From Militarism to the Soldier's Ideal: The Conceptual History of the Hungarian War Ideal in the Interwar Period

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Abstract: Although contemporaries regarded the First World War as the "war to end all wars," the concept of war regained relevance during the interwar period. To assess the scope of the concept and compare it across nations, a specific national interpretation is required. This paper explores the conceptual history of militarism in Hungary through the writings of contemporary Hungarian and foreign authors. On the one hand, I attempt to analyse the diverse interpretations of the term, considering its varying meanings and political orientations. On the other hand, I examine the conceptual transformation within the framework of literature on German militarism. It can be stated that there was no unified interpretation of the "war ideal" in Hungary during the interwar period. While the right-wing viewed it as an ideal societal state, the left perceived the Horthy era as militaristic, highlighting its martial characteristics. The "soldier's ideal" – a "Hungarianised" form of militarism – emerged in the late 1930s, championed by right-wing politicians, soldiers, and writers. For them, the concept of "intellectual defence" served as both a competitor and an alternative, opposing war and alignment with Germany.

Keywords: "war ideal", militarism, Hungary, "soldier's ideal", "intellectual defence"

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Introduction

Today, the ongoing war in our region highlights the renewed relevance of the war ideal. Understanding the concept's meaning – often narrowly associated with armament – is crucial, as it is frequently shaped by differing ideologies and political orientations. Moreover, the meaning of the concept has varied significantly across both time and space, adding to its complexity. Although contemporaries hoped that the First World War would prevent future armed conflicts, it had the opposite effect. Known as the "ancient catastrophe" of the 20th century, the Great War facilitated the emergence and proliferation of the war ideal during the interwar period. This was particularly evident in Trianon Hungary, where discussions of the war ideal were scarce, and relevant examples were typically drawn from foreign contexts. Contemporary writings often mentioned Hungary only tangentially, typically in relation to developments in other countries.

The American historian Harry Elmer Barnes (1889–1968) explored the ideologies that shaped global politics – from nationalism and capitalism to imperialism and militarism – from the early modern era to the mid-1920s. His work extensively examined the impact of the First World War and the peace treaties, including post-war armament policies and their financial implications.[1] Barnes identified

1. Harry Elmer Barnes, *World Politics in Modern Civilization – The Contribution of Nationalism, Capitalism, Imperialism and Militarism to Human Culture and International Anarchy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930).

Hungary as a country where "militaristic psychology" and advancements in military technology were even more pronounced after the First World War than in 1914.[2] Similarly, the German historian Alfred Vagts (1892–1986) provided a comprehensive analysis of militarism in his seminal work. Divided into four chapters, his study traced the evolution of militarism from the Middle Ages to the post-First World War era.[3] After 1945, Vagts expanded his research to address militarism's developments after 1937, incorporating insights from the Second World War and its aftermath.[4] Vagts noted the significant influence of military politics in Hungary, observing that – as in other Central and Eastern European countries – military leaders either held or heavily influenced the office of head of state on the eve of the Second World War. In his interpretation, this form of militarism represented an "inward-directed" ideal of warfare, posing less of a threat to broader international peace.[5] In Hungarian literature, Mária Szabó's research offers valuable insights into the interwar period. Her study highlighted innovations in officer training in Hungary, linking these developments to the broader concept of the war ideal during this era.[6] In his dissertation, Ádám Lajkó interprets militarism as a response to Hungary's lack of military security. He discusses the concept of militarism through the defeat of the First World War, presenting the perceptions of some relevant authors and their practical manifestations.[7]

The various approaches to the Hungarian war ideal make it clear that its history requires a multifaceted analysis. In this paper, I aim to fill this gap by adopting a conceptual-historical perspective, drawing on possible analytical dimensions such as armament, legislation, and memory policy. In the first part of my study, I outline the historical and political background that fundamentally shaped the war ideal during the period associated with Governor Miklós Horthy (1920–1944). Here, I focus on changes within the Hungarian army, as contemporaries primarily equated the concept of militarism with (re)armament. The second part of the paper seeks to clarify the theoretical dimensions of the term "militarism." This analysis relies on a conceptual-historical interpretation, examining treatises, memoirs, autobiographies and encyclopaedia entries authored by contemporary military officers, politicians, and civilians. In this context, I explore varying perspectives and interpretations of militarism by both right- and left-wing authors. In the third section, I analyse efforts in 1930s Hungary to reshape the concept of militarism, focusing on the emergence of the "soldier's ideal" and "intellectual defence." This period is particularly significant for understanding how – despite Germany serving as a model for Hungarian militarism after the First World War – a distinctly Hungarian concept emerged. This uniquely Hungarian interpretation, defining itself in opposition to foreign models, gained traction among social groups aligned primarily along political lines.

Trianon Hungary in the Horthy era

Following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after the First World War, the Treaty of Trianon (signed on 4 June 1920) imposed strict regulations on the Kingdom of Hungary. Among these, the most severe was the loss of territories: Hungary forfeited two-thirds of its land, home to approximately 3.3 million ethnic Hungarians. This territorial cession gave rise to revisionism or irredentism, which became the dominant ideology of the Horthy era. According to Harry Elmer Barnes, Hungary engaged in "vigorously intensive propaganda" advocating for the reclamation of its lost territories. He identified schools as the primary venue for this effort,[8] where students were taught in the spirit of historical Hungary's pre-Trianon borders and began their mornings with prayers for the "resurrection of Hungary."[9]

At the same time, contemporaries largely agreed that Hungary sought to revise the peace treaty primarily through diplomatic means, resorting to the prospect of armed conflict only as a last resort. Barnes also described the training of the *Levente* youth organizations, which circumvented the treaty's strict limitations by functioning as a kind of "super boy scout movement."[10] This initiative addressed the constraints imposed by Trianon, which abolished universal conscription, limited the Hungarian army to 35,000 professional soldiers, and banned the production or acquisition of modern military equipment

2. Barnes, *World Politics*, 429.
3. Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism: Romance and Realities of a Profession* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1937).
4. Alfred Vagts, *A history of militarism: Civilian and Military* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1959).
5. Vagts, A history of militarism, 477.
6. Szabó Mária, "Tiszti eszmény a két világháború közti Magyarországon," *Honvédségi Szemle* 49 no. 5. (May 1995): 48–55.
7. Lajkó Ádám, "A Magyar Országos Véderő Egyesület" (PhD diss., Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2024), 212–237.
8. Barnes, World Politics, 581.
9. Romsics Ignác, *Magyarország története a XX. században* (Budapest: Osiris, 1999), 178–79.
10. Barnes, World Politics, 581.

such as armored vehicles, tanks, warships, and combat aircraft. The treaty also mandated the transfer of Hungary's Danube fleet to former Entente powers.[11]

Maintaining or improving the quality of the Hungarian Defence Forces under these restrictions proved exceedingly challenging. The army's numbers failed to reach even the treaty's maximum limit, due to the combined effects of regulatory constraints and the mandatory 12-year service period.[12] Vagts, however, erred in his claim that Hungary's army, which stood at 424,000 soldiers in 1914, had been reduced to 35,000 by 1922.[13] In reality, despite secret conscription efforts, the Hungarian army counted only 22,000 soldiers by 1925. The Defence Forces also struggled with outdated equipment and severe shortages, leaving Hungary virtually incapable of modern warfare.[14] A 1924 report by the Federal Council of American Churches noted that Hungary spent 2,629,015 US dollars (equivalent to over 191 billion Hungarian Koronas[15]) on its military, placing it near the bottom of a ranking of 46 countries in terms of (re)armament expenditures.[16]

Following the withdrawal of the Military Control Commission in 1927, Hungary began to expand its army, which exceeded 50,000 personnel by the early 1930s. Ammunition production was initiated, and tanks and aircraft were acquired. Universal conscription was introduced in 1932, marking a significant policy shift. Despite these efforts, the Hungarian army – comprising only 80,000–85,000 soldiers by 1937 – remained understaffed and technically outdated. Its forces were predominantly infantry, supplemented by cavalry and bicycle battalions, reflecting the limitations of its military capacity.[17]

A decisive step toward modernization came with the *Győr Programme* (announced in 1938), just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Implemented between 1938 and 1940, the programme facilitated significant quantitative and qualitative advancements. These included increasing troop numbers to over 100,000 and enhancing transport and industrial infrastructure critical for army mobilization. However, even with these improvements, the Hungarian Defence Forces were not regarded as a formidable military power on the international stage by 1940.[18] (It is worth comparing this size with the military strength of the "Little Entente": according to the press, the size of the Little Entente's army was 420,200 in 1924[19] and 600,000 in 1933.[20] Although the press coverage is subject to criticism, it indicates that the Hungarian army made up little more than 5% of the Little Entente's army in the first half of the 1920s, and this proportion likely improved only slightly to 10–15% by the late 1930s.)

Although territorial revisions were partially achieved during this period – such as the annexation of Felvidék, Transcarpathia, and Northern Transylvania – these gains were largely attributed to German diplomatic efforts rather than Hungarian military strength. As such, Alfred Vagts's assertion that Hungary's war ideal had minimal impact on European peace and conflict during the interwar years appears accurate.[21] This perspective is further supported by contemporary Hungarian press reports, which – irrespective of political leanings – described Hungarian militarism as being primarily oriented toward maintaining "internal order"[22] and ensuring "peaceful defence,"[23] rather than projecting power on a broader scale.

The conceptual history of militarism in interwar Hungary

In exploring the Hungarian ideal of war during the interwar period, Harry Elmer Barnes highlighted its spiritual dimensions, while Alfred Vagts focused on its political and military aspects. This divergence in interpretation was also evident among Hungarian authors of the time. The theoretical works of politicians, scholars, and laypeople reveal that no unified understanding of the term existed in Horthy-era Hungary.

11. *Trianon. A diktátum teljes szövege* (Budapest: Erdélyi Szalon Kiadó, 2022), 81–102.
12. Romsics, Magyarország története, 237–39.
13. Barnes, *World Politics*, 438.
14. Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 237–39.
15. Basis for calculating the exchange rate; Danyi Pál, "Dollár árfolyamok Magyarországon 1791 óta," accessed 10, March 2024, https://artortenet.hu/dollar-arfolyamok-magyarorszagon-1791-ota/
16. Barnes, *World Politics*, 429–30.
17. Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 237–39.
18. Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 243–46.
19. "A katonai ellenőrzés és a kisebbségek kérdése a nemzetgyűlés előtt Eckhardt Tibor és Zsilinszky Endre beszéde," *Szózat*, November 6, 1924, 1–4.
20. Henri Pozzi, "Hogyan akarják megfojtani Magyarországot?," *Függetlenség*, May 14, 1933, 5.
21. Vagts, *A history of militarism*, 477.
22. "Néphadsereget Horthynak!," *Új Előre*, March 1, 1926, 1.
23. "Magyar militarizmus," *Kecskeméti Közlöny*, 18 September, 1920, 1.

For example, Lajos Simsay (1868–1925),[24] a high school teacher, proposed four distinct interpretations of the concept. Similarly, Lieutenant Dénes Jávor (?–1941) identified three separate meanings associated with militarism.[25] Captain Miksa Schultheisz (1890–1977) described the term as "ambiguous," asserting that its interpretation was subjective and depended on individual perspectives.[26] The underdevelopment of the Hungarian Defence Forces in both manpower and technology likely contributed to the emphasis on "moral superiority" as a central element of the Hungarian war ideal.[27] Authors of the period often justified their writings by highlighting society's anti-militarist attitudes. Military writer Ferenc Julier (1878–1944) argued in the third chapter of his work that before the First World War, Hungarian society engaged with military matters only when they had domestic political implications. According to Julier, the defeat in the war further diminished this interest, as he observed that "anti-militarist books have a greater place today than works for the cultivation of martial virtues." He advocated for a stronger awakening of interest in military issues.[28] Lieutenant Colonel Gyula Máté-Török, commander of the Hungarian Royal Guard (1928–1937), lamented that no other European nation had been less able to realise its "national ideals" after the First World War than Hungary. He argued that "from 1918 to the present day, the army should have been reborn with an almost superhuman speed."[29] Similarly, Dénes Jávor criticised the lack of public understanding regarding the "masculine beauty, meaning, and purpose of military life."[30]

Based on a taxonomy of different interpretations, I have identified four primary conceptual groupings related to militarism. As seen in foreign examples, the most common understanding of the term in Hungary revolved around (re)armament. Géza Horváth viewed militarism not as a cause of war but as a necessary means for state survival – a "reasonable and correct preparation for future armed struggles."[31] Ferenc Julier dismissed the possibility of arms limitation or disarmament, asserting that peace treaties' military restrictions could never secure the victorious powers of the First World War. He argued that passive defence alone could not win wars, necessitating the continuous development of offensive capabilities, even in times of peace.[32] Ferenc Szálasi (1897–1946), writing as a member of the Association of Hungarian Life, defined militarism as the pursuit of solving foreign policy issues through armed force. He suggested that militarism existed when peaceful conflict resolution was entirely ruled out.[33] Furthermore, he distinguished militarism from security, claiming that a highly militarised state often lacked true security, and "belligerence" – a concept he sharply differentiated from militarism – could not be curbed through disarmament.[34] Military writer Sándor Szurmay (1860–1945), in his memoirs, described demobilisation as a mere illusion, an unattainable promise. Drawing on the lessons of the First World War, he stressed the importance of maintaining armament efforts, even under peace treaty restrictions. For Szurmay, cultivating the "invisible forces and moral values" latent in soldiers was as crucial as physical preparedness.[35] Miksa Schultheisz emphasised the excessive focus on armament and military build-up ("armed preparedness") as central to militarism.[36] Dénes Jávor expanded on this by identifying militarism as encompassing both the traditional "fever of armament" and the political form of militarism, where the state prioritised the army as the primary means of achieving its objectives, investing all possible resources into its development.[37] Oszkár Jászi (1875–1957), a former nationality minister, critiqued the Horthy regime in his 1921 émigré publication. He equated militarism with the regime's efforts to expand its regular army beyond the limits imposed by the peace treaties.[38] Similarly, Vilmos Böhm (1860–1949) – writing in exile in 1923 – described the Horthy regime as inherently militaristic, accusing Hungary of keeping Central Europe in a "frenzy of armament"

24. Simsay Lajos, "A militarizmus," *Magyar Katonai Közlöny* 11, no. 7–8. (July–August 1923): 390.
25. Jávor, "Militarizmus," 52–6.
26. Schultheisz Miksa, "Magyar szellem a korszerű kiképzésben," *Magyar Katonai Szemle* 5 (Quarter 3 1935): 35.
27. Szabó, "Tiszti eszmény," 53.
28. Julier Ferenc, *A hadvezetés művészete* (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1931).
29. Máté-Török Gyula, "Nemzeti hadügyi hitvallásom," *Magyar Katonai Szemle* 6 (Quarter 4 1936): 9.
30. Vitéz Jávor Dénes, "Militarizmus és nemzeti jövő," *Magyar Katonai Szemle* 7 (Quarter 2 1937): 56.
31. Horváth Géza, "A militarizmus," *Magyar Katonai Közlöny* 13, no. 7–9. (July–September 1925): 642.
32. Julier, *A hadvezetés művészete*.
33. Szálasy Ferenc, "A leszerelés elvi alapjai," *Magyar Katonai Szemle* 1 (Quarter 2 1931): 67–8.
34. Szálasy, "A leszerelés elvi alapjai," 68.
35. Szurmay Sándor, *A magyar katona a Kárpátokban* (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Nyomda Egyetemi Nyomda, 1940): 182–184.
36. Schultheisz, "Magyar szellem," 35.
37. Vitéz Jávor, "Militarizmus," 52–6.
38. Jászi Oszkár, *Magyar kálvária – magyar föltámadás. A két forradalom értelme, jelentősége és tanulságai* (Bécs: Bécsi Magyar Kiadó, 1921): 210.

as an expression of its identity as a militarised state.[39] The *Social Encyclopaedia* – published by *Népszava* in 1928 – defined militarism as a policy primarily employed by great powers to achieve forceful conquest, imposing excessive personal and material burdens on their citizens through armament.[40] Lieutenant Colonel Antal Náray (1893–1973) suggested that the intellectual values of the military could be enhanced through "diligent armament," enabling the army to feel a sense of self-care, which in turn boosted its performance.[41]

One of the most evident interpretations of militarism was its impact on the balance of power between the military and the civilian spheres. Lajos Simsay addressed this aspect by discussing the dangers of military dictatorship and the tendency of the military to assert its privileges over civilians.[42] From Mihály Károlyi's (1875–1955) perspective – the former Prime Minister and President of the Hungarian People's Republic, who later went into exile – militarism represented a distinct form of power that had emerged during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson (1913–1921).[43] Similarly, the *Social Encyclopaedia* identified militarism as a force capable of enabling military leaders to gain disproportionate power within state administration, often leading to unconstitutional dictatorship. According to the encyclopaedia, militarism allowed the army to function as a dominant institution free from democratic oversight, operating autonomously within the state.[44]

Another significant interpretation of militarism was linked to the role of national service and the concept of duty. Endre (Bajcsy-)Zsilinszky (1886–1944), a writer and editor of the right-wing daily *Szózat*, defined militarism as a worldview or state system in which the "military idea" played a central role.[45] He argued that militarism was deeply rooted in the philosophy of duty, where individuals recognised and accepted the necessity of self-sacrifice for higher collective goals.[46] Zsilinszky emphasised the importance of "self-conscious organisation" – a concept he described as the internal order that opponents viewed as militarism. For him, this military order was essential to defending and ensuring the survival of the nation, tracing its significance back to the era of Saint Stephen, Hungary's first king (1000–1038).[47] Zsilinszky envisioned a "Hungarian Renaissance" where a unified, socially cohesive, and militarily organised national society would thrive.[48] He believed the army should become the state's and society's central institution, radiating values such as honour, self-discipline, self-sacrifice, purposeful ambition, and hard work into every aspect of Hungarian life.[49] Colonel Károly Raics (1875–?) similarly highlighted the moral and spiritual role of the military, describing it as the "fertile soil of the Hungarian spirit and morality."[50] He advocated for an army grounded in the strongest moral principles, where the "Hungarian spirit" would embody unity, racial pride, honour, reliability, selflessness, industriousness, and Christian values.[51] Gyula Máté-Törék emphasised the army's mission to "sanctify its nation," sacrificing itself if necessary to ensure Hungary's survival. For Máté-Törék, the military had to be "the most Hungarian of all Hungarian institutions." He stressed the importance of the army uniting with the nation through a shared sense of fervent patriotism. To achieve this, he argued that officers needed to possess extensive knowledge of Hungarian history and geography to effectively lead and inspire their troops.[52]

Another interpretation of militarism was its role in national education and social cohesion. Lajos Simsay suggested that militarism involved the education of all citizens in order, discipline, and unity.[53] In his view, the military gained the right to influence the "social and educational" life of citizens through

39. Böhm Vilmos, "*Két forradalom tüzében. Októberi forradalom, Proletárdiktatúra, Ellenforradalom*," (Bécs: Bécsi Magyar Kiadó, 1923), 483.
40. "Militarizmus," in *Társadalmi Lexikon*, ed. Madzsar József (Budapest: Népszava Könyvkereskedés, 1928), 478–81.
41. Vitéz Náray Antal, "Szellemi erők a hadviselésben," *Magyar Katonai Szemle* 8 (Quarter 3 1938): 46.
42. Simsay, "A militarizmus," 390.
43. Károlyi Mihály, *Egy egész világ ellen. 1., Harcom a békéért* (München: Verl. für Kulturpolitik, 1923), 222.
44. "Militarizmus," 478–81.
45. Zsilinszky Endre, "Militarizmus – pacifizmus," *Magyar Katonai Közlöny* 8, no. 1–2. (January–February, 1920): 65.
46. Zsilinszky, "Militarizmus – pacifizmus," 73.
47. Zsilinszky, "Militarizmus – pacifizmus," 76.
48. Vonyó József, "Zsilinszky és a zsidókérdés," in *Jobboldali radikálisok Magyarországon 1919–1944. Tanulmányok, dokumentumok*, ed. Vonyó József (Pécs: Kronosz Kiadó, 2021), 104.
49. Zsilinszky, "Militarizmus – pacifizmus," 77.
50. Raics, "Igazságok és tanulságok", 6.
51. Raics, "Igazságok és tanulságok", 254–255.
52. Máté-Török, "Nemzeti hadügyi hitvallásom," 1–10.
53. Simsay, "A militarizmus," 390.

militarism.[54] The military was seen as the final stage of education, stepping in to compensate for the deficiencies left by the family and schools.[55] Károly Raics agreed with this perspective, asserting that military education should be a "natural continuation" of civil education. For this to happen, military institutions needed to be involved in creating educational curricula. This integration would help foster both civil and military mindsets, such as the development of a unified character among the youth.[56] Dénes Jávor argued that the virtues required in the army were also the "most useful and valuable" qualities in civilian life. Therefore, militarism was seen as a system that provided the greatest opportunity for talent development and the achievement of the "self-made man" ideal within the army.[57] He stated that militarism was evident when "the whole nation is a soldier" and "everyone feels equally like a soldier."[58] Archduke József Habsburg (1872–1962) also recognised the national educational aspect of militarism, particularly in the context of sport. While he believed that sport could never replace military training, he acknowledged its significant role in national education. He viewed sport as secondary to military training, but still an important complement, stating that it "replaced national education, becoming its brother and helper." At the same time, he warned that sport should not be overemphasized, as excessive focus on it could lead to demoralisation instead of the desired effect.[59]

The "rebirth" of militarism: the "soldier's ideal" and "intellectual defence"

In the mid-1930s, a new meaning was attached to the concept of militarism, which had been interpreted in various ways until then. According to *Magyarság*, Hungarian militarism, which had long been "dormant in the souls" of the Hungarian people, was finally about to "explode."[60] Gyula Gömbös (1886–1936), Prime Minister of Hungary from 1932 to 1936, expressed his support for the formation of the so-called Miklós Zrínyi Literary, Artistic and Social Group (often referred to as the Zrínyi Group) on two occasions (5 December 1935 and 4 February 1936).[61] The purpose of the Zrínyi Group was "to develop and strengthen Hungarian racial, national, and military strength among as many people as possible, thus promoting the spiritual and moral renewal of the Hungarians by fostering a healthy, heroic warrior spirit and a public sense of patriotism willing to sacrifice." In practice, this involved press and propaganda work in favor of the "valiant" and "national defense," as well as supporting and participating in military and national educational activities. At the heart of the group's ideals was Miklós Zrínyi (1520–1566), the former Hungarian general, who, with his triple commitment (believer, patriot, warrior), embodied[62] the soldier's ideal envisioned by the group's leader, Captain József Rózsás (1894–?).

Rózsás was the first to use the term "soldier's ideal" in his 1937 book. He compared Hungary in the 1930s to the aftermath of the "Battle of Mohács" in 1526, when the Hungarian army suffered a great defeat at the hands of the Ottoman-Turkish forces. He emphasized that – amid the endless political struggles for power in the 16th century – only the figure of the soldier stood out. Similarly, in the mid-1930s, the army was seen as the last untouched national asset, the only institution with noble spirit, the only untainted body, and the only one independent of political parties. He pointed out that, in the fifteen years following Hungary's defeat in World War I, "the military (warrior) ideal had, so to speak, completely lost its roots in Hungarian society." In his view, Hungarian society had turned away from the military ideal, largely due to the almost nonexistent involvement of the public cultural sphere (film, press, theatre, etc.) in promoting the idea. Therefore, he called for a return to the soldier's ideal, using Miklós Zrínyi as a model, and emphasized the need for the army to have a greater role and influence in various aspects of civilian life.[63] A recurring theme in Rózsás's perspective was his belief that the

54. Simsay, "A militarizmus," 391.
55. Simsay, "A militarizmus," 396–97.
56. Raics, "Igazságok és tanulságok", 228–234.
57. Vitéz Jávor, "Militarizmus," 53.
58. Vitéz Jávor, "Militarizmus," 52–3.
59. József Ferenc, "Sport és nemzetnevelés," *Napkelet* 3, no. 5. (May 1925): 409–14.
60. "Husz esztendeje...," *Magyarság*, November 11, 1939, 5.
61. Facsar Mihály, "Aki megrajzolta a vitézek oklevelét. Vitéz Pataky Ferenc életrajza," *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 129, no. 39. (2016): 854.
62. "A Zrínyi csoport munkája a magyarság szellemi és erkölcsi megújulásáért," *Országépítés – Nemzetpolitikai Szolgálat*, March 15, 1941, 7–9.
63. Vitéz Rózsás József, *A magyar katonaeszmény szolgálata* (Budapest: Madách Nyomda, 1937).

civilian population still appeared indifferent to the Hungarian military ideal. [64]

Through the activities of József Rózsás and the Zrínyi Group under his supervision, the concept of the soldier's ideal also emerged in political life. When the seven Hungarian Arrow Cross parties held their first joint meeting in Budapest on October 24, 1937, Ödön Málnási (1898–1970), a teacher at the Archbishopric Teachers' Training College in Eger, emphasized the national-organizing significance of the "ancient Hungarian soldier's ideal." At the founding general assembly of the Hungarist Movement on August 21, 1938, Málnási further advocated for "Hungarian popular militarism" while presenting the movement's program, even if it meant expulsion from the Hungarian Order of the Knights (founded by Miklós Horthy in 1920).[65] Málnási attributed the "extinction" of the Hungarian military spirit to the period of "foreign oppression" following the Rákóczi War of Independence (1703–1711).[66] Although he had encountered the concept once again directly in the "bloody hell of trenches and shell holes" during the war, it had been completely devalued under the Horthy regime after the conflict.[67]

The use of the term by the Hungarian far-right, partly for political purposes, became a subject of controversy in the late 1930s. In January 1940, the daily *Magyar Nemzet* was criticized in *Magyarság* for the creation of a block titled "Intellectual Defence" by a group of "village writers." According to the newspaper, these writers had merely copied earlier publications, even publishing an annual book on the concept called *The Calendar of Intellectual Defence 1940*. László Rajkay, the author of the article, argued that the idea of "intellectual defence" originated in 1936, during the reign of Gyula Gömbös, when József Rózsás first promoted it in his book. Rajkay claimed that a column titled *Magyar Katona* was launched in the government party daily *Függetlenség* in service of "intellectual defence";[68] however, the term only appeared for the first time in the newspaper in April 1940.[69] Furthermore, until 1939, when the column was introduced in *Magyar Nemzet*, the term was almost exclusively used in relation to Switzerland. The concept originated from the Swiss ideal, formulated in response to the expansion of National Socialist Germany, to defend Swiss traditions and way of life. This concept, which expressed the national will, essentially meant "resistance" to external ideologies and foreign influence.[70]

The same can be said of the concept of the soldier's ideal, which appeared in *Magyar Nemzet* – until its closure – in barely a dozen instances, and mostly in reference to specific intellectual works or the Zrínyi Group. A stronger argument is that the two concepts did not mean the same thing. In contrast to the soldier's ideal, the concept of intellectual defence was defined by Zoltán Szabó, the editor of the *Magyar Katona* column from April 9, 1939, to February 27, 1944. Szabó envisioned that the Hungarian nation must arm itself spiritually against ideological currents to defend itself by maintaining a traditional Hungarian sense of identity and purpose, which could be achieved through knowledge of Hungarian history and literature. In Szabó's view, the acquisition of this knowledge was primarily aimed at solving Hungary's social problems, especially the "peasant question," which still existed in Hungary, unlike in Western Europe.[71] He believed that these issues should be resolved by Hungarians themselves, rather than through the influence of external forces such as German National Socialism.[72] Another key difference was that in June 1939, when presenting the means of disseminating intellectual defence, Szabó stressed the need to establish an independent board, free from party politics and financed by social funds. By emphasizing the importance of this body's independence, Szabó was likely referring to the functioning of the Zrínyi Group, which operated under the authority of the *Hungarian Order of Knights*. The two concepts influenced each other: Szabó advocated for the use of "dissemination" methods, such as radio and the press,[73] which the Zrínyi Group began to utilize, particularly in the early 1940s.

64. Vitéz Rózsás József, "Harc a harc ellen," *Magyar Rendőr* 4, no. 3. (February 1, 1937): 67.
65. "Hubay Kálmán, Málnási Ödön és Kerekes Béla háromezer főnyi tömeg előtt ismertették Pécsett a hungarista célkitűzéseket," *Magyarság*, August 23, 1938. 3.
66. Málnási Ödön, *A magyar népközösségi eszme története* (Budapest: Lőcsey, 1938), 6.
67. "Ma ítél a Kúria a magyar nemzet őszinte története és Málnási Ödön fölött," *Magyarság*, June 27, 1938, 2.
68. Rajkay László, "Szellemi honvédelem naptára. A „Magyar Nemzet" kisajátította és politikai propagandára használja fel a szellemi honvédelem gondolatát," *Magyarság*, January 14, 1940, 6.
69. "Komoly intelem," *Függetlenség*, April 18, 1940, 3.
70. Martin József, "Szabó Zoltán és a szellemi honvédelem," *Holmi* 25, no. 3. (March 2013), 303–10.
71. Szabó Zoltán, "A Szellemi Honvédelem," in *A Szellemi Honvédelem Naptára*, ed. Szabó Zoltán (Budapest: Szabó Zoltán, 1940).
72. Szabó Zoltán, "Reform. 2. Problémák és megoldások (1939. július 23.)," in *Szellemi Honvédelem*, ed. Szabó Zoltán (Budapest: Hét Torony Könyvkiadó), 85.
73. Szabó Zoltán, "Jámbor szándék – 2. A szellemi honvédelem terve (1939. június 25.)," in *Szellemi Honvédelem*, ed. Szabó Zoltán (Budapest: Hét Torony Könyvkiadó), 65.

Summary
In my paper, I attempted to define and establish the concept of militarism in Hungary during the interwar period, based on the works of contemporary authors. Due to the historical nature of the concept, my study does not aim to explore the dissemination of the war ideal (through literature, film, music, radio, etc.) or its practical manifestations (such as armament levels, legislation, or memory politics) primarily associated with war propaganda.

A revisionist and irredentist policy was aimed at reclaiming the territorial losses caused by the Treaty of Trianon. However, the chances of its implementation were significantly hindered by the restrictions imposed on the country and the challenges arising from Hungary's unique situation. While foreign contemporaries often highlighted the combative nature of the Hungarian state, it was perceived as a peaceful yet militaristic state lacking an effective army. It is clear from the writings of both right-wing and left-wing authors that the concept of militarism is difficult to interpret, as it has multiple meanings and its boundaries are often drawn according to political orientation. However, if we try to distinguish between the two groups, we can say that right-wing politicians, military officers, historians, and both professional and civilian writers thought – despite or even because of the defeat in World War I – Hungarian soldiers' virtues should be embraced and promoted within civil society. They all agreed that militarism is not merely a country's policy of arming itself but a way of life that equips society with the resilience and values necessary to face the challenges and hardships encountered by soldiers. The officers – coordinating the crew – must play a key role in this, as a thorough understanding of geopolitical dynamics is particularly essential for them. The authors also believed that the virtues demonstrated in the military should be adopted as civil virtues to enable the nation to "rise up." This was not necessarily linked to preparations for war, as they also emphasized the importance of these virtues in times of peace. On the issue of disarmament, right-wing authors also concurred that disarmament was impossible to achieve. They argued that supporting and developing the military should not be considered disarmament but rather a military-strategic policy aimed at preparing the country's armed forces for potential future conflicts. Right-wing authors were dissatisfied with the status quo, feeling that the militaristic perspective of society was insufficient. Consequently, their interpretations could – in some respects – be regarded as objectives. In contrast, left-wing authors primarily discussed militarism in terms of disarmament. They criticized the Horthy era's moves towards militarization but focused less on the social promotion of the soldier's ideal.

Due to the lack of a uniform definition, the concept of the ideal of combat had to be artificially "constructed" in Hungary. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the 1920s, the former German ally – viewed as the "hotbed of militarism" – was presented as a model to follow. According to Lajos Simsay, this was possible because Germany – as a "typical militaristic state" – continued to embrace militarism even after the revolution.[74] Endre (Bajcsy-)Zsilinszky described Germany as the place where the "unparalleled spirit of the army" was "most perfectly realized," and where it was now being revitalized through the rise to power of officers who had remained in arms.[75] In Dénes Jávor's interpretation, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, who led fascism in Italy and national socialism in Germany, were seen as representatives of "true militarism" of their time.[76] Contemporary authors also acknowledged interwar German militarism: Barnes referred to it as the culmination of a "vindictive and militaristic psychology,"[77] while Vagts highlighted the notion of officers as a social prestige even higher than that of the state.[78] Militarism in Germany was rooted in the militaristic nature of the Weimar Republic.[79] In the 1920s, the army not only remained a center of power, but it also became a "state within the state," maintaining its strength and determination without the use of force.[80] In the even more militaristic Third Reich,[81] Hitler's form of militarism was driven by his offer to counter the army's withdrawal from political life, in exchange for supporting the rearmament program, securing the army's military monopoly, and guaranteeing its autonomy – at least

74. Simsay, "A militarizmus," 390.
75. Zsilinszky, "Militarizmus – pacifizmus," 72.
76. Vitéz Jávor, "Militarizmus és nemzeti jövő," 53.
77. Barnes, "World Politics," 428.
78. Vagts, "A history of militarism," 409–11.
79. V. R. Berghahn, *The History of an International Debate 1861–1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 33–56.
80. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the state. The Theory and Politics of Civil-Miliary Relations* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 109–11.
81. Berghahn, "International Debate," 33–56.

temporarily. In doing so, he fulfilled the goals of the German military officers, such as rearming Germany, increasing arms production, training reserves, and equipping the army with modern weapons.[82]

According to teacher and filmmaker Kornélia Margit Simonyi (1909–1999), militarism truly permeated Germany's spirit after the general obligation to fight was reintroduced on May 1, 1935.[83] Although this had already occurred in Hungary in 1932, it was this development that sparked the "Hungarization" of militarism in the second half of the 1930s, following the "decade and a half of dullness" after the peace treaty. However, by 1939, the term had acquired new political significance, as it was reinterpreted by the far-right and the "third passenger village writers." The concept of intellectual defense "pulled the rug out" from under the soldiers's ideal: *Magyarság* identified the two concepts in its own interpretation and presumably criticized *Magyar Nemzet* not for "stealing" or "copying" the intellectual right to the ideal, but because it posed a real challenge to the ideal constructed by Rózsás. Its significance lies in the fact that it succeeded in partially reframing the soldier's ideal as a less pro-war, anti-German program,[84] thus aligning it with a prestigious form of German militarism that had been allied with Hungary.

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