


# Anticommunism and Détente: Mindszenty, the Catholic Church, and Hungarian Émigrés in West Germany, 1972

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**ABSTRACT.** Cardinal Mindszenty was head of the Catholic Church of Hungary between 1945 and 1974, but had been imprisoned between 1949 and 1956 and hiding in the US embassy in Budapest from 1956 to 1971. In 1971, Mindszenty left the country and settled in Vienna after long negotiations between the Vatican and the Hungarian communist government. When he visited the Hungarian diaspora and non-Hungarian followers in the West between 1972 and his death in 1975, controversies about communism, Catholicism, and Western society and social change in general erupted. This article analyzes these controversies and the different groups that supported the cardinal and their understanding of anticommunism in the context of a changing West German society and against the background of changes within the Catholic world after Vatican II. The ideas about communism Mindszenty and his right-wing supporters formulated were outdated in the 1970s but had a long afterlife.

**W**HEN Cardinal József Mindszenty, exiled head of the Hungarian Catholic Church, visited the Bavarian town of Bamberg on May 21, 1972, he arrived in triumph (see [figure 1](#)).

Between twenty-five hundred and five thousand Hungarian émigrés, mostly from West Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, but also from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and even the United States and Canada, had gathered in the town. Mindszenty was officially welcomed by representatives of Hungarian exile organizations, by Boy and Girl Scouts and girls in Hungarian folk costumes, as well as by local dignitaries: the mayor, Theodor Mathieu (1919–1995), a Christian Social Union (CSU) politician, and the archbishop of Bamberg, Joseph Schneider (1906–1976). The next day, Pentecost Sunday, Mindszenty celebrated Mass in St. Michael's Church in Bamberg. The Mass was broadcast by Bavarian state television and aired on Radio Free Europe and on the Hungarian program of the German state-run Deutsche Welle Radio; German newspapers reported on all parts of his visit.

Bamberg was Mindszenty's first visit to a West German town. Wherever he went in the Western world, he attracted large crowds and enjoyed extensive media attention.<sup>1</sup> Later in 1972, he traveled to other West German cities and Belgium. When he celebrated a Mass

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<sup>1</sup>A Hungarian journalist, Emil Csonka, who lived in the West and had a very sympathetic view of the cardinal, published, under a pseudonym, a short book on Mindszenty's last five years of life. Cf. Emilio Vasari, *Der verbannte Kardinal. Mindszentys Leben im Exil* (Vienna: Herold Verlag, 1977). For historical research on Mindszenty's travels, see the last two chapters in Margit Balogh's monumental biography, in Margit Balogh, *Mindszenty József (1892–1975)* (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2015).



**Figure 1.** Mindszenty, center, surrounded by a crowd. Archive of the Archdiocese of Bamberg (ErzbfAB, Rep. 80, Slg. 6-3, Nr. 3303).

at the Fatima shrine in Portugal in the fall of that year, about 250,000 believers came to see him. Between 1973 and his death in 1975, Mindszenty stayed for week-long visits in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States, as well as in South Africa, Venezuela, New Zealand, and other places. Only a few months before his visit to Bamberg, Mindszenty had left the US embassy in Budapest, where he had spent fifteen years after fleeing the invading Soviet troops that had come to crush the Hungarian uprising in November 1956. When the cardinal departed from Hungary in the fall of 1971, he settled in Vienna, Austria. Since 1949, Mindszenty had been considered a thorn in the side of the communist government and of the entire Soviet system and was celebrated, not only by Catholics, as a “hero of religious freedom.”<sup>2</sup>

But now, more than twenty years later, the situation had changed. Large crowds still cheered the cardinal, but his visits were also accompanied by numerous controversies. One major dilemma facing his hosts was the question of how to deal with the communist regimes allied to Moscow. While Mindszenty and many of his followers insisted that it was futile to negotiate with the Soviets and other communist regimes, the US administration, the Vatican, and the West German government had initiated diplomatic initiatives, focusing on dialogues, since the 1960s.

On the same Sunday that Cardinal Mindszenty celebrated Mass in Bamberg (May 22, 1972), US President Richard Nixon arrived in Moscow for a historic summit with the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, ending his visit a couple of days later with the signing of a number of agreements, which eased the tensions between the

<sup>2</sup>A 1948 Swedish postcard called Mindszenty a “hero of religious freedom” (*religionsfrihetens hjälte*). Possession of the author.

superpowers.<sup>3</sup> On the same Pentecost weekend, Pope Paul VI welcomed a large group of pilgrims from communist Hungary, consisting of bishops, priests, and Catholic laymen, in the Vatican.<sup>4</sup> The meetings between Nixon and the Pope with representatives of communist states were the result of the politics of détente and dialogue, or, as they were called in relation to the Vatican and West Germany, of the new *Ostpolitik*, and were welcomed by public opinion in western Europe and North America, although not uncontested.<sup>5</sup> In the spirit of the new *modus vivendi* between the Vatican and the Hungarian government in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the condition of Mindszenty's relocation from Hungary to Austria, in what amounted essentially to a second exile, was that he would abstain from political activities.<sup>6</sup> In April 1971, Pope Paul VI assured the Hungarian Foreign Minister that the Vatican would “place him in some monastery, while barring him—by means of appropriate ecclesiastical rules, applied with sufficient force—from making public appearances.”<sup>7</sup> Once Mindszenty was in the West, however, the Vatican found it very difficult to enforce this condition. The cardinal's presence there also had major repercussions on the Hungarian diaspora and on debates regarding whether the legitimate government represented the Hungarian nation founded in the eleventh century.

This article will explore how Mindszenty's visit was overshadowed by different views within Catholicism regarding the position of the church toward communist regimes; in other words, should the church negotiate with representatives of these regimes or

<sup>3</sup>Nixon had worked hard to convince public opinion in the United States of the positive aspects of negotiations with the Soviets, but he also profited from first diplomatic steps taken by the Kennedy administration. See Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Sterling, VA: Potomac Books, 2012), 81. Although the critique of Nixon's policy was growing after the summit, in May 1972, it seemed as if the Cold War had entered a new phase.

<sup>4</sup>Among those Hungarian visitors were clergy Mindszenty and others accused of collaboration with the communist regime; even diplomats of the Vatican knew that some of them continuously submitted reports to the Hungarian state security. This problem has been treated in detail by András Fejérdy, *Pressed by a Double Loyalty: Hungarian Attendance at the Second Vatican Council, 1959–1965* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press), 2016.

<sup>5</sup>In West Germany, the erection of the Berlin Wall by the German Democratic Republic contributed to a changed attitude that made *Ostpolitik* more popular; see Arne Hofmann, *The Emergence of Détente in Europe: Brandt, Kennedy and the Formation of Ostpolitik* (London: Routledge, 2007), 40; Wilfried Loth and George Soutou, eds., *The Making of Détente: Eastern Europe and Western Europe in the Cold War, 1965–75* (London: Routledge, 2010); Carole Fink, “*Ostpolitik, 1969–1974: The European and Global Response*,” *Ohio State University: Mershon Center for International Security Studies* (conference summary, 2006); and Poul Villaume and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Détente, Transatlantic Relations, and the Cold War, 1965–1985* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010). A recent study on the impact of Vatican *Ostpolitik* on Hungary: András Fejérdy, ed., *The Vatican “Ostpolitik,” 1958–1978: Responsibility and Witness during John XXIII and Paul VI* (Rome: Viella editrice libreria, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltára, hereafter MNL) OL M–KS 288. f. 5/552. ő. e. 45–46. fol. Report to the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP), Budapest, April 19, 1971. The quotation can also be found in the biography of Cardinal Mindszenty, in Margit Balogh, *Kardinal József Mindszenty. Ein Leben zwischen kommunistischer Diktatur und Kaltem Krieg*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Osteuropa Zentrum, 2014), 509. This is the drastically shortened version of the original, two-volume biography: Balogh, *Mindszenty József*.

<sup>7</sup>In the same meeting with the Hungarian foreign minister, the pope was reported to have said that Mindszenty was “a very difficult man, many of whose actions were hard to understand.” Cf. MNL, OL M–KS 288. f. 5/552. ő. e. 45–46. fol. Report to the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP), Budapest, April 19, 1971.

should it reject contact? And, related to this, how might Catholics avoid conflicts among themselves?

The article will then discuss the role of anticommunism<sup>8</sup> and its meanings in the Hungarian diaspora at the time; it will analyze the German–Hungarian community’s relationship to the West German government and certain émigré organizations, which had changed when Willy Brandt became chancellor of the first SPD/FDP (Socialdemocratic Party of Germany/Free Democratic Party) coalition in 1969. Finally, the article will address Mindszenty’s role in the inner-Hungarian debate about the legitimacy of the communist regime, which had begun in 1948 among the diaspora but which continued to have a major impact on Hungarian politics. Mindszenty’s resistance against the communist dictatorship was rooted in the so-called Christian–national tradition and the idea of the continuity of the kingdom of St. Stephen. These ideas became very popular after 1989 and were even enshrined in the new constitution, introduced by Viktor Orbán in 2010. The debates about communism in Hungary that surrounded the cardinal’s visit to Bamberg have a long prehistory and a long afterlife.

### Mindszenty the Martyr: Internal Catholic Debates on the Catholic Church’s Approach toward Communist Eastern Europe

A common narrative describing the role that the Catholic Church played during the Cold War often goes like this: after Pope Pius XII’s strict anticommunist “lonely Cold War,” his successors John XXIII and Paul VI changed the diplomatic approach toward the communist regimes. There is some evidence supporting this interpretation. It was John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and its warning of a nuclear war that qualified the extinction of humankind as a major problem, not so much the fight against communism. Later, it was *Vatican Ostpolitik*, a diplomatic initiative under Paul VI, which aimed at a modus vivendi between the church and communist regimes to safeguard the sheer survival of local churches.<sup>9</sup> Even Frank J. Coppa, who regarded the transition from Pius XII to John XXIII as more fluid and saw greater continuity in Vatican diplomacy through the 1950s and 1960s, still emphasizes the difference between Vatican policies in the two decades and

<sup>8</sup>I am spelling “anticommunism” without a hyphen because I consider it a term that, similar to antisemitism, for the most part does not need a clearly defined enemy in relation to it. It is a rather blurry term: it can mean many different ways to express antagonism to communist ideas, movements, and governments. It is an antithesis that can mix with democratic, liberal, but also with conservative and even extreme right-wing ideas. Transnational anticommunism studies is still a small field, and it mostly focuses on the earlier period of the Cold War, not détente, and it does not include Hungarian émigrés. See Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith, *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War. Agents, Activities, and Networks*, ed. Luc van Dongen (Houndsmill: Palgrave MacMillan 2014). Marla Stone and Giuliana Chamedes, “Naming the Enemy: Anti-communism in Transnational Perspective,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 1 (2018): 4–11. See also M. Durham and Margaret Power, eds., *New Perspectives on the Transnational Right* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). For the connection between anticommunism and antisemitism, see Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2018.

<sup>9</sup>The classic study by Peter C. Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII: The Roman Catholic Church and the Division of Europe, 1943–1950* (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2002). The contemporary study on the topic was Hansjakob Stehle, *Eastern Politics of the Vatican, 1917–79* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981).

under the two popes.<sup>10</sup> However, we still do not know much about what impact these changes in Vatican diplomacy had on ordinary Catholics and their ideas about the Cold War and world peace.

Regarding Italy, Rosario Forlenza argues that Catholic anticommunism was not just a manipulative, negative strategy of right-wing political elites—a view that dominated earlier studies on anticommunism.<sup>11</sup> It was, according to him, a popular ideology that was based on certain anxieties and experiences of many Italian Catholics. For West Germany, Siegfried Weichlein discussed the intellectual traditions of Catholic anticommunism and how they began to change already during the mid-1950s when their antidemocratic and anti-modern roots from the Weimar Republic slowly receded while new, liberal interpretations, particularly with regard to concepts of the *Christliche Abendland*, became more common.<sup>12</sup> Vatican *Ostpolitik*, Weichlein argues, was favored by many German bishops because it supported their attempts of reconciliation with Poland. Even among Catholic expellee organizations, which had been very critical of negotiations with communist regimes, support for the new *Ostpolitik* initiatives grew after the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> Catholic peace activists on the other side of the political spectrum understood *Pacem in Terris* as papal endorsement of their positions because Pope John XXIII had avoided the harsh anticommunist rhetoric of his predecessors, and Pope Paul VI had sent his emissary, Agostino Casaroli (1914–1998) to eastern Europe, who signed a partial agreement with communist Hungary in 1964.<sup>14</sup>

The debates around Cardinal Mindszenty's first visit to West Germany add more nuance to this debate: his qualification as a martyr who embodied an "extraordinary life" enabled West German Catholics and Catholics who did not agree with his political positions to still admire him as a person.

Even a left-leaning political magazine like *Der Spiegel* described Mindszenty in a mixture of admiration and irony as the "most stubborn Christian martyr of the twentieth century."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Frank J. Coppa, "Pope Pius XII and the Cold War: The Post-war Confrontation between Catholicism and Communism," *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Diane Kirby (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 50–66, esp. 60.

<sup>11</sup>Rosario Forlenza, "The Enemy Within: Catholic Anti-Communism in Cold War Italy," *Past & Present* 235, no. 1 (2017): 207–42 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtx016>). Examples of studies that simply understood anticommunism as manipulation for the West German case are Klaus Körner, *Die "rote Gefahr." Antikommunistische Propaganda in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1950–2000* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur Verlag, 2002), and Wolfgang Wippermann, *Heilige Hetzjagd. Eine Ideologiegeschichte des Antikommunismus* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 2012).

<sup>12</sup>Siegfried Weichlein, "Antikommunismus im westdeutschen Katholizismus," *Der Antikommunismus in seiner Epoche. Weltanschauung und Politik in Deutschland, Europa und den USA*, ed. Norbert Frei and Dominik Rigoll (Jena: Jena Center Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Vorträge und Kolloquien, Bd. 21, 2017), 124–38. For a wider context, see also Martin G. Maier, "Eine Frage 'nationaler Selbstbehauptung'? Konservativer Antikommunismus im Jahrzehnt nach 1968," *Neugründung auf alten Werten? Konservative Intellektuelle und Politik in der Bundesrepublik*, ed. Sebastian Liebold and Frank Schale (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), 195–208.

<sup>13</sup>Sabine Voßkamp, *Katholische Kirche und Vertriebene in Westdeutschland. Integration, Identität und ostpolitischer Diskurs 1945–1972* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 2007), 347.

<sup>14</sup>For Casaroli's initiatives, see Alberto Melloni, ed., *Il Filo Sottile. L'Ostpolitik vaticana di Agostino Casaroli* (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 2006). For the German peace activists, see Daniel Gerster, *Friedensdialoge im Kalten Krieg. Eine Geschichte der Katholiken in der Bundesrepublik 1957–1983* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2012), 102–3.

<sup>15</sup>"Maulkorb getauscht," *Der Spiegel*, October 4, 1971 (<https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-43230964.html>).

Mindszenty, the magazine concluded, “was a useful figure for the anticommunist Pope Pius XII during the Cold War. But he became annoying for the Vatican since John XXIII and Paul VI had begun to negotiate with the East hoping for more liberal church policies.”<sup>16</sup> The differences between the Vatican and Mindszenty may have been exaggerated by *Der Spiegel*, but they certainly revealed rifts between Catholics that the Second Vatican Council had further opened.

Some conservative Catholics celebrated Mindszenty, who represented for them traditionalist Catholicism, the anti-modernist church of the pre-Second Vatican Council era.<sup>17</sup> They saw in him someone who withstood the tides of radical political, economic, and cultural change that characterized the period since the 1960s. For them détente and dialogue, the new phase in the Cold War, was merely another symptom of the much more comprehensive political, social, and cultural decline of Western societies. Such views collided with new initiatives for a “Christian-Marxist Dialogue,” a movement in the Catholic Church that had its center in Vienna, where Mindszenty resided.<sup>18</sup> Because of these controversies, Mindszenty’s visits created problems for those Catholics who either represented the Vatican and its policy or who had sympathies for the old cardinal without fully agreeing with his political and social attitudes. They could bridge such contradictions by emphasizing his extraordinary life as a Catholic martyr or his credentials as an opponent to various totalitarian regimes. Such nuances were not easy, however, because the cardinal never really toned down his staunch anticommunism or his anti-reformist tendencies.

In his Bamberg speech on Pentecost Sunday, as in other statements, Mindszenty openly condemned the communist regime in Hungary. He described the current time as a “desert” where only a few “oases” were left that could ensure the survival of the Hungarian nation and a few guardians (“Mahner”) of the nation who would make a renaissance possible.<sup>19</sup> The cardinal compared the communists to the Mongolians who had attacked medieval Hungary in the thirteenth century. Their politics showed, according to Mindszenty, “the hand of the devil.” In short: the country had reached its lowest point in history.<sup>20</sup> The high number of abortions, which had been made more accessible in Hungary in 1960, was a sign of the “nearing end of the nation.”<sup>21</sup> The latter could also be understood as a comment on the

<sup>16</sup>“Maulkorb getauscht,” *Der Spiegel*, October 4, 1971.

<sup>17</sup>Among the most influential figures in South and North America who celebrated Mindszenty as the embodiment of their political agenda were Phyllis Schlafly, the organizer of the “silent majority” in the United States. Cf. Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); even more radical was the movement started by the Brazilian professor Plínio de Corrêa. See Roberto de Mattei, *The Crusader of the 20th Century: Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing Publishing, 1998).

<sup>18</sup>Heléna Tóth and Todd H. Weir, “Religion and Socialism in the Long 1960s: From Antithesis to Dialogue in Eastern and Western Europe,” *Special Issue 2: Religion and Socialism in the Long 1960s of Contemporary European History* (2020): 127–38; also Heléna Tóth, “Dialogue as a Strategy of Struggle. Religious Politics in East Germany, 1957–1968,” *Contemporary European History* (2020): 1–16. See also the classic study by Paul Mojzes, *Christian-Marxist Dialogue in Eastern Europe* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981).

<sup>19</sup>The text of the homily can be found in “Mindszenty: Gegenwart mit der Zeit nach Stephans Tod vergleichbar,” *St. Heinrichsblatt. Kirchenzeitung für das Erzbistum Bamberg* 79 (May 28, 1972): 2.

<sup>20</sup>The newspaper *Fürther Nachrichten*, May 23, 1972, even used this quotation as the headline: “Der Teufel regiert” (“The Devil Rules,” with the subtitle: “Harsh Critique of the Communist Leadership”).

<sup>21</sup>What he failed to mention, however, was that this happened *after* the Stalinists had tried to completely outlaw abortions in the early 1950s, without much success. Cf. Andrea Petö, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary: The Abortion Trials of 1952,” *Hungarian Studies Review* XXIX (2002): 49–76.

current discussions on abortion all over the West and particularly in West Germany and the United States, where the cardinal went on to visit numerous cities and communities in 1973 and 1974.<sup>22</sup> In Bamberg, Mindszenty called abortion a “fashion” that was spreading all over the world.

Although Catholics in West Germany might not have shared overwhelmingly Mindszenty’s harsh condemnation of the West, they could still support him as a powerful symbol of the Catholic Church. By 1972, Mindszenty had been an example of a man with an “extraordinary life” for a quarter of a century.<sup>23</sup> His experiences in communist prisons and the fifteen long years as an uncomfortable “guest” of the US embassy in Budapest had added to his earlier media image. Already in February 1949, the cardinal had made it to the cover of *Time* magazine, which depicted him in front of a blood red prison window with the caption “To die is to gain.” By this time, he had become the undisputed leader of anticommunism in Hungary, mobilizing hundreds of thousands who were opposed to the establishment of a Stalinist dictatorship. In the 1950s, two motion pictures fictionalized his martyrdom.<sup>24</sup>

Now, twenty years later, although many people had come to see this “living legend” in person, they did not necessarily subscribe to the specifics of his worldview. For many Catholics, Mindszenty was a modern martyr who celebrated Mass in a church that had once accommodated the relics of medieval Hungarian saints. Although these relics were only a faint memory, Mindszenty was alive and real, even if he had to use a microphone so that the crowd could hear his voice through loudspeakers inside and outside the church.

The local journals tried to capture the phenomenon of an ancient religious practice—a Mass in remembrance of a saint—in a mostly secularized context. One example shows how Mindszenty was described as an extraordinary persona with a body that held great symbolic meaning: “The image is deeply moving: This prince of the Roman Catholic Church, marked by the eighty years on his back but more by the suffering of many years of Communist imprisonments, it [the suffering] could not break his spirit and it could not bow his dignity.”<sup>25</sup>

Another journalist wrote that the cardinal was “marked by the suffering of the last decades” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 23, 1972, 16) Even the photographers seemed to have tried to capture the story inscribed in the body and the face of Mindszenty (see [figure 2](#)).

<sup>22</sup>In the early 1970s, only a small part of Catholics challenged the church in the abortion debate, but many Catholic laypeople had already been alienated from the Vatican because of Paul VI’s Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968). Cf. Kimba Allie Tichenor, “Protecting Unborn Life in the Secular Age: The Catholic Church and the West German Abortion Debate, 1969–1989,” *Central European History* 47, no. 3 (2014): 612–45. On the negative impact of *Humanae Vitae*, see Katharina Ebner and Maria Mesner, “Attempted Disobedience: *Humanae Vitae* in West Germany and Austria,” *The Schism of ‘68*, ed. Alana Harris (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 121–58.

<sup>23</sup>For the theoretical discussion of this, cf. Willem Frijhoff, “Witnesses to the Other: Incarnate Longings—Saints and Heroes, Idols and Models,” *Studia liturgica* 34, no. 1 (2004): 1–25.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Árpád v. Klimó, “Die Gehirnwäsche des Kardinals. Die Repräsentation des Falles Mindszenty in westlichen Spielfilmen (1950–55),” *Über die österreichische Geschichte hinaus*, Festschrift für Gernot Heiss zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Friedrich Edelmayer, Margarete Grandner, Jiří Pešek, and Oliver Rathkolb (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2012), 215–28.

<sup>25</sup>Original: “Erschütternd das Bild des von der Last seiner 80 Jahre und mehr noch in jahrzehntelanger kommunistischer Haft erlittenen Leiden gezeichneten Kirchenfürsten, was seinen Geist indes nicht zu brechen und seine Würde nicht zu beugen vermocht hatte.” *Fränkischer Tag*, May 23, 1972.



**Figure 2.** Mindszenty, center, Archbishop Schneider to his left (ErzbfAB, Rep. 80, Slg. 6-3, Nr. 3309).

Of course, someone who did not know the story of the man could have thought that he was just an old man. But the superimposing of the extraordinary life on the body and face of the man gave those Catholics who did not necessarily support Mindszenty's strict anticommunist and antiliberal ideas a chance to admire the person and his strong faith. This was certainly true of Pope Paul VI and the archbishop of Bamberg, Josef Schneider. Schneider, who had participated in the Second Vatican Council as a council father, was a Catholic reformer who was not known for being critical of Vatican *Ostpolitik*. But he, otherwise not sharing Mindszenty's extremely conservative positions within the church, still praised him as "a martyr who was ready to heroically sacrifice in the defense of faith and human rights."<sup>26</sup> His status as a martyr bridged political differences. This becomes even clearer when we look at a short comment in the Bamberg church weekly, *St. Heinrichsblatt*, where the author, Hans Zech, states: "We encounter a personage that has almost become a legend, a symbolic figure of the harsh fate that the churches of the East have endured in this century. We experienced a personality almost not from this world, a person brutal violence cannot break but only elevate: Cardinal József Mindszenty."<sup>27</sup>

In the same short editorial of the Catholic weekly, Zech criticized the Vietnam War—a war strongly supported by Mindszenty<sup>28</sup>—as causing "national misery" for the United States, concluding: "Will Nixon find a solution during or after the talks in Moscow, a solution which is, according to the Vatican 'possible, necessary and urgent'?"

Discussing Mindszenty's martyrdom in a general way allowed this Catholic journalist to praise Mindszenty and his life of suffering, and, at the same time, to stay loyal to Vatican policy and support Nixon's negotiations with Moscow. In this phase of the Cold War, many Catholics needed to praise Mindszenty as a "legend" and "martyr," while at the same time supporting the Vatican's conciliatory politics toward the communist states.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Vasari, *Der verbannte Kardinal*, 8.

<sup>27</sup>Hans Zech, "Auf ein Wort, liebe Leser!," *Heinrichsblatt*, May 23, 1972.

<sup>28</sup>In a letter to US President Lyndon Johnson, Mindszenty qualified the Vietnam War as a "convenient and justified... punishing action." National Archives of the United States, NARA RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Hungary, Subject Files Relating to Cardinal Mindszenty 1956-72, Box 3, SOC 12 Cardinal File, Jan-Sept 1965. Letter of Cardinal Mindszenty to President Johnson, Budapest, March 21, 1965.



The attitudes of exiled Hungarian priests, for whom anticommunism was part of their self-understanding, show an even more complex picture in their reactions to Mindszenty.

Although Mindszenty's martyrdom could be understood in a more general Catholic way, almost apolitically, this was not the case for those hundreds of Hungarian priests, nuns, and monks who had suffered persecution by the communist regime, who had been arrested, tortured, imprisoned in labor camps, and forced into exile. For most of them, anticommunism was a key element to their identity, an important part of how they understood their lives and told their biographical narratives. Discussions about trusting the Soviets and engaging in negotiations for them, therefore, meant that the proponents of dialogue or rapprochement had not understood, and, most of all, not experienced, the terrible reality of communist regimes. That said, almost all of them had lived in the West much longer than Mindszenty, mostly escaping during the 1956 revolution or even before.

For example, when Mindszenty arrived in Austria, conflicts arose with the bishop of the Hungarian minority in the Burgenland, an Austrian of Hungarian descent, who found that the cardinal overstepped his authority.<sup>29</sup> In this case, a conflict over the question of who was entitled to represent this specific group of Austrian-Hungarian Catholics combined with the fear, expressed by many in Austria, that Mindszenty's loud anticommunism could harm the good relations with communist neighboring countries.

Similarly critical of Mindszenty were those priests and theologians, some Hungarian Jesuits among them, who actively supported the Christian-Marxist Dialogue, a movement that had started at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Vienna.<sup>30</sup> They expressed concerns about Mindszenty's "narrow political views" and said that his conservatism could be "harmful to the Hungarian Catholic Church."<sup>31</sup>

Very critical of Mindszenty's confrontational course against the communist regime in Hungary were also those Catholic priests who kept a close relationship with representatives of the Catholic Church in Hungary, a church that was trying to survive inside a hostile dictatorship. The 1964 agreement between the Vatican and the regime had not brought much relief although it did bring some form of "normalization" and the possibility for Hungarian priests to visit Rome and Western countries. The participation of bishops from Hungary in the second part of the Second Vatican Council had opened channels of communication between the beleaguered church and Rome, but the relationship remained difficult and full of suspicions on both sides, partly because some of them were informants to the Hungarian Secret Police.<sup>32</sup>

Even the priests closest to Mindszenty, his secretaries and advisers, represented different positions and painted different images of the cardinal in their publications or statements. One of the most influential priests around him was his secretary, József Vecsey (1913–1977), who organized and perhaps even, as some claimed, "manipulated"

<sup>29</sup>According to Dr. Ferenc Galambos of the Hungarian Cultural Association of the Burgenland, cf. Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára (ÁBTTL) 3.2.9. R-8-009/2, "Vecchio" II, 22–24.

<sup>30</sup>One of the more critical priests was the Hungarian Benedictine Lothar Sümegh, OSB, who wrote about the necessity of dialogue after the Second Vatican Council. Sümegh also invited Mindszenty in 1972 to the annual retreat of the Hungarian priests in Austria. Cf. ÁBTTL 3.2.9. R-8-009/2, "Vecchio" II, 14.

<sup>31</sup>ÁBTTL 3.2.9. R-8-009/1, "Vecchio." Report on Jesuits, Budapest, November 11, 1971, 188.

<sup>32</sup>See Fejérdy, *Pressed by a Double Loyalty*; see also Árpád von Klimó, "Hungary and Vatican II: The Catholic Church between Communist Control and New Religious Movements," *Vatican II behind the Iron Curtain*, ed. Piotr Kosicki (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 50–74.

Mindszenty's activities and visits.<sup>33</sup> Vecsey was a generation younger than Mindszenty and not yet sixty at the time, and he came from the same West Hungarian region as the cardinal and had fled Hungary in 1952. For some time, he worked at Radio Free Europe in Munich as the editor of the Catholic program. Afterward, Vecsey worked as a priest in Switzerland and France until he became Mindszenty's secretary in 1971. Since 1956, Vecsey had published various books about the cardinal, mostly hagiographic in character.<sup>34</sup> Some of the other priests in Mindszenty's surroundings did not trust Vecsey; they even called him the cardinal's "bad angel."<sup>35</sup> They were concerned that he would push Mindszenty too far toward political activities the Vatican could find objectionable.

Another direction was represented by Father József Közi-Horváth (1903–1988), a writer and pastor of the Catholic Hungarian community in Munich who also played an important role in the propagation of the cult around Mindszenty. As a young priest, Közi-Horváth had supported the Christian Socialist movement.<sup>36</sup> In 1939, he became the secretary of the Catholic mass organization *Actio Catholica* and sat as a member of the ruling *Unified Christian Party* in the Hungarian Parliament. Közi-Horváth was known as the only member of parliament who protested against the German occupation of the country in March 1944. In 1948, disappointed by the lack of a new democratic beginning, he left Hungary and escaped to western Europe, where he remained active in the Christian Democratic movement of central European exiles until the mid-1960s.<sup>37</sup> It was Közi-Horváth who gave a long speech during Mindszenty's visit in Bamberg on the Sunday afternoon after the Mass. He portrayed Mindszenty mostly as a Hungarian patriot and enemy of National Socialism but also as a protector of the German minority. This was a different image of the cardinal that could appeal to a more liberal West German society.

Debates around Cardinal Mindszenty reflected a number of conflicts among Catholics in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. These questions included not only the

<sup>33</sup>József Vecsey was born in western Hungary, like Mindszenty (Nemeshegyes, Zala), and died in Switzerland. He was ordained in 1938 in Szombathely, studied theology and became a teacher. In 1952, he escaped to the West. First, he worked for Radio Free Europe (1955–1959), then served as a priest in St. Gallen (Switzerland) and in Paris (1960–1966). In 1971, Mindszenty called him, as secretary, to the Pazmaneum in Vienna. After the cardinal passed away, he worked for the Mindszenty Foundation and its Archive in Liechtenstein (<http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/V/Vecsey.html>).

<sup>34</sup>Vecsey had since 1954 published articles in the Roman *Katolikus Szemle* and in the Hungarian exile periodicals *Életünk* and *Új Európa*. In 1957, he published the book *Mindszenty József* (Munich: Selbstverlag, 1957), and later *Mindszenty-Dokumentation* (St. Pölten, 1957–1958, St. Gallen: Selbstverlag, 1958–1959). Some of his other books were *Der Prozess Mindszenty*. Dokumente (Munich: Selbstverlag, 1961); *Mindszenty the Man* [together with Phillis Schlafly] (St. Louis: Mindszenty Foundation, 1973).

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Balogh, Mindszenty ÁBTL 3.2.5. O–8–552/12. 79. fol. Report of "Dér" [i.e., the intelligence officer Oszkár Kiss] on his meeting with Archbishop Casaroli, January 9, 1973; Mészáros, *A száműzött bíboros szolgálatában Mindszenty József titkárnak napi jegyzetei (1972–1975)* (Abaliget: Lámpás Kiadó, 2000), 28. Record of June 26, 1972.

<sup>36</sup>Barankovics Foundation (<https://barankovics.hu/keresztenydemokracia-adatbazis/ki-kicsoda/kozi-horvath-jozsef-dr>).

<sup>37</sup>On Közi-Horváth's activities in Hungary after the war, see Jenő Gergely, "Towards the One-Party State: Nascent Christian Democracy in Hungary," *Christian Democracy in Europe since 1945* (London: Routledge, 2004), 142–57. On his role in the Christian Democratic Union of central Europe, see Piotr H. Kosicki and Sławomir Lukaszewicz, *Christian Democracy Across the Iron Curtain* (New York: Springer, 2018), 226, 228, 246. Cf. also Joseph Közi-Horváth, "The Aims of the Christian Democratic Union," in *Christian Democracy in Central Europe: Achievements and Aspirations of the Christian Democratic Movement* (New York: Christian Democratic Union of Europe, 1952), 5–8.

relationship between the church and communist regimes but also questions about the representation of the Hungarian exiled Catholics in Austria, West Germany, and other Western societies. For many, Mindszenty was still the primate of the church he had headed since 1945, while others did not take his authority for granted. Some would admire him as a martyr even though they did not share his political views or his conservative attitudes in rapidly modernizing societies. But Mindszenty's triumphant visit to Bamberg not only revealed conflicts and complex reactions among Catholics but also covered up the deep crisis of Hungarian émigré politics in the West during that time.

### Mindszenty, the Hungarian Diaspora and the Decline of Anticommunism

One specific group within the Hungarian diaspora in the West was particularly prominent in the propagation of the cult of Cardinal Mindszenty: they called themselves "freedom fighters" and cultivated the memory of the 1956 revolution against the Stalinist system and the Soviet invasion.<sup>38</sup> They represented a very loud minority among the Hungarian diaspora.

Others, especially those Hungarians who had fled the country years after the 1956 revolution, about ten thousand in number, seemed to have been less interested in politics and more interested in creating better living conditions.

Shortly before Mindszenty's visit, the Hungarian state security apparatus, which closely watched the Hungarian diaspora, noticed that the most active, right-wing émigré organizations were in decline. This was more than just wishful thinking. The reasons for this decline were manifold. One of them was simply time. The memory of the 1956 revolution was waning, and it was not enough to commemorate every "round anniversary" of the events that represented the suffering of Hungarians (and others) under a communist dictatorship. The extremely dynamic West German economy produced so many jobs that by 1966 most of the about fifteen thousand refugees the country had accepted a decade before were mostly well-integrated into society.<sup>39</sup> Some of them had married Germans, accepted German citizenship, or declared themselves to be ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*). In this context, fewer and fewer Hungarians were interested in active participation or even passive support of the émigré organizations, especially the extreme right-wing ones.

Also, in stark contrast to the cardinal, these former Hungarians had not been in isolation since 1956. Still, they had come to Bamberg in May 1972 to celebrate the cardinal and Hungarian culture. The local Bavarian press was impressed by the number of Hungarian émigrés paying homage to the cardinal during his visit in Bamberg. They counted several thousand Hungarians, some of whom had come from many places in western Europe and from overseas.<sup>40</sup> One newspaper wrote that "On Pentecost, Bamberg was Hungarian."<sup>41</sup> Notably, this was long before Bamberg became a World Heritage site and tourist destination. Further, the local press wrote that Mindszenty was "a symbol for the Hungarian people, unified in the Roman-Catholic faith and a symbol for national unity."<sup>42</sup> This ignored the

<sup>38</sup>This was the group the Hungarian state security apparatus was mostly interested in. In their files, they might have exaggerated their isolation and the conflicts within the Hungarian diaspora.

<sup>39</sup>According to a report on the Hungarian emigration in West Germany, 1966, ÁBTL 3. 2. 5. O-8-822/2, "Németországi Magyar Szervezetek Központi Szövetsége és Tagszervezetek," 2, 123.

<sup>40</sup>Vasari (Emil Csonka) counted 3,500 Hungarians and 5,000 visitors overall. Cf. Vasari, *Der verbannte Kardinal*, 108. Adolf Bauer of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* counted 4,000 Hungarians, among which 600 youth.

<sup>41</sup>*Fränkischer Tag*, May 23, 1972, title page.

<sup>42</sup>*Fränkischer Tag*, May 23, 1972, title page.

fact that a full third of the Hungarian population was Calvinist or Lutheran. The cardinal reminded the audience that the Hungarian diaspora was responsible for safeguarding the nation, the family, and Hungarian national traditions.

Many journalists found that the gathering demonstrated a strong symbolic relationship between young people in allegedly “authentic” folk costume and the octogenarian. However, this was basically a show of the Hungarian *Gymnasium Burg Kastl*, a high school only a few kilometers away from Bamberg. It was the leadership of that unique school, the only Hungarian institute of secondary education in the Western world, that organized the celebrations. The school had been founded in 1957 with support from the Bavarian state government, the West German Ministry for Expellees (*Vertriebenenministerium*), which had not only supported German expellees but also eastern European refugees with money from the West German Catholic Bishops Conference.<sup>43</sup> Many of the teachers had been Benedictine monks, an order with a long tradition in Hungarian secondary education. The pupils came from Hungarian émigré families from western Europe, and some came even from the United States, Canada, and Latin America. In 1972, the Catholic priest Ferenc Harangozó (1908–1991) was the managing director of the school.<sup>44</sup>

Harangozó had served almost a decade (1948–1956) in various Soviet labor camps before he fled to Austria. From 1960 to 1973, he taught at Burg Kastl until he became one of Mindszenty’s secretaries, an event that demonstrates the close relationship between the school and Mindszenty’s Austrian home, the *Pazmaneum* in Vienna.<sup>45</sup> From the perspective of the communist Hungarian state security services, Burg Kastl Gymnasium educated its almost three hundred pupils in an “irredentist” spirit because they used the old Hungarian crest of arms with the crown and had a map of greater Hungary on display inside the school.<sup>46</sup>

Burg Kastl and its pupils and the Hungarian Boy and Girl Scouts gathered in Bamberg represented the ideals and hopes of Mindszenty and his followers: Hungarian youth educated in the spirit of “nation,” “faith,” and “tradition.” Wherever he would later go, the cardinal would always urge the Hungarian diaspora to raise their children in the national Hungarian spirit. But this was, as he would hear everywhere, an uphill struggle. The younger generations of the Hungarian diaspora quickly integrated into their dynamically developing host societies. [Figure 3](#), which shows Mindszenty receiving flowers from a young girl in Hungarian costume in Bamberg, therefore, does not show the full picture.

If we look at the audience (see [figure 4](#)), we can see that popular youth culture, in the form of what was considered “long hair” at the time, was also visible among the attendees of Mindszenty’s speech in Bamberg.

This indicates that not all visitors shared the same strictly conservative attitudes that Mindszenty and his followers propagated. We, therefore, have to ask what other motivations they might have had to gather around the eighty-year-old Hungarian primate.

<sup>43</sup><https://www.kastlumni.eu/iskolánktörténete/>. See also Nándor Dreisziger, *Church and Society in Hungary and in the Hungarian Diaspora* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 204.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. “Harangozó Ferenc,” *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* (<http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/H/Harangoz%C3%B3.html>).

<sup>45</sup>In 1968, the school received half million Deutsche Mark (DM) from the West German Ministry for Expellees. ÁBTL (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, Budapest), 2. 2. 4. 0–8-822/3 “Németországi Magyar emigráns szervezetek, 33.

<sup>46</sup>ÁBTL 2. 2. 4. 0–8-822/3, “Németországi Magyar emigráns szervezetek,” 204. “Javaslat” (no date, written between November 1975 and November 1976).



**Figure 3.** Mindszenty receives flowers from a young girl in Hungarian costume, probably on Saturday, May 20, 1972 (Hungarian Dance and Song Evening). (ErzbfAB, Rep. 80, Slg. 6-3, Nr. 3299).

For one thing, the Hungarian diaspora did not have many occasions to come together, and since 1956, they never gained the attention of the West German media. Now they had a chance to assemble, to get noticed by the media, and, most importantly, to celebrate the living legend who would later (1986) be nominated for sainthood.<sup>47</sup> But as for Catholics, Mindszenty's visit created both opportunities and problems for the Hungarian diaspora: it gave the diaspora an opportunity to celebrate their community and certain traditions and receive attention also from the German and local media, but it also led to inner conflicts and to questions about its place in West German society.

### Mindszenty, Hungarian Right-Wing “Freedom Fighters,” and West Germany under Willy Brandt

Although anticommunism was in decline in West Germany, Cold War polarization and the question of the *Ostverträge*, the treaties with communist governments in eastern Europe, could still be mobilized for political gain, especially because these treaties touched upon sensitive questions of the eastern borders and the territories from where Germans had been expelled.<sup>48</sup> With this, the oppositional Christian Democratic Union (CDU) gained ground in various regional elections and held an almost absolute majority on the federal level even though the party itself was not fully unified in its opposition to *Ostpolitik*. Still, this was in strong contrast to Austria, where anticommunism had to be toned down and all political parties respected the idea of “neutrality” in the conflict among the superpowers.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup>On February 2019, with the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and Pope Francis announced that Cardinal Mindszenty was declared “venerable” a major step toward beatification in the Catholic Church (<http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/cardinal-jozsef-mindszenty-venerable-crime-fighter>).

<sup>48</sup>For an overview of the research, see Oliver Bange, “Ostpolitik: Etappen und Desiderate der Forschung. Zur internationalen Einordnung von Willy Brandts Außenpolitik,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 46 (2006): 713–36.

<sup>49</sup>After the *Staatsvertrag* of 1955, the Cold War in Austria “ended,” as wrote Wolfgang Mueller “Österreich wurde—je nach politischer Präferenz—zu einem, ‘Musterbeispiel friedlicher Koexistenz,’



**Figure 4.** Mindszenty and audience during the folk dance and song evening on May 20, 1972 (ErzbfAB, Rep. 80, Slg. 6-3, Nr. 3301).

When the social democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt brought the most important treaties with the Soviet Union and other communist states to the German Federal Parliament in the early 1970s, it passed only with extremely narrow majorities. As it happened, after the opening of the Stasi-Archives, the East German secret police paid a lot of money to bribe two CDU/CSU representatives to vote against their own parties to ensure the necessary votes.<sup>50</sup> In this context, a visit by Cardinal Mindszenty had much broader political meaning for German domestic politics than an ordinary visit by an aged church leader.

Another aspect of the debate on communism during the 1960s and 1970s was its relation to the politics of memory in West Germany. At that time, a growing number of liberals associated anticommunism, not completely without reason, with right-wing political ideas.<sup>51</sup> Left-leaning liberals argued that the narrative of anticommunism had helped right-wing extremists, fascists, and even Nazi war criminals to find a place within the democratic societies of the West or even gain new elite functions as “specialists” in secret services or other operations.<sup>52</sup> Such accusations extended to former allies of Nazi Germany like Hungarians,

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wie es Nikita Chruschtschow formulierte, oder, in den Worten von Papst Paul VI. anlässlich seines Pastoralbesuches 1971, zu einer ‘Insel der Seligen,’ die sich friedlich über den unruhigen Fluten des Ost-West-Konfliktes erhob.” Cf. Wolfgang Mueller, “Kalter Krieg, Neutralität und politische Kultur in Österreich,” *APUZ*, 2008 (<https://www.bpb.de/apuz/32264/kalter-krieg-neutralitaet-und-politische-kultur-in-oesterreich?p=all>). Chancellor Bruno Kreisky said that Austria had “nothing to do” with the Cold War in an announcement on April 20, 1970. Quoted in K. Konrad Ginther, *Neutralität und Neutralitätspolitik. Die österreichische Neutralität zwischen Schweizer Muster und sowjetischer Koexistenzdoktrin* (Wien and New York 1975), 113. This attitude was shared by a large part of the population. See Otto Schulmeister, “Die Einstellung der Österreicher zu Staatsvertrag und Neutralität,” *25 Jahre Staatsvertrag. Die Protokolle des Staats—und Festaktes* (Wien: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1980), 229–36.

<sup>50</sup>In the meantime, one of the two missing votes and how the Stasi had paid the representative has been identified without doubt. Cf. Andreas Grau, “Auf der Suche nach den fehlenden Stimmen 1972. Zu den Nachwirkungen des gescheiterten Misstrauensvotums Barzel/Brandt,” *Historisch-Politische Mitteilungen* 16, no. 1 (2009): 1–18.

<sup>51</sup>There are numerous examples in Wippermann, *Heilige Hetzjagd*, and Körner, *Die “rote Gefahr.”*

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Andrew Beattie’s article in Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk, and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (Berghahn Books, 2012). On the “specialists” in the United States, see Richard Breitman, *Hitler’s Shadow: Nazi War Criminals, US Intelligence, and the Cold War* (Darby, PA: DIANE Publishing, 2010).

Croatians, and Ukrainians. Since the 1970s, the growing debates around the meaning of anti-communism developed into a major conflict on memory politics focusing on the Holocaust. As we will see in the context of Mindszenty's most loyal public supporters, the suspicion of a connection between (extreme) right-wing politics and anticommunism was not completely unfounded.

The importance of the Cold War for West German society also explains why there was so much media attention around Mindszenty's visit. Radio Free Europe broadcast live the Mass Mindszenty celebrated in St Michael's Church in Bamberg. The radio station, which was based in Munich, had been one of the major contributors to Cold War culture.<sup>53</sup> As Melissa Feinberg has demonstrated in her book on the early Cold War, this was a culture that both Western and Eastern propaganda had constructed, creating images of "totalitarian regimes," concepts of "truth" and "lies," thus creating a specific atmosphere of the time and its emotional regime.<sup>54</sup> Since the 1960s, however, the Cold War culture in West Germany had changed. While the new SPD/FDP coalition government in Bonn discussed a possible closing of Radio Free Europe, which they regarded as a "child of the Cold War," the radio station had been advised, prior to the Munich Olympic Games that started at the end of August, to keep the "Olympic peace" and not provoke the Soviets or other communist countries in the months leading up to the games.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the improvement of relations between Bonn and eastern European governments, including the Kádár regime in Budapest, also altered the attitude of the West German government toward the Hungarian diaspora and refugees from Hungary in general.

Already in 1965, émigré politicians were shocked when the Bavarian police handed over a Hungarian refugee to the communist authorities.<sup>56</sup> This case was so unprecedented that members of the Bundestag required an explanation from the government. The Bavarian police, in this case, claimed that the young Hungarian, a locksmith, had illegally crossed the border and had stated that he did not suffer from political persecution but had only sought a better paid job in the West.<sup>57</sup> For the "freedom fighters" and their newspaper *Nemzetőr*, published in Munich, this was a major scandal. According to their ideologically filtered worldview, anyone in communist Hungary was a victim of communism and

<sup>53</sup> Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> Melissa Feinberg, *Curtain of Lies: The Battle over Truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> For discussions about closing the station or moving it out of West Germany, see Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 175–85. See also Gerhard Wettig, *Broadcasting and Détente: Eastern Politics and Their Implications for East-West Relations* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1977). The demand for RFE not to break the "Olympic peace," is mentioned in Gyula Borbándi, *Magyarok az angol kertben: A Szabad Európa Rádió története* (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1996), 371.

<sup>56</sup> This was part of a larger action when about 400 refugees were deported by the Bavarian police from the refugee camp in Zirndorf near Nuremberg. The action was also protested by the Western Allies. See: Lauren Stokes, "The Permanent Refugee Crisis in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949–," *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 19–44, esp. 32–34.

<sup>57</sup> A representative of the West German parliament had asked the government why the young Hungarian was sent back. The answer is in *Deutscher Bundestag* — 5. Wahlperiode — 10. Sitzung. Bonn, Donnerstag, 2. December (Bonn: Universitätsdruckerei, 1965), 401–2.

would therefore be eligible for political asylum in the West.<sup>58</sup> The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) also found the action of the Bavarian police questionable for similar reasons.<sup>59</sup> A year later, the West German ministers of the interior of the federal states decided to allow eastern Europeans to stay, even in cases in which they had been denied asylum.<sup>60</sup> This, according to Patrice Poutrus, was less a sign of increased anticommunism and more related to general trends toward liberalization in West Germany. Similar tendencies finally led to the loss of power of the CDU/CSU and the electoral triumph of Willy Brandt's SPD, who was now in coalition with the liberal FDP in 1969. The more liberal West Germany became, the more isolated those groups of Hungarians who propagated conservative or even extreme right-wing ideas were.<sup>61</sup>

After Willy Brandt's election, the Ministry for the Expellees was dissolved and integrated as a department into the Ministry of the Interior. With this, the financial support for anticommunist eastern European émigré associations and media was drastically reduced. Émigré organizations tried to make up for these losses by soliciting donations from rich Hungarians living in the United States or Canada. In September 1970, Bonn froze its funding to the Hungarian associations.<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, anticommunist ideas and groups were hoping to profit from the increased polarization between supporters of the SPD/FDP government and from the opposition to *Ostpolitik*. In particular, the Bavarian partner of the CDU, the CSU, heightened the controversy regarding Brandt's negotiations with Moscow and Warsaw.<sup>63</sup> For the CSU and representatives of the German expellee lobby groups, *Ostpolitik* signified the permanent abandoning of former German territories in eastern Europe because the communist states insisted on guarantees for the borders of 1945.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, most expellee activists supported Mindszenty's attitude not to negotiate with the East.<sup>65</sup> However, after the CDU and the SPD agreed on a compromise, the treaties passed the Bundestag and expellee activists "found themselves more politically sidelined than ever."<sup>66</sup>

The debate on the treaties with the Soviet Union and Poland, the so-called *Ostverträge*, reached its peak almost exactly at the same time as when Mindszenty visited the country.

<sup>58</sup> ÁBTL 2. 2. 4. 0-8-822/3. "Németerszági Magyar emigráns szervezetek 3," 119.

<sup>59</sup> "Abgeschoben," FAZ, November 19, 1965, 2. For a more detailed report, see cf. Georg Brunner, "Ungarn und das Problem der legalen Flucht," *Osteuropa* 16, no. 4 (April 1966): 246–51.

<sup>60</sup> Patrice G. Poutrus, "Zuflucht im Nachkriegsdeutschland," in *Handbuch Staat und Migration vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Jochen Oltmer (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 853–93, esp. 880; cf. also Patrice G. Poutrus, "Asyl im Kalten Krieg: eine Parallelgeschichte aus dem geteilten Nachkriegsdeutschland," *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 2, no. 2 (2005): 273–88.

<sup>61</sup> About the liberalization of West German society, see Bernhard Dietz, Christopher Neumaier, Andreas Rödder, ed., *Gab es den Wertewandel? Neue Forschungen zum gesellschaftlich-kulturellen Wandel seit den 1960er-Jahren* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014).

<sup>62</sup> ÁBTL 2. 2. 4. 0-8-822/3; ÁVH Objektum dosszié, III/I. "Németerszági Magyar emigráns szervezetek," 49. Report, Budapest September 24, 1970.

<sup>63</sup> Frank Boesch, "Abgrenzen, eingrenzen," FAZ, September 10, 2019 ([https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/die-gegenwart/frank-boesch-abgrenzen-eingrenzen-15455687.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex\\_2](https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/die-gegenwart/frank-boesch-abgrenzen-eingrenzen-15455687.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2)).

<sup>64</sup> Pertti Ahonen, "German Expellee Organizations: Between Revisionism and Reconciliation," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 45 (2005): 353–73. See also Gerhard Hopp, *Machtfaktor auch ohne Machtbasis? Die Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft und die CSU* (Regensburg: VS Verlag, 2010), 119–36.

<sup>65</sup> One example is "Warschau bedrängt den Vatikan," *Ostpreussenblatt*, November 17, 1971.

<sup>66</sup> Ahonen, "German Expellee Organizations," 360.



On May 17, 1972, only three days before the cardinal arrived in Bavaria, the West German parliament, the *Bundestag*, voted in favor of the treaties.<sup>67</sup> One of the main reasons why the CDU/CSU's opposition to the treaties mostly failed was the fact that Washington, DC, after some hesitation, decided that a rejection of the *Ostverträge* by the Bundestag could jeopardize Nixon's own détente policies and so the US administration chose to support Brandt.<sup>68</sup>

One of the increasingly marginalized anticommunist exile organizations, which strongly supported Mindszenty, was the "European Congress of Free Hungarians" (*ECFH*, orig. *Európai Szabad Magyarok Kongresszus*). On the morning the cardinal arrived from Vienna, the chairing committee of the *ECFH* held a private meeting with Mindszenty in the residence of the archbishop of Munich. The "Congress" had been founded only a year earlier in an attempt to reverse the loss of members and of activists of the West German and other émigrés' organizations. All these were dominated by former 1956 "freedom fighters." The founding of the *ECFH* was a result of their new "European" strategy, which had three components: the first was the creation of a European organization to coordinate activities of Hungarian émigré groups from various western European countries; the second was to work closely with other national émigré organizations, including anticommunist exile groups from the Baltic states, Belorussia, Croatia, Russia, and Ukraine; and the third component was to appeal directly to European organizations such as the Council of Europe and the parliament of the European Economic Community. Thus, the "free Hungarians" decided to have their founding session in Strasbourg, France, where both European institutions were located. One of the concrete aims of this new organization was to protest the beginning of the Helsinki talks of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which were a series of negotiations between NATO and Warsaw pact member states. The idea for the talks was launched in 1969 by the Finnish government and would have enormous consequences for the Cold War and its end.<sup>69</sup> Casaroli signed the Helsinki accord for the Holy See.

The "European Congress of Free Hungarians" represented only a small minority of the Hungarian diaspora. The founders invited only a few émigrés who shared their right-wing ideology. This excluded well-known journalists and writers from the most conspicuous literary magazine of the diaspora, the *Új Latóhatár*, which was published in Munich, and Hungarian exiled labor leaders, like Károly Boda, a member of the SPD. Those "reds," they thought, could not represent the Hungarian nation.

Instead, the leading members of the "Congress" were mostly representatives of the Horthy regime who claimed, like Mindszenty, to continue the "Christian national tradition." The president of the organization was the 82-year-old retired Hungarian General Lajos Dálnoki Veress (1889–1976).<sup>70</sup> During World War II, Dálnoki Veress had served as

<sup>67</sup>Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–90* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), 386–88; Oliver Bange, "Ostpolitik as a Source of Intra-Bloc Tensions," in *NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Intra-bloc Conflicts*, ed. Mary Ann Heiss and S. Victor Papacosma (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2008), 106–21.

<sup>68</sup>Jean-François Juneau, "The Limits of Linkage: The Nixon Administration and Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik, 1969–72," *The International History Review* 33, no. 2 (2011): 277–97.

<sup>69</sup>John Fry, *Helsinki Process: Negotiating Security & Cooperation in Europe* (Darby, PA: DIANE Publishing, 1999). Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny, and Christian Nuenlist, eds., *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965–75* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008). Petri Hakkarainen, *A State of Peace in Europe: West Germany and the CSCE, 1966–1975* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

<sup>70</sup>Lajos Dálnoki Veress served as military attaché in Vienna (1935–1938), and since 1938 he had commanded various infantry and cavalry units. From 1942–44, he was commander of the IX Corps. On October 16, 1944 he was arrested by the Hungarian fascist government. After his retirement, he was arrested

the commander of the 2nd Hungarian Division until he was imprisoned by the Fascist Arrow Cross government in 1944. During the Stalinist period, he was incarcerated again by the communists. Freed during the revolution of 1956, he had headed the World Congress of Hungarians since 1958. Some émigrés regarded Dálnoki Veress as a legitimate national leader because Horthy had appointed him his successor (*Homo regius*). Dálnoki Veress was now an old man and not very active in the organization, but his presidency clearly signaled the political commitments of the organization he headed.

Others led the “European Congress.” One of the most influential émigré activists was the journalist, writer, and poet Tibor Kecskési Tollas (1920–1997), the editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Nemzetőr*.<sup>71</sup> Like other émigré activists, Tollas, who was fifty-one years old in 1972, had a turbulent past. Born into a family of military officers, he served in the Hungarian army during the war, and as a gendarmerie officer in the Jewish Ghetto in Beregszász (today Berehove, Ukraine) during the Holocaust. In 1947, he was sentenced for war crimes and served nine years in prison and in a labor camp until July 1956. He then probably participated in the revolution, though it is not clear in what capacity. After Tollas had fled to Vienna, he founded various publications and became a voice of the 1956 freedom fighter movement. During the 1960s, the Kádár regime organized campaigns against him, and parts of the Hungarian emigration kept their distance from him.

In 1975, Tollas complained that the Austrian Minister of the Interior prohibited a public lecture by him because of a protest by Simon Wiesenthal, and he alleged that a US Hungarian émigré journal, *Magyar Híradó*, had participated in the “dirty campaign” against him.<sup>72</sup> Tollas was afraid that the “friend of the communists,” Willy Brandt, and the social democrats in West Germany, would one day also go after him. Throughout his life, Tollas denied that he was responsible for war crimes. But there was a stark difference between what he said in public and what he said in private.<sup>73</sup> In one meeting of the Hungarian “Political Prisoners” association, Tollas expressed his admiration for Ferenc Fiala (1904–1988), one

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and sentenced to execution following a show trial in 1947. The death penalty was commuted to a prison sentence. Liberated in 1956, he escaped to the West and settled in London. Cf. András Kis, *A magyar közösségtől a földalatti fővezérségig* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1969). “Dálnoki Veress Lajos,” *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon* (<https://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/8ABC03014/03042.htm>).

<sup>71</sup>The paper was founded in Vienna, after the downfall of the revolution of 1956. Until 1963, the journal was edited in Vienna and printed in Munich; after that, the editors moved to Munich. In the first years, the Hungarian and the German (subtitle: “*Donau-Bote*”) editions were published monthly, and the English and French every second month. For an overview of the article see Mária Horák, “A Nemzetőr repretoriuma. 1956–1990” (<https://mek.oszk.hu/04400/04459>). The monthly was partly financed by the *Magyar Harcosok Bajtársi Közössége* (MHBK or World Federation of Hungarian Veterans) and was founded after World War II. See also Jávor Miklós, “Hogyan tovább, elüldözött magyarok? Azonosságok és különbségek a Magyar Harcosok Bajtársi Közössége és a Magyar,” *Acta Historica Hungarica Turiciensia* 28, no. 1. (September 2012) ([http://epa.uz.ua/01400/01445/00007/pdf/EPA01445\\_acta\\_hungarica\\_2012\\_2\\_049-060.pdf](http://epa.uz.ua/01400/01445/00007/pdf/EPA01445_acta_hungarica_2012_2_049-060.pdf)). For some time, the MHBK was involved in intelligence work for a number of Western countries, mostly France, the United States, Britain and West Germany. Cf. Mark Stout, “Émigré Intelligence: Sifting Fact from Fiction,” in *Handbook of Intelligence Studies*, ed. Loch K. Johnson (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 253–68.

<sup>72</sup>ÁBTL 2. 2. 4. 0-8-822/3, “Németországi Magyar emigráns szervezetek,” *Síófok*, February 27, 1975, 194–95. The *Magyar Híradó* was published in New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>73</sup>For the campaign against Tollas by the Kádár regime, see László Juhász, “Tollas Tibor igazsága. 2. Rész. A Fekete füzet rágalmái,” *Kortárs*, April 2006 (<https://www.kortaronline.hu/archivum/2006/04/tollas-tibor-igazsaga.html>).

of the major propagandists of the fascist Hungarian Arrow-Cross movement, who remained active as an editor and author of numerous neo-Nazi writings and periodicals after his flight to West Germany in 1956.<sup>74</sup> Tollas said—according to the Hungarian state security informant who reported on the meeting—“that he [Tollas] honored Fiala’s work and his journal” and that Fiala could write things that he “could not write.”<sup>75</sup> Tollas, in other words, tried to keep extreme right-wing ideas out of the *Nemzetőr*, even while he shared them.<sup>76</sup> After all, the journal depended increasingly on donations from Hungarians in Canada and the United States who did not all agree with extreme right-wing views.

A close collaborator of Tollas was the former secretary to the Hungarian minister of Defense, Dr. Zoltán Makra. Makra left Hungary in 1949 and was very active in the network of former Hungarian officers. He was also supported by the West German secret service (*Organisation Gehlen*) that was built up in part by former Nazis.<sup>77</sup> Like Tollas, Makra was critical of Radio Free Europe and the United States.<sup>78</sup> He mostly worked as a journalist and writer, warning of the dangers of communism.<sup>79</sup> Together with Tollas, he edited the *Nemzetőr*, and they regularly published articles about Mindszenty, even in the years before the cardinal had left the US embassy, a time when most other media ignored him.<sup>80</sup> The monthly also published articles written by Mindszenty himself.<sup>81</sup>

When Mindszenty arrived in Vienna, Tollas and other émigré activists immediately contacted the cardinal.<sup>82</sup> They were hoping that the international prominence and reputation of the octogenarian would give their movement a strong and much needed boost. In a meeting

<sup>74</sup>Ferenc Fiala (1904–1988) studied architecture in Munich and Paris and was a world-class fencer. From 1932, he worked as journalist for *Új Magyarország*. Since the later 1930s, he was engaged in the Arrow Cross movement as a leading journalist. In 1944, he became the chief press officer of the party. In 1946, the People’s Court sentenced him to death for war crimes, but then changed the sentence to imprisonment. In 1956, he fled to West Germany, where he became the editor of the right-wing newspaper *Hídő*. Fiala published, among other books: *Ungarn in Ketten* (Saarbrücken: Hídő, 1957); *Vádoló bitófák. A magyar nemzet igazi sírásói* (with Lajos Marschalkó, London: Hídő, 1958); *Zavaros évek ... A Horthy-korszaktól Kádár Jánosig* (London, 1965; München: Hídő, 1976).

<sup>75</sup>ÁBTL 3.2.4. O-8-830/2, 80. Report Budapest, April 23, 1975.

<sup>76</sup>Gyula Borbándi, who worked for Radio Free Europe and the *Új Láthatár*, characterized Tollas and the *Nemzetőr* as “extremely conservative and nationalist.” Gyula Borbándi, “A magyar emigráció életrajza,” 2001 (<http://mek.niif.hu/03400/03472/03472.pdf>).

<sup>77</sup>Most recently, the activities of the West German secret services have been thoroughly studied by an independent historical commission (UHK). See the following: Thomas Wolf, *Die Entstehung des BND. Aufbau, Finanzierung, Kontrolle* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2018); Jost Dülffer, *Geheimdienst in der Krise. Der BND in den 1960er Jahren* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2018); Sabrina Nowack, *Sicherheitsrisiko NS-Belastung. Personalüberprüfungen im Bundesnachrichtendienst in den 1960er Jahren* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2016). About the tensions between US and West German secret services, see Bernd Stöver, *Die Befreiung vom Kommunismus. Amerikanische Liberation Policy im Kalten Krieg* (Wien: Böhlau, 2002).

<sup>78</sup>Zoltán Makra was born in Arad, in 1915, per CIA document, August 1, 1960 (<https://archive.org/details/MAKRAJANOSZOLTAN-0060/page/n3>).

<sup>79</sup>Zoltán Makra, *Honvédelmi miniszterek szolgálatában: Végzetes döntések korszaka—1940–1944* (Munich: Hídő, 1986). Also see *Kommunismus gestern, heute, morgen*, which was edited by the Association of the Free Press under the editorial guidance of Kristof Greiner, Wolodymyr Lenyk, Zoltan Makra (Munich, 1965).

<sup>80</sup>“A távozó visszanéz,” *Nemzetőr* 3, no. 41 (October 1958): 3; György Temesi, “A fogoly,” *Nemzetőr*, 5, no. 92 (December 1960): 1; “A bíboros és hazája,” *Nemzetőr* 8, no. 150 (May 1963): 1.

<sup>81</sup>József Mindszenty, “A kereszthordó Pázmány,” *Nemzetőr* 17, no. 265 (April 1972): 3, 4.

<sup>82</sup>Tibor Tollas, “A *Nemzetőr* főszerkesztője Mindszenty-nél,” *Nemzetőr* 16, no. 262 (December 1971/January 1972): 2.

of the “European Congress,” whose members considered themselves to be a sort of “exile government,” the proposal to elect Mindszenty as “an honorary presidential member” found much if not unanimous approval.<sup>83</sup> “If we could win Mindszenty,” one member said, “we can hope that his authority can help to improve the international recognition of the ECFH,” which was necessary because “the attempts to gain acknowledgement of the European Congress in Strasbourg have not yet brought any results.” During the meeting in Munich, the cardinal encouraged Dálnoki Veress and the delegation of the ECFH “to continue their self-sacrificing, important work” and announced that “he would acknowledge the members of the Congress with great pleasure.”<sup>84</sup> In the end, however, the delegation did not offer an official membership to the cardinal. They invited him to their next plenary session in fall, which Mindszenty accepted, but in the end he did not attend. We can only speculate why this cooperation did not materialize. Probably both sides were cautious, and the Vatican would surely not have approved of this. Mindszenty continued to financially support the right-wing émigré organization, and although Tollas and Makra continued to publish articles about him they never met in public again.<sup>85</sup>

What did these former Horthy officers and émigré activists have in common with Mindszenty? Why could they not, like most other Hungarians who had left their country after the Second World War, just settle in West Germany and leave the past behind? Why were they obsessed with an era that was, for most others, clearly gone? For one thing, they had experienced what could be called drastic downward social mobility. Sons of officers, some from aristocratic or gentry families, were raised with the idea that they represented the Hungarian nation and its traditions, going back to the royal knights of St. Stephen. They had lost their high social positions, and they felt that they had lost two wars and the old kingdom, which was, until 1918, one of the largest states in Europe stretching from the Ukrainian Carpathians in the northeast to the Adriatic Sea in the southwest and Transylvania in the east. For them, the Hungarian Republic of 1946 represented a sharp historical caesura in contrast to the state governed by Admiral Horthy that claimed to be a continuation of the realm of St. Stephen founded in the eleventh century. Therefore, the communist regime under János Kádár was not only illegitimate because it rested on Soviet tanks but also because it denied this “millennial” national tradition. Worst of all, state socialism in their eyes was also morally ruining Hungary’s youth and thereby destroying Hungary’s future.

Therefore, both Mindszenty and the officers celebrated the Boy and Girl Scout movement and supported the Hungarian school in the Bavarian castle of Kastl. They desperately tried to reconstruct and preserve as much as possible the older narrative of the interwar regime, the so-called “Christian nationalism” in a time of radical political, social, and cultural change. They cultivated the myth of Hungarian “victimhood” and completely rejected, as had Tollas, Makra, and others, any acknowledgment of their role in the Holocaust, an event that in their minds never happened. Even if we have to be very cautious about this point because the communist secret services organized campaigns and sometimes also made up accusations of “war crimes,” the lack of reflection and acknowledgment of the

<sup>83</sup> AVH Report, “Az ellenséges Magyar emigráció Mindszentyvel kapcs tervei,” Budapest, June 29, 1972, ÁBTL 3.2.4. O-8-830/1, 33. This idea was also included in the newsletter of ECFH, dating July 10, 1972.

<sup>84</sup> ÁBTL 3.2.4. O-8-830/1, 33.

<sup>85</sup> According to a state security report, Mindszenty paid 1,150 DM to the Congress in 1975, which was the largest part of their income of 1,719 DM. ÁBTL3.2.4. O-8-830/2, 35.

murder of Hungary's Jewish population among these former elites is evident. This group of Mindszenty supporters consisted of elderly or aging men who were anxious about the changing culture in their home country as well as in the West and were unable or unwilling to participate in the quickly growing West German economy, which might have mitigated their sense of loss, at least financially.

This anxiety was only heightened when Hungary opened its borders in the early 1960s and allowed most of its citizens to visit western Europe and other countries on the other side of the "Iron Curtain, even as, at the same time, the East German regime erected the Berlin Wall. This created opportunities for Hungarians from the communist home and the Western diaspora to meet. Both anticommunists and communists had reservations about the possible "mixing" between "friend" and "foe," but it was ultimately the Kádár regime that felt more comfortable with this new situation. Focusing on raising living standards in Hungary, the regime was not concerned that thousands of Hungarians would travel to the West, some of whom would never return. Some Hungarian tourists were even sent with the task to gather information for the Hungarian intelligence services. Radical anticommunists in West Germany like the "freedom fighters" therefore regarded everyone who visited communist Hungary as a "traitor," although most émigrés were eager to spend time at home or with family members of friends who had stayed behind the "Iron Curtain."<sup>86</sup> Increased transnational mobility resulted in new friendships or relations with families in Hungary, which made it more difficult to make a clean distinction between "us" and "them."

### Mindszenty and the Debate about "Saint Stephen's Country" and the Legitimacy of the Hungarian Communist Regime

During Mindszenty's visit in Bamberg, the regional Bavarian press propagated uncritically his message that he was the "true representative" of the Hungarian nation and its traditions. They also emphasized that these national traditions were closely related to Bamberg and Bavaria. The *Bamberger Nachrichten*, for example, explained that the occasion of the visit of the cardinal and of several thousand Hungarians was the celebration of the one thousandth birthday of St. Stephen, the founder-king of the medieval kingdom of Hungary.<sup>87</sup> The king had converted the pagan Hungarians to Christianity and thus stabilized the new state by closely embedding it within medieval Europe. The long relationship between Hungary, Bavaria in general, and Bamberg specifically began when St. Stephen married Gisella, the daughter of the Bavarian Duke Henry II; moreover, relics of the king and his son Imre had been stored in the church of St. Michael until the time of the secularization under Napoleon. Furthermore, the most famous medieval equestrian statue, the *Bamberg*

<sup>86</sup>One example for the exiled Hungarians who would visit the country often and even engaged in business activities was Count György Széchenyi (1910–1984), a former landowner and administrator, later member of the PEN Club. He had close contacts with the German Foreign Ministry. Another one was the very successful businessman Gyula Meleghy, who was also trading with Hungary. Cf. ÁBTL. 2. 2. 4. 0-8-822/3, 67–68.

<sup>87</sup>"WH," "Der Kardinal," *Bamberger Nachrichten/Fränkischer Tag*, Nr. 115, S. 13, May 20, 1972. For similar, see Adolf Bauer, "Mindszenty predigt vor Landsleuten. Der ungarische Kardinal feiert in Bamberg den 1000. Geburtstag von König Stephan," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 23, 1972, 16. The birth date of King St. Stephen is contested. Most recently, 975 has been argued instead of 972. For the discussion, see György Györffy, *King Saint Stephen of Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

*Horseman*, which stood in Bamberg Cathedral, has often been identified as King St. Stephen of Hungary.<sup>88</sup>

Both the anti-Communist exile community around Mindszenty and the Hungarian Communist regime attempted to claim the legacy of King St. Stephan for their own goals, emphasizing the constitutional significance the founder-king still had after centuries.

Related to the tradition of St. Stephen was the narrative of the “Holy Crown of Hungary,” a diadem the king had received from the pope in Rome around the year 1000. At the end of World War II, the crown had been taken away from Budapest by the Szálasi government, Hitler’s last ally, and was found by a special US Army unit searching for precious art.<sup>89</sup>

A quarter century later, after Nixon had improved his relations with communist Hungary, many anticommunists, including the US anti-feminist activist Phyllis Schlafly, were afraid that the US government would hand over the crown to the Hungarian communist government, thus legitimizing an illegitimate regime.<sup>90</sup> But in February, the US government assured the anticommunists that they were not planning any such move.<sup>91</sup> For the most conservative Hungarian émigrés, Mindszenty was still the “standard bearer” of this symbol of the millennial tradition of Hungarian statehood because he was the primate of the Catholic Church, the head of the institution that had crowned the Hungarian kings in the past.<sup>92</sup> That was the reason why the Hungarian communist regime had attempted, since it took power in 1948, to incorporate the heritage of the founder-king as a “progressive” king into its own legitimation strategy and therefore demanded the return of the crown from the US administration.<sup>93</sup> For Mindszenty, as long as the crown was stored in Fort Knox, it was still free and could be used one day as a symbol for a legitimate Hungarian government that would replace the communist regime. These questions were also hotly debated by the Hungarian émigré press, a debate closely watched by the Hungarian state security services.<sup>94</sup>

In West Germany, the ideas of a Christian Hungarian nation founded by the saint-king could be understood in the context of the broader discourse on the *Christliche Abendland*, which had been developed mostly in Catholic circles in central and eastern Europe after World War I as a reaction against the rise of liberalism, socialism, and communism, ideologies

<sup>88</sup>Cf. W. R. Valentiner, *The Bamberg Rider: Studies of Mediaeval German Sculpture* (Los Angeles: Zeitlin & Verbrugge, 1956), and Paul Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture, 1140–1300* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 95.

<sup>89</sup>Máté Gergely Balogh, “Killing the Canard: Saint Stephen’s Crown, Nixon, Budapest, and the Hungarian Lobby,” *HJEAS: Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 24, no. 1 (2018): 165–266.

<sup>90</sup>*The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 6, no. 6 (January 1972).

<sup>91</sup>*New York Times*, February 9, 1972.

<sup>92</sup>One priest, Msgr. Gábor Vargha, who still used the title “vitéz,” an order founded during the Horthy regime in the 1920s, addressed Mindszenty in a letter as “Cardinal Mindszenty Prince Primate, First Standard Bearer.” Cf. Letter by Mons. Vitéz Vargha Gábor to Mindszenty, February 5, 1972, Mindszenty Alapítvány Levéltára (Archive of the Mindszenty Foundation, i. f. MAL), Bambergi út (trip to Bamberg).

<sup>93</sup>Martin Mevius, “A Crown for Rákosi: The Vogeler Case, the Holy Crown of St. Stephen, and the (Inter)National Legitimacy of the Hungarian Communist Regime, 1945–1978,” *Slavonic & East European Review* 89, no. 1 (2011): 76–107.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. Report of the Office of Church Affairs on the émigré press. Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Országos Levéltára, hereafter MOL) Állami Egyháziügyi Hivatal, “Magyar Világszövetsége. “Mindszenty József távozása hatása, visszhangja, az emigrációs magyar sajtó tükrében,” August 7, 1972, 20–22.

that were all seen as a deadly threat to the Catholic Church and the aristocratic and royal traditions of central Europe.<sup>95</sup>

In the early 1970s, the state security agency of communist Hungary concluded that Hungarian right-wing activism in the West was in crisis and the narrative of the nation of “King St. Stephen” and the “holy crown” no longer held appeal.<sup>96</sup> Since 1956, according to this analysis, the émigrés were waiting more than ever for a symbolic figure who could unify all their differences and quarrels: they found that figure in Mindszenty. The state security concluded: “As long as there is a right-wing, reactionary emigration, and as long as Mindszenty is alive, we can count on a handshake between the two.”<sup>97</sup> This was exactly what happened when the cardinal met representatives of the European Congress of Free Hungarians shortly before his visit to Bamberg on May 20, 1972. As we have seen, however, the handshake did not lead to an official cooperation and was hidden from the broader public.

Mindszenty’s condemnation differed enormously from Pope Paul VI’s approach toward communist Hungary. This was obvious when he welcomed a group of bishops, priests, and lay Catholics from communist Hungary in the Vatican on the same Pentecost weekend that Mindszenty visited Bamberg. A special train from Budapest had brought eight bishops, sixty priests, and three hundred laypersons to Rome on May 19, 1972.<sup>98</sup> Like the Hungarian émigrés in Bamberg, they wanted to celebrate the millennium of St. Stephen’s birth. The group went to see holy sites in Rome and Assisi, but the climax of the visit was the special audience granted by the pope. The Hungarian pilgrims were headed by József Ijjas (1901–1689), archbishop of Kalocsa and president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Hungary. Ijjas reported to the Hungarian state security, but was likely a double-agent who worked for Cardinal Casaroli, the Vatican state secretary, embodying the complicated relationship between church and communist state.<sup>99</sup> On Pentecost Monday, May 22, the day when Mindszenty celebrated Mass and addressed German expellees and émigrés from twenty-one eastern European nations in Frankfurt, Paul VI welcomed the Hungarian bishops and priests in the Vatican. The pope told the bishops and priests in a Latin address that “the not few impediments and difficulties they encountered must not dissuade them from their pastoral task. ... Clerics must live a life that can be an example to the world at large” and, he continued, “these difficulties must not lead churchmen to fail to carry out their pastoral task to expand the church of Christ.”<sup>100</sup> Three days later, the pope granted a second audience, now admonishing the entire Hungarian pilgrimage group, to “pass on

<sup>95</sup>Cf. Weichlein, “Antikommunismus im westdeutschen Katholizismus.” For a broader perspective, see Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe*.

<sup>96</sup>MOL, “Magyar Világszövetsége, “Mindszenty József távozása hatása, visszhangja, az emigrációs magyar sajtó tükrében” (August 7, 1972), 23.

<sup>97</sup>MOL, “Magyar Világszövetsége” (August 7, 1972), 23.

<sup>98</sup>Open Society Archives, Budapest (HU OSA) 300-1-1. Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Rome Bureau BOX 1, Folder 15, “Hungarian Pilgrimage to Rome, May 17, 1972.” For the Hungarian state security the pilgrimage was a “very successful” action. Cf. ÁBTL 3.2.3. Mt 807/3, “Ludwig Beron” Ügy dosszié, Róma, June 21, 1972. “A római záródokat....”

<sup>99</sup>Majsai Tamás, “‘Ismereteimet soha, senkinek nem fedhetem fel.’ Papi ügynökök a Vatikán előszobáiban—I. Rész,” *Beszélő* 12, no. 1 (December 2007) (<http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/%E2%80%9EIsmereteimet-soha-senkinek-nem-fedhetem-fel%E2%80%9D>).

<sup>100</sup>HU OSA 300-1-1 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Rome Bureau BOX 1, Folder 15, “Hungarian Pilgrimage to Rome, May 22, 1972.

St. Stephen's heritage."<sup>101</sup> During the visit of the Hungarian pilgrims, a short contretemps occurred when an émigré priest from Munich approached the bus of the Hungarian pilgrims and said: "Maguk az ávosok!" (So you are the secret police agents!).<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusions

Mindszenty's visit to Bamberg and other West German towns was meant to challenge the attempt of Hungarian Catholic Church leaders to claim the tradition of St. Stephen and interpret it in a way acceptable to the communist regime. In that narrative, the founder-king represented political and social "progress" in the medieval form, transforming the pagan country into a more advanced feudal kingdoms, like those of the West. According to this version of Hungarian history, Cardinal Mindszenty could have been likened to one of the pagan princes who revolted against King Stephen's modernization program.

The struggle over the meaning and interpretation of St. Stephen centered around the question of the legitimate representation of the Hungarian nation. After János Kádár was installed as the head of state with the help of Soviet troops in November 1956, Hungary had suffered from political sanctions and embarrassing questioning at the United Nations. During that time, Mindszenty, who was a "guest" of the United States Legation in Budapest (later: Embassy), seemed to most people in the West the true representative of the Hungarian nation. His anticommunism was a legitimate protest against a dictatorship that suppressed its population. After Kádár announced an amnesty for political prisoners and a number of political reforms in the early 1960s, as a price to have the "Hungarian Question of 1956" removed from the agenda of the United Nations, the Hungarian communist regime was stabilized and gained more and more diplomatic recognition also in the West. With détente and Vatican *Ostpolitik* and the signing of the partial agreement in 1964, international relations of Hungary across the Cold War blocs improved significantly. For Pope Paul VI, *Ostpolitik* was so important that he even welcomed the priests and bishops in the Vatican who had damaged the Hungarian church by collaborating with the communist state. The pope admired Mindszenty as a martyr of the faith, but he did not seek his political advice.

At the same time, the influence of anticommunism declined and a comprehensive liberalization of Western societies caused by radical political, economic, and cultural changes increased. The increasing interchanges between Hungarians who lived in the West and Hungarians from communist Hungary further blurred the seemingly clear-cut distinctions of earlier Cold War culture. The hope of the shrinking group of Hungarian émigré activists that Mindszenty could unify the conflict-ridden Hungarian community and give their activities a boost and heightened international recognition did not materialize. Therefore in 1977, the Hungarian state security ended its observation of these activists, not considering them a threat to communist Hungary any longer. This was two years after Mindszenty's death and

<sup>101</sup>HU OSA 300-1-1 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Rome Bureau BOX 1, Folder 15, "Hungarian Pilgrimage to Rome, May 24, 1972."

<sup>102</sup>Cf. ÁBTL 3.2.3. Mt 807/3, "Ludwig Beron," 346. Father Fábrián (1919–1993) had worked for Radio Free Europe (1956–78) in Munich. Before that, he had studied theology in Rome and worked as a pastor for Hungarian refugees in Switzerland. "Father Károly" (Károly atya) had a popular Catholic radio program and he often mentioned Mindszenty. He published in various émigré journals, among them the *Irodalmi Újság*, *Új Európa*, *Nemzetőr*, and *Életünk*, but also in the *Katolikus Szemle* (Rome) and the *Délamerikai Magyar Újságban* (<http://szer.oszk.hu/szemelyek/fabian-karoly>).



the year when President Jimmy Carter handed over the holy crown of St. Stephen to the communist government of Hungary.<sup>103</sup> After this, most émigrés, who were still alive but rather old, gave up their struggle. Their cause was lost.

However, history offers many surprises. During the “second Cold War” of the 1980s, the cult of Mindszenty gained support again, when Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan cited him as a “hero” and, finally, when the new Polish Pope John Paul II allowed the start of the canonization process of the cardinal.<sup>104</sup> After Mindszenty’s remains were repatriated to Hungary in 1991, Pope John Paul II visited the country and prayed at the cardinal’s gravesite in Esztergom. Throughout the 1990s, Mindszenty, mostly forgotten in the West, had become a national hero again in an atmosphere of wide-spread anticommunism in Hungary. Since 2010, the governments of Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz Party and its junior partner, the National Christian Democratic Party, have allocated more money to the Mindszenty Foundation and funded the erection of Mindszenty statues and the hosting of public events related to the cult of the cardinal. Finally, the preamble of the new “Fundamental Law” of 2011 passed by Viktor Orbán’s two-third majority describes Hungary as a nation-state founded by King St. Stephen with the holy crown embodying “the constitutional continuity of Hungary’s statehood.”<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, between 1944 and 1989, when Hungary was occupied first by German and then by Soviet troops and when the communists ruled, the country did not have a legitimate government. Mindszenty is dead, but his spirit and his ideas have risen again in Hungarian politics today.

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<sup>103</sup>Katalin Kadar Lynn, “The Return of the Crown of St. Stephen and Its Subsequent Impact on the Carter Administration,” *East European Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2000): 181. Christopher M. Hann, “Socialism and King Stephen’s Right Hand,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 18, no. 1 (1990): 4–24.

<sup>104</sup>“Pope Begins Hungary Visit with Tribute to Mindszenty,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1991.

<sup>105</sup>*The Fundamental Law of Hungary* (April 2011), 3 ([www.kormany.hu/download/e/02/00000/The-New-Fundamental-Law-of-Hungary.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/02/00000/The-New-Fundamental-Law-of-Hungary.pdf)).