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Italy

### A Special Relationship. Hungarian Intelligence and the Vatican, 1961 – 1978<sup>1</sup>

#### Preliminary remarks

This paper aims at giving an overview of the operative actions, diversion plans and manipulative use of mass-media undertaken by Hungary against the Vatican during the Cold War in the period between the opening of the II Vatican Council and Karol Wojtyła's election. *Ostpolitik* has for a long time been a matter of scholarly and political controversy. Most Western accounts have credited the outcome of Communism and the defeat of the Soviet bloc mainly to the intensive East-West dialogue, of which the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*, initiated in the early 1960s by Pope John XXIII, had been a major element. According to this, the progressive foreign policy pursued by the Vatican and West Germany had no alternative: it was the only way they could help East-European Catholic communities to survive Communism.<sup>2</sup> Hungarian and other Eastern European

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1 To be quoted with author's permission only!

2 For a general overview, see STEHLE, Hansjakob: *Geheimdiplomatie im Vatican. Die Päpste und die Kommunisten*. Zürich, Benziger, 1993. See also Card. Casaroli's memoirs – CASAROLI, Agostino: *Il martirio della pazienza. La Santa Sede e i paesi comunisti (1963 – 1989)*. Torino, Einaudi, 2000 and his apologetic portrait by Santini – SANTINI, Alceste: *Casaroli, l'uomo del dialogo*. Roma, San Paolo Editore, 1993. A positive assessment of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik* in the scholarly work by Melloni – MELLONI, Alberto: *L'altra Roma. Politica e S. Sede durante il Concilio Vaticano II (1959 – 1965)*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000 and MELLONI, Alberto (ed): *Il filo sottile. L'Ostpolitik vaticana di Agostino Casaroli*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006, and also BARBERINI, Giovanni: *L'Ostpolitik della Santa Sede. Un dialogo lungo e faticoso*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007. On the origins of left-wing catholic movements in the 1960s Italy, see SARESELLA Daniela: *Dal Concilio alla contestazione. Riviste cattoliche negli anni del cambiamento*. Brescia, Morcelliana, 2005. A more sceptical approach is in RICCARDI, Andrea: *Il Vaticano e Mosca, 1940 – 1990*. Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1992; perceptive critiques on the dominant interpretation of the II Vatican Council as a radical breakthrough for the Catholic Church in MARCHETTO, Agostino: *Il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II. Contrappunto per la sua storia*. Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana,

accounts have been always been rather critical on the aims and the results of the Vatican's opening to the East.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of extensive fieldwork in the Hungarian state security archives, I will analyse the long-term effects that the *Ostpolitik* – strongly influenced by the intelligence services of the Soviet bloc – had on the Hungarian Catholic movement and bilateral relations between the Holy See and a moderate Communist regime. My point is that a mostly Catho-

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2005, a senior Vatican diplomat now serving as Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples. Long-term negative effects of the Communist religious policy on Poland and Hungary are briefly summarized by ORLANDI, Fernando: *Východné cirkvi : čo kážu, a čo robia*. EAST, 13/2007, pp. 22 – 29.

- 3 See Card. Mindszenty's memoirs – MINDSZENTY, József: *Memorie*. Milano, Rusconi, 1975 (or. ed. 1974) and his diary of the years spent in the US Embassy in Budapest – MINDSZENTY, József: *Napi jegyzetek. Amerikai követség 1956-1971*. Szerk. Csonka Emil. Vaduz, 1979; from a similar perspective ADRIÁNYI, Gábor: *A Vatikán keleti politikája és Magyarország 1939 – 1978*. Budapest, Kairosz, 2004 and MÉSZÁROS, István: *Egy "kultusz" a XXI. században. A Mindszenty-tisztelet története (1975 – 2005)*. Budapest, Kairosz, 2005. A good analysis of the Hungarian participation in the II Vatican Council in MÁTÉ-TÓTH, András: *A II. Vatikáni zsinat és a magyar elhárítás* (2003, manuscript, available at [http://www.vallastudomany.hu/Members/matetoth/vtmtadocs/m-ta\\_II\\_vatikani\\_zsinat](http://www.vallastudomany.hu/Members/matetoth/vtmtadocs/m-ta_II_vatikani_zsinat)). An authoritative account on the relationship between Hungary and the Vatican during the 1960s, based on an impressive documentation, in SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005*. On the infiltration of the secret police into the Hungarian Catholic Church before 1956, see KAHLER, Frigyes: *ÁVH történelmi olvasókönyv 4. Adalékok az egyházüldözés történetéhez*. Budapest, Kairosz, 2007; for the following period see the recollection by LÉNÁRD, Ödön – TÍMAR, Ágnes – SZABÓ, Gyula – SOÓS, Viktor Attila (eds): *Utak és útvesztők*. Budapest, Kairosz, 2006; an acquitting stance in TOMKA, Ferenc: *Halálra szántak, mégis élünk (Egyházüldözés 1945 – 1990 és az ügynökkérdés)*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 2005; a balanced account on post-1956 trends in the Hungarian Catholic world in BAUQUET, Nicolas: *Entrer en kadarisme: l'Église catholique hongroise de la révolution à la «consolidation»*. COMMUNISME, 88/2006-2007, pp. 91 – 106; TABAJDI, Gábor – UNGVÁRY, Krisztián: *Állambiztonsági tanulmányok*. Manuscript, Budapest, 2007 – radical critics in the chapter devoted to the Catholic Church of their general work on the Hungarian state security under the Kádár regime (2007), pp. 286 – 313. On Hungarian-Italian diplomatic relations from 1956 to the second half of the 1970s, see PANKOVITS, József: *Fejezetek a Magyar-olasz politikai kapcsolatok történetéből (1956 – 1977)*. Budapest, Gondolat, 2005, and in particular chapter 5 on Mindszenty's case.

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lic, still multi-confessional and quite secularised country like Hungary was the best ground for such a tactical and at times ideological compromise:

- 1) After a first period of confrontation and sufferance, most of the hierarchy (cardinals, bishops, professors of theology, Catholic journalists and intellectuals) and an influential minority of rank-and-file priests and believers came to accept the necessity to cooperate with the Kádár regime. The price for this choice has been very high: in no Eastern European communist country had the Catholic movement suffered such a serious erosion of its moral authority as the Hungarian Catholic Church, a direct consequence of the deep, long-standing and humiliating compromise with an atheist state.
- 2) From the early 1960s, when diplomatic talks between Hungary and the Vatican were relaunched, the „liberal” Kádár regime was assigned by the Warsaw Pact special intelligence tasks regarding Italy and the Vatican. Ideological subversion, diplomatic talks and intelligence activity appeared as the different facets of the same sophisticated strategy. Hungarian politicians and state security officers in charge of diplomatic missions were polite, spoke good Italian and made reference to values that were very popular in post-1968 Europe: the deepening of the co-existence; the struggle against the conservative wing within the Catholic Church; and the necessity of a constant East-West „dialogue” to be promoted by left-wing, pacifist, profoundly anti-American and pro-Soviet new Catholic movements. Due to the existence of a strong Communist party and to the rise of left-wing Catholic dissent, Italy proved to be the ideal ground for this kind of soft ideological work.

### Sources used

For my research I have made use of recently declassified files of the Hungarian foreign intelligence, preserved in the State Security Archives of Budapest. The most relevant source, without doubt, is a so-called *objektum dosszié*,<sup>4</sup>

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4 „Objektum dosszié” was a collection of different materials referring to a single

opened in 1971 and closed as late as the 25 February 1993,<sup>5</sup> which includes all relevant operative information obtained from and concerning the Vatican's Secretariat of State. This general file was given the „Nérók” code name.<sup>6</sup> Ten out of the 16 original volumes are missing from the State Security Archives. The documentation available to scholars encompasses vols 11-16 (ca. 1 300 pages) covering the period between 1972 and 1985. These files originally had been classified as „state secret” (államtitok) until 2071, but have been declassified and made available for research under the effects of the Law 3/2003.

Further information came from some of the personal files of foreign informants of the Hungarian Intelligence Service („Mozart” operative file 1962 – 1965, „Kerekes” operative file 1966 – 1968, „Blanc” operative file 1972 – 1979), from already published documents – in particular the „Canale” (Channel) *objektum dosszié*, referring to an earlier stage of the Hungarian-Vatican relations between 1962-65. A further source of interest were the files of the of the residency (from the Russian *rezidentura*<sup>7</sup>) called „Világosság” (Lightness), created by the Hungarian intelligence within the State Office of Religious Affairs in 1967 with the aim of improving the operative work among the “Catholic reaction”<sup>8</sup>.

However, one must be aware that while top-secret records now available in Hungary or Poland describe in detail the anti-religious strategies adopted

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case/problem/territory, which was used for operative purposes by intelligence officers.

- 5 I asked archivists and other scholars the possible reason for this: the unanimous answer was that the operative file may have been closed well later than 1989. We can reasonably suppose that the Hungarian intelligence activity inside the Vatican did not stop with the end of Communism, due to the fact that in the first years of transition the I (Foreign) Directorate responsible for the Vatican line (section III/I-4-A) had not been dismantled because of „national security reasons”.
- 6 Állambiztosági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, Budapest (*ÁBTL*): fond 3.2.5, file 0-8-552, vol. 11 – 16.
- 7 Quoting from a KGB lexicon: „An Intelligence unit under deep cover in a target country, where it conducts Intelligence work from legal or illegal positions”. *Lexicon of KGB terms*. Impedion Report No. 152, 115. A copy available at CSSEO library (Levico Terme, Italy).
- 8 SOÓS, Viktor Attila – SZABÓ, Csaba: „*Világosság*”. *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal és a hírszerzés tevékenysége a katolikus egyház ellen*. Budapest, Új Ember-Lénárd Ödön Közhasznú Alapítvány, 2006.

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by Moscow and its allies, they cannot shed light on the policy and strategies adopted by the Vatican – carried out by a notoriously secretive bureaucracy. Moreover, unless the Secret Archives of the Holy See disclose the key documents of the period after the II World War, we will not be able to solve the puzzle, but merely to propose a partial and likely biased point of view, i.e. the one suggested by these documents available in the post-communist archives.

### **Internal factors: the Kádár regime's new Catholic policy**

The first question I would address is how the Hungarian intelligence bodies – which Moscow viewed as peripheral and inefficient when compared to the Czechoslovakian, the East German or even the Bulgarian secret services – came to be considered by the late 1960s an efficient instrument for the Soviet bloc's ideological offensive against the West. From 1948 to 1956 the Communist-Catholic relationships in Hungary did not differ from the more general East-European pattern. After Card. Mindszenty's show trial in 1949, hundreds of priests, friars, professors of theology and simple believers were arrested and sentenced to hard prison terms; every official contact with the Vatican was strictly forbidden; and properties and schools belonging to the Catholic Church were confiscated. The fey institutions left immediately became part of the show-dressing policy pursued by the Rákosi regime, which tried to build up a loyalist Catholic movement, but its leaders were immediately excommunicated by Pope Pius XII in 1950. After a moment of relative tranquillity between 1955-57, a second wave of arrests and political trials of clerics took place (along with similar ones in the Soviet Union and Romania) between 1958 and 1961, at the peak of the anti-religious campaign led by Nikita Khrushchev.

The reconstruction of the informative network damaged by the 1956 revolution was given high priority by the „reformed” secret services. Starting from 1957, a great number of priests were recruited by the secret police, with most of them having a history of brief or longer periods of detention. Due to the fact that no new bishops had been appointed until a partial bilateral agreement was signed on 15 September 1964, the aim of the authorities became the selection of a new Catholic elite from this pool of „trustworthy” priests: the deal was

career prospects and the possibility of travelling abroad in exchange for secret assistance and public loyalty.

By combining punishment and social mobility, the Kádár regime set the basis for further compromises. The second attack against the Catholic Church ended the movement of collective resistance in Hungary. A sociological analysis on the Hungarian Catholic clergy's involvement shows that while the early total percentage of agents and sources among the nearly 4 000 priests did not exceed 6-7%<sup>9</sup>, this rate later rose to 60-70% (over 80% in the mid-1980s) in the cases of bishops and leading professors of theology (rectors, visiting scholars to the *Hungarian Pontifical Institute* in Rome (Pápai Magyar Intézet – PMI<sup>10</sup>). Almost every bishop appointed after 1964 had previously been linked (or was still linked at the moment of his appointment) to the different branches of the Hungarian intelligence (i.e. section III/I-4 of the Ministry of Interior dealing with Italy and the Vatican, residencies all over the world, the hypertrophic Directorate III/III-1 of MI dealing with the „Catholic reactionaries”). The career of this new „cooperative” clergy – or better, the making of a carefully selected counter elite – was monitored and, in fact, directed by the Hungarian secret service and the State office for Cults, in order to replace the old-styled, uncompromised icons like Cardinal Mindszenty; Lajos Shvoy, Bishop of Székesfehérvár; József Pétery, the *impeditus* Bishop of Vác; Norbert Legányi, the abbot of Pannonhalma; or Arthur Schwartz-Eggenhoffer, appointed by the Vatican apostolic administrator of Esztergom (without the agreement of Hungarian authorities) after cardinal Mindszenty fled to the US Embassy. People like József Ijjas (appointed Bishop of Kalocsa in 1964), Pál Brezanóczy (appointed Bishop of Eger in 1964), theologian Imre Timkó (appointed Greek-Catholic Bishop of Hajdudorogh in 1975), Kornél Pataki, György Zemplén, and Árpád Fábán

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9 According to András Tóth-Máté, in 1958 out of 4663 active clergy (3,7%) only 171 agents were active. Not surprisingly, the highest rate can be found in Budapest (45 out of 480 priests). In the 1970s and 1980s the percentage of clergy collaborating with the Hungarian secret services nearly doubled due to the recruitment of young theologians and priests by the III/I Directorate (external service).

10 TABAJDI, Gábor – UNGVÁRY, Krisztián: *Állambiztonsági tanulmányok*. Manuscript, Budapest, 2007, pp. 290 – 293.

became the best possible ambassadors for the new socialist Hungary during and in the wake of the II Vatican Council.<sup>11</sup>

### Early intelligence activity against the Vatican

Between 1948 and 1963 there were no official contacts between the Vatican and the Hungarian People's Republic. The officers working on the Catholic problem in the Centre and in the small-sized residency in Rome were given the task of monitoring the activity of Hungarian political refugees in Italy. Special attention was paid to those churchmen attending their service in Rome who refused to come back to Hungary after the Communist takeover in 1948. In the early 1950s the ÁVH had opened an informative file, codenamed „Hontalanok<sup>12</sup>” (Stateless), against prominent conservative clerics in Rome such as József Zágon, who left Hungary in 1949 and organized the Hungarian „Actio Catholica” in Rome, becoming first the rector of and later a member of the Curia (secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants between 1970 and 1975); Mons. István Mester, the vice-rector of the PMI and the spokesman of the Hungarian Bishop's Conference until 1964; the Piarist priest Vince Tomek, appointed Father General in 1947 and acting as such until 1967; and finally Mons. Sándor Csertő, a senior member of the powerful *Propaganda Fidei* Congregation, appointed *Promotor Iustitiae* (the third most important position) by its conservative prefect, the Archbishop of Zagreb Šeper in 1969.<sup>13</sup> Although in 1952 a general file named “Vatican's Secretariat of State” was opened, it was impossible to directly penetrate the Vatican until the death of Pope Pius XII.<sup>14</sup>

11 *Ibidem*, pp. 296 – 300.

12 *ÁBTL*, 3. 1. 8. Cs – 687.

13 This provoked negative reactions in Budapest by the ÁEH and the officers handling „Világosság” residency within it. See SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szentszék és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 397. In the „Canale”, „Hontalanok” and „Nérók” files one finds many references to the intensive cultivation of these „hostile” clerics. In the early 1970s the Hungarian intelligence tried a more direct approach to Csertő, who refused any cooperation with the state security. *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5, 0-8-552/15, pp. 92 – 97.

14 The existence of an objektum-dosszié named „Pápai Államtitkárság” had been

By stimulating rivalry and misunderstandings, the Hungarian state security attempted – without much success until 1964 – to weaken those Hungarian-born clerics belonging to the conservative, openly anti-communist wing, and to undermine their position as mediator between the Holy See and the Hungarian Church. By a curious accident, the emigrant-run PMI and the state-owned Hungarian Academy of Rome had to share the magnificent Palazzo Falconieri located in Via Giulia, next to Piazza Farnese and Campo dei Fiori and located only a few hundred meters from the Vatican.

A turning-point in Vatican-Hungarian relations came when the new Pope John XXIII called for a Vatican Council on 25 January 1959.<sup>15</sup> It was an utmost difficult moment for all East-European Catholic Churches, hit by the intensive anti-religious campaign launched by Nikita Khrushchev one year before. It was only after the first official invitations were posted to Hungarian bishops (June 1962), that the Hungarian party and intelligence officials focussed on the question. At first, Cardinal Mindszenty and some other bishops, whose appointment had not been recognized by the Communist state, did not receive invitations, probably due to the internal conflict within the Curia between the declining conservatives, willing to openly condemn Communist regimes, and the rising progressive wing – supported by the Pope himself – seeking to find a compromise with them. When the „reparatory” invitation to old conservative bishops was posted, it was too late: the Hungarian delegation had been set up by the Office for Religious Affairs (ÁEH), in cooperation with the III/III („internal reaction”) and the III/I (foreign intelligence) Directorates. Six informants and several operative agents, who served under diplomatic cover in the Hungarian Legation in Rome, joined the high-level delegation which travelled to Rome in October 1962. Among the informants who had received special training before leaving, one can find future bishops, leading theologians and catholic journa-

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recently discovered by Hungarian scholar István Bandi. The 10 volume file is supposed to have preceded „Nérók” (which starts from vol. XI) but this is unfortunately not available in the state security archive. According to the staff’s opinion, most of this part of it could have got lost or destroyed during or immediately after the 1956 revolution.

15 SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szentszék és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 20.

lists.<sup>16</sup> For the second session, in 1963, the proportion of agents rose to 9 out of 15 members. Intelligence reports showed scarce satisfaction for the work of the Hungarian spies who were the first to work in the Vatican,<sup>17</sup> most of them had been simply unable to remain undiscovered.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, it was during the II Vatican Council that the Hungarian intelligence officers, learning from their errors, laid the foundations for further operative work against the Vatican. To better implement the new policy of opening and dialogue, shortly before the beginning of the Council, in mid-1962 a new ambassador was appointed to Italy, the open-minded and clever József Száll. He was followed by young and well-trained (but ideologically inflexible) state security officers. The Hungarian Legation (from 1964 the Embassy) and the Rome residency staff could get more easily acquainted in Vatican affairs under diplomatic cover by regularly meeting with cardinals, members of the Curia, and civil servants of the staff of the Secretariat of State and new bodies such as the Secretariat for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians, founded in 1960 and the Secretariat for Non Believers founded in 1965, both aimed at stimulating East-West ecumenical dialogue.<sup>19</sup>

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- 16 See MÁTÉ-TÓTH, András: *A II. Vatikáni zsinat és a magyar elhárítás* (2003, manuscript, available at [http://www.vallastudomany.hu/Members/matetoth/vt-mtadocs/m-ta\\_II\\_vatikani\\_zsinat](http://www.vallastudomany.hu/Members/matetoth/vt-mtadocs/m-ta_II_vatikani_zsinat)) and SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szentszék és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005.
- 17 According to István Bandi, the first reports regarding Hungarian clerics emigrated to Italy date back as early as 1950, but agents working for the Hungarian state security in the first 1950s did not represent the „official” Hungarian church like their later fellows.
- 18 SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szentszék és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 143 – 144.
- 19 From 1960 to 1965 the resident was János Bogye, codenamed *Tarnai*, who was to be appointed chief of the Hungarian intelligence in 1976. Other valuable officers proved to be Major György Földes, codenamed *Dér*, the referent for the Catholic issue of the Rome residency between 1962-66, appointed later chief of section III/I-8, charged with the training of illegals, who was also until 1982 the „handler” of the Vatican line in the Centre (service III/I-4-A); Major Ferenc Garzó, codenamed *Fekete*, who joined the Rome residency in 1962 under diplomatic cover, becoming a key element of the Vatican line and the resident from Rome between 1973-77; László Róbert, codenamed *Rezső*, officially the MTI press agency and

In September 1962 officer *Fekete*, who worked in the Rome residency (then dependent on the III/I-3-D service – Vatican), met a German-born journalist (Hamburg, 1900), Dr. Fritz Kusen, who had been living in Italy since the early 1930s and had been working in the German section of *Radio Vaticana* after 1947 and was in contact with the West German Embassy of Rome, as well. According to the information collected in his personal file, Kusen (codenamed „Mozart”) had also been tasked with diplomatic missions by the Canaris service during the II World War; while after 1945 he had had good contacts with a number of East-European and Arab diplomats. The Hungarian intelligence was sure he was not only a double agent, but was being used by the Vatican to spread both true and false information.<sup>20</sup> So he never became an „agent”, refusing to be paid for his reports and oral information he released between 1963–64, but his expertise was valuable to the Hungarian intelligence and party leadership engaged in bilateral talks with the Vatican. Kusen had excellent access to internal information. He was a close friend of Father Sebastian Tromp, the personal secretary of the leading conservative Cardinal Ottaviani, a fierce enemy of the opening to Moscow. During a confidential talk with him on 14 April 1963, Kusen got to know that the visit to the Pope of the „Izvestija” editor and Nikita Khrushchev’s son-in-law Adjubei, on March 7, had not been an accident but had to be placed into a broader perspective. Shortly after the publication of encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris*, on April 11 – in which the head of the Catholic Church renounced to voice anti-communism,<sup>21</sup> Pope John XXIII arranged with Soviet authorities a private visit for Khrushchev to Rome and to the Vatican on June 15. Although the plan has never been made public – and the Pope’s death on June 3 made it fail – it provoked deep concern not only in the Vatican, among leading conservative circles, but also in the USA and in West Germany, where chancellor Adenauer reacted furiously to the bad news coming from Rome.<sup>22</sup>

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the newspaper *Népszabadság* correspondent to Rome between 1961 and 1966.

20 *ÁBTL*, fond 3.2.4. K-383 („Mozart” operative file, 1962 – 1965), pp. 137 – 138.

21 MELLONI, Alberto: *L'altra Roma. Politica e S. Sede durante il Concilio Vaticano II (1959 – 1965)*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000, pp. 179.

22 *ÁBTL*, fond 3.2.4. K-383, pp. 118 – 119.

Thanks to „Mozart” and the Hungarian agents „Kékes Pál” and „Molnár Béla”,<sup>23</sup> and legal channels such as Italian journalists Alceste Santini<sup>24</sup> and Valerio Occhetto, the Hungarian intelligence and party leadership managed to run the first talks between a Communist state and the Holy See from a very favourable position. While the Vatican’s envoys to Budapest (the Archbishop of Vienna, Franz König, visited Card. Mindszenty at the end of April 1963, followed on May 7-9 by Mons. Agostino Casaroli, the special envoy the Secretariat of State<sup>25</sup>) had only a superficial knowledge of the internal situation in Hungary, the Kádár regime had detailed information about the increasing strength – stimulated both by internal factors and by the mounting activity of Warsaw Pact’s intelligence – of the intentions of the progressive wing within the Vatican, whose aim was to persuade Card. Mindszenty to give up his personal resistance, to leave Budapest and to step down from his post of Primate of Hungary, allowing the Hungarian church to „live on and work”.<sup>26</sup>

The policy of distension and dialogue inaugurated by Pope John XXIII was carried on by his successor, Paul VI, and despite Mindszenty’s refusal to leave Hungary without a complete rehabilitation, after one year of intensive bilateral talks a partial agreement was signed in Budapest on 15 September 1964 by Agostino Casaroli and József Prantner, the head of the ÁEH. The agreement

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- 23 „Kékes Pál” was the codename of Pál Brezanóczy (1912 – 1972), the Apostolic Administrator of Eger since 1959, who was appointed bishop on 28 October 1964. „Molnár Béla” was the codename of Vid Mihelics, a leading Catholic journalist and the editor of *Vigilia* review.
- 24 Santini was a well-reputed *vaticanista* of the Communist newspaper *l’Unità* and also gave valuable support (not as an agent, but a confidential source) to the Hungarian state security. For over 35 years, until 1990 he led the press service of the Hungarian Embassy to Rome, being also in friendly relations with Casaroli and other Vatican diplomats belonging to the progressive wing.
- 25 Five days before Casaroli’s arrival to Budapest, on 2 May 1963, section III/III-2-a of the Ministry of Interior arranged an operative plan on his surveillance which involved 17 agents in Budapest, Győr, Szeged, Esztergom, Nyíregyháza and Székesfehérvár. SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szentszék és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 97 – 99.
- 26 MELLONI, Alberto: *L’altra Roma. Politica e S. Sede durante il Concilio Vaticano II (1959 – 1965)*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000, pp. 172.

should be considered one of the most successful act of Kádár's regime for three reasons:

- 1) As a consequence of the communist regime's lobbying for the appointment of politically loyal churchmen to replace uncompromised bishops, a great number of bishops and auxiliary bishops working for both the internal service (Directorate III/III) and the foreign intelligence (Directorate III/I) were appointed between 1964 and 1969, when the Hungarian Bishop's conference fell under a complete control by the state.<sup>27</sup> For Moscow, Hungary became a positive model for the state-church relationships in the socialist bloc. Even if religious harassments (censorship, intimidation, arrests, trials) were not stopped, and a new wave of repression took place in early 1965, only a few months after the agreement, the Vatican's diplomacy preferred to downplay their significance in order to maintain good relations with the Hungarian state.<sup>28</sup>
  
- 2) In 1965 the Hungarian state took over the PMI, located at the second floor of Palazzo Falconieri in Rome. Emigrant clerics were removed from their position and replaced by a new staff (rector, vice-rector, a half dozen professors and 4-5 students per year, whose salary or grant was allotted by the Hungarian state). According to archival records, all

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27 ADRIÁNYI, Gábor: *A Vatikán keleti politikája és Magyarország 1939 – 1978*. Budapest, Kairosz, 2004, pp. 70 – 71. According to a prudent estimation, in 1987 no less than 10 out of 13 members of the Hungarian Bishops' Conference (HBC) had been in the past or were still agents and informants of the state security. On the case of Card. László Paskai, the President of the HBC between 1986 and 1990, see UNGVÁRY, Krisztián: *Mozgástér és kényszerpályák. Ecsetvonások egy egyházfő életrajzához*. ÉLET ÉS IRODALOM, 2006/5.

28 In the mid-1960s (the best example could be his speech at Domitilla's Catacombs, on 12 September 1965) he looked more uncompromising towards Poland, which he strongly desired to visit despite the official refusal by local authorities. On Paul VI's position toward Communism see MELLONI, Alberto: *L'altra Roma. Politica e S. Sede durante il Concilio Vaticano II (1959 – 1965)*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000, pp. 352 – 357 and pp. 368 – 371; CASAROLI, Agostino: *Il martirio della pazienza. La Santa Sede e i paesi comunisti (1963 – 1989)*. Torino, Einaudi, 2000, pp. 67 – 76.

rectors leading it between 1965 and 1987 had been skilled agents of the Hungarian intelligence, trained to entertain political discussions, or to use „technique instruments” such as portable microphones.<sup>29</sup> From 1965 to the late 1970s, the proportion of informants among visiting professors and students – most of them attending the Gregorian and the Lateran Pontifical Universities, or the *Collegium Germanicum* – was lower, but still exceeded 50%.<sup>30</sup> PMI’s rectors and professors were a major instrument of Kádár’s policy towards the Vatican, enjoying unrestricted access to the Vatican diplomats dealing with East-European affairs: Agostino Casaroli and Giovanni Cheli until the early 1970s; later on Luigi Poggi, Gabriel Montalvo, Angelo Sodano, Ivan Dias and John Bukovsky.

- 3) Already in 1964 the PMI was given by the state security the task of selecting the future Catholic elite in Hungary, that is the medium and upper ecclesiastical positions. In 1976 a report by the Hungarian intelligence praised the loyalty of former students and stated that the reproduction of a new Catholic elite was a permanent task for the state security, and could only be achieved by preventing „undesirable persons” from getting a chance for career in Rome. Following the „prospective” view adopted after 1964, along the Hungarian Cultural Institute, the PMI was to become the basis of the Hungarian „soft” intelligence in Italy.<sup>31</sup>

29 György Zemplén (codenamed *Karl Wittmann*, 1965 – 1968. Work file nr. Mt-567/1-2.), Árpád Fábrián (*Ludwig Beron*, 1969 – 1972. File Mt-807/1-3), István Bagi (*Blanc*, 1973 – 1979. File Mt-1109/1-4), Dankó István (*Körmöczi*, 1980 – 1987. File M-35493). Although few information is still available about the agent’s network of PMI in the late 1980s, on the basis of the closing date of the „Nérók” operative file (1993) one has to suppose that the methodic penetration of it had not stopped in 1987.

30 BANDI, István: *Adalékok a Pápai Magyar Intézet történetéhez, állambiztonsági megközelítésben*. EGYHÁZTÖRTÉNETI SZEMLE, 2007/1. (<http://www.unimiskolc.hu/~egyhtort/cikkek/bandiistvan.htm>).

31 Operative files concerning the PMI were collected into a dossier codenamed „Palota” (Palace). *ÁBTL*, 3. 1. 5. O-20011.

## 1967 – 1971: Solving Mindszenty’s question

The year 1967 marked a new turning-point for the Hungarian effort to infiltrate the Vatican. On 26 March Pope Paul VI’s encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio* was published. The Catholic church openly faced modernity and stood for social and political rights, especially in Africa and Latin America, claiming that evangelization and a call for social justice were consistent aims. On 4 July 1967 Mons. Casaroli, who expressed his own sympathy for the cause of the socialist countries, was appointed Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (renamed shortly after Public Affairs Council, equivalent to a foreign ministry), and on 16 July he was also created Bishop.<sup>32</sup> Only four years after his first visit to Budapest, he had become the chief architect of the Vatican’s *Ostpolitik*. The reaction of Moscow was immediate. On 24-27 July senior officials of Soviet Bloc intelligence agencies met in Budapest to discuss „work against the Vatican; measures to discredit the Vatican and its backers, and measures to exacerbate differences within the Vatican and between the Vatican and capitalist countries”; the meeting was followed by active measures aimed at discrediting and dividing the Uniate Church and at penetrating the Vatican.<sup>33</sup> According to Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, in 1968-69 an ambitious program personally supervised by the new chief of KGB, Yurii Andropov, aimed at infiltrating all major sections of the Vatican bureaucracy. After the successful takeover of PMI and the marginalisation of the Catholic emigration to Rome, Hungary was given the further task to creep into all Congregations and the Secretariat of State, then run by French cardinal Jean

32 Casaroli’s biographic data in CASAROLI, Agostino: *Il martirio della pazienza. La Santa Sede e i paesi comunisti (1963 – 1989)*. Torino, Einaudi, 2000, XXXI-XXXV.

33 The quotation has been taken from Christopher Andrew-Vasili Mitrokhin (1999), pp. 651. A more detailed Czechoslovak account in KAPLAN, Karel: *Těžká cesta. Spor Československa s Vatikánem 1963 – 1973*, Brno 2001, Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, pp. 145 – 152. See also HALKO, Jozef: A magyar és a csehszlovák titkosszolgálat együttműködése a II. Vatikáni Zsinat „operatív fedolgozásában”. REGNUM. MAGYAR EGYHÁYTÖRTÉNETI VÁZLATOK, 1-2/2006, pp. 81 – 88. References to the 1967 meeting can be found also in the archives of the former Securitate: ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar 69, vol. 2, 2-21. f. No record of the meeting has yet been found in the Hungarian archives.

Villot, and religious orders, especially the Jesuit one, whose members were running the Vatican Radio and most of the Italian Catholic press (*Osservatore Romano* and *Avvenire*).<sup>34</sup>

On the external plan, in order to implement bilateral cooperation, a necessary step in order to carry out the Vatican's master plan to establish normal diplomatic relations, the Hungarian state and the Holy See did not hesitate to remove obstacles to „full blown” *Ostpolitik*. The first victim was Vienna's Archbishop, Franz König, himself a protagonist of the early *Ostpolitik* but more sceptical of Kádár's goodwill than most Vatican staff. In the late 1960s, Card. Mindszenty's situation remained the last contested issue in a delicate negotiation involving Hungary, the Vatican and the USA. In order to increase Mindszenty's isolation, in September 1967 Hungary asked Washington and Vienna to suspend Card. König's frequent visits to Mindszenty.<sup>35</sup> According to a report by the foreign section of MSZMP's Central Committee, König's private talks were causing embarrassment and widespread protest among the Hungarian Bishops Conference.<sup>36</sup> As a result, Card. König had to interrupt his parallel diplomacy and did not play any significant role during the last round of bilateral talks of 1971.<sup>37</sup>

In the same period, Mons. Luigi Bongianino, a skilled diplomat of the Secretariat of State and in charge of Hungarian affairs since 1963, paid his first

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34 The most important success for the Hungarian intelligence in this period was the appointment to *definitior generalis* of the Franciscan order of Father Ferenc Király Pacifik (codenamed *Falter Ludwig*. File Bt-1308/1-3 and Mt-387/1), who kept this position between 1967 and 1973. In the 1970s the most important channels were „Bertold”, an Italian journalist who worked in the foreign desk of the ANSA press agency, the still unidentified „Krammer”, „Engel”, „Kimmel Johann”, „Nemere” and „Sigmund Raymund”.

35 SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szentszék és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 308 – 309.

36 ADRIÁNYI, Gábor: *A Vatikán keleti politikája és Magyarország 1939 – 1978*. Budapest, Kairosz, 2004, pp. 75 – 76. König paid visit to the seriously ill Mindszenty on 7 May and 23 June 1967.

37 From 1967 to 1971, König visited Mindszenty only once, in October 1969. SOÓS, Viktor Attila – SZABÓ, Csaba: „Világosság”. *Az Állami Egyháziügyi Hivatal és a hírszerzés tevékenysége a katolikus egyház ellen*. Budapest, Új Ember-Lénárd Ödön Közhasznú Alapítvány, 2006.

individual visit to Hungary<sup>38</sup> in March 1967 with the task of examining some possible candidates for appointment as bishop. Bongianino surprised his Hungarian fellows, „Kerekes”<sup>39</sup> and „János Zoltán”<sup>40</sup> for his independent-mindedness and „conspiracy”. The report on his visit to Budapest, Eger, Szeged and Kalocsa underlined the political risk represented by Bongianino – who did not care too much of official accounts and called every cleric to confidential talk which had shocking effects on them: people kept crying, their voice trembled.<sup>41</sup> Despite the lack of documents on the Hungarian intervention, their complaint had immediate effects: after a short time Bongianino, who only age 40, was dismissed from diplomatic service and later created Bishop (March 1968).<sup>42</sup>

His successor was Mons. Giovanni Cheli, a senior diplomat who entered the Roman Curia in 1967 as a protégé of Casaroli. He first visited Hungary in September 1968,<sup>43</sup> and with his friendly style immediately gained the trust of his Hungarian counterpart. After his visit to Hungary in November 1969 the Archbishop of Kalocsa, József Ijjas, told agent „Kerekes” that Cheli was „*much more diplomatic and sympathetic to us.*”<sup>44</sup> In the following years Cheli’s positive attitude to socialist Hungary was repeatedly praised by party and intelligence reports. He played a key role in the solution to the troubled Mindszenty affair, travelling several times to Budapest and always surrounded by undercover security officers and influential agents. Under the pressure of the Hungarian state and the progressive wing of the Curia, a reluctant Pope Paul VI agreed to solve the question, and communicated the Vatican’s decision to

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38 Before that he had only joined Agostino Casaroli in 1965 and 1966.

39 Kornél Pataki was the personal secretary of Szeged’s bishop József Udvardy, then was appointed Bishop of Győr (1975 – 1990). His „work file” in *ÁBTL* 3.1.2. M-36278/1-2.

40 György Zemplén, the rector of PMI between 1965 and 1968.

41 Report by „Kerekes” agent on Luigi Bongianino’s visit to Hungary. M-36278/2, pp. 86 – 92.

42 He was sent to the small town of Alba, in Piedmont, then was moved to Vercelli (1970) and Tortona (1975).

43 SOÓS, Viktor Attila – SZABÓ, Csaba: „*Világosság*”. *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal és a hírszerzés tevékenysége a katolikus egyház ellen*. Budapest, Új Ember-Lénárd Ödön Közhasznú Alapítvány, 2006, document n. 3.

44 Report by „Kerekes” on Giovanni Cheli’s visit to Hungary (18-19 November 1969). M-36278/2, pp. 188.

bring the old Primate to Rome to the Hungarian Foreign Minister, János Péter (himself a former Calvinist bishop), on 16 April 1971. According to Péter's report for the MSZMP Political Committee, during the meeting the Pope showed little concern for Mindszenty's fate, calling him „*a victim of history who is causing indeed much difficulty both to the Vatican and the Hungarian government.*”<sup>45</sup> Five days later, a secret agreement was signed by the representative of the Vatican, Giovanni Cheli, and the president of ÁEH, Imre Miklós, according to which the Vatican agreed to revoke excommunications inflicted in 1958 to three Hungarian churchmen (Miklós Berestóczy, Richárd Horváth and Imre Várkonyi) who had been elected to the Communist parliament in spite of official prohibition.<sup>46</sup> According to the evaluation given by the Hungarian Communist Party, this decision was important for Hungarian foreign policy too, because it made easier „*cooperation between left-wing movements and progressive Catholic forces in the West.*”<sup>47</sup> On the Vatican's demand, the formal rehabilitation of collaborationist priests – supposed to be welcomed by conservative public opinion as a betrayal – was made public only on 13 October 1971. On that date Card. Mindszenty already was in Rome, after the Vatican's representative Giovanni Cheli had signed on 9 September the agreement that made it possible for Mindszenty to leave Hungary. Conditions imposed on Mindszenty's status were humiliating: he was denied juridical rehabilitation, so thus leaving Hungary as an infractor, and he was also prevented from dealing with Hungarian affairs. Moreover, the Vatican agreed to let him retire from Primacy after he had reached 80 years (that is to say in 1972).<sup>48</sup> These points were made clear by the Vatican to Mindszenty only on 10 October 1971 by the Apostolic Delegate to Vienna. So after only four weeks spent in Rome, Mindszenty decided to move to Vienna, where he died in 1975. His departure under these conditions

45 SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szezszték és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években.* Budapest, Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 408.

46 BALOGH, Margit – GERGELY, Jenő: *Egyházak az újkori Magyarországon 1790 – 1992. Kronológia.* Budapest, História-MTA Törtéttudományi Intézete, 1993, pp. 344.

47 ADRIÁNYI, Gábor: *A Vatikán keleti politikája és Magyarország 1939 – 1978.* Budapest, Kairosz, 2004, pp. 117 – 118.

48 *Ibidem*, pp. 213.

was welcomed as a major success by the Hungarian state security: agreements signed were in line with Hungarian interests and were testimony that „progressive Catholic forces” were gaining ground even into the Vatican.<sup>49</sup>

In the very important period following the first operative meeting on the Vatican in 1967, Hungary was able to consolidate its positive image, also contributing to the progressive marginalisation of internal ideological enemies (Mindszenty) as well as external ones (Cardinals Ottaviani, Benelli, the Croat-born Franjo Šeper, and München’s Card. Döpfner). On the internal plan, a key role was played by a special residency called „Világosság” set up in November 1968 within the State Office of Cults and belonging to the fourth section of III/I Directorate, in charge of Italy, the Vatican and Israel. Major József Orosz, codenamed *Vági*, was appointed chief of the five-member staff. Sándor Rajnai, the chief of the Hungarian foreign intelligence directorate, tasked Orosz to keep and work out confidential information coming both from Hungarian churchmen travelling to Rome (skilled informants or „confidential sources”, that is up to say involuntary confidants) and from Vatican diplomats visiting Hungary. During such occasions, particular attention was paid to the special envoy to Hungary, Giovanni Cheli, and his assistant, Mons. Gabriel Montalvo, both of whom were very close to Mons. Casaroli and were intensively cultivated through the so-called „black channel”.<sup>50</sup> For over three years – working together with the other sections of intelligence, the State Office of Cults and the Propaganda section of the Party’s Central Committee – the residency also helped „prepare” Hungarian bishops for their regular visits to Rome, in order to smuggle in dissenters on the *Ostpolitik* and strengthen the Vatican’s belief that the Hungarian question had been settled.<sup>51</sup>

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49 *ÁBTL* 3.2.5 0-8-552/12, 45-53. Report by section III/I-4 on current trends of the Vatican’s foreign policy. Budapest, 2 October, 1972.

50 *ÁBTL* 2.2.1 Operatív nyilvántartás II/2 –7. doboz (Operative files – Giovanni Cheli). Montalvo dealt with Eastern European affairs between 1964 and 1974, then became apostolic delegate to Nicaragua, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya until 1986, and later pro-nuncio to Yugoslavia (1986-96) and ambassador to the USA (1999-2005). Further biographic details in „Gabriel Montalvo; Archbishop, Vatican Envoy to U.S”. *Washington Post*, 4 August 2006.

51 On the „Világosság” residency, see SOÓS, Viktor Attila – SZABÓ, Csaba: „Világosság”. *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal és a hírszerzés tevékenysége a katolikus egyház ellen*. Budapest, Új Ember-Lénárd Ödön Közhasznú Alapítvány, 2006.

## Hungary's agent network and targets in the Vatican during the 1970s

The operative efficiency and political influence of the Hungarian intelligence towards the Vatican reached its peak throughout the 1970s, before the natural turning point represented by the shocking election of the Polish cardinal Karol Wojtyła (16 October 1978), whose effects on the Cold War's dynamics were immediate and consistent. After cracking the resistance of the Hungarian Catholic movement and signing favourable agreements on the Mindszenty case, in the early 1970s the Hungarian authorities felt ready to intensify their intelligence activity within the Vatican and Italy as a whole. Due to growing political instability and economic crisis, Italy continued to be regarded by Moscow as the most vulnerable Western country, where operative interests could have been easily achieved.

From 1972/73 onwards, the „Vatican line” became a source of major success for the Hungarian intelligence, led from 1967 to 1976 by Sándor Rajnai and afterwards, until November 1989, by János Bogye, who himself had been a legal resident in Rome during the 1960s and spoke perfect Italian and Spanish.<sup>52</sup> In the Centre, one of the most important sections of the First Directorate (III/I-4<sup>53</sup>) dealt with Italy and operated on three lines/services.

- **III/I-4-A:** intelligence against the Vatican line and the Catholic emigration to Western countries<sup>54</sup>

52 UNGVÁRY, Krisztián: *Kik voltak, mit akartak? Egyenes út a csúcsra: Harangozó Szilveszter. Egy állambiztonsági főcsoportfőnök karrierje.* RUBICON, 2007/1, pp. 34 – 35.

53 For a clear account on the Third Chief Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs see URBÁN, Aladár: *Kádár politikai rendőrsége. A BM III. (Állambiztonsági) Főcsoportfőnökség felépítése és működése.* RUBICON, 2002/6-7, pp. 58 – 65.

54 Officers leading the Vatican service (III/I-4-A) from 1972 to the early 1980s were capt. György Kósa, sub-lieutenant János Knopp, lieutenant-colonel Ferenc Garzó and sub-lieutenant János Rostási. Section III/I-4 was led by colonel János Bogye, lieutenant-colonel György Földes, lieutenant-colonel Ferenc Zsigmond, then Gábor Patkó and Oszkár Kiss.

- **III/I-4-B:** intelligence against NATO targets in Italy (with particular reference to the NATO Defence College of Rome<sup>55</sup>)
- **III/I-4-C:** intelligence activity against Zionist movements and Israeli targets in Italy

The high operational level reached by the Vatican service can be first explained through some statistical data. In the second half of the 1970s one can estimate that state security staff working on the Vatican reached its peak, with some dozens of well-trained, Italian-speaking intelligence officers working around the world under diplomatic cover or „illegally” for III/I-8 service. The highest concentration was in Italy, where the Rome main residency hosted 6 – 7 officers dealing with the Vatican out of a total number of 21 – 22 staff (12 of which were operative officers).<sup>56</sup>

According to a report about the period from January 1973 to June 1977, Hungarian intelligence collected 860 pieces of intel and reports of the Vatican line, 686 of which had been evaluated as „usable” by section III/I-6 (documentations, analysis and forecasts). Two-thirds of this information (565 by number) came from different residencies; the most successful proved to be the intelligence from Rome, from where 546 reports, secret documents and information had been sent (461 of which usable, 85 unusable), but further intelligence came also from Vienna (during Card. Mindszenty’s stay, until 1975, from his circle and later from Card. König’s entourage), Paris (where the French Bishop’s conference was monitored until 1977), Köln (whose Archbishops were two influential conservative churchmen Josef Frings, 1942-69, and Joseph Höffner, 1969-87<sup>57</sup>), Zürich and also New York (the UN’s residency), where Hunga-

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55 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.6. 8-346/1-4 (Nato Defence College, 1968 – 1988).

56 Figures are taken from *ÁBTL*, 3.2.6. 0-200/IX, pp. 29 and pp. 77 – 78 (*Velence* operative file – Hungary’s embassy to Rome, 1976 – 1987). To make a comparison, KGB’s „legal” residency in Rome had a 35 staff and was running over just 20 agents. ANDREW, Christopher – MITROKHIN, Vasili: *Mitrochinov archiv. KGB v Evropě a na Západe*. Londýn, Penguin, 1999, pp. 620.

57 Pope Benedict XVI had been a consultant for theological questions of Card. Frings at the II Vatican Council, and later a leading professor of Theology in Münster and Tübingen, well known to the Hungarian state security for his conservative stance after 1968.

rian intelligence officers could also meet with Vatican diplomats working in the USA.

Another 295 pieces of information (216 of which were evaluated as useful to operative tasks) had been collected through the network agency. By this time, the number of agents followed exceeded 20, most of them living and working in Rome. More notably, in the mid-1970s most candidates and confidential sources were Italian or people working for the Vatican, and provided Hungarian intelligence with secret information on the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*, and political and personal conflicts which could be exploited according to the Soviet bloc's interests.<sup>58</sup> According to available data, the flow of reports further intensified after 1978. In 1980-81 the Rome residency forwarded the Centre a monthly 30 – 35 reports. Most of them were referring to the Vatican's foreign policy and to the main operative targets, such as the Radio Vaticana (codenamed *Son*), the PMI (codenamed *Palota*) and the Jesuit Order (codenamed *Fekete Ház*).<sup>59</sup>

In the second half of the 1970s, the resident and its operative officers ruled a complex, multi-level network in Rome. The highest grade was represented by „hivatásos munkatárs” (*skilled agent – HMT*), „titkos munkatárs” (*TMT – secret agent*) and „hírszerző ügynök (*HÜ – intelligence agent*). All *TMT* and most *HMT* and *HÜ* were Hungarian-born (staff of PMI and the Hungarian Cultural Institute, journalists, intellectuals and scholars), and also got a special training before moving to Italy. The main operative basis against the Vatican was Palazzo Falconieri, where the PMI operated: here even the meeting rooms and the offices were microphoned, allowing the intelligence service to make the best use

58 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5 0-8-552/13, pp. 159 – 173. The most important foreign agent working for the Hungarian intelligence in Italy was „Von Schiller”, a West German journalist accredited to Italy. Among his confidential sources (certainly unaware of his real aims) one could find „T-1” – a diplomat of the FRG Embassy, „V-2” – the general assistant of the Jesuit Order and „V-4”, a high-ranking official of the Secretary for the Christians' Unit. Other valuable sources were „Bertold”, a journalist for the ANSA press agency, „Braun Franz”, a Rome-based journalist of Radio Free Europe, „Heine”, director of the left-wing oriented ADISTA Catholic press agency, „Ágel”, an Italian MP belonging to the left-wing of the Italian Socialist Party, „Müde”, „Scherring” and „Böhm” (a Cistercian father teaching at Lateran University). A confidential contact was also the well-known Hansjakob Stehle, a senior correspondent to Rome for „Die Zeit” and ARD and author of books about the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*.

59 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5 0-8-552/14, pp. 165 – 169.

of official ceremonies, concerts and other cultural events. On the second level one could find clerical agents (priests, friars, theologians, civil servants within universities and congregations), also of Hungarian background. The third level, by no means the most successful one, was represented by all those Italian and Vatican sources, who intentionally or unintentionally (when provoked by intelligence staff following operative psychological techniques such as the „black channel”) proved less valuable to the Hungarian intelligence by giving compromising or confidential information. Most of them were sincerely convinced about Hungary’s commitment to friendly bilateral relations with the Vatican and Italy and did not regard Kádár’s Hungary as a truly Communist regime.

According to archival records, due also to technological progress during the 1970s (e.g. the creation of an electronic database), the cooperation between different branches of the state security reached a high operational level. „Legal” residencies (like Rome’s, which depended on section III/I-4) exchanged their information not only with the Centre (sections III/I-4, III/I-6, as well as the „illegal” III/I-8 and „Akadémia” chief residency, charged with the monitoring of cultural relations with the West, whose activity remains still unexplored), but also with section III/III-1, in charge of the „Catholic problem” for the First Directorate, the Second Directorate of counterintelligence taking care of foreign citizens visiting Hungary, the Foreign Ministry and the State Office of Cults.<sup>60</sup> „Nérók” files show a regular exchange of operative information and personal data on foreign clerics with some East European secret services. An intensive bilateral cooperation was further established with Poland and the GDR, whose diplomats and/or intelligence officers working in Rome regularly met with their Hungarian fellows. The Hungarian intelligence had been used as a main reference for those Warsaw Pact countries – such as Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union – whose bad or inexistent relations with the Vatican made it quite difficult to penetrate its secrets. By contrast, the intelligence services of the different Warsaw Pact countries shared very few operative links with Ro-

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60 Every visit to Hungary of Vatican diplomats was jointly prepared the three Directorates and the State Office of Cults. During Giovanni Cheli and Angelo Sodano’s visit to Hungary in April 1972, for example, a one-day trip to lake Balaton was organised for them in order to permit security officers to secretly enter their hotel room in search for confidential papers to copy. *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/11, pp. 31 – 35.

manian foreign intelligence, which operated independently and showed much interest towards Italy and the Vatican itself.<sup>61</sup>

### **Full-blown *Ostpolitik* and first signs of crisis**

From the second half of the 1960s the Warsaw Pact countries made an extraordinary effort to undermine the Vatican's positions, to weaken its moral influence and to ideologically reorient it from a pro-Western, theologically and socially conservative stance towards ideological nonalignment between capitalism and socialism. While reading self-confident Hungarian reports about serious political damages inflicted to the „clerical reaction” (both in the Vatican and in Hungary) by the active measures taken throughout the 1970s, one wonders how trustful and reliable they should be considered from a historical perspective. Looking at *Ostpolitik*'s development in the last years of the Paul VI papacy, it seems that the way Hungary could penetrate and influence the Vatican's policy towards the Socialist bloc was quite similar to KGB and Stasi joint operations and operative combinations against leading West German politicians like Willy Brandt and Helmut Schimdt.<sup>62</sup> In both cases, the success did not rely on direct recruitment of targets, yet on the creation of stable channels inside their staff of advisors in order to collect information and influence their decisions through positive propaganda and disinformation.

Favourable contingency also helped to spread the perception among Catholic believers that the 1968 global turbulences were a clear demonstration of economic, psychological and even moral crisis plaguing the US-led Western capitalist world. Intelligence reports based on confidential talks with Vatican diplomats could not miss a comparison between a „secularised” West, where the Catholic world looked divided by theological quarrels and dissenting groups that questioned the moral authority of the Pope, and the East, where Catholicism had survived to through Communism, preserving devotion and

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61 I would like to thank Chris Davis for his perceptive comments made on this part of the paper.

62 ANDREW, Christopher – MITROKHIN, Vasili: *Mitrochinov archiv. KGB v Evropě a na Západě*. Londýn, Penguin, 1999, pp. 594 – 595.

obedience to Rome.<sup>63</sup> Two years later, in 1972 the Hungarian intelligence came to know that during a confidential meeting of the Congregation for the Public Affairs (the Vatican's „Foreign Ministry” led by Card. Casaroli from 1968 to 1978) the Vatican's French Secretary of State, Card. Jean Villot, had been even more explicit, recognizing that socialist regimes unintentionally erected a wall against the diffusion to Eastern Europe of materialism and hedonism.<sup>64</sup> A general report released in October 1972 by the Hungarian secret service on the Vatican's foreign policy trends underlined that the Holy See was now giving priority to the collection of reliable information from beyond the Iron Curtain and to the upgrading of the hierarchy (a most striking question for Czechoslovakia, where most bishops appointed by Rome had not been recognized by the state). The KGB had also warned all socialist countries that the Vatican had recently set up a master plan for „ideological subversion”, motivated officially by the common struggle for peace and disarmament and to be realised through a more intense contact with local authorities and private citizens. Nevertheless, the Hungarian intelligence showed no particular concern for this alarm. On the contrary, internal divisions within the Curia were appreciated, where the pro-Secretary of State Card. Giovanni Benelli and ultraconservative Card. Ottaviani led the opposition to *Ostpolitik*, targeting not only Villot but also Casaroli and his „liberal” staff.<sup>65</sup> According to Villot, the Catholic Church should avoid committing with socialism the same error previously made with capitalism, from which the Vatican seemed to be too dependent. The Holy See should preserve its „neutrality” and, indeed, look with „sympathy” to socialism and help elevate the moral level of East-European societies without undermining the political legitimacy of ruling Marxist parties. Finally, although the Kádár regime was concerned with the spread of basis communities being in open dissent with

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63 SZABÓ, Csaba: *A Szezszték és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat-Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 38 and pp. 400 – 401 (report of „Világosság” residency of the visit to Budapest of Agostino Casaroli and Giovanni Cheli on January 1970).

64 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 164 – 166.

65 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/15, pp. 62. According to a report by the Rome residency of November 1974, rumours were heard in the Curia about the removal of Agostino Casaroli, who had entered into conflict with Card. Benelli and was expected to be appointed as the Archbishop of Turin.

collaborationist clergy, well-informed intelligence could report that according to Vilлот the Vatican would not have allowed the existence of any dissenting community in the socialist world, where the reconstruction of an officially recognised structure became the first – and sometimes the only possible – aim for Vatican diplomacy.<sup>66</sup>

According to Agostino Casaroli, reported by Polish Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pope Paul VI intended to avoid any major conflict with the socialist camp. Casaroli added: he was personally convinced that within ten years Catholicism and socialism would have become the dominant „ideologies” all over the world, and both needed to find a common ground.<sup>67</sup>

A year marked by international tension mainly due to the first oil crisis, 1973 was also a troubled period for the Vatican, which seemed to realise formerly declared intentions to distance itself from the United States and play an active and independent role in the European security conference.<sup>68</sup> On 7 February 1973 the Hungarian intelligence came to know that two CIA agents working undercover as „minutanti” in the Vatican Secretariat of State had been recently unmasked and sent on punishment to Uganda and South Africa as Vice Nuncio.<sup>69</sup> Some months later, on 28 July 1973, the *Osservatore Romano* announced with a brief communiqué that the high-ranking diplomat Giovanni Cheli, charged of contacts with Hungarian officials,<sup>70</sup> had been appointed Apostolic Delegate to

66 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 45 – 53. Report by section III/I-4 on guidelines of the Vatican’s foreign policy. Budapest, 2 October 1972. See also 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 164 – 166. Rome, 7 February 1974. Report by agent „Engel” on internal conflicts into the Vatican.

67 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 157 – 159. Record of the meeting between the Polish Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Hungarian Ambassador to Poland. Warsaw, 30 November 1973.

68 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 69. Intelligence report by agent „Nemere”. Rome, 23 November 1972; *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 70 – 74. Report by agent „Von Schiller” talking to confidential source „V-2”. Rome, 15 December 1972.

69 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 94.

70 Besides taking part in official talks with Hungarian representatives, Cheli held also private and strictly confidential talks on 8 January and 29 May 1973, in a restaurant in Rome with undercover officer György Földes, codenamed *Dér*. During these talks, the main topic of which was Mindszenty’s case, Cheli also offered to give Hungarian diplomats first-hand information on any further developments of the Vatican’s *Ostpolitik*. Reports by *Dér* in *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 77 – 82

the United Nations, in New York. In spite of Vatican discretion, the Hungarian intelligence informed the Centre and the party leadership of Cheli's removal as early as 18 July, well before the news had been made public. Hungarian sources were also informed on the true reason for his removal, due to a denunciation against him presented to Pope Paul VI by Hungarian-born emigrant clerics, led by Károly Fábian, a senior editor of Radio Free Europe, who openly accused Cheli of being „a Communist agent”.<sup>71</sup> The rumour was confirmed by Cheli himself, who confidentially admitted to agent „Blanc” (the PMI's rector, István Bagi) that the real target of the conservative offensive was Casaroli, put under pressure by the Pope who – always trying to balance between the two wings – was forced to sacrifice him in order to keep the line.<sup>72</sup> Cheli's indiscretion was useful to the Hungarian intelligence, which realised the political risks linked to top-level confidential sources. Cheli was replaced by Mons. Luigi Poggi, another senior diplomat belonging to Casaroli's wing but much less an enthusiast of Hungarian religious policy than Cheli.<sup>73</sup>

In 1973, ten years after the intensive, apparently one-sided opening towards the East, the Vatican's progressive wing had to face the same accusation of inconsistency made by a younger generation of diplomats to the old conservatives in the 1950s: neither resistance nor dialogue seemed to have any major influences on the internal life of the Communist regimes, though the dialogue did help them increase their legitimisation and international weight. Casaroli

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and pp. 108 – 113.

71 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/11, pp. 142 – 144. Report by section III/I-6 of the removal of the Vatican diplomat dealing with Hungarian affairs. Budapest, 19 July 1973.

72 *Ibidem*, pp. 143.

73 Along with other Vatican diplomats such as John Bukovsky and Francesco Colasuonno, Luigi Poggi can be found on a list of former Hungarian agents known as “Szakértő 90”, which was first made public in 2005 (<http://www.angelfire.com/zine2/szakerto90>). According to available records („Nérók” files and the his personal file: *ÁBTL* 2.7.1 NOIJ Névmutató Karton – Luigi Poggi) any direct link between Poggi and the Hungarian intelligence has to be excluded. Along with many other staff of the Secretariat of State, Poggi was indeed subject to intense cultivation by the Hungarian intelligence, but also used his frequent talks to Hungarian diplomats and officers to exchange information and enforce the Vatican's position.

himself showed dissatisfaction with the results of his own policy.<sup>74</sup> According to a Hungarian intelligence report, during the annual conference of the Apostolic Delegates held in Frascati, near Rome, Casaroli had to point out that, in spite of popular expectations in the West, dialogue should not mean „ideological compromise” with Communism, and in spite of its „disappointing results” this strategy should not be abandoned because „*so long as we dialogue, East-European Churches are not at risk.*”<sup>75</sup>

A similar policy was quite easy to follow in Hungary, where the intensive cooperation between the Catholic Church and Kádár’s regime had no more obstacles after Mindszenty’s forced resignation<sup>76</sup> (18 December 1973), which made it possible in 1976 to appoint as Hungary’s primate one the most collaborative bishops, László Lékai. It was much more difficult for the Polish Catholics and the West German Bishop’s Conference to yield to the demands of Vatican’s realpolitik. In February 1974 Hungarian intelligence registered with satisfaction the unprecedented conflict between the Polish Bishop’s Conference and the Vatican Secretariat of State on Casaroli’s official trip to Poland, made on at the invitation of the Polish government. After Casaroli preached his sermon in St. John the Baptist Cathedral of Warsaw, praising the ongoing reconciliation between the state and the Church, Cards. Wyszyński and Wojtyła openly accused him of „*weakening the positions of the Polish Bishop’s Conference*” and of „*provoking misunderstanding among the Polish clergy.*”<sup>77</sup> They also boycotted the reception organised by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as a sign of protest. According to a Polish diplomat, Warsaw was aware that Casaroli needed well-sounding promises in order to face critics, and agreed to consider his proposal to establish normal diplomatic relations; but the Polish government had no

74 See Agostino CASAROLI, Agostino: *Il martirio della pazienza. La Santa Sede e i paesi comunisti (1963 – 1989)*. Torino, Einaudi, 2000, chapters IX and XI on his diplomatic efforts in Czechoslovakia and Poland.

75 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 216 – 224. Report by section III/-6 on new trends in Vatican’s policy. Budapest, 7 June 1974.

76 Consistent material on the operative measures taken by the Hungarian authorities and the Vatican to positively influence public opinion can be find in the „Nérok” files, as well as „Blanc” (*ÁBTL*, 3.2.3. Mt-1109/2) and „Kerkai” operative files (*ÁBTL*, 3.2.3. Mt-988/1).

77 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 199 – 202. Report of section III/I-4 on Vatican-Polish talks. Budapest, 22 February 1974.

serious intention to modify bilateral relations with the Vatican, already considered to be satisfying and favourable to Warsaw.<sup>78</sup> The Polish journalist working in Rome, Dominik Morawski, also told the Hungarian agent „Nemere” that the Polish government now feared the sudden death of frequently-ill Pope Paul VI, an event which could damage the work already done by Casaroli.<sup>79</sup>

In this period, Polish-Hungarian cooperation on religious matters became so intensive that the two ministers of Foreign Affairs, Stefan Olszowski and János Péter, met in early September 1973 to discuss further relations with the Vatican, and Olszowski complained about Wyszyński’s un-collaborative stance, which strikingly diverged from „harmonic coexistence” in Hungary.<sup>80</sup> Tension between the Vatican and the Polish clergy reached a peak when the Secretariat of State (on Casaroli’s initiative) heavily censored a speech, very critical of *Ostpolitik* and the negative effects of „dialogue” on the East-European churches, that Card. Wyszyński was intending to address to the Sinod of Bishops held in Rome in October 1974.<sup>81</sup> Confidence by father Jozef Penkowsky to agent „Kimmel Johann” was interpreted in Budapest as another sign that „operative work” on the Vatican had been successful: stopping critical voices against *Ostpolitik* by direct intervention of the Eastern bloc’ countries was no longer needed: the Vatican provided for it on its own.

### **The long way to the breakthrough**

By 1975 the crisis with Polish clergy and a diplomatic conflict with West Germany on the diplomatic recognition of East Germany – along with a succession of failures with Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia and the USSR – came to undermine the legitimacy of the Vatican’s *Ostpolitik*. The Hungarian intelligence had reached excellent positions in the Vatican, where the „double loyalty” of the Hungarian Bishop’s Conference to the Communist state and the

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78 *Ibidem*, pp. 200.

79 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 225 – 228. Report by „Nemere”. Rome, 10 June 1974.

80 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/15, pp. 39 – 41. János Péter’s report on talks with the Polish minister of Foreign Affairs. Budapest, 13 September 1973.

81 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/12, pp. 266 – 268. Report by „Kimmel Johann”. Rome, 14 November 1974.

Pope was highly appreciated, and also substantially contributed to the marginalization of the „clerical reaction” within and outside Hungary. Top-level Hungarian politicians came to visit Hungary and the Vatican: in 1975 Prime Minister György Lázár and in June 1977 János Kádár, who had been the Minister of Interior during the Mindszenty trial.<sup>82</sup> Kádár’s visit to the Vatican raised only isolated protest and represented by no means a small triumph for Hungary’s „fuzzy socialism” and its soft, still very efficient intelligence. But the over-optimistic accounts on the Vatican’s commitment to *Ostpolitik* could not avoid mentioning that after the Helsinki Conference and the election of Jimmy Carter to the US presidency something had changed in international politics.

An intelligence report in 1975 made an excellent forecast on possible successors to Pope Paul VI, putting the lesser-known Card. Wojtyła among the three or four most probable choices, along with Card. Ugo Poletti and two German-speaking foreign clerics: Berlin’s Alfred Bensch, sincerely committed to the *Ostpolitik*, and Vienna’s Franz König, who had played a major role during an early stage of the opening to East but who in the 1970s had become more and more sceptical about it. In the case of the election of Krakow’s Archbishop Karol Wojtyła, a choice that the Hungarian intelligence identified as „possibly the most hazardous”, „major consequences for world politics” and deep changes were forecasted, with Poland at the centre of this.<sup>83</sup> After reaching full proficiency into Vatican affairs, the Hungarian secret services were capable of predicting the coming end of *Ostpolitik*’s golden age, but not strong enough to prevent it.

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82 PANKOVITS, József: *Fejezetek a Magyar-olasz politikai kapcsolatok történetéből (1956 – 1977)*. Budapest, Gondolat, 2005, pp. 141 – 152.

83 *ÁBTL*, 3.2.5. 0-8-552/15, pp. 90. Forecast analysis on the possible successors to pope Paul VI. Budapest, 15 August 1975.

*tial Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania), February – July 2007, Budapest (Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security, Hungarian – Vatican relations).*