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THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM
OF HUNGARY BETWEEN 1985 AND 1994

Abstract

This chapter of my thesis will elaborate on the political forces behind the structural change in education during the Hungarian transition. The communist era forced a rather comprehensive system on Hungary (8 years long primary and 4 years long secondary, catchment areas, centralized curriculum and financing). Stemming from as early as 1985, but completed mainly in 1993, Hungary liberated and decentralized its system. A large variety of institutions were allowed to start, free school choice and early selection of students became possible, and centralized regulation was allocated mostly to the level of the school maintainers, local governments.

A unique set of interviews with the major party and church representatives made in 1989/90 and in 1994 offers a possibility to see what were the intentions of the policy makers and major lobby groups before and after the 1993 Law on the Hungarian Public Education was passed. I analyze these interviews and other publications from the time to see what were the political and ideological motives behind the structural change.

Preliminary results suggest that the outcome of the changes can be considered as a quasi-compromise between the ruling conservative parties and the largest opposition forces, the liberals. While the former promoted the reinforcement of the gymnasium/vocational school division, an implicitly selective system (supported largely by the church), the liberals urged a "liberal" system, where the local demand shapes the institutions, and free school choice and free school formation is permitted.