Motion of no confidence or no trust vote – today this political procedure expresses the most fundamental principle of parliamentarism according to which the government should always enjoy the trust or confidence of the parliamentary majority. This principle, however, has been developed gradually and amid harsh political conflicts and debates in almost every European country. This paper will examine and compare two historical developments with special emphasis on the question of parliamentary trust or confidence in the executive branch. Since the competence of the monarch to appoint a prime minister – even in the absence of the trust of the parliamentary majority behind him – was one of the most discussed topics in Hungary and the United Kingdom in the late nineteenth century, I will try to compare the debates on the prevalence and realization of this royal prerogative in both countries. This focus is justified by the fact that the most important question of the emerging parliamentary government at the late nineteenth century was whether the prime minister should enjoy the trust of the parliamentary majority, and whether this trust is of legal or conventional nature. To put it differently: the question was whether the prime minister must or should resign if he had lost the trust of the parliamentary majority. While in the first case the parliamentary government has a legal character, which means that resignation is enforceable (the prime minister must resign), in the second case it is rather an unwritten convention that the prime minister should resign after having lost the confidence of the parliamentary majority. Tracing back to the debates at late nineteenth century will help us to better understand the real nature of this central concept of parliamentarism, since those debates focused on the question whether trust or distrust in government is of legal or rather conventional nature.

It is a well-known fact that the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise had a considerable impact on the political theory and practice of British parliamentarism. In particular, the Compromise offered a model to approach the Irish question, one of the most important issues at the end of the nineteenth
century in the United Kingdom. In turn, British parliamentarism had always played an important role as a reference point in Hungarian political thought. Although the interplay between British and Hungarian political thought was more asymmetrical than supposed by Hungarian politicians and political scientists, frequent references to British parliamentarism in Hungary produced an image of similarities between the two political systems rooted in a long-standing tradition of parliamentarism, and the idea of an ancient or unwritten constitution and self-government. However deceptive this idea of analogous political traditions might have been, the notion of a unique parliamentary tradition, comparable only with that in the United Kingdom, heavily influenced Hungarian political thought and practice.

In this paper, I will try to shed light on the special nature of these references by analysing a debate between Gyula Andrássy the Younger, one of the most prominent leaders of the opposition at the beginning of the twentieth century and Count István Tisza, Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament. Both politicians quite frequently referred to British parliamentarism during the constitutional and parliamentary crises in Hungary between 1906 and 1910/1912. I will focus particularly on one point of their debate: the monarch’s competence to appoint a prime minister in the absence of a clear parliamentary majority. The extent of this royal prerogative was one of the most discussed topics in both countries and, as explained above, has a clear link to the question of trust in government. After describing and evaluating the events of the constitutional crises at the beginning of the twentieth century, I hope to present a more sophisticated picture of the mechanism of instrumentalizing the image of British parliamentarism in Hungary.

1 Constitutional Crises in the United Kingdom and in Hungary

At the beginning of the twentieth century, both the United Kingdom and Hungary experienced serious political and constitutional crises. British politics was dominated by the conflict between the two Houses of Parliament. The struggle resulted in a final victory of the House of Commons: the House of Lords was deprived of its veto power after the 1911 adoption of the Parliamentary Act. This act led to the emergence of the so-called “elective dictatorship” of the

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