

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED  
HISTORY OF SCIENCE GRADUATE SCHOOL

**DOCTORAL (PHD) THESES**

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THE POLITICS OF THE PRESS AND THE POLITICAL PRESS IN HUNGARY AT  
THE END OF THE 18TH AND IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Hungarian newspapers in the service of national identity, modernization and civil  
transformation during the Enlightenment and the Reform Age

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## I. Topic choice and significance

I drafted an overview of the Enlightenment and the Reform Age era Hungarian language press and, in particular, the history of political journalism within it and the correlations of the government press policy. In addition, I demonstrate the study of the cultural, social and political role of the *Magyar Hírmondó*, the *Magyar Kurír* and the *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* Enlightenment era and the *Jelenkor* Reform Age Hungarian political newspapers in accordance with the new, social history focused, analytical research trends of press history, which may become capable of providing added value to the traditional, content-descriptive press history mindset forgoing the cultural-social context.

I outline the development of the book and press censorship in Hungary, its correlations relevant for the era, its operating principles, and the direction changes of the government press policy. I describe the press history of the *Magyar Hírmondó* of Bratislava, the *Magyar Kurír* of Vienna, and the *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* (from 1792 the Viennese *Magyar Hírmondó*), and I analyze its issues in selected years.

I conducted a study of the *Jelenkor* Reform Age newspaper from two aspects: on one hand regarding what role it played in nurturing and developing our national language, culture and science, and on the other hand regarding what role it played in creating the national identity and the civilizing activity of Count István Széchenyi behind the paper.

## **II. The methodology and sources of the study**

The new, social history focused, analytical studying method of press history entails the involvement of new aspects, analytical methods and sources. One of the options of the new approach is the examination of the social context and the research of the economic and social history of the press, the social history of journalists, and the internal correlations of the press and political culture.

In addition to the examination of the traditional press history literature and the content analysis of the articles and news material of the examined newspapers, I also find important the examination of the life journeys of the editors.

The life history of the editors-journalists is an integral part of the social history of the intellectuals, which deems the examination of the process of professionalization a saliently important analysis aspect. The introduction of persons participating in press entrepreneurship is important, due in part to the determination of the social history status of the intellectual occupation groups, and in part to the outlining of the editor-entrepreneur careers.

Its weight and role represented in the press product political public opinion formation is unavoidable. However, I have approached the concept of political public opinion formation based on the 19th century definitions, when it still represented the opinion of a political aware minority, and they deemed the task of the press to voice the already existing knowledge and opinion of the reader audience.

For a novel way of studying the subject, the handling of new sources, statistical data and personal documents (diaries, memoires, literary works) was necessary, as well as the new analytical methods of the press material, in addition to the examination of the press products themselves. I studied the press products as mediums providing lifestyle and political behavior patterns, and what purpose was that the given press product served at the time, as one of the most important expressions and physical manifestations of the reality-creating discourses.

With my analysis I attempted to examine how the selected mediums contributed to the development and surpassing of the civilian public, and the spreading of the new communication behavior codes induced by the media. I examined the changes taking place in the function of the press, the language, and how Hungarian book and newspaper publication became the cohesive force of natural culture.

In the given social political context (opportunities-limitations-compliance) I tried to analyze the political directedness of the newspapers, their role in the civic transformation, and their culture-creating and organizing activities.

During the press history analysis the examination of the method of speech is necessary, as is capturing the political intentions of the editors and their supporters. In the case of newspapers, the editors have less opportunity for publicist activities and the reflection of news, due to the sheer characteristics of the news genre. In the reviewed period, an analyzable journalistic and editorial “program,” in which the mission and the intentions of the newspaper was often not unambiguously stated, was provided only on few occasions, usually at the launch of the paper; therefore the political intention, the political meaning could only be “read” between the lines and deduced from the short commentaries occurring in or annotated to certain articles, and the selection of news, the system of their conveyance, and the frequency or correlation of certain topics.

The basis for my research was provided by the content and statistical analysis of the articles, in which I compared the given topics and, elevating them in a wider context, I placed them in the topic network of the public speech having evolved by the era, in whose developed value preferences initially the cause of the Hungarian language, culture and science seemed to the common denominator. As a result of my research, I strive to demonstrate how the topic relates to the political topics ruling and dividing the public speech and public thinking of the era, and to the processes urged and launched by Count István Széchenyi striving to thematize public speech.

Among the sources used in my research, the documents found in the Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences are of salient importance: Dániel Berzsenyi, Gábor Döbrentei, Ferenc Kazinczy, Sándor Kisfaludy, János Kis, Ferenc Kölcsey, Pál Szemere, Benedek Virág, Miklós Wesselényi’s letters to Mihály Helmečzy (*HAS Archives, Hungarian Lit., Ltr 4r No. 119. III.*); Ferenc Kazinczy’s letters to Gábor Döbrentei (*HAS Archives, Hungarian Lit., Ltr 4r No. 53. I.*); Ferenc Kazinczy’s letters to Dániel Berzsenyi (*HAS Archives, Hungarian Lit., Ltr 4r No. 135.*); István Széchenyi’s letters to Mihály Helmečzy (*István Széchenyi’s Book of Letters from Bratislava 1833-1835. K 201/98; HAS Archives the book of the copies of István Széchenyi’s letters 1828-1835. K 210/1/89*); filling the spaces of the removed articles of István Széchenyi in Társalkodó 1835 (*HAS Archives the book of the copies of István Széchenyi’s letters 1828-1835. K 210/1/132*); temporary contract between István Széchenyi and Mihály Helmečzy for Jelenkor (*HAS Archives the miscellaneous notes of István Széchenyi, the documents related to his works*

182?-1848. K 291ff. 303-306.); István Széchenyi Credit 1830. Partly autogr., details, fragments, notes, and corrections of Lunkányi, Döbrentei and Helmeczy (*HAS Archives Széchenyi Legacy K 257/1-2. Poss. Sz.M. 846.*); István Széchenyi Stadium 1831-1836 the corrections of Helmeczy and Dreschner (*HAS Archives Széchenyi Legacy K 261/1-4. Poss. Sz.M. 847.*); registry of books which the academy library received on the recommendation of Mrs. Helmeczy. 18 July 1853 (*HAS Archives Historical 2r. No. 83. II.*)

Additionally, my important primary sources both in the content analysis and the statistical analysis are the contemporary press articles: *Magyar Hírmondó*, Bratislava, 1780 complete year, 1 January 1784 Issue; *Magyar Kurír*, Vienna, 1789 complete year, 2 and 23 May 1787 Issues; *Magyar Múzsza*, Vienna, 2 and 23 May 1787 Issues; *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek*, Vienna, 4 December 1789 Issue; 15 January, 9 March and 7 May 1790 Issues; 3 June and 23 December 1791 Issues; *Magyar Hírmondó*, Vienna, 1793 complete year; *Jelenkor. From the newsletters of the two homelands and abroad in a political aspect.* 1832-1833-1834-1835-1836-1837-1838 complete years.

In my research I used the source publications related to the topic, which by the publishing the original documents made possible the study of the censorship decrees, censorship instructions, and related documents (Géza Ballagi: *Political Literature in Hungary until 1825*; Oszkár Sashegyi: *German Enlightenment and Hungarian Censorship 1800-1830.*; Gábor Pajkossy: *Hungary's History in the 19th Century. Collection*, Elek Jakab: *The History of Censorship in Transylvania*; Sándor Domanovszky: *The Writings of Palatine József. Volumes I and II*; Sándor Domanovszky: *The Life of Palatine József. Volume I Parts 1-2*), journalistic programs (György Kókay: *Magyar Hírmondó. The first Hungarian newspaper*), correspondence published in source publications (Kálmán Benda: *Writings of the Hungarian Jacobins*; János Váczy: *The Correspondence of Ferenc Kazinczy. Volumes IX and XIII*) or diaries (Gyula Vizota: *The Diaries of Count István Széchenyi. IV. 1830-1836.*; Orsolya Völgyesi: *Ferenc Kölcsey Parliamentary Diary*) study.

### III. Main Results

In my essay I introduced the study of the cultural, social and political role of the Enlightenment and the Reform Age newspapers, with the involvement of new aspects and analytical methods, examining the social context, beyond the traditional text analyzing study, and analyzing the social history of the editors and the “supporting medium” and the internal correlations of the press and political culture.

Examining the period of civic transformation, I considered it my important task to outline the initial period of that development process by the interpretation of the biographies of the editors (*Mátyás Rát, Sándor Szacs vay, Demeter Görög, Mihály Helmeczy*) embedded in a social context, in which the marginalized intellectual news editor status became the editor status belonging to the spiritual-cultural elite.

The life stories of the selected editors are integral parts of the social history of the contemporary intellectuals and are extraordinarily relevant from the aspect of the development of the journalist vocation, and later of the profession already suitable for the shaping of the political public opinion during the civic transformation, as well as due to the outlining of the editor-entrepreneurial career paths and the social-political role and effect of the newspaper edited by them. By the use of related professional literature and source publications, and in the case of *Mihály Helmeczy* the use of primary, unpublished archival source material, I was able to successfully outline the biographies for the purpose of drafting a description of the newspaper editor status.

I found it equally important to introduce by describing the press history of the Bratislava *Magyar Hírmondó*, the *Magyar Kurír* and the *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* and the analysis of their selected years as the primary contemporary source material to outline the arc that connects the Hungarian political newspaper writing of the Enlightenment Era with the history of the press of the Reform Age, since I consider the knowledge of this prehistory to be unavoidably essential from the aspect of analyzing and understanding the press correlations of the 1830's and the cultural, social and political role of the *Jelenkor és Társalkodó*. I examined the newspapers as the medium providing the lifestyle and political behavioral patters, and I analyzed what expression of social discourses they enabled.

I established that in the reviewed period, as a result of conformity to the censorship conditions, the political intention, the political meaning could only be “read” between the lines and deduced from the short commentaries occurring in or annotated to certain

articles, and the systematic selection of news, the system of their conveyance, and the frequency or correlation of certain topics.

As attachment to my dissertation, I compiled and made reviewable the *complete content list of the issues in the years 1832-1838 of the Jelenkor*, and conducted the content-descriptive and statistical study resting on the detailed and complete domestic political news material. On one hand regarding what role it played in nurturing and developing our national language, culture and science, and on the other hand regarding what role it played in creating the new, non-privilege-based community, the nation and the national identity, and the civilizing activity of Count István Széchenyi assuming a significant role in launching the paper and providing its intellectual background.

In the case of *Jelenkor*, the basis for my research was provided by the content and statistical analysis, resting on a more detailed basis than in the cases of the other newspapers, of the domestic political news material of the newspaper's issues in the years 1832-1838, in which I compared the given topics and, elevating them in a wider context, I placed them in the topic network of the public speech having evolved by the era, in whose developed value preferences initially the cause of the Hungarian language, culture and science seemed to the common denominator.

Publishing the results of my research, I demonstrate how the topic relates to the political topics ruling and dividing the public speech and public thinking of the era, and to the processes urged and launched by Count István Széchenyi striving to thematize public speech, and I establish that publicity received a great role in the political battles fought for civic reformation during the Reform Age, while the role the press assumed also reflected back on its development.

It was in the focus of my study how the examined Hungarian newspapers became *the cohesive force of the national culture and identity in the given political context* (opportunities-limitations-compliance).

In relation to this, my proposition seems to be confirmed that during the Enlightenment Era the *goal* of the newspapers is to make use, for the cause of the Hungarian language and culture, of the public interest in “the predicaments of the world,” “the useful or curious inventions of clever people,” “the news reporting on those memorable events,” or e. g. the news about the Turkish war. While during the Reform Age the news material dealing with the cause of the Hungarian language and culture is *no longer merely a goal but also a tool*, the “common denominator,” the “political minimum” in which those travelling on different paths agree, and which is suitable to create the public

opinion armed with a national identity, as well as the political camps that was able to undertake the battle for winning the political rights of the Hungarian nation and for becoming a civil nation.

#### **IV. The publications of the author connected with the topic of the dissertation**

- *The cause of the national culture and the Hungarian language in the Hungarian press during the Enlightenment Era and the Reform Age.* In: Culture – Art – Society in the World of Globalization. /editor: Tamás T. Kiss. Szeged, 2007. Pages 45-50.
- *Questions and ways of modernization in the Hungarian political press during the Enlightenment Era.* In: Tradition and modernization in the 18th-20th centuries. /editors: Erzsébet Bodnár-Gábor Demeter. Budapest, Hungarovox Kiadó, 2008. Pages 103-115.
- *The life of a Transylvanian news editor in the tempest of the Viennese political press.* In: Common past and common future. /editor Gábor Ferenc Kiss. Szeged-Arad, Belvedere-Szövétnek special issue, 2008. Pages 31-38.
- *The cause of the Hungarian language in the Jelenkor, in the service of the political program of István Széchenyi.* In: Studies: Graduate School of History. /editor: Vilmos Bárdosi. Budapest, ELTE BTK, 2012. Pages 5-12.
- *Jelenkor in the service of national identity and civic transformation in the 1830's.* In: Central Europe Publications 2012. Year V. Issue 2. Pages 169-177.
- *István Széchenyi's political program in reflection of the Jelenkor.* In: Student Workshop Studies, 2. Graduate School of History and Ethnography of the University of Debrecen. /editor: Péter Forisek, Orsolya Hajdufi, Gábor Szabó-Zsoldos, Ákos Szendrei. Debrecen, University of Debrecen, 2013. Pages 85-96.
- *Press and censorship in Hungarian at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries* In: MEDIA RESEARCH : MEDIA THEORY MAGAZINE 2014. Year XV. Issue 2. Pages 17-28.
- *II. The interpretation and placement of József's anti-Turkish war in the thematic network of the Year 1789 issues of the Magyar Kurír 1789.* In: Studies of Hungarian history from the early modern period to the modern age: Selection from the lectures of the scientific conference organized in Szeged by the University of Szeged, Faculty of History Graduate School on 25 April 2014. /editor András Döbör, Ferenc Zeman. Szeged, Association for Central European Research, 2014. Pages 25-34.

The complete list of my publications can be seen in the Hungarian Scientific works database.

## V. Lectures of the author related to the topic

- “VI. Apáczai Summer Academy” international conference, lecture titled “*Reading, culture, and press during the Enlightenment and the Reform Age*”, Novi Sad, Association of Vojvodina Hungarian Educators, 17 July 2006.
- “*The theory and practice of cultural conveyance*” international conference, lecture titled “*The cause of the national culture and the Hungarian language in the Hungarian press during the Enlightenment Era and the Reform Age*,” Szeged, SZTE JGYPK, 6-8 March 2006.
- “*State and nation in the 19th-20th centuries*” conference, lecture titled “*István Széchenyi and the Jelenkor*,” Debrecen, Institute of History University of Debrecen, 31 March - 1 April 2006.
- “*The Faculty of Pedagogy on New Roads. Scientific and Art Workshops of SZTE JGYPK*” conference, lecture titled “*István Széchenyi’s political program in the years 1832-34 issues of the Jelenkor*,” Szeged, SZTE JGYPK, 10 April 2007.
- “*Tradition and modernization in Europe in the 18th-20th centuries*” international conference, lecture titled “*The questions and ways of modernization in the Hungarian political press during the Enlightenment Era*,” Debrecen, BTK Institute of History of the University of Debrecen, 15-16 November 2007.
- “*SZ.E.M. Of centuries and people to everyone*” scientific lecture series, SZTE JGYPK, 23 April 2009.
- “*The semiotics of identity*” conference organized by the Hungarian Semiotic Association, the Identity research Workshop of the JGYPK Adult Education Institute of the Szeged University of Science, and the New Democracies and Human Communication Research Group of the SZTE JGYPK Applied Linguistics Faculty. “*The path search of the national identity in the Hungarian press during the Enlightenment and the Reform Age*” lecture, Szeged, SZTE JGYPK, 6 May 2011.
- “*V. Nyíregyháza Doctoral Conference – Human Studies Department*” organized by the University of Nyíregyháza and the University of Debrecen. “*Jelenkor as the support of the civilizator and political initiatives of István Széchenyi*” lectures, Nyíregyháza, 7 December 2011.
- “*Politics, society, institutions*” - *The international symposium of historians* organized by the ELTE BTK. “*The cause of the Hungarian language in the Jelenkor, in the service of the political program of István Széchenyi*” lecture, Budapest, 17 February 2012.

- *"The evolvement and demise of multi-ethnic states in Central Europe"*. Scientific conference series for historians, geographers, regionalists and economists, organized by Central European Publications. *"Jelenkor and Társalkodó in the service of national identity and transformation in the 1830's"* lecture, Szeged, 3 March 2012.
- *"No future without the past! Individual and community in historical view"*. Scientific conference organized by the BTK Graduate School of History and Ethnography of the University of Debrecen, lecture titled *"István Széchenyi's political program in the reflection of the Jelenkor - in the service of national identity and civic transformation in the 1830's,"* Debrecen, 16 November 2012.
- *"Kanizsa Summer University"* organized by the Délvidék Research Center *"Press and censorship in Hungary in the 18th-19th centuries,"* Magyarkanizsa, 5 July 2013.
- *"The semiotics of group identity"* scientific conference organized by the Hungarian Semiotics Association, organized by the Identity Research Workshop of the JGYPK Adult Education Institute of the Szeged University of Science, and the New Democracies and Human Communication Research Group of the SZTE JGYPK Applied Linguistics Faculty, lecture titled *"The political press during the Reform Age, in the service of national identity and civic transformation in the 1830's – István Széchenyi's political program in reflection of the Jelenkor,"* Szeged, 15 November 2013.
- *"Information and society"* scientific conference organized by the History and Philosophy Institute of the University of Nyíregyháza, lecture titled *"Press and censorship in Hungary in the 18th-19th centuries,"* Nyíregyháza, 21-22 November 2013.
- *"Chapters from the history of the Délvidék. Hungarian-Serbian relations – Common past and common future"* international history and cultural history conference organized by the Délvidék Research Institute, lecture titled *"II. The interpretation and placement of József's anti-Turkish war in the thematic network of the Year 1789 issues of the Magyar Kurír 1789,"* Szeged, 23 January 2014.
- *"Hungarian history from the early modern period to the modern age"* scientific conference organized by the BTK Graduate School of History of the University of Szeged, lecture titled *"II. The interpretation and placement of József's anti-Turkish war in the thematic network of the Year 1789 issues of the Magyar Kurír 1789,"* Szeged, 25 April 2014.
- *"Literature – language – identity"* scientific conference, organized by the International Association for the Hungarian Language and Culture (Mother Tongue Conference), for the 80th birthday of Béla Pomogáts, lecture titled *"The path finding of national identity in the*

*Hungarian press during the Enlightenment and the Reform Age,*” Budapest, ELTE BTK, 3 November 2014.

– *“The heritage of the past – the opportunities of the present”* scientific conference, organized by the MTA SZAB Civic Competences Work Committee, lecture titled *“Value creation, modernization and progress: The interpretations of the causes of the Hungarian language, Hungarian culture, and Hungarian science in the press during the Reform Age,”* Szeged, SZAB Székház, 13 November 2014.