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THE BUDAPEST BEACON

Sandor Szakaly: Veritas Institute will not deny anyone opportunity to seek truth

JANUARY 20, 2014 BY BENJAMIN NOVAK



The following is a translation of an interview with Veritas Institute director Sandor Szakaly appearing last week in pro-government news magazine *Heti Valasz*.

Veritas means truth in Latin. According to this absolute truths exist in history. Will you decide what those are?

Every historian believes that their personal account of history is true. Our institute's name does not imply any exclusivity. We do not want to deny anyone the opportunity to seek the truth.

The institute's goal is "to provide an undistorted exploration of our national turning points". There are some historians who believe this unduly labels their work.

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Some historians believe that the creation of the Veritas Institute somehow implies that until now all historical research has been wrong. Obviously, this isn't about that, and the criticisms weren't even unified. Interestingly, the loudest criticisms didn't even come from historians.

The Hungarian Academy of Science already has a section that deals with history. Why is there a need for another similar entity?

The history section of the Hungarian Academy of Science deals with everything from occupation of the Carpathian basin to the 20th century. However, the government has the right to expressly dedicate research to specific eras. This doesn't mean the government's opinion of a particular era will have to be shared by everyone. Our job is to deal with the country's myths since the 1950s, and to account for subsequent events.

Opposition parties are claiming this is part of an arbitrary reinterpretation of historical events by a government-funded propaganda institute.

I don't think it's up to Gyorgy Foldes, former head of the MSZP's Political History Institute, to decide what is independent. My personal value system and knowledge of history can help me decide what is true. If [the government] wanted to force something on me, I wouldn't continue to assume responsibility for running the institute.

There are already a number of similar institutes: The Regime-change Historical Research Institute under the direction of Zoltan Biro, or the Research Center lead by Tamas Molnar at the National Civil Service College, to name a few. How is your institute any different?

Zoltan Biro's institute deals with the regime change. Tamas Molnar's deals with philosophy and the history of ideas approach. I see no conflicts here. The society of historians only wins with more research centers.

What will be your institute's first research theme?

Seeing as how this year is a remembrance year of the Holocaust and many people will focus on that, we will deal with the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1944 and the lost history of those deported.

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You have been categorized as someone on the right, but certain people from left-liberal circles accept you. Aren't you worried that you might be labelled as a government-favored person?

I am a conservative right-wing person who is capable of accepting others' opinions. I support my position in historical debates using a list of arguments and try to convince other accordingly. People on the left acknowledge this. Of course, they also add that the power will influence me. They're wrong.

As a researcher of the Horthy-era, is there any chance for a consensus to be reached regarding the judgment of Hungary's last regent?

As long as certain circles see Horthy as a fascist and a dictator, I don't think so.