

The chapter on the American and Czech reception of Kafka highlights the author's approach. Kafka's writing "would provide Cold War writers and intellectuals in the United States with a literary vocabulary for imagining life behind the Iron Curtain" (27). At the same time, Kafka would serve as a catalyst for a "dissenting" position on the part of both American left-wing intellectuals and Czech writers and critics. The chapter devoted to Matthiessen's visiting professorship at Charles University in the autumn of 1947 offers the best of Goodman's method, as he carefully traces the trajectories and shifting political and aesthetic positions of both American and Czech writers and intellectuals. The chapters on better-known figures and events, such as Škvorecký, Alan Ginsberg, Roth, or Arthur Miller's involvement with Czech dissent, offer valuable detail and innovative readings and interpretations. The epilogue provides a platform for the post-1989 controversies and ambivalent trajectories of key figures in the book, including the discussions on Karel Šrám's (one of the leaders of the Jazz Section) collaboration with the secret police, or Václav Havel's support for the Iraq War.

Goodman manages to capture the complex processes of cultural transfer as a form of translation (of both literary texts and cultural paradigms). As the author argues, the texts analyzed were not only translated into another language, but also into a new form of dissent. Since translation plays such a key role in the book, we can regret that important figures of translators such as Rita Klímová or Dagmar Eisnerová are mentioned only briefly, without playing a more central role in the narrative. This could have been an opportunity to explore the role of female dissidents more thoroughly, a task that is long overdue.

Goodman's book is an important stepping stone for further research into the interconnectedness of literary circles and their ideas: "Cold War-era literary dissent was yet another form of 'novel fusion' between East and West" (20). It demonstrates the vitality of the subject, provides methodological tools and answers important questions, while leaving ample space for further research.

**Ed. Mária Csanádi, Márton Gerő, Miklós Hajdu, Imre Kovách, Mihály Laki, and István János Tóth. *Dynamics of an Authoritarian System: Hungary, 2010–2021*.**

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Although difficult to prove statistically, there is good reason to assume that what is often called "democratic backlash" generated by the Viktor Orbán regime since 2010 has already sparked more interpretive concepts and social science theories in Hungary than the historic regime change, in 1989. Deemed a departure from the principles of humanist rationality, commonly recognized today as the values of the European Union, the regime has been characterized in relevant academic literature with descriptors including illiberal state, autocracy, semi-hybrid regime, state-capitalism, developmental state, party-state, predatory authoritarian state, dependent state, accumulating state, competitive

authoritarianism, crony system, Potemkin democracy, mafia-state, and kleptocracy—to name the more moderate ones. Consequently, Mária Csanádi and her co-authors faced a challenge navigating through this web of concepts to develop a clear explanation that sheds light on the gradual expansion of the System of National Cooperation (SNC, new-speak codename for how the state operates). Their argument is that while some existing concepts can describe certain aspects of the system, none fully captures its complexity or its dynamic nature.

This volume represents a monumental academic endeavor written in the best traditions of Hungarian positivist social sciences, aiming to create a comprehensive itinerary of the SNC; some kind of Grand Encyclopedia of the transgressions of the SNC by compiling facts from various sources. In the first section, Csanádi meticulously recalls and systematizes over 700 events and political decisions, effectively demonstrating how the ruling party elite captured the country's economy and society. Employing the concept of “diffusion,” the author unravels a process of a centrally managed network of influence infiltrating every facet of social functioning, gradually asserting control over the country. While theoretically she does not go too far beyond often-referred to forerunners like János Kornai and Bálint Magyar, the empirical material presented here constitutes an astonishing historical indictment against the assault on democracy and process of modernization in Hungary.

The concept of diffusion, originally used in physics, is adeptly transposed to the social sciences. It not only clarifies the spread of authoritarian practices within a country but also provides insight into the productive interaction between two anti-democratic regimes (Hungary and Russia). The study could have extended its focus to investigate the dynamics of interplay between the anti-Enlightenment ideologies propelling the two regimes. This would have expanded diffusion theory to explore both external and internal impacts on the system. Furthermore, the author contends that conceptualizing the system is challenging due to the permanent and deliberate modifications in which the regime's dynamism originates from. This notion clearly echoes Samuel Huntington's description of the (communist) single-party regimes' dynamic, published in 1970 (Huntington and Clement Moore, *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of One-Party Systems*). Referring to Huntington's insights could have enriched Csanádi's narrative with a deeper historical and temporal perspective regarding the diffusion of repressive practices and ideology from the state socialist autocracy to the present one.

In the volume's second part, three strictly empirical studies provide further evidence to support Csanádi's thesis. All three present and analyze the self-reproductive mechanisms of the emerging authoritarian system in maximum detail and with impeccable methodological consistency. In the second chapter, Márton Gerő and Imre Kovách present the redistributive mechanisms of the Orbán regime and make a compelling argument that the growing number of state welfare projects is a blind to build clientele and expand a system-dependent voter base, while actual social spending and subsidies are steadily declining. In the third chapter, János Tóth and Miklós Hajdu analyze the risk of corruption and the competitive intensity of public tenders between 2005 and 2021, processing a stunning 242,000 public procurement contracts. Their research proves beyond any reasonable doubt that the Orbán regime systematically distributes public funding almost exclusively to “crony companies,” as well as creating a legal background for corruption. In the final study, Mihály Laki concludes that crony entrepreneurs have a comparatively greater chance of getting rich than outsiders, unravelling the contact networks of the 100 richest Hungarians. All three studies have the merit of presenting relevant, evidence-based results in a political environment that has perfected the technique of concealing economic facts. In addition to scientific rigor, the authors have also carried out virtuoso detective work to draw their conclusions.

Given its academic style and highly scholarly content one can assume that this book is mainly targeted at academics. Hungarian readers following fact-finding sites and news will enjoy its form and consistently executed methodology, however, they would find the

conclusions less than revelatory, because corruption, violations of European standards, and disregard for social justice are to them commonplace. Yet there are dilemmas about some issues that the book treats as categorical facts. For example, there is no certainty that authoritarian regimes only “diffuse” downward and poison society from above, or that the power elite exploits and utilizes historically inherited pre-existing social patterns with simply better sensitivity to voter demands than its political predecessors. Historical and social psychological approaches have thus far paid much more attention to the Orbán regime’s communication (propaganda and adaptation to social demands as well as power techniques based on memory politics, which are used to exploit existing voter attitudes and successively win big). It is just as difficult to avoid the question of why nobody stops this regime’s shameful practices: where is civil society and the political opposition? It would be difficult to understand the whole Orbánian construct without reference to one of the regime’s greatest innovations in power technology: the concept of a “central power field,” by which the ruling party effectively paralyzes its political opponents.

As for international readers, this book will certainly have a mind-opening and revelatory effect. Despite the above criticisms, this is a highly valuable academic work offering an ambitious and accurate vision of a dictatorship in the making.

## **Ed. Tracey German, Stephen F. Jones, and Kornely Kakachia. *Georgia’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: Challenges for a Small State.***

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The introduction to this book begins by noting that Georgia, a small nation and minor power that for centuries has been surrounded by larger powers, has always been insecure and thus has needed to practice skilled diplomacy in order to guarantee the state’s survival. It also observes that Georgians, having converted to Christianity in the fourth century, possess a self-image as Europeans that represents the source of their overwhelming elite and mass consensus on seeking membership in both the European Union and NATO. (That consensus, by the way, is immediately visible to any visitor to Tbilisi where EU, American, and Ukrainian flags are perhaps even more numerous in the city’s ubiquitous street graffiti than are Georgian flags.) Once one moves beyond those observations, however, the picture gets complicated very quickly and little about Georgia’s international posture and policies is simple. As a result, wide-ranging, highly informative, and thoroughly documented books on Georgian foreign policy are sorely needed. Tracey German, Stephen Jones, and Kornely Kakachia have compiled just such a book.

*Georgia’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century* consists of four sections and eleven substantive chapters that deal with a variety of topics. All of them are written by top-notch scholars who execute their assignments masterfully. Part I, titled “The Uses of Identity in Georgian Foreign Policy,” begins with a chapter written by German and Kakachia that “explores the foreign policy behaviour of Georgia through the lens of the existing literature on small