



Politics and Educational System: The Case of Church Schools in Hungary in and After Communist Era¹

Fadime Yilmaz²

Abstract

Religious/church schools (RSs) played a crucial role in the social and educational life of Hungary in the first half of the 20th century. However, the 1946 communist power transmission had a serious blow on the church school system. Except few of them, RSs were reprivatized. The previously compulsory religious education from 1949 became optional, and until 1977 it remained under strict state control. The main political objective of these decades is “disbelief”, and this objective used education as main tool, and the ideology of the state determined the educational system. Churches opposed it strongly, and nation-wide protests started. Yet, nothing changed until the collapse of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Then, with the system change in 1990, the entire school system changed and schools were returned to the churches. Using historical research methodology, this paper will analyse the religious education politics of Hungary in the communist era and after it by collecting data from the secondary sources. Thus, this paper, first will describe the Hungarian education system in general with a focus on church schools. Then, it will widely discuss how the politics of the time affected the educational structure, and how the RSs responded to the oppressive political climate by exploring the history of RSs in communist time and after it.

Keywords: Church schools, Communist era, state & religious schools.

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² Ph. D. student, Szeged University, Doctoral School of Education, Szeged, Hungary. fatima.yilmaz@yahoo.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-5062-3191.

Introduction

“From the first, education was the creature of religion” (Murphy, 1968). Schools were a part of religious institutions and most of the lecturers of schools were religious officers. With the modern era, the impact of the religion on the public sphere decreased and religion became “an epiphenomenal force in society” (Fox, 2006). States separated themselves from religion and started to control the education and the information taught in the classrooms.

Religious education is related to “systematic instruction concerning a specific faith or practices that are categorized as religious. It encompasses a multitude of concepts, institutional settings, and national heritages” (Gross, 2011, 257). Sterkens and Yusuf distinguish two general models of RE based on the differences in their social context, normative basis and pedagogical aspects. The first one is the mono-religious model and this model aims to construct a particular religious identity in line with one’s religion. This model focuses primarily on one religion and students are taught deeply in their faith. The second model, the inter-religious model, focuses on religious identity formation through dialogue and does not prioritize teaching of a particular religion. The goal here is to develop a particular religious identity in dialogue with other religious traditions (2015, 51-52). There are studies that developed some models to define RE, however, the concept of religious school can have different meaning for different countries depends on the context (Jackson, 2008; Bråten, 2013). Religious schools (RSs) mainly follow the mono-religious model. They have a distinctive religious character and focus on instilling religious values and socializing students into a religious identity. They operate in the same way schools operate (Riley, Marks & Grace, 2003; Maussen & Bader, 2015). They teach almost all the subjects that are being taught in general schools alongside with the religious subjects.

Freedom of education is guaranteed by The European Convention on Human Rights, including establishing religious schools (RSs). However, with an increase in religious diversity and a decrease in the religiosity of people in many countries, the role, and even existence of religious schools has become a topic of debate. In many countries, this discussion hovers around whether RSs are politicized, and, -because of the political reasons-, they betray the educational and religious values (Riley, Marks & Grace, 2003). While religious institutions were controlling education, religions were taught without hesitation. However, today, it is a complicated question and part of a big debate. Religious education, especially teaching about different religions is a sensitive topic. Easier said than done. “It demands sensitivity in approach, across different topics and disciplines, and there can be no single formula or curriculum” (Marshall, 2018, 188).

State and religion have never been in an easy relationship, there was always a tension between two. Moreover, this tension has got stronger after the centralization of education by the states. It is not a rare thing to see such debates on this relationship in any country with different religions and governances. It is a worldwide debate. However, the scope of this paper is the religious education politics in Hungary, during and after the communist era. The communist era in Hungary was effective in all the areas of life, as it was in the all countries under Soviet occupation. All followed a similar political and economic path for decades: left-wing parties united under the Stalinist leadership, and right-wing parties were abolished or reduced to a satellite status. “Political events followed very similar patterns with show trials of non-communists and communists alike; persecution of any dissent; setting up all-knowing secret police; harsh repression that in almost all countries triggered a revolutionary response from society at one point” (Bukowski, Clark, Gáspár & Pető, 2021). Land reform took place in everywhere and industry was nationalized step by step. Then, private property was nationalized. All countries started forced industrialization and invested in industry more than agriculture. Communists reformed education as well. Number of students in secondary education increased rapidly. Tertiary education also expanded but not as high as secondary education.

Hungary became a part of Soviet occupation zone after 1945. The Red Army crossed Hungarian border in late 1944, and it was the starting point of an almost 47-year-long occupation. There was a brief period of multi-party elections between 1945 and 1948; however, this period was followed by the violent establishment of a Stalinist-Communist regime. “The new leadership was determined to

transform Hungarian society and the economic system. Education was no exception” (Gyuris, 2014, 537).

The purpose of this study is to explore the religious education politics of Hungary to see how the politics of time affects the educational and religious institutions. It will also demonstrate an example of ‘uneasy’ state-religion relationship. The time focus of the study is during and after Communist era in Hungary. Therefore, as the aim is to systematically explain and analyse historical phenomena, this study will employ historical research methodology and collect the data from secondary sources. The data is collected from newspaper articles, government documents, articles, and books. Most of the studies were collected via online research, while some were found through library research.

Historical research is a methodology of studying past events, phenomena, or occurrences systematically in order to provide comprehensive information about happenings in the past. It is describing what happened in the past in a flowing and dynamic manner by including an interpretation of these events. “The purpose of historical research is to verify and explain history of any area of human activities, subjects or events by means of scientific processes” (Tan, 2015). This method will help to perceive the relationship between the politics of time and church school, which had affected the education system in the past, and has been continued to influence the present (Berg, 2001). Thus, by employing a historical research methodology, this paper will analyze the educational politics of Hungary in the communist era by collecting data from the secondary sources. To start, this paper, first will describe the Hungarian church school system in general with a focus on church schools. Then, it will widely discuss how the politics of the time affected the educational structure, and how the RSs responded to the oppressive political climate by exploring the history of RSs in communist time and after it.

Religious Education in Hungary

In Hungary, everyone has fundamental rights to access education. The state guarantees the freedom of primary and secondary education in the constitution and the financial support of students (scholarship system, student loan) in higher education. In public education, the churches appear as an institutional maintainer and usually strive to provide the full-scale education, from kindergarten to high school. In larger settlements, nursery-primary school-high schools all in one appear as a so-called unified school institution maintained by the Church. According to Act CXC of 2011 on Public Education, there are three forms of religious education in Hungary: “RE in congregations, RE in church-schools, and RE in state-schools. In church schools, RE is compulsory in every grade, 1st to 12th, usually 2 hours in a week. These classes are also denominational and confessional, however, the child and parents have the option to decide about the denomination of the RE classes” (Kodácsy-Simon, 2016).

The beginnings of Hungarian education go back to the early medieval times. For many centuries education and teaching were closely connected to the Church (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2008). In the first half of 20th century, churches had a crucial role in the social life of Hungary. Especially historical churches had a great influence on public life, and a major part in nursing and education. “Churches operated two third of the elementary (primary) schools. In the school year 1946, out of 7016 schools, 4278 primary schools were sponsored by churches. Most of the primary schools (63% of the schools) were operated by the Roman Catholic Church, in line with the confessional distribution of the population. In addition to the primary schools, churches also had several vocational schools, grammar schools, and teacher trainer colleges. Church schools (CSs) generally had high prestige”(Szóró, 2019, 105-106).

Religious schools were a decisive element of the education system until the middle of the 20th century. The 1946 communist power transmission had a serious blow on not only the church school system, but also the organization of the churches: the assets of the churches and their schools (apart from some exceptions) were derivatized, and the operation of the orders was banned. The radical turnover was brought about by the 1990 system change in the lives of the churches and the entire school system. In 1990, one of the first laws was the Church Law (1990, Act IV), which guaranteed

full freedom of conscience and religion, provided the possibility of practicing them and also provided optional religious education in public schools (1990. Act IV. 17). Another significant step for religious education was taken by the Christian-Conservative Government after 2010. Churches received more economic and also political support than ever. The Public Education and the Church Act (Act 2011. CCVI.) defines the conditions that certain religious communities may operate, guarantees freedom of conscience and religious education, parents right of choosing school for their children.

Today, the Hungarian church schools mainly define their pedagogical goals based on Christian values. They are following the Hungarian curricula. The content, methodology and tools of education are completely identical with public schools. They follow the same curricula regarding the non-religious subjects. All schools receive equal financial support from the state. The only difference is religious education class that CSs have. This subject cannot exceed two hours in a week. Every CS can have their own religious education curriculum, and “they are free to add their special religious courses” (Dronkers & Róbert, 2003, 12). This strong connection between education and churches affects today’s educational system too. Today, religious schools are part of the education system, and most of them have a prestigious status. To understand how the state-CS relationship shaped in the past and today, and how this relationship affected the status of CSs, this paper will discuss the historical data by focusing on the status of church schools in Communist era and what happened after the collapse of USSR.

Communist Era

Churches, especially the Catholic Church had possessed considerable power before 1945. However, it was obvious that the Communist regime “would sooner or later collide with the churches, since Communist ideology and Christian faith were not reconcilable” (Kenez, 2003, 867). After the Second World War and formation of the Communist regime, the situation changed and government took action against the churches. The heaviest action was the 1945 land reform. The reform was set out to abolish large estates, and with that landless people would get some land. With the reform, most of the churches’ lands were expropriated and portioned out. Churches lost one of their most important sources and faced with difficulty in maintaining their schools. The state promised to compensate the churches for their loss of income but the promised had not been realized (Szóró, 2019; Dreisziger, 2016).

“According to a public opinion survey carried out in Hungary in 1948, over 90 percent of the population considered themselves believers (95 percent in the countryside); half of the population attended church regularly, and another 25 percent occasionally. This was a larger percentage than before the war. Some contemporary observers attributed this phenomenon to the people’s craving for consolation through religious faith at a time of great poverty, misery, and uncertainty. It is also possible that some people were attracted to religious worship, especially in the Catholic churches, because it was one way to express opposition to the new order, in which the Communists played an ever greater role” (Kenez, 2003, 866).

The communists’ main war against the churches was over the control of education. They started saying that education in CSs was outmoded and of low quality while state schools provide modern education. Because of this, the campaign to modernize the educational system was supported by people with different political opinions. To achieve this end, in 1947, the state attacked the teaching activities of the churches, and the first step was nationalization of textbook publishing and making RE optional (Dreisziger, 2016). Churches opposed this idea strongly, claiming that optional RE would be affected by politics, parents’ mood, and some other external effects. In March, the churches started nation-wide protests. “On 19 and 20 March there were student demonstrations in several cities. In Szeged 3000 students marched to the county school-inspectorate” (Szóró, 2019, 108).

Cardinal Mindszenty issued a pastoral letter saying that authorities were the enemies of good morals and religion. He said: “Those who oppose compulsory religious education bring up the example of the outside world. We do not regard foreign countries always as an example to follow. We do not regard

every intellectual current and point of view as worthy. We had and we have opportunities to compare the results of our moral education with that of foreigners, and it is not to our disadvantage” (Kenez, 2003, 883). Furthermore, the Cardinal came up with the idea of “Year of the Virgin Mary” to honour the Virgin Mary. Kenez (2003) claims that of course the Cardinal was genuinely inspired by religion, however, “it must have also occurred to him that by organizing mass meetings, prayers, and pilgrimages the church would be able to show that it was capable of mobilizing a sizable part of the population” (885). In fact, hundreds of thousands of people gathered to pray in the capital and other cities in the second half of 1947 and the first half of 1948. These meetings were definitely perceived as a challenge by the Communists, however, did not stop the communist party. For them, monopolization of course books and optional RE were inevitable. However, they saw that it was necessary to prepare the action much better; and they put the question aside in the summer 1947, because there was early election in August. They won the election, and the communist propaganda against CSs intensified. This time it was not only about RE but also on the nationalization of church schools.

In the 1947–8 school year, churches were still operating the biggest part of the schools. Under these conditions, for the communists, the socialist transformation of the society would not be possible, and the plan was to expropriate these schools. In the 1948 summer, Hungarian society was full of stress. Communist party members, labor union speakers were visiting the villages and trying to explain the benefits of the nationalization of schools. The media kept saying that the standards in schools were too low. The party promised that there would be compulsory RE even in the nationalized schools. Teachers and clergymen of church schools would be employed. The party raised the teacher salaries, outstanding renovations started in the schools were taken over, and clergymen were encouraged to make positive declarations. They promised higher wages, career opportunities, and better conditions.

The nationalization of schools caused stronger public opposition than the land reform and Catholic churches were at the center of the protest. Catholic parents joined the protests. “There were protest meetings in towns and villages, and the government received thousands of letters opposing the reform plan” (Kenez, 2003, 887). The protests were stronger in the countryside as Catholic Church was more influential there. Police were dissolving the mass demonstrations by firing into the air and using water cannons. Women were at the forefront usually. People did not want to mix students from different religions because, for them, it would make it impossible to teach religion. To defend the reforms, the Communists were claiming that they were not against religion and the schools would be cheaper and better with the reforms. Moreover, religion would be still a school subject.

The defenders of the bill argued that public education was owned by the states in the developed European countries, and only unified state education could provide standard and equal education. Moreover, nationalization was presented by the communist party as a fight between reaction and progress. “Those who were against it were the enemies of not only nationalisation, but also democracy and progress” (Szóró, 2019, 109). Similarly, priests and teachers were trying to convince people that nationalization was not a necessity, rather, it was another step to forming a totalitarian state, and would open the way for the left-wing to expropriate political power. However, the party made the campaign in the summer, and there were not strong protests as churches could not mobilize the parents and students during holiday (Szabó, 2016)

According to Szóró (2019), school nationalization was not about modernizing or unifying the education, or modifying the property relations. It was about to gain influence over society to the highest possible extent. It was an effort to control and formulate the next generations view of life. Left-wing parties were very effective changing the public opinion. They had the communicational opportunities and succeeded to make people uncertain and turn against the churches. Without having similar media tools, churches were significantly disadvantaged. Thus, they could not mobilize people to protect the independence of their schools.

The bill was discussed in the Parliament on June 16, 1948, and passed. “With this, 6505 denominational schools were taken over by the state (5437 primary schools, 113 grammar schools, 98 teacher training college, and lyceum), and 18 000 teachers became employed by the state. Nationalised

schools included 63 % Roman Catholic, 24 % Calvinist, and 8 % Lutheran schools” (Szóró, 2019, 111). When the law passed, organized opposition stopped. The Protestant Church transferred the schools as seeing that resistance was useless. The reformed church leader was removed from his position. Lutheran bishop was arrested and then prisoned. Catholic Church showed the strongest resistance, it had too much to lose and had the biggest support from the people. The protests led by Catholic Church were dealt with severely. A local priest was condemned to life imprisonment and, after a summary trial, one alleged resister was executed. However, the Catholic Church did not have enough power to fight against it, and lost. The church did not want to have a continuous conflict with the ruling power. It accepted its loss and focused on the remaining ones. It was given eight of its schools. And, the state promised financial aid. After this, churches in Hungary had no function except maintaining these schools. “Hungary’s monastic orders were effectively closed down” (Dreisziger, 2016, 123-124).

Szabó (2016) claimed that the Hungarian Catholic Church had never been in such hopeless situation since WWII as it was in 1951 summer. “The upper clergy and the episcopacy were broken and saw no point in further resistance. Since 1945 the breathing space for the church had been gradually closing, as it slowly lost its possessions, societies, schools and, along with the two archbishops, hundreds of priests were imprisoned” (105). In the new system, both, state and church schools were maintained by the monopoly of an atheist state education and one ideology under the ruling of a single party. Millions of believers were affected deeply. Even after the nationalization of the CSs, the campaign against the church did not stop. The regime considered the church member as the “most reactionary” persons and the dispersal of nuns and monks continued after the nationalization (Szabó, 2016, 99). As a result of this, the churches’ influence on education was damaged. Yet, many clergy and religious laypersons continued to secretly teach religion to youth during activities disguised as field trips, picnics, and so on. If this was discovered, these instructors were arrested and imprisoned (Dreisziger, 2016).

After nationalization, since the 1950s, less than ten church-run secondary schools were operating in Hungary. These schools were financed by the state, and the curriculum was similar to that at state schools (Nagy, 2003). During the nationalization process, the government did not keep its promises, took over the schools that were promised to the churches, and made the RE optional on 6 September 1949. The 1950 agreements would define the church-state relationship until the end of communist era. In 1950, authority over churches was transferred to a newly established government bureau called the State Office of Church Affairs (Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal – SOCA). It supervised the churches for 39 years (Dreisziger, 2016).

Churches in Hungary also criticized that their resistance, institutionally, to the regime was not effective enough. It was explained saying that the Catholic Church maintained low profile during Communist era, and even managed to establish a relationship to some degree. This attitude made churchmen able to live in their private religious sphere. In addition, the Church was not successful enough to create strong connections with other oppositional movements. “There have been isolated initiatives of individuals belonging to the clergy, and additionally, several actions initiated by representatives of religious minorities” (Angi, 2011).

However, 1956 Revolution should be mentioned here to show the people’s reaction to the oppressive regime. 1956 revolution was first provoked a protest among students and intellectuals. Then, mass demonstrations started in October 1956, and it led to the revolution on 23 October. It was an anti-totalitarian and anti-communist uprising, but not necessarily anti-socialist. They established the new parliament, took over the state-owned factories, and restored the freedom of speech and press. Yet, this democratic regime had a short life. Soviet troops entered Hungary in November 4, and on the streets of Budapest there was a bloody fight with younger people. As a result, 200,000 young and educated people of Hungary emigrated to the West, and the political leaders of the revolution were imprisoned and executed (Bozóki & Simon, 2010).

After Communism

In the last period of communism, the regime changed its attitude toward CSs. The nationalist wing of reform-communists highlighted in their newspapers that nationalization of schools was a politics of “Stalinist features of socialism”, and it was not the aim of democratic forces in the 19th and 20th centuries as some liberals claimed. With the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989, liberalization of religious life in Hungary started. Thus, “The reform-communist regime moved the supervision of the state-church relationship from the State-Church Office (described as a tool of Stalinism) to the Ministry of Education. The minister of education declared in 1989 that the “reprivatization of church schools is in the national interest” (Nagy, 2003, 27-28).

Many things happened in the parliament. In 1990, the Education Act of 1985 was changed and the new Act gave the churches right to open schools as many as they wanted. The same amount of money was offered from the central budget to both: students in the state schools and CSs. In this system, CSs were free to ask for a fee while state schools could not, and this made CSs better than the state schools. The 1990 Act guaranteed the rights of the churches to instruct the religious courses in the state schools. When a right-wing coalition won the 1990 elections, the new parliament, inheriting the plan from the last communist parliament, discussed the reprivatization of properties of the churches. Despite the opposition of all other actors in political life, in spring 1991 the act passed (Nagy, 2003, 30). Soon after the regime changed, Catholic Church would take 300 educational institutions. The Reformed church also would get its buildings. “Especially important advances had been made in the restoration of the Reformed Church’s school system. By the first decade of democratic rule, many Reformed schools had been restored to the church and a few new ones had been started” (Dreiszigler, 2016, 317).

Nagy (2003) stated that the right-wing parties were very optimistic and hoped that new church schools would change the face of Hungarian education. The new act (November 1991 version) allowed to make a special agreement between CSs and the Ministry, and gave the supervision of these schools to the churches. This version also accepted that education in state and municipal schools would be on the basis of a secular worldview. “At this moment it seemed to be a working compromise: government ambitions about “Christian renewal of society” would happen in church schools-and the state/municipal schools would not be involved in ideological changes”. However, because of the issues occurred in the separation of buildings and institutions while changing a state school to a CS, at the end of 1991 the 1991 act was changed. The new one, January 1992, did not define the schools separately, but said that: “In the schools-any kind of school -education is organized on the basis of a peaceful coexistence of different worldviews” (31). Besides, the government wanted to add a new point to the act “If people requested a parochial school, the municipality would have to make an agreement with the church.” The aim, for Nagy (2003), was to make it possible for churches to ask for more properties without paying any compensation to municipalities when a state school changed to a CH. The municipalities would have to finance the CSs too.

At that time, over 6000 properties were requested by the churches including 1,304 elementary schools, 31 kindergartens, 61 grammar schools, 51 technical schools, 11 vocational schools, and 34 student hostels. However, because of the strong opposition, the parliament postponed the debate of the act. In addition to the municipalities and other political forces, the majority of parents, students, and teachers did not want to be “shifted” to a church school; they did not want to change schools. The only accepted solution was to buy a new building with the money from the government and move the institution there. The constitutional court took a decision in line with the opposition and declared that “the state (municipality) has to offer the possibility of attending a neutral school for everyone who does not want to attend church school. Those who choose the neutral school have fewer personal sacrifices to make than those who choose church schools” (Nagy, 2003, 32-33).

The government found solutions to support the CSs in the February 1993 version of the act. In the spring of 1994, the government signed an agreement with the churches stating that the state will finance the CSs for the next 20 years. With this, each student in CSs became more expensive for the

state than a student in public schools. The act also made it possible to shift the municipal schools into CSs. “In a small Hungarian village (Dabas-Sari) the right-wing municipality gave the municipal school to the Catholic church. As there was no other school in the village, the majority of parents and teachers, who did not want to be “shifted” to the church, could not find another school”. Politicians and church leaders supported the shift, at the end; the building was divided into two institutions: one functioned as a municipal school and the other one was a church school. Then, with the initiation of the Catholic bishop, an actual wall was built in the building. That wall became “a symbol of the inflexible behavior of the Catholic church in the eyes of most of Hungarian society” (Nagy, 2003, 33).

“In the next parliamentary period, 1994-98, a socio-liberal coalition had to form its new policy concerning the church-state-education relation” (Nagy, 2003, 33). 1994-1998 government left the generous policy of previous government towards churches. It adopted the state-church separation strictly. It suspended reprivatization for a year and paying of the salaries of RE teachers, and cut the financial support for the social services provided by the churches. Before 1998 election, Catholic church leaders preferred not to favor one party over another, however, encouraged people not to vote for marginal parties with little chance to win. Dreisziger (2016) wrote that this statement was interpreted as a support to the major opposition parties. At the end, the Alliance of Young Democrats led by Viktor Orbán (319-320).

Orbán declared that his government would follow the policies that support the churches. The motto was “whatever is good for the church is good for the country and whatever is good for the country is good for the church.” The Minister of Culture explained the aim of new government as the “establishment of a Christian and civic Hungary and drawing [Hungarian] society closer to the churches.” (Dreisziger, 2016, 320). In line with this aim, the government took some steps to support the churches. It provided funds for CSs. Orbán government emphasized on the role of churches in education. In return for his support, Orbán expected churches not only to participate in the moral education of Hungarians but also in abroad. For Dreisziger (2016), this development in the state-church relationship had increased the polarization of Hungarian society. The division was between those who support the strict separation of state and church and who believe that nation and church cannot be separated. This polarization became very obvious in 2002 elections and Orbán government lost, the reformed communists and their allies return won. The coalition government, from 2002 to 2010, followed “free churches in a free state” policy. However, they did not know how to deal with the churches. They often made contradictory statements. Except allowing individuals to allocate a small portion of the tax they paid to the churches of their choice, what was done by the coalition was not positive (322-326).

In the 2010 elections, Orbán won the huge majority in the Parliament, and embarked on a reshaping of Hungarian society according to his own vision with his alliances, the Alliance of Young Democrats and the Christian Democrats. A legislation was adopted in 2011 concerning the freedom of religion. For Dreisziger (2016), that law guaranteed religious freedom, with significant limitations because it “distinguished between incorporated churches that enjoy state support and many privileges, and less favoured religious communities with fewer entitlements. The law acknowledged only fourteen churches in the first category but made provisions for the recognition of others as well – albeit that recognition would require a two-thirds majority vote in Parliament, which would be very difficult to achieve” (326).

Conclusion

Hungarian education has a long history and it was closely connected to the church for ages. Thus, religious schools were/are also part of the education system. This paper, briefly, focused on the status of church schools in the Communist era and what happened after the collapse of the USSR. Including the first half of the 20th century, churches played an important role in the social life of Hungary and influenced the public life by owning the major part of educational institutions. That is why, despite their uneven status through the history, the existence of CSs has not been a highly debated topic in Hungary. They are accepted as a part of the Hungarian culture. However, this favourable situation

dramatically changed after the Second World War, and the government took action against the churches. With the 1945 land reform, most of the churches' lands were expropriated and portioned out and left schools without sources to maintain their schools. Then, course books were monopolized and religious education became optional. Lastly, CSs were nationalized and taken from the churches with the claim of modernizing or unifying the education. Only few of them were allowed to operate. Yet, right after 1989, CSs regained their positions. The churches regained the right to operate schools as many as they wanted. The government offered the same amount of money from the central budget to both: students in the state schools and CSs.

This brief paper shows that the relationship between state and religion has never been an easy one. Especially after the centralization of education by the states, this tension became more visible. Moreover, it is not impossible to say that conflicts over religion in school are neither new nor pertain to a specific country. There has been a worldwide debate about the position of religious education in school curriculums, the mandatory character of religious education, the responsibility for designing curricula, and the content and learning models of religious education (Diez de Velasco 2007; Moulin 2015; Dilek, 2022). Briefly, looking at the changes happened in the educational system of Hungary in the 20th century, it can be said that the politics of the time had affected the religious education in Hungary. CSs had to deal with political pressure and find a way to survive. The times of dramatic decrease and increase in the number of the CSs and their students were not caused by educational reasons but mainly by politics.

Suggestion for future research is to study the history of state - religion relationship in connection with RSs in different countries. This might provide a good opportunity of comparison to have more comprehensive view on the issue. Having a wider perspective will enable us to come up with more applicable solutions to the problems related to religious schools, and the educational system in general. Moreover, the findings of historical and comparative studies can provide invaluable help to the researcher to prepare surveys and conduct quantitative researches to examine the current situations of RSs in different countries with similar or different religions and cultures. This type of research might be beneficial for the multi-religious countries that have issues in dealing with a plurality. Furthermore, research on RSs might help multi-cultural countries to ease the tension between different groups. It can also help to increase the quality of education in RSs. In sum, this study focused on the RSs in one country, this is one of the limitations of the study. Secondly, as the author is not a native speaker of Hungarian, the data used in this paper is only in English.

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