



FACT SHEETS ON HUNGARY

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

2003

National symbols, national days

Area:

93,030 km²

Population:

10,162,000 (1 October 2002)

Neighbouring countries:

Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia

Official language:

Hungarian

State form:

republic

Administrative division:

capital, 19 counties, 22 county towns, 229 towns, 183 large settlements, 2716 communities (1 January 2003)

Capital: Budapest

(population: 1,800,000)

Largest towns:

Debrecen (211,000)

Miskolc (185,000), Szeged (168,000), Pécs (162,000), Győr (130,000)

Currency: forint (HUF)

GDP: EUR 6876/person (2002).

Source:

Central Statistical Office

Major rivers:

Danube (417 km), Tisza (597 km)

Largest lakes:

Balaton (596 km²), Lake Velence (26 km²),

Highest point:

Kékes (1014 m) in the Mátra Hills

Lowest point:

Gyálárét (78 m) near Szeged

The national coat of arms

Act XLIV of 1990 decrees that the coat of arms of the Republic of Hungary is the so-called historical crowned, lesser coat of arms. The Hungarian Holy Crown is on top of the pointed, impaled shield.

In the 12th century the royal coat of arms and the country's arms were one and the same. However, from the 15th century the two coats of arms began to be differentiated, and this is when the lesser coat of arms took on its final form.

The single most ancient element in the coat of arms, the double cross, first appeared on the coinage of Hungarian kings in the late 12th century. Originally the cross stood on three feet; the triple mound underneath developed from this element. The bars were introduced into the coat of arms at the beginning of the 13th century. The crown of Hungarian kings has graced the coat of arms for more than six centuries.



The national flag

The flag of the Republic of Hungary is a tricolour comprising three bands of equal width in red, white and green.



These three national colours first appeared together in a seal ribbon during the reign of King Matthias II, in 1618. The red-white strip had been used for centuries on royal and aristocratic pennants. It is thought the green joined the red and white from the triple mound to be seen in the coat of arms.

During the Age of Reform in Hungary (1830-1840) the red-white-green colours were deliberately used in political assemblies. An act on the national flag was first passed during the 1848-49 War of Independence against Habsburg oppression.



The Holy Crown and coronation regalia: sceptre and orb

Red symbolizes strength, white fidelity and green hope.

The National Anthem

The text of the Hungarian National Anthem was written in 1823 by Ferenc Kölcsey (1790-1838), one of the great politicians and poets of the Age of Reform. It was first published in 1828. A tender for the setting to music of the National Anthem published in 1844 was won by Ferenc Erkel (1810-1893), and it was first performed in the National Theatre in the same year. Ferenc Kölcsey's verse set to the music of Ferenc Erkel has been the legally registered National Anthem of Hungary since 1903.

The National Anthem comprises eight verses, although on most occasions only the first verse is played or sung.

*O my God, the Magyar bless
With Thy plenty and good cheer!
With Thine aid his just cause press,
Where his foes to fight appear.
Fate, who for so long didst frown,
Bring him happy times and ways;
Atoning sorrow hath weighed down
Sins of past and future days.*

In Hungary Mihály Vörösmarty's (1800-1855) Summons is considered to be the second national anthem. Vörösmarty, one of Hungary's greatest literary figures, wrote the Summons in 1836. Béni Egressy (1814-1851) composed the music to the verse in

1843. On state and other occasions the National Anthem is performed first, while the first two verses of the Summons are often sung as a conclusion to the event.

*Oh Magyars, stand beside your land
Unshaken, loyal, true!
Here is your crib, your future grave
Which tends and covers you.*

*There is no other place for you
On earth, beneath the sky.
May fortune bless or break you down
You must live here and die.*



King St. Stephen, founder of the state

The Holy Crown

The crown, although not an official state symbol, is regarded with particular respect in Hungary.

The Hungarian crown is called either the Holy Crown or Crown of St. Stephen, and it is not only a symbol but also an attribute of statehood. Its legitimising role can be traced back to the time when our first ruler, founder of the state and the institution of a Christian monarchy, King Stephen I (who was later canonized), was crowned with the crown despatched by Pope Sylvester II. In Hungarian history only those who are crowned with this symbol of state are considered lawful rulers of the country.

Experts estimate the Holy Crown to be around 850 years old, although parts of it date from the 11th century. The unique feature of the Hungarian Holy Crown is that it is made up of two parts, the so-called Greek and Latin crowns. Over the course of history the crown underwent every conceivable adventure: struggles for the throne, wars, it was stolen, buried, smuggled abroad and even pawned. Whenever it came to light again or returned home, it was always the cause for nation celebration.

The crown and coronation insignia – the orb and sceptre as well as the coronation mantle – were stored in the United States of America after the

Second World War. American president Jimmy Carter decided that they could be returned to, as the official statement put it, the Hungarian people in 1978. These historical relics were first placed in the Hungarian National Museum and then, from 1 January 2000, they have been on display in Parliament.

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Three national days are celebrated in the Republic of Hungary each year.

15 March, in memory of the outbreak of the 1848 revolution and War of Independence, day of the birth of modern parliamentary Hungary.

20 August, official state celebration in memory of founder of the state King Saint Stephen.

23 October, outbreak of the 1956 Revolution and freedom fight, and the day in 1989 when the Republic of Hungary was proclaimed.

20 August

At the end of the 10th century Prince Géza, descendant of conquering chieftain Árpád, in a move designed to safeguard his people who at that time lived within a nomadic, tribal clan structure, carrying out plundering raids and worshipping pagan gods, concluded an alliance with Holy Roman Emperor Otto I and sought to develop links with Christianity.

Géza's son, Vajk, was baptized and given the name Stephen. He continued his father's policies and had himself crowned king at Christmas in the year 1000. In a move of particular significance Stephen asked Pope Sylvester II to send a crown from Rome, which request the pope duly complied with. This was a public declaration that Hungary wished to ally itself with Western Christianity. Stephen developed a highly centralized state administration, established the county (comitat) structure on West European lines, and founded bishoprics and independent archbishoprics (Kalocsa and Esztergom). Christianity, private ownership, public order and morality were protected by a series of strict laws. He did much to encourage the propagation of culture and learning, and considered it particularly important for Hungary to be fully receptive to new ideas, and

tolerant of other people. At the time of his death in 1038 Hungary was a viable, strong and independent country drawing closer to Western societies.

King Stephen was canonized in 1083, from which date Hungarians have remembered their great ruler on 20 August, St. Stephen's Day. The mummified right hand of the founder of the state is preserved in St. Stephen's Basilica, Budapest. The respect in which this relic is held remains strong to this very day.



Lithograph depicting the revolutionary heroes of 1848. From left to right: General Josef Bem, Prime Minister Lajos Batthyány, the poet Sándor Petőfi, General György Klapka, Lajos Kossuth, leading figure of the Revolution

15 March

During the first half of the 19th century Hungary, as a part of the Habsburg Empire, was one of Europe's backward regions without any independence. The court in Vienna was not prepared to consider the most cautious of reforms, even though those promoting change, the more enlightened members of the nobility, had no intention of infringing on the rights and role of the ruler.

The most outstanding figure of the age, Count István Széchenyi, envisaged gradual and measured advancement. He looked to the more developed countries of West Europe for an example, and did much to introduce into Hungary their technical and economic advances.

From the early 1840s the untitled petty nobleman and lawyer Lajos Kossuth and his followers began to call with an ever louder voice for economic and political independence within the Habsburg Empire, the emancipation of serfs, repeal of all the privileges of the nobility, recognition of the equality before the law of civil property, and the creation of independent domestic industry. In short, civil transformation. The wave of revolutions which washed across Europe in the late winter-early

spring of 1848 did much to strengthen Hungarian opposition. These uprisings created the conditions under which Hungary's aspirations for reform might be realized by lawful means. On 15 March 1848 a group of intellectuals composed mainly of young writers and poets took to the streets of Pest. First they won over university students to their cause, and then the citizens of Pest. By the end of the day this small group had grown to several tens of thousands. The revolution had started. One of the leading figures of the day was the poet Sándor Petőfi whose National Song mobilized and emboldened the crowd. The Twelve Points summarized the most important political demands of the revolutionaries, including press free-

dom, the formation of an independent Hungarian government, annual parliaments, civil and religious equality before the law, the creation of a national army, general taxation, the cessation of sojage and reunion with Transylvania.

On the very same day, in Vienna the parliamentary delegation led by Kossuth succeeded in getting the ruler to accede to the demands formulated at the Diet of Pozsony; these were passed into law and received royal assent in April 1848. Hungary achieved the transition without bloodshed, the first and only country to do so. The first independent Hungarian government responsible to the Hungarian National Assembly was formed under the premiership of Count Lajos Batthyány.

While the government continued to operate on the basis of legality the House of Habsburg, parallel with the upsurge of European reactionaryism, went on the counter-offensive. The revolution was forced to take to arms. The War of Independence lasted close on a year, after which Francis Joseph I finally overcame the Hungarians, but only with the assistance of the Russian czar. The collapse of the struggle for independence was followed by bitter reprisals and terrible oppression. However, there was no undoing the achievements of the uprising. On the other hand, many of the successes were realized only two decades later after the Compromise signed in 1867 (in which Ferenc Deák played a major role), when the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was established.

23 October

By 1953 the economic policy pursued by the communist government had brought Hungary to the brink of catastrophe. The standard of living in Soviet-occupied Hungary had fallen, and tension and dissatisfaction were rising. The new Soviet leadership installed after the death of Stalin instructed Hungarian party leader Mátyás Rákosi to hand over the post of prime minister to Imre Nagy. Nagy, like Rákosi, had returned from exile in Moscow in 1945, but Nagy had voiced his disagreement with many of the political and economic measures implemented in Hungary at the time. However, there was little time for reforms because the resurgent Rákosi and his followers managed to get Nagy replaced in 1955 and expelled from the

party. This gave rise to much general discontent, and dissatisfaction was increasingly voiced, mostly among intellectual circles. Social ferment within the country had begun.

In the early autumn of 1956 students at one Budapest university after another formulated their demands for change: withdrawal of Soviet troops, a new government to be headed by Imre Nagy, the bringing to trial of Rákosi and his associates, democratic elections, a new economic policy, a minimum wage and the declaration of 15 March as a national day. On 22 October students at



Crowds listening to Imre Nagy in front of Parliament, 1956

the Technical University decided to organize a demonstration on the following day, the 23rd, in support of Poland which was striving for greater independence from the Soviet Union.

This demonstration proved to be the spark for the 1956 Revolution. As the day progressed the number of people gathering at different parts of the city swelled to 200,000. A huge statue of Stalin was toppled, and demonstrators marched to the Radio to have their demands aired. The first armed conflict broke out at the headquarters of Hungarian Radio; by the morning of the following day the building was in the hands of the rebels.

Imre Nagy was re-elected prime minister on 24 October. Soviet troops

stationed around Budapest were ordered into the capital, where desperate gun battles ensued. The Revolution soon spread across the entire country. New political bodies – revolutionary committees and workers' councils – sprang up, parties destroyed or which had withered after the Second World War quickly reactivated, and new ones appeared on the scene.

On 1 November Imre Nagy announced that Hungary was withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact and declaring its neutrality. At dawn on 4 November Soviet forces launched an intensive attack

to quell the Revolution. Armed resistance was broken by the Soviets' overwhelming superiority of force. In a radio address János Kádár announced the formation of a pro-Soviet government. The suppression of the Revolution was followed by mass arrests and the execution of several hundred, among them Imre Nagy and Minister of Defence Pál Maléter in 1958. Some 200,000 people fled the country in the succeeding months.

The 1956 Revolution was the greatest deed of the Hungarian people in the 20th century. For this reason, 23 October 1989 was declared the day of the proclamation of the republic, thereby representing the consummation of the ideals expressed in 1956.

