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The Hungarian Democratic Opposition in the 1980's: External and Internal Effects and Resources

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Abstract

The basis of the article is that there has been a renewed interest towards the opposition movements of 1980s Central Eastern Europe. One of the most interesting of these movements was the Hungarian opposition which, considering its size was much smaller than the Polish opposition, nevertheless considering its social effect and network, had a significant role in the late Kadar-era. The essay analyzes the relationship of the State-party and the opposition through concrete events as well as analyzing in depth the strategy of the State-party towards the opposition. The piece concludes that concerning the Hungarian democratic opposition not only its ideological influence but its network building must be the source of further research as well.

Keywords: Kádár era, Hungarian democratic opposition, informal politics, human rights.

With the passing of time since the 1989-90 Central and Eastern European transitions, we are beginning to understand what we did not comprehend twenty-five years ago. We knew that opposition movements throughout Central-Eastern Europe played an important role in the disintegration of state party dictatorships, however, it was not clear yet, *in what way* and *how* they were of significance. Even today, we can not say that we know everything. Nevertheless, in light of the research carried out during the past two decades, we now hold not just the *ideological* influence of the opposition decisive, but the principles of organisation represented by the anti-elite (the rehabilitation of “*informal politics*”) are seen as important as well. Though I speak of the first in greater detail and less (and only in the Conclusion) of the latter, I suggest that the reader keep both in mind. The opposition groups and movements were simultaneously political and public phenomena, meaning they affected the system and the “life-world” at the same time.

As a preface (and with no claim of completeness) let me refer to a few works from which the reader may receive information concerning these movements. The volume edited by Pollack and Wielgoths presents the individual Central-Eastern European opposition groups. Bartkowski discusses the role and significance of the Polish Solidarity movement; Torpey examines the East German intellectual movements and their legacy, while the thematic issue of East European Politics and Societies (Blokker-Brier eds.) covers all Central-Eastern European countries. For those interested in the theory of opposition, I suggest the works of Alfred Stepan as well as Lewis, Hlavacek-Holzer, Helms, and Falk. (See Pollack and Wielgoths, 2004; Bartkowski, 2009; Torpey, 1995; Blokker-Brier eds., 2011; Stepan, 1997; Lewis, 1997; Hlavacek-Holzer, 2009; Helms, 2008, Falk, 2011)

Naturally this piece of writing is mainly about the Hungarian democratic opposition. Writing this essay I built abundantly on my own works, primarily on my three-volume book on the democratic opposition, as well as on my essay written about János Kis, a leading figure of the one-time democratic opposition. I also used the works of other Hungarian authors. (Csizmadia, 1995; Csizmadia, 2005: 289-301; Bozóki, 2008; Bozóki, 2010; Szabó Máté, 2008; Ripp, 1995, Ripp, 2006, as well as Bernard, 2007.)

Out of the Hungarian democratic opposition's legacy, I am interested in at least two questions: 1. What international effects and external examples did the democratic opposition base its institutionalisation on during the second half of the Kádár-regime? 2. What political programme and strategy did the movement develop, and what role did this programme play in the collapse of the system?

Finally, in the conclusion, I summarise my findings concerning the examination of internal and external factors, and raise an aspect which this analysis can only refer to, but not elaborate on. This is the question of the informal organisation of the democratic opposition. Its “network capacity”, which will have to be the source of future research.

The External Effects: International Trends and Central-Eastern European Examples of Opposition

The birth of the Hungarian opposition is inseparable from the reversal of political reforms – due to Soviet influence – in the beginning of the 1970s. The recoil however, was not final. To such an extent, that the first time the Hungarian opposition really called attention to itself, was in January 1977, when 34 dissidents signed the petition drafted to free Pavel Kohout, the leader of the Czechoslovakian Charter 77 movement. Two factors played part in the fact that a declaration of solidarity could come about and the Hungarian opposition was formed: 1. a unifying concept was created, the idea of human rights; 2. the Polish opposition worked out a highly successful strategy, new evolutionism. The identity of the Hungarian democratic opposition evolved from these.

Helsinki and Human Rights

Though Convergence – the theory of the approach of the two world orders – was quite strong during the mid 70s, nevertheless the socialist countries thought that the general crises of the capitalist countries would continue to “deepen”. This appeared at the Brussels Conference of Western European Communist Parties in January 1974 and in the March 1975 statement of the XI. Party Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSZMP)¹. This evaluation was based on two pillars. Firstly, on the traditional notion that socialism was ab ovo superior to capitalism and that the constant voicing of its superiority is one of the most important comparative legitimating requirements against the de-ideologised system aimed at eliminating Marxism. Secondly, the alleged vantage of socialism seemed to be supported by the Western left’s “feedback”. Not just by the strong left-wing system critique, but the leftist type *changing* of the system as well (i.e. Greece, Portugal). This was fuelled by the Vietnam conflict and the ambivalent political, economic position of the United States. For the socialist bloc and quite a few left-wing intellectuals, the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Helsinki Accords fell in line with this perception, as if it had been the fruit of the persistence of the socialist countries.

The West refused to recognise any sort of socialist vantage. On the contrary: starting from the mid-1970s it experimented with creating a *new type* of capitalism which can only be compared to the real socialism in a *positive* sense. With the closure of the Vietnam War, and the political, economic and intellectual organisation of the West, the socialist strategy based on *comparative* legitimacy gradually started to erode. It eventually became impossible to make citizens believe that there could be a *positive outcome* of a comparison with the West. Between 1975 and 1985, a neo-conservative turn came about in international politics. The leftist illusion of the global victory of socialism, or at least the creation of a democratic socialism – dominant among Western intellectuals following 1945 – dissolved.

¹ Cf: The documents of the XI. Congress of the MSZMP. *Társadalmi Szemle*, April 1975: 4-39.

The Helsinki Accords had *political* and *human rights* antecedents going back many years. (Tóké, 1977; Haas, 1977) Socialist countries considered the political antecedents their own merit, as the Warsaw Pact's March 1969 Budapest statement "paved the way" to Helsinki. According to the "old" perception, the statement contained guarantees for the most important questions of European security (for example the assurance of the existing European borders).

On the other hand, the Helsinki Accord's *third basket* contained the articles concerning human rights and humanitarian issues. This was strongly connected to the developments of the years preceding CSCE. Several high-profile human rights cases were registered in socialist countries between 1968 and 1975 which justified the need for the question to be dealt with on an international level.

Human rights could become a part of the programme of CSCE because no international treaty guaranteeing the area had been made in the preceding decades.² Though the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948, this was just the first step towards the creation of a legally binding international law concerning human rights. Already at that time the decision was made that *two* covenants would be necessary: one concerning *political and civil rights*, and another on *economic, social and cultural rights*. In the end, the General Assembly adopted the International Covenants and the closely connected Optional Protocol almost two decades later, on *December 16, 1966*. However, the necessary signatures of at least 35 states could only be reached at the CSCE. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) took effect on January 3, 1976, followed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), along with its Optional Protocol, on March 23.

In Hungary, the two covenants were proclaimed by statutory rule; however, the leadership did not sign the Optional Protocol. This is important in light of the later events. Article 1 contains the following: "A State Party to the Covenant that becomes a party to the present Protocol recognizes the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals subject to its jurisdiction who claim to be victims of a violation by that State Party of any of the rights set forth in the Covenant. No communication shall be received by the Committee if it concerns a State Party to the Covenant which is not a party to the present Protocol."³ It is clear from this text that the signature of the Protocol was unthinkable for Soviet-type regimes. *Violations of the State* against individuals were unknown for the socialist legal systems. Signing the Protocol would have been equal to them giving up on their interpretation of law and politics. As (in the official canon) Marxism was the embodiment of *the* scientific ideology, the State signified *the* supremacy of socialism. Just as no initiative could face official Marxism, the State could not be called to account for anything, and especially not through individual appeal.

It is widely held that Hungary *put in force* the covenants on human rights. In reality we can only talk of this with restrictions. Though Hungary signed the ICCPR,

² From here on see: The publication of the Information Department of the UN Office in New York and the UN Association of Hungary: *Az Emberi Jogok Nemzetközi törvénye*. (The International Law of Human Rights) Bp. 1987: 5-7.

³ See: Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In. *Az Emberi Jogok Nemzetközi törvénye*: 58.

by not signing the Optional Protocol it indicated that it still did not recognise *external* authority in the judgement of disputed issues or violations concerning human rights thereby *relativising* ICCPR and making their compliance with the obligations a question of *interpretation*.

The entry into force of the covenants was invaluable for international politics and the evolution of the opposition movements. The notion of human rights, the liberal concept of the innate and inalienable rights of people, became the means of regeneration from the “ideological crisis” of the marginal Hungarian intelligentsia. The social movements created in Central-Eastern Europe starting from 1976 could hardly reckon with a debate starting over the interpretation of the content of the covenants. This was exactly the case though, namely because the ICESR was *more important* for the socialist countries than the ICCPR. From the beginning of 1977, serious debates took place concerning the violation of human rights in socialist countries, as well as the unilateral Western (American) interpretation of human rights.

The XXIV. Congress of the CPSU decided on the programme for 1976-1990 concerning the construction of complete communism basically at the same time that the covenants took effect.⁴ From the perspective of communism, the concept of human rights was another “imperialist strategy” aimed at the destruction of the *unity* of the “three forces of world revolution” (the proletariat, socialist countries and liberation movements). While the socialist countries wanted to keep up the existing system of international politics, they saw human rights as a dangerous plan aimed at the alteration of relations.⁵

Though the concept of human rights became the basis of regeneration for marginalised intellectuals, the dogmatic forces of the socialist countries strengthened in reaction to the human rights “doctrine”.

The Polish Example: From Revisionism to New Evolutionism

KOR (Workers’ Defense Committee) was the first Central-Eastern European alternative political movement following the Helsinki Accords and the enactment of the ICCPR. But where did this opposition movement come from?

Contrary to Hungary and Czechoslovakia, no reform processes started in Poland during the second half of the sixties. The ideas of 1956 however, were influential; Leszek Kolakowski, who later became a worldwide known philosopher, was expelled from the party for taking part in the commemoration held at the Warsaw University on the tenth anniversary of the October events. The dissatisfaction peaked in 1968, when – following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War – an anti-Semitic campaign started within the State and party leadership. This intensified in March, when Adam Mickiewicz’s piece was banned. At the last authorised performance, a fervent

⁴ *Társadalmi Szemle*, April 1976.

⁵ Cf. László Nagy: Ideológiai harc és nemzetközi enyhülés (Ideological Struggles and International Thaw). *Pártélet*, 1976. Issue No. 10; Tamás Pálos: A szocializmus hiteles képe—az antikommunista propaganda kudarca (An Authentic Picture of Socialism—the Failure of Anti-Communist Propaganda), *Pártélet*, 1977, No. 4. also, Tamás Pálos: Az ideológiai harc korunk objektív jelenségei (The Ideological Struggle is an Objective Symptom of Our Times), *Társadalmi Szemle*, February 1977. The conference of Secretaries of Central Committees of fraternal parties in Sofia on March 2-3, 1977 formulated its position this way as well (“ideological struggle is an objective symptom of our times”).

demonstration of sympathy took place, with strong anti-Soviet feelings. A large-scale demonstration was held at the Warsaw University. During the anti-Zionist, nationalist campaign, more than 1600 students were dismissed; certain faculties were completely eliminated, the leaders of the student demonstrations were sentenced to prison. (Mizsei, 1987: 190-191; Rupnik, 1979: 60-65) Though the campaign was predominantly aimed at the displacement of the reform communist party opposition, (following Edward Gierek's rise to power, close to 100,000 members were expelled) (Körösényi, 1988: 109-110) it became clear, that as the tradition of pluralism lived on in Poland, the line of battle would run not just between the conservatives and reformers within the Party.

As a result of the nationalistic cleansing, the Party could no longer hope for society to *accept* any sort of reform. Despite the success reached by the Party leadership with the signature of the Treaty of Warsaw recognizing the Polish borders, in December 1970 demonstrations and strikes erupted in several cities toppling the Gomulka regime. A new national programme was accepted in February 1971 which placed emphasis on the *overall* development of economy instead of *selectivity*. (Mizsei, 1988: 196)

Prices in Poland were practically frozen from 1956 to 1970 in order to secure *consumer legitimacy*. The moment they tried to change this, society revolted against the price rises. Economic policy deteriorated into a device for the prevention of social discontent. It was nearly impossible to break free from this vicious circle. Society did not accept the ruling power as *authority*, however, in order to preserve the living standards, the leadership had to make drastic attempts to try and correct the distorted economic policy.⁶ The period between 1971 and 1975 was an expansive period of the new party leadership; economic growth—though financed from external sources—was fast and undiminished. While the economy could not be turned around, the standard of living grew constantly.

In 1975, the amendment of the 1952 Constitution was put on the agenda, with plans to constitutionally anchor two fundamental points: the declaration of the *leading role of the Party* and the *friendship with the Soviet Union*. Furthermore, changes were planned in the constitutional definition of civic rights and duties. (Mizsei, 1988: 197; Raina, 1978) Contrary to the factors affecting the development of the Czech and Hungarian opposition, in Poland, the *direct actions* of the political leadership triggered the protests, and initiated the approach of intellectuals who otherwise held different world views. The protests of various social groups played an important role in the fact that the amendments became significantly milder than originally planned.

The other factor which had an effect on the reorganization and increased political activity of intellectuals, was the June 1976 plan for a price rise of 60%, which was even more drastic than the 36% of 1970. Following the day of the announcement strikes and walkouts were held. As a result of the demonstrations the price rises were repealed. (Mizsei, 1988: 197; Bernhard, 1987: 363-392) Nevertheless, proceedings were started against the participants and many were sentenced to prison terms.

⁶ T. H. Rigby analyses the problem of the lack of authority in Poland during the period of Solidarity exceptionally well, this is also true for earlier periods. Cf.: Conceptual Approach to Authority, Power, and Policy, in: Rigby, Brown, Reddaway (ed.), *Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR*. London, 1983: 9-10.

KOR was created on September 23, 1976 to help to free the convicts; provide support to the families of the victims, wounded and imprisoned, as well as to collect and share information on the events with those concerned. Owing to KOR and international publicity, the Council of State of Poland ordered an amnesty on July 22, 1977, freeing the convicted workers and KOR members who had been imprisoned because of their work.⁷

How and why did KOR have an affect in Hungary? First and foremost, because it was an *ideology-free* movement. It was the answer to the question troubling young intellectuals who had become marginalised after 1968. KOR made it clear that the strategy of *revisionism* was over, and designated its main partner in society: the *working class*. Adam Michnik summarised the new Polish democratic opposition's strategy – the politics of new evolutionism – in an article which can be considered the backbone of the programme. (Michnik, 1977, 1978)

Two different concepts of evolution came about following 1956. Both started out from the assumption that the communist system was capable of evolving. Michnik called one concept *revisionist*, the other *neopositivist*. The Polish revisionists tried to renew the Communist party and Marxism “from within”, hoping that the system could be made more democratic and that Marxist theory would integrate the modern elements of social sciences. The neopositivist view of evolution differed from this, mainly because it originated not *within* the party, but from the *Znak* group, a non-party Catholic parliamentary faction led by Stanislaw Stomma. The point of it was that it was not necessary to accept Marxist doctrine and socialist ideology but one had to be *loyal* to the Soviet Union. Stomma's aim was to create the seed of a political movement which – at the right time – could lead Poland.

The two evolutionary strategies met the needs of the special situation starting from 1957, which was “a period of social normalization and political thaw, increasing prosperity, and relative expansion of civil liberties. Both groups reflected to a great degree the atmosphere of political peace and socio psychological stability.” (Michnik, 1985: 141) Between 1968 and 1976 however, as a result of the spontaneous social actions, (the 1968 student protests, the 1970 workers strikes, the 1975 protests against the amendment of the Constitution, and the 1976 workers demonstrations) the problems became obvious. Clearly two positions were facing each other: that of the *oppressor* and that of the *oppressed*. In the event of crisis revisionists and neopositivists always chose the side of power without examining the nature of their relationship to it.

What should our relationship towards power be like? – asked Michnik. The only possible strategy could be to *place pressure* on the power apparatus, reaching gradual changes, giving up the XIX. century illusion of the revolutionary toppling of power. One has to set out from reality: both the power of the Soviet Union and the Communist party will survive. However, one must not think that nothing can be done in this situation. The starting-point therefore is that: “...the interests of the Soviet political leadership, the Polish political leadership, and the Polish democratic opposition are basically concurrent. For all three parties a Soviet military intervention

⁷ Adam Michnik spent several months in Western Europe in the autumn of 1976 and spring of 1977, following his return he was placed into remand from where he was freed by the amnesty.

in Poland would be a political disaster.” The Polish opposition had to prevent that catastrophe.

Convergent interests can lead to mutual *allowances*. As *in principle* the invasion of Soviet troops in Poland could not be excluded, the “concession” of the Polish opposition was that during the first phase of the change it had to accept the Brezhnev Doctrine, or the theory of “limited sovereignty”. It had to come to terms with the fact that there was no talk of *complete* sovereignty without accepting the lack of it forever.

Within the circumstances of limited sovereignty, the opposition differs from the position of the “old evolutionists” as it speaks *not* to the totalitarian power, but is aimed at the *independent public*. It is somewhat unclear what Michnik meant by independent public, as following this he writes: “‘New evolutionism’ is based on faith in the power of the working class, which, with a steady and unyielding stand, has on several occasions forced the government to make spectacular concessions.” But what should the relationship between the new evolutionist opposition and the intra-party revisionists be like?

Michnik made it clear: there is no such thing as the relationship of democrats *and* democrats; party “*pragmatists*” are not democrats, they do not want a multi-party system or workers’ self-governments. However, they do not want to *suppress* the opposition either. Therefore the democratic opposition can be a *partner* of the party pragmatists in political concessions, but never an *ally*. The opposition has to be capable of *distinguishing* the different tendencies within the party, but should not confuse its own efforts with what the pragmatists want. Revisionists – Michnik suggested – never undertook the task of clearly *defining* themselves and forming a political trend. The democratic opposition had to do just that: “The democratic opposition must formulate its own political goals and only then, with those goals in hand, reach political compromises.”

This meant not just political, but *behavioural* reform as well. The intelligentsia had to work out the comportment of the non-conformist person, the “lifestyle of truth”. Michnik articulated these thoughts for the first time at the conference held in Paris on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the 1956 Warsaw and Budapest revolutions. The text of this speech (along with the main documents of KOR) became significant for the Hungarian opposition.

Making Contact with the Polish Opposition and the Western Emigration

1977 was not just an important year because a small group of the Hungarian opposition openly showed solidarity with the Czech Charter 77 movement, but also because it brought a change in the “international relations” of Hungarian dissidents. Even though the opposition existed before 1977, it was not “institutionalised”. Firstly, because prior to 1976 there was no organised opposition in Czechoslovakia or Poland either, and also because we could speak even less of organised dissent in Hungary than in the other mentioned countries. Thirdly, the passports of all affected parties of the “Philosophers’ Trial” and the Haraszi-trial were revoked – making it practically impossible to keep contact with the Western emigration – therefore personal contacts could not develop. There was no Hungarian lecturer yet at the October 1976 Czech-Polish-Hungarian conference in Paris; Gyula Tellér (writing under the pseudonym

János Kovács) sent his essay to the conference. The January 1977 Charter proclamation was indispensable for the breakthrough. This directed attention on the Hungarian dissidents.

Lacking personal contacts, the publications of the Polish and Czech opposition reached the Hungarian dissidents through intermediaries. Pierre (Péter) Kende, György Schöpflin and Bill Lomax played an important role in this.⁸ According to several accounts, the first personal contact with the Polish opposition was made in December of 1977.⁹

Miklós Haraszti and István Rév travelled to Warsaw at that time. Miklós Haraszti could travel to the West – for the first time in ten years – fulfilling an invitation to West-Berlin. Eventually, Haraszti went to Warsaw and talked with the leaders of the Polish opposition, Jan Litinski and Adam Michnik. The selection titled, *0.1%* (edited by György Bence and János Kis) made especially for the Poles, served the strengthening of the ties well.

The second issue of *Magyar Füzetek* (Hungarian Leaflets) in Paris published all the writings of *0.1%*. The following stands in the introduction by the editor: “It is not indifferent concerning the formation of Hungary’s intellectual identity, that there *exists* a young generation searching for something new, which is just cutting away the umbilical chord connecting it to the Marxist political and ideological ascendants. On the other hand, we have to bear in mind, that the Hungarian manuscript literature is full of authors who approach the question of nation and society with completely different terminologies.”¹⁰ In the introduction *three* different schools of thought are mentioned: the Christian Church, national traditions and social democracy. The volume only foreshadows these trends, however, *it does not represent them*. The editor also emphasised, that in the case of a “new movement”, full representation is secondary. It is more important that *0.1%* “draws attention to what is new in Hungarian public life, the alienation and path seeking of the intelligentsia raised by the system.”¹¹

To speak briefly of the volume, let us see Miklós Haraszti’s introduction. Firstly: what does the title of the publication indicate? Above all the ratio of the representatives of Hungarian “unofficial literature” within the total population, as well as the fact that Hungary’s Western perception is “astoundingly” positive, many people compare it to the West, where the governments represent the will of 99.9% of the population. What could be the key to the Hungarian secret? The author looked for the answer not so much in the loyal behaviour of the people, but mainly in the positions of the *opinion leaders* (writers, social scientists), the common strategy of *internal critique*. The West was disarmed by the fact that in Hungary some sort of conciliation came about, and not between the *descendants* of the jailers and the prison inmates, but between the jailers *and* the jailed. The West thinks it symbolic if the two camps can make peace with each other; however, this is more than just sheer compromise. According to Haraszti, this conciliation is based on false premises, “it is

⁸ János Kenedi’s verbal account.

⁹ Verbal accounts of István Rév, János Kis, Miklós Haraszti.

¹⁰ Cf.: *Magyar Füzetek*, Issue No. 2.: 11.

¹¹ *Magyar Füzetek*: 11-12.

not a movement evolving towards freedom. On the contrary, the way to freedom could only lead through the disintegration of this compromise.”¹²

In this situation based on the “freedom of counsellors” virtually no one has the *right* to support the freedom of *others*. This chronic lack of liberty leads to emigration.

Thus, the background of the samizdat is given by the fact that a small minority of intellectuals had had enough of the “freedom of counsellors”, orientation and self-censorship. At the beginning of 1978 this circle had no other programme yet than the *rejection of self-censorship*. However, since the social environment was not supportive, it could have no other aim than to be “the symbolic voice of permitted disobedience of 0.1% of the citizens”¹³

0.1% was a conscious signal from the Hungarian samizdat writers towards the intellectuals of the Polish opposition. At first, *0.1%* was published in Pierre Kende's periodical, *Magyar Füzetek*. According to Kende, he did not have the means to create a publication representing Hungarian critical thought - before the end of the seventies. He must have meant that an organised opposition did not appear in Hungary before 1977. Up until the appearance of *Profil* - Kende did not believe that there were enough manuscripts in Hungary for it to make sense to start *Magyar Füzetek*.¹⁴ The mission of *Magyar Füzetek* was to aid the formation of “professional, systematic, political self-reflection”, to create a forum for non literary, non nostalgic analysis, filling the void within Hungarian (and emigrant Hungarian) public thought. It was even more important though, for a new opposition movement to enter the scene, which had already *broken* with Marxism.¹⁵ This makes it clear why a closer cooperation could not come about earlier between the emigrants and those at home. Those living abroad saw the budding opposition as too Marxist, and this view remained unchanged between 1973-76. On one hand, the proclamation of solidarity of the Hungarian “34's” was needed, on the other, the compilation of *Profil* (which could hardly be called Marxist) in order for the conditions for taking up contact to come about. According to Kende, there were *two* things that the Hungarian dissidents did not understand until the middle of the seventies: that “Marxism does not give a framework for modern democratic civil thought”, and that the nation is a central category of political thinking and political discourse is fundamentally within national frameworks.” Kende thought, that it was they, who spoke from the “outside” who gave these two aspects.¹⁶

Both the questions of democracy and the nation were issues which appeared very rarely among the Hungarian dissident intelligentsia prior to 1977-78. Of course we have no reason to say that these questions became part of the Hungarian areas of interest *solely* as a result of the Hungarian emigration in Paris, however, it seems certain that they contributed to the opposition's later self-definition. We can also say perhaps, that they played part in the opposition turning towards István Bibó, as well as

¹² Miklós Haraszti: Az egytized százalékos terv (The One Tenth Percent Plan), *Magyar Füzetek*, Issue No. 2.: 15.

¹³ Haraszti: 11-12.

¹⁴ Interview with István Kemény, *Interjúk*: 34.

¹⁵ From the Parisian Tower interview: 35.

¹⁶ From the Parisian Tower: 36.

in the fact that the dissident Hungarian intellectuals searched for and partly identified, those most important internal problems to which they had earlier paid meagre attention.

Magyar Füzetek, remained the scene of the path finding and debate of the Hungarian opposition later on as well, yet 1978 was the year when the dissident Hungarian intellectuals first reflected upon their "situation".

The Programme and Strategy of the Hungarian Opposition

The end of the 1970s still meant very difficult circumstances for the budding opposition. Partly because very few people participated in the movement (especially compared to Poland); and partly because the authorities tried to render its existence impossible. Nevertheless, the movement had started living a life of its own, the proof of which was the organisation of the Western and Polish orientation and the establishment of contacts.

The next step could be no other than the creation of the programme, which set the not too numerous Hungarian opposition in front of a huge challenge. This meant weighing the possibilities of following the external examples, especially after the introduction of martial law in Poland (December 13, 1981). Many in the Hungarian opposition thought that the "self containment" movement of the 1971-1977 period could not be continued, and they felt, that a considerable hardening of power will follow, resulting in the certain dissolution of the opposition. (György Bence belonged to this group.)

Others, (e.g. János Kis, Miklós Haraszti and Ottília Solt) thought otherwise. This "optimistic" part of the opposition created the first real samizdat-publication, the *Beszélő* (Speaker). This periodical became (between 1981 and 1990) the most important organ of the democratic opposition, and this is where the first programmes were laid down, starting in 1982. The need and necessity to define themselves, is important for every movement, and the perpetual debate over self-definition (lasting until 1987) played a significant role in the survival of the Hungarian opposition. The opposition had a great part in shaking the system of János Kádár, but the real breakthrough came with the since then famous document called *Társadalmi Szerződés* (Social Contract).

The Programme of the Social Contract

The "Social Contract" was not created through the active pressure of *large social groups*. Such large-scale social movements (similar to the Poles) did not exist in Hungary. It is no accident that the earlier analyses in *Beszélő* spoke repeatedly of *public opinion*, trying to deduce an opposition strategy from the condition of public opinion (mainly the opinions of the intelligentsia). Public opinion was a central element of the programme called *How to Find a Way out of the Crisis?* (Hogyan keressünk kiutat a válságból?). The article titled *Fáradt akarók hada* (The Army of Tired Activists) which appeared in 1986, reported the "activation of public opinion" (and not of certain social groups) which of course meant *dissatisfaction* rather than an

intention of political activity. According to the article “the majority” was not politically active; despite the discontent of *millions* only a *few hundred* people participated in regular, targeted political activity. In this article, *Beszélfő* mentioned the possibility to resolve this contradiction by asking: “Should we not try to pull ourselves out of the swamp by our own hair as in the tale of Baron Münchhausen?”¹⁷

This “self-rescue” programme was created only in the middle of 1987, following the appearance of other opposition movements. Why was this so? On the one hand, the economic and systemic crisis was clear, as well as the crisis of the principle of exercising power. On the other hand, as we can read in the February 1987 article titled *Vég és kezdet* (End and Beginning) “the people haven’t sprung into action yet”. The growing unrest and discontent intensified the activity of the groups of *intellectuals* who had been formerly loyal to the system but not the activity of the *majority*. There is a “lively flow of thoughts and patterns of behaviour” between the (oppositional and official) intelligentsia, however a political programme cannot come out of this *alone*. *Beszélfő* wanted to remain true to deducing its tasks from the *state of public opinion*. This is why it stood at the beginning of the Social Contract that: “Public opinion no longer believes that there is a point to further sacrifices.” It goes on to say, that: “The object of general discontent has been personified... There is one thing in which everyone agrees from the worker to party cadre: Kádár must go!”¹⁸ The editors stated with these sentences that public opinion had changed, it had become the direction and aim of existing discontent; and – parallel to this – that *there was an alternative* to János Kádár and Kádárism (which the 1986 End and Beginning article viewed pessimistically). The only way to deal with the crisis – which is not solved solely by Kádár leaving – is with a Social Contract reached through *open negotiations*.

At the same time, it was also clear that the change in public opinion was *restricted*; even if the public agrees with the need of Kádár’s leaving, the *majority* continues to remain passive in demanding a *different* type of politics. This circumstance sheds light on the internal contradictions of the programme: the *main tendency* of a possible opposition programme can be spelled out from this change in public opinion however, the contents cannot be automatically deduced from this change. This is why the editors said: “The key question of politics today is whether the termination of the tacit agreement will be followed by a push for an open social contract.” Here followed a list of things that had to be done *after* this: society had to create effective forums of speech; be these forums in workplaces, in KISZ (Hungarian Young Communist League), Hazafias Népfront (Peoples Patriotic Front, PPF), clubs, party open days or elsewhere. After all “power will only enter a dialogue if it feels that it has to negotiate not just with intellectuals.” Strong illusions still lived in the Social Contract towards some sort of *workers’ self-organisation* which would have been meant to supplement the intellectual character of the reform movements. The relationships of the opposition in this direction were weak however.

The political programme was designed for *public opinion in general*, not for specific social groups. That is, the role of the opposition, the *tasks* that followed from

¹⁷ *Beszélfő*, No. 16. *BÖK*, Vol. II.: 351.

¹⁸ I analyse the Social Contract based upon Volume II. of *BÖK* (748-791.) I do not indicate the pages of the citations.

the programme were unclear.¹⁹ The set of *additional* steps through which the Social Contract would orient itself towards a possible social base was undefined. At the same time, the primary function of the Social Contract is not so much to “*extend its base*” as to show an alternative of compromise leaning on its already existing base.

One of the essential points of this programme is the stipulation according to which the political demands of 1956 (multi-party system, self-management, neutrality) are not *outdated*, but *untimely*. Thus, for a timely programme, one has to go back not to October 1956 but to *November* (to the suggestions of the democratic parties and Workers’ Councils)²⁰ and examine “how could the fundamental political questions which have been postponed since the crushing of the Revolution finally be posed under *these circumstances*?” (Meaning a one party system). The editors knew that people would want *more* than just the suggested compromises. However, the aim of the programme was to facilitate that change would start *at that time already*, not just when the external conditions would change. *Beszélő* suggested the constitutional restriction of party rule; freedom of the press defined by laws; protection for the workers interests guaranteed by the right of assembly; fair social policy and the respect of civic rights in light of this.

Concerning living with the *one party system*, the Social Contract made it clear that the MSZMP *may keep its privileged position* if it integrates into the state’s legal system. Public opinion (as well as the majority of the party members) lost its faith in the system and the legal modifications because they left the party’s status as something “above the law” untouched.

Aside from the legal regulation of the party, the programme dealt emphatically with the Parliament, as well as the social checks over government activities. The former held an important place in the previous 1982 programme as well, this time however it was supplemented with new elements (vote of confidence before the appointment of the Council of Ministers (Minisztertanács), extension of the Parliament’s rights for appointment etc.). Along with this, the parliament-substituting role of the Presidential Council had to be terminated, the existing electoral system needed to be modified; *public organisations*, the party included, would nominate candidates on a *larger*, national list. In individual constituencies the candidates of the PPF and individual candidates could run. The *information law* (which fixes the obligation of the government to provide information) and the law on *civil initiatives* and *referendum* were mentioned in connection with the social checks on the government.

The chapter concerning the *freedom of the press* had history too: the ’82 program contained suggestions on book and magazine publication (moreover, in September 1983, *Beszélő* turned to the legal, judicial and administrative commission

¹⁹ Miklós Gáspár Tamás said in the review and critique cited, that the program does not contain tasks for the opposition much rather an intellectual challenge. Miklós Gáspár Tamás gives the reason for this as well, which is the “relative weight” of the *Beszélő*-group. Without them being asked, *Beszélő* became the programme of the opposition’s non-ideological activists as a result of its special ideological-political authority. (*Hirmondó*, March-July: 5.)

²⁰ *Beszélő* did not have a single position on this issue. I.e. Sándor Szilágyi thought from a human rights perspective, that the demands of 1956 – which he thought unquestionable as well – needed to be “suspended”. (Cf. Legyünk az emberi jogok őskeresztényei (Let Us Be the Early Christians of Human Rights) speech, October 23, 1986.)

of the Parliament, making a suggestion for the principles of media regulation.) We can also count among the antecedents the Hungarian democratic opposition's appeal to the European Cultural Forum (in October, 1985), where they fought for the full prevalence of the freedom of the press.

The Social Contract speaks in a more in-depth way about the protection of the freedom of the press than previously. Mass media, publications, publishers as well as unauthorised publications (of which samizdat was only a part) were mentioned separately in the text. According to *Beszélf*, in all three areas there was conflict between the political requirements of official authorities and members of the media. To what extent can the media be controlled? The authors of the programme stated in this case as well that their goals are humble: "to show how far the official media control can reach, and how the media can gain protection from undue interference."

The programme saw that the State's dependence and the taboo-topics of the Warsaw Pact's military policy will remain. Therefore, the law on censorship was designed to protect these, while ending the arbitrary restrictions. In general, following publication, it can be exercised through *judicial* means, but in the case of civil associations or natural persons *preliminary* censorship is possible.

With this, *Beszélf* clearly stated its position in the debate within the opposition concerning the necessity of censorship. This debate originates from the second half of the seventies. (E.g. in the *Túlpartról* (From the Opposite Bank) volume or István Eörsi's speech at the Hungarian Writers' Association.) An interesting aspect of it was György Bence's article, *Cenzúrázott és alternatív közlési lehetőségek a Magyar kultúrában* (Censored and Alternative Possibilities for Publication in Hungarian Culture), as well as Ferenc Kőszeg's writing, titled *Anti-Bence*. Bence took a stand *against* the law on censorship, as the 1985 proclamation of the opposition did not accept the law on censorship, since it contained the sentence that "The government has to tolerate public criticism ranging all the way to the demand of the alteration of social and State order." According to them, the future law created by Parliament concerning mass-media had to state: all ideas can be freely disseminated in the event that they do not promote violence, war, or racial discrimination. Censorship - encapsulated in this law - can only be used in these cases.²¹

This was *not* what appeared in *Beszélf's* programme as the 1985 proclamation was not *Beszélf's* own programme, but the manifest of the whole opposition, while the Social Contract reflected solely *Beszélf's* position.²² (For many, the Social Contract's suggestion concerning the legalisation of censorship was unacceptable.)

Concerning *special interest groups* and *social policy* the most interesting ideas are those on *authority-free* employment and workers' self-management. The programme was about equal conditions of competition for the different proprietors of capital in the workplaces. It did not want the concentration of power based on private property. The creation of a unified capital market had to be connected with the vigorous enhancement of workplace self-management.

²¹ *Beszélf* No.15. *BÖK*, Vol. II.: 335.

²² I.e. Demokrata's 1986 reform programme demanded all - open, veiled or secret - forms of censorship to be terminated. (*Demokrata*, 1983, Issue No.3.: 3.)

In the part concerning *social security* and *fair social policy*, the most important idea was that the “the complete institutional mechanism of social policy has to change”. The introduction of population policy (elementary school, family allowance, healthcare) into the programme was new. It clearly mirrored the experiences of SZETA (Foundation to Support the Poor).

According to this chapter the most serious chronic indicator of the social crisis was the population splitting into, a *consolidated* majority and an *unconsolidated* nation of pariahs. This suggests that despite all contrasts, there were strong ties connecting the democratic opposition and the “folk” opposition.

The fifth part dealt with civic rights. The programme built on *Beszélő*'s earlier positions in this area, but went further regarding the declaration of the ICCPR as the basis of its train of thought. They wrote: “The compromise entailing the maintenance of the one-party system undoubtedly limits civic rights in the public sphere. The compromise does not justify however the restriction of civic rights belonging to the sphere of civil law.” The programme saw social minorities (“vagrants”, mentally impaired, HIV/AIDS-infected persons, drug users etc.) as well as minority groups (believers, conscientious objectors) as belonging to the sphere of civil law. These groups could only be protected through human rights guarantees, for which independent and supervised courts were needed, and – in line with *Beszélő*'s old wish – a *constitutional court*. Furthermore, the separation of church and state had to be provided for, as well as a law on religious freedom. This had to secure unarmed or civil service for all conscientious objectors.

The Social Contract dealt with wider issues as well such as “Hungary in the Soviet World Order” or the *minority question*. The authors pressed for a *change* in the official *minority policy* and formulated the principles of a democratic minority policy. They took a stand concerning the *collective rights* of national minorities based on the individual rights of people. They also made it clear that the minority problem could not be solved with a “fair border revision”. They held the *publicity* of the minority issue and civil initiatives essential. They held that change was necessary because of the indefensibility of the Romanian minority policy. The actions of the Hungarian leadership to restore the relations were not effective, therefore *public* debate was inevitable if the “Hungarian State does not want to assist in Romanian Hungarians being ruined and affronted.” The Hungarian government had to make Hungarian minorities feel that they were not on their own. This would inevitably lead to the need for dialogue with the “democratic minded circles” of the given countries.²³

Finally, the programme took a stand concerning the role of 1956 in *Hungarian politics of the time*. The authors saw 1956 as a key issue, which, if not clarified “would cause the Social Contract to be unstable, even if it were created.” The MSZMP however, should not make concessions out of *compulsion*, but as a *step forward*. “The work of the party reformers was to reach an interpretation of '56 which is still

²³ The Democratic Opposition traditionally had an opinion about the minority issue. This was most comprehensively expressed in the article titled Magyarország 1983 tavaszán (Hungary in the Spring of 1983). (*Beszélő*, Issue No. 7. *BÖK*, Vol. I.: 335-338.) Several elements of this text can be found also in the *Társadalmi Szerződés*. For the practical aspects of the minority issue see: A kisebbségek kérdése – Magyarországon (The Minority Question – In Hungary): Ervin Cszizmadia, 1995: 284-289. For *Ellenpontok*: see: 234-237. For *Duray-Bizottság*: see: 289-292.

compatible with the continuity of power, but does not exclude dialogue.” The authors of the programme were careful that the “Kádár must go”-type call for radical rupture should not mean “discontinuity” for the party as in the case of 1956. The Social Contract imagined a *gradation* in the official reinterpretation of 1956, but expected a convincing demonstration of the sincerity of intentions. (They had to wait until 1989 for Imre Pozsgay’s “historic” announcement about the classification of 1956 as a popular uprising.)

Erzsébet Nagy, the daughter of the executed Prime Minister, formulated her message (on the 29th anniversary of the death of Imre Nagy) demanding the complete rehabilitation of the revolution; the exhumation of those executed; as well as their burial in a common national mass grave.

The position of the Social Contract was somewhat different. It also required the elimination of all consequences of the retributions following the revolution, however, it argued differently. It turned to the Ministry of Justice in the name of humanity and according to the regulations of the penal law. It expressed the need to settle the situation of those who were convicted in '56. The Supreme Court has to state: “the relatives can ask for retrial in order to clarify what was the real role of their lost ones in the events of 1956... The elimination of the consequences of the retributions would be the first step towards a real reconciliation without lies and withheld information... If there will be enough courage in the new leadership to convey to the past the historical causes of discord, then there will be a chance for an orderly opening based on compromise.”²⁴

This called for a change in the behaviour of those in power as well. The secret to success: we must not be afraid of *concessions*, even if the motivation to our fear is that the budding social movement will “inevitably surpass its original goals.” The Social Contract signalled that: the *fragmentation* of society is exactly the stabilising factor that prevents this “over running”, as society is not “facing the power as one” (like in 1956). The final conclusion drawn from this was that: “The political reforms which preoccupy public thought do not create one centre of power facing the party, but several counterbalances working together in a diverse way.”

This last sentence paraphrased the Social Contract’s quintessence: the programme of pluralism of *institutions* not *party politics*. *Beszélf* consciously renounced the creation of a multi-party system or an *alternative centre of power*. Therefore it was such a “minimal programme”, which was “soft enough for it not to be blow provoking, but hard enough not to go unseen.”²⁵ It was intentionally softer than it could have been; its self-restraint was born under the shadow of “the power’s fist”.²⁶ Despite all disintegration, in the summer of 1987, we cannot say that the ruling power suffered *final* defeat, namely that it was incapable of demonstrating its strength

²⁴ Concerning the issue of 1956, the first demands in *Beszélf* – mainly concerning questions of piety – were made in 1983. Following this, the periodical dealt with the topic several times. Issue No. 18. contained a thematic compilation. Issue No. 19. dealt with the retaliations following the revolution and stated that: “1956-57 became a political issue from a moral issue.”

²⁵ The 1986 editorial article titled Fáradt akarók hada (The Army of Tired Activists) stated that: “For years every initiating group has been trying to figure out how to “exert public resistance that is soft enough not to be blow provoking but hard enough not to go unseen.” (*BÖK*, Vol. II.: 351.)

²⁶ See: *Beszélf*, Issue No. 16.

against the opposition. The power stepped up more forcefully against those groups who exhibited stronger resistance. It can be said, that the degree of resistance became the measure of the reaction of power.

Conclusion

In the following, I summarise the conclusions of the review of the two aspects of the phylogeny of the Hungarian democratic opposition. Firstly, the opposition embedded itself to a great extent into the international environment, which was shaped by a wider western and a narrower Central Eastern European project. From a broader perspective, the activities of the Hungarian opposition are connected to the process started in Helsinki in 1975, while ideologically linked to the human rights topic. Without Helsinki, there is no opposition. From a narrower perspective, the more established and institutionally richer Polish opposition was the example which led the way in several aspects for the Hungarian movement.

In addition, the opposition could be successful because it was in touch with domestic realities, and it could develop original ideas and an institutional structure for an “evolutive” coexistence with the Kádár-system which later turned into a multi-faceted critique. In this essay I have presented in detail the key to this strategy, the Social Contract, which, while it did not contain a radical split with the regime, nevertheless starts with the famous words, “Kádár must go”.

It is true that the opposition inflicted the greatest blow on the system by a./ “internationalising” politics and finding external allies for itself in face of the inward turning system b./ rehabilitated political thought and developed a complex political strategy. It did not contribute to the fall of the system merely in these two areas however, but with its *informal concept of organisation*, which at the time was new. I can only mention these organisational principles at this time, however I could not yet undertake a more in-depth study of this subject. Nowadays – owing to the research carried out in this area over the past 25 years – we know a lot about the fact that informal politics, or network-like organisation, is an integral part of democratic politics. However, less attention was paid so far to the fact that informal politics can have an important role in non-democratic systems as well. The democratic opposition in Hungary – having no other terrain – made this informal principle the central element of its organisation, creating a flexible “anti-structure” against the inflexible formal structure of state power. This did not merely mean a “parallel state” (as many people wrote at the time), but rather a free, fast and mobile organisation, which could be successful exactly because of its speed and network-like character. If we think about what great role velocity and the rapid flow of information plays in the age of the internet, perhaps we can retroactively assess this decisive speciality of pre-information age politics, when the elite groups facing state power could create not just an ideology against it, but an effective network as well.

This is exactly why the role of a couple of hundred members of the opposition became so important, as they possessed such resources that the Party did not have, despite the fact that it had 800,000 members in its heyday. The “network theory” approach to the former opposition however – which, as I mentioned could be the

subject of a later study –, can shed light on the phenomenon of what caused the decline of these groups practically everywhere in Central-Eastern Europe following the 1989-90 transitions. The answer is to be found in the transformation of the concept of professionalism. In the 80s, the creation of informal oppositional cells was the epitome of political professionalism. The socialisation of the Hungarian opposition was built on this as well. In the 1990s however, political actors created their own modern networks within the frameworks of democracy, and parallel to this, the cell-like form of organisation which used to be the privilege of the democratic opposition became devalued. From this point of view, the failure of the Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats), created out of the opposition at the end of 1988, can be explained by the fact that its earlier organisational resources became worthless and its ideological message was not attractive enough for the wider social strata.

This however is another story, and does not change the fact that the history of the Hungarian democratic opposition in the late Kádár-era was a success. Without this group the transition in Hungary would definitely not have happened the way it did. This is the great historic merit of this movement, which can not be challenged, even if in 2015, the ideals that reign in Hungary are largely contrary to the former democratic opposition's ideals, and the perspectives of the Polish new evolutionism, which had been orienting for the opposition, are perhaps worse then when Michnik originally formulated them.

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