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The transformation of the public image of the Parliament in Hungary from the middle of the 19th century to the Second World War

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Abstract

In Hungary, despite the tradition of political representation of the estates, the modern institution of the Parliament was created in the mid-nineteenth century. The institution enjoyed a high degree of prestige, which oscillated over time, and its work was constantly in the public eye. However, the real power of decision was concentrated, to a large extent, in the hands of the executive and the monarch / regent. Also, the electoral process was conducted in such a way that it often provided the ruling party with a comfortable parliamentary majority. Consequently, the role of the representative institution was diminished, while the opposition's possibilities to influence the legislative process were minimized. Such issues have been highlighted by contemporaries, which provided a rather large documentary base made up of correspondence, press articles, memoirs and pamphlets.

This paper aims to shed light on the transformation of the parliament's image in the eyes of their members and the general public of the time, in terms of their functionality and reference to ideal models of political representation (sometimes external, sometimes theoretical). I intend to follow and compare the evolution and transformation of the public perception of the parliament as representative body of the nation, its relationship with the democratic principles of pre- and interwar periods, and the self-perception of its members – the latter with the purpose of highlighting how the MPs understood their political role and the mission of the institution they represented. In this context, one of the research questions will be to what extent the aftermath of the First World War (in particular the electoral changes and the crisis of conscience) has impacted on the above-mentioned issues. The comparative perspectives of the time, between the Hungarian parliament and the Western European models, will also be highlighted.

Keywords: parliament, transformation, public image, Hungary