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HAVASI ZOLTÁN (társszerkesztő), V. KOVÁCS SÁNDOR, MEZEY LÁSZLÓ, REJTŐ ISTVÁN,
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A NÉVMUTATÓT ÉS A TARTALOMJEGYZÉKET
ÖSSZEÁLLÍTOTTA

B. JUHÁSZ ERZSÉBET

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ZOLTÁN HAVASI

The Role of the National Library in the Sciences and Public Education of Our Country

At the 175th anniversary of the founding of the National Széchényi Library

1.

If we should move back in time to 1802 and linger for a while and, knowing what we know today, have a look around, we would as certain that, viewed even from the perspective of the entire social development of Hungary, we were standing at a particularly important turning point in the history of Hungarian culture.

The date, of course, is symbolic. Its symbolism is conferred by the date of a deed of foundation. The deed of foundation was the result of a decision by Count Ferenc Széchényi to lay the foundations for the institution and later the system of institutions that would develop, prepare and propagate the riches of Hungarian culture. He established national library but "the collection placed at the disposal of his dear country" included other kinds of objects besides books and manuscripts. Thus, Hungarian museums and public collections can trace their descent back to this endowment.

Today, we know, although the recognition is still spotty, that economy, politics and culture form an indivisible dialectic whole. That is to say, culture, especially public education, not only conforms to economic-political demands but can also be regarded as one of the conditions necessary for solving the problems imposed by these demands.

If we should stand at the threshold of the year 1802 (or more generally, the dawn of the 19th century) and we should take a look at the state of consciousness in Hungary (which did not differ much from the general situation in Eastern Europe), it would strike us that it tells us more about national culture than about economics. During the period of national revival, only outstanding personalities saw what lay behind national development, the economic and social questions, the necessity of changing to a capitalistic system, the need to achieve "bourgeois status". Thus, the trend of the social function of culture was thrown intermittently but increasingly into relief on the Hungarian map of consciousness at the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th.

The historical role of reconciling certain kinds of social activities fell to culture. Put more exactly, the struggle for cultural development could, from time to time, make the most headway among economic, political and cultural pursuits. The interchange of the various main branches of activities can be observed even the lives of certain personalities. Ferenc Széchényi, who at a young age attained public office and assumed political roles, withdrew after ten years of service. He voluntarily retired from public life and for a while focussed his energies on cultural life. That is to say, during this time, other activities in his life were organized around this area.

This coordinating role of culture is realized in the horizontal system of interconnected social development. However, since the philosophical meaning of culture can be understood only in its historical perspective, it not only has a vertical interconnected system in conformity to its social function, but also, within its relations of time and space, it is realized more fully in time and likewise, its supporting and critical role of general conditions predominates. That is how it becomes the guardian of traditions and the creator of the future.

Here, we have arrived at the significance of Ferenc Széchenyi's act of laying the foundations of the library, the national collection, at the turning point in Hungarian cultural history at the beginning of the 19th century. At the beginning of the national rebirth, stimulated by the enlightenment, it was possible to take action to ensure the continuity of cultural development which had often been interrupted due to the till then fragmented nature of Hungarian economic, social and political development. This was the point at which a way was opened to systematically look back, retrospectively develop culture, change the given cultural situation and strive for long-range cultural development and shaping of the future.

We would like to demonstrate, though sketchily, that Ferenc Széchenyi worked hard not only to collect cultural possessions, he did not want to set himself up as a generous patron of the arts, but he wanted to stimulate public activity, raise the cultural level of the society, expand the circle of creative artists, and participate in shaping the future.

We should not consider him merely as a generous founder, we should not see only the gesture in his donation, we should think of him as a man who longed to create, who often had to struggle and spend many anguished moments during his career. When he could, he used his office for noble causes, when he saw unavoidable obstacles, he preferred to retreat from public life. Many times he was forced to compromise. Often he failed, at other times he was lauded to the skies. Near the end, he thought back on his life and achievements with both dissatisfaction and a calm mind yearning for peace. One of his achievements proved lasting.

2.

We will compare the initiative of 175 years ago with our efforts today in the interests of our present work of rebuilding the future and strengthening our scientific and cultural goals. We can draw a few lessons in cultural history and cultural policy from the partial results achieved by the work of our library historians.

One of the lessons is that there is a much closer connection between science and libraries and museums, that is, between research and the national collection, both in terms of historical development and the current functions of these institutions, than is generally known or practiced in the organization of research. Summaries of cultural and scientific history to this day give scant attention to the role the founding of the national library and national museum played in shaping Hungarian scientific life and in helping to establish the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The summary, published for orientation at home and abroad, which appeared under the title of *Hazánk Magyarországa* in Hungarian and *Information Hungary* for foreigners, states

in its chapter on scientific life: "At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was not without reason, that critical spirits complained of the indifference manifested by feudal society and of the insufficiency of conditions necessary for scientific work. It was nevertheless in this period that Ferenc Széchenyi in 1802 created the new centre of future scientific life by founding the Hungarian National Museum and together with in the National Library." By this statement, in which logical fragmentation and ambiguous historical information is perceptible, it is not clear that for two decades the Museum performed the functions of the Academy of Sciences which did not yet exist.

It is even more surprising that, while the monograph, published at the occasion of the 150th year anniversary of the Academy (*The Century and a Half of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. 1825—1975*. Bp. Akad. Kiad. 1975.), in many respects discusses the efforts at establishing the scientific society before 1825 remarkably well and concisely, it exaggerates precisely the decade before the national assembly of 1825, thus, the events directly preceding the institution of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Though it mentions endowments and competitions and also that the committee setting up and judging the competitions worked in the National Museum. Indeed, it does not refrain from stating: "in 1812, the national assembly declared that the National Museum was incomplete without the Scientific Society". Still we feel that the irreplaceable role the founding of the first Hungarian national public collection played in the development of scientific life, and its significance in the history of science has been up to now unjustly forgotten. Furthermore, the summaries to date did not include those partial research results which convincingly present Ferenc Széchenyi's promotion of science.

Without a doubt, the political movements which emerged after 1790 favourable to the scientific pursuits of the enlightenment soon succumbed; thus, interest in establishing the scientific academy also declined. It was also true that, although the national assembly of 1790 charged a literary committee with establishing the Scientific Society, the matter was never discussed because of the armed attacks by the French. Moreover, it is undeniable that most of the gentry, alarmed at news of the French Revolution and its consequences, backed off from scientific progress for a time.

Under these circumstances, the activities of those who belonged to the slowly emerging intelligentsia and bourgeois literateurs who remained steadfast in their social and cultural pursuits or the actions of those public figures who could direct their attention to fostering the sciences and developing public education were all the more praiseworthy. The latter included Ferenc Széchenyi. In the deed of foundation of the national library, he devoted himself to disseminating a printed catalogue of the collection donated to the nation. He personally directed the publishing of the catalogue series for a decade and a half (1799—1815). The carefully compiled volumes demonstrate that "Széchenyi intended the State Library to be not only a museum but primarily a workroom for the scholars and scientists of the nation."¹

Széchenyi's decision to found the collection, develop it in a certain direction, which made possible the publication of the catalogue of the national collection

¹ BERLÁSZ, Jenő: *Hogyan propagálta Széchenyi Ferenc az Országos Könyvtárt?* (How Ferenc Széchenyi propagated the State Library?) = *Az OSZK Évkönyve 1968—1969*. 57. p.

and which enabled his endeavours to take root in national and international consciousness must be considered to be of scientific historical significance and in a certain sense a standard achievement in this area. It is undeniable that the counsel of the best minds of the country (József Hajnóczy, Márton György Kovachich and others) influenced him, but we believe that, for the most part everyone concentrated on his own scientific pursuits. Széchényi, on the other hand, had one kind of totality in mind concerning the collection which "included literature, the humanistic and natural sciences, works concerning religion, politics and economy, etc. often even booklets of ephemeral value; thus, everything that was ever published in Hungary or in foreign countries written by Hungarian authors. To this was added foreign literature about Hungary. (This included not only published works but also manuscripts.) These principles essentially meet the standards of modern conceptions of the national library. Such an early example of the achievement in practice of these conceptions is worthy of note."²

Many plans, programmes and proclamations to establish a national scientific centre were produced during the 18th century. Mátyás Bél (1735), Péter Bod (1756), Adam Kollar (1763), György Bessenyei (1778), Ignác Batthyány (1786), Miklós Révai (1790) and many others wanted a Scientific Society whose goals would be, in the words of Farkas Bólyai (1806), "to become familiar with our nation's past, present and future."

Széchényi also strived to bring about the Hungarian Scientific Society. "When, in 1790, the idea of establishing a Hungarian Scientific Society has engaged the attention of many people, a distinguished company of nobles and writers discusses the matter in this house", wrote Ferenc Kollányi in 1905, citing the correspondence of Ferenc Kazinczy published in 1891 by János Váczy. He participated in numerous other movements and enterprises promoting scientific life. It is difficult to keep track of all the writers he supported both materially and morally.

However, he did not consider the planning of projects, the occasional support of certain scholars to be enough. He initiated a *comprehensive* enterprise, "embracing the culture of the entire nation". He decided "to collect everything that concerned our country, her history, literature, etc., be it in Hungarian or in a foreign language, written by a Hungarian or a foreign writer, be it a publication or manuscript."³ He did not consider it to be sufficient to formulate plans, but, as an enlightened aristocrat who had travelled much in Europe, chose action. Ahead of the reform era and preceding the generation of builders, he lived by the watchword to be invented later — "act, create, and increase". The desire to build moved him too as it did his son István Széchényi whose achievements affected the economic development of the entire country.

² SOMKUTI, Gabriella: *Széchényi Ferenc nemzeti könyvgyűjteménye*. (The National Library of Ferenc Széchényi.) = *Az OSZK Évkönyve 1970–1971*. 181. p.

³ KOLLÁNYI, Ferenc: *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Széchényi Országos Könyvtára 1802–1902. I. köt.* (The Széchényi State Library of the Hungarian National Museum 1802–1902. Vol. 1.) Budapest 1905. 14. p.

3.

Action meant building a new, cultural reconstruction. Not long after Johann Gottfried Herder, German poet and philosopher of history, predicted that Hungarians would soon be finished, this action aided the survival and rebirth of the nation, helped it join forces with social progress because the national rebirth created that framework within which social progress could evolve.

Action stimulates rebirth and renewal. The demands and requirements of renewal crop up again and again in the evolution of Hungarian cultural history. That is, the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th was not the first time that Hungary had conceived and brought into being the collecting of national cultural treasures.

The history of Hungarian books, written records and libraries that goes back to the 11th century is well-known. Only the precedents created by the flowering medieval book culture of the monasteries, chapters of collegiate churches, cathedrals and royal chancelleries and the introduction of humanism into the country could have led to King Matthias' world-famous library, the Bibliotheca Corviniana during the second half of the 15th century, in addition to the valuable libraries of the humanist prelates competing with the king. The culture of the court of King Louis I (the Great), the princely codex, the *Képes Krónika* (Illustrated Chronicle), prepared in this court convincingly attest to the fact that these collections were at the same time centres of learning and the royal library did not spring up overnight from nothing. In addition to our codex literature, the first attempts at founding universities (in Pécs in 1367, in Óbuda, 1389, in Pozsony in 1467), and the first printing workshop whose first printed book, the Chronicle of Buda which appeared in 1473, marking the beginning of printing in Hungary, that was established near the royal court, all of these bespeak of a flowering medieval culture.

However, this courtly culture, which could have laid the groundwork for a national library and museum, as it happened in several European countries, unfortunately fell into decay and vanished in the middle of the 16th century (after 1526) within a few decades as a result of the Turkish hordes that devastated the country. The century and a half of Turkish rule and Habsburg despotism set back the development of Hungarian collections for a long time. During these centuries, it was the society that sustained and developed the national culture rather than the government. This cultural development that came from below can be considered a healthy process but a slow one. It took three centuries for a permanent university, established in 1635 and still extant, and a secondary school system, that came into being in the midst of the reformation and counter-reformation and later the social and intellectual movements of the enlightenment, to reach the middle classes as a consequence of the development of cultural history.

After the process of this development (at the end of the 18th century), the time came for the society to collect and preserve the country's cultural achievements, a task which the king's library should have accomplished for centuries.

The ideas of the enlightenment reached Hungarian society and found a response among the aristocracy, the well-to-do gentry and the new secular intelligentsia. Mostly, peasant, the clergy of bourgeois or small-holding gentry origin, teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, farm managers, county and state officials strived to develop Hungarian science. It was increasingly evi-

dent, however, that the lack of a centre for the collection of scientific literature, or research source material was a major obstacle in the path of the development of systematic scientific activity. Thus, it is to Ferenc Széchenyi's credit that, in the spirit of the enlightenment and the aspirations of the approaching reform era in addition to his experiences gathered abroad, he sought out the old cultural treasures of the nation, the written and printed records of the Hungarian past throughout the country. Directing the work personally, he brought them together in an organic collection at much material sacrifice and put it at the public's disposal.

4.

The way in which he placed it at the public's disposal is worthy of attention. It denotes work of scientifically standard value. The scientific method of exposing the collection, the source material, is an example that is useful to us today. It can guide us in our work serving both science and public education.

Ferenc Széchenyi was not the only aristocrat who established a private library. The Eszterházy family, for example, built up an extraordinarily valuable library which they opened to the public. But unfortunately, they had no Hungarian books. On the other hand, Gedeon Ráday's rich collection in "hungaricas" directly supported the work of scholars. It is well-known that many Hungarian researchers achieved results by using Széchenyi's books. Several among those who established libraries believed that their collections could lay the foundations of a scientific society. This idea inspired Ignác Batthyány, bishop of Transylvania, who founded his library in Gyulafehérvár, or Sámuel Teleki Transylvanian chancellor, who founded the Teleki-collection in 1796.

It was Széchenyi who was most skillfully consistent in bringing his library to the public, not only by founding the national library, but also by his scientific work of dissemination and printing the catalogues of the collection that mobilized the country and informing foreign countries with his publications presenting the collection in detail. Jenő Berlász demonstrated in his high-level treatise: *How Ferenc Széchenyi propagated the State Library?* The work convincingly shows that these catalogues were not modest manuals but many-sided catalogues, professionally prepared bibliographies that met the scientific standard of the times. He sent his catalogues abroad, every-where he thought people should have a concrete realistic view of Hungary and her people with special emphasis on Hungarian cultural achievements. His catalogues provided the world with evidence that Hungary, contrary to Herder's view had for centuries been an active participant in universal culture, in European civilization.

The way in which he organized the dissemination at home, with a little bringing up-to-date, comes up to the standards of modern educational-sociological research and evaluation, but is also equal to a carefully prepared publicity or awakening interest or even an appeal to social forces to help develop public education. He was careful to inform the men of high-rank in public life, he also focussed his attention to the clergy, he considered the gentry, recognized the importance of the cities and counted on the new intelligentsia.

These were the activities that we esteem more highly than the efforts and appeal, containing generalities, aimed at establishing the scientific society.

Thus it is understandable that contemporaries regarded the new institution as a historical event. György Kóky wrote in a study about the reaction of the press toward the founding of the national library:⁴ “. . . our enlightened writers and scholars referring to the Corvina, often declared that a large public library was needed in the present. And when Ferenc Széchenyi offered his collection to the nation, even more people recognized the significance of such a library upon reading the news and commentaries of the home press. One after another came the offers from all classes of society to supplement the collection of the national library. And as can be discovered from the contemporary press, they spoke of the newly established national library with almost as much respect as earlier they had remembered the famous library of King Matthias. This respect. . . in addition to the founder Ferenc Széchenyi, was meant for the collection destined to play an important role in the cultural and scientific life of the nation.”

5.

It was soon clear, that the endowment was suitable not only for a library, but could also lay the foundations for a national public collection, a museum. The first librarian, Jakab Ferdinánd Miller, already took great pains so that the Hungarian National Museum established by law in 1808, and the Hungarian Scientific Society „should be established on one and the same foundation.” The Scientific Society was still not established. At the same time, at the beginning of the century, endowments were set up with that goal in mind. István Sándor, writer and bibliographer, set up an endowment with 10,000 florins and his valuable collection, and the Marczibányi family donated 50,000 florins. These funds were used for competitions and prizes and were entrusted to the committee of the Hungarian National Museum.

The first Hungarian public collection fulfilled the functions of the as yet non-existent scientific academy not only in this area but also by starting a series of scientific publications. The main reason for publishing the museum papers (*Acta litteraria Musei Nationalis Hungarici*) was seen to be “to inform population of the country about the unpublished manuscripts in the possession of the literary institution by publishing them and to enrich Hungarian literature with the studies on numismatics, archaeology and the natural sciences. The more these kinds of works are publicized, the more they become common knowledge, the more useful they become for the country and its citizens.”⁵

This development can be considered to be an organic continuation of Ferenc Széchenyi's initiatives. Already in the first decades of the life of the institution, scientific study was thus coupled with public education.

This picture of the first years would not be complete, if we focussed only on what which was positive and progressive. The deed of foundation placed palatine Joseph in charge of supervising the collection. He carefully fulfilled his responsibility in exemplary fashion. He carefully strived to develop it.

⁴ *Az Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár Évkönyve 1961–1962.* (The National Széchenyi Library Yearbook 1961–1962.) 277–278. p.

⁵ KOLLÁNYI, Ferenc: *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Széchenyi Országos Könyvtára 1802–1902. I. köt.* (The Széchenyi State Library of the Hungarian National Museum 1802–1902. Vol. 1.) Budapest 1905. 384. p.

His "care" extended to everything. "But while... the palatine opened the rich material of the Széchényi-State-Library to the public, in the spirit of the times, he took care that abuses not occur because of the permitted freedom and that dangerous doctrines and anti-state ideas, etc. not be spread by these means", wrote Ferenc Kollányi, the hard-working chronicler of the first year of the institution. In the course of the chronological exposition of the remaining papers, he noted that, on August 14, 1807, the palatine informed Jakab Ferdinánd Miller that he had heard from a creditable source many of the documents and manuscripts were being copied for the purpose of publication. Miller should report if this was true and in the future every copy should be shown to him before being published. Miller, faithful subject that he was reported in a memorandum within days the kinds of manuscripts there were and the steps that were being taken up to then concerning their use. "Unknown individuals could look at the manuscripts only from the outside. Only those who had taken an official oath of allegiance to the reigning house or scientists whose work attested to the reliability of their character and ideas could use them for more extensive study. As far as he knew, they had not given out papers whose publication might be supposed to cause damage to the country. True, Gergely Berzeviczy's paper on the conditions of the peasants had been recently published but the library was in no way concerned. More than one manuscript that had been copied beforehand came here. More recently, the founder himself took out several papers on the national assembly in exchange for a receipt but it certainly cannot be supposed that he would misuse them."⁶

We cited these lines from Kollányi's book because it provides a convincing example of the contrast between the intentions of the founder and general practice and illustrates the dependence of the first librarian appointed by the founder on the palatine which meant his virtual break with the aspirations of the founder.

6.

Széchényi, whose "most ardent wish, first and last, was that individuals who were really familiar with the literary past should use the Széchényi State Library", could see in his lifetime that among the librarians, there were and there would continue to be those who would carry on his work. He must have considered István Horvát to be one of these. Horvát played a decisive role in preparing the decision to lay the so-called second foundation for library, the collections of books in Széchényi's palace in Sopron, which, in contrast to the collection of Cenk contained mostly foreign works.

In our present study, we will point out two viewpoints represented by István Horvát which can teach something today.

Horvát wanted to obtain the collection of foreign works for the reference library of the national library. When he declared that all of the sciences were very closely connected to each other, he was thinking of interdisciplinary studies, in accordance with our modern concepts. He himself thought it very desirable that "research into national matters" should depend on the home

⁶ KOLLÁNYI, Ferenc: *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Széchényi Országos Könyvtára 1802 – 1902. I. köt.* (The Széchényi State Library of the Hungarian National Museum 1802 – 1902. Vol. 1.) Budapest 1905. 151. p.

source material of national library, but he no less desired that there should finally be a Hungarian whose work would be outstanding in all the sciences. Perhaps it was untimely of him to expect Hungarian polihistor, but he was right in believing that Hungarian science needed men, who had a versatile education and who approached European standards. He was convinced that "before the establishment of the Széchényi State Library, scientific progress was hampered not so much by the lack of such talent as by the lack of indispensable resources."

His other noteworthy idea was that, although it would be wrong to deprive the museum and library of its national character, collecting only works written by Hungarians about Hungary was not enough. "The work of our fathers, who had very few literary resources at their disposal are only pails of the national effort and only rarely can they serve as resource material." The presentation of the national literature and culture should be built on firmer foundations. "The necessary material, especially those referring to previous centuries, should be obtained from countless foreign works which were all but inaccessible to our writers."

These thoughts illustrate that, already when the first national public collection was founded and during the decade following the foundation, our ancestors took on such tasks and set goals that are still valid today.

In the last years, in the most recent past, did we begin to work out a project which included searching out the national treasures which are still in foreign lands. Recently, the International Association of Hungarian Philology which keeps track of the activities of professionals who do research into Hungarian linguistics, literary history and ethnography and popularizes and disseminates their results to the public. These efforts had their obvious effect on libraries.

7.

The founder's intention to designate the institution originally established as a national as state library could be investigated in the future. Jenő Berlász pointed out this important formal element. "The fact that, during the years of the emerging movement to reform the Hungarian language and "Hungarize" the sciences, Ferenc Széchényi published the catalogue series of the national library in Latin was most certainly not an accident. The reason is not that Széchényi looked down on the Hungarian language because of intellectual arrogance or that he opposed the program of Bessenyei and his followers on principle, as he was one of the few aristocrats who mastered Hungarian as his mother tongue and practiced it in the village of his home. The Latin must have another purpose, probably to express the founder's intention to destine the State Library as a cultural treasure and cultural tool not only for Hungarians by birth but also for all the peoples under the Hungarian crown. The designation of the new library as Bibliotheca Regnicolaris which soon came into general usage replacing the Bibliotheca Nationalis seemed to bear this out."⁷

⁷ BERLÁSZ, Jenő: *Hogyan propagálta Széchényi Ferenc az Országos Könyvtárt?* (How Ferenc Széchényi propagated the State Library?) = *Az OSZK Évkönyve 1968-1969*. 58. p.

Another simple explanation is that the catalogues were written in Latin because they were intended, from the outset, to be sent abroad. The change in the name of the library implies that old Hungary was the scene of the history and culture of many peoples and that the various nationalities lived beside each other in close social and cultural association. Thus, the designation of "state" was more fitting than the emphasis on the "national".

It is worthwhile to examine the matter further, because today the National Széchényi Library is undisputably our national library and we are called upon to develop that national culture in a way that both that which distinguished it from and that which connects it to other nations is expressed. The 175-year development of the collection of the National Széchényi Library reflects well, reliably, and convincingly that numerous manifestations of our history and culture is the heritage of several peoples. Given this knowledge and with our modern concepts and world view, we interpret the historical traditions correctly, if we emphasize not the characteristics that keep us apart from other countries, turn inward but those that bring us closer to other nations.

8.

During the 175 years that have passed since the founding the National Széchényi Library, many changes, that we are unable to relate here, have happened in the world, in our country and in the life of the institution. If, at the occasion of this anniversary, we recalled a few incidents and elements of the circumstances of the founding and beginning phase of the library, we did not do so because we believed that our tasks today can be traced back to the 19th century. In addition to presenting the concrete professional lessons to be found. We wanted to express that national tradition is a vital factor, an organic part of socialist patriotism, that political, economic and ideological-cultural history of a society is at the same time the antecedent of the socialist present.

Perhaps not enough light has been shed on the fact that we must bear in mind the historical traditions which conflict with each other, but at the same time are interdependent and conditional upon one another, that both the progressive traditions and negative experiences must be considered.

In the perspective of the development of library work, let us take heed not to want to unhistorically discover everything ourselves, but let us not cling tenaciously to outworn concepts. We emphasize the desire to create in pointing up the example of the founder of our institution and those who continued his work, and we carry on according to the demands of our age and the foreseeable future. We saw that in many essential questions, the basic tasks of the library were in conjunction from the outset, and it is to be seen whether the basic questions come up again and again in the course of the entire historical development of the institution.

Our present social situation and living conditions raise the questions to which we must find answers, in the spirit of active socialist patriotism and indivisible from this, current internationalism that opens up long-range perspectives and enlightenment in compliance with the demands of our times.