



# Excerpts and memories from the periods of border security in Hungary

---

**István Hottó**

PhD student, lecturer, research assistant  
University of Pécs  
Faculty of Law and Political Sciences  
Department of Criminology and Penitentiary Law  
hoto.istvan@ajk.pte.hu



---

## Abstract

**Aim:** The purpose of this study is to enhance understanding of the evolution of the Hungarian Border Guard, by providing an overview of the various historical events and forces that shaped the organization throughout different periods.

**Methodology:** By drawing on a broad literature covering various periods in the history of border surveillance in Hungary, this study provides a detailed examination of the history of the Hungarian Border Guard.

**Findings:** It is imperative to work to preserve the memory and traditions of the Border Guard, as this is the only path to maintaining its spirit into the future.

**Value:** This study provides the reader with an understanding of the history, spirit, and messages of the Hungarian Border Guard. A great deal of recent work has been conducted to preserve these memories. Several significant monuments have been created, including the Apátistvánfalva Border Guard Memorial Site, established in the former Apátistvánfalva border guard post, and the Border Guard Memorial Room at the Border Guard Department of the National University of Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement. The dedication of those working to protect these traditions is exemplary; the significance of their work is unquestionable. The protection of the values of the Border Guard and the preservation of its traditions is arguably a matter of public interest.

**Keywords:** border patrol, history of the border patrol, border guard, the demise of the border patrol, Apátistvánfalva border patrol memorial, border patrol memories

---

English-language republication. The Hungarian version of this article was published in *Belügyi Szemle* 2025, issue 8. DOI link: <https://doi.org/10.38146/BSZ-AJIA.2025.v73.i8.pp1679-1698>

## Introductory thoughts

The concept of border protection has changed. Whereas in the past, from the point of view of military science and police science, this activity primarily included territorial defense and military tasks, today, in a broad interpretation, border protection includes all legal and technical means and law enforcement and military methods that are involved in preventing the unlawful crossing of the state border and in protecting the order of the state border. The task of the police, however, is not border protection but border policing, and consists of sub-tasks such as guarding the state border, controlling border traffic and maintaining border order at all times (Hautzinger, 2020). Since 1992, Border Guard Day has been celebrated every year on 27 June, the day of St. Lazlo, the patron saint of border guards. This tradition has not been interrupted by the integration of the organization into the police force on 1 January 2008. The Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Border Guard Culture Foundation, László Vájlók, Police Lieutenant Colonel, Master Teacher, and Dr József Balla, Police Colonel, Deputy Dean for General and Development Studies at the Faculty of Police Sciences of the National University of Public Service, initiated the creation of a memorial site. Thanks to their dedication, the National University of Public Service

The Border Patrol Memorial Place and Memorial Room was inaugurated on the 30th anniversary of the faculty, on 1 September 2022, and since then it has been an integral part of the education of the students of the Faculty of Law Enforcement and the cultivation of traditions ([URL1](#)).

On the initiative of Lieutenant General József Béndek, the last national commander of the Border Guard, the Border Guard Memorial was established in 2007 in Apátistvánfalva, in the former border guard station in the Guard.

The station, which had been closed down, was reborn after sixteen years, and the Border Guard Memorial was erected there, where former border guards commemorate and lay wreaths on St. László's Day every year ([Hottó, 2023](#)).

At the symbolic border guard memorial in Apátistvánfalva, the commemoration of St. László's Day has been organized by the Körmend Police Technical School every year since 2019, and prior to that, the wreath-laying ceremony was organized by the National Police Headquarters.

The marble plaque on the wall of the Apátistvánfalva Border Guard Memorial - a quote from a letter by Lajos Kossuth - 'Let the mercy of the nation be a reminder of loyalty and duty to the freedom of the Hungarian Homeland....' ([URL2](#)) - faithfully reflects the former message of the Border Guard to visitors of the memorial.

## The beginnings of organized border surveillance in Hungary

After the Compromise, the military border guards gradually ceased to exist, and various organizations were formed to guard the state borders. The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie, established by Act III of 1881 ([URL3](#)), only occasionally performed border guard duties, as was the case during the rinderpest and cholera epidemics of 1884. After the Hungarian-Romanian border treaty, which was enacted by the Hungarian Parliament on 30 April 1888, it became necessary to guard the new, well-defined and maintained border more reliably. For this purpose, the Royal Hungarian Border Guard was established on 15 July 1891 by Joint Order No. 50.341 of the Minister of Defense and the Minister of the Interior. The Border Guard, which - with minor changes and later within the organization of the Gendarmerie - was involved in border surveillance, in addition to its public security tasks, practically until 1945. The second border police organization, adapted to the Hungarian statehood, was the Hungarian Royal Border Police, established by Act VIII of 1903 ([URL4](#)). It was the first border police organization with national jurisdiction in the dualist state.

After lengthy negotiations, the Border Police started its operations on 15 January 1906. Its tasks covered the entire border section of Hungary, and its organization consisted of 16 border headquarters and 31 branches. In addition to the quarterly inspections of the headquarters, the work of the authorities involved in border surveillance was audited every six months (Parádi, 2006). With its establishment, the management of border surveillance was transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Interior (Kui, 2020). The Border Police, which played a leading role in coordinating the activities of border control organizations, was accordingly given broad powers in border surveillance, border traffic control and aliens policing, but its own personnel were directly involved only in border traffic control. Border police officers carried out passport checks, issued border crossing cards and checked compliance with public health regulations at border railway and boat stations (Suba, 2014).

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, road traffic at border crossings was not significant. On the border with Serbia and Romania, so-called official premises were designated in buildings along the priority roads, where passengers were required to enter to see their travel documents. Many people were allowed to cross the state border without a travel document, such as state, county and municipal officials employed at Romanian and Hungarian border stations, members of their families, people going to the nearest market to buy food, officials of the Hungarian and Romanian state railways, residents of the Kingdom of Serbia, Romanian officials working in border villages and their

families. The Border Police's exclusive role in controlling border traffic lasted until 1912, when the gendarmerie took over passport control on the Serbian and Romanian borders. From the 1910s, in the run-up to the war, the role of the Royal Hungarian Defense Forces increased in the management of the Treasury Guard and the Gendarmerie, but the Border Police remained under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, and in the period of the war the Border Police supported the work of the military authorities. In 1918, in addition to the originally established border police stations, there were also border police stations in Liptovszentmiklós, Ótátrafüred, Timisoara, Sibiu and Novi Sad. At the end of the war, much of Hungary's territory was occupied by foreign troops, the border guard system was dismantled, and the newly established demarcation lines were no longer a border guard but a defense post.

After the Revolution of the Roses, the Károlyi government began to disarm the army, leaving the remaining areas of the country unprotected. Several officers (despite their different political beliefs) joined the Red Army of the Soviet Republic because it was fighting to restore the territorial integrity of the country. Red Guard regiments were deployed to the border to control the sparse border traffic, but their primary task was to protect the demarcation line. The peace treaty that ended the Great War also required the creation of a new organization to guard the state border and the restructuring of the border guard system.

## **Customs police and the emergence of border hunters in border surveillance**

As a result of the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary's territory was reduced to one third. In the absence of a unified organization, the new borders were guarded by the gendarmerie, the remaining units of the border police, the finance police, the police and the Hungarian Defense Forces.

With the establishment of the Royal Hungarian Customs Guard<sup>1</sup> on 25 August 1921, the guarding of the state border was once again the responsibility of a single organization, which was in charge of military border surveillance, the control of the movement of persons and goods across the border and the control of minor border traffic. The supreme administration of the Customs police was exercised by the Minister of Finance, but its organizational, personnel, service and material affairs were handled by the XIX Department (later the General

---

1 25 August 1921, pursuant to Decree No. 6 200/1921 of the Ministry of Finance and Circular No. 114.400/1921 of the Minister of Finance.

Department) of the Ministry of Finance, which in fact operated under the hidden Home Guard General Staff. It was headed by the Director-General of Customs and the Chief of Customs. The seven customs districts were headed by customs district commanders, in accordance with the organization of the district headquarters. The districts were subdivided into customs sections, which were then divided into customs stations and border inspection posts. The number of sections was 52 in 1925 and 54 in 1931. In 1925, there were 200 border posts and 35 inspection posts. The troops wore uniforms and carried weapons, but administrative staff and auxiliary staff were neither uniformed nor armed. The maximum number of troops was 4,500, 600 officers and 1,250 administrative staff. Their use of weapons was regulated according to the gendarmerie pattern (Borbély & Kapy, 1941).

The Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie continued to help guard the border, control traffic in the border area and provide external security at border crossing points. Within the Royal Hungarian State Police, Peripheries Branch Stations were set up to control long-distance border traffic. The aliens police authority of the State Police was the National Central Office for the Control of Aliens. From 1 July 1939, the harbor master's office was set up to control waterborne border traffic.

From 1 October 1932, the tasks of the Customs Guard - with the exception of customs and excise duties - were taken over by the Royal Hungarian Border Guard, which remained nominally subordinate to the Minister of Finance, but was part of the Hungarian Defense Forces. The seven Border Guard regiments, set up as the 3rd Infantry Regiment of the Mixed Brigade, operated in the seven Border Guard Districts, which were identical to the Home Guard Districts.

The integration of the Border Guard into the National Defense Forces was planned from 1 October 1938. However, this order of operations was changed due to the invasion of the Highlands, and the reorganization could only begin in December 1938. On 23 January 1939, 24 border fighter battalions were officially established within the National Army, based on the border security divisions previously subordinate to the border guard district headquarters. Some of the battalions were large and highly armed, while others were smaller and less well armed. Border guarding was carried out by one or two border fighter patrol companies per battalion, a quarter of the total border fighter force. The direct guarding of the border was carried out by the border hunter patrols and border hunter patrol officers of the companies (Borbély & Kapy, 1941). The majority of the battalions, the so-called troop section, were a strong infantry battalion capable of independent action. From 1 October 1939, the number of border hunter battalions increased further, and the reorganization of the battalions stationed in the Carpathian mountainous area into mountain-equipped

units began. In 1943, some of these were formed into mountain hunter battalions. After the reintegration of North Transylvania and Székelyföld, 18 border hunter battalions were used to form the 27th Székely infantry brigade when the troops of the newly created IX Corps in Cluj were organized. The role of the disbanded battalions was taken over by border patrol battalions, which had no troop units and only border guard duties. During the war, the border fighters fought heroically against the enemy on the eastern and southern borders of the country (Borbély & Kapy, 1941).

## **The Army Border Guard - Non-political border guards under political leadership**

On 30 January 1945, the Provisional National Government issued a call for recruits to form a new army. At the same time, the organization of a border guard was mooted, justified by the fact that the guarding of the borders, which had been restored before 1937, was considered an important political issue by the neighboring countries. The Soviet territorial commands near the borders also urged the organization of border guards, because crime and smuggling had become so rampant that they threatened the tranquility of the area behind the front, the security of the military lines and even the economic stabilization of the country. Smuggling was already significant towards Romania in November 1944, and as the front progressed, it expanded towards Yugoslavian and then Austrian territories. Smuggling gangs of several hundred men, often travelling in 10-15 wagons, equipped with automatic rifles, sometimes including heavy weapons, were active. These smugglers would channel goods, machinery, equipment and parts from factories, embezzled from public supplies and even stolen from military warehouses, into the channels of the smuggling trade (Berki, 2015). After the end of the Second World War, border patrols in Hungary began along the restored borders.

On 22 February 1945, the Minister of Defense decided to set up border patrol companies within the framework of the military district headquarters (Fórizs, 2015). Reinforced after the war with officers and soldiers returning from the Western theatre of operations, the Border Guard was able to start operating on all the country's borders by 14 June 1945. The corps then consisted of 27 border patrol companies and 150 outposts.

At the urging of the Allied Control Committee, the Ministry of Defense took measures to reorganize the Border Guard on 11 March 1946. The number of Border Patrol companies increased to 50 and they were organized into 14 Border

Hunter Battalions. The command staff was reinforced by officers transferred from the National Army who had graduated from the Ludovico or the military academy and who were prepared for border guard duties in courses. With this organization, the then 11 493-strong Border Guard was effective in the fight against smuggling and border crime. Until the organization of the Border Police in January 1946, the Border Hunter sub-units were also involved in border traffic control. By the spring of 1946, the bodies of the Border Guard had been established: the captaincies, the sub-stations and the guard headquarters. In addition to controlling border traffic, the new body also carried out a wide range of border police activities. Border checkpoints and camps were set up for the mass crossing and screening of returning prisoners of war and emigrants. Peaceable border traffic was established from 1947-1948.

## **The State Defense Border Guard - total border control**

By Decree No. 4.353/194 of the Council of Ministers, from 1 January 1950, an independent body was created from the State Defense Authority of the Ministry of the Interior and the National Defense Border Guard, which was named the State Defense Authority. The State Defense Authority came under the Council of Ministers ([URL5](#)).

The professional officers of the National Defense Border Guard, up to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, were appointed by the Head of the SAO. The length of service of the enlisted crew was changed to three years. With the integration of the border police, the number of border guards swelled to 17 777. The reorganization of the new corps was carried out on the Soviet model, subordinated to political interests. Soviet advisors at the National Command of the Border Guard and in the border guard districts were involved in the management of the activity (Berki, 2015).

In the Cold War atmosphere, the western border was completely closed. The deterioration of relations with Yugoslavia led to frequent conflicts and sometimes armed confrontations on the border. In 1950, a technical barrier of barbed wire was installed along these two sections of the border, with a 10-metre-wide minefield and a strip of track between the wire fences. From June 1950, a 15 km wide border zone was established<sup>2</sup> on the Yugoslav border, which was extended to include the Austrian border<sup>3</sup> in September 1952. Within the border

---

2 On the basis of the instruction of the BM IV. Department No. 16/1950.

3 On the basis of BM Department IV Instruction No 0390/1952.

zones, a 2 km restricted zone was designated, with 500 m and 50 m border strips. Entry to each zone was only possible with written permission from the police or border guards, and only border guards were allowed in the 50-metre border strip. The restrictions have caused serious tension among border residents. On the basis of a decision of the Council of Ministers, the ÁVH was subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior with effect from 15 July 1953. The BM Border Guard and the BM Internal Armed Forces were placed under joint command. Minefield clearance on the western and southern borders began in April 1956 and was completed by 15 September. The wire fence on the southern border was also removed and the area was returned to the population. The main task of the Border Guard troops during the 1956 Revolution and War of Independence was to guard the state border. The Revolutionary Military Committee of the Border Guard, formed at the National Command of the Border Guard, was unable to influence the national management of the Corps. In Mosonmagyaróvár, border guards fired into a crowd marching towards the barracks, killing more than a hundred people and wounding many others. In the last months of the year, the biggest problem was caused by the wave of refugees heading west (Bisi, 2011).

By the end of December 1956, the border police had apprehended 26,113 people and detected a total of 32,699 people escaping abroad, which is known in the trade as unpunished border violations. It was often impossible to realistically estimate the number of fugitives arriving in large numbers in the course of group border violations, and in winter it was impossible to properly assess and analyse the traces. The organization had no interest in determining the exact number, as providing the data would have been detrimental to the border guards. Therefore, in many cases, the patrols of the stations did not even report the movements of border crossers (Fórizs, 2020).

## **BM Border Guard between 1957-1971 - The development of a stable border guard system**

Until the spring of 1957, the Border Guard was under the Ministry of Armed Forces and then again under the Ministry of the Interior. In early 1957, due to a wave of mass emigration (defections), the mine barrier was reintroduced on the western border and the border zone was re-established on the southern border from 2 February. From 1 March 1960, the Border Guard Gazette became a joint publication of the Border Guard and the Interior Guard, under the title 'For the Homeland'.



As part of the qualitative development of the Border Guard, the Officer and NCO Training School was opened in May 1958 and the Border Guard Officer School in March 1959. In 1960, a clothing allowance for professional staff was introduced with an initial sum of HUF 5000. In 1959, conscripts received new baize uniforms, in 1960 new summer uniforms and in 1964 new uniforms for going out. In 1968, the salaries of enlisted personnel were increased. Officer training was enhanced by the new officer schools, the Unified Officer School and the Lajos Kossuth Military College, which were set up in the 1960s to meet ever higher standards.

The training of senior commanders took place at the Miklós Zrínyi Military Academy. The professional training of non-commissioned officers was supported by the Police Flag Training School. Between 1965 and 1970, the minefield on the western border was gradually replaced by the electric signaling system, and the border guard system was also changed. Based on the Government Decision 2002/69, BM Order 01/1969 abolished the western border zone, and the border strip was reduced to a 2 km strip between the signaling system and the border line.

Based on Government Decision No. 2007/65, BM Order No. 0017/65 abolished the southern border zone, but the lane and the 500 m border strip remained. Border traffic started to increase again from 1957, mainly with the socialist countries. This made it necessary to improve the efficiency of border controls. Joint controls were introduced at the border crossing points at Kürtös in August 1961 and at Párkány in June 1962. The first minor relaxations were introduced in 1964.

From 15 June to 15 September, Western tourists could buy a three-month visa at a reduced rate, thus the tourism of Sopron, Kőszeg and Szombathely increased. On 16 September 1964, the new building of the border crossing at Rajka was inaugurated, which also housed the Czechoslovak authorities. In June 1966, the Udvar-Hercegszőlős border crossing was opened, on 1 July the Rédic-Lendva border crossing was opened, and passport operators started their work. In March 1967, the new building of the border station in Hegyeshalom was inaugurated, in April 1968 the Nagylak crossing was opened, in May 1969 the Barcs-Verőce Drava bridge was completed and the Barcs border crossing was opened, and on 1 June 1970 the Gyula-Varsánd border crossing was opened.

The Yugoslav-Hungarian local border traffic agreement, which came into force in February 1966, favored the residents in the 15 km band. Under the Hungarian-Romanian local border traffic agreement signed on 17 June 1969, residents in the 15 km zone were allowed to cross four times a year on an easier basis. The agreement, which entered into force on 12 January 1970, allowed

passenger traffic to be opened at Nyírábrány, Csengersima and Ágerdömajor in addition to rail traffic (Bisi, 2011).

## **The Ministry of the Interior Border Guard 1971-1989 - In the spirit of developing technology and tourism**

During the period 1971-1989, the importance of border traffic control increased. New crossing points were built at a rapid pace, while old ones were expanded and modernized. By mid-August 1973, the reconstruction of the border post at Letenye was completed, with the border post being extended from four to 14 lanes and a roof over the lanes. Construction of the new buildings for the yard and Nagylak crossings began, and the new Drávaszabolcs bridge with the new border crossing was inaugurated on 25 October.

In February 1975, traffic was already passing through the enlarged Nagylak crossing. On 24 September 1976, the Bucusu border station was opened. In 1977, 37.2 million people crossed the border, the busiest crossings being on the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav borders, with Komárno in first place with 5.1 million people crossing per year. At the time, Hegyeshalom was in 8th place with 2.1 million people. In 1977, two new border crossings were opened, at Tompa on 3 June and at Bajánsenye in July. On 6 April 1982, the new 36-lane border crossing at Hegyeshalom was opened. The Berzence border crossing was opened on 12 June. On 2 January 1983, the Vámoszabadi-Medve border crossing was opened to international traffic. On 1 July 1985, the 65th crossing at Kópháza-Deutschkreutz was opened.

After the 1970 Passport Act, a new passport was introduced on 1 January 1972, valid for seven socialist countries for five years, renewable for another five years, but still requiring an exit permit for each exit. On 1 January 1979, the Hungarian-Austrian Intergovernmental Agreement on the abolition of the visa requirement, signed on 5 May 1978, entered into force (Nagy, 2010).

The number of Hungarian border violators decreased from 1972, but the proportion of foreigners, mainly Romanian and East German citizens, the number of foreign people smugglers, the aggressiveness of border violators and the number of escape attempts at border crossings increased. In 1976, there were seven assaults on patrol. In 1988, the national commander restricted the use of weapons by patrols, so that no weapons could be used against fleeing border crossers at the western border (Bisi, 2011).

## The Ministry of the Interior Border Guard in 1989 - A radical change

The year 1989 marked a historic turning point in the life of the Border Guard. Technical barriers and restrictions on the state border were abolished, and a radical transformation of the Corps began.

At the beginning of 1989, there were 13 000 Romanian refugees in the country who, with a few exceptions, had entered Hungary illegally via the green border, and by November 1989 their number had risen to 30 000. In several cases, Romanian border guards fired on the refugees, and some were returned to Romania for deportation.

A governmental proposal was made in March 1989 to dismantle the then obsolete electronic signaling system at the western border, based on a decision by the Ministry of the Interior. The MSZMP Political Committee had already assessed the circumstances in February that the former border guard system had to be adapted to the new times, with the tasks of passport management being taken over by professional border guards instead of conscript border guards.

The Authority officially began demolishing the signaling system on 2 May and, although the rehabilitation of the area took until 1990, it was completed by August. Prior to that, in May, access restrictions to the southern border strip were lifted, and by 1 August, the trail and border strip on the western border had also been removed. Hungary acceded to the Geneva Convention on 15 October and new refugee camps were established in Békéscsaba and Hajdúszoboszló.

The lifting of border restrictions and the internal situation in Romania led to a significant increase in the number of border crossers. By July 1989, border guards had arrested 5,000 border crossers, mostly Romanians and East Germans. In the second half of the year, attempts by East German citizens to cross the border became widespread and the number of violent incidents increased. During the Pan-European Picnic in the Fertőrákos area in August, hundreds of East German citizens crossed into Austria. *'The Debrecen branch of the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the parties of the Sopron Opposition Round Table announced an event called the Pan-European Picnic for 19 August 1989 to promote the idea of the dismantling of the Iron Curtain and the idea of a common Europe without borders. The main patron of the event was Imre Pozsgay from the Hungarian side and Otto Habsburg from the other side of the Iron Curtain. After the event had received considerable publicity in the GDR, even more people came to the shores of Lake Balaton on holiday that summer, and those who stayed there later refused to go home. It was worth staying, because on 19 August 1989 the organizers of the Pan-European Picnic opened a symbolic border*

*crossing for three hours - from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. - between Sopronpuszta and Szentmargitbánya on the Austrian side. The symbolic cutting of the barbed wire was performed by the Secretary General of the Pan-European Union, Walburga Habsburg Douglas, followed by a Hungarian delegation crossing the border to the Austrian side. There, a symbolic gate was opened, and the delegation crossed the free border back to the site of the celebration with Austrian citizens. Then Ottó Habsburg, Member of the European Parliament, President of the Pan-European Union, and Imre Pozsgay, Minister of State, delivered a message and an appeal from the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Pan-European Union, which organized the meeting. The event made the world press because hundreds of East German citizens took advantage of the temporary opening of the border to rush to Austria to travel to the 'other' Germany. The border guards were perplexed, as the opening of the border was not for the release of GDR citizens, so they were not ordered to stop or let them through. The Border Guard guidelines only allowed the use of weapons in cases of legitimate self-defense. The Hungarian border guards, abandoned by their superiors and 'condemned to freedom', did not prevent the siege-like escape, which thus became the first truly spectacular action of German unification.*

*On that day, hundreds of GDR citizens crossed the temporarily opened Austro-Hungarian border into Austria. A month later, on 11 September, the Hungarian border was officially opened to East German citizens wishing to leave for the West.*

*The Pan-European Picnic set in motion an avalanche that accelerated the collapse of the bipolar world and the democratic transition in Eastern Europe. It contributed significantly to the breaking of the Iron Curtain and the reunification of Germany.' (URL6)*

There have been cases of patrols being attacked by border crossers trying to cross to the west. On one such occasion, on 21 August, the patrol's gun accidentally discharged, and the attacking border crosser was fatally shot (Nagy, 2010). A joint Hungarian-Austrian investigation found the border guard not guilty, and he was given 10,000 schillings by the residents of neighboring Sankt Martin and Deutschkreutz. In an increasingly tense situation, the government decided to open the western border crossings to East German citizens, which the border police implemented on 11 September.

Border traffic has increased significantly, with 34 million people crossing the border in the first half of the year. Act XVIII of 1989 granted Hungarian citizens the right to a world passport as a citizen. There was a significant increase in the number of arrivals from the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Poland and Yugoslavia.

In December, the Council of Ministers discussed the situation of the Border Guard and decided on organizational changes. According to Resolution 2046/1989<sup>4</sup>: ‘... *the Border Guard will start to carry out its tasks with professional and civilian staff at the stations and traffic control points from 1 January 1990 and will complete them by 1995.*’

The increasing growth in border traffic, its control, and the declining importance of the western border have also justified changes within the organization. Increasingly, the focus had to be on the development of a law-enforcement organization. Already at that time, researchers realized that, given the state of military technology of the time, the weaponry available to the border guards would be ineffective against a regular military attack. There was therefore no justification for operating as an armed force and for military armament, but instead a move towards becoming an armed corps. Accordingly, instead of large numbers of conscripts, border guard tasks gradually be performed by professional personnel (Fórizs - Gáspár & Paku, 1990).

The gradual withdrawal of the conscript border guards, and the measures taken in this regard were well-founded on the information available at the time, taking into account the social and migration changes expected at the time, and thus provided a sound basis for further legislative efforts. On the other hand, the deepening crisis of the political order in Eastern Europe and the resulting conflicts, neither the Yugoslav civil war nor the subsequent migration crisis, were not considered (Ritecz, 2003).

## **Ministry of Interior Border Guard 1990-1998 - war and transformation**

The organization faced many new challenges. The period of the Border Guard’s history between 1990 and 1998 was marked by the transition to a professional border guard organization following the withdrawal of conscripts, the management of fundamental changes in border order, border surveillance and border traffic, and new tasks resulting from the civil war in Yugoslavia. New states have been created around our country, with seven countries on our borders instead of five. This has also required a renewal of the conventions governing border cooperation and partnership.

---

4 Decision of the Council of Ministers No 2046/1989 on the principles of the draft law on the state border of the Republic of Hungary, its order, guarding and rules of crossing, Decision No 17.

Border traffic increased significantly, to over 100 million by the end of 1990 and remained around that figure in the following years. To cope with the high traffic, from April 1990, selective checks were introduced instead of complete checks, with travelers divided into three groups (Hungarians, foreigners requiring visas, visa-free foreigners) and stamping abolished for Hungarian citizens.

Unilateral controls on the Hungarian-Czechoslovak border were lifted on 12 September 1991. New crossings were opened to Austria and joint border controls were introduced. From 1995, new crossings were opened on the Slovak and Slovenian borders. The EU's Phare program was involved in the modernization of border posts, which started in 1995 at the border posts at Nagylak, Gyula, Ártánd, Záhony, Rajka and Rédics.

At the beginning of the Yugoslav civil war, from 27 June 1991, the Yugoslav People's Army (JPA) wanted to control the crossing points, and on 14 October it began to mine the main routes across the border in the Ivándárda–Illocska–Sárok region. From 17 August, refugees began to appear at border posts and on the green border. The National Commander of the Border Guard has ordered reinforced service along the affected border section and has strengthened the local border guard force by five hundred. The government ordered the establishment of police action squadrons, and by the end of 1992 there were 19 squadrons reinforced with armored transport combat vehicles. Because of the prolonged fighting, a local command was set up in the Baranya Triangle and this area was reinforced with an action battalion.

In April 1992, the Border Police's Aliens and Offences Department was created and the Corps' law enforcement agencies began their work. Eight community lodgings were set up in the directorates. The new Aliens Act<sup>5</sup> adopted in 1994 gave the border police more powers. From 1 September 1992, the Minister of the Interior established a Border Police Department at the Police College. In 1995, the directorates in Zalaegerszeg and Sopron were abolished, the two directorates in Budapest were merged, the training base in Siklós was closed and the training and further training institute in Sopron was established, with a branch in Csorna. In April 1998, the last conscripts were discharged from the Border Guard. The Border Guard and Border Guard Act<sup>6</sup> completes the legal framework governing the activities of the Border Guard. In 1994, the Border Guard started to prepare for accession to the European Union, and after accession it continued to prepare effectively to meet the conditions for border surveillance

---

5 Act LXXXVI of 1993 on the entry, residence and immigration of foreigners in Hungary.

6 Act XXXII of 1997 on border surveillance and border guards.

set by the Schengen Convention, and the Act<sup>7</sup> on Criminal Procedure defined the scope of criminal offences for which the Border Guard may act.

## **The Border Guard 1998-2004 - Towards the European Union**

The period between 1998 and 2004 was marked by the preparation for Hungary's accession to Schengen, the introduction of additional laws regulating the tasks of the Border Guard and the management of the aftermath of the Balkan civil war. Act XIX of 1998 on Criminal Procedure, adopted in 1998, defined the scope of criminal offences that the Border Guard could prosecute. The Act<sup>8</sup> on the Entry and Residence of Aliens regulated the powers and tasks of the Border Guard.

The number of irregular migrants has been consistently high, mainly on the Ukrainian and Romanian, and later Yugoslavian, borders, while on the outward direction it is mainly towards Austria, Slovenia and Slovakia. Many entered Hungary legally but later tried to continue their journey to the West illegally. Illegal migration was also linked to people smuggling. The proportion of Hungarians among the smugglers has been steadily increasing, reaching 40% by 2002. The investigative bodies of the border police have been effective in combating well-organized and highly technically equipped smuggling organizations. International cooperation in law enforcement work has been strengthened. In 2001, a border police operation called *High Impact Operation* was carried out at the future external borders under the supervision of the EU Presidency, in which the Border Police played a successful role. Furthermore, during joint operations at airports, such as *High Impact Operation* TP 12PT and RIO I-IITP 13PT<sup>9</sup>, it became clear that continuous liaison and comprehensive information exchange between international airports was essential (Bendes & Dankowski, 2004).

Effective border surveillance increasingly required the use of modern technical equipment. Intensive technical development, supported by the COOP programs under the Phare program, started in 1998. Up to 2004, border crossing points were equipped with modern IT tools to facilitate the control of travel documents and the detection of forgeries, and transmission systems were set up to facilitate rapid data transmission. Industrial endoscopes and CO measurement equipment have been installed to help detect people trapped in vehicles.

---

7 Act XIX of 1998 on Criminal Procedure.

8 Act XXXIX of 2001 on the Entry and Residence of Aliens.

9 Risk Immigration Operation I-II.

High-powered mobile thermal imaging cameras and hand-held night-vision equipment have been installed at the green border to aid detection. In parallel, the Schengen legislation was transposed and put into practice, and staff prepared for the new requirements. At the future external borders, the reconstruction of border crossing points to Schengen standards continued. Local border traffic was abolished for Ukrainian and Serbian-Montenegrin citizens following the denunciation of the relevant conventions, and a visa requirement was introduced from 1 November 2003 in line with EU requirements (Bisi, 2011).

## **The BM Border Guard after 2004 - Towards the Schengen area**

Hungary joined the European Union on 1 May 2004. This created 1139 km of internal borders in the areas bordering Austria, Slovenia and Slovakia. On the 1103 km of the border with Ukraine, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro and Croatia, the external border of the European Union was created, where the Hungarian border guards had to meet the higher security requirements of the EU. Customs controls on the internal border line have been abolished, allowing Hungarian citizens to travel within the European Union with an identity card. After accession, the possibility of travelling to Croatia with an identity card was maintained.

After the accession, the Border Guard continued its preparations for the period when Hungary will become a member of the Schengen area. The Schengen Convention imposes several conditions on non-EU citizens entering the European Union at its external borders. The method of selective and differentiated checks on border traffic and the categories of travelers used to separate border crossers were already in line with Schengen requirements. The Border Guard received €27 million worth of modern equipment under the COOP programs, which spanned four development cycles up to 2004 (Hegedűs, 2016). The installation of the unified automatic document and number plate scanner was completed in December 2000. Schengen requirements were applied to border crossing points in the upgrades carried out after 2000 and to the construction of new motorway crossings. The European Union continues to support the reinforcement of the external borders and the construction of Schengen compliant border crossing points.

Under the Constitution, as amended on 1 January 2004, the dual role of the Border Guard was abolished. It became a national armed law enforcement agency, which until June 2006 was part of the Ministry of Interior (then the Ministry of Justice) and performed essentially law enforcement tasks. In the course of the modernization process, the 125 border police and border traffic branches were replaced by 63 border police branches, and the territorial and central



bodies were modified accordingly. Border traffic control was carried out at 112 border crossing points (Nagy, 2010).

In order to fight crime, a complex control system was established before accession between the Border Guard, the Police, the Customs and Finance Guard, the Immigration and Nationality Office and the National Labor and Safety Inspectorate, and after 1 May 2004 the Integrated Management Centre was established. To combat international crime more effectively, close cooperation with neighboring countries has been established in the area of service tasks and investigative activities (Nagy, 2010). To this end, joint contact points have been set up, for example at Hegyeshalom-Nickelsdorf.

Following Hungary's accession to the Schengen Area, border checks at internal borders were completely abolished. However, in order to preserve the security of the country and the European Union, it became necessary to carry out immigration control of foreign nationals and to detect those who had entered illegally within the internal, so-called "in-depth" areas. For this purpose, the Border Guard's deployment units were established, which, in addition to continuous inspections, also served as a reserve force for border policing operations.

The independent Border Guard was dissolved at the end of 2008 and integrated into the organisational structure of the police.

## Concluding thoughts

*'Border policing is a historical category that can be continuously studied using both military and police research methods. And the way and quality of border surveillance itself reflects the social priorities of the country that employs it.'* (Hautzinger, 2020).

At the 2007 session of the Parliament's Committee on Defense and Law Enforcement, József Béndek, Lieutenant General of the Border Guard, National Commander of the Border Guard, reported on the integration of the Border Guard and the challenges ahead. At the end of the committee meeting on 13 December, Károly Konrád, who chaired the meeting, read out the committee's resolution on the integration of the Border Guard, which also meant the end of the independent Border Guard. At this time, Lieutenant General József Béndek placed the commemorative ribbon on the border guard team flag, and Károly Konrád and Zoltán Gál also placed the commemorative ribbon of the committee. Afterwards, the members of the Committee and the guests present laid a wreath on the border guard heroes' headstone (URL7) in the courtyard. The Border Guard in Hungary ceased to exist as a nationally competent independent law enforcement body, and on 1 January 2008 it was integrated into the police force of the Republic of

Hungary. The assets of the Border Guard, worth nearly HUF 80 billion, consisting mainly of real estate, vehicles and other assets, were managed by the police. The National Police Headquarters, as the successor body of the National Command of the Border Guard, continues to pay special attention to the cultivation and maintenance of the traditions and the corporate spirit of the Border Guard (Hottó, 2023).

## References

---

- Apátistvánfalvai Határőr Emlékhely (2007). *Az apátistvánfalvai őrs története*. [‘The history of the Apátistván village station’] című tájékoztató.
- Bendes, G. & Dankowski, A. (2004). A Budapesti Határőr Igazgatóság csatlakozása az Európai Határ Információs hálózathoz és a Légi Határok Központjának munkájához [The Budapest Border Guard Directorate joins the European Border Information Network and the work of the Air Border Centre]. *Határrendészeti Tanulmányok*, 1(2), 34-66.
- Berki, I. (2015). *Az adyligeti Határőrezred története* [History of the Adyliget Border Regiment]. Doktori értekezés. Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem. <http://doktori.btk.elte.hu/hist/berkiimre/tezis.pdf>
- Bisi, J. (2011). *A Határőrség integrációja a Rendőrségbe* [Integration of the Border Guard into the Police]. Debreceni Egyetem Állam és Jogtudományi Kar.
- Borbély Z. & Kapy, D. (Eds.) (1941). *The 60-year-old Hungarian police 1881-1941*. Halász Irodalmi és Könyvkiadó Vállalat.
- Fórizs, S. (2015). A határőrség megalakulása, valamint tevékenysége az első években (1945-1950) [The creation of the Border Guard and its activities in the first years (1945-1950)]. *Magyar Rendészet*, 15(6), 89-102.
- Fórizs, S. (2020). A Határőrség és a határőrizet újjászervezése 1956. november 4-ét követően. A hadtudománytól a rendészettudományig – társadalmi kihívások a nemzeti összetartozás évében [The reorganization of the Border Guard and the Border Guard after 4 november 1956. From military science to police science - social challenges in the year of national unity]. In Hautzinger Z. & Gaál Gy. (Eds.), *Pécsi Határőr Tudományos Közlemények XXII*. (pp. 111-126). Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság Határőr Szakosztály Pécsi Szakcsoportja.
- Fórizs, S., Gáspár, L., & Paku, J. (1990). Határőrizet és határőrség a kilencvenes években [Border surveillance and border guards in the 1990s]. *Határőrségi Tanulmányok*, 1(1), 39-72.
- Hautzinger, Z. (2020). A határvédelem arca. A hadtudománytól a rendészettudományig – társadalmi kihívások a nemzeti összetartozás évében [The face of border protection. From military science to police science - societal challenges in the year of national cohesion]. In Hautzinger Z. & Gaál Gy. (Szerk.), *Pécsi Határőr Tudományos Közlemények XXII*. (pp. 93-97). Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság Határőr Szakosztály Pécsi Szakcsoportja.
- Hegedűs, E. (2016). Motorizáció a XX. századi magyar határőrizetben [Motorization in the Hungarian border police of the 20th century] -történeti Füzetek, *Acta Historiae Praesidii Ordinis*, XXVI. (52), 30. <https://doi.org/10.31627/RTF.XXVI.2016.52N.15-52P>

- Hottó, I. (2023). Gondolatok a határőrség letúnt korának üzeneteiről, értékeiről és fennmaradt szimbólumairól [Reflections on the messages, values and surviving symbols of a bygone era of the Border Guard]. *Rendőrségi Tanulmányok*, 6(4), 104-142. <https://doi.org/10.53304/RT.2023.3.05>
- Kui, L. (2020). *A magyar határőrizet technikai generációváltásai és lehetséges fejlesztési irányok* [Technical generational changes and possible directions of development of the Hungarian Border Guard]. Doktori értekezés. Nemzeti Közszerzői Egyetem.
- Nagy, G. (2010). Határőrség 1957-2007. [Border Guard 1957-2007]. *Rendvédelmi – Történeti – Füzetek, Acta Historiae Praesidii Ordinis*, 18(21), 57-65. <https://doi.org/10.31627/RTF.XVIII.2010.21N.57-65P>
- Parádi, J. (2006). A dualizmus kori magyar rendvédelem és határőrizet [The Hungarian police and border police of the dualism period]. *Határrendészeti Tanulmányok*, 3(1), Budapest, 5-46.
- Ritecz, G. (2003). Az európai (schengeni) határőrizeti követelményekre való felkészülés helyzete és további feladatok Magyarországon [The state of preparation for European (Schengen) border control requirements and further tasks in Hungary]. *Európai Tükör: Az integrációs stratégiai munkacsoport kéthavonta megjelenő folyóirata*, 90, 5-68.
- Suba, J. (2014). Rendvédelmi szervek Ausztria és Magyarország titkosszolgálatában [Law enforcement agencies in the secret services of Austria and Hungary]. *Szakmai Szemle: Katonai Nemzetbiztonsági szolgálat Kiadványa*, 12(3), 40-41.

## Online links in the article

---

- URL1: *Határőr Kultúráért Alapítvány (2022). Határőr emlékhely (Emlékszoba) avatása.* <https://hokalapitvany.hu/hataror-emlekhely-emlekszoba-avatasa/>
- URL2: *Magyar Idők. Kossuth levele. Emlékeztető hűségre, kötelességre.* <https://www.magyaridok.hu/lugas/kossuth-levele-3530249/>
- URL3: *Az 1881. évi III. törvénycikk a közbiztonsági szolgálat szervezéséről.* <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=88100003.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D31>
- URL4: *Az 1903. évi VIII. törvénycikk a határrendőrségről.* <https://net.jogtar.hu/getpdf?docid=90300008.TV&targetdate=&printTitle=1903.+%C3%A9vi+VI-II.+t%C3%B6rv%C3%A9nycikk&referer=1000ev>
- URL5: *A Magyar Népköztársaság minisztertanácsának 4.353/1949. (268) M. T. számú rendelete Államvédelmi Hatóság szervezése tárgyában.* [https://www.abtl.hu/sites/default/files/forrasok/1949\\_4353.pdf](https://www.abtl.hu/sites/default/files/forrasok/1949_4353.pdf)
- URL6: *Páneurópai Piknik 1989. augusztus 19.* [https://mnl.gov.hu/mnl/gymsmsl/hirek/paneuropai\\_piknik\\_1989\\_augusztus\\_19](https://mnl.gov.hu/mnl/gymsmsl/hirek/paneuropai_piknik_1989_augusztus_19)
- URL7: *Jegyzőkönyv az Országgyűlés Honvédelmi és Rendészeti Bizottságának 2007. december 13-án, csütörtökön, 10 órai kezdettel a Határőrség Országos Parancsnokságán megtartott kihelyezett üléséről.* <https://www.parlament.hu/documents/static/biz38/bizjvk38/HOB/0712131.htm>

## Laws and regulations

---

Act III of 1881 on the organization of the public security service.

Act VIII of 1903 on the Border Police.

Decision of the Council of Ministers No 2046/1989 on the principles of the draft law on the state border of the Republic of Hungary, its order, guarding and rules of crossing, Decision No 17. Decree No 4.353/1949 (268) M. T. of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic on the organization of the State Protection Authority.

Based on Instruction No. 16/1950 of the Department IV of the Ministry of Defense

Based on BM Department IV Order No 0390/1952

Act LXXXVI of 1993 on the entry, residence and immigration of foreigners in Hungary.

Act XXXIX of 2001 on the Entry and Residence of Foreigners. <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0100039.TV>

Act XXXII of 1997 on Border Guard and Border Guard

Act XIX of 1998 on Criminal Procedure

## Reference of the article according to APA regulation

---

Hottó, I. (2025). Excerpts and memories from the periods of border security in Hungary. *Belügyi Szemle*, 73(8), 1789–1808. <https://doi.org/10.38146/BSZ-AJIA.2025.v73.i8.pp1789-1808>

## Statements

---

### Conflict of interest

The author has declared no conflict of interest.

### Funding

The author did not receive any financial support for researching, writing, and/or publishing this article.

### Ethics

The data will be made available on request.

### Open access

This article is an Open Access publication published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY NC-ND 2.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/>), in the sense that it may be freely used, shared and republished in any medium, provided that the original author and the place of publication, as well as a link to the CC License, are credited.

### Corresponding author

The corresponding author of this article is Istvan Hottó, who can be contacted at [hotto.istvan@ajk.pte.hu](mailto:hotto.istvan@ajk.pte.hu).