

Eszter KIRS¹:

Saint Stephen's Legacy, Immigration and Foreign Policy in Hungary in the X-XIst Century

The Carpathian Basin was occupied by the Hungarian people at the end of the 9th century. After the Eastern origin Hungary was a nomadic state in this age but during the Reign of Prince Géza the orientation towards the West started to change considerably. At the end of the 10th century Géza made contact with the German monarchs expressing his intention to establish peaceful relation with the Western states. He definitely wanted to orientate the country towards that direction. He sent twelve Hungarian aristocrats to Quedlinburg in 973 to acclaim and greet the German Emperor Otto II like the Czech, Polish, Bulgarian, Russian and Danish delegates, the representatives of Rome and Byzantium did. The German-Hungarian relation took a turn for the worse when Henry the Bavarian prince, who was in the most intensive contact with Géza, rose against the Emperor in 974. Later, however, the former, good relationship was restored. The fact, that the delegates of Géza proposed marriage to Gisela the sister of Prince Henry on behalf of his son Stephen was part of the opening strategy.²

Stephen followed his father's foreign policy and wanted to establish a stable, autonomous and Christian state, which was acknowledged by the Western countries and could be real part of the mediaeval Europe. Wishing to achieve that goal, Stephen appealed not to the German Emperor but to Pope Sylvester II for his royal title to be acknowledged and as one of the signs of his legitimacy to the Hungarian throne, he also wanted the Pope to send him a crown. The Pope himself welcomed these wishes and sent the requested diadem to Stephen to testify his acknowledgement of his royal title. An apostolic cross was also sent as a sign of his support of the missionary and church-organising activity of the would be Hungarian king. This means, that he did not enter into feudatory relation with the German Emperor, consequently, he could create the sovereignty of Hungary. At around the same time when the Pope had the crown sent to Hungary the Emperor also expressed his acknowledgement in connection with the situation.

In the case of Géza his orientation to the West was only for political considerations, but as Stephen is concerned, he was a committed Christian king with all of his heart and faith. He did his best to make the most favourable decisions for the sake of the modernisation of the country. He opened the western gates of Hungary, invited foreigners, made favourable rules to them and wanted to stabilise and maintain the situation for the future as well. That was the reason why in his so called *Admonitions*, written to his son Imre (the heir of the crown), several

¹ University assistant, Department of International Law, Faculty of Law, University of Miskolc

² Hóman, Bálint: Szent István. (Saint Stephen) Szent István Társulat/Kairosz Kiadó, Győr, 1998. page 90-112

provisions or pieces of advice were included about the significance of inviting and supporting guests:

“As our guests come from different regions and provinces they bring different models and arms with them. All of these blazon the country, elevate the splendour of the royal court and deter the foreigners from swaggering. The country with one language and custom is weak and fallible. Considering all of these reasons, I order you, my son, to protect the newcomers with good will and hold them in high esteem, so that they prefer to reside in your country than to live anywhere else.”³

Reading this part of the *Admonitions*, it can be seen that Stephen realized the main reasons why it was so important to invite foreigners. He saw that Hungary needed the above mentioned immigration and she also needed new models and arms for the desired development. It did not mean, that he wanted the foreigners simply to be tolerated but he wanted them to be supported by special and favourable rules. This way, the immigration to Hungary for the exterior visitors did not convey the idea of some kind of last chance but meant a highly advantageous decision.

Reasons of immigration

During the conquest of the Carpathian basin the Hungarians occupied a large territory with numerous inhabitants and people living in the area. However, inside the new borders there were large uninhabited fields as well. In this era, amongst Hungarians, agricultural activities were deemed to be inferior to hunting, fishing and shepherding. Only these, ancient, brought ways of producing food were considered appropriate to free people. They applied foreign servants to do agricultural works for them.

At the end of the 10th century the circumstances were still the same. The fields did not have their real value, because they remained uncultivated. That is the reason why reigning Prince Géza and his son King Stephen invited the agrestian settlers from the West and the East so much. They gave rich donations to priests, to gallant soldiers arrived from the West and also to loyal Hungarian families, who committed themselves to cultivate larger and larger fields applying the necessary amount of people.⁴ The Hungarian fields were especially attractive for the foreign agricultural workers, as the soil, comparing to the lands of the neighbouring countries were simply outstanding in quality. There were not only ample pasture lands good for animal breeding, there were not only large benign fields for agricultural cultivation, but Hungary had excellent climate and location for grape-growing as well.

The other reason for so many people to come into the territory of Hungary was the possibility of economic success. This meant good chance for building a house, getting animals, acquiring an autonomous estate for servants and getting horses and carriages. They also had quite excellent prospects to get free status as having already been autonomous farmers. The immigrated craftsmen and tradesmen could justly hope to become suppliers of the monarch while the valiant, loyal soldiers expected to fight under the king's banner, and consequently, to get an own estate.

³ King Stephen I: *Admonitions*. Chapter VI about inviting and supporting guests

⁴ Hóman, Bálint. (1998) page 98-99, 202

The third explanation for the considerably high level of immigration to the country was the stable legal security. At those times the feudal states of the West had different legal rules and statutes within their borders. In Hungary only the law of King Stephen was applied and although the up-to-date criminal acts were rigorous, they affected not only the poor but also the rich people.⁵ Beyond these favourable conditions the Hungarian State was famous all over Europe for her character of warmly welcoming foreign settlers. The situation was one of the most significant grounds of the establishment of the Hungarian Christian state.⁶

Ways of immigration

Usually, immigration was a well-prepared journey from the part of the settlers. Before the actual action, due delegates had already been changed between the countries, or a special representative had arranged the necessary steps. Beyond that, quite many people arrived as refugees bringing their remained properties and animals into the country. However, only collective immigration was secure, as lonely newcomers were usually robbed and/or captured already at the border.⁷

Refugee status had special importance in this respect. Outstanding persons of the age thought that no one else dealt with the refugees in such an excellent way as Saint Stephen did. Any Polish, Italian, German, Bulgarian or Petchegen refugee could find new home in his state.⁸

A huge Slavonic immigration took place, so beyond the ones mentioned earlier, a lot of Moravian, Czech, Croatian and Russian people came into the state not all as refugees. There were numerous immigrants from the South and West as well. The settlers arrived from the German territories were especially significant, for they could help Stephen to reorganise the army and to introduce a general policy that was appropriate to the Western systems.

The immigration of Petchegens is a controversial issue. According to experts of the field, their early arrival to Transylvania at the age of Stephen was simply a legend. However, appropriate, dependable historical data was available only from the reign of Andrew I.⁹ Others claim, that in the 10th and 11th century, it was the sovereigns of Hungary who had them settled down so as to defend the militarily important lines of the river Danube and Rabe. They were superb warriors especially on their horseback. Evidently, the foreigners with their free status were subjected only to the power of the king; their paramount judge was the palatine of Hungary. The Petchegens chose their own leaders and they also had their own public administration.¹⁰

⁵ Györffy, György: István király és műve. (King Stephen and his work) Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 2000. page 518-519

⁶ Glatz, Ferenc: Az ezeréves magyar állam. (The thousand years old Hungarian state) História, XXII/5-6. História Alapítvány, Budapest, 2000. page 14

⁷ Györffy, György. (2000) page 517-518

⁸ Hóman, Bálint. (1998) page 133

⁹ Györffy, György. (2000) page 514

¹⁰ Eckhart, Ferenc: Magyar alkotmány- és jogtörténet. (History of constitution and law of Hungary) Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, (2000) page 59

There is a story related to the Petchegen settlers which shows us how open Saint Stephen was to the immigration of foreigners. Sixty Petchegens came to Hungary with gifts and peaceful intents, nevertheless, at the border, Hungarian soldiers killed or wounded them. The ones who stayed alive went straight to the king and told him what had happened to them. Stephen ordered the soldiers to come at once and to confess who had committed the murders. He also added the following: „Why did you violate the law of God? Why did not you know mercy and why did you punish innocent people?” Stephen sentenced these soldiers to death.¹¹

Besides the well-prepared immigration and arrival of refugees there was a special way of coming into Hungary. The peaceful foreign policy, the internal consolidation and the high respect for Stephen made it possible that around 1010 a new pilgrimage came through Hungary. This road was very popular because it was much safer than the sea route as the Hungarian king protected the people going through the country.¹²

The stabilising social layers

As mentioned above, in the age of Stephen, there were large uncultivated fields so the invitation of foreign people with tried and effective production technology and special agricultural knowledge was part of the development strategy. After their arrival they belonged to those free status tenants who cultivated the king's fields and paid annual tax. Their immigration was a large step in the development of the country, as it made possible for the first time, that on most of the agriculturally optimal territories they began farming activities and created the necessary conditions for settling.¹³

Even more significant was the settlement of craftsmen and tradesmen, which increased trade quite much; with the help of these apron-men, the development of towns started. The foreigners dealing with agricultural activities lived in villages, which had their own public administration (in historical sources these are called '*villa*', whereas the name '*praedium*' meant the communities of servants). Previously, only villages had tradition in the country, but as immigration of foreigners began in this era, a new, bigger, more complex type of settlement was born – the town. In the beginning, only foreign settlers so called '*hospes*'-es received charters for establishing towns. In the charters of the age, mainly German and Italian people were mentioned as founders but the population of towns included Hungarian and Slavonic people were mentioned as well.¹⁴

The immigration also played significant role in the development of the army. The reshaping and restructuralizing of the army began as early as in the time of Géza when following the opening strategy to the West numerous German knights settled down in Hungary. Such, famous knights were for example, *Herman*, *Hont* and *Paznan* who arrived in the escort of Gizella (later Stephen's wife). During the reign of Stephen it was still important to invite the

¹¹ Kristó, Gyula-Makk, Ferenc: *Az Árpád-házi uralkodók.* (The reigns of the House of Árpád) Interpress Kiadó, Budapest, 1988 page 45

¹² Kristó, Gyula: *Az államalapító.* (The founder of the state) Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, Budapest, 1988. page 139

¹³ Hóman, Bálint: *A történelem útja.* (The way of history) Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2002. page 28

¹⁴ Timon, Ákos: *Magyar alkotmány-és jogtörténet.* (History of constitution and law of Hungary) Hornyánszky Viktor Könyvkiadóhivatala, Budapest, 1910. page 151-153

foreign knights with heavy armour. With their character of armament and equipment they considerably improved the Hungarian army, in fact, they created the strongest part of the army.¹⁵ They often received large estates from the king for their military services and merits, thus, they could become founders of later famous families. Some of these knights came into the country with heavy armoured soldiers (Héder, for instance, brought 300 valiant soldiers) from whom Stephen formed special armoured divisions fitted for action. These soldiers melted into the stratum of '*miles*', which was the military escort of the king and aristocrats.¹⁶ Besides these knights and soldiers, the auxiliary groups organised on ethnical ground also took considerable part in the Hungarian army. The formerly mentioned Petchegens, Russians, etc. were strong additional units of the army.

The opening process to the West required revolutionary changes in the intellectual life of Hungary. The immigration of foreign priests and monks served this aim, as they were well-prepared scientists of their age. These persons became the actual colleges of Stephen, for example: the Italian Anasztáz, the German Asherik, the Czech Adalbert, the Venicer Gilbert, the French Bonipert and their mates. The education of these priests active in church-organising and catholicizing derived from the distant West and South, namely, the monasteries of France and Italy.¹⁷ In the case of the immigration of priests and monks a special rule was applied. They needed a recommendation letter if they wanted to come into the country. The lack of this precious document was the reason of the failure of Saint Roumald's monks. Around 1010 Roumald departed from Italy. He had the permission of the pope but also had 24 of his followers with him. After a while, still during the journey, Roumald had some health problems so he returned home, but 15 of his followers continued the tour. However, their fortune did not give the opportunity for them to diffuse the religion because they were stopped already at the border and as they did not have the vital recommendation, they were simply made to turn back so they could not even get before the king. This special legal restriction was undoubtedly inevitable because in this age there were a lot of cozeners who pretended to be priests or monks.¹⁸

Stephen I the Christian monarch

In the nomadic states the members of the noble stratum were legally equal but those who did not belong to them – servants or foreigners – were given no rights. Surprisingly enough, the aristocrats were not served by their own nationals but were usually served by those foreign people who were captured by them.¹⁹

In the age of Saint Stephen it would have been egregious to introduce and maintain a legal system, which would have been unapproved by the Western Christian states. In the religious mediaeval Europe the divine origin of the monarchs restricted the possibility of arbitrary enforcement of the royal power. At those times the sovereigns of Europe were heavily

¹⁵ Kristó, Gyula. (1988) page 148-149

¹⁶ Györffy, György. (2000) page 510

¹⁷ Hóman, Bálint. (2002) page 21

¹⁸ Györffy, György. (2000) page 510

¹⁹ Kristó, Gyula: A magyar állam megszületése. (Birth of the Hungarian state) AGAPÉ Ferences Nyomda és Könyvkiadó, Szeged, 1995. page 345

submitted to the rules of the Church even in case of taking secular measures, as the legal and moral grounds of royal power were seen in the divine origin of them. In Stephen's time keeping the rules and demands of the Church depended only on the voluntary decision of the king. Accordingly, Stephen also submitted himself to the law of the Church and chose himself the model: '*rex iustus, pius et pacificus*'. This was ideal for the fair-minded, pious and peaceful king to be able to retain his own will.²⁰ According to domestic and foreign historical sources of his age Stephen I was a constructive and always-realistic reform politician who was faithful Christian and who had been educated in the European spirit. He was led by his steady faith in the Christian doctrine and by the future of the Hungarian Kingdom. He was capable of both clearly realize the internal and external problems, admirably analyze the situations and find appropriate solutions. His clear awareness of the political and religious character of his age, his ability to grip the complicated situations, his audacious intuition, his flexibility and his comprehensive interest all helped him to make successful decisions.²¹

The legal status of foreigners

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Stephen was a constructive reign who perceived what the best for Hungary was in connection with the West. This is the reason why he created favourable legal rules related to the status of foreign settlers. Those who came into the country with their own will received free legal status but it did not mean full and free right for moving, whether or not they dealt with agriculture or trade. They were compelled to join to a master and after Stephen's first act they could not move from this person's territory.²²

The hospice-communities existing in the neighbourhood of remote Hungarian villages chose their judge themselves and they were permitted to act according to their own foreign law. Historical sources mention foreign law as '*ius Theutonicum*' which also proves that the hospices applied their own law. These hospice-communities enjoyed exemption-status, according to their privileges they received rights to keep marketplace and choose their priest. They had to ensure some services and annual tax to the king, in return, they were entitled to possess and cultivate the field on which they settled down.²³ For exemption from military service the tax paid for the field was not sufficient, so they also had to pay the so-called '*free denarius*'.

The incoming gallant soldiers were legally free but once they had given military services they belonged to the king or a castle-estate. Soon after, the new office-holder and propertied aristocrats took the lead of the society. Such aristocrats were the Hungarian, German and Italian knights who received donation from Géza and Stephen.²⁴

²⁰ Hóman, Bálint. (2002) page 19

²¹ Hóman, Bálint. (1998) page 148

²² Györffy, György. (2000) page 510

²³ Timon, Ákos. (1910) page 153-154

²⁴ Hóman, Bálint. (1998) page 249-251

Conclusion

Hungary needed immigration for development. There were large uncultivated fields, which necessitated the invitation of foreign people with special agricultural knowledge. Towns could not be founded without the incoming foreign craftsmen and tradesmen. The army was not properly modern and strong enough, consequently, the country needed the new models and arms which came into Hungary with the foreign gallant soldiers, armoured knights and auxiliary military groups. Finally, it was essential to transform the intellectual life of Hungary; the wished notional alteration could not have come true without the help of foreign priests and monks.

Stephen wanted to build a developed Christian state and he saw the essential importance of immigration, that is why he created favourable conditions to the foreign settlers. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that he wanted to create a minority-protecting system and to make it possible for the foreign settlers to keep their nationality. When, in his *Admonitions*, Stephen wished his son to maintain the introduced favourable rules related to the guests, actually, he wanted to protect not minority rights but general human rights. According to the provisions of law of the Church, they had to give these rights to the foreigners anyway. He considered that the guests and Hungarians would possibly get on well. Giving donations and offering offices to foreigners, he enabled the natural way of assimilation to begin, thus, he set Hungary on the way of development.²⁵

Bringing in the new models, applying the settlers, introducing peaceful foreign and immigration policy he found the autonomous and acknowledged Hungarian State. Having strong faith in Christian values, he was determined to organise the Roman Catholic Church of the country, and he was able to do so. His outstanding character and his all-essential activities give explanation why he became a saint and why he has great reputation in Hungary.

Eszter Kirs: L'héritage de Saint Étienne - Politique étrangère et politique d'immigration en Hongrie aux X-XIe siècles

Fondée au Xe siècle, la Hongrie sentait le besoin de l'immigration pour accélérer la construction des structures étatiques. Le roi Étienne le 1er a reconnu l'importance de cette politique surtout en ce qui concerne l'agriculture sédentaire et la vie aux cités. Son armée ainsi que la vie culturelle du pays en profitaient également. La jonction d'une politique étrangère pacifique avec une politique ouverte d'immigration a contribué à la reconnaissance de l'État hongrois indépendant, par les monarques contemporains. Fidèle aux règles du christianisme, il a jeté les bases du fonctionnement de l'église chrétienne en Hongrie. Manifestant les caractéristiques des meilleurs rois chrétiens de l'époque (*pius, justus, pacificus* / pieux, juste et pacifique), il a été canonisé peu de temps après sa mort par l'église catholique. En Hongrie, son autorité et son respect n'ont jamais été brisés durant l'histoire millénaire du pays.

²⁵ Hóman, Bálint. (1998) page 257-258