

Two Facets of ‘Southern Opening’ Bilateral Relations Between Angola and Hungary in the 70s-80s and Post 2015

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Abstract:

The new strategy of ‘Southern Opening’, announced in 2015, has put Africa again in the focus of Hungary’s foreign policy, with Angola being among the priority countries. The reopening of the embassy in Luanda in 2017 and the Hungarian Foreign Minister’s visit in 2018 were further symbolic steps in recognizing Angola’s importance as a potential regional power and a strategic partner in the sub-Saharan region.

Bilateral cooperation dates back to much earlier, the late 60s, however, spanning through nearly two decades during the socialist era of both countries’ history. Hungary has provided sizable military aid (to the MPLA), actively ‘exported’ goods, technology, and knowledge through sending experts and offering scholarships, and received wounded soldiers for treatment and rehabilitation. After the mid-90s, bilateral relations have stagnated up until the new turn to the South from 2015.

Building on national archive documents and personal accounts of experts and diplomats, this paper presents the heyday of bilateral cooperation in the 70s and 80s. It also gives an overview of the revitalising relations; and analyses how those may fit in the new foreign policy agenda and promotion of Hungarian economic interests in Angola..

The People’s Republic of Hungary was also involved in the ‘socialist scramble for Africa’. Angola seemed to be the targeted country in the region mentioned above, but in the 1960s another opportunity emerged, namely Namibia. This large, sparsely inhabited country was under South African rule, although the Ovambo, a majoritarian ethnic group, was fighting for independence. Their organisation was known as the SWAPO.

This study aims to describe how the Hungarian socialist leadership and the leaders of SWAPO found a way to cooperate with each other. The original documents quoted in this study are from the Hungarian National Archives and the daily newspapers between the 1960s and 1980s, and they have been cited to assist the readers in following the development of the relations.

Keywords:

Angola; Hungary; bilateral relations; foreign policy; military aid; economy promotion; knowledge transfer; technical-scientific cooperation; socialist cooperation; Southern Opening.

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Introduction

In 1975, Angola and Hungary were separated by two main factors: the huge geographical distance and their completely differing political, economic, and social system and culture. In the subsequent one and a half decades, these were bridged by the common socialist orientation that both countries adopted and that served as the ideological base for bilateral cooperation. Hungary provided significant military aid to the socialist MPLA that ruled Angola;² actively “exported” Hungarian goods, technology and knowledge including through technical advisors and scholarships; and received wounded soldiers for treatment and rehabilitation.³

With the change of regime, relations sunk to a nearly minimum level, up until 2015, when the Hungarian government’s new strategy of ‘Southern Opening’ has put Africa again in the focus of Hungary’s foreign policy. Over the past years, Angola has become a new-old key partner in the Sub-Saharan region and started to see increasing levels of investment by both government and private sector actors. The reopening of the embassy in Luanda in 2017 and the Hungarian foreign minister’s visit in 2018 were further symbolic steps in recognizing the importance of Angola as a potential regional power and strategic partner.

Building on archive documents of the Hungarian National Archive, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry and the Hungarian Red Cross as well as personal accounts of several experts and diplomats, this paper presents the heyday of bilateral cooperation in the 70s and 80s. It analyses the various ‘incentives’ and priorities behind bilateral cooperation and shares insights into the daily realities and challenges experienced at that time. Following that, it describes how relations have gradually declined and then started to revitalise from 2015. It looks at the main motives behind Hungary’s new ‘Southern Opening’, how priorities have evolved or, in contrast, may have remained the very same as back during the socialist era.

Angolan-Hungarian bilateral relations, especially those in the 70s-80s are still an under-researched area, with only one monograph – that covers relations until 1981 (Apáti, 1981) – and this piece of research available. Some of the archives are not yet open to the public, and many of the experts and diplomats could not yet be traced in case they have not yet passed away. The archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Luanda and the formerly accredited Angolan Embassy in Prague may also hold additional valuable resources. These offer interesting further research opportunities to uncover new historical facts and correlations.

² Three movements were fighting against the colonizing Portugal and later against each other for the state power: Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA, Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA, National Unity for the Complete Independence of Angola) and the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA, National Front for the Liberation of Angola).

³ Through the Hungarian Solidarity Committee, Hungary already supported the MPLA from 1967 during the war of independence with military aid, scholarships, and medical treatment.

The Heyday: Bilateral Cooperation in the 70s and 80s

Vision vs. reality

Upon gaining independence from Portugal on 11 November 1975, the MPLA, who was in control of the capital Luanda, immediately proclaimed the People's Republic of Angola and began to build a socialist state. While officially, the newly independent Angola belonged to the group of 'non-aligned' countries, in the bipolar Cold War world order it had to find its own place. As a result of its socialist orientation, it came under the protective wing of the Soviet Union (SU).⁴ Consequently, this determined its 'circle of friends'. As the head of MPLA and the country's first president, Agostinho Neto said: "This choice also defines our relations with the socialist countries: they are our natural allies in the struggle to build a socialist society, in the fight against imperialism" (Gulyás, 1978, p.47).

As part of the Soviet sphere of interest, Hungary also had to align to the foreign policy of the SU. As the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) stated in an internal note: "Our relations with the People's Republic of Angola are determined by the basic principles of our foreign policy; and the practices align to the coordinated strategy of the friendly socialist countries" (MOL, 1987f). This included the expansion of relations with socialist developing countries, among them Angola.⁵

After establishing diplomatic relations on 23 December 1975, diplomat Tibor Újvári arrived in Luanda in April 1976 as a temporary representative to set up the Hungarian Embassy. This was based on the following grounds, which also summarised Hungary's main motives behind bilateral cooperation: Angola's mineral resource wealth; potential as a major market for Hungarian products; strategic importance for the future of the Southern African region; strategic coastal location on the sea route bypassing Africa; connection to the eastern coast by three east-west railways; and the opening of delegations by other socialist countries (MOL, 1976).

Despite the clear visions on both sides, the development of bilateral cooperation did not go smooth. Relations had to be built up from scratch and required constant initiation and pro-activity from the Hungarian side. As the first ambassador, Dr Sándor Árgyelán said: "We were the ones who were on their backs, offering this kind of help, that kind of opportunity (...). Because they didn't know how, they didn't have the experience" (Interview with Dr Sándor Árgyelán..., 2005). During the colonial times, the vast majority of Angolans did not have access to any education; and even those who did, could not gain experience in public administration, while they had to take up senior roles post-independence.

⁴ The Soviet Union supported the MPLA with arms and money during the war of independence already. It also educated many of its leaders in Moscow universities. In contrast, the rival insurgents UNITA and FNLA received financial and logistical support and arms supplies from the United States, the South African Republic and Western European countries.

⁵ In addition to Afghanistan, Benin, Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Yemen (Árgyelán, 1983. p.185).



Between 1977-1981, the two countries concluded a range of bilateral agreements, including, just to name a few, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation for twenty years, a Technical and Scientific Cooperation Agreement, Trade Agreement, Cultural Agreement, Health Cooperation Agreement, Television Cooperation Agreement, Inter-Bank Cooperation Agreement, Inter-Party Cooperation Agreement and so on (MOL, 1982b). However, their entry into force often delayed several years because Angolans were not yet aware of the diplomatic procedures (MOL, 1983c; MOL, 1984b). András Gulyás, Hungary's ambassador between 1983-1987 also wrote in a diplomatic note: "On several occasions, it was the pro-activity of the Hungarian Embassy that helped to move a case from a standstill and stuck in the local authorities' bureaucracy" (MOL, 1986a). It is no wonder that in his 1987 annual ambassadorial report, Gulyás described Hungary's position as follows: "We have managed to secure a modest but recognised presence" (MOL, 1987e), which, despite the eleven years of the Embassy's existence, counted as a significant achievement.

Technical advisory and hands-on labour

One of the backbones of bilateral cooperation was the deployment of Hungarian experts to Angola for five to ten years to advise and train Angolan counterparts in various trades. Between 1977-1989, nearly 140 Hungarian experts worked in the country either on existing industrial and agricultural plants that managed to escape the destruction of the civil war or in newly established ones, set up through Hungarian material support. The technical advisory programme was based on a Technical and Scientific Cooperation signed by the two countries in September 1977 and coordinated by the state company known as TESCO (International Office for Technical and Scientific Cooperation).⁶

The biggest group, some 10-12 specialists at a time of the Székesfehérvár factory, were deployed to the bus assembly plant in Viana where they assembled Ikarus bodywork on Volvo and Scania chassis.⁷ Specialists of Pannonauto (in Pécs) worked in the Manauto 3 repair plant (near Caxito) where they did general repairs on Ikarus engines and bodywork. Hungarian rubber experts helped to restart production in the rubber factory in Luanda. Draughtsmen, milling, mechanical engineering, metallurgy, geological and water research specialists were also deployed. Hungarian agriculture experts taught soil conservation and organised the restart of the Kangua Agricultural Secondary School in Uíge. A professor from the Agricultural University of Gödöllő spent three years at the Huambo College of Agriculture in 1979-81 as a crop production consultant and instructor and took part in the establishment of the university's instructional farm (MOL, 1988d). Hungarian poultry experts helped to organise the national breeding network and a fish breeding expert worked in Huambo for two years. A

⁶ During the socialist era, Hungary signed such agreements with 57 developing countries. TESCO also opened a representation in Luanda in July 1977. After it closed in 1982, the representative in Maputo visited Angola three or four times a year until that office also closed in 1986. TESCO was only responsible for arranging the deployments, but not for the local employment terms and conditions.

⁷ Initially, they were mounting on Ikarus bodywork, but these did not cope with the conditions in Luanda: passengers crowded in the rear part, and the bodywork could not withstand the weight, broke into two and the rear of the bus tore off.

dozen of veterinarians supported the 1980 veterinary and vaccination campaign of the socialist countries' Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CfMEA).

Hungarian pharmacists helped to merge two pharmaceutical laboratories and established the first pharmaceutical factory in Angola. Hungarian Red Cross expert, Dr Gergely Kovách consulted on the management of the Angolan Red Cross and the set-up of the national blood donation service. In 1980, he also prepared a study on how to organise the ambulance service in Luanda.⁸ Another Red Cross expert, Dr Imre Horváth trained Red Cross staff on basic first aid and home nursing in 1981 (MVÖ, 1981), helped to establish the Angolan Red Cross Training Centre and took part in organising the national ambulance service (MÖV, 1980). Hungary also sent surgeons, gynaecologists, midwives, virologists and, at Angola's request, a swimming and football coach. Furthermore, in the late 1980s, a Hungarian economist was a personal advisor to the Minister of Planning.

One of the most successful areas was the six-year long policy advisory by a team of economists led by György Tallós, former Deputy Governor of the Hungarian National Bank upon the personal request of the (late) Angolan president, José Eduardo dos Santos (MOL, 1983d; MOL, 1986c). Between 1984-1990, the team advised and commented on several draft plans relating to the Angolan fiscal, monetary and credit policy, foreign exchange and trade policy, state-corporate relations, the banking system, taxing, insurance and customs, international financial organisations and so on. In a 1988 report, Tallós noted two major achievements of their work, namely "convincing Angola that the centralised planned economy model could not be successfully applied in the Angolan context"; and "effectively preventing a hasty, economically ill-founded and technically unprepared monetary reform in 1984 on their first visit just before its introduction" (MOL, 1988e). The delegation also played a major role in the development of the 1987 economic reform programme. An indirect and unintended result of the consultancy, and in fact the biggest benefit for Hungary was that Angola made sure it had no debts to Hungary to keep the service provision ongoing. Thus, even if for a short while only, Hungary was the only country which did not have any receivables in Angola (MOL, 1988b).⁹

Originally, Hungary envisaged to send 134 senior experts by 1980, however, it could only manage to deploy 33, and later the numbers kept steadily declining (MOL, 1981d). Even though Angola continuously asked for more specialists and for longer periods, as then TESCO chief, István Bene wrote in a 1989 background brief, they were not able to provide the basic agreed support such as housing and transport (MOL, 1989b). Other archive notes mentioned

⁸ The Hungarian Red Cross was also active in humanitarian support: between 1975-1985, it delivered food, medicine, and clothes worth over 50 million Hungarian forints (at then value) either through own collection or on behalf of the Foreign Ministry, the Hungarian Solidarity Committee, the National Council of Trade Unions, the National Women's Council and the HSWP (MOL, 1987b).

⁹ Angola covered the bulk of the consultancy costs, with Hungary spending around 6.5 million Hungarian forints a year (at then value). The last consultation took place in Budapest between 10-13 July 1990. The Angolan side did not prepare the economic documents for the meeting, it changed currency, which Hungary opposed, and did not give a date for the next consultation in November 1990. As a result of the latter, the work of the Tallós delegation implicitly came to an end (KÜM, 1991a).



general lack of preparation, slow response to technical offers, and difficulties in ensuring employment and technical conditions (MOL, 1977c). Experts were not only required to provide trainings and advisory, but to also carry out actual on-the-ground operational tasks, as Angolans were generally unskilled in both managerial and technical aspects.¹⁰ It must also be added, however, that Hungary did not always send out technical offers on time, managed to offer the right profile or offer a replacement if someone cancelled the mission (MOL, 1980b).

Around 90 percent of the experts were paid, where all the costs were to be borne by Angola. The rest were so-called unpaid/free-of-charge, where Angola was to cover the costs of travel only. In both cases, however, Angola was required to provide accommodation, board, and transport (MOL, 1978a). Depending on qualifications and experience, experts were remunerated between 730-1290 US dollars, which was considered a particularly high amount at that time (Interview with Ágoston..., 2006). Working abroad had a high prestige and despite the circumstances and risks amidst the civil war, many were willing to go, and in fact stay longer than returning home (Interview with Attila..., 2006). The only bigger difficulty was the language as at that time Portuguese was an even more rare language in Hungary.

Added benefits: potential new markets

Once, under Soviet pressure, Hungary had to take part in the activities of CfMEA in Angola, it tried to do it in a way that it also benefitted itself. This became particularly important from the mid-80s when Hungary's own economic situation also started to worsen, while Angola's debts also kept piling up. Despite the trade office set up at the Embassy in Luanda (Interview with Dr Sándor Perjés..., 2006) and the 1977 bilateral Trade Agreement, which promised a most favoured treatment for Angola, Angolan-Hungarian trade relations remained one-sided throughout the 70s and 80s. Hungary asked for sisal and industrial diamonds, but Angola could only offer coffee and, in smaller quantities, kerosene until 1980 and once more in 1986.

In contrast, Hungarian export included bus engines, spare parts and bodywork parts, telephone centre spare parts, medicines, technical and vacuum equipment, footwear, dry pasta, breeding eggs, baby chicks and animal feed. Hungarian Ikarus buses 'conquered' Angola from 1979 when the foreign trade company Mogürt signed an 11-year agreement with the Angolan company ENACMA for the delivery of bodywork to the Viana plant. The plan was to produce 9,000 buses by 1990, however, due to the constant delays in payments, by 1986, only a tenth of them could be finished. In 1980, Mogürt also signed a contract worth 1.5 million US dollars to deliver supply parts (together with Pannonauto specialists) to the Manauto 3 site. The 'autobus cooperation' between Angola and Hungary was not just profitable for Hungary (at least until Angola could pay till the late 80s), but also significant, amounting to between half and two-thirds of the total Hungarian export to Angola. Ambitions were also quite high: Agostinho Neto wanted to organise Luanda's public transport (including vehicles,

¹⁰ Other socialist countries encountered the same challenges and downscaled the sending of experts, with the exception of Cuba.

maintenance, and personnel) through the Ikarus buses. The Hungarian leadership also wanted to supply the whole of Southern Africa through the factories in Angola and Mozambique.

The second largest exporter was the foreign trade company Budavox. From 1981 onwards, Budavox delivered various telecommunication, VHF and SWR equipment and telephone centre parts manufactured in the Budapest Radio Engineering Factory. Export values generally made up a third of the total annual to Angola, fluctuating between 152,000 and 2.5 million US dollars per year, depending on the orders and capacity of payment.

From 1979, the Bábolna Agricultural Combine exported broilers and breeding eggs, accounting for some 15 per cent of all Hungarian exports. Baby chicks were transported by MALÉV on IL-18 cargo flights on the route of Budapest-Tripoli-Cano-Luanda and some 500kms further down to the Bábolna plant in Cacuso (Malanje province). Almost half of the chicks died during the marathon journey. By the late 1980s, Angola became unable to pay, thus both the plant and the exports were suspended.¹¹ Under the bilateral agricultural agreement, Hungary also set up a pig farm in Cada, and a freshwater fish farm in Huambo, through the Agroinvest Foreign Trade Company and with the help of specialists from the Agricultural College of Szarvas.

The fourth biggest area was the export of pharmaceuticals by the company Medimpex and the export of medical equipment by Medicor. Both Medimpex and Angola wanted to scale up the export volumes: the former because it was generating profits, the latter because of the disastrous quality of healthcare in the country and the non-existing pharmaceutical industry (MOL, 1987c). Payment difficulties have, however, led to halting deliveries by the late 1980s. Medicor shipments went, for example, to hospitals in Lubango and Malanje, worth 20 million US dollars in 1981 (MOL, 1981a).

In the first few years, Hungary also exported clothing items through Hungarotex and Tanimpex, and from 1979, machinery, such as combine header adapters of the company Komplex. Hungary also planned to set up several other factories, such as lamp and fluorescent tube production through Tungsram in Huambo, television assembly and servicing through Videoton, as well as metallurgic, foundry, cable production, shoe and ready-to-wear clothes factories and cultivation of tropic plants, after similar plans had failed in Cuba.

Table 1 provides an overview of the – generally fluctuating – annual export and import values and balance from 1975 to 1988, just before the change of regime.

¹¹ Archive sources also describe that Angola could not obtain necessary fodder, and when it could, hunger was so huge that people ate it up instead of feeding the animals (MOL, 1980c).

	Export	Import	Balance
1975	0.1	-	+0.1
1976	0.5	8.5	-8
1977	5.5	24.5	-19
1978	4.7	0	+4.7
1979	7.8	3.5	+4.2
1980	10.6	1.8	+8.8
1981	13.5	-	+13.5
1982	6.7	-	+6.7
1983	1.7	0.24	+1.5
1984	4.3	-	+4.3
1985	5.5	-	+5.5
1986	4.1	0.4	+3.7
1987	1.9	-	+1.9
1988	8.1	-	+8.1
TOTAL	75	38.94	+36.06

Table 1: Direct Hungarian exports and imports (in US million dollars) Source: MOL, 1983a; MOL, 1987c; MOL, 1988a.

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of Hungarian export and import products in 1986.

	Company	Products	Total value (US\$)
	EXPORT	Mogürt	handtools
		autobus bodywork	22,570
HUNGARIAN BUSEXPORT		autobus bodywork	2,405,804
TECHNIKA		machinery	44,800
MEDIMPEX		pharmaceuticals	716,672
BUDAVOX		telephone centre spare parts	14,505
		URH transceiver equipment	755,779
MEDICOR		X-ray car	45,085
		medical X-ray	16,923
AGRÁRIA BÁBOLNA		baby chicks	64,000
MALÉV	kerosene	5,313	
	TOTAL		4,111,007
	Company	Products	Total value (US\$)
	IMPORT	MONIMPEX	raw coffee (150 tons)
MALÉV		kerosene	3,575
TOTAL			377,575

Table 2: Distribution of Hungarian export and import products and their total value in 1986 (in US dollars) Source: MOL, 1987c. Similar summary tables or individual data from previous years were not available in publicly researchable documents.

Embassy reports reveal that until 1979, the Hungarian National Bank tried to slow down the pace of Hungarian exports. This was due to concerns that Angola would not be able to pay back the company and bank loans that financed the deliveries (MOL, 1983a). For the same reason, from 1979, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Trade also proposed a ceiling that was not advised to exceed in the level of export.

Scholarships and study trips – informal advertisement for Hungary

Upon gaining independence, Angola faced a severe shortage of skilled professionals. The Ministries of Education and Planning made it clear that secondary education and the training of teachers were their priorities. Sending Hungarian secondary school teachers who spoke at least Portuguese or Spanish and free of charge to Angola seemed rather unfeasible and it would have cost a lot of money. Therefore, Hungary opted for providing scholarships in two distinct ways.

In the 1977 Technical and Scientific Cooperation agreement, Hungary offered 50 scholarships per year (decreased to 30 from 1983) for secondary or post-graduate courses and shorter or longer study trips. Scholarships were offered by the HSWP, the National Council of Trade Unions or the Hungarian Solidarity Committee, among others, and the receipt of students was organised by TESCO. The Agricultural University in Gödöllő also ran three-month livestock training courses.

Between 1977-1988, the following students were received:

Year	Number of students	Course	Duration
1977	2	pharmacist	2 months
1978	18	poultry breeding	1 year
1979	12	electrician	4 months
1980	15	TV specialist	6 months
1985	9	pharmacist	2 months
	14	car mechanic	5 years
1986	3	football trainer	1 month
1987	10	pharmacist	3 months
	12	car mechanic	8 months
	3	education specialist	10 days
1988	3	agriculture specialist	2 months
	9	car mechanic	6 months
TOTAL	110		

Table 3: List of trainings and scholarship students received between 1977-1988 in the organisation of TESCO. Source: KÜM, 1992a.

For (non-military) higher education, scholarships were offered under the 1975 Cultural Agreement and organised by the Foreign Scholarship Department of the Ministry of Culture. Scholarships covered a wide variety of subjects such as medicine, mechanical and electrical engineering, law, food chemistry, zoology, economics, business management, cartography,

geophysics etc. There were also scholarships for short study trips such as a two-month training course for a kindergarten teacher, and two staff of the Angolan State Secretary for Social Care in 1981 and a three-week study trip for two publishing experts in 1988.

Between 1979-1987, higher education scholarships were offered by Hungary and used by Angola as follows:

Academic year	Number of places offered	Number of applicants accepted	Number of applicants arrived
1979/80	8	7	-
1980/81	13	no applications received	-
1981/82	5	5	5
1982/83	5	5	5
1983/84	10	9	9
1984/85	10	6	5
1985/86	10	6	6
1986/87	13	12	10
TOTAL	74	50	40

Table 4: Number of scholarship places offered and used between 1979-1987. Source: MOL, 1987a.

After 1989, Hungary only offered three places a year, and from 1991, students also had to pay tuition (KÜM 1991b; KÜM 1991d).

Applicants were selected by Angola, thus having good connections played an important role. Angola covered the flights, while everything else was paid for by Hungary. Delegations received accommodation, breakfast, a daily allowance, and an interpreter. Scholarship students were provided a stipend, free medical care, discounted accommodation, meals and medicines and a clothing and school supply allowance.

Until 1981, Angola did not prioritise the use of the available scholarship places. Later, it filled the quota, but many applicants could not be accepted to either secondary or tertiary level because of their very low level of education or too high age (MOL, 1980a). Many of them were already drop-outs at home, and many of whom who were accepted and eventually arrived dropped out later in Hungary (MOL 1988c). By 1991, only some fifty students graduated (KÜM 1991b). As recounted by Ágoston Zács, the international coordinator of TESCO at that time, most of them enjoyed studying in Hungary and tried to find a way to stay on (Interview with Ágoston..., 2006). Therefore, out of political considerations, they were allowed a home visit every three years so as not to lose touch with the Angolan soil and reality.

Military training, arms supplies and rehabilitation

The largest chapter of scholarship provision was the four-year officer and two-year deputy officer training at the then Zalka Máté Military-Technical College in Budapest, the Kossuth Lajos Military College in Szentendre and the Air Defence Training Centre in Debrecen.

Between 1983-1992, more than 100 Angolan military students completed their studies in Hungary and served in the highest ranks upon returning home. The training was governed by the foreign trade agreements called TAN-1, TAN-2, TAN-3, TAN-4, and their amendments, concluded between the International Cooperation Cabinet of the Angolan Ministry of Defence and the Hungarian foreign trade company Technika on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

Officers were trained free of charge, while deputy officers for a monthly fee of 400 US dollars (MOL, 1985a). Specialisations included mechanised gunners, intelligence, anti-aircraft missiles, radio locators, armoured and automotive engineering, combat engineering, chemical engineering, military finance. The training was adapted to the context at home: for instance, it included fewer hours of gunnery, since students entered the classroom right from the battlefield (MOL, 1986b). Angola oversaw the selection of participants: a minimum of five per year with at least ten grades completed. Scholarship places were not always fully used, or they had to be rescheduled to the subsequent year as Angola often did not sign the training contract in time. From the mid-80s, Angola's worsening economic situation prevented it to pay for the tuition and following the accumulation of a total debt of 720,800 US dollars by July 1992 (KÜM, 1992b), the 82 remaining students were called back home, and the scholarship scheme was suspended.

Besides training, Hungary also offered medical treatment and rehabilitation to wounded MPLA soldiers from as early as 1965. Later, in the 80s, an average of ten soldiers were received every six months free of charge, Angola only had to cover the travel costs (MOL, 1983b). Most of the patients were only between 18-25 years of age. Rehabilitation took place in the then state-run Fodor Sanatorium. Hungary was a popular destination among those waiting for artificial limbs and rehabilitation as they could access high-quality equipment made with Western German technology at affordable prices (Interview with István Szigetvári..., 2006). Prostheses were not always perfect though: it often happened that an Angolan patient received a white-colour limb replacement. As he refused to return home, the prosthesis had to be painted before.

Generally, military cooperation was one of the most active areas of bilateral relations. In 1982, the two countries signed Cooperation Guidelines between the two Ministries of Defence. In addition to officer trainings and medical care, Hungary sent various military aid shipments to the MPLA on multiple occasions to support their armed struggle, first against the Portuguese, then against the UNITA (MOL, 1981c). Shipments – worth a grand total of 287.6 million forints (at values at that time, based on available archive data in MOL, 1977b; MOL, 1981c; MOL, 1982a; MOL, 1980d; MOL, 1977a) – included small arms, munitions, tents, military uniforms, typewriters, medical items, food and in one case, even a full battalion of 66 tanks of type T-34. Lastly, throughout the 80s, Hungary also hosted Angolan military officers and their families for rest and recuperation, usually six per year, among whom was also the Minister of Defence Pedro Maria Tonha 'Pedalé' in 1984. They were accommodated in the biggest resort of the defence forces in Balatonkenese, and provided with free board, general

medical screening, free time and cultural programmes, shopping in Skála and similar recreational activities (MOL 1981b; MOL 1984a; MOL 1989a; MOL 1987d; Interview with István Szigetvári..., 2006).

Changing Regimes, Changing Priorities

Despite the promising start, from the mid-80s, bilateral relations and cooperation started to systemically decline. Several factors led to this.

Due to its internal economic difficulties, from 1981 onwards Angola was more and more unable to repay its accumulating debts to both Hungary and its other lenders (in both the socialist bloc and Western Europe). In February 1982, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Trade suspended all shipments and the issuance of new credit authorisations, tied cash transactions to a special permit and only authorised shipments with third-country bank guarantee. It also put Angola on the list of 'C' countries, which were subject to strict financial assessment and individual control. Bilateral economic relations therefore stagnated. Angola had to ask for a moratorium, as a result of which several rounds of debt rescheduling took place until 1989.¹² After the first round, and the slow restart of repayments, the Ministry re-authorised the shipments. However, the pertaining delays in bank transfers discouraged the Hungarian companies, exporting based on company or bank credits, from scaling up the volume of shipments to previous levels.

The deployment of experts and offering of scholarships by Hungary had a double objective. On the one hand, they aimed to support the development of Angola's economy and human capital. On the other, they served as an 'informal advertisement' to help promote the Hungarian economy, find markets for Hungarian products and source raw materials that Hungary did not have. The latter two aspirations did not materialize, however. While experts helped to build business contacts and scholars were shown the 'Hungarian economic achievements', this did not translate into increased trade flows. Angola lacked an exportable commodity base due to both its underdeveloped economy and ongoing civil war hindering agricultural production and mineral resource extraction (just as general industrial production).

The early 80s also saw the Hungarian economy entering a recession with increasing debt levels (Pritz, 2004, p.13). Thus, the government was forced to make savings in those external relations that were essentially based on free services, such as those with Angola. Even though the country was officially considered a "priority relationship" in Sub-Saharan Africa (MOL, 1985b). The instructions given to Ambassador József Németh, assuming his post in 1987,

¹² In 1998, the total debts totalled some 14 million US dollars (consisting of 2.7 million in debt plus interest on arrears) according to the Ministry of Finance. As time went on, debt recovery became more and more difficult. In a March 1998 fax sent to the Ministry of Finance by János Budai, the then Hungarian Ambassador to Pretoria, it was mentioned that the Angolan High Command had set a priority for repayments and "the Hungarian claim [was] not included in it". In 2002, Angola's debt was transferred (together with that of Cuba) to the Hungarian Claims Management Company that was managing certain foreign state debts (KÜM, 1998).

illustrated this shift: "In developing relations, we seek those opportunities which produce a significant political result with small financial investment (e.g., solidarity messages, declarations, medical treatment, scholarships, holiday visits). (...) In our economic relations, we keep those areas where there is solvent demand. (...) In case of aid to Angola, we look for opportunities where we can act as contractors or consultants in third-party-funded programmes" (MOL, 1987f). From 1986, TESCO also prioritised the training of Angolan experts, paid for in Hungarian currency, instead of sending out Hungarian experts, that required transactions in foreign currency (MOL, 1989c). Angola equally preferred to reduce the number of experts to host as it took out a significant amount from its budget while most of them were in fact unutilised on the plants due to the stalling production.

In general, the Angolan government appreciated the technical and material assistance provided by Hungary. However, in its foreign policy, it applied certain categories and Hungary fell into the second one together with other European socialist 'friends'.¹³ The first category included Cuba, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Hungary was placed at the same level with Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, even though Bulgarians were having much more advanced relations with Angola.

It must also be noted that, in an assessment by the Hungarian foreign leadership, only the top Angolan leadership seemed to effectively believe in the socialist path and in the idea of building relations based on a common socialist ideology, and not even all of them. At mid-management level, which was primarily responsible for operationalising the actual cooperation, this was not self-evident (MOL, 1981e).

With the change of regime (in both countries), Angola almost completely disappeared from the horizon of the Hungarian foreign policy. Hungary's main priorities became to integrate in the political, economic, and military community of Western Europe, establish friendly relations with the neighbouring countries in the interest of Hungarian minorities and dismantle institutional relations with the former Soviet bloc. Trade relations with Angola were only considered in case of company- or bank-level barter transactions (since Angola could hardly pay in cash), and possibly in the food or light industry (MOL, 1989d). At one of the last official Angolan visits – led by the deputy Defence Minister –, Hungary made it clear, that in the future, it can engage in commercial transactions only and based on mutual interests (KÜM, 1991c).

Military relations also sank to a minimum level and were limited to Hungary's participation in the peace-keeping missions of the UN. Hungary deployed ten soldiers and a 15-member police contingent to UNAVEM II (1991-1995) and UNAVEM III (1995-1997) (KÜM, 1992b). They were followed by a three-member military and eight-member police contingent in MONUA (1997-1999) (Besenyő, 2015).

¹³ The publicly available Hungarian National Archive material does not contain the criteria of categorisation. The internal records of the Angolan Foreign Ministry from this period might provide an answer to this (MOL, 1978a).

Due to the renewed outbreak of fighting, in November 1992, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs evacuated the entire embassy staff. While initially there was an intention to return, on 30 June 1993 the mission was closed down, claiming general budgetary difficulties in foreign affairs.¹⁴

The late 90s and early 2000s have started to mark a new era in reinstating bilateral relations. As the then Angolan ambassador accredited from Prague, Manuel Quarta ‘Punza’ noted in his letter to President Árpád Göncz, the volume of cooperation was below potential and Hungary should act as a bridge within the Central and Eastern European region to develop relations (KÜM, 1997). Angolan Deputy Foreign Minister Chicoty also noted on his 2001 visit to Hungary that there would be opportunities for Hungarian companies in Angola to help rebuild the infrastructure damaged by the civil war (KÜM, 2001).¹⁵

By joining the European Union (EU) in 2004, Hungary has also joined several common EU policies, including those related to foreign and security affairs, and development cooperation, including the joint strategic approach to the EU-Africa relations. Hungary’s EU membership marked a new period, with the new objective to explore the opportunities the membership offered (T. Horváth, 2020, p.34). The political dialogue with the continent has centred around four main pillars: peace and security, good governance, regional integration and trade, and development for poverty reduction. As a member, Hungary has also been contributing to the European Development Fund (EDF), alongside other multilateral channels pooled by the UN, the World bank, and regional development banks and funds (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2020). While Hungarian state, business and non-profit actors may access funds and opportunities through these, bilateral relations need to be rebuilt and strengthened separately.

In September 2004, Angola opened its embassy in Hungary to facilitate the revival of bilateral cooperation. As the then ambassador João Miguel Vahekeni put, there were already several directions for the development of bilateral relations: “It is not that we are asking for money, not at all. Angola is a huge country in the process of reconstruction. It needs to rebuild the infrastructure that has been destroyed, to rebuild the small villages, to reorganise the schools, to reorganise agriculture and to lead them. We are looking for partners, engineers, doctors, geologists, etc., to participate in this reconstruction” (Interview with João Miguel..., 2006).

¹⁴ Hungary thought to fill the diplomatic void first by accrediting the ambassador in Zimbabwe or in Portugal. Finally, the ambassador in South Africa was accredited. The reopening of the mission was not possible. From the earlier ten, only three embassies remained operational, and even those with small teams only.

¹⁵ The late UNITA head, Jonas Savimbi, also noted at one point that in case of a new government in Angola, led by the opposition, they would not consider cooperating with the GDR and Czechoslovakia, but for Hungary, there would be opportunities on the Angolan market (Interview with Dr András Gulyás..., 2006).

Southern Opening: A New Beginning with Old-New Priorities

Recognizing the explosive growth of African economies over the past two decades and the untapped potentials the continent offers (Marsai, 2020), Hungary has also adjusted and renewed its geographic focus. Following and aligned to the 2011 strategy of 'global opening', in 2015 it has announced its policy of 'southern opening' aiming at revitalizing external (economic) relations with Sub-Saharan Africa (as well as Latin America, Asia and the Pacific) (T. Horváth, 2020, p.35).

The policy specifically aims at opening new opportunities for Hungarian companies in new markets, among others, in infrastructure development, agro-industrial development and water management. It also serves to promote the country and nurture relations with the Hungarian diaspora. Importantly, it links political and economic decisions, relationship-building and investments to relieve the migration pressure from the 'South' to Europe. As part of the policy, Hungary aims to conclude several bilateral, economic, and technical cooperation agreements, intergovernmental framework and inter-ministerial agreements on education, and reciprocal visa waiver agreements.

At the launch of the policy (at the 2nd Budapest Africa Forum), Hungarian Foreign Minister, Szijjártó Péter said that Hungary acted still in time in the global race for the leading positions in economic cooperation with Africa (Magyarország Kormánya, 2015). Indeed, the competition is fierce, with former colonial powers, newly emerging powers (such as BRICS), the US, Japan, Turkey and several smaller European countries all in the field. This current, third 'scramble for Africa' (after the 19th century colonisation and 20th century cold war rivalry) focuses on the same as the first two: resources, energy, and raw materials (Marshall, 2016, p.170). Marsai (2020, p.11) argues that in the pursuit of new economic opportunities, Hungary can build on a range of advantages. This includes the fact that it is not perceived as a big former colonial power and local leaders often favour smaller states over bigger ones to have negotiations as equal partners. There is an endless range of investment needs at small- and mid-size enterprise levels that bigger actors have no capacity to cover. Furthermore, Hungary can access EU funds through its multiple voluminous EDF contributions to implement socio-economic development projects, which in turn strengthen its image and power in follow-on profit-oriented deals.

Under the strategy of 'southern opening', Angola has emerged as a key new-old partner for Hungary. This is not by coincidence, considering its huge geoeconomic potentials including a range of renewable and non-renewable natural resources such as oil, natural gas, diamonds, fertile agricultural and grazing lands, rivers with large hydro-electric potential, industrial fishing grounds, sea access for maritime trade, natural sights, flora and fauna, ethnic and cultural heritage (Hodges, 2004, p.101). Over the past two decades, Angola has been among the fastest growing economies globally (T. Horváth, 2020, p.31; Búr, 2020, pp.174-75). In addition, the two decades of past cooperation during the socialist period has developed a



strong social capital and connections, which make it easier to upgrade relations than starting them from zero.

The driving logic and areas of cooperation so far already show significant resemblance to the past. The backbone of relations is the provision of scholarships to Angolan students through the programme *Stipendium Hungaricum*. Launched in 2017, the scheme allows 50 bachelor, master, or doctoral students to pursue studies in various fields fully funded by the Hungarian government, with a prioritization of engineering, technology, health, and agricultural sciences¹⁶ (TPA, 2020; *Jornal de Angola*, 2018; *Jornal de Angola*, 2020b). On the one hand, the scholarship programme aims at enabling Angolan students to obtain competitive knowledge in the global labour market. On the other, it functions as a tool of ‘soft power’ in developing commercial, economic, scientific, and other relations with the home country of the students, who upon graduation can return home with fond memories of their time in Hungary and function as a ‘cultural ambassador’ in promoting bilateral ties (T. Horváth, 2020, p.39; Tarrósy, 2020, p.27). Thus, the programme can be interpreted as a renewed version of the socialist period’s scholarship scheme and the concept of ‘informal advertisement’.

When it comes to trade and economic relations, the primary objectives of the Hungarian foreign (economic) policy are similar to those of the 70s and 80s: to diversify export markets, allocate profitable investments, attract foreign investors, boost tourism to Hungary, stimulate cultural dialogue, and find allies for representing Hungarian positions and interests in international fora (Suha, 2020, p.50). The priority sectors include agriculture, (potable) water supply, basic sanitation, and electricity distribution in rural areas (*Jornal de Angola*, 2019a), as well as technology, industry, transport, higher education, culture, sports (*Jornal de Angola*, 2022). Hungary may be able to import larger quantities of iron ore and other mineral resources (Búr, 2020, pp.179-180), invest in emerging manufacturing industries (such as metal processing, textiles, cement, tobacco, food processing, and brewery); and exploit the purchasing power for its products thanks to the revenues from the oil sector.

Recent government information already highlights significant investments by Hungarian companies including the establishment of thirteen water supply plants by Hungarian Water Technology Corporation, as well as the renovation of previously installed Hungarian gas turbines, each in the value of some 100 million US dollars (Magyarország Kormánya, 2022). A Hungarian company is producing Angola’s biometric passports (Magyarország Kormánya, 2021) of an investment value of some 145 million US dollars (*Jornal de Angola*, 2022). Loans are usually provided by (the Hungarian) Eximbank (T. Horváth, 2020, p.38), which has set up a fund of 40 million Euros to help Hungarian companies set up production, research, and development capabilities in the country and opened a credit line of some 135 million Euros to support bilateral trade (Angola Embassy, 2019, p.3.).

¹⁶ The number of scholarships has been increased from 20 to 50 on the occasion of the Hungarian Foreign Minister’s visit in February 2018. Angola only has to cover the flight costs for the students (*Jornal de Angola*, 2019a).

As in past times, the volume of Hungarian export to Angola significantly exceeds Angolan export to Hungary for the time being. This will most likely remain so in the foreseeable future. According to Hungarian Central Statistical Office data, external trade in goods over the past two decades has been as follows (see *Table 5*):

	Export to Angola	Import from Angola	Balance (for Hungary)
2001	100.2	0.8	+99.4
2002	112.3	24.1	+88.2
2003	295.1	2	+293.1
2004	208.4	-	+208.4
2005	756	0.2	+755.8
2006	1059.6	0	+1059.6
2007	825.7	-	+825.7
2008	803.8	-	+803.8
2009	653.3	11.7	+641.6
2010	489.4	-	+489.4
2011	1026.5	-	+1026.5
2012	14654.7	2.1	+14652.6
2013	1137.3	0.1	+1137.2
2014	6605.4	0.3	+6605.1
2015	1628.6	0	+1628.6
2016	1573.3	0.1	+1573.2
2017	12468.4	6.4	+12462
2018	1662.8	-	+1662.8
2019	657.9	63.6	+594.3
2020	1259	63.7	+1195.3
2021	2558.1	4.7	+2553.4

Table 5: External trade in goods at current prices in Hungarian million forints between 2001-2021.
Source: KSH, 2021.

The two countries also aim to revive cooperation in the areas of security and defense. From Hungarian perspective, Angola is among the notable examples of African countries with minimal outward migration thanks to maintaining its security and developing its economy (Magyarország Kormánya, 2021). It has also strengthened border control against refugee flows from neighbouring countries (T. Horváth, 2020, p.38). The increase of scholarship places (from an annual 20 to 50) facilitates training opportunities for Angolan military officers and deputy officers as well, similarly to the training scheme in the 70s-80s (Index, 2018). Furthermore, Angola has been interested in replicating the Hungarian border control system (consisting of cameras, electrified fences, and a remote-control centre) to reduce its vulnerabilities, particularly in the North, to control population flow and natural resource traffic, and to strengthen its overall security (Jornal de Angola, 2020a).



In 2016, Hungary reopened its embassy in Luanda, officially inaugurated at the 2018 visit of the Hungarian Foreign Minister. This has also indicated the elevation of bilateral relations to a higher level (Búr, 2020, p.180). The two countries have also already signed a range of agreements. In 2016, they concluded an economic cooperation agreement (Jornal de Angola, 2019a) setting up a Joint Economic Commission. In 2019, they signed an economic and technical-scientific cooperation agreement and a visa waiver agreement for diplomatic and service passports. 2020 saw the conclusion of exchange agreements between the Angolan and Hungarian Institutes of International Relations and Trade, as well as the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry (Jornal de Angola, 2021). In 2022, they also signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between the Agency for Private Investment and Promotion of Exports of Angola and the Hungarian Export Agency; between the Ministry of Energy and Water and Hungarian Water Technology Corporation; between the two countries' aeronautical authorities; as well as the Angolan and Hungarian Public Televisions (Jornal de Angola, 2022). Under negotiations are agreements on the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments; on double taxation; and on bilateral air services, to allow the Angolan state airline TAAG flights to fly the route of Luanda-Moscow-Budapest to boost direct passenger and cargo traffic (Magyarország Kormánya, 2020).

Conclusion: Future Outlooks

The 'Southern Opening' will not bring a radical overhaul of the priorities of the Hungarian foreign policy (Marsai, 2020, p.12). That said, Sub-Saharan Africa, including Angola will undoubtedly receive a stronger focus over the coming years following a quarter of a decade of very limited attention. As we have seen, Angola is among the key partners again, and Hungarian priorities have hardly changed since the 70s, nor have the forms of developing bilateral cooperation, such as the provision of scholarships, the export of Hungarian capital, goods and expertise and a range of agreements in various fields. Hungarian companies could potentially have several opportunities to support and benefit from the still ongoing reconstruction of post-civil war Angola. Some are able to invest independently, albeit on credit, some may need to rely on multilateral and third-party financing.

The common history and past cooperation in this case certainly provide a good basis and advantages for scaling up relations and the related economic, trade, cultural, and political initiatives. However, there are also a range of challenges, such as pervasive corruption, complex bureaucracy, and unreliability of infrastructure in Angola, geographic distance, cultural differences, misconceptions, and limited knowledge among most Hungarian entrepreneurs, who tend to have low levels of capital and be rather risk averse (Marsai, 2020, p.15). Yet, the Hungarian private sector will need to take up the task and pro-actively initiate, explore, and invest, building on the opportunities facilitated by governmental and international, multilateral sources (such as the EU, the various United Nations agencies and funds, the World Bank, the African Development Bank etc.). In this, the experience and

knowledge accumulated by the Hungarian academic and civil society sector on Africa in general and Angola in particular can further facilitate decision-making, priority-setting and relationship development (Suha, 2020, p.50) with a view to both mutual economic and financial interests and enabling inclusive and sustainable development.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank all the former diplomats and experts for their time and valuable contributions to this research by sharing their professional experience, personal memories, and analytical insights during the interviews. In particular, I express my sincere gratitude to late Dr Sándor Árgyelán, former and first ambassador of Hungary to Luanda for providing irreplaceable pieces of information and expert guidance and advice on multiple occasions throughout the research process. Special thanks also go to the Virágh family for taking hours of their time to recount details of their years and everyday life as a foreign expert family on-the-ground.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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