem of regionalism as well. It was essential that I tried to find problems which until now were not analyzed even so should be interesting both for professionals and audience. The process of choosing of topic also influenced a factor that I could utilize my objective advantages such as language skills, the prior education and experiences, and I can relatively easily access to resources and data to be processed. The choice of theme was influenced by the fact that I could access archives materials have been already processed and structured. I also had to take into account the purpose of work. This factor primarily influenced the length of dissertation and affected the topic of research. I had to reduce the scope of the research and narrow the analyzed period. Finally, I wanted to analyze a problem area, which has given me is a lot of novelty and pleasure, and would help on my professional carrier.

In the dissertation I focused on period precede of transition years, the final phase of socialism, in case of Czechoslovakia namely the Husák era, years between 1969 and 1989, and in case of Hungary the mature era of Kádárism. In the research I focused on the main source of the period, namely on documents of the most important and representative institution of the state which was the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCZ) and its Slovak fraternal organization Slovak Communist Party (SCP). Within the framework of my research I wanted to reveal the opinion of the party about the economic and social reforms in Hungary.

The reasons why I chose this theme are the following. The documents of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia are already processed and researchable. In the past I studied history and economics. There are no language barriers, I speak Slovak and I also comprehend the Czech language. As a Hungarian I am well informed about the recent economic and social events in Hungary. I have Slovak citizenship and I gained overview of the Czechoslovak events as well. For as much as the research was aimed at era of communist dictatorship, when the decision was based in one centre. I supposed if I focus on processing of these materials I

could achieve relevant results. I believe the analysis of these two decades was enough to write a unified and coherent dissertation. The theme is also eligible to introduce the recent past events and differences of the two countries. While the earlier phases of the socialism in each countries were more similar to one other, after 1968 began to develop a greater divergence. In Hungary finally embodied the so called “goulash communism”, in Czechoslovakia was shaped the “brezhnevian stagnation period”. The period between 1968 and 1989 which in both countries immediately preceded the transition, largely influenced the development of future pluralistic society. The roots of contemporary problems, the current position of two or three countries in global economic could be understood by knowledge of the previous decades.

This work was primarily prepared for Hungarian readers who are interested towards Czechoslovakia. Despite the comparison is important searching method presentation of Hungarian events gained less space. The chapters and their contents were constructed to present more facts and information about Czechoslovakia. This is also valid for time phase. The analysis of period between 1969 and 1989 is impossible without the study of all socialist age. In case of Czechoslovakia I extended to WW II and the middle war period. I did it for reason that the existing Hungarian and Czechoslovak socialism were determined by the political, economic and social heritage. This is also manifested among others by fact that the description of Hungarian events sometimes based on the works of Czech and Slovak historians. In case to point out the major differences between the opinions, I refer to the footnote. The Czechoslovak influence is sometimes reflected in the terminology too. Hungarian terminology used by Hungarians live in Slovakia can differ from the terminology used by Hungarians live in Hungary. If necessary, I make remarks in footnotes. To improve the comprehension I translated the titles.

The Czechoslovak influence is manifested in case of terminology. During the translation I preserved the original Czech and Slovak terms used in documents, sometimes I took over the calques. Of course, these terms should not fit every time with the Hungarian ones. If it was possible, I took over the terms used by the Hungarians lives in Czechoslovakia. Of course, these should differ from Hungarian ones as well. It also important to note, there should be differences among the meaning of the terms. If is necessary a make footnotes too. In the same reason I compiled the subchapters to highlight the differences among Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The next aim of my dissertation was show to Hungarian readers the view of (former) northern neighbour about them. I have already contributed a similar type of works (Horbulák 2010a; 2010b). Although in other disciplines – I would like to follow those. Hereby I want to contribute to improve the Hungarian self-acquaintance and mainly to avoid the country to make to same mistakes again. Sometimes the external spectator sees these better however we must take in a reef. In spite of the analysed age was passed almost three decades, it still has lot connexions to our age.

With the processing of archive documents and books I had a secondary aim too. Besides the economic analysis I try to acquaint with the Hungarian audience the socialist Czechoslovakia, its social history, the relationship and the way of thinking of Czechs and Slovaks and partly their affiliation to Hungarians. I tried to present each problem with their real weight. As to processing, besides the economic history I apply the research methods of regional sciences.

The work contains attachments. These are key macroeconomic and social indicators of the analyzed period. I decided to add them for reason to better understand the material on one hand, and on the other hand these kind of information for Hungarian readers are difficult to access. My primary aim was to attach meaningful data rather than absolute numbers. I prefer ratio numbers and the data that comes directly from the Czechoslovak Statistical office. Instead of absolute number I preferred proportional numbers. During the preparation of graphs and tables I attempted to compare same or very similar dates.

## **1.2. The Methodology of the Research**

The essential research methods of works in economic history – independently of their nature, purpose of research, place of their availability or branch of science (social or natural) – is to analyzing and processing resources. In case of this thesis the primary sources were written archival materials, in smaller part testimonies of contemporary personalities.

The genre of doctoral dissertation is academic work and its audience are primarily professionals, historian, economists and academicians. Nevertheless I hope that the matter of dissertation will be aquatinted with non professional audience.

As to process of research, contrary to my initial expectations the Slovak National Archive in Bratislava does not do custody over materials of Communist Party of

Czechoslovakia. The main part of materials wanted to examine are accessible only in Prague. In Slovakia are stored only the documents of the Slovak Communist Party. The funds of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia are stored in the Czech National Archive in Prague. After the processing of the materials of SCP I can state, that they contain very few relevant information. This fact made my task more difficult, namely if not language, but another kind of problems emerged. The merit of the research I had to realize in Bohemia. I made altogether three trips to Prague, two 12 day long and one five-day long. The processed material I got from the funds designated of Central Committee of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and to Gustav Husák 1945-1989. From my point of view I considered interesting about 94 documents with different lengths and I made approximately 680 shots, which means equal number of typewritten pages.

Nevertheless, I studied the all Hungarian related documents of the SCP Presidency (KSS Predsedníctvo) and Secretary (Sekretariát) made between 1969 and 1989. In these documents can be found materials related to both Hungarians live in Hungary and Hungarian live in Czechoslovakia. The quantities of documents related to Hungarian affairs are insignificant, but the economic nature is very rare. Despite the materials of Slovak Communist Party generally do not consider my topic relevantly, I came by some valuable information. Sometimes to get acquainted with Slovak side view about situation of Hungarian economy I had to “read between the lines”. The greatest proportion of Hungarian materials of Slovak Communist Party is dealing with ethnic issue, but frequently occurs papers about the common Hungarian and Slovak history. The fact remains that the bodies of Slovak Communist Party paid great attention to activities of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. According to plans, later I shall process these materials in a separate study.

Besides the primary sources I studied secondary sources too. They were usually publications related to general economic history of the period, social history, the history of the communist party and of international relations, namely the Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations. Whenever I could, I tried to cite the thoughts of most renowned economists.

### **1.3. The Hypotheses of dissertation**

Taking into account I have prepared a scientific work I had to formulate a working hypothesis as well. These are the following:

- Hypothesis no. 1: Taking into account the heritage of 1956 the Hungarian leadership continuously observed the society, tried to avoid the mistakes of Rákosi era in any case and its policy characterised carefulness. Whereas the retarded Czechoslovak melting was more susceptible to radicalization, therefore *the economic reforms in Czechoslovakia in the second half of 60s were more radical, than the Hungarian ones.*
- Hypothesis no. 2: After the fall of Prague Spring came into power the Husák system, which practiced much more orthodox form of socialism than Hungary did, *the introduction of economic mechanism in Hungary from 1968 the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia judged definitely negatively.*
- Hypothesis no. 3: It is generally well-known fact, that János Kádár supported the reforms but Gustáv Husák opposed them. This fact among others meant that Kádár was able to clearly recognize the internal obstacles of socialism. This fact appeared in the Czechoslovak-Hungarian interstate relations, because *János Kádár during his personal meetings with Gustáv Husák frankly and openly talked about the problems of Hungarian economy then it did Gustáv Husák about the Czechoslovak problems.*
- Hypothesis no. 4: August of 1968 in the history of Czechoslovakia was a milestone. From this date was changed the opinion about the reform policy about both own and the other socialist states. In spite of that the official judgement of Czechoslovak Communist Party towards the Hungarian reforms was refusal *there were Czech and Slovak Economists, who measures realized in Hungary or phenomena seen in Hungary, at least partly esteemed yet positively or considered as exemplary.*

## 2. Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the Middle European Space in between 1969 and 1989

Both Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia are situated in Central Europe, in other words Interim Europe. For the states positioned in this region is typical the quite limited economic and politic space, the fairly common and strong external influence and high threat by great powers, the internal instability, almost equal size and economic power as well as high possibility of mutual conflicts. It is evident also that these countries influence each other. The root of all listed fact is the common history, geographical environment and the traditional national cross-border and internal relations, which have fundamentally influenced by the prevailing geopolitical conditions. In the dissertation this subject was the socialism. In Central Europe socialism was created entirely as result of external influences and its long-term maintenance was possible only with active role of external power which represented the Soviet Union. The states of the region, including Hungary and Czechoslovakia, this enforced economic and political constantly tried to change, make more efficient. The milestones for economic reforms in these two states can be summarized as follows:

Table 2: Comparative chronology of Czechoslovak and Hungarian economic reforms

	Hungary		Czechoslovakia	
	comprehensive	partial	comprehensive	partial
1954	„new phase”			„new phase”
1957-1963		correctional economic policy		
1958-1959			„first reform“ – Kurt Rozsypal	
1965-1968			„second reform“ – Ota Šik	
1968-1972	New Economic Mechanism			
1980-1981		the restart of the reforms „the reform of reform”		
1984-1985		the restart of the reforms		
1988		the restart of the reforms		the complex transformation of economic mechanism

Own source



Table 2 demonstrates that Hungary tried to make corrections more frequently, while Czechoslovakia made less effort to improve the system. In this work I investigated how the political leadership of Czechoslovakia assessed the efforts of its southern neighbour in this effort.

## 2.1. Interaction of Czechoslovakia and Hungary in Macrolevel

Within the interim Europe,<sup>17</sup> the former Czechoslovak state and Hungary primarily for historical, but not least geographical and ethnographical reason forms a macro space, which connecting bond is the nowadays Slovakia. The formerly two states made area also can be called as Central Danube region, but some people prefer more emotional denominations like “heart of Europe”. In these two countries in the analyzed period a lot of similarities and differences can be observed. I gathered them in Table 3:

Table 3: Hungary and Czechoslovakia between 1969 and 1989

	Czechoslovakia	Hungary
The most important external factor influences these states	Yalta world order, the Soviet Union	Yalta world order, the Soviet Union
Foreign economic impacts	Comecon, the Soviet Union, relatively weak other effects	Comecon, the Soviet Union, the oil crisis, worsening terms of trade, weakening external competitiveness, increasing indebtedness
Internal political situation and social conditions	Legacy of 1968, survival of orthodox communism, weak internal opposition, strengthening Slovak separatism, careful handling of minority issues	Legacy of 1956, ongoing political detente, partial toleration of political opposition, widening social differences, increasing interest towards Hungarians lives beyond the borders
Internal economic situation	fairly stability, low but steady economic growth, weak reforms	standstill but decisive reforms, weakening economic performance, tolerated later supported second economy, accelerating inflation
policy goals	retaining of internal stability and living standards	retaining of internal stability living and standards
foreign policy goals	retaining of stability of the socialist bloc	retaining of stability of the socialist bloc, opening toward the West

Own source

<sup>17</sup> Hungarian poet Endre Ady for position of Hungary in Central Europe uses epithet ferry state.

The theme of the dissertation is the analysis of Hungary's economic reforms between 1968 and 1989 from perspective of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In this period the most remarkable attempt of transformation in Hungary was the New Economic Mechanism. Every other economic reform realized in afterward period were modifications and renewals of this reform. The start of the Hungarian reform matched with climax of Prague Spring, the most significant Czechoslovak reform and its peak period harmonized with the declining period of events of Prague Spring. The Czechoslovak side still genuinely interested in fresh ideas of Hungarian reform at those times when the Hungarian economic problems began to emerge and the Prague regime stiffening again.

The relationship between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was peculiar or would say asymmetrical. However The Czech-Hungarian relations compared with the Slovak-Hungarian were quite different. It became visible just during the analyzed period. The transformation of Czechoslovakia as federal state was carried out at January 1, 1969. The foreign policy remained at federal level, but Bratislava received some privilege to lead international relations. After the processing of collected materials I can state that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Slovak Communist Party observed and evaluated the economic changes in Hungary from different point of view. While the central institutions of the party monitored the changes as a whole in macro-level, the regional Slovak branch above all scrutinized the regional effects of the transformation.

The problem can be studied besides from view of economic history as well as by the methods of regional science. The concept of space is very wide. Andras Gergely A. (1996) collected among others the following spatial concepts: social space, public space, economic space, space of power, socio-political space etc. All of them could be used in theme of the dissertation. In this case would rather talk about virtual and social space in which I examined the flows between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The subjects of flows and changes were ideas, reforms and innovations. The theoretical description of problem could be found in many sources (eg. Rechnitzer 1993, p. 24-35), but the history and regional sciences can be connected as well (Nemes Nagy 2009, p. 78-82). The population, the material, the capital and information in different intensity were continuously moving, spreading between these two countries, independently from political conditions.

The subject of the analysis is the spread of the idea of reform from Hungary toward Czechoslovakia. On the basis of process of archival we can follow the track of diffusion of the ideas clearly. It is visible what kind ideological difficulties the ideas had to meet, how they

introduced stealthily market elements to an economic system based on central planning. The expanding of Hungarian reform ideas prevented the appearance of serious Hungarian problems, the weakness of reform measures. Among the obstacles could be ranked the strengthen of anti-reform political groups and the deterioration of external economic environment. The fact is there were always obstacles to innovations which background can be psychological, technological, legal etc. In this case one side strongly inhibit the spread of innovation. Though the innovations had a rational economic justification they were not desirable from ideological point of view. Nevertheless, some successfully practiced novelties in Hungary, like backyard petty commodity production, appeared on the southern border of Czechoslovakia.

## **2.2. The Czechoslovak-Hungarian border in the last two decades of socialism**

There are many concepts and descriptions of the border.<sup>18</sup> It can be separating space element, impediment, filter zone with gates can, frontier and buffer zone, but it may be also connecting element (Nemes Nagy 2009, p. 169). It is obvious that during the examined period the role of Czechoslovak-Hungarian border were rather filter. The border was not hermetically closed, but it pass was strongly hindered. In Hungarian (Czecho)Slovak dimension based on other authors István Mezei (2008, p. 14) writes about additional functions such as legal or ideological. I do not want to cite the very diverse literature, but I just point out that the 680.8 km long Slovakian-Hungarian border is the longest border of Hungary. A large number of books deal with its creation what is related to participation of Hungary in the World War I. It is fact, that at time of formation organic units were cut in half. It is obvious that whatever political and economic constellation were between the two sides of the border has always been connection. Works written already at that time of analyzed age (Enyedi 1978, p. 255) are also pointed out that from the view of Hungary for borderland “integration the most advantageous areas [...] are stretching along the Slovak and Hungarian border.”

Béla Baranyai (2007, p. 31) is wrong when he writes that “the state borders around Hungary until the year 1990 were functioned like a wall...” The truth is closer to sentence written in previous page of his cited books that “... after the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 [...] the

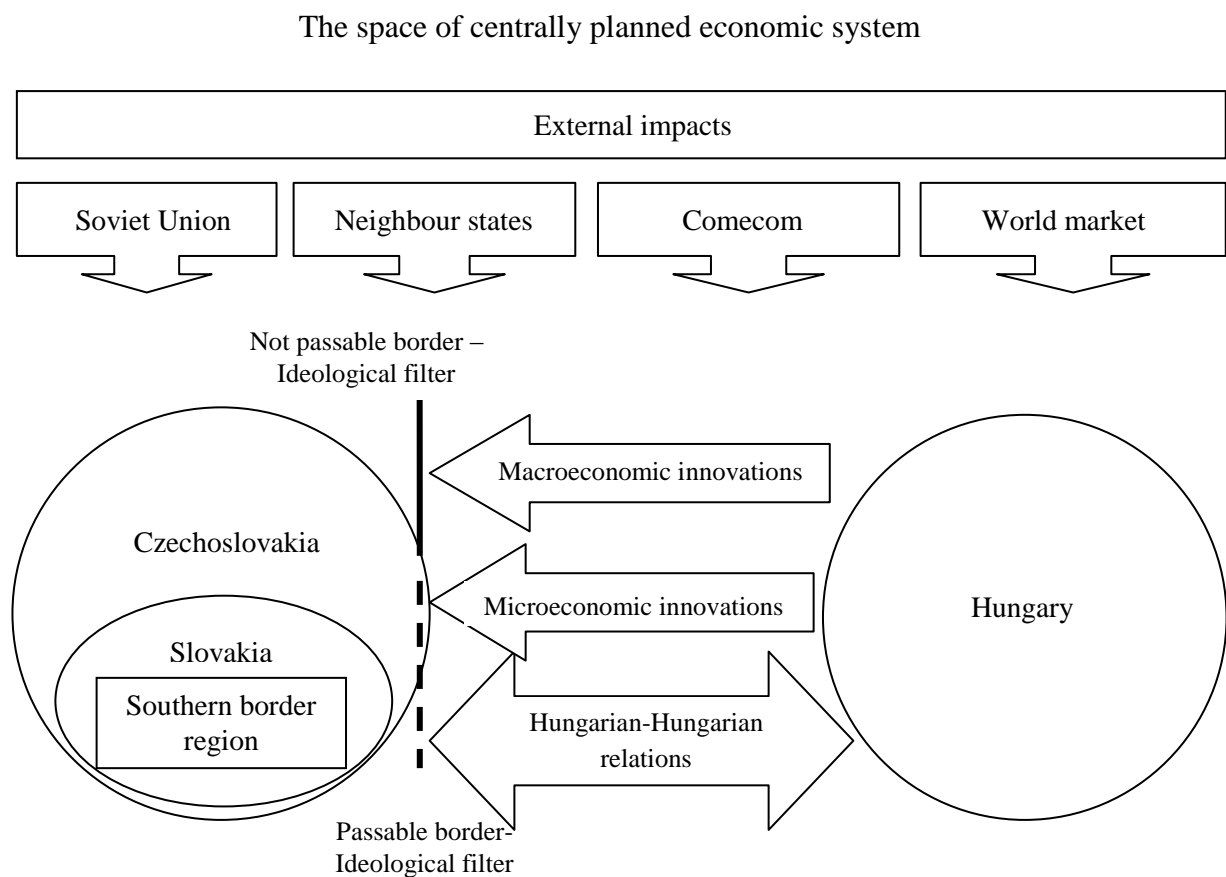
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<sup>18</sup> Lásd pl. Hardi – Hajdú – Mezei (2009) p. 11-27

history of the state borders also accompanied the *duality of separation – connecting...*” Mezei István has true (2008, p. 15) from the 1970s in this border section began the détente years have taken place, re-appeared on local border traffic, the life of people lived along the borderline was simplified. However, the cooperation distorted that business relations among public companies may have existed only at national level.

The local border traffic includes mainly tourism and shopping tourism. In reason to ensure internal supply for own citizens both countries tried to prevent it. In the Hungarian side the rigor was eased just in the second half of the examined period. At that time the Hungarian political leadership was no longer regard to the particular circumstances even shortage economy still exists, and what is more, called for boosting ties. The Czechoslovak side, still on ideological basis, refused the Hungarian initiative. The Hungarian side exported not only goods but also ideas, books and newspapers.

Figure 1: The influence of Hungary to Czechoslovakia between 1969 and 1989



Own source

The Czechoslovak party was not interested in expansion neither democratic ideals, petty commodity production and household management, nor in strengthen of the idea of mutual Hungarian contacts. While the private and personal contacts were inhibited, the economic ties were formally tolerated. The international Convention on mutual employment along border areas between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was signed in 1985 (Hardi – Hajdu – Mezei 2009, p. 140). I can demonstrate the system of Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations with figure 1.

### **2.3. The proof of the hypothesis**

In the dissertation I have formulated for hypotheses. Their prove or rejection I resume in following sentences:

Hypothesis no. 1: Taking into account the heritage of 1956 the Hungarian leadership continuously observed the society, tried to avoid the mistakes of Rákosi era in any case and its policy characterised carefulness. Whereas the retarded Czechoslovak melting was more susceptible to radicalization, therefore *the economic reforms in Czechoslovakia in the second half of 60s were more radical, than the Hungarian ones.*

The Czechoslovak plans seemed to be more profound because their elaborators were mainly professionals, economists who strove after efficiency and better comprehend socialist system, understood its internal contradictions and less took into account the ideological factors, even if they were members of the party and its “ideological harmfulness“ recognized later. However, in Hungary all of this happened with the approval of the party what was a stronger brake. The profound changes were reflected in concrete proposals as well. Among these I highlight the following:

- In Czechoslovakia the medium-sized companies could have been in mixed ownership, the small and privately owned companies could have been in private ownership. On the contrary in Hungary, among the small firms only a personal or family-owned companies could have been in private ownership, but their existence were partly legal and illegal. The changed only during the mid 80s.
- In Czechoslovakia the management of companies should have been chosen by their workers, in Hungary they were appointed by the party.

- In Hungary the role of the party in decision-making remained in many places, in Czechoslovakia market conditions should have been got more room.
- The reform idea of Ota Šik should have been burst the foundations of socialist economic system, and should have been created a Yugoslavian type of economy, however, Hungary in ideological level remained a socialist country and maintained all along the socialist economic system as main pillars too.

It follows that both Czechoslovak and Soviet political leadership was far less tolerant about the Czechoslovak plans than about Hungarian reforms.

*I consider hypothesis proven.*

Hypothesis no. 2: After the fall of Prague Spring came into power the Husák system, which practiced much more orthodox form of socialism than Hungary did, *the introduction of economic mechanism in Hungary from 1968 the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia judged definitely negatively.*

The introduction of a new system of economic management in Hungary was carried out during the peak time of Prague Spring. Until August 20<sup>th</sup> 1968 the population of Czechoslovakia watched the Hungarian changes with great interest. After the Warsaw Pact's military intervention to Czechoslovakia the stiffening of the political system was carried out gradually, so during 1969-70 Husak and Bilak still monitored Hungarian events. The weakening of efficiency of the New Economic Mechanism Hungarian and the stiffening of Czechoslovak political regime happened in same time. From the early 70s the negative assessments of Hungarian reforms by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia became frequent. Despite the predomination of negative opinions, their proportion is imbalanced. There was period when the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia of the Party considered Hungarian economic reforms as interesting experiments.

*I do not consider the hypothesis proven I reject the hypothesis.*

Hypothesis no. 3: It is generally well-known fact, that János Kádár supported the reforms but Gustáv Husák opposed them. This fact among others meant that Kádár was able to clearly recognize the internal obstacles of socialism. This fact appeared in the Czechoslovak-Hungarian interstate relations, because *János Kádár during his personal meetings with Gustáv Husák frankly and openly talked about the problems of Hungarian economy then it did Gustáv Husák about the Czechoslovak problems.*

It is well-known fact that from mid 1960s János Kádár was a pragmatist reformer. The easing of political and economic transformations took place with his consent. The fact is that Kádár observed the events of the Prague Spring with confidence. He is also recognized personality by the Slovak historians. Ivo Samson calls him as “tactician”, because Kádár thought over every his step, paid attention to dogmatists and between all the other communist leader only he accepted the action program of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Renner – Samson 1993, p. 57, 75). There is a Slovak historian evaluates Husák’s balance of life right up to Kádár: “Husák, so brave when the thing was he, so resourceful and ruthless when got to the top of the pyramid of power, he never used his power and influence for the benefit of the country and its future. When compared the attitude of János Kádár, who in 1956 proved the Soviets a similar service as Husák did since August 1968, however, after a few years for Hungary to achieve substantial relief and begin the era of liberalization” (Prečan 2013, p. 37). On the basis of documents it can be proved that during the international meetings János Kádár talked about the problems of Hungarian economy and society frankly, while Gusáv Husák did not mention the problems of its own country

*I consider hypothesis proven.*

Hypothesis no. 4: August of 1968 in the history of Czechoslovakia was a milestone. From this date was changed the opinion about the reform policy about both own and the other socialist states. In spite of that the official judgement of Czechoslovak Communist Party towards the Hungarian reforms was refusal *there were Czech and Slovak Economists, who measures realized in Hungary or phenomena seen in Hungary, at least partly esteemed yet positively or considered as exemplary.*

Basing on the accessible documents created during the period 1968-1970 the Czech and the Slovak economists were still open towards the reform ideas and were ready to accept and as well as to consider Hungary as an example. They judged important to move ahead step by step, respectively “... to carry out an economic reform without economic and social shocks.” After the events of 1968 this phenomenon for the Czechoslovak reformists had a great importance. The Hungarian example was not valuable only from view of quality, nature or methods, but was also appreciated the way of their introduction. This was valid around one and half year after the fall of Prague Spring.

*I consider hypothesis proven.*

## Summary

The reforms practiced in Hungary and Czechoslovakia had both similarities and differences. The first ones are related to their contents and reasons, the second ones mostly to their process.

One of the most significant difference between the Hungarian and Czechoslovak economic policies was the possibility of open criticism of the system in Hungary 1954 onward. This is directly related to the fact that in the Kádár era there was no return to Stalinism. The negative tendencies of economic policy practiced during the rule of Mátyás Rákosi were already comprehend by the contemporary Marxist economists. To contrary Czechoslovakia remained dogmatic for the whole period, any kind of change comparable to Hungarian situation could be observed only around the years 1965 and 1968. I think the most significant similarity can be found around the reasons of the reforms. These reasons in both cases were rather internal compulsions, deteriorating economic situation, only in the second place external circumstances. Of course, the first one influenced the fundamentals of the two states, which I presented in the second chapter of the dissertation. Czechoslovakia was able bear the negative impacts of socialist economic system, but after one and half decade later there were not possible to postponing the measures and the changes. The second reasons were external political, above all the influence of the Soviet Union. All states of former eastern block had to fit in the expectation of Moscow. When the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was ready to soften, the same happened in the satellite states and when came to power the hard liners, the system stiffened in every European communist country. The freedom was typical for period of Khrushchev and the first years of Brezhnev. Of course sometime happened, that a country opposed the line of the Soviet Union for a long time, see the example of Albania and Rumania, but these attitudes did not mean democratization in economic nor social level.

Among the similarities I have to mention the fact, that the preparation to the reform took place under the view of each other. Ota Šik his ideas published in the Hungarian professional press in 1966. The western public opinion watched the movements in both country with great interest and confidence (Berend 1988, p. 205, 207).

As matter the content of the reforms, besides the lot of similarities there were some differences. Naturally, the plans were not same, but everywhere appeared the widening of the company independence, the emergence of market elements and the role of the price.



The considerable differences could be observed not between the economics but in the place of politics. The Hungarian reforms remained economic, did not have connection with the policy, but the Czechoslovak reforms spread to policy and ideology. This was most visible during the events of Prague Spring, when Hungary took part in the military intervention while he could continue his own reforms. The Czechoslovak ideas were bold, maybe this caused that they were not introduced.

According to opinion Iván T. Berend (1999, p. 183) the Czechoslovak 1968 developed from the late melting, the Hungarian reform was built on ruins of 1956. The Hungarian reform policy realized from 1968, except the separately developing Yugoslavia, was not applied by any European socialist country, including Czechoslovakia. There were two main reasons why it happened so: from 1969 came to power an orthodox communist leadership, which the internal opposition reduced to silence or expelled, respectively the economic situation of the country did not require major transformation. However, the Czechoslovak communist leaders monitored the Hungarian experiment with interest rather by cautiousness, because it should be dangerous for Czechoslovak political, economic and social order. Czechoslovakia did not apply the methods of its southern neighbour and also refused the spontaneous infiltration of reform ideas across its border. This was typical rather for Slovak political leadership.

Already in the beginning of the analysed era, in the second half of the 1960s, the name of János Kádár became the synonym of the reforms. As I stated above, the Czech and Slovak historians many times compare directly these two politicians. This is valid for economic historians too. Zdislav Šulc (1996, p. 59) wrote that Gustáv Husák formerly was “reformist” who aspired to role of Kádár, but he was unable to rid himself of the influence of antireformist “healthy core”. The Hungarian historiography has modified view. By the Hungarian historians Kádár became a reformist rather from compulsion.

To tell the truth after some years the Hungarian reforms faded away. To compare with Czechoslovakia in this fact greater role played the internal opposition, and of course the economic reasons. Certainly the other states of the communist block also put pressure on way to stop. Nevertheless soon began a new wave of reforms, which had economic roots again. The reforms were brought out by “the exhaustion of the extensive sources of the growth in the 70s (for long time unlimited reserves of labour force) – however the incapability of development based on increasing of productivity without disinterest or without greater difference of income, related to productivity – the idea of equality, which maintained it in lower level, preferring the growth on quantity was easier to realize” (Berend 1986, p. 16).

Hungary fell into spiral of crisis. On the other side, Czechoslovakia still had enough internal reserves, at least sufficient for another one and half decade. In spite of the new economic mechanism did not bring success, "...for the Hungarian economic policy definitively shut down the road to back, the possibility of return to the soviet model of economic direction, even with careful correction or with "Hungarization" of the model should not been possible..." (Nyers 1988, p. 125).

In the dissertation I present when, why, with which purpose and by what sources observed the Hungarian reform attempts, moreover how perceived them. We could see, that Hungary did not render the flow information, he was ready to inform about his successes and difficulties. I must call attention to the difference between the Czech and Slovak interest. Prague paid attention to the economic reform at all, Pressburg focused his concentration on border region and people living by the frontier line respectively on the ideas filtering through the border. It is true, that both the CPCZ and its SCP were afraid of Hungarian attempt.

The further research of the theme has wide room. The analysis of documents of the Communist Party time can be extended to decades 1950s and 1960s. I can analyze the opinion of the party presented in daily newspapers Pravda and Új Szó. Due to the lack of space in this thesis I could not processed every collected documents. Among other I plan to complete thematic studies, which will be based on the processed documents, but later I want analyze the scope of issues already discussed in this thesis separately.

I started the thesis with the idea of János Kornai, however, I close it with thought from memoirs of Ota Šik (1990, p. 7) related to 1968 respectively socialism itself. Šik characterized the system as follows:

- „the party, government and the state alienated from the people
- the economy and the whole society was bureaucratized to the point of absurdity
- the efficiency of the economy is diminished and increasingly lagged behind Western industrial countries
- the people's most basic needs could not be ensured in the long run
- the highest post were elected people mostly in-qualified but smooth toward the party apparatus and who were chosen by the party
- the censored media concealed the truth before the people and prevented any criticism or alternative ideas
- progressive and creative-minded employees by help of police reduce to silence, the culture could not develop freely

- all the Novotný's promises for the future for the Czechoslovak people remained ineffective, since it turned out that they were empty phrases.”

No wonder that Šik became a pledged reformer.

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