A type of optative construction

1. Goals
The talk analyzes the structure illustrated in (1), aiming to explain its word order possibilities and its interpretation:

(1) a. *Jöttél   volna haza   idejében!*
     come-PAST-2SG COND home   in.time   '(If only) you had come home in time!'

    b. *Büntetné   már   egyszer meg a rendőr   gyorshajtásért!*
       fine-COND.3SG   already once   PRT the policeman speeding-for
       '(If only) the police would once fine him for speeding!'

    c. *Ne ŐT választottátok   volna meg már megint!*
       not him elect-PAST-2PL   COND PRT again   '(If only) you hadn't elected HIM again!'

The structure will be identified as a kind of optative construction. The talk will first examine standard optative sentences, c-commanded by the particle *bár(csak)*. The construction in (1) will be shown to be a special case of the optative sentence, in which the optative head c-commanding the proposition is a [+optative]-marked V or a [+optative]-marked negative particle.

2. Facts to be accounted for
The structure illustrated in (1a-c) has the following properties:

i. The neutral 'particle, verb' order is reversed (cf. (1a)).

ii. The V cannot be preceded by a (non-negated) focus, but can be followed by it:

(2) a. %*KEVESEBB TÁRGYBÓL   buktál   volna meg*!
      fewer   subjects-from fail-PAST-2SG COND PRT

    b. *Buktál volna meg KEVESEBB TÁRGYBÓL! (Akkor most vakációzhatnál!)*
      '(If only) it had been fewer subjects that you failed in!' (Now you could be vacationing.)

iii. The V can be preceded by *ne*, the negative particle licensed in subjunctive/imperative contexts:

(3) *Ne/*nem   jöttél   volna   haza olyan későn!*
   NEG.SUBJ/not came-PAST-2SG COND   home so   late
   '(If only) you hadn't come home so late!'

iv. The V can be preceded by *ne* + focus (1b). The negated focus cannot follow the V:

(4) **Választottátok   volna meg   ne   ŐT!*
   elect-PAST-2PL   COND PART NEG.SUBJ him

v. The construction can marginally include a topic:

(5)   *?Pétert   BÜNTETNÉ   már   meg egyszer a rendőr gyorshajtásért!*
    Peter-ACC fine-COND.3SG   already PRT once   the police speeding-for
    '(If only) the police would once fine Peter for speeding!'

vi. Functionally, the structure has a counterfactual interpretation expressing an unfulfilled expectation or demand. The V is in the past or present conditional. Evidence that it involves an optative operator is provided by the fact that the negative particle *ne* attested in (1c)/(3)/(6b) is only licensed in the scope of volitional (optative or imperative) mood. Cf.:

(6) a. *Ha nem/*ne   késtél   volna el …*
     if   not /NEG.SUBJ be-PAST-2SG COND PRT
     'If you had not been late, …'

    b. *Bárcsak ne   /*nem késtél   volna el!*
     if.only NEG.SUBJ/not   be-PAST-2SG COND PRT
     'If only you had not been late!'

3. The canonical optative sentence
Canonical optative sentences are introduced by *bár, bárcsak*, or *csak*. The optative particle can act like a complementizer, not affecting the word order of the projection it combines with. It can merge with PredP, the predicate phrase of neutral clauses (7a). In (7b), PredP is also preceded by a topic. In (7c), the topic precedes the optative particle:

(7) a. [_{OptP} *Bár(csak)* [_{PredP} **haza jött   volna   Péter idejében!**]]
         if   only   home come-PAST.3SG COND Peter in.time
     'If only Peter had come home in time!'

   b. [_{OptP} *Bár(csak)* [_{TopP} *Péter* [_{PredP} **haza jött volna** *idejében!*]]]

   c. [_{TopP} *Péter* [_{OptP} *bár(csak)* [_{PredP} **haza jött volna** *idejében!*]]]

The optative particle can also behave like an operator (8a), merging with a Non-Neutral Phrase, eliciting V-movement into the NN head. In this case, too, the optative particle can somewhat marginally be preceded or followed by a topic.

(8) a. [_{OptP} *Bárcsak* [_{NNP} **jött volna haza** *Péter idejében!*]]

   b. [_{OptP} *Bár(csak)* [_{TopP} *Péter* [_{NNP} **jött volna haza** *idejében!*]]

   c. [_{TopP} *Péter* [_{OptP} *bár(csak)* [_{NNP} **jött volna haza** *idejében!*]]

The optative operator can also merge with a FocP or a NegP:

(9) a. [_{OptP} *Bár(csak)* [_{FocP} *PÉTER*   *kapná*   *meg a díjat!*]]
               if   only   Peter   get-COND-3SG PRT the prize-ACC
      'If only it would be Peter who gets the prize!'

   b. [_{OptP} *Bár(csak)* [_{NegP} *ne kapná*   *meg Péter a díjat*]]
               if   only   not get-COND-3SG PRT Peter the prize-ACC
      'If only Peter would not get the prize!'

Generalization: an optative sentence must be in the scope of an optative functional head (except for the topic, which, being referential, necessarily outscopes all operators anyway.)

4. The analysis of (1a-c)
(1a-c) and (2b) are optative sentences with the optative particle absent. The optative head can be empty if it is immediately followed by a V-initial NNP ((1a,b), (2b)), or by a *ne*-initial NegP (1c).
Derivation:
Tentative hypothesis (to be discarded): The V-initial optative construction is the output of V-movement across the focus into the Opt head. (*Kevesebbet* 'less-ACC' is obligatorily focused.)

(10)a. [_{OptP} [_{Opt'} *Bár(csak)* [_{FocP} *KEVESEBBET* [_{NNP} [_{NN'} *[ittál*   *volna]*]]]]] –>
              if   only   less-ACC   drink-PAST-2SG COND
      'If only you had drunk less!'

   b. [_{OptP} [_{Opt'} *[Ittál volna]*_i [_{FocP} *KEVESEBBET* [_{NNP} t_i]]]]
      '(If only) you had drunk less!'

However, an optative operator can elicit V-movement across a FocP into a higher NN head without V-to-Opt movement taking place. In (11), the lower NNP is selected by the Foc head, and the higher NNP is selected by the Opt head. The V moves across the lower NN, and lands in the higher one (provided it does not cross a NegP, which is ruled out independently – see also (4)).

(11) [_{OptP} [_{Opt'} *Bár(csak)* [_{TopP} *János* [_{NNP} *[ivott volna]*_i [_{FocP} *KEVESEBBET* [_{NNP} t_i]]]]]]
      'If only John had drunk less!'

The fact that the optative particle can also be missing in front of a NegP, as in (12a,b), also indicates that the possibility of an empty Opt does not presuppose any V-to-Opt movement:

(12)a. [_{OptP?} [_{NegP} *Ne* [_{NNP} *ittál*   *volna* *[annyit!*]]]]
               not   drink-PAST-2SG COND so.much-ACC
      '(If only) you hadn't drunk so much!'

   b. [_{OptP?} [_{NegP} *Ne* [_{FocP} *PÁLINKÁT* [_{NNP} *ittál volna!*]]]]
      'If only it hadn't been palinka that you had drunk!'

(12b) does not involve any Neg-to-Opt movement from below FocP; negation cannot have narrow scope with respect to the focus. What licences the empty Opt is its adjacency to *ne*.

Claim:
The optative mood of the construction is present in the feature complex of three heads in the sentence: the optative particle, the V+conditional morpheme complex, and the *ne* variant of the negative particle. An empty Opt head is licensed if it is adjacent to a [+optative] marked head (the V in the conditional, or the *ne* particle), presumably because

(13) A head carrying a [+optative] feature, adjacent to an Opt head, can merge with Opt, which, therefore, need not be spelled out.