

Final Report on the Research Project „Péter Hanák – A Central European Historian in the 20th Century” at Open Society Archives from 15th September to 16th November 2020

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The eminent Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm gave his autobiography the title ‘Interesting Times’, referring to an ancient Chinese curse (‘Live in interesting times!’). If possible, the life of Péter Hanák (1921–1997) was even more interesting than that of Hobsbawm, with whom he even got into a controversy in the 1990s over the issue of ‘Central Europe’. The centenary of the birth of Péter Hanák in 2021 provides a great opportunity for us to reflect on the career of Hanák and write his intellectual biography.

‘A contemporary historical study must be written on Péter Hanák’, wrote Ferenc Glatz in his Hanák obituary, and there is no shortage of sources which I started to process the summer of 2020 in the various archives of Budapest (Manuscript Archives of the Library of Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University Archives) and I have been continuing the research during the fall at the OSA with the help of the Visegrad Scholarship. The role of Hanák in the establishment and operation of the CEU Department of History between 1993 and 1997 can be reconstructed from the OSA collection (The archival materials of CEU History Department), and Hanák interviews and recollections on Hanák also available at the OSA. I could accomplish the research of these archival materials in order to reconstruct the academic career of Hanák at the CEU. And thanks to the Black Box Foundation (Fekete Doboz Alapítvány) a seminar of Hanák was also recorded in 1995, so I could study the teaching style and methods of this brilliant lecturer, who always pulled the correct answers with clever questions of his students.

In addition to processing archival documents and reviewing press material – reading and noting a collection of articles published in Hungarian newspapers related to Péter Hanák (1976-1990), preserved in the collection of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute at OSA –, in the last months I made oral history interviews with former colleagues and students of Hanák.

During the research I made one-two hours interviews with András Gerő, Gábor Gyáni, Tibor Hajdu, Géza Jeszenszky, Viktor Karády, Gábor Klaniczay, László Kontler, János

Kornai, Robert Parnica, Attila Pók, Éva Somogyi and Zoltán Szász so far, and I am planning to make another interviews for example with the participants of the one-year Teacher Training Course managed by Péter Hanák in 1991/1992. Apart from the interviews, I have an extent correspondence with the former colleagues and students and Hanák. Miklós Almási, Zsuzsanna B. Kádár, Eva S. Balogh, Péter Bihari, Endre Bojtár, István Deák, Katalin Fenyves, Éva Gál, Mary Gluck, Éva Kende, Tamás Kende, Gábor Pajkossy, Peter Pastor, Iván Pető, Sándor Radnóti, Rudolf Tőkés and Mária Vásárhelyi characterized Hanák and told interesting stories on him in their letters.

After months of research I can answer the question roughly: who was Péter Hanák?

Péter Hanák also belonged to the ‘generation that lost its way’ after 1945, as György Litván wrote in his ‘essay on János Bak’ about himself and his contemporaries of Jewish origin (Péter Kende, János Kornai and Miklós Vásárhelyi from the older generation) who survived the Holocaust, and who joined the communists wanting to ‘completely erase the past’ after World War II. Hanák told the story of his escape in 1944 in the documentary movie “Escapes” by György Csepeli and Antal Örkény, which I could watch at the OSA.

Although Péter Hanák graduated outstandingly, he could not attend university due to the Second Jewish Law in 1939. This tiny, fragile young man had to work as an iron-turner and was deported to the Eastern Front as a labour serviceman during World War II. He escaped from there in late 1944, but when he returned home to Kaposvár, he had to face the fact that his entire family and relatives had been deported. He was left alone, but Hanák found a new ‘family’ in the Hungarian Communist Party. When asked by his fellow countryman, economist Sándor Kopátsy, why he had not left the country, he gave the following answer: ‘How could I leave the country that gave me my mother tongue, Ady, Attila József, Bartók?’

Perhaps that was the reason why Hanák returned home to a Soviet-dominated Hungary full of ruthless party struggles in 1948 from Italy, where he spent a year as a scholar at the Collegium Hungaricum, as a young researcher of the 1848–1849 war of independence, the Habsburg Empire and the ethnic movements. As the right-hand man of the leading Stalinist historian Erzsébet Andics, Péter Hanák played an important role in the “Stalinization” of Hungarian historiography by writing Communist textbooks and helping to get rid of ‘reactionary’ historians. And as a university professor he evaluated political credibility of his students in reports.

Hanák was so enthusiastic, that in June 1951 he invited his boss, Zsigmond Pál Pach, the assistant director of the Institute of History, to take part in a Stahanovist work-competition. Hanák undertook to collect five chapters for the university textbook, and to complete one chapter until 31 December 1951. He also undertook to write a study for the representative publication *Mátyás Rákosi and the Hungarian Historiography* in 1952. He later rated his own success as 96%.

Hanák was the organizer of the celebrations for the 60th birthday of Mátyás Rákosi organized by the Hungarian Historical Society and the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and was the author of the homage study *Mátyás Rákosi and the Hungarian Historiography* published in the festive issue of the *Századok* (Centuries): This homage, in a short, was published in the party daily *Szabad Nép* (Free People) under the name of the leading historian, Erik Molnár. In this homage, Rákosi was called not only the greatest figure in the history of the Hungaria Soviet Republic (instead of Béla Kun), but also the most outstanding historian of the commune.

According to an anecdote, Hanák always tied a red tie in the Rákosi regime, and he paid the most peace loans among the researchers of the Institute of History: 4000 Forint. (Twice as much as the third-place György Magos, who paid 2000 Forint.) Hanák's monthly salary as head of department at that time was 1990 Forint.

Although not completely successfully, but Hanák tried to clarify the dark role of himself and his comrades in his 1993 autobiography, *Insisting on Utopia*. According to István Deák, a professor at Columbia University, he did not succeed as Hanák 'did not recognize that they were driven not only by idealism and fear of a fascist reaction, but also by the promise of privileges and the desire for power'. Although Hanák's desire to perform was another important reason, István Deák is right.

The cultivation of partisan historiography paid off both financially and in prestige. In 1950, he received 300 Forint only as an author's advance for one study entitled „The International Relations of Hungarian Financial Capital”. (At that time, the average monthly salary was only 700 Forint.) Hanák in 1949 got a flat in the II. district, Garas Street, and in 1956 he was listed to be treated at the Kútvolgyi Hospital, which was a party privilege.

However, Hanák did not start self-criticism after the Transition. Following a decade filled with active party work, Hanák got tired of his communist illusions and turned into

critics of the Stalinist regime from 1953. He was a participant in the historical debate of the Petőfi Circle and was at the forefront of those who wanted to “de-Stalinize” Hungarian historiography.

He took part in the events of the 1956 revolution, but on 25th October he was hit during a shooting in Kossuth Square as a member of a university delegation (the head of the delegation, Zoltán I. Tóth, dean of the Faculty of History, died). I could read a copy of Hanák’s 1956 diary and medical report at the OSA.

Hanák was removed from Eötvös Loránd University after 1956 and could only return in 1980 as a university professor. The establishment of the first non-chronological, ‘thematic’ department of history, the Department of Cultural History gave Hanák the opportunity to return. Although in the 1970s Hanák was banned from university education in order to not impress and indoctrinate the Young, Hanák had a popular TV- and Radio-show, so could teach the whole country. It is a paradox contradiction, and if we can resolve this contradiction, we can more understand the cultural policy of the Kádár dictatorship.

The years after 1956 were about Hanák rebuilding himself from not only an identity crisis, but a professional one as well. In the ‘Compromise-controversy’ of 1960 Hanák re-evaluated positively the 1867 Compromise as a ‘realistic bargain’. With this, Hanák overthrew the ‘independence fighter’ perspective of the Rákosi historiography, which became uncomfortable for the regime after 1956, whereas the ‘wise’ Ferenc Deák could have been used as a forerunner of the ‘compromising’ János Kádár. This historical dispute on the ‘Compromise’ serve the legitimacy of the Kádár regime, that is why the controversy on ‘1867’ was not only a historical, but a political dispute in Hungary.

It is interesting that although the rivalry between Hanák and Szabad became mythical, they had a common course between 1953 and 1956: *The History of the Hungarian People 1849-1917*, and curiously Hanák enthusiastically supported the promotion of Szabad at the sessions of the Council of the Faculty of History in early 1956. Nevertheless, Hanák had a particularly good relationship with later MDF politicians: in 1967, as head of the TTI dualism department, he asked for 1200 Forint to support József Antall’s monograph on József Eötvös (although Antall did not work at Institute of History), and the later Minister of Foreign Affairs, Géza Jeszenszky was the aspirant of Hanák.

Hanák began to write a monograph on the Compromise in the 1970s, but this work was left unfinished and only published posthumously (*1867 – európai térben és időben; 1867 – In European Space and Time*, 2001). Hanák's real genre were studies, not monographs. According to his colleagues, he was too impatient and had too many ideas to dive into one topic for long.

Ágnes Heller said that Péter Hanák was the most curious person he knew. Hanák was interested in too much historical things at once, perhaps this is the reason why the writing of shorter problem-oriented studies became the speciality of Hanák (in addition to synthesizing textbooks and summaries), instead of longer monographs. At the end of the 1960s, Hanák had a contract for a biography of István Tisza, writing a history of the First World War and a monograph on the political crisis of 1905-1906. He did not write any of these. Partly due to his restless temper, partly because Hanák often overdid himself, something it often complained about in the reports of the Institute of History.

Péter Hanák's international career was also linked to the interpretation of the Compromise: he gave a lecture at the Monarchy Conference in Bloomington in 1966, and in 1967 he published his famous study 'Hungary in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: Preponderancy or Dependency?' in the *Austrian History Yearbook*. How could a historian from behind the Iron Curtain enter the Western Historiography?

Based on the correspondence of Hanák and various recollections, I can distinguish the following steps. Hungarian historiography opened to Western historians with the 1964 International Conference on Monarchy in Budapest, and the next step was an important Western connection to Richard Plaschka and the Österreichisches Ost- und Südosteuropa-Institut. This was followed by the friendship of Hungarian-born Denis Sinor at Indiana University in Bloomington, where the 1966 international conference on the compromise was held. Hanák attended there and his conference presentation was published in the *Austrian History Yearbook*, and became familiar with John Rath, the editor of the review. From then, Hanák became an expert of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the United States.

In addition to re-evaluations, Hanák also began to step onto new paths: instead of being the representative of 'power-centric' historiography, he turned towards 'people-centred historiography'. His works in the 1960s are comparable to the *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, but Hanák was nearly a decade ahead of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's work in Bielefeld, where Hanák later became a visiting lecturer in 1988.

Despite his academic achievement Hanák became a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences only in 1990, and a full member in 1995. His career in the Kádár regime was hampered not only by his 1956 past, but also by his lectures given in 1979 at the 'Flying University' of the democratic opposition. According to some recollections, this opposition role prevented Hanák from getting a visiting professorship in Bloomington – but this 'fact' can only be ascertained through archival research.

But according to the recollection of Róbert Braun, Hanák stated in a debate in the early 1990s in the apartment of Ágnes Hellér and Ferenc Fehér that György Aczél was not different from Béla Biszku. Since György Aczél was a supporter of Ránki, it is possible that this particular dislike can be traced back to the fact that Hanák could not get a visiting professorship in Bloomington.

As a researcher of the history of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Péter Hanák played a key role in rebuilding the Western relations of Hungarian historiography, which were interrupted in 1948-1949. The way Hungary could have been a participant in the politics of the great powers as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, so could the results of Hungarian historiography and the Hungarian compromise debate also draw attention only as part of the wider sub-field of Habsburg studies. All of this coincided with a trend: writing about the history of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy became popular from the 1960s onward, the most influential creator of this 'fashion' being Carl E. Schorske, who published his magnum opus, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, in 1980. Schorske had the greatest impact on Péter Hanák in Hungary. Hanák even made an interview with Schorske in Princeton, and he published a Schorskian essay-collection in 1988 under the title *The Garden and the Workshop*. Schorske also wrote a foreword to the 1998 U.S. edition of the book of Hanák, signalling the international significance of the Hungarian historian. The collaboration between Schorske and Hanák also resulted in a joint US-Hungarian conference series that dealt with the urban and cultural histories of New York and Budapest.

The importance of the research of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in international relations of Hungarian history is illustrated well by Péter Hanák's earlier intention to organize a Habsburg Studies-centred Department of History at CEU, inspired by the Inter University Centre of Dubrovnik. The role played by Hanák in the foundation of CEU was the 'cause' why 21 years after his death, Hanák became enlisted in the tragicomic article of pro-

government weekly, *Figyelő* (Observer) among ‘the Mercenaries of Soros’ in 2018. There is hardly a more characteristic story of our ‘illiberal’ age than this.

I could reconstruct the story of the foundation of CEU and role of Hanák in the establish of the CEU History Department with the research of the relevant archival materials preserved at OSA and with the help of fellows and archivists of this fascinating institute who shared their recollections with me.

At first only two or three weeks long courses were held in Dubrovnik in the years of Transition in order to bring the peoples of Central Europe closer to each other. Hanák attended the first seminar in Dubrovnik in 1989, with other liberal historians for instance György Litván, one of the acquaintances of György Soros. Hanák, Litván, and Soros were similar in that they all regarded Oscar Jászi, the „prophet of Central Europe”, as a hero who struggled in his whole life for the reconciliation of the peoples of Central Europe. The Soros Foundation supported the courses with international participants from 10-15 different nations, and Hanák conducted a seminar with the title „Coexistence and Conflict in Central Europe since 1848”. For the second meeting in Dubrovnik Soros invited a wider range of intellectuals – 30-40 people – in order to develop a concept of a one-year course that could later become a university. After great controversy the concept was clarified, and the realization was „helped” by the outbreak of Yugoslav war. After that the participants of the seminar could not to go to Dubrovnik for years. The last „dubrovnik” seminar on the Second World War and its aftermath was held in Budapest in June 1991. This seminar in Budapest was so inspiring that Hanák launched a one-year Teacher Training Course that year, in which young scholars with PhD degree could take part, it started in September 1991 and lasted until May 1992. The aim of the program was to train lecturers for the university – including for the History Department that founded in 1993. Why was important the establishment of the History Department at the CEU? Because according to Hanák economic cooperation is not enough to reconcile Central Europe, souls and consciousness of people must be changed, and this is the task of historians: to acquaint the peoples of Central Europe with each other’s history in order to eliminate nationalist prejudices, which about the first book of the students of the History Department became published.

Hanák emphasized that at the CEU not only do the teachers teach, but the students also educate each other, and they also teach the professors as well. Unfortunately, the CEU had been already surrounded by a hostile political atmosphere when it had been formed - and not

only when it was expelled from Hungary: it had been considered as a “non-Hungarian”, “cosmopolitan” university that “does not represent the Hungarian position”. However, Hanák emphasized shortly before his death that the CEU really represents Hungary’s interests by representing the Central European cause.

APPENDIX

1. The list of researched archival sources at OSA related to the academic career of Péter Hanák in 1990s and the history of CEU History Department:

HU OSA 203-70-1 Records of Central European University - Administrative Records (CEU History Department)

Archival boxes #5

203-70-1:4/1

College Council Meeting Minutes, 1992 - 1994

203-70-1:4/2

Reports to the Senate, 1992 - 1993

203-70-1:4/3

Senate Meeting, 1992

[History Section Report]

203-70-1:4/4

Grading Policy/Evaluations, 1992 - 1993

203-70-1:4/5

Program Announcement, 1992

203-70-1:4/6

Professor Appointments – B.N. Smith, 1993

203-70-1:4/7

Prague College, 1992 - 1995

203-70-1:4/8

Teacher Training Program, 1991 - 1992

203-70-1:4/9

Borders/Students Conference , 1998

[Including Applications and Proposals]

203-70-1:4/10

Borderlands Conference, 1999

203-70-1:4/11

Accreditation Package Material, 1992

203-70-1:4/12

Accreditation Package Material, 1992

203-70-1:4/13

Romania – History related material, 1992 - 1995

203-70-1:4/14

Prague - History related material, 1994

203-70-1:4/15

Poland (Bathory Foundation) - History related material, 1992 - 1994

203-70-1:4/16

Hungary - History related material, 1992

203-70-1:4/17

Ukraine (Renaissance Foundation) - History related material, 1992 - 1996

203-70-1:4/18

St. Petersburg (Cultural Foundation Initiative) - History related material, 1992 - 1996

203-70-1:4/19

Soros Foundation – New York - History related material, 1992 - 1995

203-70-1:4/20

Faculty List, 1992 - 1993

203-70-1:4/21

Memoranda – Interoffice Memo, 1991 - 1994

[Memoranda and Urgent Action Memoranda]

Archival boxes #5

203-70-1:5/1

Background Material for Diplomas, 1992 - 1993

203-70-1:5/2

Student Administration, 1996 - 1997

203-70-1:5/3

Correspondence, 1993

[Departmental Correspondence with students and Professors]

203-70-1:5/4

Bratislava Trip, 1994

203-70-1:5/5

IHLS English Course, 1992

203-70-1:5/6

Academic Information Sheet (Professors), 1994

203-70-1:5/7

Recruitment Report and Strategy for 1995, 1995

203-70-1:5/8

Invitations and Addresses for the Lectures, 1993

203-70-1:5/9

Research Break Administration , 1995

203-70-1:5/10

Student Applicants Administration 94-95, 1994 - 1995

203-70-1:5/11

Diploma Administration, 1994

203-70-1:5/12

List of History Students, 1996

203-70-1:5/13

Supplementary Grant in 1994-1995, 1994 – 1995

Archival boxes #6

203-70-1:6/1

CEU Oxford Scholarship Program, 1992 - 1993

203-70-1:6/2

CEU Oxford Scholarship Program, 1992 - 1993

203-70-1:6/3

Student Administration – MA Applications, 1992 - 1993

203-70-1:6/4

Student Administration – MA Applications, 1992 - 1993

203-70-1:6/5

Public Lectures, 1993

[Including Minutes of College Council]

203-70-1:6/6

CRC Program, 1996

203-70-1:6/7

Hanak Peter Correspondence, 1993 – 1997

2. Other researched archival materials reflecting on the life of Péter Hanák:

HU OSA 300-40-5 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Hungarian Unit: Biographical Files

A collection of articles published in Hungarian newspapers related to Péter Hanák (1976-1990) - 300-40-5:61/8

HU OSA 408-2-5 László Varga Collection: Research Documentation on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution: Miscellaneous Documents on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution

The diary of Péter Hanák on the revolution 1956 (1956) - 408-2-5:1/7

HU OSA 356-1-2 Pál Schiffer Personal Papers: Film Documentation: Works produce for the Hungarian Television and Radio

Archival materials related to making of the documentary movie on the life of Péter Hanák with the title „Rutinműtét: Hanák Péter portréja” (1993) - 356-1-2:2/7

3. Processed video- and audio materials related to the history of CEU History Department and the life and career of Péter Hanák and activity during the years of the Transition:

HU OSA 305-0-3 Fekete Doboz Alapítvány Video Archive: Unedited Video Materials

Interview with Péter Hanák on the Democratic Trade Union of Scientific Workers (1988) - 305-0-3:691/1

A recorded course of Péter Hanák at the CEU on the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1995) - 305-0-3:1102/2

A recorded course of Péter Hanák and András Gerő at the CEU on the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its remembrance (1995) - 305-0-3:1107/1

An interview with Péter Hanák on the foundation and the early years of the CEU (1995) - 305-0-3:1100/1

An interview with Péter Hanák on the CEU History Department (1995) - 305-0-3:1101/1

An interview with István Rév on the history of CEU and the foundation of OSA (1995) - 305-0-3:1108/1

An interview with Gábor Klaniczay on the history of CEU and the foundation of the Department of Medieval Studies (1995) - 305-0-3:1108/2

HU OSA 203-13-1 Records of Central European University: External Relations Office: Audio-visual Recordings

An interview with Andrea Pető on the history of CEU (1999) - 203-13-1:42/1

An interview with István Rév on the history of CEU (1999) - 203-13-1:45/1

An interview with Mária Kovács on the history of CEU (1999) - 203-13-1:41/1

Escape: interviews with escapers by prof. György Csepeli, prof. Antal Örkény, András Surányi (1997) – HU OSA 13-3-1:81/1

An interview with Péter Hanák on his escape from the labor service in November 1944.

4. Researched archival sources related to the history of relationships of Hungarian and American Historians from the 1980s to the 1990s:

HU OSA 435 Peter Pastor Collection on Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc.

HU OSA 435-0-2 Documents Related to Conferences and Events

Archival boxes #1

435-0-2:1/1

Conferences and Events : 1976-1984, 1976 - 1984

435-0-2:1/2

Conferences and Events : 1985, 1985

435-0-2:1/3

Conferences and Events : 1986-1992, 1986 – 1992

HU OSA 435-0-3 Grant Related Documents

Archival boxes #1

435-0-3:1/1

Documents Related to the Grant of Gabor Demszky, 1987 - 1989

435-0-3:1/2

Documents Related to the Grant of Tibor Liska, 1986 - 1998

435-0-3:1/3

Documents Related to the Grant of Viktor Orban, 1990

435-0-3:1/4

Correspondence Related to Grants : 1985-1986, 1985 - 1986

435-0-3:1/5

Correspondence Related to Grants : 1987-1988, 1987 - 1988

435-0-3:1/6

Correspondence Related to Grants : 1989-1991, 1989 - 1991

435-0-3:1/7

Correspondence Related to Grants : 1992-1997, 1992 – 1997

HU OSA 435-0-4 Documents Related to Members and the Circle of Friends of ARP

Archival boxes #1

435-0-4:1/1

Chronological Correspondence, 1979-1989, 1979 - 1989

435-0-4:1/2

Chronological Correspondence, 1990-2001, 1990 - 2001

435-0-4:1/3

Contact Lists, Directories, 1979 – 1995

Archival boxes #2

435-0-4:2/1

Documents Related to Bona, Gabor, 1996 - 1998

435-0-4:2/2

Documents Related to Decsy, Janos, 1983 - 1992

435-0-4:2/3

Documents Related to Dreisziger, Nandor F., 1996 - 1997

435-0-4:2/4

Documents Related to Fischer-Galati, Stephen, 1988 - 1998

435-0-4:2/5

Documents Related to Gosztonyi, Peter, 1982 - 1991

435-0-4:2/6

Documents Related to Held, Joseph, 1997 - 1999

435-0-4:2/7

Documents Related to Jonas, Pal, 1992 - 2001

435-0-4:2/8

Documents Related to Kende, Peter, 1983 - 1988

435-0-4:2/9

Documents Related to Kovrig, Bennett, 1996 - 1997

435-0-4:2/10

Documents Related to Rainer M., Janos, 1996 - 1999

435-0-4:2/11

Documents Related to Ungvari, Tamas, 1995 - 1997

Archival boxes #3

435-0-4:3/1

Pastor, Peter on Kiraly, Bela : Kiraly-Pastor Debates, 1996 - 2006

435-0-4:3/2

Pastor, Peter on Kiraly, Bela : Memoires of Pastor, Peter, 2016 - 2018

435-0-4:3/3

Pastor, Peter on Kiraly, Bela : Oral History Interview with Kiraly, Bela by Toth, Pal Peter, 1987

435-0-4:3/4

Pastor, Peter on Kiraly, Bela : Personal Files of Kiraly, Bela, 1977 - 1998

435-0-4:3/5

Pastor, Peter on Kiraly, Bela : Sources collected by Pastor, Peter, 1956 - 2012

435-0-4:3/6

Pastor Report of Budapest, 1988, 1988

435-0-4:3/7

Pastor, Peter on Hungarian-American Coalition, 1989 - 2018