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**MÁTÉ FÁBIÁN**

**EMIL BORBÉLY-MACZKY**  
**(1887-1945)**

**A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY**

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## SUMMARY

Valiant Emil Borbély-Maczky of Léva is one of the typical yet less well-known figures of Hungarian political life of the period between the two world wars. The various characteristic features of the era can be detected in his career. In my dissertation I make an attempt to give a portrayal of the successful soldier and the nationally renowned and acknowledged politician as well as that of the main county head who was esteemed highly by both the officer corps and the population of the largest county.

The importance and novelty of the topic is that historiography – primarily the works of local history – did not deal with the life and activities of Emil Borbély-Maczky after his death in 1945 at all. Although a conscious decision obviously played a role in this, the lack of the processing of historical sources can be mentioned as a serious deficiency. As a result, the few works that refer to it have insufficient data, are extremely short and contain several inaccuracies. In the past decades, there appeared only one remarkable biographical account of Emil Borbély-Maczky, written by István Dobrossy, a local historian of Miskolc and Borsod County. In the fourth volume of the series of scientific publications about the urban history of Miskolc (Miskolc, 1997), entitled *Miskolc in Words and Pictures*, the author published a number of short biographical passages about the main county heads of the county and Miskolc. Borbély-Maczky was not omitted from the list, either, his sketchy biography, however, does not reflect the many-sided and versatile career that he was. Although some of the historical works published in the following years make a mention of the former main county head, the entries given in the references of the dissertation used the extract of the above short biography in almost every case.

In connection with the former main county head, it is exclusively his murder in 1945 that remained in the public consciousness of the local people, but his detention, alleged escape and execution have not been clarified until recently. The reason for this is, on the one hand, the lack of processing in academic literature, and on the other hand, the unequivocal position of the leadership of the era that did not allow any alternatives, according to which he was helped to escape and murdered by his Arrow Cross and pro-German accomplices. The case was not investigated at that time, and the circumstances were not clarified later, either, and thus there were several legends

about his death, which are still vividly alive in the consciousness of the older inhabitants of the city even today. I must point out that I cannot prove without a doubt even at the end of my dissertation whether the former main county head was murdered by the members of the Arrow Cross or it was the police or other armed forces that took revenge on him.

The question may arise whether it is worth dealing with the career and work of Emil Borbély-Maczky at all in more detail than in the above mentioned review. This can be answered with a clear yes, which –I hope –will be supported by the dissertation.

My dissertation is built on the following momentous issues and topics: 1. why the youngest son of the Maczky family, who were connected to the public life of Heves County with several personal relationships, left the familiar environment in his teens and chose the unknown military career and Transylvania; 2. what kind of a medium of socialization the Hungarian Royal Army after the turn of the century meant; 3. how Emil Borbély-Maczky laid the foundation of his military reputation during World War I; 4. what personal and other reasons led a renowned soldier, given several awards and destined for a successful military career, to decide to retire at the age of thirty; 5. what personal motivation aroused his interest in national politics and public life when he had not been not interested in this area earlier at all, what is more he had been repelled by it; 6. how he became the head of Borsod Gömör and Kishont counties; 7. why his inauguration as main county head can be regarded as a political event of national importance; 8. what moral belief led him to give up the position that he himself also considered to be the most suitable one for him just a year later; 9. how he became one of the confidants and friends of Gömbös Gyula as well as one of the leading personalities of the racist organisation; 10. whether his appointment as main county head for the second time meant an escape route or the possibility of a career accomplishment; 11. how he became the best-known and inevitable leader of Borsod county in less than one and a half decades; 12. to what extent the decisions that he made during World War II influenced his career and the last months of his life.

## PORTRAYALS OF EMIL BORBÉLY-MACZKY

Emil Borbély-Maczky's career can be portrayed by examining three closely related roles and stages of life, which also show significant differences. This is what I make an attempt to demonstrate in my dissertation.

The first is that of the dedicated soldier who committed himself to this profession rather early at the age of 15. The youngest son of the Maczky family, who were connected to the public life of Heves County through several personal relationships – due to his rebellion against his father, his love for horses and the romantic image of the army – left the familiar environment in his teens and chose the unknown military career as well as the remote Transylvania. His decision proved to be right, and he spent eight years until the outbreak of the First World War in the 5th and 9th Hussar regiments in Kassa and Marosvásárhely. The young, exuberant soldier tried to make the best use of the time available for him so as to be successful both in his professional and private life. In the case of the former, there is no doubt that he achieved his goal, but he failed with regard to the latter. His first marriage lasted only for a year when in 1911 his pregnant wife, Margit Kerekes, died. Just a few years later his second engagement to Erzsébet Pálinkás also ended.

While in his private life this period was surrounded by disappointments and tragedies, he achieved his full potential in his professional life, and so he started to build his career consciously. It is known from his officer's personal data sheet that he often sought the company of his superiors, learnt a lot and trained himself to become a better soldier. During his service in Kassa and Marosvásárhely he became an excellent horseman and machine gunner, and he could make good use of these skills during the war years. It made a significant change in his personality that he got away from the oppressive expectations of his parents almost as a child and could experience the vibrant life of a big city. The once lively teenager, who was not interested in anything, found his profession, and so he was able to get rid of his father's watchful and (frowning) look.

World War I had a significant impact on his military career. At the beginning of August, 1914 he was entrained and spent the next four years on the eastern front. In this historic moment he showed himself to be a real soldier who had trained himself

for decades and waited for the opportunity to stand out from among his companions. During the war years he seems to have had the talent to become a successful hussar officer. Due to his heroic actions in Stojanow, near Wirchne and in the surroundings of Mt. Rusulu and Jakoben he was awarded an Honourable Mention three times between 1914 and 1918 (the honourable mention by the commander-in-chief of the Imperial and Royal Army 1914; Sigmund Laudis; 1915, 1917), furthermore he received the Charles Troops Cross (1917), the Military Merit Cross 3rd Class with War Decoration and Swords (1917) as well as the Order of the Iron Crown 3rd class with War Decoration and Swords twice. The cadet sub-officer became a captain who was awarded several times during a decade, and his name became familiar by the military columns of the daily national papers in the hinterland as well.

Another aspect of Emil Borbély-Maczky's portrayal is given by the image of a national politician. From his childhood he had an aversion to public engagement, and although he saw possible models in the figures of his father and his brother before him, it drove him even more towards the military career. By the end of 1919, however, he showed more and more interest in the consolidating political relations of his new home (Bóta). After the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, seeing that his former fellow officers and comrades appeared in an ever-increasing number in the consolidating political system, his plans for the future changed. He first gained a parliamentary mandate in the election of the 1920 National Assembly (Ózd) and then in the 1926 Parliamentary elections (Miskolc). However, the importance of his participation in national public life can be traced back not to his activities as a Member of Parliament since he hardly ever took part in the meetings and spoke only very rarely in the Parliament –and when he took the floor, he spoke in less relevant issues.

In contrast, his activities outside the Parliament were much more significant. He got acquainted and made friends with Gyula Gömbös very early, and through him he took an active part in the organisation of the racist movement from its outset. This was the time when he came into contact with the radical right-wing camp in which he found his place and built a close relationship with like-minded people (e.g. Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, Miklós Kozma). While working hard to make the Hungarian National Independence Party (the Racist Party) a success in the 1924 interim and 1926 regular elections, he also climbed higher and higher in the hierarchy at the same time.

His result in the latter election – according to which he was the only candidate who gained a mandate as an unambiguously racist candidate in an actual election fight – significantly increased his prestige in the eyes of the leaders of the movement and especially in those of Gyula Gömbös. After 1926 the latter relied more and more on the former fellow-soldier and made Borbély-Maczky increasingly more his innermost confidant. Borbély-Maczky followed his friend and leader all the way, and used his organizing and coordinating talent to strengthen the former counter-revolutionary associations (MOVE, ÉME) standing behind the disintegrating racist movement and to provide a stable social background for Gömbös by uniting the old front-line soldiers in a new organization.

In these years of fights he turned into a professional politician from an inexperienced Member of Parliament, and at the end of the '20s he was already moving around in the national public life as if he had been dealing with it all the time.

The third and most prominent part of Emil Borbély-Maczky's portrayal is given by examining his person as the first and most important person of the county. When in 1919, after his military retirement, he purchased a property (a mansion and land) in Bóta, about 100 kilometers away from his parental home, belonging to another administrative unit, he got into a basically unfamiliar environment. Just three years later, in 1922, he was appointed main county head of Borsod, Gömör and Kishont counties, so the unknown gentleman in Bóta suddenly became the head of the entire administration unit. Moreover, his entry also turned out to be very effective. By the fact that the entire leadership of the newly formed Unity Party (István Bethlen, István Nagyatádi Szabó, Gyula Gömbös) showed up at the installation, they demonstrated not only the unity of their own organization but they also gave emphasis to the inauguration of the main county head himself. The public life of the county saw such a leader in Borbély-Maczky who made politicians of high-standing and with a national reputation travel to Miskolc.

In the beginning, the role of a main county head was unfamiliar to him, so he relied heavily on the officer corps, the deputy county head and the main noble judges. He considered handling the affairs of the county more suitable for him from the very first moment than being a Member of Parliament, which he could not get used to either by the end of the first cycle or in the second period. It was the second time in his life

when Emil Borbély-Maczky felt that he had found his profession in which he could make use of his knowledge and talent.

In 1930, when he returned to this position, he behaved completely differently and changed his leadership style. By that time the organisation, disintegration and reorganisation of the racist movement had taken place, and he had played an important role in most of these processes. He became the head of the county while he was very well aware of the fact that he acquired such relationships during the past decade that made his position as main county head stable and brought considerable financial support for him to be able to carry out his large-scale social projects. Of the latter, the flood protection in South Borsod and the planting action in the surroundings of Mezőkövesd must be pointed out, which increased his prestige and authority in the population of the county.

He was the head of Borsod, Gömör and Kishont counties for about one and a half decades (from 1939 only that of Borsod), and his activities left indelible traces on the everyday life of the area. During this period the settlements that developed rapidly thanks to the main county head awarded him honorary citizenship in acknowledgement of his work.

His engagement during World War II represents an important aspect of Emil Borbély-Maczky's portrayal. Due to the role he played in the ghettoisation and deportation of the Jews, his name was added to the list of war criminals, so it is quite obvious that he would be held liable for his actions after the war. However, after his arrest in March 1945, he disappeared from the police station under the circumstances described in the dissertation, and he was executed by unknown perpetrators and his dead body was thrown into the Public Gardens of Miskolc.

The changing political and historical discourse was clearly negatively disposed to the former main county head, who was regarded to be the servant of the fascists and Germans, and one of the leaders of the racist movement. His person was deliberately omitted from the local historical canon, and there were even attempts made to prevent people from forming a memory of him. This is mostly the reason why decades later he did not become the emblematic martyr of the radical right-wing politics of memory, and furthermore this is why we cannot talk about the afterlife of Emil Borbély-



Maczky's life and work, either. His personality and activities are remembered only in two small communities, his family and village.

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