

A Cross-border Railway Company Connecting Two World Orders, the GYSEV between 1945 and 1990: Gaps in the Iron Curtain

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Abstract

The World War II was not the beginning of a new and peaceful era. Until 1947 relations between the victorious powers became more and more intense. Both parties announced their own Cold War doctrine: on the American side this was the Truman principle and the Marshall plan, while by the Soviets it was the Zhdanov–Stalin's "two camp" theory. Moreover, the war was not ruled out by the general peace treaty made with the consent of the victorious powers. The outcome of it was that distancing of the different values between the two great powers occurred in the German question, which resulted in the formation of two world order separated by the iron curtain: the Western Bloc and the Soviet Bloc. Hungary was important to the Soviet Union geopolitically as it was considered its Western military forefront and ultimately, with the Soviet defeat of the 1956 Revolution, it became apparent that it would remain within the Eastern Bloc. The Iron Curtain that physically appeared in 1949 separating two world orders also split up the Győr–Sopron–Ebenfurti Vasút [Railway] (GYSEV) that was established in 1876 and the Fertővidék Local Railway line that started its operation from 1897. Contrary to this, the private railway of the Monarchy and the vicinal it operated did not cease to exist. Moreover, it went on its own uniqueness not only in the two countries, but throughout the two world orders of West and East. The purpose of my presentation is to outline this paradoxical situation, which shows that the iron curtain did not shut the two camps hermetically apart, but there were gaps on it. In addition to this, I would like to show how the Austrian- and Hungarian-owned company was authorized or tolerated by the political power, why the nationalization did not take place. In addition to the sources of archives, research is based mainly on reports, news and articles written about the era in the Hungarian and international press. I am making it complete by using the oral history method through presenting the narratives of people working on the railroad, picturing the uniqueness of the situation and its effects on society. As a conclusion it can be claimed, that the railways crossing the two world order opened the way for smuggling and illegal migration. The company was responsible for its strategic significance in the past as well as in the present by bridging the divide between the blocks which had their own way of ideological, economic, cultural and political development.

Keywords: Iron Curtain, Railway, Two World Orders, GYSEV

Introduction

The Győr–Sopron–Ebenfurti Vasút (GYSEV) started its operation as a private railway company in the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy or within Hungary in 1876. However, the fall of the Monarchy and the peace treaty of Trianon redrew the map of Hungary. Nearly two-thirds of the territory of Hungary was annexed that largely cut down the railway system of the Carpathian basin that had been incorporated perfectly into its natural spatial structure. GYSEV also fell victim to this forced shift of the border that had also been operating the Fertővidék Local Railway by that time (Pándorfalu[Parndorf]–Eszterháza–Fertőszentmiklós–Kiscell) since 1897. From 4th June 1920, the company and both its lines belonged to two countries: Austria and Hungary. The operation of them was managed by an international treaty between the states by the beginning of the 1920s and went on uninterruptedly. However, a new trend arose once more after the Second World War. The construction of the Iron Curtain from 1949 and the sovietisation of Hungary compromised the existence of GYSEV which still belonged to two countries and by then to two different world powers. Its operation was not halted during this

period either contrary to the restrictions and beside the legal service illegal activities (smuggling, defecting) began to take place on both lines in question. In the present study I make an in-depth examination into the time between 1945 and 1990 of the history of GYSEV concentrating especially on its operation and the international traffic as well as presenting its economic and social significance.

1. The Iron Curtain Rolling Down

The Second War didn't turn out to be the beginning of a peaceful era. Up to 1947 the relations between the victorious powers became strained. Both parties launched their own cold war doctrine: the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan on the American side whereas the Soviets had their Zhdanov–Stalin 'two sides' theory. What is more the war was not closed down by the overall peace treaty settled down by the approval of both parties. They even failed to come to an agreement in the most important question in Paris, 1947: in the question about the Germans, therefore the demarcation of the interests was taken place between the two major powers. It consequently led to a divided Europe. Stalin firmly believed that the multilateral trade agreement led by the Americans for the rebuilding of Europe and the Soviet control over middle and Eastern Europe were incompatible. That side of Europe rejected the Marshall aid as well so in a few months it turned into a homogeneous 'Soviet Bloc' that was artificially isolated by iron curtain from the western part of Europe – thus from the USA too – in the name of the Stalinian empire construction. The economic deployment of the 'Rubel Bloc' was taken place of which key link in the chain became the Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance). By this, the fate of Hungary was also determined as a forefront of strategic importance in the west. (Fischer, 1992, p.113-127)

After the massive destruction of World War II, GYSEV was hardly able to cope with the reconstruction tasks. First, on the 6th of May, 1945 scheduled but not cross-border traffic could commence on the line of the Fertővidék HÉV and on 20 July on the GYSEV line. At the same time, freight transport began to grow slowly and more and more quickly. By 1946 the railway difficulties had slightly reduced and the previous timetables were restored. Crossing of the border between Sopron and Ebenfurt was launched again. (Zwickl, 2011, p.133) In the same year, the responsible Hungarian railway officials called for the nationalization of GYSEV. It could not be made through because – in accordance with the Three Power Pact of Berlin – the previously German-owned shares of GYSEV, as many as 39.9% of all shares were granted to the Soviet Union, which could exercise the same rights relating to the company that relied to the shareholders in accordance with the existing Hungarian law.¹ But the year 1947 turned out to be disastrous. Civil and Soviet shipments suddenly fell back, yields of grain and sugar beet were low due to drought and Austria was at the top of inflation right then. (Lovas, 2000, p.363-369) In Hungary, from 1946 to 1949, the model of Soviet socialism was being adopted, which was reinforced by the Paris Peace Accords of 1947 by pointing to mutual shift of interests. Then, based on the previous agreement between the two blocks led by the USA and the Soviet Union the spheres of influence under the shield of the Great Powers were set up. Hungary then became part of the Eastern Bloc. (Fischer, 1992, p.113-127) Thus, the new shareholder, in the spirit of sovietisation delegated as many as 6 Soviet representatives to the Board of Directors of GYSEV in 1947. (Majdán and Varga, 2014, p.85) At the same time, two years later, the Soviet Union transferred these shares to the state under the act entitled as the law of 20 of 1949 in the Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic.² By this, the influence of the state on the company increased significantly.

From 15 November 1947, the competent authorities imposed a strict limit on the western edge because of smugglers and border crossings. From that time on, 15 km from the border, the police and the patrols of the border guard checked the identity of all vehicles and passers-by. In addition to this, raids were held in the farms, the roads were sealed and the area was combed through.³ From this point onwards, it was not possible to cross

¹Internationalization, initiatives to establish a new source of researchers and graduates, and development of knowledge and technological transfer as instruments of intelligent specializations at Szechenyi University EFOP-3.6.1-16-2016-00017

Hungarian State Archives, Archives in Sopron of Győr-Moson-Sopron District. SL VI. 435. XXIV. 406. 68. box, Magyar Közlekedésügyi Miniszter 39.738/1946.I.1. number

² 1949. évi XX. törvénycikk, A Magyar Népköztársaság Alkotmánya.

<http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/dokument/1949.evi3.htm> (Access: January 18th 2018)

³ „Rendőrök és határvadászok rohama a nyugati határon a csempészfront ellen,” *Friss Ujság*, vol. 125, pp. 3, November 26, 1947.

the border or to take anything through it. Sopron, where there was already an alcohol prohibition and movement restriction in force,⁴ and the surrounding area – due to the railway traffic to Austria – attracted defectors or smugglers⁵ as it was only 3 km from the border and several options – such as Lake Fertő – offered a chance for forbidden border crossing.⁶ In addition, the city was classified as an Austrian station outside Austria.⁷ Cross-border traffic between Mekszikópuszta and Pamhagen was enabled by the Soviet authorities on the Fertővidék HÉV only from 1947, previously only the Hungarian and Austrian parts were used for the traffic. It was particularly interesting that the "Puszta Expressz" could transport passengers from Fertőszentmiklós – through Parndorf – to Wien Ostbahnhof from 1948. (Lovas, 1998, p.30-43) At this time, ex-defectors also appeared, who were krauts – often former SS members and Volksbundists – previously displaced from Sopron and its vicinity. However, they jumped off the trains – that were meant to carry them to Bavaria from 1946 – after 10 to 20 km after crossing the border and stayed with Austrian farmers. After two or three months of their stay they could get a legal border crossing permit from the authorities by which they returned to Sopron three or four times to dig out their hidden assets and flee back to Austria with them.⁸ The trains were therefore unhindered interconnecting the two countries. As Hungarian staff provided the service for the transmission of the trains on the lines of GYSEV in Austria as well, they could travel regularly on the border with a valid travel document. This way some smuggling through the outgoing staff turned out to be practically unavoidable before 1949 as well. Various manufactured goods and foodstuffs changed hands through railwaymen. Then, since 1948 the number of people intending to cross the border illegally by the help of the railways or railway workers increased. Hiding in the tenders of the locomotives, in the fuel oil tanks or on freight trains, or jumping barely onto freight trains heading towards Austria were the most common among the experiments. (Lovas, 1973, p.17-20) The authorities were unable to prevent further illegal border crossings with even strict border control and anti-Western propaganda (unemployment, slums, hunger).⁹ By 1949 the physical obstacle came into existence, as the iron curtain was built at the western border of Hungary, and then the minefield by 1952. (Zsiga, 1999, p.30-33) The Austrian party did not particularly welcome it, sometimes deliberately damaged or even blasted it.¹⁰ By then, the configured iron curtain thus physically restricted the movement of those who wanted to cross the 'green border', but the railway offered a new alternative by continuing to cross the border at Sopron and Mekszikópuszta. On 20th August 1949 the People's Republic was proclaimed in Hungary, which meant full nationalization at the same time. The protection of the western border was tightened, as there was a growing fear of espionage from Austria and the West towards Hungary.¹¹ From 1949, the Border Guard (Gáspár, 2012, p.42) operating within the framework of the State Protection Authority, used the railway workers' assistance to protect the border. Within a three-month regular training period, special attention was paid to this,¹² and among the station- and train- crew members groups were formed that were alert to the appearance or travel of strangers. In addition to this, from 31st August 1950, the train patrol service was introduced on the GYSEV line and from 23rd July 1951, in the vicinal of the Fertővidék line. All the trains from Sopron and Fertőszentmiklós were accompanied by a patrolman. There, the train was once again checked and it could leave the Austrian territory only then. Incoming trains were searched at the border and escorted them to the Hungarian terminal. This was used to prevent people from jumping down the trains and on the trains. From 1952, a territory stretching 20 km from the border was allowed to be entered only with permission. The Hungarian shuttling employees of GYSEV have been granted a permit similar to passports for their work. Shortly afterwards, trains departing to and arriving from Austria were separated from the others. As a result, in 1953, a new customs inspection building was set up for the separation of domestic and foreign passengers (until

⁴ „Sopronból is megkezdtek a svábok kitelepítését,” *Világosság*, vol. 91, pp 6, June 24, 1947.

⁵ „Megdöbentető leleplezés a magyar–osztrák határon,” *Kossuth Népe*, vol. 138, pp. 299, November 27, 1947.

⁶ „Sopron: a kalandorok, szökevények, csempészek és kitoloncoltak „pihenő helye”,” *Kis Újság*, vol. 148, pp. 5, December 19, 1947.

⁷ Based on an interview with Dr Tibor Józán, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of GYSEV since 2007, on 15 December 2017, Sopron. (Author's possession) (Józán 2017.)

⁸ „Osztrák területen megszöknek a kitelepítő vonatok utasai,” *Kossuth Népe*, vol. 142, pp. 329, October 12, 1947.

⁹ „Fiatalkok a határon,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 287, pp. 3, October 15, 1956.

¹⁰ „Osztrák határszervek sorozatos támadásai a magyar biztonsági berendezések ellen,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 268, pp. 2, November 18, 1949.

¹¹ Hungarian State Archives, Archives in Győr of Győr-Moson-Sopron District. GYL MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottság Archivuma, 31. 1948–1950. 14. Jegyzőkönyv, December 2, 1949.

¹² Hungarian State Archives, Archives in Sopron of Győr-Moson-Sopron District.. SL VI. 435. XXIV. 406. 66. box, 1951. évi oktatási program

the winter of 2007, it remained there until the entry into the Schengen area), but there were still many problems after all. (Lovas, 1973, p.17-20) More severe restrictions were introduced on the Fertővidék HÉV. As the atmosphere became more and more tense between the Western and Eastern Bloc, the Hungarian customs and border guard units were drawn back from Pamhagen to Mekszikópuszta. Though the former was situated in Austrian territory, it only had a Hungarian number on the basis of the 1923 State Treaty.¹³

On 14th May 1955, Hungary also signed the Warsaw Pact,¹⁴ with which it permanently committed itself to the Soviet Bloc. Austria, however, went on a different course and became neutral.¹⁵ From this time on, there was a radical difference in economic and social development between the two countries. There was not just a single border, but a separation caesura between the two world powers. As a consequence, border traffic was abolished on 22 May 1955 on the Fertővidék HÉV. (Lovas, 1998, p.30-43) Thereafter, however, there was little relief between the blocks of the world order. The four major powers (US, USSR, UK, France) stated that obstacles to the international cooperation in the fields of industry, agriculture, trade, science, technology, culture and tourism had to be slowly eliminated. Any relationship between the East and the West had to be developed.¹⁶ Hungary and Sopron also had an interest in increasing the number of inbound tourism in Austria due to foreign exchange needs. Thus, in the fall of 1956, the landmines were removed as a relief to the border surveillance. (Zsiga, 1999, p.30-33) In the summer of the year, there was nothing to indicate the autumn revolution, and in fact, the Sopron rail junction was preparing for the peak traffic due to the autumn harvest beside the already increased import and export transports.¹⁷ The continuous growth of the traffic of GYSEV called for an inevitable modernisation of the railway wagons and motor vehicles.¹⁸ The improvement of the Austrian–Hungarian relations also became noticeable by this time.¹⁹ However, the Revolution and War of Independence which broke out on 23rd October 1956 completely rewrote the future of Hungary. These events also made it impossible for the Border Guard to function. Border guard personnel left the station. The train attendant also ceased. Hungarian and Austrian passengers were free to get off and talk on the station platform in Sopron. (Lovas, 1973, p.17-20) At the same time, mass influx of the refugee started to flood from the inside of the country and began to flow towards the western border. On 3rd November the entire garrison of the border guards in Vienna Street fled to Austria, thus eliminating the surveillance of the border. On the Austrian side, refugee camps and direct trains waited for the evacuated people. (Locsmándi, 2009, p.147) As a result of the Soviet attack, refugees filled up the GYSEV trains, but many of the crew members also left the country. (Lovas, 2000, p.363-369) In response, the Soviet authorities imposed a border closure between Mekszikópuszta and Pamhagen on 4th November (Lovas, 1998, p.30-43), while Austria did the same, abolishing this way all the train traffic. Following the dissolution of the tension, representatives of the socialist countries agreed in Budapest in December 1956 to restart the international passenger and freight traffic.²⁰ Then, on 17th December 1956 the passenger transport could be launched again on the GYSEV line to Ebenfurt. (Lovas, 2000, p.363-369)

By 1957 the situation in the country was more or less normalized. Nevertheless, illegal migration to Austria was not over. During this time, the aid to the Hungarian refugees was becoming more and more problematic for Austria, and they were increasingly cause of political and financial burdens.²¹ The Hungarian government ordered a strict border guard for stabilizing the situation from 8th January and on the 24th a decision was made to reinstall the technical border closure. The mine barrage was employed once more. With Austria's neutrality, this area really became the demarcation line of the West and the East. (Jankó and Tóth, 2008, p.107-131. After 1957, due to the more and more thorough work of the Hungarian border guards, the number of dissidents

¹³ Józan 2017.

¹⁴ „Aláírták a varsói értekezleten résztvevő országok, barátsági, együttműködési és kölcsönös segítségnyújtási szerződését,” *Győr–Sopronmegyei Hírlap*, vol. 113, pp. 1, May 15, 1955.

¹⁵ „Aláírták az osztrák államszerződést,” *Győr–Sopronmegyei Hírlap*, vol. 114, pp. 1-2, May 17, 1955.

¹⁶ „A szovjet küldöttség javaslata a Kelet és Nyugat közötti kapcsolatok fejlesztése kérdésében,” *Győr–Sopronmegyei Hírlap*, vol. 257, pp. 2, November 1, 1955.

¹⁷ „Őszi csúcsforgalomra készül a soproni vasúti csomópont,” *Győr–Sopronmegyei Hírlap*, vol. 176, pp. 4, July 27, 1956.

¹⁸ Hungarian State Archives, Archives in Sopron of Győr–Moson–Sopron District. SL VI. 435. XXIV. 406. 45. box

¹⁹ „Jó szomszédokhoz méltón,” *Szabad Nép*, vol. 250, pp. 1, September 9, 1956.

²⁰ „A szocialista országok vasutainak segítségével megindul a nemzetközi teherforgalom Magyarországon,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 29, pp. 4, December 9, 1956.

²¹ „A külföldre távozott magyarokról,” *Kisalföld*, vol. 13, pp. 7, January 17, 1957.

decreased and at the same time the number of arrests increased.²² Slowly, it also crystallized for some, how to get to the west. To do so, a passport was required in the first place from the passport department at the police station, soon afterwards at IBUSZ and was finally issued in Budapest. Only close relatives were allowed to be visited those times.²³ With these arrangements the authorities made travelling to the West or to keep contact with relatives living there far more difficult. The relationship between the two countries, Austria and Hungary became tenser – a new phase of estrangement began.²⁴ However, this did not seem to have an impact on the activity of GYSEV. In fact, from 1958 on, as one of the important transit routes between the East and the West, it was able to increase its turnover dramatically.²⁵ At the company, the shuttling Hungarian rail passengers could only carry out their work on the other side of the border with a special permit. Until the end of the 1980s, only one shunter was operating on the border crossing of the Fertővidék HÉV departing from Fertőszentmiklós and carried railway workers to Austria each day.²⁶

It was just in 1962 that the Hungarian–Austrian relations started to improve. (Locsmándi, 2009, p.147) One example to this was the Soproni Festive Evenings, which was also visited by many from Austria.²⁷ Rail traffic to the west also rose significantly.²⁸ The Sopron line of GYSEV became an increasingly important railroad route towards Baumgarten and, in terms of freight transport, the Mekszikőpuszta–Pamhagen section was also in use.²⁹ GYSEV having been adapted to the increasing traffic performed a rail replacement on its railroads in Hungary and Austria.³⁰ The company's income from transit cargo to the West and, to a lesser extent, its income from the coaching traffic was major foreign exchange revenue for the country. (Bodnár, 1966, p.362) It considerably grew when, in 1968, Austria and the Soviet Union signed the SAT agreement (Soviet–Austrian Transit Fees Committee) to establish a direct international rail freight between the two countries and to establish ETT (Single Transit Tariff).³¹ Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia also became members of the organization. Annually, 60–65% of the many thousands of railway freight (wood, cellulose, fertilizer, potash, industrial wood, paper-wood, aluminium waste, crushed engines and machines³² from the Soviet Union to Austria) passed through Hungary and GYSEV also.³³ GYSEV celebrated its 90th anniversary on 28th October 1969. As a result of the ever-increasing transitional efficiency of the railways – operating on a formal basis –, the Hungarian and Austrian governments extended its concession for another 20 years.³⁴ By doing so, the company from the age of the Monarchy demonstratively did not disturb anybody even after the iron curtain had descended. Its staff was 80% Hungarian that were managing the traffic on the whole line, while Austria only provided the station staff in the Austrian area. Furthermore, because of its special position and its status (total line length at that time 217.4 km of which 153.9 km was located in Hungary) took an important role in the national and international transport system.³⁵ The establishment of Raabersped also took place, which received only the international containerised freight forwarding right at first and from 1984 onwards had full right of freight forwarding.³⁶ In 1973, György Csanádi Minister of Transport and Post and Minister of Transport of Austria Erwin Lang jointly signed the new

²² „A határőrségen,” *Kisalföld*, vol. 10, pp. 7, January 13, 1957.

²³ „Hogyan utazhatunk külföldre?” *Kisalföld*, vol. 43, pp. 2, February 21, 1957.

²⁴ „A Külügyminisztérium nyilatkozata a magyar–osztrák viszonyról,” *Kisalföld*, vol. 56, pp. 2, March 8, 1957.

²⁵ „Húsz évre meghosszabbították a GYSEV szerződését,” *Népszabadság*, 1969. október 23. 247. szám, 9. p.

²⁶ Józsan 2017.

²⁷ „Auf Wiederschaun, Sopron”. Több mint százezer látogatója volt a soproni ünnepi heteknek,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 170, pp. 7, July 23, 1963.

²⁸ It concerned not only the line of GYSEV, but the other operating railway lines to Austria: (Budapest–)Hegyeshalom–Bécs, (Budapest–)Szentgotthárd–Graz, Sopron–Kőszeg, Sopron–Bécsújhely. „Béke menetrendje,” *Szabadföld*, vol. 25, pp. 2, June 22, 1969.; „A ki-belépő forgalom állomásai a magyar határon,” *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja*, vol. 45, pp. 3, November 25, 1974.

²⁹ „A pénzügyminiszter és a külkereskedelmi miniszter 1/1966. (III. 1.) P M–Kk M számú együttes rendelete a vámjog részletes szabályainak megállapításáról és a vámeljárási szabályozásáról,” *Magyar Közlöny*, vol. 16, pp. 1-5, March 1, 1966.

³⁰ „Meggyorsul a vasúti forgalom Győr–Sopron között,” *Népszava*, vol. 211, pp. 56, September 7, 1966.

³¹ „Sopronban aláírták a SAT-konferencia jegyzőkönyvét,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 155, pp. 4, July 4, 1975.

³² In accordance with an interview with retired Gyula Nagy on 15th December 2017, who worked as a brakeman on the Austrian line of the Fertővidék HÉV from 1971, then as a train driver in Ebenfurt for 25. (Author's possession)

³³ „Tárgyalás Sopronban a szovjet–osztrák forgalomról,” *Világgazdaság*, vol. 127, pp. 3, July 5, 1975.

³⁴ „Húsz évre meghosszabbították a GYSEV szerződését,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 247, pp. 9, October 23, 1969.

³⁵ „Fiatalítás előtt a GYSEV. Új állomás Sopronban – Pályarekonstrukció – Drótkötélpálya,” *Népszava*, vol. 247, pp. 204, October 23, 1969.

³⁶ „Törpevasút, nem kis vasút,” *Népszava*, vol. 12, pp. 152, January 15, 1984.

statue of GYSEV, under which the company later presented itself in tourism in both countries, built hotels, restaurants, expanded its travel business and opened a travel agency as well.³⁷ Thus, after the beginning of the reconstruction of the marshalling yard in 1974 they started the construction of the new railway station in Sopron.³⁸ In 1975, the SAT conference was held at the company's headquarters, where Soviet, Austrian, Hungarian, Polish and Czechoslovak railway experts deepened their previous freight transport cooperation.³⁹ In 1976, the two countries extended the GYSEV operating license – that had been renewed in 1969 by 20 years – with another 30 years, which remained in force until 2007.⁴⁰ That made it possible to modernize the Austrian railroads of the company.⁴¹ In the same year, the new 9-track freight railway station was inaugurated in Sopron,⁴² which could serve the East–West transit traffic on a much higher scale. The company also built a customs warehousing centre beside the yard, which gained a monopolistic position in terms of mass goods due to its industrial distribution system with a railway turntable. Thus, regarding the mass, Sopron had the largest freight volume.⁴³ This almost 40,000-square-metre warehouse – except the company warehouse – became a free zone, which meant a highly favourable condition for the Hungarian companies involved in exporting.⁴⁴ The passenger station was handed over in 1977, where border police and customs departments were also stationed and served as a common Hungarian-Austrian border station from that time,⁴⁵ and a separate waiting hall for foreigners was established.⁴⁶

The growth of tourism was also indicated by the appearance of "hobby trains". The locomotives and wagons that had been constructed in the 19th century travelled from Vienna via the lines of GYSEV at a scheduled time. The trains were launched at the stations by the horns of the old traditions, and railroaders were all wearing contemporary uniforms. First, Austrians started to use them to meet with the sights of Sopron and Nagycenk, then, also a Japanese colony living in Vienna arrived to Hungary with it.⁴⁷ The participants of the Congress of the World Museum of Transport in 1978 in Vienna were invited to Nagycenk by the Transport Museum of Budapest, where they could try the Széchenyi Railway Museum, visit the open-air exhibition of small steam locomotives and the memorial museum of Széchenyi.⁴⁸ So the old festive trains of the GYSEV became popular on distinguished occasions. Only in 1979, tourists from 24 nations travelled there about 100 times.⁴⁹

In 1979, the 100th anniversary of GYSEV was celebrated in both the Hungarian and the Austrian part.⁵⁰ But the joy they felt was mixed with sadness, as the 1968 Transport Policy Concept, the termination of the railway line, also reached the company. The section of the Fertővidék Local Railway between Fertőszentmiklós and Celldömölk was classified to be wound up by referring to an economic failure. The last operative day of the Hungarian section was on 26th May 1979 (within a few years the rails were also removed). The abolition of the section was acknowledged by the local population with a funeral service. For villages left without rail, it became clear that their lifestyle changed significantly and a new era began. (Varga, 1990, p.42) The leaders of the railway company planned to terminate the Fertővidék HÉV as well. However, the Austrian branch had just received new executives who then convinced the leaders of GYSEV that it was worth keeping and updating the line. (Lovas, 1998, p. 30-43) Later that year a convention was signed between Hungary and Austria to further

³⁷ „A magyar és az osztrák közlekedési miniszter aláírta a GYSEV új alapszabályát,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 269, pp. 3, November 17, 1973.

³⁸ „Új pályaudvart kap Sopron,” *Népszava*, vol. 117, pp. 228, May 22, 1974.

³⁹ „Sopronban aláírták a SAT-konferencia jegyzőkönyvét,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 155, pp. 4, July 4, 1975.

⁴⁰ „Harminc évvel meghosszabbították a GYSEV koncesszióját,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 44, pp. 4, February 21, 1976.

⁴¹ „Meghosszabbították a GYSEV koncesszióját,” *Világgazdaság*, vol. 36, pp. 79, February 21, 1976.

⁴² „Felavatták az új soproni teherpályaudvart,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 83, pp. 4, April 7, 1976.

⁴³ Józán 2017.

⁴⁴ „Törpevasút, nem kis vasút,” *Népszava*, vol. 12, pp. 152, January 15, 1984.

⁴⁵ „Felavatták az új soproni pályaudvart,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 162, pp. 1, July 12, 1977.

⁴⁶ „Sopronban,” *Népszava*, vol. 162, pp. 97, July 12, 1977.

⁴⁷ „Hobbivonat osztrák turistákkal,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 143, pp. 14, July 6, 1977.; „Hobbivonat,” *Népszava*, vol. 143, pp. 176, June 19, 1977.

⁴⁸ „A bécsi IATM-kongresszus – Nagycenken,” *Népszava*, vol. 224, pp. 214, September 22, 1978.

⁴⁹ „Százéves a győr–sopron–ebenfurti vasút,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 238, pp. 8, October 11, 1979.

⁵⁰ „Százéves vasút,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, vol. 51, pp. 19, December 21, 1979.

ease cross-border rail traffic.⁵¹ By then, the number of Austrian tourists taking a day's journey on the GYSEV line and Sopron started to grow. This was due to the fact that it was cheaper than driving there in one hand, and on the other hand they did not need to bother about drinking a few glasses of wine in the famous Sopron wine region. The railway company organized one-day trips and built up its own business network for the tourists for selling their sought after store products, besides, they also came to the country for cheaper services (meals, dentists, hairdressers, beauticians).⁵² The earlier frozen Austrian and Hungarian relations were thus resolved quite a lot. In 1983, GYSEV joined the Eastern Transport Association, and thereafter, instead of the three pairs of trains per day, there was a nearly hourly train transport on the Sopron–Ebenfurt line to Vienna, which was mostly harmonised to going to work and schools.⁵³

The same tendency got started much earlier from the point of view of railroads. As most of the staff was Hungarian, and many of them – with different types of permit – were shuttling out to Austria, most of the time good relationship emerged between the employee of the two nations working at the same workplace. Usually, the interdependence gave birth to friendly relations. Workers in Austria had to learn German that was provided by the company on a weekly basis.⁵⁴ At the same time, smuggling could not be stopped even under the strictest controls, in spite of thorough scrutiny. Among other things, the most wanted products were anoraks, coffee, nylon stockings, housecoats, dresses, sewing material, 'Fa' soap, shower gel and calculators. Most often, train attendances brought Soviet champagne (Sovietskoje Igristoje), Pick salami, blocks of cheese and loin-chop to the neighbouring country, where people and acquaintances bought them most happily. Human smuggling was also present throughout the era.⁵⁵

For the second half of the 1980s, GYSEV's passenger transport index rates were measurably affected by the more and more competitive road – bus – and aerial transportation. Personal transport rate decreased to the half of the previous, while the amount of transported goods got doubled due to the logistic opportunity provided by their warehouse.⁵⁶ Moreover, the two states extended the concession of Fertővidék HÉV in 1986 until 2007.⁵⁷ In the vicinal, mainly sugar beet was being transported from spring to autumn, and that was when private trains also began to show up on it – with special permission and for touristic purposes⁵⁸ – after passenger transport was terminated on this line from 1955.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, political transformation began to take place in Hungary that launched the shift of the regime and liberalization. Even before the iron curtain was demolished, the recovery of the scheduled transport between Pamhagen and Fertőszentmiklós at Fertővidék HÉV came up.⁶⁰ It had to wait until 1990, when the Iron Curtain fell completely. At this time, the regular passenger train traffic was restarted between the settlements of Fertőszentmiklós and Neusiedl am See.⁶¹ Thus, the GYSEV finally came out of the iron curtain that barely ever restricted its operation. The thus far state-owned railway could now operate again as a real joint-stock company.⁶²

Conclusion

All in all, it can be stated that the GYSEV and the Fertővidék Local Railway that was managing by it were considered a unique phenomenon because they remained in the hands of two countries (Austria and Hungary), which meant that they belonged to two world orders, the socialist East and the capitalist Western Bloc. From

⁵¹ „A Magyar Népköztársaság Elnöki Tanácsának 1979. évi 17. számú törvényerejű rendelete,” *Magyar Közlöny*, vol. 57, pp. 776-782, August 18, 1979.

⁵² „Élelmes turizmus,” *Amerikai–Kanadai Magyar Élet*, vol. 9, pp. 18, March 5, 1983.

⁵³ Józán 2017.

⁵⁴ „A jószomszédság vasútja,” *Szabad Föld*, vol. 49, pp. 4, August 8, 1984.

⁵⁵ Nagy 2017.

⁵⁶ „Kétnyelvű vasút,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 163, pp. 4, July 12, 1986.

⁵⁷ „Meghosszabbítják a Fertő vidéki vasútvonal koncesszióját,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 273, pp. 8, November 20, 1986.

⁵⁸ Józán 2017.

⁵⁹ „Meghosszabbítják a fertővidéki vasút működési engedélyét,” *Népszava*, vol. 273, pp. 220, November 20, 1986.

⁶⁰ „Új vasút” Ausztriában,” *Világ gazdaság*, vol. 75, pp. 1, April 22, 1989.

⁶¹ „Újra megnyitott a határátkelő. Vonattal a Fertő tájain,” *Népszabadság*, vol. 125, pp. 9, May 30, 1990.

⁶² „A GySEV kibújít a vasfüggöny alól,” *Népszava*, vol. 53, pp. 8, March 4, 1991.

Sopron to Ebenfurt and Fertőszentmiklós to Neusiedl am See, apart from a short break, virtually, there was cross-border traffic throughout the era. However, it also provided a unique opportunity for illegal border crossing and smuggling. Many tried to defect - ordinary people and even among the railway employees. They sacrificed and risked a lot for going to the West in the hope of a better life, often leaving their families behind for this reason. The relationship between Austria and Hungary started to ease only from the 1960s, which was also promoted and utilized by GYSEV. Having become popular as the gateway to the West, Sopron became one of the most important railway logistic centres in the Eastern Bloc. The company's employees shuttling to Austria were privileged to gain insight into the capitalist world. The shift of regime in 1989, however, marked the beginning of a new era by the elimination of the physical closure, with which the earlier historical relations between Hungary and Austria could gradually start their regeneration.

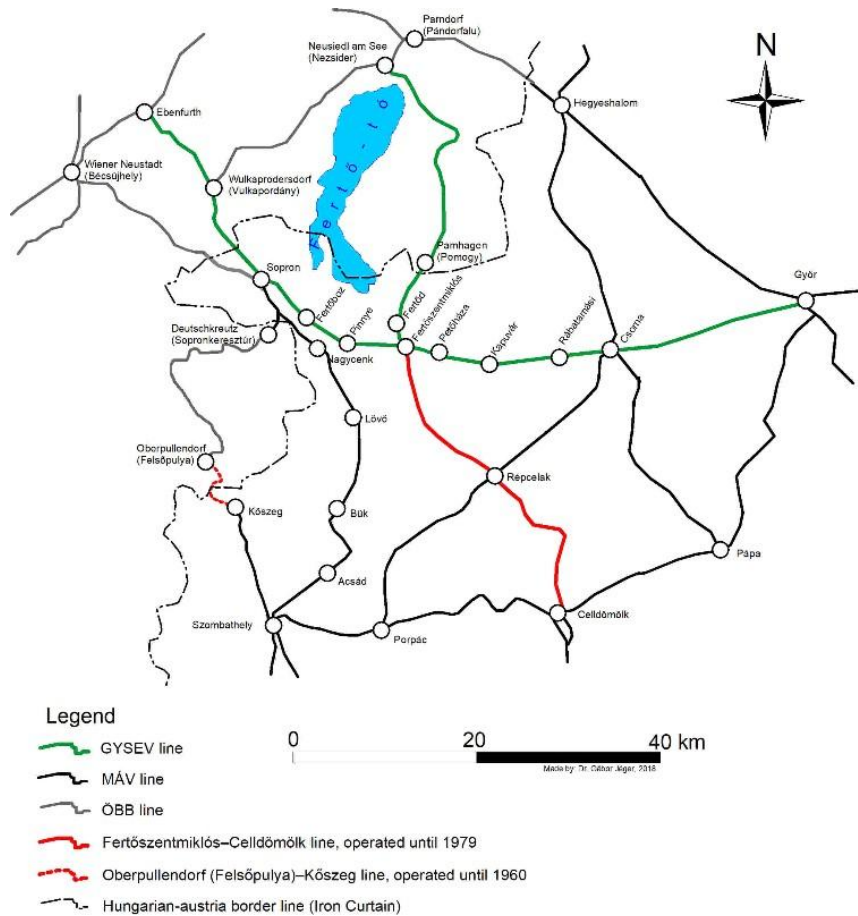
The former Iron Curtain



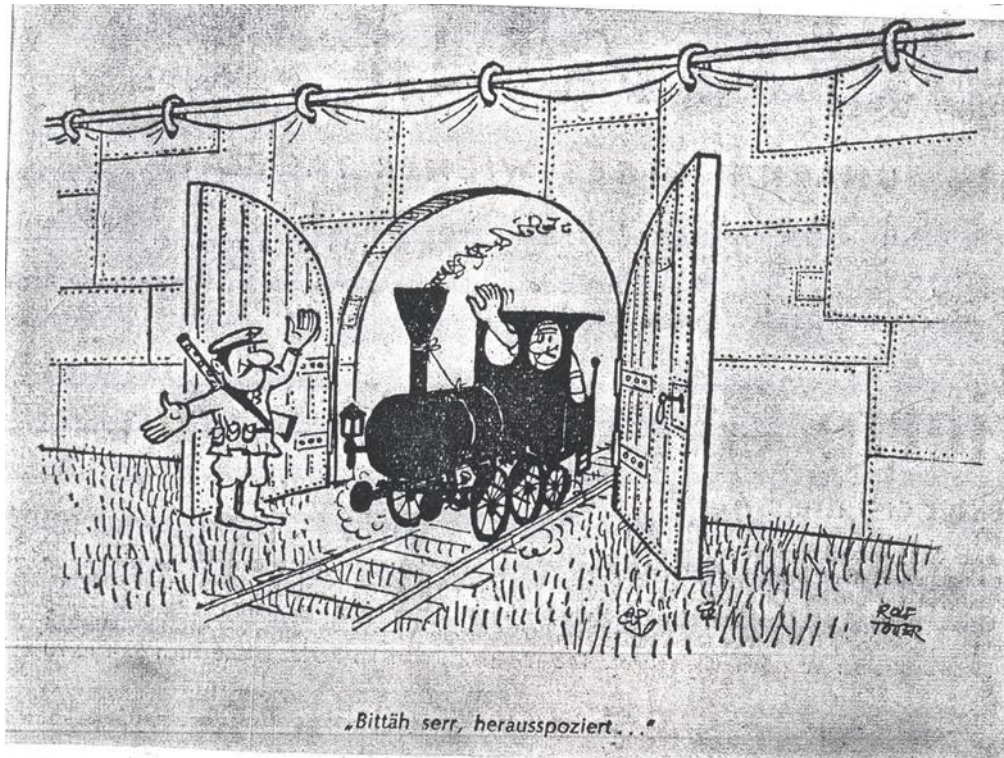
RICH CLABAUGH/STAFF

The former Iron Curtain

(<http://one-europe.net> Access: February 22th 2018)



GYSEV and Fertővidék Local Railway lines in the northwestern Hungarian region in this period. (Map was made by Dr. Jéger Gábor for the request of author)



A caricature of a fleeing with train from 1965. „Flucht aus Ungarn auf einer Lok,“ *Neues Österreich*, vol. 126, pp. 3, August 5, 1965.

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