



# **Hungarian Distinctiveness of CSR in Comparison with the EU Practices**

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# **Hungarian Distinctiveness of CSR in Comparison with the EU Practices**

## **Summary**

Europe – included Hungary – needs a public climate in which entrepreneurs are appreciated not just for making a good profit but also for making fair contribution to addressing certain societal challenges. This public climate cannot be achieved without spreading CSR in the new member states – like in Hungary – as well. “The European Commission strongly believes that CSR matters to each and every European citizen, since it represents an aspect of the European social model. CSR can contribute to sustainable development, while enhancing Europe’s innovative potential and competitiveness, thereby also contributing to employability and job creation.” [Commission of the European Communities, 2006] In Hungary – as in other Eastern-European countries – has only a short past of corporate social responsibility, but growing demand for CSR can be felt in Hungary as well. I would like to give an introduction to the present Hungarian situation of CSR and to the attitude of the Hungarian citizens and the business sphere toward CSR activities. I’m going to explore the motivations, barriers, and further possibilities of spreading voluntary CSR in Hungary in my paper with taking the Hungarian distinctiveness into the consideration.

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## **II. The Background of Voluntary CSR in Hungary**

Before giving an analysis the present Hungarian situation and the further possibilities on the field of CSR we should take some distinctiveness of the Hungarian market economy, society and legal framework into the consideration for better understanding the Hungarian challenge in spreading CSR.

### ***II.1. Hungarian Market Economy***

After the fall of the Soviet Union the systems of existing socialism in Eastern-Europe collapsed, and that meant the overwhelming victory of capitalist system in most of the countries of the region. The changing of the political system in Hungary (1989) brought not only the demand for democracy and civil liberties, but also the demand for the abundance of wares of the Western countries. The general acceptance of market economy, however, does not mean an uncritical attitude toward capitalism. The common foundation and the economic policy models of the market economy of the most developed countries were missing in the former socialist countries, and are missing more or less even today. Profit still has a dubious meaning in the eyes of many citizens in Hungary, and the image of corporate leaders is still wrong. The public opinion is that the managers of the corporations and the owners of the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are not convinced with the impact of their activities and in seeking maximal profit they tend to accept consequences that are damaging to society as a whole. [DEMOS, 2006] According to their image they are indifferent toward social and environmental problems, like global and local environmental pollution, gender equality, quality of the work conditions, local community connection, bribery, etc.

## ***II.2. Hungarian Society***

On one hand the most significant problem of the Hungarian society in this field is low level of consumer awareness. While the consumers and the business partners don't force business actors to reduce or compensate for negative effects of their economic activity, we cannot expect self-restrictive business operation from them. The good examples of Western-European countries also show that spreading corporate social responsibility cannot be achieved without the pressure of consumers. The CSR activities of the companies don't play a significant role in decision making of the Hungarian consumers.

On the other hand the Hungarian citizens have bad memories about voluntary and collective actions from the time of the socialist area. [Radácsi, 2006]

The other characteristic feature of the Hungarian society is lack of commitment to the global social and environmental problems. As I mentioned there is a growing demand of CSR in Hungary as well, the Hungarian citizens are open to the problems of society and environment, but mostly just in mind and not in action. They are dealing with only those problems which endanger directly their local community and environment.

## ***II. 3. Legal Framework***

Hungary became one of the Member States of the European Union in 2004. As a result of the accession the legal framework also has changed, the Hungarian Parliament made the respective legal harmonization steps.

The adaptation of the 2003/51/EK directive [EC, 2003] to the Hungarian Accountancy Act in 2005 means just the possibility – not the obligation – for the companies to publish sustainability or CSR-reports, social accounts or corporate citizenship reports. Nevertheless the amendment of the Act has an incentive effect on the report-making prosperity of the companies.

Besides the adaptation of EU directives there are also Hungarian legislative initiatives and proposals in connection with corporate responsibility concerning the Hungarian Public Procurement Act.

Additionally all the EU legislative provisions, directives and also proposals of the European Commission will be valid and available in Hungary too.

All in all the dilemma is just that how can Hungary adopt CSR methods and philosophy that have been developed and successfully implemented in other markets in a context that is different in so many respects like history, tradition, attitude, customs, knowledge, human and financial resources, etc. [Radácsi, 2006]

### **III. CSR activities in Hungary**

The motivation factors of integration CSR into the business operation in Hungary are similar to the other European countries: growing competitiveness; becoming attractive to the investors; reducing risks; developing image and reputation; multiplication of PR tools; attraction of motivated employees; saving money by environmental conscious operation; meeting the needs of the local community and the stakeholders, with the exception of targeting the conscious consumers, because most of the Hungarian consumers – as I mentioned – are not critical in making their purchase decisions. The main driving force on the companies would be if they recognized firstly the business benefits than the global impacts of responsible operation.

In Hungary like in other European countries, the most important fields of CSR – which has considerable influence on consumers – are the quality of the work conditions and management of cut-backs, realignments and crisis situations. Good example for that the case of Győri Biscuit and Waffle Corporation in 2001. The Danone bought up the mentioned old-famous Hungarian biscuit factory with the promise of not to close it. But some months after – in spite of its promise – Danone decided to close the company and admitted that the only reason for the acquisition was to get further market for its products. The reaction was a country-wide boycott against the products of Danone. The sales of Danone products significantly relapsed in Hungary that year. The most consumer world-wide boycott the products of Nike, Coca-Cola, Nestlé and McDonald's because of the work conditions.

### **III.1. Responsible Companies in Hungary**

In Hungary – besides the subsidiaries of multinational companies – those responsible companies exist in large number who are not really committed to the ideology of CSR just would like to get the benefits by “**painting themselves green**”. These companies try to emphasize the environmental friendly characteristics of their products even those cases these products are not environment friendly at all. In these cases adopting CSR practices are just PR tools or advertisements in “green clothes” without any commitment. Analyzing the Hungarian enterprises fortunately we find one more type of responsible companies. These companies are **really committed to CSR**. Their purpose is not just to be more and more profitable, but to create workplaces, to produce environment friendly products by using environment friendly technologies. These companies often employ handicapped and disabled employees. These companies cannot exist and work without the support of the government. Lack of governmental support can be one of the reasons why the number of these enterprises in Hungary is pretty low. [Gulyás, 2004]

Mainly **corporations** and the subsidiaries of multinational companies use CSR instruments consciously in Hungary, but **SMEs** also carry out socially and environmentally responsible activities.

#### **III.1.1. Responsible Corporations**

Almost all the Hungarian corporations are in familiar with CSR, and they are more or less active in this field. They have the knowledge, the human and financial background in order to act like responsible players of the economy, nevertheless most of them apply just a very few ones from the wide range of existing instruments of CSR, and there are a lot of deficiency in their social responsibility.

Serious characteristic deficiency is lack of long-term thinking. Although the ageing society or equal opportunities issues are well-known challenges in Hungary as well, the corporations do not present whether they have any contribution to solve these problem or not.

The next frequent problem is the way of putting social responsibility into practice. They don't make partnership relations, although they are not expected to solve the emerging problems alone. Therefore they are not able to demonstrate their relevant efforts and their involvement in the efforts of society. [DEMOS, 2006]

Another problem is that the Hungarian corporations are not good at reporting their social responsibility. Analyzing the 2003/51/EK directive and the new Hungarian Accountancy Act we can declare that publishing sustainability or CSR-reports is not compulsory, just a possibility for the companies. Lack of these kinds of reports makes difficult to get an overall picture of CSR activities of the Hungarian corporations. Just 35 Hungarian corporation made environmental or sustainability report – including CSR – at least once in the last 5 years. The first sustainability report was made in Hungary in 2002. [DEMOS, 2006] The number of these reports will hopefully enlarge in the forthcoming years, and hopefully publishing these reports will contribute to establish the transparency and accountability of Hungarian companies, which is indispensable for spreading CSR in our country.

The other thing which makes more difficult to get information about CSR activities of the corporations in Hungary is the problem of media. According to the current Media Act, the corporations have to pay the rate of the commercial advertisement even for the public-purpose announcement or news. If a broadcasting company reports – among the news as factual report – some CSR activity (for example a charitable event) with mentioning the name of the responsible company it can calculate on 20-30 thousand Euro fine from the National Radio and Television Commission, because the announcement is identified as a hidden advertisement. [Üzleti Etika (a), 2005] Because of this regulation – which doesn't meet the EU directive of media regulation – the responsible companies have no chance to publicize their CSR activity without paying the high rate of commercial advertisement.

At the same time one of the most appreciated Hungarian CSR-experts – László Radácsi – declared that the most important question is what the companies do and what they do not do in this field, and not what they announce to the public. In his opinion the spreading of CSR philosophy doesn't depend on the publicity of the charitable events.

Anyway the media has another important role in the field of CSR which is to get the consumers be more critical and to get them build in the social and environmental issues into their purchase decisions. The enormous influence of the media on the thinking of the society would be an effective tool of enlarging the number of so called conscious consumers who prefer the goods of responsible companies and who boycott buying the goods of “bad” ones.

The role which has to be required from the corporations and subsidiaries of multinational companies is showing good example to SMEs in adopting CSR practices. Nevertheless there is a debate in Hungary concerning the CSR activities of the multinational companies. The question is whether there are real actions behind the sustainability reports and public advertisements, or not? By the public opinion most of these companies belongs to the category of companies which paint themselves green, and their reports and public announcements are in fact commercial advertisements in ‘green clothes’.

In the last two years several conferences and events were held in Hungary in the topic of CSR. Most of these events were organized and financed by large corporations and leading business organizations aiming to promote recognition and exchange the experiences of good practices. So the first steps had already been taken by some of the Hungarian corporations in setting good example.

### ***III.1.2. Responsible SMEs***

Firstly I have to lay down, that unfortunately most of the Hungarian SMEs are not in familiar with CSR philosophy. The majority of the entrepreneurs have never heard about even the expression of CSR at all. However in spite of this fact a growing number of SMEs carry out socially and environmentally responsible activities related to their business strategy occasionally, without knowing that is CSR. Mostly those CSR instruments are used among Hungarian SMEs, which do not cost anything for them and with which they are able to reduce their risks and costs, and are able to manage their reputation. [RARE, 2005]

SMEs play an important role in the Hungarian Economy. According to the data published by the Hungarian Ministry of Economy and Transport, more than 99 percent of the Hungarian companies (similar to the EU average) belong to this sector, which employs more than two thirds of all workers, contributes 48,9% of the gross added value and produces nearly 36,8% of all exports. Most enterprises operate in the sector including real estate trade/renting, IT and business, and business support services. This is followed by commercial enterprises and then by manufacturing and construction.

Hungarian SMEs are characterized by a duality: they show every sign of catching up in many important areas (financing, self-organization, management, ICT), but also a considerable backlog relative to their peers in the developed economies. The Hungarian SMEs have a significant backlog in adopting CSR too.

The collective impact of CSR activities of the SMEs is highly important also in the point of view of the European growth, job creation and sustainable development. The European Commission recognized the importance of SME sector in developing CSR practices in Europe. The Commission is going to emphasize on SMEs in those Member States, where CSR is a less well-know concept. [Commission of the European Communities, 2006] Hungary belongs to the group of these Member States.

Writing this paper gives me a good opportunity to present a research project – in which I participate in – within the EU's Sixth Framework Program entitled ***Rhetoric and Realities: Analyzing Corporate Social Responsibility in Europe (RARE)***. The project will provide for the first time systematic evidence on this topic. One aspect of the research is a review of how SMEs approach corporate social responsibility in Europe. The RARE project is researching the extent to which companies' voluntary activities in corporate social responsibility and related activities really contribute to sustainability and in particular to sustainability goals set by the European Union. It examines as one aspect, whether such voluntary activities are relevant to SMEs. Besides analyzing voluntary commitment in multinational companies, in this specific part of the project entitled *SME study* we are surveying 40 companies in the automotive supply sector in Austria and Hungary (20 companies in each country).

Voluntary activities are being researched in the following issue areas:

- Protecting the environment, in particular mitigating climate change and minimizing the risks from chemicals
- Promoting gender equality
- Countering bribery

These issues areas have been chosen because they are crucial for different dimensions of sustainable development.

The reason for I presented the purposes of the RARE project is to present some preliminary experiences of the **Hungarian** part of the **SME survey**. After processing some of the questionnaires (and processing several Hungarian publications in the topic, listed in bibliography) we can paint the following picture of Hungarian SMEs' CSR:

- The main purpose of the SMEs is to reduce risks and costs and to manage their reputation by adopting CSR. → They have no real commitment.
- Managers and owners of the SMEs are not always educated and sophisticated enough (not in a bad sense) to understand the strategic importance of CSR.
- Some of SMEs use instruments without knowing that these are CSR tools. → Lack of relevant information.
- Business partners and consumers of the SMEs do not evaluate or support their social and environmental performance. → Lack of awareness.
- Hungarian SMEs support mainly sport clubs and sport events, youth and education at local level. → Charitable activities appeared also among SMEs.
- They think that their activity is irrelevant regarding climate change and other environmental problems.
- They prefer environmental friendly technologies. → Energy efficiency, reusing and recycling.
- The entrepreneurs promote gender equality.
- The SMEs do not speak about bribery at all. → It is a kind of taboo in Hungary.

- According their opinion the main barriers are: lack of financial support, lack of awareness and lack of competitiveness of the local industry.
- SMEs do not use indicators to measure their environmental performance, they are able just estimate it. → There is no capacity for that.
- They regard monitoring employee satisfaction and collecting information from/about the stakeholders the most useful instruments.

The SMEs involved were cooperative and they were all interested in the topic of CSR and the final survey results too.

Taking everything into the consideration the development of this area is unavoidable. In order to make steps in this field, the cooperation of the government, the civil sector and the trade unions; and dialogue among all the stakeholders are need as soon as possible.

Small enterprises have an important role to play in raising awareness too, mainly at local level through provision of information, connection with the local community and showing good practices.

According to the proposal of the Green Paper: “In the future, the most significant pressure on SMEs to adopt CSR practices is likely to come from their large business customers, which in return could help SMEs cope with these challenges through the provision of training, mentoring schemes and other initiatives.” [Green Paper, 2001]

#### **IV. Future possibilities of spreading and developing CSR in Hungary**

In this chapter of my paper I'm going to summarize the aspects which Hungary has to emphasize on in order to develop further CSR practices.

##### ***IV.1. Awareness-raising of the society***

Awareness-raising of the whole society is the most important aspect in Hungary, because the companies become responsible just in that business environment where

this business behavior is appreciated. In my opinion this is the field where changes are required first, because the behavior of the consumers is the most important barrier of spreading CSR in Hungary. Awareness-raising can be achieved in different ways.

In case of children the **Public Education** (pre-primary, primary and secondary education) and the **Higher Education** should play the most important role in raising awareness of the youth. The educational institutions would build social and environmental approaches into their curricula. "For CSR to become a mainstream business practice, the relevant knowledge and skills need to be developed among future entrepreneurs, company managers and employees." [Commission of the European Communities, 2006]

The **Media** – as I mentioned earlier – has an enormous influence (sometimes unfortunately) not just on the adults but on the youth as well. The players of the Hungarian economy should take the opportunity given by the Media to announce and to publish their responsible activities. This goal can be achieved with the help of the modification of the Hungarian Media Act, by which a company has to pay currently the full rate of a commercial advertisement even for a public announcement.

**National and Regional Authorities** also has a role to play in raising awareness, namely by transmitting CSR informing campaigns of the European Commission to the Hungarian citizens.

**CSR and Sustainability Reports** of the Hungarian companies will become authentic and popular just in case they seek after making them available to all stakeholders, including to consumers, investors, and the wider public. These reports should be important resources of consumer information in Hungary as well. The Hungarian corporations should also make a distinction between CSR and Charity.

#### **IV.2. Role of the National Government**

The role of the government in developing CSR was not a frequented topic in Hungary, but recently growing number of companies recognize its importance in governmental **decision-making to promote CSR**, in giving **rate and tax allowances**, in **labor law reform**, in **supporting national CSR research projects** or in **establishment of CSR-**

**awards and reconcilements.** The emphasis is on providing incentives for responsible production and responsible business behavior without any interventions. It means that the government should create a 'good business environment' for the 'good practices' of CSR in Hungary as well.

The wider society does not expect individual corporations to offer solutions to the social and environmental problems alone. Governmental encouragement can help to the Hungarian corporations in **shaping partnership relations** in order to make their social responsibility more successful and more targeted. They would especially need governmental support since quite a lot EU-funded projects are to be implemented in this field. [DEMOS, 2006]

#### **IV.3. Cooperation with Member States**

'**Good examples**' can be taken not just **from** the multinational companies operating in Hungary, but from other **countries that are on higher level of implementation CSR.** For example the British example also shows how important can CSR be in a well functioning market economy. They established an individual Ministry to coordinate and support CSR in Great Britain seven years ago. We can take either Western-European or American good examples, we should always take the **different nature and different characteristics between the distinct national and cultural context** into the consideration. Nevertheless the 'good examples' always have incentive effects even if they cannot be taken over in the same way.

#### **IV.4. Importance of Academic Research**

There is a **need for more interdisciplinary research** on CSR, in particular on: links at the macro- and meso-levels between CSR, competitiveness and sustainable development; the effectiveness of CSR in reaching social and environmental objectives; and issues such as innovation, corporate governance; industrial relations, and the supply chain. **Hungarian researchers have to be active in these interdisciplinary research areas** and they have to give their best scientific contribution – with publishing

the results of their own research work – to development of CSR in Europe and all over the World.

They should also seek for the opportunity of participating in the CSR part of one of the research projects financed by the forthcoming 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Program of the Commission. ***Participation in these*** extended – sometimes some-years-long – ***research projects can give*** Hungarian researchers ***opportunity to meet and cooperate with the European experts of CSR***, and gives also the opportunity them to visit and to study directly several European countries that are more developed in CSR like Hungary.

## **V. The Latest Hungarian Developments of CSR**

### ***V.1. CSR Decision of the Government***

The Hungarian Government completed and published the first CSR Decision in March 2006. The news was announced by Agnes Simonyi the under-secretary of the Hungarian Ministry of Employment and Labor. The under-secretary told that the decision complies with the obligations of the EU, and it presents the governmental intention to participate in spreading and developing CSR in Hungary. She emphasized the promoting and regulating role of the government in creating a business environment which gives the players of the Hungarian economy ground for spreading good practices of CSR. She also emphasized that the government mustn't apply any intervention on this field, because interventions would detract the voluntary nature of CSR.

Mentioning the concrete instruments of the government, the under-secretary appointed rate and tax allowances and labor law reforms as the areas where the first steps are going to be taken by the Hungarian Government, which is strongly committed to CSR. [Üzleti Etika (c), 2006]

### ***V.2. The First CSR Day in Hungary on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2006***

Participants (Hungarian corporations and several leading broadcasting companies) of the conference titled “Corporate Responsibility and the Media” organized by one of the

biggest mobile operator companies (Pannon) on 25 May declared 1<sup>st</sup> June the Corporate Social Responsibility Day in Hungary. [Üzleti Etika (a), 2006]

Partnering companies, television and radio channels want the new Media Act to regulate media publicity on corporate social responsibility efforts. They also want the National Radio and Television Commission to adopt European standards already in the period until the new law is enacted and not to sanction publicity on charity actions motivated by corporate social responsibility.

On the Corporate Social Responsibility Day, participating media introduced CSR actions of selected companies in their news programs. With this initiative, they want to communicate the clear difference between a factual report on an event of public interest and hidden advertisement aiming to promote consumption, the latter of which is in conflict with relevant laws and is not supported by them either.

Conference participants and initiators of the Corporate Social Responsibility Day included such large corporations as Ericsson, HP, Nokia, Pannon, Richter, Tesco; and the leading Hungarian television and radio channels.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In the last years the expectations were grown also in Hungary, which require from the companies to be active – besides profitability and job creation – in solving ethical, social and environmental problems.

The purpose of fostering corporations and also smaller companies to integrate CSR activities into their operations cannot be achieved in Hungary without raising awareness of the society and without effective governmental support, but the most crucial question concerning the expansion of corporate social responsibility whether players of the Hungarian Economy will recognize those forms of CSR that can be beneficial and easily harmonized with their business interests.

The objective of raising number of responsible companies in Hungary is realistic, because we all agree in a thing: the profit of a company has to be achieved in an ethic and responsible way.

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