

OPTIMISTIC BANKERS

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Kovács, Levente – Sipos, József
Cycle-Changing Years,
Parallel Biographies

Portraits of the Hungarian financial sector,
 2014–2016

Budapest, 2017, p. 244.

Hungarian Banking Association –
Semmelweis Publishing House
 ISBN 978-963-331-407-4



Did you know when *György Zolnai* painted a baseball ground's locker room? That *Sándor Csányi* regards the agricultural sector as the most innovative branch of industry? Or that *Radován Jelasy* lived in a rectory during his studies in higher education? Of course the volume entitled "*Cycle-Changing Years, Parallel Biographies*", hallmarked with the name of the Hungarian Banking Association, does not only give an account of the private lives of leading Hungarian bankers, but also of the Hungarian financial sphere in general, covering the years of the domestic banking sector from 2014 to 2016.

Who could provide a more faithful picture of the past three years in the Hungarian banking sector than those who lead its institutions? In this book, we get to know the thoughts, and the family men and leaders behind these financial institutions, such is the comprehensive nature of the Association's publication presented to readers.

Rare is a book which manages to have the top managers of almost every bank in Hungary speak at the same time, to reveal their thoughts on our country, the financial sector and – last but not least – themselves. In articles appearing in the form of interviews, each leader reveals their personal side while speaking in an easily intelligible manner about the past and present of the domestic sector and the financial profession in general. In this respect, the book will be of interest to anyone curious to know about the careers of domestic bankers, and what they think about the role of the banking sector in future.

The volume is published under the aegis of the Hungarian Banking Association, and begins with a summary by its secretary general *Levente Kovács*, outlining the processes and future challenges of the financial sector. The tightening of regulations and the digital transformation will incentivize domestic players to ensure

that we can arrange our finances efficiently and with ever-greater convenience and security. In addition, it can also be seen that in the period 2014–2016, the global economy continued to be characterized by slow growth and the persistence of earlier imbalances. This further intensifies the pressure on global markets – and thus also the banking market – to seek out new paths and exploit the potential in the digital transformation. The decrease in one-off state interventions may have a favourable impact on the domestic sector, as may the appearance of various forms of government subsidy on the mortgage loan market and in the SME segment, which typically has caused an expansion in credit volume here in Hungary in excess of average growth in Europe. According to the secretary general, the period since 2016 may once again create favourable grounds for restoring the competitiveness of the Hungarian banking sector, as decreasing uncertainty and growing legal security lead to a greater capability than at present on the part of the domestic sector to support the growth of the Hungarian economy.

Following this, Hungarian bank leaders directly present the diversity of the Hungarian banking sector and their own institutions within it. One at a time, we get to know the institutions both large and small, each revealing how faith in their own role and the dedication of their leaders plays an important part in the operation of banks in Hungary. Naturally individual banks were impacted in different ways by the economic decline that occurred after 2008, so that significant differences are apparent in the positioning of individual institutions, and in the assessment of their growth potential.

The interviews with domestic leaders are personal in tone, letting us get to know each leader as a person. We can find out who has been in Africa, Canada or elsewhere on the planet before they embarked on their career at home, putting their broad range of knowledge to use in the banking sector. Attitudes to leadership emerge from each leader's words, and these are surprisingly diverse, contributing to the complexity of the domestic sector. In addition, there is naturally room for each leader to expound on the positioning and future strategy of the firm they direct, from which we can discern that domestic bankers are generally optimistic with regard to the future prospects of the sector in Hungary. They aim to ride out the challenges of the times, develop relationships with clients and improve the customer experience. No one wants to be left behind by the competition, which is only good for us, the consumers of financial products.

So what will the future bring? While it is not sure that the same picture forms in everyone's heads, what is sure is that the future will evolve by way of regulatory changes, the adaptation of digital technologies, and the transformation of traditional banking. In this way, by addressing the younger generations, the sector will progress significantly, and our grandchildren will have the chance to access an entirely different range of financial services, which are hopefully easier to comprehend and simpler to manage than those available today.