Henry Clay and Lajos Kossuth's Visit in the United States, 1851–1852[1]

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The visit of Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) in the United States is one of the best-known chapters in the history of Hungarian-American relations. It has often been seen in the Hungarian literature as a triumphant journey when the great Hungarian patriot charmed the American public and convinced it to support the cause of the freedom of Hungary (Pivány, 1944, 13–14). On the other hand, some segments of American society and politics vehemently opposed the measure of European intervention proposed by Kossuth. Such influential American intellectuals took the floor and denounced the ideas of the former governor of Hungary as William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), and Orestes Brownson (1803–1876) (Várdy, 2000, 53–54; Várdy 2002, 27–29; Jánossy, 1940, 167–168). This powerful opposition played a crucial role in Kossuth's failure in the United States.

Much has been written about the causes of Kossuth's fiasco and about the roots of it in American domestic politics. Among others Steven Béla Várdy, Timothy M. Roberts, Daniel W. Howe and myself called the attention to the different factors behind the refusal of contemporary American politicians, including the debate about slavery, the political, and economic interests of the United States, and the tactical mistakes made by Kossuth himself (Várdy, 1998, 337–339; Várdy, 2000, 51–55;. Várdy, 2002, 21–31; Howe-Roberts, 166–167, 172–173; Lévai, 317–320; Vida, 2012, 9–13) The authors, who covered the topic, often pointed out the role contemporary American political leaders played in these events. Ödön Vasváry described the refusal of Kossuth by President Millard

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Fillmore (1800–1874), and several historians gave account of the political motifs of secretary of state Daniel Webster (1782–1852) (Vasváry, 1988, 81–82; Várdy, 1998, 334, 337; Várdy, 2000, 52; Várdy, 2002, 22; Lévai, 309–320). It is mentioned by some experts that yet another leading figure of American politics opposed vehemently the ideas of Kossuth concerning the intervention of the United States in European affairs on behalf the Hungarian independence (Howe-Roberts, 173; Nolan, 363; Lévai, 319; Oliver, 492–493, 495). This person was senator, former secretary of state, and three times presidential candidate Henry Clay (1777–1852) who had been one of the most prestigious politicians in the United States by the 1850s. Born only one year after the declaration of American independence, the seventy-four year old Henry Clay was the grand old man of contemporary American politics, thus he was very influential and respected. He was one of the important leaders of the governing Whig party which meant that his opinion could influence the formation of the opinion of Whig leadership about Kossuth and his visit in the United States. This role of his is usually ignored by historians of Hungarian origin. Dénes Jánossy was the only Hungarian historian who discussed the opinion of Henry Clay in a somewhat detailed manner, but even he referred to it only sporadically in his two-volume collection about the history of the Kossuth emigration in England and the United States, and did not summarize it. Understandably, American historians devoted much attention to the opinion of Henry Clay concerning Kossuth and the "Hungarian question", but they usually studied it exclusively from the point of view of American domestic politics. In this essay I intend to combine the approach of Hungarian and American historians and analyze the intermingled questions of the aims of Kossuth and American domestic politics as a coherent problem. American politics had been preoccupied by two issues at the beginning of the 1850s: the "Hungarian question", that is the reaction of the United States to the defeat of the European and Hungarian revolutions in 1848–1849, and the problem of the territorial expansion of slavery. These two issues had been interconnected not only in politics but also in the mind of Henry Clay. My goal in this essay is to answer the question, why Henry Clay opposed so vigorously Kossuth's ideas about European intervention. With the above mentioned in mind one can answer this question only if he or she studies both issues as a coherent problem in the mind of the Kentuckian politician. In order to answer this question, first we need to summarize briefly the political career and ideas of the "grand old man" of contemporary American

politics. Then, I am going to discuss the impact of the "Hungarian question" on the thinking of Henry Clay, followed by looking at his opinion about the territorial extension of slavery. Finally, at the end of my treatise, I will try to explain how the interconnected issues of the Hungarian revolution and slavery determined the ideas of Clay concerning Lajos Kossuth.

The political career of Henry Clay prior to 1848

Henry Clay was born on April 12, 1777 in Hanover County during the revolutionary war in the contemporary frontier region of Virginia. He studied law and he moved to Kentucky at the end of the 18th century, where he established a very successful legal practice. His growing reputation urged him to start a political career. He was elected to the state legislature in 1803 where he continued until 1806 when he was elected to the United States Senate. (1757–1840). During his long political career he served in the Senate in 1806–1807, 1810–1811, 1831–1842, and 1849–1852, and he was the member of the United States House of Representatives in 1811–1814, 1815–1821, and 1823–1825. He was a three times presidential candidate (1824, 1832, 1844), and also served as the secretary of state of President John Quincy Adams between 1825 and 1829. Here and now I do not want to describe his career in details, but I focus only on those parts of his life which are important for the purpose of this essay. It means that I emphasize his efforts as the "Great Compromiser" to find a peaceful solution to the problem of the territorial expansion of slavery

Henry Clay played a crucial role in the formation of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The debate about the admission of Missouri into the Union was the first occasion when the problem of the extension of slavery became the crucial question of national politics. The territory of Missouri was the part of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Since the territory was populated mainly by Southerners, the proposed state constitution of Missouri recognized slavery. By the year of 1820 the North had outstripped the South in population, and consequently could gain control of the United States House of Representatives. During the debate of the Missouri constitution a representative from New York proposed an amendment "requiring the gradual abolition of slavery as a condition of admission" (Jones, 112). Due to the above-mentioned

balance of forces the House passed the amendment but it was defeated in the Senate. There were eleven slave states and eleven free states in the Union at that time and, as Maldwyn A. Jones points out: "Which section would control the federal government in the future depended on whether slavery was to be permitted in Missouri and the rest of the Louisiana Purchase" (Jones, 112). Henry Clay was the main architect of the compromise that could temporarily settle the question. Missouri was admitted as a slave state but in exchange for that Maine, hitherto part of Massachusetts, became a free state. Slavery was forbidden on the territory of the Louisiana Purchase north of the line 36°30' except for Missouri. But Missouri started to exclude free blacks from its territory in 1821 and Clay had to intervene again to devise another compromise. During the debate about slavery in Missouri Henry Clay was motivated mainly by his anxiety about the extension of the power of Congress over the states. This was the first occasion when he played the role of the designer of a political compromise between the supporters of the extension of slavery into the territories and the oppositional party.

The second occasion came at the beginning of the 1830s during the so-called "Nullification Crises." In order to support the development of industry in the United States Henry Clay was the advocate of high protective tariffs. He played a crucial role in the introduction of high tariffs in 1828. High tariffs were not in the interest of the planters of the South. The reduction of duties by the tariff bill of 1832 did not satisfy the planter elite of South Carolina and a popularly elected convention of the state pronounced the tariff acts of 1828 and 1832 unconstitutional as well as null and void. The convention also prohibited the collection of federal customs duties in South Carolina after February 1, 1833. President Jackson "asked Congress for a 'force bill' empowering him to use the armed forces to collect customs duties in South Carolina." (Jones, 144) The result was the so-called "nullification crisis" in which Henry Clay played again the role of the compromiser. He wanted to avoid the outbreak of a civil war at all cost, and behind the scenes he made an agreement with the leading South Carolina politician John C. Calhoun (1782–1850). Clay proposed "a compromise measure providing for the gradual reduction of all tariffs over a nine-year period to a uniform level of 20 percent." (Jones, 144) Congress passed the bill on March 1, 1833 and the South Carolina convention also accepted it two weeks later.

By the end of the 1840s Henry Clay became one of the most influential American politicians, and American politics had to face two

important issues at that time: the impact of the European revolutions of 1848–1848 on the United States, and the territorial extension of slavery. These are the two interconnected factors that fundamentally determined the opinion of Henry Clay about Kossuth.

Henry Clay and the impact of the Hungarian revolution of 1848–1849 on the United States

As Daniel W. Howe and Timothy Roberts pointed out:

> The United States had a paradoxical relationship to the revolutions of 1848. On the one hand, the nation had been born out of a revolution, and Americans were extremely proud of this revolutionary heritage. It disposed them to welcome the European revolutions in 1848, and wish them success. On the other hand, however, most Americans also felt somewhat detached from the events they read about. (Howe-Robertson, 158)

The two historians enumerated several sources of this detachment. The European revolutions, especially in central and southern Europe "reflected the national aspirations of ethnic groups. American citizenship, however, was defined in terms of republican ideology, not in terms of national origins." (Howe-Roberts, 158; Vajda; Lévai 2003) Howe and Roberts also called the attention to the fact that many American Catholics expressed their anxiety because of the European revolutions threatening the rule and the influence of the Pope. The political instability in Europe was not in the interest of some American business groups either. They wanted the return of business confidence and applauded the triumph of authoritarian regimes. (Howe-Robertson, 172–173) The European revolutions of 1848 resulted in the emancipation of slaves in the French and Danish West Indies, and the abolition of serfdom in a few European countries. Some Southern politicians regarded these developments as potentially dangerous examples. On the other hand, in another article, Timothy M. Roberts called the attention to the very interesting fact that many Southern intellectuals, similarly to their Northern colleagues, supported the Hungarian cause. Some Southern editors could find parallels between the position of Hungary and the South. According to an editorial of the *Southern Literary Messenger* "the [Hungarians are] fully aware of their dangerous position … hated by the Slaves (viz. the Slavs), isolated among the nations of the earth, they were left alone … to resist

the conspiracy against them." As Timothy M. Roberts noted although the spelling of the word "Slav" as "Slave" was "consistent with other American periodicals' grammar of the day … with its tone and contextual language the southern journal's sympathy for the Hungarians' plight sounded like a bleak southern self-assessment." (Roberts, 271) Contrary to this favorable evaluation of the Hungarian cause, Southern journalists usually condemned the French revolution of 1848. According to Roberts the cause of this different evaluation was that:

> Hungarians were not promoting socialist utopias, nor did they maintain West Indies plantations, where slave emancipation was looming. Moreover, unlike France, Hungary did not appear to be trying to extend its revolution to areas near or within American borders. Southerners shared northerners' revulsion over France's pathological revolutionary past. Hungary, in contrast, had no preexisting revolutionary identity gone sour. (Roberts, 273)

The opinion of Henry Clay about the European and Hungarian revolutions of 1848–1849 was also very complex. On the one hand, he applauded the efforts of European liberals to establish republican governments in the Old World. As Calvin Colton, the editor of his works, pointed out, "he sympathized with Hungary profoundly; he loved the patriot martyr (viz. Kossuth) who was about to come into his presence." (Colton, 221) On the other hand, he rejected vehemently the idea of intervention raised by some American politicians and Kossuth himself.

As it is well known, President Zachary Taylor, who supported the expansion of the United States, sent Ambrose Dudley Mann (1801–1889) as an American emissary to Hungary in the summer of 1849. Although Mann arrived in Vienna on July 30, and he did not continue his travel to Hungary or approve of her independence, his mission provoked significant diplomatic tension between the United States and the Austrian Empire. Much has been written about this affair, and the role Chevalier Johann Georg Hülsemann, the Austrian envoy in Washington, and secretary of state Daniel Webster played in it. (Pivány, 1910; Várdy, 2000, 46–48; Lévai, 2005, 302–320; Howe-Robertson, 170) My focus is on the opinion of Henry Clay about Kossuth and the Hungarian revolution in this essay, consequently I do not wish to go into the details. The text of the instructions of Mann, the fact that secretary of state John M. Clayton (1796–1856) publicized the mission of him in the *New York Tribune*, and some passages of the state of the union address of President Taylor in December 1849, forced Hülsemann to lodge an official complaint.

Somewhat later, Senator Lewis Cass (1782–1866), who was the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party at the last election in 1848, submitted a resolution to instruct the Committee of Foreign Relations of the Senate to suspend diplomatic relations with Austria. Cass clearly counted on the support of the Whig Henry Clay, but to his surprise the Kentuckian rejected his overture in a long speech he delivered in the Senate. As Clay pointed out in this address, Cass' proposal would involve the recall of the American envoy from Vienna, and he feared that "the natural conclusion would be to declare war immediately against Austria." (Hay, 643) Instead of the suspension of diplomatic relations, Clay proposed Cass to offer asylum for the Hungarian refugees. Clay reminded his colleague that the recall of the American chargé d' affaires would only "close the door of intercourse with Austria, by which we shall gain nothing in behalf of the suffering Hungarians." (Hay, 644) In addition, such measure would "deprive our merchants and the sailors of our country of what benefits might redound from having a minister in Vienna." (Hay, 644) Cass referred to the fact that Henry Clay supported the recognition of the Latin American republics at the beginning of the 1820s. Clay refused the idea that his behavior might have served as an analogy in the case of Hungary, since, in contrast to the republics of South America more than twenty years ago, "unfortunately, Hungary fell suddenly, and to the surprise of the American world. She is subdued; she is crushed." (Hay, 644) The Kentuckian unequivocally rejected the idea of intervention supported by Cass. He asked his colleague from Michigan to lay down the limits of intervention into the affairs of other nations: "We may say in reference to Turkey, Your religion tolerates polygamy; unless you change your religion, and your habits of social life, we will cease all intercourse with you." (Hay, 644) In the opinion of Clay the United States should condemn Russia's interference in the war, and he did not understand why Cass proposed the suspension of diplomatic relations with Austria instead of Russia. Since Hungary was the part of the Habsburg Empire Cass' proposal would call the United States "to interfere between Austria and a portion of her empire; and we are called upon to do this, in direct contradiction to the whole policy of this Government, first laid down by Washington and pursued by every successor he has had." (Hay, 644) Close to the end of his address Clay posed again the theoretical question: "Sir, if we are to become the defender of nations, the censurers of other Powers, I again ask the honorable Senator where are we to stop, and why does he confine himself

to Austria alone?" (Hay, 644) Finally, referring to the United States, Clay concluded that "this is a great country… that very greatness draws after it great responsibilities… to avoid unnecessary wars, maintaining our own rights with firmness, but invading the rights of no others." (Hay, 645)

It is clear from this speech that Clay had refused the idea of intervention almost two years before the arrival of Lajos Kossuth in the United States. It means that he did not simply rebuff the person and the principles of Kossuth, but he opposed intervention on theoretical grounds and for other reasons, too. In order to understand the motivations of Henry Clay we should throw a glance at contemporary American politics. Territorial expansion, and in connection with this, slavery became the central issues of American domestic politics by the 1840s. The annexation of Texas and then the war against Mexico (1846–1848) preoccupied American politicians. As a result of the victory against Mexico, the United States gained an enormously large section, including the territories of present day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. It means that the United States did not reject the idea of intervention into the affairs of other countries on the continent of North America, if it coincided with her putative national interests. As mentioned before, Henry Clay originally opposed the war against Mexico, since he thought that it would raise the dangerous question of the territorial expansion of slavery. Expansion was supported mainly by the states of the Midwest and the Democratic Party. Under such circumstances a new group emerged within the Democratic Party by the middle of the 1840s. This group was called the "Young America" and it not only propagated the territorial expansion of the United States, but also urged the American government to support liberal republican political movements abroad. They thought that it was the obligation of the American republic to disseminate republican government all over the world. The name of the group clearly referred to such European revolutionary movements as "Young Italy, Germany or Ireland". Most of the leaders of "Young America" were young politicians and came from the Midwest. One of the most active leaders of the group was George N. Sanders from Kentucky, Henry Clay's home state.

Merle Curti called the attention to an old enmity between Sanders and Clay going back to the middle of the 1840s. (Curti, 38) Henry Clay was the presidential candidate of the Whig Party in 1844 and it seemed to everybody that Martin Van Buren would be that of the Democratic Party. The central issue of contemporary politics was the admission of Oregon

and Texas into the Union, and the annexation of the latter also raising the problem of the territorial extension of slavery. Both hopeful candidates thought that this problematic question would divide the nation and would possibly lead to a war with Mexico. Clay and Van Buren respectively issued statements in which they declared "that annexation was inexpedient because it would be likely to bring war with Mexico." (Jones, 180) Clay was officially nominated by the Whig Party on a platform which was silent about the question of Texas. On the other hand, partly due to his statement concerning the annexation of Texas, Van Buren could not secure for himself the Democratic nomination against James K. Polk (1795–1849), who was a well-known expansionist. The Democratic platform included the reoccupation of Oregon and the re-annexation of Texas and public opinion was clearly in favor of territorial expansion. George N. Sanders had been the main supporter of the annexation of Texas in Kentucky, and thus, his agitation had played a major role in forcing Henry Clay to give up his original intent, and to expose his ideas concerning the annexation of Texas. Clay issued a declaration in which he stated that the problem of slavery was not involved in the question of Texas. He halfheartedly supported the annexation of Texas on the understanding that it could be done "without dishonor, without war, with the common consent of the Union, and upon just and fair terms." (Malone, 178) According to Maldwyn A. Jones, Clay's declaration "may have done him some good in the South but on balance it was a mistake for it lost him support in the North, especially in the key state of New York. Had Clay carried it, he would have been President, but Whig antislavery voters deserted to the Liberty Party in sufficient numbers to throw the state to Polk." (Jones, 181) No doubt, that Henry Clay had the largest chance to win the presidency at this occasion. The race was very close and the Democratic victory was extremely narrow. Voter participation was over 78 percent. Polk received 1,338,464 popular and 170 electoral votes, while 1,300,097 constituents voted for Clay, who received 105 electoral votes. (Chudacoff et. al., Appendix A-31) No wonder that Henry Clay did not sympathize with Sanders and "Young America". It is also worthy of note that somewhat later in 1853, Sanders had been appointed American consul to London, where he became a close associate of Kossuth, who was living there at that time. (Curti, 48)

Other leading figures of "Young America" were Stephen A. Douglas (1813–1861), James Shields (1806–1879), and William Richardson (1811–1875) of Illinois, William Corry of Ohio, William Polk

of Tennessee, and William R. Smith of Alabama. (Curti, 38) The outbreak of the European revolutions in 1848 provided the opportunity for the politicians of "Young America" to put their ideas into practice. This was also a presidential election year in the United States and under such circumstances the national platform of the Democratic Party incorporated many references to the European revolutionary movements. It referred to the principle of the "sovereignty of the people" and mentioned that European nations were "erecting republics on the ruins of despotism in the Old World." (Howe-Robertson, 168–169) The presidential candidate of the Democratic Party became Lewis Cass, who was not the member of "Young America", but who also supported territorial expansion and intervention. (Curti, 36) The victory over Mexico also raised the dangerous problem of territorial expansion and slavery in the same year. Henry Clay feared that under such circumstances the young zealots of "Young America" and its allies could seize the opportunity to push through national politics the program of expansion and intervention. No wonder that under such circumstances Henry Clay vehemently opposed the ideas of "Young America" and the proposal of Lewis Cass.

Although the Senate did not approve the proposal of Cass, the senators obliged the President to clarify his position concerning the mission of Ambrose Dudley Mann. Zachary Taylor sent over the papers to the Senate but he attached a provocative preamble to it which triggered the official remonstrance of Austria on September 30, 1850. Meanwhile, President Taylor died on July 9, 1850 and Millard Fillmore became the new president. He was a close friend of Henry Clay, and he appointed a new secretary of state in the person of Daniel Webster, who responded to the complaint of Austria in a long and detailed memorial on December 21, 1850. Much has been written about this famous piece of Webster and the diplomatic tension it caused between Austria and the United States. (Várdy, 2000, 47; Vasváry, 57-58; Lévai, 2005, 309–313) Webster's celebrated response was generally well received in the United States and there was a proposal in the Senate to print it out in ten thousand copies. Henry Clay opposed this proposition in a speech he delivered in the Senate on December 30, 1850. He called the attention of his colleagues to the fact that Hungary had been defeated. He posed the question whether under such circumstances it would be a good policy on the part of the United States "to continue to irritate either Austria or Russia" on "a subject which was past and had ended." (Hay, 837) President Fillmore sent over to the Senate the correspondence between Webster and

Hülsemann and the papers concerning the mission Ambrose Dudley Mann to Hungary. Clay supported the measures of the Whig administration, which are "marked by great ability as everything which emanates from that source generally is." (Hay, 837) Nevertheless, he opposed "a diffusion of this paper (viz. Webster's answer to Hülsemann's remonstrance) among the people of the United States." (Hay, 837) According to his opinion, these copies "are not wanted by the people of the United States" because "they are satisfied with the principles first laid down by the immortal Father of his Country (viz. George Washington), and to which there has been a general adherence from that day to this." (Hay, 838) With Mann's mission in mind he cited the United States as an example to his colleagues. Clay posed the question what would happen if one of the states of the Union "revolted against the General Government, and any European power sent an agent here for the purpose of obtaining information, even such as that which our agent had been sent to Hungary." (Hay, 838) He was sure that there would certainly be "a great deal of feeling throughout the United States." He also added that we should "place ourselves in their position" before the United States should take any further action concerning Hungary. (Hay, 838) This passage of Clay is interesting for the purpose of this essay for several reasons. It is clear that he did not agree full heartedly with the sending of Mann to Hungary. As it will be discussed in details later on, this debate about the "Hungarian question" was almost at the same time with the great discussion about slavery that led to the approval of the famous compromise of 1850, in the conclusion of which Henry Clay also played a crucial role. Under such circumstances, his allusion to the revolt of one of the states "against the General Government" referred to a very sensitive issue of the period. It is clear from this statement that the issues of Hungary and slavery were interconnected in the mind of Henry Clay. In the remaining part of his speech he approved the general course of the administration's policy towards Austria, but he added that it wouldn't be wise to "say anything in that document (viz. Webster's response to Hülsemann's remonstrance), which another Government must feel as reproach." (Hay, 838) At the end of his address Clay stressed again that "there was no necessity for printing the great number of copies which had been proposed", since the "principles contained in that paper were fastened and fixed in the American heart and mind", and the publication of Webster's response would only "continue the irritation which may exist between a foreign Government and this." (Hay, 838) Mainly due to

the efforts of Henry Clay the Senate refused the proposal concerning the printing out of Webster's response.

By the time of the arrival of Lajos Kossuth to the United States, almost one year later on December 4, 1851, the seventy-four-year-old Henry Clay was mortally ill. Kossuth was mainly aided by the members of "Young America" and in the Senate by such politicians as Lewis Cass, Stephen A. Douglas, William Henry Seward (1801–1872), and James Shields who supported expansion and intervention. Kossuth arrived in Washington on December 30, 1851, and a little bit more than a week later, he took part at a reception organized in his honor by the Congress on January 7, 1851. At his reception secretary of state Daniel Webster answered the address of Kossuth. Although the language of Webster's speech was more moderate than the intonation of his response to Hülsemann's complaint: he said, for example: "In my opinion, Austria would be a better and a stronger government tomorrow if she confined the limits of her power to her hereditary and German domains, especially if she saw in Hungary a strong, sensible, independent neighboring nation." (Mills, 6) Kossuth visited Henry Clay in his quarters after such antecedents only two days later on January 9. Clay was alarmed by the popularity and influence of Kossuth and also by the assistance of him by such American politicians who supported expansion and intervention, and who were his political opponents. Clay's position was not an easy one since he wanted to express his sympathy towards Kossuth and the Hungarians on the one hand, but he wanted to make clear his opposition to the policy of intervention in Europe by the United States on the other. Lewis Cass, his old opponent, accompanied Kossuth to the bed chamber of Clay. All this mean that one can interpret the speech of Henry Clay to Kossuth only in the context of American domestic politics.

Clay started his address with the expression of his admiration of Kossuth's accomplishments as a politician and orator. He pointed out that "your wonderful and fascinating eloquence has mesmerized so large a portion of our people wherever you have gone, and even some of our members of Congress." (Hay, 944) According to the witnesses of the scene, at this point of his speech, Clay was waving his hand toward the American politicians who accompanied Kossuth, Lewis Cass among them. But after this courtesy he expressed to Kossuth that "I hope, to speak with that sincerity and candor which becomes the interest the subject has for you and for myself, and which is due to us both, as the votaries of freedom." (Hay, 944) Clay assured the Hungarian that "I

entertain the liveliest sympathies in every struggle for liberty in Hungary, and in every country, and in this I believe I express the universal sentiment of my countrymen." (Hay, 944) But in the next sentence he said to Kossuth that "for the sake of my country, you must allow me to protest against the policy you propose to her." Clay posed the "momentous question of the right of one nation to assume the executive power among nations for the enforcement of international law, or of the right of the United States to dictate to Russia the character of her relations with the nations around her." (Hay, 944) According to the Kentuckian politician, Kossuth sought "material aid" in America, and wanted the United States to put into practice its declarations concerning Austria, Russia, and Hungary. In the opinion of Clay, the former governor of Hungary proposed war between the United States on the one hand, and Russia and Austria on the other. But he warned Kossuth:

> To transport men and arms across the ocean in sufficient numbers and quantities to be effective against Russia and Austria would be impossible… Upon land, Russia is invulnerable to us, as we are to her. Upon the ocean, a war between Russia and this country would result in mutual annoyance to commerce, but probably little else… her parts are few, her commerce limited, while we, on our part, would offer as a prey to her cruisers a rich and extensive commerce. (Hay, 944–945)

It means that it was clearly not in the interest of the United States to wage war against such powerful European empires. According to Clay, it would be hypocrisy on the part of the American republic to support intervention in Europe when she is strong, and abandon it when she is weak. He argued that the despotic powers of Europe would refer to American intervention as an example, on the basis of which they would support their intervention on the American continent. Henry Clay concluded that the real role of the United States in the struggle against the despotic governments of Europe was to set an example to the oppressed nations of the Old World. By the policy of non-intervention "to which we have adhered since the days of Washington, we have prospered beyond precedent – we have done more for the cause of liberty in the world that arms could effect. We have showed to other nations the way to greatness and happiness." (Hay, 945) As the result of a European war on behalf of Hungary or other European republics, the United States "could effect nothing, and if in that struggle Hungary should go down, and we should go down with her, where, then, would be the last hope of the friends of freedom throughout the world? Far better it is for ourselves, for Hungary,

and for the cause of liberty, that, adhering to our wise, pacific system, and avoiding the distant wars of Europe, we should keep our lamp burning brightly on this western shore as a light to all nations, than to hazard its utter extinction amid the ruins of fallen or falling republics in Europe." (Hay, 945–946)

In this speech Henry Clay unequivocally rejected the idea of intervention on behalf of Hungary. He could maintain the traditional foreign policy of the United States towards Europe by the endorsement of the principle of American exceptionalism.

Henry Clay's speech to Kossuth proved to be his last public address, since he died a little bit more than six months later on June 29, 1852. But this does not mean that he never mentioned Kossuth and the "Hungarian question" in his writings again. He received a letter, for example, from Theodore Freylinghausen (1787–1862), who was a former senator from New Jersey and his running mate during the election campaign in 1844. In his letter Freylinghausen mentioned to Clay that "he had been rejoiced to hear his words of soberness and truth on the exciting question of Hungarian politics." (Hay, 948)

Due to his illness, Henry Clay was not able to visit the Congressional banquet honoring George Washington's birthday on February 22, 1852. Nevertheless, his written answer to the invitation provided him another opportunity to express his adherence to the traditional foreign policy of the United States towards Europe, founded by the first president. Referring probably to the efforts of some American politicians and Kossuth, Clay mentioned:

> We have seen serious attempts to induce the United States to depart from his great principles of peace and neutrality, of avoiding all entangling alliances with foreign Powers, and of confining ourselves to the growth, improvement, and prosperity of our new country; and in place of them, to plunge ourselves… in the wars of Europe. (Hay, 955)

Clay's message was printed out in the *Daily National Intelligencer* a few days later, so the position of him could become clear for the public opinion.

Meanwhile, Kossuth had started his tour throughout the United States. He was very well received and applauded in the western parts of Pennsylvania and in Ohio, but his reception in Kentucky was not so cordial. (Oliver, 487–492) The city of Louisville did not invite him officially, and when he delivered a speech in the city in a tobacco store on

Mach 4, 1852, not only his admirers but his opponents were also present, and the latter caused some disturbance during his address. John W. Oliver attributed the relatively cold reception of Kossuth to the "lukewarm attitude assumed by Henry Clay… his stand was well known to his constituents, and this tended to dampen the enthusiasm for Kossuth in the Blue Grass State." (Oliver, 492–493) In contrast, Dénes Jánossy ascribed it to the special economic interests of the South. According to him, the European stability provided by the military intervention of Russia, would make possible the maintenance of the economic ties between the South and Europe. Under such circumstances Kossuth felt it necessary to explain his policy of intervention to the audience of Kentucky. In another speech delivered also in Louisville, Kossuth wanted to convince his audience about the correctness of his policy of intervention of the United States in Europe. He argued that only the small nations could have the luxury of detachment from the great events of world politics. But such great nations as the United States were twitted to the world with several thousand ties, so they simply could not detach themselves from world affairs. The neutrality of a great power in itself means intervention on the part of one of the interested parties. In the case of the conflict of Hungary on the one hand, and Austria and Russia on the other, the neutrality of the United States means intervention on the part of European absolutism. The neutrality of the United States could lead to the intervention of European absolutism into the affairs of the American republic. Kossuth posed the question why the United States conducts such a ruinous foreign policy? On the basis of his speech to him, Kossuth attributed it mainly to the harmful influence of Senator Henry Clay. (Jánossy, 328–332)

In this address Kossuth clearly initiated an attack against Henry Clay, and the news of it reached not only Clay himself but Johann Georg Hülsemann, too. In a letter which he sent to an unknown recipient on March 30, 1852, Clay expounded: "I have never distinctly understood what Mr. Kossuth said of me at Louisville. I certainly had given him no cause of offence." (Hay, 962) He pointed out that his speech to Kossuth was not a private affair, since several other persons were present. As a result "What I had said… was variously and sometimes contradictorily represented in the newspapers."(Hay, 962) Senator Thomas Ewing (1789–1871) was also present and, according to Clay, he verified the accuracy of the statement that was published. He even added a preface to it in which he treated Kossuth "with perfect respect." Clay assured his

unknown correspondent that "Over my own sentiments and language I thought I had entire control." (Hay, 962)

In his report to Prince Schwarzenberg on March 16, 1852, Hülsemann also mentioned Kossuth's attack against Clay with great complacency. According to him, by attacking the mortally ill Henry Clay in his own state, Kossuth made a serious mistake, what was good news from the Austrian point of view. (Jánossy, 654)

The example of Kossuth and Clay was also invoked in the Senate in these days. Senator William Henry Seward, a member of "Young America", evoked the example of Henry Clay on March 9, 1852, when he supported the recognition of the young republics of Latin America at the beginning of the 1820s. Seward asked the question, how Clay could oppose intervention on behalf of Hungary when he supported intervention into the affairs of the Spanish Empire thirty years before? (Jánossy, 333)

Meanwhile, Kossuth continued his tour to New Orleans. He arrived in the city on March 27, and his reception was even colder than in Louisville. (Oliver, 495; Jánossy, 341–343) Dénes Jánossy attributed it to the general Southern condemnation of Kossuth, and also to the fact that the former governor of Hungary was invited by a Democratic city government, while, by the time of his arrival, the city had been governed by the Whig Party. Kossuth still believed that the unfavorable opinion of Henry Clay also played a crucial part in it. The local Whig press heavily criticized Kossuth's Louisville address in which he attacked Henry Clay, one of the most prestigious leaders of the party. Under such circumstances, Kossuth felt it necessary to clarify his standpoint about the Whig politician. He also wanted to win the sympathy of the South. According to the reports of the American press, Kossuth tacitly noticed the reasoning of Clay concerning foreign policy. On the basis of these reports, many came to the conclusion that Kossuth adopted the ideas of the Kentuckian. In the speech he delivered in New Orleans, he wanted to give an explanation of his personal meeting with Clay. According to Kossuth, he did not want to tackle with Henry Clay, because of the serious illness of the latter. He deemed his visit of Clay a private affair, and he did not think that the address of Clay would be publicized. Not to mention the fact that the press misinterpreted his abstention towards the mortally ill senator. Then, in the second part of his address, he drew a parallel between the position of Hungary and the South. According to him, Hungary was fighting for her constitutional self-government, which is also very important for the South. It is clear, that Kossuth realized the

importance of this argument for the South, in the midst of the embittered debate about the territorial expansion of slavery. The intonation of this speech was much milder than that of his Louisville address. Kossuth argued that he did not want the Union to wage war for Hungary, but he simply asked for the sympathy of the American people. (Jánossy, 342–343)

Hülsemann, again, proved to be very well informed about the cold reception of Kossuth in New Orleans. In a report to Prince Schwarzenberg on April 8, 1852, he mentioned that Kossuth was not well received in the city despite the fact that he strove to explain his ill behavior towards Henry Clay.

On the basis of all this it is clear that Henry Clay's opinion about the "Hungarian question" and Lajos Kossuth was partly determined by the developments of American domestic politics, but it was also formed by his opinion about the territorial extension of slavery as well as by his attitude towards African-Americans and the peculiar institution of the South.

Henry Clay and the problem of slavery

As a result of the victory against Mexico the United States gained an enormously large section, including the territories of present day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. This territorial gain raised again the issue of the extension of slavery, and the outbreak of the gold rush in California in January 1848 made it even more serious. Due to the gold rush the population of California exceeded 100,000 by the end of 1849, much more than it was needed to gain statehood. President Taylor did not realize the significance of the problem and urged California and New Mexico to frame constitutions and apply for statehood. Ignoring the heated debate about the right of Congress to restrain the extension of slavery on territories under the authority of the federal government, Taylor practically empowered these states to decide for their own about the question. The California convention ratified an anti-slavery constitution in March 1850 and New Mexico followed the example a few months later. The Southern slave-holding states had been alarmed by these developments for several reasons. Approximately half of the territory of California and the whole territory of New Mexico located to the south of the line established in the Missouri Compromise,

according to which slave holding states should have been formed south of the line 36°30'. As already mentioned, there was a northern majority in the United States House of Representatives from the 1810s, and the number of free and slave states was equal in the Senate in 1849. There were fifteen slaveholding and fifteen free members of the Union then. Under such conditions Southern interests had been alarmed, "since none of the remaining territories was likely to become a slave state, a Northern majority, once achieved, would be permanent and might ultimately be large enough to permit a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery." (Jones, 192) Besides this major question there were minor issues at stake as well. Northerners also wanted to secure the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, while Southerners sought to introduce a more efficient fugitive-slave act. Furthermore, Texas was claiming a portion of New Mexico.

Under such circumstances did the thirty-first Congress convene in December 1849, and the seventy-two year-old Henry Clay was among the members of the Senate again. "The Great Compromiser" decided to return into the Senate in this state of emergency. He hammered out a compromise to cover all the disputed issues in one proposal. He introduced into the Senate on January 29, 1850, almost at the same time with his speech against Cass' proposal concerning the suspension of diplomatic relations with Austria, a set of resolutions which proposed that (1) California be admitted as a free state; (2) other territories acquired from Mexico be organized with no mention of the status of slavery; (3) that Texas abandon its claim to New Mexico; (4) the federal government assume that Texan national debt contracted before annexation; (5) slave-trade in the District of Columbia be abolished; (6) slavery in the District of Columbia only be abolished if the people of the District and of Maryland consented and if compensation were paid; (7) a new and more effective Fugitive Slave Act be passed; and (8) Congress declare that it had no power to interfere with the interstate slave-trade. (Jones, 192-193)

Clay's proposal provoked an embittered debate in the Senate. The other "grand old man" of contemporary American politics, Daniel Webster fundamentally supported the proposal of Clay, while the most prestigious Southern congressional leader John C. Calhoun in the last speech of his life "insisted that the South possessed a constitutional right to take slaves into the territories and demanded a constitutional amendment that would restore the political balance between the sections." (Jones, 193) William H. Seward from New York, a member of "Young

America", also opposed Clay's proposal—but from the Northern point of view. President Taylor insisted on his own statehood plan and heavily opposed the compromise. Henry Clay also made a mistake. He combined his proposals into a uniform omnibus bill "in which form it attracted the opposition of all who objected to parts of it" (Jones, 193). The disillusioned and very ill Clay decided to leave Washington at the end of June, 1850, and it seemed many that there is no hope for Clay's compromise to succeed. But President Taylor suddenly died on July 9, 1850 and he was succeeded by Vice-President Millard Fillmore who was a moderate Whig from New York and a close friend of Henry Clay. Fillmore used his influence in the Whig Party and in Congress to support Clay's compromise. Support also came from Senator Stephen A Douglas of Illinois who proposed to split up Clay's "omnibus bill into six separate measures and piloted them through Congress one by one" (Jones, 194). As a result of these efforts Congress passed the major elements of Clay's proposal between September 9 and 20, 1850. Congress accepted the admission of California as a state and decided to organize the rest of the section acquired from Mexico into two territories. In the case of New Mexico and Utah Congress applied the "sovereignty doctrine" of Stephen A. Douglas and empowered the inhabitants of the two territories to decide whether they would adopt a constitution accepting slavery or not. As the part of the compromise Congress also enacted a new Fugitive Slave Act which "permitted slave-owners to arrest suspected runaways without a warrant, denied alleged fugitives the right of trial by jury and the right to give evidence on their own behalf, and imposed heavy penalties for helping slaves to escape." (Jones, 194)

The opinion of Henry Clay about slavery

The problem of slavery was behind all the issues covered in the Compromise of 1850. In order to understand the commitment of Henry Clay on the part of the compromise we need to survey briefly his opinion about slavery and African-Americans, and Clay's attitude towards Kossuth was also determined to a great extent by the problem of the territorial extension of slavery.

Henry Clay was himself a slave-owner. Nevertheless, he wanted to find a middle ground concerning the question of slavery. He did not agree with the radical ideas of such abolitionists as William Lloyd Garrison, but

he called slavery the "deepest stain upon the character of the country" (Vida, 596). He thought that gradual emancipation and colonization could provide a middle course solution to the problem. Clay made his first effort to put his ideas into practice in 1799 when he introduced a plan of gradual emancipation through the constitutional convention of Kentucky. According to this, "beginning in 1855 or 1860, children born to slaves would become free at the age of 25." (Vida, 596) Similarly to Thomas Jefferson he thought that after gradual emancipation there is no hope for the peaceful cohabitation of the white and black races within the boundaries of the United States, due to the very different physical and moral constitutions of the two races. (Vida, 596) Consequently, he proposed that emancipated blacks should leave the American republic and he advocated the transportation of free blacks to Liberia in Africa. According to him colonization would be advantageous for several reasons. On the one hand Americans would find a peaceful solution to the growing problem of slavery, and American freed blacks would be the pioneers of Christianity and civilization in Africa on the other. Henry Clay was one of the founding members of "The Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America" (American Colonization Society) in 1816. As one of the most prestigious politician in the nation Clay's ideas about slavery had a great impact on the thought of the younger generation. The views of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) concerning slavery were heavily influenced by the ideas of Clay. As István K. Vida pointed out "It is not by chance that Lincoln was asked to deliver the eulogy of Clay. He hailed Clay for occupying a position between the extremes, quoted his pro-colonization speeches and embraced his idea of gradual emancipation followed by colonization." (Vida, 597)

Conclusion

Henry Clay was called the "Great Compromiser", since it was the fundamental element of his political credo to find a peaceful solution to the problem of slavery, which had occupied a central ground in American politics by the beginning of the 1850s. He opposed the further expansion beneath the borders of the United States since it would raise again the question of the territorial expansion of slavery, which could ultimately lead to the dissolution of the union. Kossuth propagated the intervention

of the United States into European affairs, and he was assisted by those segments of American politics, which also supported the further territorial expansion of the American republic. As a result of the victory of the United States again Mexico in the war of 1846–1848, and the outbreak of the European revolutions of 1848–1849, there was a strong affection among some American politicians towards further expansion, especially among the members of "Young America". As it was argued earlier, American domestic politics and his attitude towards the expansionist forces of it clearly influenced Clay's opinion about the "Hungarian question" and Kossuth. Under such circumstances, in the midst of the embittered debates about the territorial expansion of slavery and his proposal concerning compromise, Clay saw in Kossuth and in his ambitions a force that could endanger his efforts to save the union. In such a way, his ideas concerning slavery and colonization also heavily influenced his opinion about Kossuth. There were two interconnected sources of Henry Clay's opposition to the foreign policy proposed by the former governor of Hungary: his interpretation of the European and Hungarian revolutions of 1848-1849 in the mirror of American domestic politics and his opinion about the possible consequences of the territorial expansion of slavery.

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