

RÁBA – Running Down a Dream¹

The Hungarian Mission in North Africa, Egypt

Borbála Horváth²

Abstract:

This article aims to introduce to the reader the story of the RÁBA Hungarian machinery factory and its connections to North-Africa. As the RÁBA consortium was one of the largest industrial company in Hungary from the beginning of the 20th century, it surely has a long history with Africa to be told. The article firstly gives a historical review of the company, then it turns to describe the role of the machinery factory in the international trade and then the life of the famous Mr. Ede Horváth (CEO of RÁBA), a relative of the author gets to be examined. The article then takes every era of Egyptian politics (the Infitāh with Sadat, the Mubarak years), and continues to describe the business the company made with the country. After concluding the findings, there is an interesting appendix with the memoirs of the author which colours lively the experiences and thoughts of the author. The theme is very actual and with its interesting forms and stories that it includes is more than recommended for the reader. The article's aim finally is to give a comprehensive picture about the Soviet era's businesses between Hungary and Africa, which it surely describes well enough.

Keywords:

Africa; Egypt; Hungary;
RÁBA; Horváth Ede;
Business.

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² BA degree with postgraduate education in African Studies, Széchenyi István University; ORCID: 0009-0007-1974-0796; management@sherparoute.com.

Introduction

The business Mission in Africa of Hungarian motor vehicles started in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century, when Hungarian Railway Carriage and Machine Works³ (Győr, Hungary) delivered the first railway carriages; however, it will run further to heavy vehicle trade, including Libya, Sudan, and Ethiopia. The aim of this article is to investigate the vivid world of the Hungarian vehicle success story around the Nile's neighbouring countries after the Egyptian-Israeli 6 days happened in 1967.



Figure 1: The Nile River map with neighbouring countries.

Source: <https://egyptunitedtours.com/nile-river-map/>.

This research will show, through interviews, articles, datasheets and oral history, how the trading has evolved and what the background was. How the bilateral agreements of the 1970's affected future partnerships. The chronicle that is going to be elaborated on is based on personal experience, interviews, articles, studies, and reports collected from the abovementioned timelines.

³ Large engineering company established in 1896 supplied the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy with army and road vehicles.

This research work intends to investigate and analyse in light of the Cold War the period of 'friendly countries cooperation', focusing on Hungarian-Egyptian relations and partnerships, how the collapse of the Soviet Union and the affected partnerships, and how neoliberal globalisation affected Egypt.

Egypt is in the heart of the world; it connects Asia with Africa, belongs to the Arab world, and yet is located on the African continent, where the Nile, the Red Sea, and the Sahara interconnect Egypt's socio-economic and political life with its neighbours. So it can be confidently said that Egypt belongs to the African continent, treasures its Asian dimension, and historically contributes to building and developing the African continent.

Brief historical overview

The 1980's was the period when Egypt and the Soviet bloc, including Hungary, had already boosted friendly and prosperous economic, technological, cultural, and diplomatic bonds. Despite the turmoil of political and economic challenges of the 1960s and 1970s in Egypt, the Egyptian and Hungarian political relations that have re-emerged since 1955 – after Stalin's⁴ death – were able to develop and extend into a bilateral multidisciplinary agreement.

After the six-day war in 1967⁵ Hungary continued to support Egypt. Discussing the relation between Egypt and Hungary, János Kádár, the General Secretary of the Hungary Social Workers' Party, stated at a meeting in Hungary in 1971 that the partnership stands on strong principles and economic interest. "We both stand against imperialism, and we also share common ground on certain issues, for instance, social progress [...] Our solidarity is not something newly formed. We enjoy political cooperation, economic alliances, and, to a limited extent, the military." (Abdallah Abdel-Ati Al-Naggar, J. Nagy László, 2020).

The official contact between the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the Arab Socialist Union took place in 1972 in Egypt during Anwar Sadat's leadership. The two countries' economic alliance had shown a nonpareil in the Hungarian vehicle export: 800 Ikarus buses and 1300 heavy vehicles were already running on the roads in Egypt. According to *Világgazdag* (World Economy), in the following years, the Hungarian Trading Company for Motor Vehicles (MOGÜRT) has made significant progress in exporting IKARUS buses running with RÁBA MAN diesel motors and RÁBA trucks to African countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Libya (Böcz, 1971).

The chart below gives an insight into the RÁBA truck sales statistics to Africa of the given time period:

⁴Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (born Dzhugashvili, 18 December 1878 – 5 March 1953, born in Gori, Georgia) was a Soviet politician and revolutionary who led the Soviet Union from 1924 until his death in 1953; he began calling himself Stalin, i.e. "Man of Steel", when he was a young revolutionist.

⁵The six-day war of 1967 was the 3rd Arab-Israeli war; Israel's overwhelming victory included overtaking the Sinai Peninsula (returned back to Egypt in 1982), Gaza Strip, West Bank, Golan Heights, and Old Jerusalem, subsequently the major territories of which are still disputed and conflict zones.

RÁBA HEAVY VEHICLE EXPORT*				
Year	Country	Vehicle Type	Qty	Notes
1973	Sudan	831.03+571.00	27	
1974	Sudan	831.03+571.00	30	
1978	Egypt	853.13	21	
1979	Egypt	853.13+574	8	
	Egypt	853.16	16	ADR
	Tunesia	853.04	15	
1980	Egypt	833.03	6	
	Egypt	853.13+574	26	
1981	Egypt	853.13+574	48	
	<i>Libya</i>	<i>F26.188</i>	<i>10</i>	
	<i>Libya</i>	<i>K26.188</i>	<i>14</i>	
	<i>Libya</i>	<i>S26.188</i>	<i>34</i>	
	Zambia	F22; U26	2	
1982	<i>Libya</i>	<i>K26.188</i>	<i>28</i>	
	<i>Libya</i>	<i>L26.188</i>	<i>2</i>	
	<i>Libya</i>	<i>582.00</i>	<i>10</i>	
	<i>Libya</i>	<i>S26.188</i>	<i>20</i>	
1983	Egypt	833.03	1	
	Egypt	L26.188	27	
	Egypt	S26.188	63	
1985	Egypt	S16.206	120	
1987	Egypt	S16.206	40	
<i>1988</i>	<i>Libya</i>	<i>T18.188</i>	<i>174</i>	

Figure 2: excl. sales by MOGÜRT (Ikarus buses, Steiger trucks, RÁBA MAN diesel motors). Source: Szabó János, RÁBA Technological Center, 2024.

RÁBA Motor Vehicle Manufacturing Company had achieved in the 1980s unprecedented growth in exports outside of the Soviet bloc. During the Cold War time

period, the USA had become one of the largest importers, which marked a milestone in the worldwide success of the Hungarian manufacturing company.

Years of living dangerously

It is worth mentioning that the Libyan government was also a special partner to RÁBA Company. Muammar Gaddafi's president of Libya from 1969 until his assassination was a suggestive and highly influential figure in the region. His particular Third Theory ideology set him apart from other autocrats in the Arab and African regions. He combined his radical fundamentalist Muslim faith with a militant creed of "national liberation" to garner support for terrorist activities and revolution across Africa. His policy was based on strong moral, religious, and political foundations. Gaddafi's vast oil wealth and alliance with the Soviet Union provided resources for making him a strategic acquirer.

To understand the peculiarities of the Rába Company for taking part in the and Libyan and Middle-Eastern public vehicle trade, it is important to know that in the 1980s there was an agreement between the Libyan government and the Rába company that for constructing houses the Rába would export public vehicles to the country (Aranyi, 2020).

Since 1975, the Soviet Union and the Socialist bloc strongly supported Libya's military force. The Soviets' sale of powerful weapons to Gaddafi has raised security concerns for Egypt. In 1981, the Soviets sent RBA military trucks to the Sahara for testing; the deployed RBA professionals, accompanied by the Libyan Army, cruised around the borders of Sudan, Chad, and Egypt. The secret military mission involved capturing the military radio frequencies of neighbouring countries, listening to their communications, and recording their movements.

"It was very demanding with a lot of stress," recalls Alfred Fehérvári, one of the military-deployed RÁBA technicians. President Muammar Gaddafi's headquarters in Tripoli held us almost captive. Held captive and under constant military guard, with tanks stationed everywhere, we found it difficult to leave. The army changed the gate codes every hour. Once we set off to the Sahara with RÁBA trucks, we stayed in the desert for 3 months, living in tents. The experience was not only physically intense but also mentally demanding, remembers Alfréd. Three employees of RÁBA were accompanying the trucks. Due to their specialized efforts and military undercover missions, backed by RÁBA technology, President Gaddafi acquired a total of 174 RBA military trucks by 1988.

These were the years when Gaddafi permitted outlawed organizations from other countries to have representatives in Tripoli. These include resistance movements from Tunisia, Chad, Sudan, and Egypt. Gaddafi provided funding, training, weapons, and radio facilities for these groups and others from around the world. There were about 20 training camps for terrorists and guerrillas in Libya, with approximately 7,000 recruits (Francis, 1982). One can lament whether the RÁBA technicians were hosted in these camps while fulfilling their business undercover mission.



A brief historical overview of the RÁBA factory

Ox Stables served as the first site for the founding of one of Hungary's most renowned automobile manufacturers over 125 years ago. Austrian entrepreneurs established the Hungarian Waggon and Machine Factory (Rába Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár, Rába MVG) in 1896, which became the preeminent machine-factory enterprise of the 20th century. The Lederer family, prominent manufacturers in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, possessed 88% of the firm. The City of Győr (known as Raab in German) was the preeminent hub for Hungarian grain exports. The Industrial Revolution in Győr during the 1880s displaced horses from transportation. The railway network in Hungary was rapidly constructed and predominantly state-owned, with the Ganz factory in Pest being the sole manufacturer of wagons. Győr's primary enterprise involved the production of railway freight and passenger wagons; that also caught the eye of the audience at the Exposition Universelle (1900) in Paris (Hacsa, 2021b). Subsequently, Rába MVG exported locomotives to Romania and Italy and afterwards to India, Egypt, Korea, and Yugoslavia (Hacsa, 2021b). Also, passenger vehicles and pickups were manufactured under the Austro-Daimler license. In 1899, the company began exporting railway carriages to South Africa, the East Indies, and Egypt. Rába supplied city tramcars to Antwerp and Amsterdam and many carriages to the London Underground Railway. Production of gasoline-fuelled trucks began in 1904 and of passenger cars in 1914; later, the company also produced military vehicles. Between World Wars, Krupp and MAN licensed their vehicles. (History of automobile production, "Rába" (publications of the Museum of Transport 5., 1980)

A turning event in the history of the manufacturing company is 1938. Ede Horváth, a 14-year-old ambitious—later stakhanovist—Turner apprentice, entered Rába MVG. His father already worked at the factory, so he followed him there. At that time, no one anticipated that this young man would elevate the Hungarian automotive industry to international prominence, thereby enhancing the region's and the nation's visibility and sustainability during socialism (Interview with Jr. Ede Horváth). The massive military preparedness program offered significant development prospects. (Honvári & Somlyódyné Pfeil Edit, 2014) In later years, the 38-meter Botond military all-terrain vehicle, the Rába 41-meter artillery truck, and Turan tanks were created. Aviation included the Levente learning machine, the Falcon bomber, and military training machines from 1940 ("The All-terrain Hungarian," n.d.). From 1942, young Ede Horváth used to work on the Messerschmitt machines (Interview with Jr. Ede Horváth)

The facility contributed to the city's reconstruction and the restoration of the region's bridges with assistance from the Soviet army, as their advancement and mobility were impeded in the absence of road and rail bridges. The city endured 18 significant bombardments during World War II. The primary and most disastrous catastrophe transpired in 1944. On April 13, 163 British and American B-17 bombers targeted Győr, obliterating the wagon and machinery factory and the airport beyond the Industrial Canal. (Interview with Jr. Ede Horváth)

In 1948, Rába MVG was placed under state management (Honvári & Somlyódyné Pfeil Edit, 2014), and until the 1960s, it manufactured essential automotive components, including front and rear undercarriages, steering systems, and gearboxes. Ede Horváth became the general manager of the plant in spring 1963. With his ambitious vision and extensive experience, he enacted significant changes, systematically optimising production, organising administration, integrating departments, and establishing new divisions, while implementing rare socialist employee dismissals. Numerous war-destroyed bridges were predominantly fabricated at the Rába MVG. A swivel bridge was provided to Heluwan on the Nile Delta. They manufactured large cranes, tanks, and forklifts. Vehicle output increased as Ede Horváth took over the leadership (Hacsa, 2021b). During COMECON, the factory commenced the production of high-performance road diesel engines and large series chassis licensed from MAN, ceasing the manufacture of railcars. They also manufactured trucks and agricultural machinery. A significant milestone was the multibillion-dollar funding package that enabled the MAN-Renault-Ferrostal collaboration to develop a cutting-edge diesel engine with innovative manufacturing technologies. During the Cold War period, Rába's primary markets encompassed the Eastern Bloc, the Middle East, Africa, and the United States. 80% of the company's turnover was from exports. The company employed more than 22,000 people in the region. The 1990 Eastern Market meltdown nearly obliterated the industrial giant. Ede Horváth was overthrown from his position. The state crisis management plan enabled the firm to conclude 1992 with moderate profits; nevertheless, it also inflicted significant transformation of the corporate (Interview with Jr. Ede Horváth)

Since 1999, the company has conducted its primary operations via subsidiary companies. Audi acquired the 114,000-square-meter hall in 1993; General Motors purchased the Szentgotthárd facility. The open Joint Stock Company Rába today makes chassis, cars, and parts. It is still one of Western Europe's largest automotive suppliers; the business has supplied the Hungarian army's off-road vehicles exclusively since 2003. While Rába continues to thrive, its size and significance have diminished. It now employs 1,700 people and no longer affects Győr's life. (Hacsa, 2021b)

The RÁBA Engine

“The strength or weakness of a society depends more on the level of its spiritual life than on its level of industrialization. Neither a market economy nor even general abundance constitutes the crowning achievement of human life. If a nation's spiritual energies have been exhausted, it will not be saved from collapse by the most perfect government structure or by any industrial development. A tree with a rotten core cannot stand.” (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn)

The CEO of the RÁBA Rába Hungarian Wagon and Machine Factory (Rába Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár, Rába MVG) facility in the socialist era was Mr. Ede Horváth, a great visionary, a businessman who was generous and shared the success of his business with

the people, a real patriot. He consistently sought opportunities and innovative solutions to secure a larger position in the global vehicle market, while also sharing the benefits with the community. RÁBA was the largest factory in the county of Győr-Moson-Sopron. The international trade in US dollars resulted in a positive trading balance both for the country and region, and that was one of the greatest economic necessities for the country of Hungary. No one ever disputed the management, qualities, community spirit, and international trade performance of the director, known as 'Red Baron'. He took the bravery and radically changed the production structure in favour of international and Western competitiveness. The company he led was an exceptional engineering firm, dedicated to identifying sustainable markets abroad and fostering prosperity in his home country. He expected hard work from others as much as from himself. He considered it natural for people to burn themselves at work, as he himself worked the hardest. The main investments of the Rába in the first decades of the company's history included the COMECON public vehicles cooperation and its major business partners were the eastern Soviet-Bloc countries (Germuska & Honvári, 2014, p. 158.).



Figure3: RÁBA logo from 1933. The RÁBA brand has been a registered trademark since 1918. This logo was used for most of the years of operation.

Source: <https://iconape.com/raba-logo-logo-icon-svg-png.html>.

The New York Times published an article in May 1976. His company's sales are 80% for export—with three-quarters of the exports going to the other Eastern European members of COMECON and one-quarter to the capitalist world, including the United States. An emblematic milestone and a breakthrough between US and Hungary relations was the visit to the Győr RÁBA plant by Philip M. Kaiser, former ambassador to the United States of America, on the 9th of December in 1977. It was the period when the Hungarian government had ongoing negotiations about the transfer of the Hungarian crown. It was then that the author's grandfather became a respected businessman in the International Mechanical Engineering Industry, and his authentic management behaviour convinced the Americans that they could trust us Hungarians and hand over our treasured Hungarian royal treasures. In 1978, on January 5, The Crown arrived at Ferihegy Airport on a presidential special plane, and on January 6, a

delegation representing the American people, headed by foreign minister Cyrus Vance, solemnly handed over the Holy Crown and the coronation symbols in Budapest.

Mr. Philip Mayer Kaiser during the administration of Jimmy Carter was ambassador to Hungary. While ambassador to Hungary, he was instrumental in the return of the Hungarian Crown jewellery to the Hungarian government from the United States. In his memoir, he recalls the encounter with the CEO of Rába with these thoughts:

"I saw with my own eyes how the new economic program worked in Raba, one of Hungary's most important plants. Raba produced axles for General Motors. Horváth, the company's director, earned the nickname "Red Baron." With thousands of employees, he steered his huge company with a hand that many American and British leaders could have envied. On one of my visits to the headquarters of the company, which is about 140 km from Budapest to Vienna, Horváth proudly displayed his state-of-the-art machines brought from the United States, Germany, and other Western countries." (Kaiser, 1992).

Nevertheless, the Rába had an excellent relationship with the US, as for example during the years 1975-1990, before the regime change, the value of the goods exported to America was 470,7 million USD. Besides the Soviet Union – which was the main business partner of the company in those years – the US was one of its main export targets and the cooperation was were active (Áldozó, 2014, p. 118.).

The Rába had excellent relations with Italy as well. In the early years, the company had agreed to a contract with the Austro-Fiat consortium in 1928. Furthermore, a pact was further accomplished on 05 March 1937, when serious deals were made between the two partners concerning their mutual cooperation and work (Nagy, 2013, p. 165.).

Mr. Ede Horváth was the author's grandfather, who had a remarkable sense of how to build collective ambition and integrate the brand Rába into more than 20,000 people's lives. Moreover, an entire region's population enjoyed his international appreciation, shaping it into a football stadium, a modern theatre, cultural centres, and housing.

One of his famous quotes was "I would even cut a deal with the devil...". What it meant was that he was ready to find the most extreme solutions to multiply the production and revenue of the factory with bold decisions, bypassing the economic socialist regulations of the time, only focusing on fulfilling the plan, and keeping the interests of the economy in mind. This benefited the national economy and factory workers, say many. The company was highly respected in Győr, known as the biggest employer. They built a large stadium and sponsored the local football team, Rába ETO. They also provided training and scholarships, along with a technical library, cultural centre, brass band, dance group, and sports club.

One of the key elements of business success was the establishment of a local technical service and after-sales management network. The strategy was based on the notion that



new prospects are also important, but it's also crucial to continue nurturing your existing customers.

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Infitāh: Egypt's Open Door Policy

The initiative of economic liberalisation in Egypt started under Anwar Sadat's presidency. "In the past, when the government was expected to meet every need, people's attitudes were negative. That belongs to a dead era of impoverishing socialism. Now we have an open-door policy for our economy—and democratic socialism," reflected Sadat on the previous president Nasser's policy (Sadat, 2014).

This shift in economic policy, known as the Infitāh or "Open Door" policy, marked a significant departure from the state-controlled socialist model implemented by Gamal



Abdel Nasser. The liberalization process aimed to attract foreign investment, promote private sector growth, and reduce government control over the economy (Ikram, 2006).

The implementation of these reforms, however, was not without challenges. While the Infitāh policy led to increased foreign investment and economic growth, it also exacerbated income inequality and social tensions. The urban elite and foreign investors largely benefited from economic liberalization, while rural and working-class Egyptians saw little improvement in their living standards, according to a study by Waterbury (1983).

However, the policy also faced significant challenges, such as bureaucratic obstacles and increased economic disparities, benefiting a small elite while leaving the broader population largely disappointed. Despite some improvements in GDP, Egypt's economy continued to struggle with issues like underemployment and a trade deficit, and the general standard of living remained low. Political instability following Mubarak's ouster in 2011 further impacted the economy negatively, particularly in the tourism and manufacturing sectors.

The Soviet Union's influence in Egypt had already waned significantly by the time Mubarak took office, following Sadat's expulsion of Soviet advisors in the 1970s and the subsequent realignment towards the West. Mubarak's presidency was characterized by a pragmatic approach to foreign relations, prioritizing economic aid and political stability over ideological alignments.

Authoritarian governance, socio-economic transformations, and the persistent influence of military power marked the Mubarak presidency (1981–2011). The author's encounter with Egypt started in 1984, when RÁBA signed a contract with the Egyptian exclusive distributor and his, Jr. Ede Horváth (firstborn son of the late Ede Horváth, CEO, RÁBA), was appointed as head of after-sales service to Cairo. The Hungarian MOGÜRT-RÁBA Business Mission was at its peak. In 1985, Mr. Tilly and Mr. Horváth (the younger) successfully closed a deal that was struck for the supply of 120 RBA trucks, with Copetrole Egypt among the buyers. The oil shocks (1973, 1979) created a regional boom that had direct effects on Egypt, indicating higher oil revenues as well as indirect effects (through workers' remittances, foreign aid, and tourism), resulting in abundant financing for investment. The further liberalization of the economy, which granted the private sector a wider scope for operations, and a series of laws encouraging investment through incentives also fuelled growth. As a result of these factors, real GDP grew sharply, averaging 8.4 percent a year between the years of 1974-75 and 1984-85.

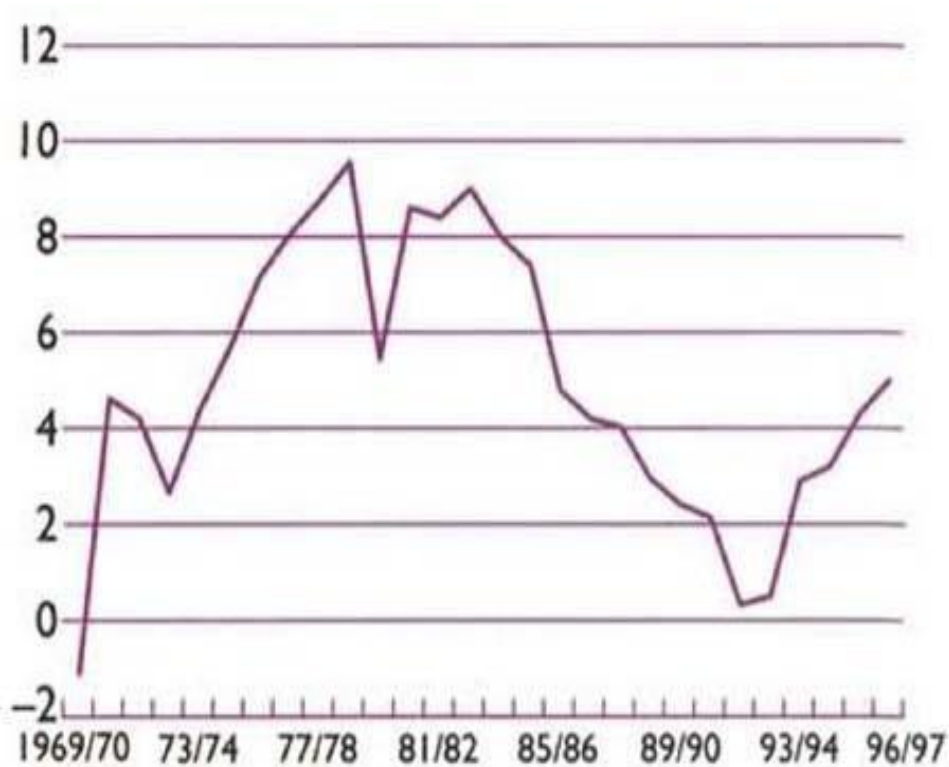


Figure 4: A Historical examination of growth, investment, and saving, IMF eLibrary. Source: Handy, 1998.

The state of emergency became a hallmark of governance under Mubarak, who succeeded Sadat. This period was characterized by the entrenchment of authoritarianism, where the executive branch wielded significant power, often at the expense of democratic institutions (Reza, 2007). The political landscape remained largely unchanged, with the ruling party Nationals suppressing opposition and dissent, leading to a climate of political stagnation and public disillusionment. The persistence of emergency laws and the use of military courts to try to suppress citizens and disillusionment. The persistence of emergency laws and the use of military courts to try to suppress citizens and movements was a regular practice.



Figure 5: D10 RÁBA L26.188-6.4-000 Egypt 1983. Source: RÁBA Technological Centre

Mr. János Tilly, former MOGÜRT representative to Cairo (1980-1985), was fulfilling his duty on the days at the Hungarian Embassy when President Anwar Sadat was assassinated during the annual victory parade held in Cairo to celebrate Egypt's crossing of the Suez Canal.

“It was a constant state of emergency,” says Mr. Tilly. “We, Hungarians serving at our foreign post, took enormous personal risk and tackled the political and ideological issues of the time; we were young and enjoyed every moment of the trading in Africa; we were cautious, but nothing could stop us. These men had guts with wit and intelligence and were eager to bring home results,” said Mr. Tilly when recollecting the pieces.

Mr. Tilly graduated from high school in Egypt at the end of the 1960s; his father was a 3x national champion fencer for decades and the brother of the legendary head of section of Vasas Sport Club,⁶ Endre Tilly. Older János Tilly, just as his brother was a fencing coach in the 1960s in Cairo, Egypt. Younger János graduated as an economist and immediately headed to MOGÜRT to enhance his skills in international vehicle trade and gain valuable experience from his youth in Egypt.

“The major focus of MOGÜRT was the sales of Ikarus buses,” said Mr. Tilly. “The Hungarian buses were running with RÁBA-MAN licensed diesel engines. They were reliable buses; however, the heavy overload of the buses caused a lot of problems.”

⁶Vasas Fencing Sport Club, established in Budapest in 1911, is one of Hungary's most successful clubs. It boasts 45 Olympic Gold Medalists and 40 World Champions among its over 30 sports, including fencing with 9 Olympic Champions.

Looking back into the 1960s, Hungary made a significant contribution to Africa. They organized an expedition that included two Ikarus buses operating on the Raba axle and two Csepel trucks. Their journey began in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, and spanned over 20,000 kilometres as they passed through Nigeria on their way to Accra, the capital of Ghana. MOGÜRT hoped that African countries would buy the buses and trucks. How much exactly the expedition itself boosted sales is not known. But it is known that there were 1,298 Ikarus buses sold in 1963; in 1964, the figure rose to 2,060; and in 1967, to 2,820. In the desert of Mali, the Ikarus buses were the first to make it through the desert. (Ághassi & Dezsényi, 2024)

Ikarus buses were the all-winning goods of the Hungarian motor vehicle, however, the public transport capacity of the buses was meant to carry 180 passengers; but in Egypt, public transport vehicles are constantly overloaded, carrying up to 300 passengers. The lack of proper maintenance and non-proper use (i.e., heavy overload). „It was time for us to start introducing RÁBA truck heavy vehicles," recalls Mr. Tilly.

Thanks to Mr. János Tilly trading skills and devotion, after a break of more than 10 years, Hungarian trucks returned to Egypt. MOGÜRT Company won the competition in front of more than 30 international companies. The vehicles were put into service in different cities of Egypt from the following year, January. The other major contract was with Alexandria Transport Company; according to this, they had been commissioned to transport 63 tractor units and 23 trucks based on the tender they had won. The Alexandrian company has been buying from RÁBA almost every year since 1977, so the Hungarian factory was able to introduce additional trucks of various categories to the Egyptian market on a larger scale. (Hungarian News Agency, 1983).

The visit of Mr. Ede Horváth, RÁBA CEO, to Cairo in 1983 and his ambitious yet professional approach to after-sales services between 1983 and 1985 resulted in further supply of trucks in 1985. The sales management team was composed of a business manager and three technicians. The head of the after-sales team was Jr. Ede Horváth. The RÁBA service team was truly one-of-a-kind. Not only did they provide education and knowledge to local technicians in garages, but they also served as the go-to service and support team for all Hungarian expats and diplomats in Egypt. They formed an alliance of knowledge, innovative wit, and courage—a crucial support system, acting almost as an umbrella organization for those in need or in a state of emergency. One could always count on them for assistance and guidance, no matter the issue at hand.



Figure 5: Photo: R22 RÁBA 833.03 in Egypt, 1985. Source: RÁBA Technological Centre.

The Jr. Horváth's favourite motto was:

“We show as the RÁBA team to the outside world a strong unity. We are from Győr, representing a company and a brand that we are all proud of. Any personal or professional problem can be solved within our team, but it should not concern outsiders. The RÁBA team's unity should never crack on foreign land!”

János, the confident and driven head of MOGÜRT's representative office, and Ede, the experienced and resourceful leader of RÁBA's after-sales team, had formed a remarkable partnership. Their shared vision for what makes a successful business in Africa had earned them the opportunity to establish an exceptional after-sales and service presence in the market. This included providing comprehensive education, installing garages, conducting regular monitoring, and offering on-the-spot technical support. The team seamlessly communicated with their Egyptian partners' employees in Arabic. This unique collaboration not only strengthened the bond between Hungary and Egypt on a professional level but also fostered strong personal connections.

Early signs of Mubarak's Internal Policy struggles

When Mubarak took office, the Centralized Security Forces already had a great number (cca. 100,000 members). The state of emergency and military enforcement were a common phenomenon one got used to since Nasser's presidency.

The new president in 1981 had immediate concerns following the killing of Sadat. The two main worries were the possibility of a power grab and the loyalty of the armed forces, which may have been compromised by religious extremists. Within days of the assassination, supporters of the assassins attacked government property and Coptic

Christians. The government responded swiftly with paratroopers and Special Forces. There was concern that Islamists had gained influence within the military, as evidenced by the religious beliefs of Sadat's assassins. Radical groups sought to recruit from the military and mobilize the people against the regime. Low-ranking soldiers who came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were particularly susceptible to extremist ideologies.

After the growth of Islamist militancy, the Mubarak government conducted a study and determined that economic distress and poverty were to blame. They took measures to prevent infiltration by religious fanatics in the armed forces, but some officers still formed alliances with extremists. To prevent this, an oversight institution was created. However, by the turn of the millennium, the system began to falter as top-ranking officers believed promises of lucrative post-retirement positions were enough to maintain their loyalty. These positions were highly sought after due to patronage and kinship ties. This led to resentment towards those who obtained these positions and the affluent liberal class in control of the economy.

In the tumultuous era of the 1980s, a strikingly odd characteristic of Egyptian authoritarianism emerged: the staggering inefficiency of its large coercive apparatus. Despite vast financial and human resources being directed towards it and its well-deserved reputation for ruthlessness, time and time again, the government proved incapable of effectively handling issues such as low morale, inadequate training, and dismal pay. These problems continued to fester well into the twenty-first century. The police and paramilitary forces were particularly affected, with the units based in the south being deemed unreliable due to their failure to fulfil their duties.

The official story that not many know

A post-Mubarak report on internal security revealed that the paramilitary Central Security Forces (CSF) lacked proper training and skills. In February 1986, a "revolt" involving 20,000 CSF members erupted as rumours circulated that their unpopular term of service would be extended. Despite being a conscript force of 300,000 men, mostly illiterate peasants from rural areas, the CSF was responsible for maintaining security around public facilities and suppressing demonstrations by students and workers.

The military was ultimately called in to quell the rebellion, although there was little chance of it gaining traction with urban society. The two groups were culturally different, despite both facing economic struggles. However, the government failed to learn from this event and made few efforts to improve the quality of life, pay, and skills of the CSF members. While units based in northern Egypt received better treatment and training, those in southern Egypt (where the Islamist insurgency would later erupt) remained neglected and vulnerable to infiltration by Islamist activists. As a result, northern units were often deployed to deal with unrest in the south.

Rebellions broke out in CSF camps in Qaliubiya, Ismailia, and Sohag, but the conscripts were unable to leave as the army surrounded them. In Asuit, during a year of rampant terrorism, there was a strong mutiny at the CSF camp. It is rumoured that the

governor of Asuit at the time, police general Zaki Badr ended the mutiny by drowning thousands of conscripts in the Asuit Nile canal after opening its lock.

The dying of the Swan

Népszabadság⁷ interviewed the author's grandfather, Ede Horváth on June 20th, 1989, one month before the 41st president of the United States of America, George Bush, visited Hungary. In that interview, he comments on the political-economic urge for reforms and measures:

“...do you know where the problem is? No political reform automatically creates economic renewal. And we, as if rocking ourselves in this dream, sit idly by and wait for the western capitalists to take our place in the form of millions of dollars. Political reforms can relieve the economy of many unnecessary burdens. They can sweep away the current bureaucratic economic management. They could radically transform our disastrous cadre policy. Political reforms can help society not to turn economic issues into political issues. The former state is untenable.” (Hajba, 1989).



Figure 6: Mr. George Bush US president meets Mr. Ede Horváth CEO of RÁBA, at Ambassador to Hungary Mark Palmer's Residency. Source: family album.

The downfall of the MSZMP⁸ in October 1989 left Ede Horváth without the political backing he had relied on for years. The once-powerful members of the old political elite, now facing accusations and blame for the country's economic turmoil, were under immense pressure to defend themselves. As a prominent figure within the Central Committee, Ede Horváth was a prime target for criticism and attack. His every move

⁷ Népszabadság - “Liberty of People”, major Hungarian Daily Newspaper, formerly the official press of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party.

⁸ MSZMP - Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party.

and action would be scrutinized by both his enemies and allies alike, leaving him vulnerable in a time of uncertainty and unrest.

A few months later, the magnificent businessman and emblematic figure of the Hungarian industry and a local patriot was overthrown by his own board of directors from his position. Ede Horváth's dream to create an automobile manufacturing plant seemed to perish. By the early 1990s, RÁBA factory was in difficulty due to the unforeseen collapse of the Eastern Market, and later, due to reorganizations, chassis production and the design and production of walking chassis came to the fore. RÁBA did not give up truck production despite the difficult economic situation. In 1992, it signed a new licensing agreement with MAN for small and medium-sized trucks with a gross weight of 6 to 10 tonnes. By the end of the '90s, however, it became clear that Raba trucks could no longer compete with Western European products.

The new management of RÁBA invited AUDI Car Manufacturing Company to set up their plant and purchase the unfinished workshop facility left abandoned after the grandfather was removed by force.

Sparks of RÁBA in Egypt

Since 2011, Egypt has undergone a new phase, leading to a power struggle between those in favour of the revolution and those supporting the coup. Although these developments were part of the country's democratic transition, it was disappointing that people's political and economic demands were not met after the Arab Spring. This has highlighted the fact that success in movements like these requires both political transformation as well as attention to economic and social needs. View of the role of global actors on the failed transition to democracy in Egypt (n.d.).



Figure 7: RÁBA annual report 2018. Source: [source: https://raba.hu/wp-content/uploads/befektetoknek/eves_jelentesek/raba_eves_jelentes_2018_hun-eng.pdf](https://raba.hu/wp-content/uploads/befektetoknek/eves_jelentesek/raba_eves_jelentes_2018_hun-eng.pdf)

In 2015, RÁBA closed a “monumental” deal to supply 145 axles to EAMCO (Engineering Automotive Manufacturing Company). The company was built upon the truck and bus businesses of NASCO (El Nasr Automotive Manufacturing Company). EAMCO has become an independent public limited company. Dating back to 1960, it gained immense industrial prowess through access to DEUTZ and FIAT know-how, cementing its dominance not only in Egypt but also in the Arab world.

This year, on February 20th, Lieutenant General Ferenc Kajári, Deputy Chief of the HDF General Staff, received a courtesy visit from Colonel Tamer Ali Ibrahim Bebars, Egypt's non-resident defence attaché in Hungary. They both acknowledged the strong and positive relationship between their countries and the potential for further cooperation. The key areas of collaboration between the Hungarian Defence Forces and the Egyptian Armed Forces include joint participation in military exercises, joint training opportunities such as peace operations and counter-IED courses, and defence industry cooperation. There is also ongoing cooperation between the Hungarian Army and RÁBA within the frame Hungarian national procurement program. Recently, the Ministry of Defence and Raba Vehicle Ltd. renewed their framework contract to extend the vehicle procurement program until 2026.

Egypt has constantly grappled with the struggle between authoritarianism and the pursuit of an open door policy. This battle has been shaped by various factors such as socio-economic policies, military influence, and civil society activism, leading to significant changes and upheavals. The legacy of emergency rule continues to play a crucial role in shaping the country's political landscape and poses challenges for transitioning towards a more democratic governance model.

The textbook definition of military rule came to fruition in Egypt after the events of 2013. It was then that then Minister of Defence Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi orchestrated a coup d'état, overthrowing the only civilian president in the country's history. In the year following, el-Sisi assumed the role of president himself. (The Changing Role of the Egyptian Military Under el-Sisi | ISPI, 2024)

Now, 'military society' permeates all levels of government in Egypt. The Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF), along with other powerful military entities and closely affiliated intelligence agencies, hold significant control over parliament and local governance. Their presence is felt in every aspect of daily life.

Ede Horváth's words from the 1989 interview keep echoing: “No political reform automatically creates economic renewal.”

On the other hand, Hungary's manufacturing and motor vehicle industry has experienced significant transformations since the 1990s. Today, RÁBA no longer manufactures vehicles and instead functions primarily as a supply chain management body for H22 military trucks. RÁBA supplies military trucks to the Hungarian Army with an outsourced manufacturing technological model. Initially, the author's father's grand vision was to construct the company's own military vehicles, as the RÁBA Holding was well empowered by all necessary manufacturing capacity in the early years of the 2000s. With years, the production of different vehicle components was cut down to being a

basic supplier of complete axles and other vehicle components. No more genuine RÁBA trucks.

Today you can read on the company's website, www.raba.hu, the following catchphrase: "RÁBA's flagship is the production of complete axles and axle components. Every third truck on Europe's roads has a chassis component manufactured and delivered by the company."

Conclusion

While RÁBA managed to secure new markets and maintain some of its existing ones between 1990 and 2010, it appears that in Africa, Egypt, it has re-earned its strategic and technological significance after years of stagnation in different forms to enhance the current government policy. It is supposedly fit to believe that a deep and unbreakable bond was forged during the times of socialism, when the Arab nation eagerly absorbed Hungary's advanced and affordable motor vehicle technology through years of close collaboration and relentless pursuit of knowledge, industrial and military autonomy, regional dominance, and sustaining. The close industrial and strategic ties between Hungary and Egypt are based on their shared understanding of the negative impact of powerful global states throughout their histories. Both nations have experienced this burden, creating a self-explainable foundation for their relationship with the aim of becoming autonomous and knowledgeable nations in their own regions. Some might look at the Hungarian military partnership as support towards President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's initiative for human development called "Bedaya: A New Beginning for Building the Human."⁹ If it is so, then the two countries not only would focus on economic benefits but can rely on each other as allies. The new forms of partnerships have the potential to encapsulate an alternative in responding to today's challenges indicated by the main global actors.

Conflict of Interest

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

Notes on Contributor

Borbála Ágnes Horváth is a postgraduate of African Studies at Széchenyi István University and an apprentice researcher at the Africa Research Institute at Óbuda University, Doctoral School for Safety and Security Sciences. She graduated from Eötvös Lóránd University in English-Russian major. From this year, became a junior researcher at Africa Research Institute, writing articles and reviews for journals. She speaks Russian and English, and has learned Arabic and Spanish. She aims to advance her academic

⁹The project targets human development and strengthening Egyptian identity through initiatives in health, education, culture, sports, and job creation. It involves collaboration between state agencies, civil sectors, and private sectors to enhance investment in human capital coordinated by the Egyptian Army.



work in humanitarian relief towards self-sustaining development in the African continent and would like to continue researching and actively participating in projects.

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Interviews:

Interview with late Jr. Ede Horváth, son of Ede Horváth (oral history).

Interview with Mr. János Tilly former representative of MOGÜRT office in Cairo, Egypt.