

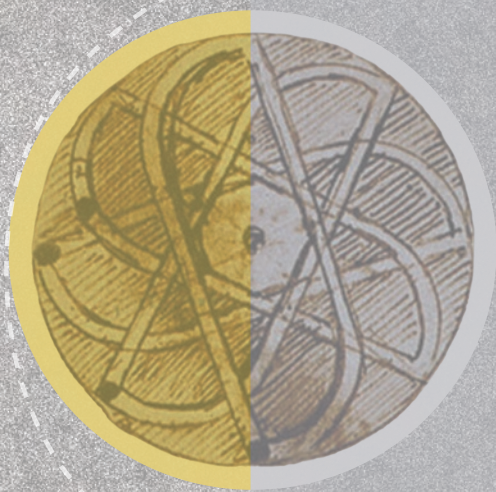


ROLLING TRANSITION *and the* ROLE of INTELLECTUALS

The Case of Hungary



András Bozóki



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Rolling Transition and the Role of Intellectuals

András Bozóki

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The Case of Hungary, 1977–1994



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Abbreviations

BAL	Left Alternative	(<i>Baloldali Alternatíva</i>)
BZSBT	Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society	(<i>Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Baráti Társaság</i>)
CMEA	Council of Mutual Economic Assistance	
DC	Democratic Charter	(<i>Demokratikus Charta</i>)
Demisz	Alliance of Democratic Youth	(<i>Demokratikus Ifjúsági Szövetség</i>)
EKA	Opposition Roundtable	(<i>Ellenzéki Kerekasztal</i>)
Fidesz	Federation of Young Democrats	(<i>Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége</i>)
FJF	Independent Lawyer's Forum	(<i>Független Jogász Fórum</i>)
FKGP	Independent Smallholder's Party	(<i>Független Kisgazdapárt</i>)
HNF	Patriotic People's Front	(<i>Hazafias Népfront</i>)
KDNP	Christian Democratic People's Party	(<i>Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt</i>)
KISZ	Young Communist League	(<i>Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség</i>)
KMT	Central Worker's Council	(<i>Központi Munkástanács</i>)
MDF	Hungarian Democratic Forum	(<i>Magyar Demokrata Fórum</i>)
MDP	Hungarian Workers' Party	(<i>Magyar Dolgozók Pártja</i>)
MISZOT	National Council of Hungarian Youth Associations	(<i>Magyar Ifjúsági Szövetségek Országos Tanácsa</i>)
MKP	Communist Party of Hungary	(<i>Magyarországi Kommunista Párt</i>)
MNP	Hungarian People's Party	(<i>Magyar Néppárt</i>)
MNOT	National Council of Hungarian Women	(<i>Magyar Nők Országos Tanácsa</i>)
MOP	Hungarian October Party	(<i>Magyar Október Párt</i>)

Abbreviations

MSZDP	Social Democratic Party of Hungary	<i>(Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt)</i>
MSZMP	Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party	<i>(Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt)</i>
MSZOSZ	National Alliance of Hungarian Trade Unions	<i>(Magyar Szakszervezetek Országos Szövetsége)</i>
MSZP	Hungarian Socialist Party	<i>(Magyar Szocialista Párt)</i>
MTI	Hungarian News Agency	<i>(Magyar Távirati Iroda)</i>
MÚK	Community of Hungarian Journalists	<i>(Magyar Újságírók Közössége)</i>
MÚOSZ	National Federation of Hungarian Journalists	<i>(Magyar Újságírók Országos Szövetsége)</i>
NDSZ	National Democratic Alliance	<i>(Nemzeti Demokrata Szövetség)</i>
NKA	National Roundtable	<i>(Nemzeti Kerekasztal)</i>
SZDSZ	Alliance of Free Democrats	<i>(Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége)</i>
SZETA	Fund for the Support of the Poor	<i>(Szegényeket Támogató Alap)</i>
SZIMA	Széchenyi Academy of Literature and Arts	<i>(Széchenyi Irodalmi és Művészeti Akadémia)</i>
SZOT	National Council of Trade Unions	<i>(Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa)</i>
TDDSZ	Tudományos Dolgozók Demokratikus Szakszervezete	<i>(Democratic Trade Union of Scientific Workers)</i>
TIB	Committee for Historical Justice	<i>(Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottsága)</i>
ÚMF	New March Front	<i>(Új Márciusi Front)</i>

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Introduction

This book investigates who were and what was the aim of the most active participants of the Hungarian regime change and what role the opposition intelligentsia played in the democratic transition. The concept of transition is understood more broadly than the mainstream academic literature considers it. In this book, I cover the period between 1977 and 1994 to highlight the incremental, rolling, and accelerating nature of political change. It includes the late communist period, the disintegration of the system, the regime change itself, and the early post-transition years. I introduce the concept of *rolling transition* that I consider as the model for those nonviolent, elite-driven regime changes in which the educated leaders of the opposition—the intellectuals—do not take up the role of the vanguard, but keep rotating themselves as the dynamics of transition require. My starting point to approach the emergence of democratic political divisions is that their formation was linked not only to historically determined deep currents but also to certain break points or turning points. Some historical moments have a significant effect on the organization of political forces and the transformation of political systems. These rare moments also form generations.

Various competing narratives of the revolutions of 1989 emerged a few years after historic transformation. On their own, these narratives are one-sided simplifications, each containing a certain piece of the truth. They can be summarized, in a nutshell, as follows.

According to the American narrative, US President Reagan's "Star Wars" initiative displaying economic and military superiority, his political intransigence, as well as his diplomatic skills demonstrated in his negotiations with President Gorbachev of the Soviet Union led to the Western victory in the Cold War. This narrative sees the significance of 1989 in winning the Cold

War and the victory of the liberal revolution.¹ In a broader context of the history of ideas, this also meant the depletion of systemic alternatives to liberal democracy.²

According to the Russian narrative, President Gorbachev turned out to be weak in keeping the territories the Soviet Union had occupied in World War II. To stop the internal economic decay of the Soviet Union, he gave up Central Europe and allowed the satellite states to follow their own way. This is interpreted as a negative phenomenon, as a sign of weakness in contemporary Russian political discourse. Yet the change of Soviet politics was not only the reason but also the radical consequence of the regime changes of 1989. A substantial part of international literature interprets the dissolution of the Soviet Union as the essence of the process that started in 1989.³

According to the Polish narrative, revolutionary changes in Central Europe can be described as a domino effect of consecutive events. The first domino was Poland, due to the self-limited revolution of Solidarity, a unifying social movement and independent trade union, just as the unbiased influence of the Catholic Church, including the impact of John Paul II, the Polish pope, peaceful methods, and moral credibility.⁴ This approach emphasizes the importance of the trailblazer regime change of Poland, and to a great extent deduces the political turns of other Central European countries from that event.⁵

Finally, the German narrative claims that the quintessence—and visually also the most memorable—of Central European regime changes was the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. It represented both the end of the competition between two superpowers and the reunification of the two Germanys. In this narrative, the importance of the regime change is almost subordinated to that of the German unity,⁶ which paved the way to the reunification of Europe.

Whichever approach we choose, it is obvious that 1989 was a turn, not of local or regional but of global significance.⁷ Interestingly, Hungary has its

1 Ackerman, *The Future of Liberal Revolution*.

2 Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

3 Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989*.

4 Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics*.

5 Kaminski, *The Collapse of State Socialism*; Kenney, 1989.

6 Meyer, *The Year That Changed the World*.

7 Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*; Huntington, *The Third Wave*; Fehér and Heller, *Kelet-Európa dicőszéges forradalma*; Rothschild, *Return to Diversity*; Lawson, Armbruster, and Cox, *The Global 1989*.

place in almost every narrative, for 1956 was the first anti-totalitarian revolution of history which contributed to the global loss of credibility of Stalinist politics. The Polish-Hungarian cooperation of dissidents impacted the rise of a new, liberal and anticommunist Central European identity. Moreover, the German narrative attributes an outstanding role to the Hungarian reformist communist leadership of 1989, which decided to let go of East German refugees and thus knocked the first brick out of the Berlin Wall.

Even if we put aside the competing global interpretations of the revolutions of 1989, the Hungarian transformation had a conspicuous peculiarity, something that cannot be found in such density in other countries. This was the political activity of intellectuals. The Hungarian-negotiated revolution was mainly the deed of intellectuals: they organized the initial movements and participated in the Roundtable talks, and it was mainly they who filled up the first parliamentary groups in 1990.⁸ The process had its antecedents, as the 1980s already saw the outlining of various groups of political intellectuals: the democratic opposition standing outside the system, the reformists representing criticism within the system, and the group of populist writers and cultural critics who occupied an intermediate status between the two former groups. Wider groups of society remained passive until 1988.

After decades of stability, the era of rapid changes—when the rules which had been known before suddenly became relative, and then disappeared—saw the appearance of new social actors. At first, these actors came from the circles that had been outside the system and therefore possessed the necessary moral capital to initiate change. In a post-totalitarian system, such as the state socialism of the late Kádár era, very few people could exist outside the system. Mostly, they were the ones who had lost their jobs due to “renitent” behavior but could ensure their living not only from the state but also from other sources that existed in the shadow of the state. As international elite research has shown, in times of radical changes such actors can be the intellectuals. They are not the ones creating the opportunity for change, but they are the ones who realize it the soonest. In revolutionary periods, the more mobile and cosmopolitan actors come to the fore—because change requires new ideas, visions, and forms of action—whereas the period after the revo-

8 Róna-Tas, “The Selected and the Elected.”

lution typically sees the return of the socially more embedded actors who know the hierarchy from the inside and operate the system routinely.

The period of regime change in Hungary in 1987–1990 was an exceptional historical moment. It radically altered Hungarian politics and the life of the society. My aim in this book is not to give a descriptive account of the regime change, restricted to three years, as it has been the topic of numerous studies as well as Zoltán Ripp's seminal monograph.⁹ I do not aim to provide a detailed history of the democratic opposition, which was processed in Ervin Csizmadia's comprehensive monograph,¹⁰ and which other scholars have analyzed from a variety of aspects.¹¹ My actual aim is to explore how the actors and their strategies changed before, during, and immediately after the regime change. Therefore, this book examines not only the years of the narrowly understood political regime change but also the processes in the previous decades which led to it, and the short movement period which characterized the years following the regime change. I see the period between 1977 and 1994 in general—and the decade from the beginning of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s in particular—as an era that was characterized by the unusually strong influence of intellectuals involved in politics.

How come the intellectuals came close to forming politics in the period of decay of the Kádár era? In the periods mentioned above, did the same activists fulfill key positions or did they change from period to period? Which opportunities did opposition expression have in the first and second public spheres—how did they divide, and later merge? What was the division of labor like between different groups of intellectuals? How did the

9 Ripp, *Rendszerváltás*. For further studies, cf. Bába, *Rendszerváltoztatás*; Bihari, *A többpártrendszer kialakulása*; Bozóki, "Hungary's Road to Systemic Change"; *Alkotmányos forradalom*; *The Roundtable Talks of 1989*; Bozóki, Körösenyi, and Schöpflin, *Post-Communist Transition*; Bozóki et al., *A rendszerváltás forradalmi könyve*; *Kerekasztal-tárgyalások 1989-ben*; Bruszt, "Negotiated Revolution in Hungary"; Király and Bozóki, *Lawful Revolution in Hungary*; Kis, *Politics in Hungary*; "Between Reform and Revolution"; *Az összetorlódott idő*; *Mi a liberalizmus?*; Lengyel, *Végkifejlet*; Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*; Schiemann, *The Politics of Pact-Making*; Szalai, "Rendszerváltás és a hatalom konvertálása"; Tökés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution*.

10 Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*.

11 For example, see Bozóki, *Politikai pluralizmus Magyarországon*; "Die Politik der Opposition in Ungarn"; "Die Demokratische Opposition in Ungarn"; Csizmadia, "The Hungarian Democratic Opposition"; Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*; "Resistance and Dissent"; Körösenyi, "The Revival of the Past or New Beginning?"; Laczó, "Five Faces of Post-Dissident Hungarian Liberalism"; Renwick, "Antipolitical or Just Anticommunist?"; Schöpflin, "Opposition and Para-Opposition"; Máté Szabó, "Hungary"; "Dissent and Opposition"; Tamás, "The Legacy of Dissent."

ideas that formed the thinking of opposition intellectuals change in this era? What regularities can be noticed in the political mobilization of intellectuals in times when the regime changes not by revolution but transitions in a peaceful, democratic way? As my research reveals, there were significant personnel changes within the ranks of opposition intellectuals. The circulation of opposition actors was typical to every circle from the dissidents through the participants of the Roundtable talks to the composition of the new parliament and the participants of post-regime change movements. It is worth mentioning here one of the findings of my research, which showed that the change in the composition of opposition intellectuals was much more significant between the examined periods than its continuity.

The regime change in Hungary did not exactly happen in a revolutionary way but brought revolutionary results. Not only did the political structure change but also the economic system and even the political formula,¹² that is, the vision of the new order about society, history, and cultural context. However, the transformation was not called as a revolution back then either but was seen as a democratic transition that was moderate, built on the temporary mobilization as well as demobilization of the masses, and regarded the aspects of peace, legality, and nonviolence as particularly important. Such transitions differ from classical revolutions in various aspects beyond legality and legitimacy,¹³ but it is no exaggeration to call them, following Hannah Arendt,¹⁴ a “new beginning.” Arendt argues that political revolutions have three stages: the first one is the loss of authority, the second one is the experience of liberation, and the third one is the new beginning or laying the fundamentals of freedom. An outstanding political and legal act of the last stage is constitution-making, which closes the revolutionary process and also is the symbol of a new beginning. Revolution cannot exist without the widespread, social experience and awareness of the new beginning, which is just as important as the expansion of freedom. Unlike classical revolutions, however, this change is not a revolution of “the people” but of citizens. It is not a social revolution but a political one. By their achievements, the transitions of 1989 were revolutionary, but they cannot be regarded as such if we

12. Mosca, *The Ruling Class*.

13. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*; Kis, “Between Reform and Revolution”; Arato, *Civil Society, Constitution, and Legitimacy*.

14. Arendt, *On Revolution*.

focus on the process of change and the understanding of the actors of their own position.¹⁵ The result of the change was revolutionary, but the process of change was rather mixed. The following points in comparing transitions and revolutions help in highlighting some differences in the nature of transformative politics.

First, while revolutions tend to start from the outside of the power center and in a bottom-up fashion, transitions represent a more complex interaction of elite and non-elite powers. It is a distinctive feature of transitions that they begin from the inside as well as the outside of the center of power, and in a top-down as well as bottom-up fashion in the society. Second, while most revolutions are violent or use the threat of violence, democratic transitions are typically nonviolent endeavors where the participants deliberately try to avoid the use of violence.¹⁶ Third, while revolutions typically divide society into the supporters of the old and the new regimes, democratic transitions are inclusive toward various types of participants. In the process of transition, both the representatives of the outgoing authoritarian bloc (reformers and orthodox believers) and of the incoming opposition bloc (moderates and radicals) are politically customary.¹⁷ Fourth, while revolutions are based on the mobilization of society (or at least they try to mobilize the people), processes of mobilization and demobilization coexist in the period of democratic transition.¹⁸ And, finally, while revolutions change the elite, or at least attempt to carry out an elite change as completely as possible, democratic transitions bring the more malleable rearrangement of the elite, and they do not bring a radical change of elite at once.¹⁹ In the periods of transition, elite change happened at different speeds and forms in the political, economic, and cultural spheres.²⁰

These differences make it problematic to assess democratic transitions as processes of comprehensive political change for many. It was quite typical, too, that after the transition many people were dissatisfied with its results, and demanded another, more “genuine,” revolutionary change. Frustrations

15 On the interpretations of 1989, cf. Arato, *Civil Society, Constitution, and Legitimacy*, 1–41.

16 Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*.

17 Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*; Stepan, “Democratic Opposition and Democratization Theory”; Colomer, *Strategic Transitions*.

18 O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions*; Staniszkis, “Political Capitalism in Poland.”

19 Dogan and Higley, *Elites, Crises, and the Origins of Regimes*; Stark and Bruzst, *Postsocialist Pathways*.

20 Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley, “Post-communist Managerialism”; *Making Capitalism without Capitalists*.

regarding the post-transition regime appeared for a long time as criticisms of the process of transition rather than that of the new system. But although transition is closer in style and process to reforms, it is closer to the concept of revolution in terms of the results. Reformers want to save the system while the supporters of transition want to go beyond it. If the reform is successful, the system remains; if the transition is successful, the regime changes.

While we must analytically distinguish reforms and revolutions, these processes are usually more combined: one may stem from or flow into the other, and they can reinforce each other. Revolutionary situations²¹ can, if they do not lead to revolution, open the way for reforms. Or in the reverse case, the radicalization of reforms can create revolutionary situations. In some cases, the success of reforms becomes the first, preparatory phase of the revolution, but even unsuccessful reforms can lead to revolutions if they provoke society. There are even examples of reforms being “solatium” for the defeated revolutions as it happened in Hungary in the 1960s. Opposition strategies developed for the democratic transition were usually based on the experience of former historical events.²²

The temporary dominance of the political activity of opposition intelligentsia in the late Kádár era did not come out of thin air. It was related to János Kádár’s politics of moderation, which followed the defeat of the Revolution of 1956 and tried to maintain social peace and “legitimize” the system through the co-optation of intellectuals.²³ More famous intellectuals were in a privileged position due to the state socialist “intelligentsia-policy,” which granted them relative autonomy within the system. However, others were marginalized, and they later became the dissidents who comprised the democratic opposition. This was accompanied by the relative openness of the regime in the 1980s. No wonder some described the late Kádár regime as a “discursive dictatorship.”²⁴ This relative flexibility was used by certain philosophers, sociologists, historians, freelance intellectuals, and other intellectuals who worked casual working hours to express the demand for the radical reform of the system.

21 Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*.

22 Michnik, “A New Evolutionism.”

23 Bozóki, *Konfrontáció és konszenzus*.

24 Csizmadia, *Diskurzus és diktatúra*.

Political pluralism in Hungary originates from the cultural pluralism of intellectual groups to a great degree. Unlike previous decades, the 1980s already saw the embryonic form of all those political trends which formed the quickly emerging multiparty system at the end of the decade. Circles, clubs, civil initiatives, environmental and peace movements, as well as the cultural-historical cleavages that divided the opposition and slowly appeared at the level of politics, all showed a fermenting society that was moving toward crisis. This was also documented by the related literature.²⁵ For the most part of the decade, the bulk of these initiatives did not aim at open political confrontation but at the revival of civil society.

Analyzing the role of the intellectuals in the regime change, one needs to speak about the long decade of intellectuals. For the emergence and rapid spread of the culture of critical discourse long preceded the regime change and lasted for a few years after it as well. At first approach, we may divide the long decade of intellectuals into three larger phases: the periods of (1) dissidence, (2) professionalization, and (3) the new political movements after the regime change. From this perspective, the first, dissident, period was the phase of the alternative public sphere, the organization of the opposition, the network building, the great protests, and the creation of parties and manifestos (1977–1988). At the beginning of this phase, the dissidents were mediators between the society and the power holders. Later, these groups organized into the democratic opposition, performing the roles of moral leader and “legislator,” in the period of professionalization (1989–90) and the role of “interpreter” (1991–1994) in different periods of time.²⁶

However, if we take a closer look, it becomes clear that the whole epoch between 1977 and 1994 needs to be divided into five distinct periods due to the different nature of political activities. The decade-long period of dissidence from 1977 until 1987 differs from the year of 1988, when opposition activity became widespread and was, therefore, an interim phase between dissidence and the phase of multiparty politics. The period of political professionalization can also be further divided into the period of the 1989 Roundtable talks and the period of democratic parliamentary politics beginning in 1990. In these years, the opposition activity of intellectuals centered

25 Cf. Ács, *Kizárt a párt*; Csapody, *Hazugság nélkül*; Diczházi, *Körök kora*; Lengyel, *Végkifejlet*.

26 For the concepts of “legislator” and “interpreter” cf. Bauman, *Legislators as Interpreters*; “Culture as the Ideology of Intellectuals.”

on legislation and constitution-making. Finally, in the last phase of the long decade of intellectuals many of the former activists left party politics for the professional life and various civil movements. Those who participated in the new movements wanted to stress the basic values of democracy in the sphere of movements, and to contrast them to the daily practice of the newly created multiparty system. Opposition intellectuals made attempts to redefine democracy, drawing it up in broad normative terms, and criticized the political parties of the existing democracy on that basis.

To sum up, the long decade of intellectuals lasted from the petition of solidarity of the Charta '77 of Czechoslovakia through different forms of dissident activities, like formation of samizdat journals and the rise of democratic opposition, the open network-building and party formation, the Roundtable negotiations, the beginnings of parliamentary politics, and the political rise and fall of new movement activism. After the 1994 elections, the era of political activity of intellectuals ended. Afterward, there was no period when the intellectuals could exercise such political influence as they could in the one and a half decades between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1990s. In the period of democratic consolidation, the leading role was taken from the intellectuals by the experts of the routine operation of power, that is, professional politicians and bureaucrats.

With respect to methodology, it was obvious that adhering to a single method would be inappropriate for such a complex topic. In the spirit of methodological pluralism, contextual analysis of political texts, the politico-historical and sociological tracing of political processes, interviews with the participants, analyzing their biographies, and quantitative, statistical analysis were all needed. Following Weber's classical method of "interpretive sociology"²⁷ my aim was creating types, summarizing the essence of the dynamics of change. This was supplemented by biographical analysis known from the social sciences,²⁸ whereby I explore the social background, change of activity, occupation, political values, and self-interpretation of the participants. I used different forms of expressions as documents from the time to analyze the strategy of the actors, particularly their articles published in samizdat journals.

²⁷ Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*.

²⁸ Bornat, Chamberlayne, and Wengraf, *The Turn to Biographical Methods*; Renders and de Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*; Renders, de Haan, and Jonne Harmsma, *The Biographical Turn*.

This book is based on empirical research, the most significant part of which comprises 200 semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants of the transition.²⁹ These interviews cover both the biographical background of the participants and their activity during the regime change in general and at the Roundtable talks in particular. While the subject of my book is the political activity of the intellectuals who transformed from being dissidents to participants of the Roundtable talks to the new political movements, my analysis incorporates the interviews we conducted with the representatives of the retreating communist power as well. These interviews were an integral part of the research I had led about the regime change, where I with my students and colleagues interviewed the politicians and delegates of the Opposition Roundtable (*Ellenzéki Kerekasztal*, EKA), the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, MSZMP), and the Third Side. Here I relied on the literature of elite interviews methodologically.³⁰ In addition, the analysis of the strategic debates of and the written documents (statements, articles, petition campaigns) published by the opposition intellectuals was an important element of my research. The identification of these documents helped me to measure oppositional activity for a longer period.

The political activity of opposition actors was also examined by statistical methods. This made it possible to draw a more precise picture of the activity of the participants and the dynamics of the regime change. First, we used statistics to differentiate the dissident activity within the first phase of movement politics until 1987 and the activism of network building, party creation, and protests which characterized 1988. One must mention another political juncture in the life of the participants of the regime change: from 1990, some of them pursued their career in power politics, in the parliament or political parties, whereas some of them returned to their professional life or remained active in the new movement politics after the regime change. The revealed data led to further differentiation of the phases I used as a starting point above, which made the contours of rolling transition clear. The statistical analysis supported the approach in which *five periods* were differen-

29 The names of the 200 interviewees are listed separately. I am grateful to the members of my research team who helped me in conducting the interviews.

30 Kezar, "Transformational Elite Interviews"; Lilleker, "Interviewing the Political Elite"; Richards, "Elite Interviewing."

Table 1. The timeline of rolling transition: Types of political activities and the role of intellectuals

ERA	1977–1987	1988	1989	1990–1991	1991–1994
CHARACTER OF ACTIVITY	Dissidence	Open network-building	Roundtable negotiations	Parliamentary politics	New democratic movement
ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS	Mediator, moral leader	Movement initiator, party founder	Constitution maker	Legislator, politician	Critic, interpreter

tiated by the various forms of activity: the phases of (1) dissidence, (2) open network building, (3) roundtable negotiation, (4) parliamentary activity, and (5) new movement politics.

I measured political activity by assessing the degree of the involvement of each participant in the “events” selected as most important in the process of transition. This involved participation by signing petitions of protest, the free (or, in other words, flying) university, certain leading samizdat journals, party creation, the Roundtable talks, as well as the political activity in the new parliament or movements. An important aspect I wanted to explore was the personal continuity and discontinuity in the various phases. Did the same people participate in the various political phases, and how can strong fluctuation be observed between the phases? I aimed at exploring the personal overlap between the groups of political opposition before, during, and after the regime change. For how long did the dissident intellectuals remain in politics, and when were they replaced by the professionals? What kind of paths led the dissident intellectuals through party formation and the Roundtable talks to participation in parliamentary politics or the new movement politics, renouncing direct party politics? Accordingly, my analysis focuses on those groups which actively turned against the Kádár regime in the 1980s, and later became the main body of the new political order. As far as the Roundtable talks are concerned, I examine first and foremost those parties and organizations which were dominated by opposition intellectual political activity. This includes the Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége*, SZDSZ), the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*, MDF), the Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions (*Független Szakszervezetek Demokratikus Ligája*, Liga), and the Federation of Young Democrats (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, Fidesz).

Finally, in addition to but in harmony with the methods above, I followed the methodology of contextual analysis,³¹ which means that I scrutinize political intellectual groups and actors in their historical-sociological embeddedness. Presenting the given political context, I want to show the real room for maneuver of the actors, and the opportunities to widen that room. I describe the political participation of intellectuals by the main junctures of the formation of political pluralism in Hungary, in the dual dimension of formal and informal institutional order. Thus, I discuss in parallel the rules of the decaying state socialist system in the public sphere and the world of the newly forming opposition initiatives and democratic movements, the main actors at the Roundtable talks and the revolutionary political change, and the world of intellectual movements of the 1990s and the political cleavage formation after the regime change. The early acts of expression of the democratic opposition happened in samizdat journals, therefore I analyze them in the context of the censorship and the media control of the era. I embed the intellectuals of the negotiations of Opposition Roundtable and the National Roundtable (*Nemzeti Kerekasztal*, NKA) in the political background of the regime change. Finally, the Democratic Charter movement is analyzed in the environment of the political contradictions of the new democracy.

In Chapter I, I analyze the theoretical approaches to the political participation of intellectuals through a review of the classical and contemporary literature. Besides the general introduction of the theories of intellectuals, I describe classical theories, New Class theories, and contemporary approaches of the role of intellectuals. Based on these theories I can identify some characteristic intellectual roles, which can be ordered according to their attitude toward politics. Here I devote attention to the literature of the political activation, movement organization, and social preconditions of the revolt of the intelligentsia. I scrutinize the idiosyncrasies of the political activity of the intellectuals of Central and Eastern Europe accordingly.

Chapter II covers the Hungarian political context by focusing on certain basic informal features of the Kádár era such as censorship, cultural policy, and techniques of co-optation. I describe the regime by the term *selec-*

31 Rueschmeyer, "Why and How Ideas Matter"; Tilly, "Why and How History Matters"; Tilly and Goodin, "It Depends."

tive repression. I examine the dissolution of the state socialist system, first, through the change in the structure of the public sphere, that is, how a double public sphere developed and the officially defined border between the two became gradually more permeable. Relatedly, I analyze the changing intelligentsia policy of the communist party and the strategies of the key communist politicians who were responsible for that policy. Political pluralization appeared first on the cultural level, in various intellectual debates which took place in partly overlapping circles. These can only be understood through the analysis of the different levels of the public sphere.

In Chapter III, I analyze the dissident era, particularly the political debates, turning points of political activity, and the strategies of cooperation into the democratic opposition of the dissidents. I do this through the samizdat journals *Beszélő*, *Hírmondó*, *Demokrata*, and *Égtájak között*, while I also describe the specific character of each journal through an analysis of their topics. The characteristics of the historical vision of the dissidents and the key points of their interpretation of history, formulated in opposition to the official standpoint of the system, are discussed. In this chapter, I also examine the 1982–1984 debate in *Beszélő*, where the dissidents disputed over the assessment of the political situation and the possible directions of future opposition strategy. This was the most important political debate among the opposition activists in the era of dissent.

In Chapter IV, I present the fundamental ideas and moral principles of the dissidents, and scrutinize their ideas of humanization of power, antipolitics, disobedience, civil society, and human rights. I discuss how dissidents moved from moral principles toward political action. After the long dissident era there came a short period of spectacular opening of political activity, which mainly characterized 1988, a period when they had to adapt to the challenges of participation in broader protests, movement politics, open network-building, and also in the work of party formation.

In Chapter V, I analyze the relationship between elite change and regime change. First, I show the similarities and the differences between the Polish and Hungarian opposition, then I focus on two “nonpolitical” groups of the transition, the reform intellectuals and the technocracy. The common denominator between the two groups was that they both believed in modernization, but not as an academic theory: for them it was an ideology. This chapter also investigates the elite settlement theory as useful

conceptualization of the Roundtable negotiations. Finally, I also discuss three phases of transition: the politics of co-optation, cooperation, and competition.

In Chapter VI, the history of the Roundtable talks of 1989 is discussed in the perspective of the process of constitution-making among the member organizations of the Opposition Roundtable, as well as the representatives of the state party standing against them. Based on their personal composition and the activity of their intellectual members, parties are distinguished as intellectual parties and historical parties. In the former group, MDF, SZDSZ, Fidesz, and Liga are included, which stemmed mainly from the dissident movements of the 1980s. These are distinguished from the attitudes and political strategy of the representatives of the historical parties and organizations on the one hand, and the negotiators of the MSZMP representing the decaying dictatorship on the other hand. After the first free parliamentary elections in 1990, several characters of the intellectual groups became party politicians and Members of Parliament, but many of them also remained active in the press and political society.

Chapter VII offers a political sociological analysis of the parties that participated in the Roundtable talks, paying special attention to the personal recollections of the party delegates. The interviews reveal significant differences in the composition of the so-called historical parties and the parties that grew out of the social movements of the 1980s. The former groups were composed of those victims of the interrupted history of communist takeover of 1948 whose career as young politicians was cut short, and life was crippled by the takeover and the long period of single-party rule that followed. They could return to the spotlight as elderly people who survived the Kádár regime in various employee or subordinate positions of expertise, climbing up from the bottom again. In contrast, the organizations that grew out of the dissident movements of the 1980s had a strong intellectual base and were more strongly embedded in the Hungarian society. These organizations were the drivers of the talks and the authors and protagonists of the successful scenarios of the peaceful transition. I also discuss in this chapter the opposing pole, the negotiating delegates of MSZMP, and explore its multi-component (reformist, technocrat, and party intellectual) background.

In Chapter VIII, I examine the role of intellectuals appearing in the reforming movement sphere in the environment of democracy. Freedom of

the press provided the opportunity for the critique of the contradictions of the new democratic system and the activity of the first freely elected government. This period was characterized by intellectuals who alternated between political and intellectual roles, often crossed personal boundaries, and disposed of significant influence and cultural capital. In the beginning, this group comprised the reformers, later the expert and consulting background of certain parties and sometimes even the base of the movement that turned against party politics.³² This chapter deals with those “new movement activists” who published calls for protest and started new initiatives against the radical right tendencies appearing within the ranks of the ruling coalition. In 1991–1994, these intellectual groups were able to bridge the gap between the ex-communist left and ex-dissident liberal parties, and became the ferment of the new political coalition of 1994. In relation to this, I analyze the political role of the representative new intellectual movement, the Democratic Charter with the aid of interviews, documents, and statistical data concerning the movement.

Chapter IX has been co-authored with Ágnes Simon. The chapter summarizes the personal composition and activity of the long decade of intellectuals by quantitative means, and by doing so, it displays the character of rolling transition. Compiling the events of opposition, we highlight the circle of most active actors based on their participation in those events in all five phases. Analyzing the data, the picture of a “rolling regime change” emerges, which means that it was not the same group that ended the regime change and the one that started it in the period of dissidence. What distinguishes the Hungarian regime change is that every period was fought through by dominantly different actors. As I mentioned above, the statistical analysis of the activity of opposition actors allowed me to further differentiate the initial three phases. For example, the movement year of 1988 was different from the dissident activity of 1977–1987 in many respects, as that year was no longer characterized by conspiracy and the world of the second public sphere but by great protests, network building, and the founding of parties. Thus, I regard 1988 as a distinct “era” from the perspective of statistical analysis. On the other hand, career paths got separated by the type of political activity as well after the Roundtable talks. Most of the opposition actors retired, and

32. Kovács, “Reform Economics”; Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, *Making Capitalism without Capitalists*.

the ones who stayed in politics either chose the parliamentary path (from 1990) or they joined the new movement politics (from 1991). Accordingly, one needs to distinguish between two internal “phases” in the period after 1990 which also partially temporally overlap: the parliamentary politics and the new movement politics.

In each of the five phases I distinguished, there was a great inflow of new entrants. Typically, only 20 percent of the actors of a phase remained for the next phase as well, and this “20 percent rule” more-or-less applies to the whole process. Thus, the regime change was more similar to a “relay race” of the intellectual groups of the opposition—most of whom pass on the baton to the next racers—than to a single storm, which would have been carried out by the same people all the way through. It proves that rolling transition is much more about rotation of agents than vanguardism of a single, coherent elite group.

In each group, I defined the group of the most active participants, the core group, which was supplemented by the less active participants. Together, they make up the total number of participants, which we analyze in Chapter IX both in terms of each phase and the whole period. In the table below, I indicate the scope of the analysis, so that the reader can, even at the beginning of the volume, get an impression of the size of the intellectual group which was the subject of the research. This is summarized in Table 2.

If we add these numbers, we get 2,052 as total. But as the participants of the phases overlap, the real numbers are slightly lower than if we simply summed up the number of participants in each phase. That means we find that altogether 2,037 activists participated in the whole period between 1977 and 1994. More than 2,000 people took part in the political fights before, during, and immediately after the regime change. About 91 percent of the registered participants (1,845 people) were considered as intellectuals in this research.

Whatever definition we choose for intellectual—erudition, education, institutional position, participation in public debates, voicing opinion in national issues, active participation in the movement—it is interesting to notice that, by at least one of these criteria, virtually all these people were intellectuals. Yet these activists never aspired to form a New Class during the transition. As I state in the concluding chapter, Jerome Karabel’s criteria

Table 2. The summary of the opposition activists of the five phases of rolling transition

NAME OF THE PHASE	Dissent	Open network-building	Roundtable negotiations	Parliamentary politics	New pro-democracy movements
ALL PARTICIPANTS	830	669	288	296	419

were partly met but those were not achieving a critical point to prompt intellectuals to fight for their own class power.

Although this book begins with a historically informed, multidimensional interpretation of the concept of intellectuals, I do not intend to adhere exclusively to any of the known definitions of *intellectuals* throughout the book. The reason for this is that, in the decade-long fluctuation of opposition activity, the participants had to fulfill different positions in every phase, and therefore they were intellectuals in different ways in the given historical context. Moreover, intellectual roles and characteristics tend to overlap. In other words, my method does not depend on a predefined criterion, on which I could decide who are intellectuals. Rather, I examine who participated in certain emblematic events of opposition politics that offer different patterns of behavior and therefore require different definition of intellectuals. Undeniably, there were cases when erudition and education mattered, but in most of the events I analyze the importance of participation in public debates and active movement participation stood out. It was not being intellectual *per se* that made someone part of the opposition, but often on the contrary, opposition activity produced the critical mass of intellectuals. This group includes dissident intellectuals, reform intellectuals, movement intellectuals, negotiator intellectuals, all those political intellectuals who became members of the first freely elected parliament, as well as the intellectuals who opted for the new movement politics after the regime change. The period between 1977 and 1994 draws a long arc, where various groups of the opposition—sometimes connected, sometimes split up—were in constant movement, and contributed to the formation of democracy to a significant degree.

Naturally, this does not mean that the transition was “made” by only two thousand people. The readership of samizdat journals, the membership of newly forming parties, the listeners of Radio Free Europe, and the attend-

ees of the protests were much more than that. While the 2,037 people mentioned in the table meant the total number of regime-changing or opposition activists, the group of those who closely followed and supported these activists was much larger, meaning around ten times as much (ca. 20,000) people. And, based on protest participation, we can say that the influence of the latter group was significant as well, and around 200,000 people were ready to go to the streets in the most critical moments in the 1980s. The politically isolated dissidents could mobilize a mass of 200,000 people in short time, and this mass grew to several millions by the first free elections.

The inverse of this process could be observed in the membership of the state party: while in the beginning of the period, MSZMP had 800,000 members (which, counting in family members, could mean a base of 2.5 million supporters), this mass melted to 30,000 by the end of 1989, and resulted in only 300,000 votes in the first free elections. Indeed, one of the lessons of this book that the democratic opposition can be small, but it might grow quickly, while the supporters of the authoritarian bloc might look more numerous than as they really are.

Revolutionary changes are usually dominated by moralizing mode of speech, constitutional politics, ideological fights, the reinterpretation of the attitude to history—in short, symbolic politics. In contrast, the period after the revolution is gradually taken over by “quiet politics,” the alignment to the needs of social peace, the agreement in the principles of redistribution, and the institutionalization of the realization of the common good by the new principles—in short, material politics. Yet symbolic politics does not disappear in democracy either, only the contrast between the alterations of symbolic and material politics fades, and the oscillation between the two becomes shorter.

CHAPTER I

The Role of Intellectuals: Theories and Interpretive Frameworks

1. WHO ARE THE INTELLECTUALS?

Historically, the concept of intellectual appeared in the age of Enlightenment, referring to a social group whose members believe in the force of rational argument and follow, beyond or against their religious commitment, some ideologically justified norms of living. They regularly corresponded with each other, and actively participate in political and public debates. This was the era when, due to the spread of mass media, the feudal type of court-like, ceremonial, aristocratic, representative public sphere gave way to the early capitalist type of free-spirited, more democratic public sphere.¹ The changes of the structure of the public sphere in the 18th and 19th centuries did not simply benefit the rise of free intellectuals but was in interaction with it.

The appearance of the concept of intellectual is also related to secularization and the spread of the concept of ideology. Napoleon used the term “ideologue” in a derogatory sense for those educated public people who commented on and interpreted political events but did not take an active political role. The generational aspect was particularly important in 19th century Russia: partially in the generational debates between reformist “fathers”

¹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*.

and revolutionary “sons,”² and partially in the “nihilist,” populist and socialist waves that later followed.³ This is where the term *intelligentsia* originates too,⁴ although the concept appeared at almost the same time in Poland as well. Later, it appeared in every semi-peripheral society in Eastern Europe where the dilemma of capitalist development was articulated in the discourse about “convergence to” and “divergence from” the West. In Eastern Europe, the social-opinion molding role of intellectuals became obvious for the first time in the Dreyfus affair.⁵ In the Hungarian reform era, intellectuals of the humanities were the first to raise the dilemma of motherland and/or progress.

1.1 CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES

There exist numerous approaches to define intellectuals as a group of influential social actors. Some of them derive the concept of intellectual or intellectual role from erudition, the high level of public activity, social position, the production of ideas, the context-free, convertible knowledge, critical attitude, or the regular intervention in the discourse about society. While one school claims that the concept of intellectual has predefined sociocultural attributes, another school argues that anyone can be an intellectual as everyone can participate in social debates.

Most generally, the concept of intellectual involves “all those who create, distribute, and apply culture, that is, the symbolic world of man.”⁶ Fulfilling this task, the intellectuals rely on cultural references, which has the “side effect” of using culture as an ideology to justify their own social role. The intellectual is often a schizophrenic social actor, whose thinking may involve the contradictory features of propensity for teleological thinking (*telos*) and wanting to meet the requirements of technical rationality (*techné*).

By social position, the intellectual may be understood as an actor who is characterized by constant tension between their elite-belonging and the self-interpretation of their role as emancipatory. In this approach, the intellectual is a kind of “civilizer” whose mission is to educate and “elevate” the masses but

2 Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*.

3 Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism; A History of Russian Thought*; Brower, *Training the Nihilists*; Nahirny, *The Russian Intelligentsia*.

4 Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*.

5 Bell, *The Winding Passage*.

6 Lipset, *The Political Man*, 331.

still separates from them on the basis of erudition and believes in their (the intellectual's) superiority. According to Bauman,⁷ the concept of intellectual is built on a duality as it includes its opposite, the nonintellectuals, as well.

According to another well-known definition, the intellectual is an actor with trans-contextual, that is, context-free and convertible knowledge, whose social position is legitimized not by institutional embeddedness but only by their knowledge.⁸ It is not expertise or institutional embeddedness that makes someone intellectual, but precisely the ability to go beyond professional knowledge and institutions.

Functionalist scholars argue that the role of intellectuals is the production and dissemination of culture and knowledge, as well as mediation between separated subsystems of society, exercising informal kind of influence.⁹ Until the counterculture appears as a threat to the prevailing social order, the representatives of political and economic power will declare intellectuals dangerous and attempt to marginalize them. However, as soon as the counterculture is successfully integrated by the system, the intellectual is seen as someone who offers a useful contribution to the innovation and survival of the system.

A duality that often appears in the concept of intellectual is the distancing from the masses of society (and the related feeling of alienation) and the need for social participation or community engagement. From this duality often follows tension as these expectations of intellectual role are in contradiction most of the time. Some believe that the cold distancing from social processes is a virtue of the intellectual, while others regard social sensitivity and the active involvement in political processes as such. Others define intellectuals by their critical attitude vis-à-vis mainstream culture.

Certain influential theories state that the role of intellectuals is to observe and analyze, to not align, to "float freely" but not as a group above (or outside) society but as an integral part thereof. This definition applies both to independent intellectuals who keep distance from the existing institutional system¹⁰ and "free-floating intellectuals."¹¹ They may be writers, artists, scholars, philosophers, journalists, religious or political thinkers, or any-

7 Bauman, "Culture as the Ideology of Intellectuals"; "Love in Adversity."

8 Konrád and Szelényi, *Road to Class Power*.

9 Parsons, "On the Concept of Influence"; Znaniecki, *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge*.

10 Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 209.

11 Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*.

one from similar walks of life. Intellectuals set a demand by their position to disseminate and mold public discourse. Forming social relations, they take an active part in defining the value of knowledge, in exchange for which they can expect social appreciation. Thus, intellectuals comprise a social group which occupies a privileged position in the social hierarchy due to its disposition of cultural capital.

The normative, universalist standing of intellectuals¹² and the professionalization stemming from the division of labor¹³ are often in conflict. Social differentiation deprives intellectuals from their old free-floating role and forces them to play, from the point of view of the system, the part of the “fool”¹⁴ or the “celebrity.”¹⁵ If we take universalism and differentiation as one dimension, and political or nonpolitical stance as another, we can divide intellectuals into four groups. The universalistic/political category is composed of political prophets, global leaders, and “missionaries,” while the differentiated/political category involves intellectual political leaders, consultants, and administrative experts. In the universalistic/nonpolitical group we can mention, for instance, teachers, philosophers, priests, and clerics, whereas the fourth group of differentiated/nonpolitical intellectuals comprises the professionalized expert intellectuals.

Table 3. Intellectual positions by universalistic/particularistic and political/nonpolitical attitudes

	UNIVERSALISTIC	PARTICULARISTIC
POLITICAL	ideologues, prophets	political consultants
NONPOLITICAL	clerics, priests	professionals

We arrive at similar results if we differentiate the concept of intellectuals by the axis of preserving or changing the *status quo* on the one hand and the political and nonpolitical axis on the other hand. This way, we can distinguish politically involved intellectuals who defend the *status quo* (experts,

12 Benda, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*.

13 Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*.

14 Dahrendorf, “The Intellectual and Society.”

15 Coser, “The Intellectual as Celebrity.”

technocrats, propagandists, and other loyal operators of the system) and the intellectual group of movement leaders, dissidents, and system-critical intellectuals who desire change. Professionals who contribute to the survival of the *status quo* usually fulfill technical, problem-solving, routine-like roles in the system, while the nonpolitical but creative intellectuals are the artists, inventors, and other kinds of innovators who make outstanding achievements in particular fields of art or science. One branch of the literature on intellectuals regards the critical or innovative relation of the understanding of one's role as distinctively intellectual behavior,¹⁶ but another group sees the development of professional intellectuals and their integration in the (democratic) system as normal,¹⁷ and the lack of it as a deviance.

Naturally, this is also related to the type of the political regime. A democratic system is characterized by the principles of pluralism and social differentiation, and therefore political fights also take place within the framework of the system.¹⁸ However, political control in nondemocratic systems usually goes beyond the whole of political institutions, and therefore any kind of unusual or nonmainstream artistic, scholarly, or literary expression can be interpreted as anti-system behavior. Many authors see creativity an integral part of the concept of intellectuals, and emphasize that the task of the intellectuals is innovation, and the accumulation and symbolic expression of sophisticated knowledge. Others regard critical attitude as the most important: according to them, intellectuals must approach everything critically from a normative-ethical point of view. Finally, a further group includes in the group of intellectuals those experts (holders of special knowledge about a field, including bureaucracy) as well who do not hold a critical attitude toward political processes. I scrutinize these approaches in more detail in the following.

The English language has two words for the actors I examine: *intellectuals* and *intelligentsia*. They have historically different connotations. The two are often used synonymously; at other times, "intellectuals" refers to involvement in humanities and "intelligentsia," to a technical attitude and corre-

¹⁶ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*; Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*; Confino, "On Intellectuals"; Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*.

¹⁷ Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*; Dahrendorf, "The Intellectual and Society"; Gagnon, *Intellectuals in Liberal Democracies*; Hollander, "American Intellectuals."

¹⁸ Lawrence and Döbler, *Knowledge and Power*; Lilla, *The Reckless Minds*.

sponding social embeddedness. Thirdly, the concept of intellectuals can also express that the people who are involved in this group are rather versatile, whereas intelligentsia sometimes refers to a closed and single-minded group identity (as in the case of the 19th century Russian intelligentsia). A fourth interpretation holds that intelligentsia refers to erudition, and the term intellectuals to both erudition and active participation in public debates. Finally, intellectuals can also express that these actors speak about the issues of the world from a general, normative standpoint (i.e., they are generalists), while representatives of the “intelligentsia” are specialists who can be better described as *professionals*.

There are researchers who opine that erudition and knowledge are inseparable from being intellectual. Others argue that it is not simply knowledge but it is participation in public debates that makes someone an intellectual. Proponents of the first position hold that a noetic way of life is a necessary requisite of intellectual status. The essence of that way of life is the knowledge that does not achieve social legitimacy through institutional affiliation but is appreciated for itself, and either it is devoted exclusively to the intellect¹⁹ or can be converted to various social positions.²⁰ In contrast, those who hold the second position believe that intellectual way of life is related to social relations and, therefore, directly or indirectly, to politics. The intellectual, by definition, cannot be anything else but a critical actor. According to this position, the concept of intellectual cannot be separated from public matters, and it involves the ability to go beyond “private knowledge” or mere expertise.²¹

There are authors who emphasize strong moral commitment and personal qualities, and originate the role of intellectual in tradition²² or compare it to religious belief.²³ Many people agree with that the role of the intellectuals is indeed a moral one.²⁴ According to Said, the intellectual represents a kind of social actor whose mission is to state provocative questions in public matters, publicly raise their voice against dogmas and orthodoxy,

19 Benda, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*.

20 Konrád and Szelényi, *Road to Class Power*.

21 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*; Confino, “On Intellectuals.”

22 Eisenstadt and Graubard, *Intellectuals and Tradition*.

23 Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in Americal Life*; Shils, *The Intellectuals and the Powers*.

24 Havel, “The Power of the Powerless”; *Living in Truth*; “The Responsibility of Intellectuals” (1995b); Colini, *Public Moralists*; Flam, *Mosaic of Fear*.

and their most important task is to confront those in power with the truth.²⁵ In this approach, intellectuals do not necessarily speak to the society but to the power holders, although they do so in the interest of the people, as their advocates.

Based on their attitude toward their profession and public matters, we can distinguish between the kind of professional intellectuals who are more typical in the West and traditional or, somewhat tautologically, “public intellectuals,” who are primarily socialized to fulfill public roles.²⁶ Professional intellectuals voice their opinion in fewer matters but their comments are deeper, based on their knowledge, while traditional intellectuals comment on more issues and are rather led by moral motives. Those who believe the latter role to be more important define intellectuals primarily as “initiators of public debates on ideas and values.”²⁷ Several people believe along these lines that society which is characterized by the exclusive prevalence of professionalism is doomed to decay,²⁸ for it loses its identity without normative points of reference.

According to the Marxist intellectual theory, the intellectual can be a useful fellow fighter of the working class in the struggle against the bourgeoisie. For the former requires ideological guidance so the struggle can be victorious. This role can be fulfilled, in the view of Marx, by philosophers or socialist writers. Lenin attached greater importance not to philosophical or literary texts, but the imagery created by filmography with respect to the persuasion and mobilization of the workers. Gramsci believed that intellectuals can “organically” identify with the liberation of the workers only if they are related to the workers by origin.²⁹ In certain historical periods, intellectuals exhibited the features of “class consciousness” or “order consciousness”³⁰ but in modern, plural societies the fragmentation of intellectuals is what is typical.³¹ There were some who distinguished, on the basis of their relation to political power, the intellectuals who contribute to the legitimation of the system from “producers and consumers of social criticism.”³²

25 Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*.

26 Small, *The Public Intellectual*.

27 Jedlicki, “What Is the Use of Intellectuals?”

28 Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*; Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals*.

29 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*; Sassoon, *Approaches to Gramsci*.

30 Pipes, *The Russian Intelligentsia*.

31 Gagnon, *Intellectuals in Liberal Democracies*; Zald and McCarthy, “Organizational Intellectuals.”

32 Hollander, “American Intellectuals”; *The Survival of Adversary Culture*.

1.2 CLASSICAL THEORIES OF INTELLECTUALS

What is the real task of intellectuals? To observe the transcendental, universal aspects of humanity in the world of noesis, staying away from the world of politics—or on the contrary, to participate, expanding the traditional concepts of politics and intellectuals, actively in the formation of public matters, social movements, the fight for cultural hegemony? Or, as a third option, to live inside social struggles but do not align with any side but interpreting and synthesizing their aims as “free-floating intellectuals?”

In the following pages, I present three classical but fundamentally different approaches in more detail. Julien Benda³³ holds that the intellectual, who is a person of reason, must serve universal truth and not the popular ideas that appear in society. On the other hand, Antonio Gramsci³⁴ opines that intellectuals should align with the cause of the working class for a just and equal society. Third, Karl Mannheim³⁵ sees the task of intellectuals as the understanding the motives of different social groups and offering a synthesizing analysis. The theories of Benda and Gramsci are normative; Mannheim’s theory is positive, but it also carries normative conclusions.

According to Benda, members of society can be fundamentally of two types, based on the passions that lead them and the spheres they live in. Laymen are motivated by material interests and earthly goals, while clerks are by intellectual challenges and the ideas of transcendental truth. Intellectuals belong in the second category: they are people of reason, rationalists, believers and preachers of religion, devotees of literature; they are the philosophers, the moralists, the scholars. Benda argues that the mission of the intellectual is to devote their life to the unbiased search for truth, and they are led not by practical or political but moral aims. Intellectuals cannot move with the tide, cannot be captives to earthly passions, because they devoted their lives to science, art, or philosophical contemplations. They present the transcendental ideas of humanity, which originate not from politics but from the world of intellect, and their understanding depends not on direct observation but theoretical reflection.

³³ Benda, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*.

³⁴ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*.

³⁵ Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*.

Nevertheless, Benda did not reject the participation of intellectuals in politics, provided they fight by their original mission for the truth there as well, that is, if they retain their autonomy and integrity.³⁶ For example, if they stand up to falsehood and violence, and support the weak vis-à-vis the strong. The “treason of intellectuals” happens, Benda says, when intellectuals who participate in politics place a certain group identity above their own identity, if they renounce their autonomy and become captives of a party, a political trend, or an ideology. At this point, they leave the universalistic, truth-seeker world of intellectuals for the divisive and particular world of politics, built on hatred and violence. Thus, they depreciate themselves and their original vocation. For in the political area, they behave no longer as truth-seeker universalists but as citizens who put group identities before the truth.

Benda believes that political actors are realists, activists, and materialists, who are fired by the passion of change, not intellect. For them, the place of God and intellect are taken by particularistic notions such as state, nation, and class. Their communication is narrowed, their realism expands not only to politics but every walk of life, which they interpret by the “new morality” of political logic. Nationalism, patriotism, and the representation of class interests incite passions and politicize life. The victory of realism reinforces the spirit of conquest, the political use of religion, pride, combat discipline, and aggression, and, in the end, it leads to war. Yet this is precisely what intellectuals should avoid and represent universal values in every case by their vocation. Denying this and being led by divisive political passions instead of scientific exploration, they commit “treason.”

Benda was pessimistic toward the morality of the modern era, which converts people of intellect to citizens. In his view, people of intellect became actors of political games, who glorify the state and the bourgeoisie they depend on. Historical knowledge gave way to short term memory. He believes that civilization was only a short—and not at all universal—episode of history, and the struggle ended with the victory of laymen.

Gramsci had the opposite position. For him, politics is not simply an instrumental form of behavior but the central element of human action. Society is constructed by politics, and therefore the analysis of society is inseparable from the analysis of political action. As a Marxist theoretician,

36 Kimball, “The Treason of the Intellectuals.”

he held that frontal attack against the prevailing order cannot be successful, the social legitimacy of the system cannot be disregarded, and socialist politics cannot be built on violence. The cooperation of the vanguard-type party and the workers is not enough *per se*, because change also requires the support of committed intellectuals. Changing the system requires more than economic and political change: these must be related to cultural change.

This means, according to Gramsci, that the forces against the bourgeois order must get rid of the bourgeois cultural hegemony first, which can be achieved only by the gradual development of a new hegemony. The new hegemony requires a consciously built, wide social coalition, which comprises various groups of civil society, including workers, state employees, and even some bourgeois elements. A new hegemony cannot be built without the deconstruction of the legitimacy of the system. Violence does not substitute for intellectual work, and revolutionary action without widespread persuasion and commitment will inevitably fail. Instead of the violent Leninist methods, Gramsci offered the way of persuasion, the key categories of which were civil society, moral and intellectual reform, and the primacy of culture. In Gramsci's view, revolution is not a single act but a longer process, where intellectuals have a vital role in the creation of the new hegemony.

However, for Gramsci, the role of the intellectual cannot be a privileged social status. Gramsci called the intellectuals who rejected politics for the ivory tower of science and culture traditional intellectuals and did not believe that they could be the key to changing society. In his view, it is not institutional qualification, university degree, academic knowledge, or titles and grades that make someone an intellectual, but the reflexive and conscious participation in the political processes of the society. On the other hand, this does not require to be professional revolutionary in a vanguard-like party, which is the other extreme: not the concept of the *status quo*, but the elitist concept of revolution. According to Gramsci, being an intellectual is essentially related to no old or new institutional forms or positions but political action carried out as party of civil society. In this view, anyone can be an intellectual for everyone—and not only the vanguard of professional intellectuals—has the ability for rational analysis and persuasion of others in the revolutionary process. He put an especially important role on mentors, teachers, and journalists in the foundation of cultural change, if they represent the arguments and interests of the rising new class.

Gramsci did not believe in the classical, autonomy-based view of the role of intellectual, because he believed that only leads to the conservation of *status quo*. Against this, he argued that cultural change requires intellectuals who are themselves recruited from the emerging new class and therefore are “organically” related to the class they came from. Organic intellectuals can alter the dominant convictions of civil society via speaking in the name of and for the interest of the subordinated class. Thus, they can achieve the new hegemony, that is, the cultural change which is the prerequisite of fundamental social change.

For Gramsci, intellectuals do not comprise a new class but a group that is subordinated either to the class in power (the bourgeoisie) or the class that struggles for hegemony (the workers) and does not speak its own voice but gives voice to the point of view of the class it represents. They do not represent their own interest but the class-based issue of progress (or preservation). Gramsci suggests that no regime change is possible without the active contribution of organic intellectuals, which aims both at the dissolution of the *political formula*³⁷ of the old system and the development of the linguistic, conceptual system and knowledge of the new legitimate order (the new hegemony). In the new system, organic intellectuals fulfill the role of cultural organizers and mediators between political leaders and civil society, which means that the working class does not need a vanguard to consolidate power.

The third classical theory of intellectuals is related to the name of Karl Mannheim, who examined the role of intellectuals from the point of view of reproduction of power. He accepted the theorem of Marx which stated that class position defines class consciousness and ideology. Accordingly, the ruling class represents an ideology which blocks the way of the opportunity of radical social change. However, in contrast to Marx, he did not consider the proletariat as the carriers of the values of cultural emancipation, because he believed that the ideology of the working class is related to its class position just as much as in case of the bourgeoisie. The determination of the working class by social being manifests in the belief in an ideology that aims at social change.

According to Mannheim, only the intelligentsia is located in a position to understand the movements of society in their entirety and provide a holistic picture of its internal lines of force. For the intelligentsia is not integrated

37 This is the expression of Mosca, *The Ruling Class*.

into either class or political party, its point of view is determined by neither by its class position, nor the interest of a single class. As members of the intelligentsia do not take part in physical productive work, they usually need a patron who sponsors them and who they depend on financially; this may be the state or a wealthy supporter. With the support of an external financier, the members of the intelligentsia gain free time which allows them to create and to observe social environment. In the words of Mannheim, “an experimental outlook, unceasingly sensitive to the dynamic nature of society and to its wholeness, is not likely to be developed by a class occupying a middle position but only by a relatively classless stratum which is not too firmly situated in the social order. [. . .] This unanchored, relatively classless stratum is, to use Alfred Weber’s terminology, the ‘socially unattached intelligentsia’.”³⁸ Intellectual activity is not simply unattached to the interests of any social class but it shows a special social stratum, the members of which are recruited from a constantly widening circle.³⁹ This liberates the intelligentsia from the representation of class interests, and allows them to understand processes as they are, without biases. The members of this group are independent from other classes, and they are capable of summarizing and crystallizing every aspect of social life. Due to their heterogeneous background and “socially unattached” position, the intelligentsia can take various points of view into account, and therefore they are able to describe social reality in neutral terms.⁴⁰ Thus, only the “socially unattached intelligentsia” is able to formulate an autonomous view that is independent from the members of society.

However, Mannheim argues that there is a basic sociological bond that connects the intelligentsia and differentiates them from others: erudition. In his view, the common background of education and erudition is so strong in this group that it relegates differences of origin, wealth, occupation, or income among them into a secondary category of importance and unites them as erudite people. The intelligentsia can mediate between the working class and the entrepreneurial class, because they can loosely tie to both antagonistic classes; but they can also keep distance from both classes, and represent the normative aspect of the intellectual vocation instead. At any rate, Mannheim does not regard the intelligentsia as an independent

38 A. Weber, “Die Not der geistigen Arbeiter”; Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 137–38.

39 Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 139.

40 Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 140.

social class because they are not capable of coordinated social action, and do not create an own party that would represent the interests of this stratum. Notwithstanding that the intelligentsia is situated in between various social classes, it cannot be called a middle class either. In concrete political issues the intelligentsia cannot create such cohesion that would base its coordinated class action, unlike the working class. In contrast to the latter, the intelligentsia in Mannheim's view can only play the role of interpreter and mediator. If the sociologists want to understand society, one of their most important tasks is to analyze the forms of knowledge about society, that is, to cultivate the sociology of knowledge.⁴¹

According to Mannheim, that the intelligentsia does not have its own, common ideology makes it unsurprising that it arrives at the widest range of parties in the political life. For the task of intellectuals is not to represent the socially independent, rational truth—as Benda believed—but to seek social synthesis. For the intelligentsia exists “between, but not above, the classes.”⁴² Mannheim was convinced that synthesis in society is possible, because in every situation a “total perspective” that contains every point of view is possible. As he wrote, the problem of political sociology is that unlike in the case of “exact” sciences, the knowledge about politics is inseparable from political existence and the irrational elements connected to it. As politics consists of a series of rational and irrational acts, Mannheim argued that only the socially unattached intelligentsia are able to research the sociology of political knowledge reliably. For their ascertainments are not bound to interests, meaning they are not connected to the interests of any class.

Mannheim also saw the tendency of modern societies that social structure is defined by market relations, and professionalization⁴³ can force the intelligentsia into existential dependence. The requirement of professionalization deprives the intelligentsia from the ability to manage time on their own, from the ability to deal with comprehensive issues. Thus, the intelligentsia loses its privileged social position, which means it gradually loses its intellectual being. According to Mannheim, if the market forces the members of the intelligentsia to choose regular, routine-like occupations—for example, they become journalists, heads of institutions, or university profes-

⁴¹ Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*.

⁴² Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Culture*, 104.

⁴³ Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*.

sors—they lose their intellectual independence. They are forced to obey such socially constructed rules that constitute constraints and hinder their efforts to further social change on the level of reason.

Classical theories of intellectuals are summarized in the table below.

Table 4. Classical theories of intellectuals

THEORY	INTELLECTUAL POSITION	INTELLECTUAL ATTITUDE
BENDA	an actor standing above society	based on erudition, the follower of indivisible truth: universalistic attitude
GRAMSCI	organizes on the basis of class origins, anyone can be an intellectual: “organic intellectuals”	an actor of civil society, follower of given class interest, intellectual fight for hegemony
MANNHEIM	“socially unattached intelligentsia” within society but between classes	the ability to create synthesis, special position: bourgeois way of life, proletariat income

All three theories of intellectuals mentioned above share the starting point that intellectuals can be regarded, in some sense, as a special social group. They can stand firmly above society in the service of reason or pure science, they can be socially unattached between political groups that represent antagonistic class interests, or they can join a social class, as its organic intellectual. In any case, their erudition, status, ability to create synthesis, inclination to participate in public life, or ability to create ideology ensures their prioritized position in society.

The special role and function of intellectuals in the society appears even more emphatically in those theories which see the intellectuals not as a status group but as a “new class.”

1.3 THEORIES OF THE NEW CLASS

New Class theory appeared in three waves in the last 150 years,⁴⁴ but their differences cannot hide their genuine similarity. Every theory of New Class

44 King and Szelényi, *Theories of the New Class*.

shared the conviction that (1) the class rule of bourgeoisie that emerged in capitalism is not eternal, and (2) post-capitalist systems will not be classless societies. The first statement agrees with the theory of Marx, while the second one questions it. The anarchist proponents of the first wave of the theory of New Class emphasized the separation of the intellectual class, as well as its relative closedness and class consciousness.⁴⁵ Representatives of the second wave put the emphasis on the structural position the intellectual class occupied in the society.⁴⁶ Finally, exponents of the third wave underlined the importance of knowledge or cultural capital to achieve their goals on the road to class power.⁴⁷

The early theories related the concept of intellectual to the ruling class, interpreting it as a part of it. The anarchists and syndicalists were suspicious of the intellectuals who appeared in ever greater number in the workers' movement, and the former began to treat the latter as a rising new class. They pointed out that the solidarity of intellectuals with the oppressed is hypocritical, because they, in spite of their universalist forms of expression, indeed follow their own class interests.⁴⁸

The second wave of the theories of New Class reflected on the gradual bureaucratization of revolutionary systems. According to this theory, the intellectuals who survive the revolution sooner or later blend into the system at the time of consolidation. They take influential positions and therefore they take a role in the exercise of power. The first analysts and critics of seemingly revolutionary regimes were former communist, exiled or jailed politicians who examined the system through its stratum of bureaucrats. According to Trotsky,⁴⁹ bureaucrats can be seen as a social stratum that has class attributes and fulfills an important role in the consolidation of the Stalinist state socialist systems. Decades later, in the interpretation of Milovan Djilas, the same bureaucratic control appeared in the form of the rule of a significant new class.

45 Bakunin, "God and the State"; on Machajski, see Shatz, "Conspiracy of the Intellectuals"; *A Radical Critic*; Gouldner, "Prologue to the Theory of Revolutionary Intellectuals."

46 Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution*; Djilas, *The New Class*.

47 Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*; Konrád and Szelényi, *Road to Class Power*.

48 Bakunin, "God and the State"; Machajski, *The Intellectual Worker*; Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*; Michels, *Political Parties*.

49 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*.

From the mid-twentieth century, New Class theory became an unexpected point of connection between the East and the West. In the first half of the 1940s, Burnham argued that in modern capitalist societies it is not the owners but CEOs who make the strategic decisions of major enterprises. This stage of development can be called managerialism, where the source of power is not ownership rights but the decision-making position.⁵⁰ Just as bureaucrats in state socialism, technocrats and managers in the operation of the welfare state—and thus the survival of capitalism—seemed essential. It seemed that, as a result, the importance of ownership and the owners becomes secondary and therefore the two types of social system—welfare capitalism and state socialism—converge.

This conjuncture was pursued further by Konrád and Szelényi,⁵¹ who understood the reform era of state socialism as a struggle within the ruling class between the old (less educated, more party-dependent and ideological) bureaucrats and the new (more educated, intellectual) technocrats who preached the ideology of professional knowledge. In their view, technocrats gradually take the place of the communist nomenclature and therefore fundamentally change the sociological character of the regime. Thus, expert intellectuals get to the top echelons of power, which closes a long historical process.

According to Konrád and Szelényi,⁵² the structural position of intellectuals has been in continuous change in the last centuries. While it existed in feudalism as an order and in capitalism as a stratum, in the system of state socialism built on rational redistribution it organizes as a social class. While intellectual achievements appear as products in capitalism, in socialism they are not products but the mold of the culture of a relatively homogeneous intellectual class, and they are involved in the process of social redistribution with state support. According to them, this leads to a situation in which intellectuals of the world in capitalist systems can represent their interests via multinational corporations, while east to the Iron Curtain the intellectuals—with the occupation of state positions—are on the road to class power from their previous *estate* status. The authors believed that intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-Stalin era could monopolize the dis-

⁵⁰ Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution*.

⁵¹ Konrád and Szelényi, *Road to Class Power*.

⁵² Konrád and Szelényi, *Road to Class Power*.

course about reforms with their teleological knowledge, gradually crowd out the less qualified members of the state bureaucracy from the positions of power, and obtain class power. However, bureaucracy was temporarily able to co-opt the carriers of knowledge capital into the state socialist system.

The English-language publication of the book of Konrád and Szelényi coincided with the rise of the third wave of New Class theory in the West. Alvin Gouldner⁵³ in his ambitious analysis, which was based on Marxian theory but wanted to exceed it, explained that only the new intellectual class has the necessary progressive power to create the *culture of critical discourse*, and delegitimize capitalism. Gouldner judged the rise of the New Class critically and still optimistically, interpreting it basically as the last resort of the left.

According to Gouldner, the New Class comes from the revolutionary intelligentsia which claimed to have followed universal values but, in the long run, it became clear that it really followed its own interests. Gouldner realized that the New Class appeared as the cooperation of the technical intellectuals and the intellectuals of the humanities both in capitalism and socialism. He refrained from proclaiming the formation of the New Class power, but he asserted that these groups may comprise the future ruling class, which will be based on cultural capital in general and particularly on the culture of critical discourse. Gouldner's key concept, the culture of critical discourse, is a kind of educated community of expression where the validity of the formulated goals, demands, and arguments depends not on the social status or power of the speaker but on the rationality of their arguments.⁵⁴ In this community of expression, every discourse is decontextualized, and any argument can be subject to rational criticism.

The culture of critical discourse not only connects intellectuals from technicalities and humanities but also creates a new common ideological platform for them, which provides the identity of the later New Class. They can protect their autonomy by the culture of critical discourse, and they can bring up new generations of possessors of cultural capital by exercising it. The basis of the culture of critical discourse is cultural capital, which yields income for the intellectuals and makes them competitive vis-à-vis the social-

⁵³ Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*.

⁵⁴ Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 28–29.

ist bureaucracy and the capitalist class. That is why Gouldner referred to the intellectuals as cultural bourgeoisie.⁵⁵ The culture of critical discourse provides the opportunity for the members of the New Class to reflect on the events of the world and to make material profit through their monopoly of interpretation. The cultural elite defined the quality of culture, supervises its distribution, and resists the constraints that would affect them negatively on the labor market. In contrast, the technical intellectuals serve the ruling class and defend their interests the most effectively by controlling productive forces and working conditions.

According to Gouldner, the collective consciousness and new ideology of the intellectuals is professionalization. It serves the purpose of guaranteeing the technical and moral superiority of the New Class, depreciating the power of the old ruling class. Nevertheless, members of the New Class cannot take over the top positions of political and economic power. This alienates them, increases the cohesion of their community, and radicalizes them. Another reason for the alienation of the New Class is the culture of critical discourse and reflection, which separates its participants from traditional language, culture, and society based on hierarchical structures. A seemingly unbridgeable gap appears between the universalist point of view and emancipatory program of the intellectuals on the one hand and the more traditional values and social embeddedness of the social strata the intellectuals want to elevate on the other hand.

Accordingly, Gouldner called intellectuals a flawed universal class,⁵⁶ because, in spite of its progressiveness, it creates a new social hierarchy by its stance for universal values. They monopolize the demand for truth and use their special knowledge to serve their own interests, therefore they remain elitist, despite their intentions, because they sacrifice solidarity, social sensitivity, empathy, and spontaneity on the altar of intellectual reflexivity. Yet, the intellectuals may be able to resist the further differentiation of capitalist society, which conceals universal values behind individual interests.⁵⁷ Gouldner described the New Class as a two-faced, morally ambivalent phenomenon: they are capable of both understanding the common good and following their own interests.

⁵⁵ Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 18.

⁵⁶ Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 83.

⁵⁷ Gouldner, *Against Fragmentation*.

Some neoconservative thinkers accepted the theory of the New Class as a starting point, but they observed the emerging intellectuals and the ones who gained influence in the media with suspicion. These authors voiced their concern that the rise of the new left creates a new, radical power center which potentially undermines the civic culture of market society. Schelsky⁵⁸ went as far as to describe the moralizing intellectuals of the new left as “modern priests” who crowd out the views in opposition to theirs from the public discourse. Phillips⁵⁹ reached a similar conclusion, who discovered the characteristics of the New Class in the community of expression of the media intellectuals. They treated the carriers of the counterculture, the “knowledge class” or the “knowledge industry” as a new class that no longer appears as a driving force of social mobility but as an identity-politics based, destructive power that is dangerous to liberal democracy.⁶⁰ However, Daniel Bell rejected these opinions and saw the representatives of the counterculture not as a new class but as a joint group of mentalities.⁶¹

The theory of New Class was particularly popular among sociologists until the duality of state socialism and welfare capitalism prevailed and the convergence of the two moved the imagination of researchers. The theory was suitable to reveal the reasons of the depoliticized relation of technocratic power and consumer society, to point out the implicitly political nature of this relation, and to be the base of critical opposition to it.

1.4 MODERN THEORIES OF INTELLECTUALS

The movements of 1968 and the cultural revolution that followed were successfully domesticated by capitalism. The spirit of rebellion always returns,⁶² but liberal democracy is flexible enough to be able to integrate even the radical criticism of the culture of the system.⁶³ The cultural contradictions of capitalism were pointed out most forcefully by Bell.⁶⁴ In his view, liberal

⁵⁸ Schelsky, *Die Arbeit tun die Anderen*.

⁵⁹ Phillips, *Mediocracy*.

⁶⁰ Bruce-Briggs, *The New Class?*; Podhoretz, “The Advisory Culture”; Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism; Reflections of a Neoconservative*.

⁶¹ Bell, *The Winding Passage*, 144–46.

⁶² Lipset and Dobson, “The Intellectual as Critic and Rebel.”

⁶³ Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics*.

⁶⁴ Bell, *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*.

democracy is the only system that systematically reproduces, alongside the mainstream, its own counterculture as well, which sets newer and newer challenges to the system. Bell saw intellectuals as a rising social stratum, which is capable of articulating its values and cultural attitude more clearly and with more impact than others. From a conservative point of view, he saw the new intellectual stratum dangerous because they represented anti-capitalistic views in public policy and, as Hayek⁶⁵ pointed out, reinforce the need for state intervention vis-à-vis market coordination as experts. Right-wing intellectuals feared that left-wing opinion molders undermine the anti-Soviet consensus in Western societies, and strengthen the “third world” ideology that was based on arguments about global exploitation.

But even beyond the political aspects it became increasingly obvious that the post-industrial system of values placed the stronger connection of information technology and theoretical knowledge into the center, which advanced the position of the new intellectuals. In the information economy, discursive intellectual knowledge may be closely linked to white-collar, professional intellectual roles. This may bring revolutionary changes in certain sub-systems of society, particularly in the higher education. As traditional production is pushed into the background and the service industry, the information economy, and higher education jointly gain ground, new revolutionary potential appears. In the short run, this manifests in radical student movements, but it may lead to the dominance of the meritocratic ideology in the long run, which can create fundamental social change.

According to Bell, intellectuals comprise a social stratum that is distinguished from others by their intensive use of knowledge capital. He lists as part of this stratum (1) the producers of knowledge (scholars, researchers, etc.); (2) the producers and critics of culture (writers, painters, musicians, critics); (3) the disseminators of culture and knowledge (journal editors, publishers, leaders of cultural institutions); (4) news producers and the actors of the entertainment industry (reporters, journalists, the editors of printed and electronic media, people of show business); (5) the users and disseminators of knowledge (physicians, engineers, jurists, teachers, etc.); and finally (6) the managers and organizers who work in economic enterprises, in the state bureaucracy, and in nonprofit institutions.

65 Hayek, *The Intellectuals and Socialism*.

Using cultural-political categories, we may distinguish three groups: the groups of “clerks,” policy intellectuals, and ideology-driven intellectuals. The “clerks” include those who represent the well-established rules in the society, be they religious or scholarly ordinances. Thus, they are the people of the establishment. Policy intellectuals are consultants, specialists, and all who utilize their knowledge to support the policy decisions of the government. Finally, among ideological intellectuals we can find those who try to represent and disseminate ideas and values, and those who attack or defend existing institutions—in short, everyone who participates in the struggle of ideas.

By activity, intellectuals can fulfill instrumental, creative, or normative-critical roles. By professional positions, intellectuals can occupy scholarly, technological, administrative, or cultural (artistic, religious) statuses. Finally, by their position in the institutional system, they can be in interest-based positions based on subordinate relationship: they can work in economic enterprises, government administration, universities and research institutes, hospitals, the social sector, communal organizations, even the military. In this case, however, they lose a significant part of their intellectual being, because corporative rationality and institutional loyalty overrules their critical rationality. Bell attempted to visualize the society stratified by economic and cultural issues; this is summed up in Table 5.

Table 5. The distribution of social groups in economic and cultural dimensions

		ECONOMIC	
		<i>Left-wing</i>	<i>Right-wing</i>
CULTURAL	<i>Liberal</i>	Urban intellectuals	Managers
	<i>Conservative</i>	Working class	Old capitalists

Source: Bell⁶⁶

Many authors accepted the relevance of intellectual knowledge but rejected the idea of intellectuals being a class, and they interpreted the concept of intellectuals as a social function instead. In the functionalist approach, the task of the intellectuals in a plural society is twofold. On the one hand, intellectuals must professionalize and specialize according to the

⁶⁶ Bell, *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*.

requirements of the social division of labor.⁶⁷ In this function, the intellectuals contribute to the operability of capitalist systems. In Bourdieu's approach, the intellectuals use cultural capital to form the dominant taste as a subordinate faction of the ruling class. This way they help the ruling class acquire and maintain symbolic as well as material power.⁶⁸ According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is a kind of (noneconomic) capital the individual can use to reach higher social status (education, knowledge, erudition, etc.), and therefore it supports the relative openness and stability of society at the same time.

However, the other task of the individuals somewhat contradicts this. It is the contribution to social renewal, which requires a kind of thinking that deviates from ordinary norms. The role of the intellectual is not only constructive but also deconstructive, which applies to social as well as cultural criticism. Among the tasks of the intellectuals are the questioning of the common sense and the protest against political oppression and social inequality and injustice. This constantly reproduces the counterculture vis-à-vis the dominant culture of capitalist social system. Some opined that this is dangerous to the democratic order of the majority because they believed that critical intellectuals undermine public morality and weaken the reflexes of self-defense of the social majority. Others, however, saw it on the contrary and argued that the challenge of counterculture is what keeps the market-based dominant culture alive. The "cultural contradictions of capitalism" indirectly strengthen the immune system of the prevailing democratic society.⁶⁹ There are certain cultural patterns that are based on calling the existence of the system into question, but the system is flexible enough to integrate these cultural tendencies into consumer society.

In Bell's view, the intellectual position is not a social class; it is rather a mentality and cultural attitude. Intellectuals cannot be positioned in society in structural terms but only on the basis of cultural attitudes.⁷⁰ The essence of the change is that the legitimacy of social behavior has moved from religion to expressive culture. Sanctity has been replaced by the norm of expressing impulses, and culture is liberated from the dominance of religion and

67 Cf. Berger, "Sociology and the Intellectuals"; Lipset, *Political Man*; Parsons, "On the Concept of Influence"; Lipset and Dobson, "The Intellectual as Critic and Rebel."

68 Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital"; *Distinction*.

69 Bell, *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*.

70 Bell, *The Winding Passage*.

traditional norms. According to Bell, this is a result of the growth of state power in the 20th century, which includes the increase of military spending, the expansion of public services (education, healthcare, and welfare spending), the revolution of transportation and communication, as well as the increasing interdependency in the world economy. Bell says that capitalism has created the opportunity for widespread hedonism, and the joy of work, diligence, long-term planning, and transcendental belonging have become obsolete and given way to the satisfaction of pleasures. The economic culture of the American system that invites success, profit, religion, work, and achievement is in contradiction with its urban culture which is based on doubt, aestheticization, resistance, and radical criticism. This led to the anti-bourgeoisie culture of “*épater la bourgeoisie*,” and later to the protest against new hedonism. Right-wing intellectuals who contributed to the neoconservative revolution started their career as critics of the moralization of the New Left but soon they themselves became new supporters: they preached a new moral order, sometimes in a fundamentalist manner.

Foucault often emphasized the inseparability of knowledge and power, albeit he did not see intellectuals as a social group of special tasks. His theory of power⁷¹ holds that power exerts influence not only vertically, in a top-down fashion, but also horizontally, for power is “capillary.” This means that power is related not to great social structures and political hierarchy but it is present in the microstructures of life, in the interactions of people on every level. Power, as Foucault⁷² writes, has a “fluid” nature: it can flow from the top to the bottom or from the bottom to the top, depending on the various social situations, and it may appear in the conflicts of people of similar social standing.

Speaking about intellectuals, Foucault emphasized that the traditional, normative, and moralizing kind of understanding of intellectuals prevailed until World War II. After that, we can see the gradual growth of influence of those scholars, technocrats, and “specific intellectuals” working in universities and research institutes who no longer feel a calling to voice their opinion in every issue of public interest. These “specific intellectuals” have remained within the confines of institutionally demarcated disciplines, and they have

71 Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*.

72 Foucault, “The Subject and Power.”

legitimized their statements not as a moral standard but through their institutionally confirmed expertise. According to this view, intellectuals have become humble and realist because they have realized that they are no longer considered unerring and their truth may prevail only in a well-defined field. They have no longer had the demand for the universalist understanding of the truth, but they have had the claim to interpret their arguments as valid and properly debatable within the given context.

In response, Bauman⁷³ argued that the concept of “specific intellectual” Foucault introduced is a *contradictio in adjecto*. For intellectuals either deal with issues beyond their narrowly interpreted field of expertise, or they cannot be regarded as intellectuals. Bauman held that experts and professional scholars cannot be regarded as intellectuals. They become intellectuals if they discuss or make statements about general issues of public interest. However Bauman also sensed an era change: he believed that, while in the period of modernity intellectuals fulfilled the function of “legislator” in the society, in the new era of post-modernity they are limited to the role of “interpreter” which involves interpretation, mediation between cultures, and “translation” in the symbolic sense. This is related to that formerly homogeneous and ethnically integrated societies have become parallel, multicultural societies forced to deliberation. This does not necessarily make the intellectual a social actor who is immersed in his profession, because the broadly understood task of interpretation has become a condition of everyday operation of the community. The understanding of cultures and establishing noetic connection is just as important as the “legislation” or the representation of the “only truth.” It is society, and not the intellectual demand for legitimation, that has changed: culture has been replaced by plural *cultures*, which has forced out the transformation of the social function of intellectuals.⁷⁴

For Bauman, intellectual is a positive, not a normative, concept. He disagreed with the definitions which claimed that intellectuals must be “freedom fighters” who are always in opposition to the state and its oppressive functions. Bauman believed that intellectuals are more like cultural leaders, who are strongly related to the state and have affinity to cooperate with political leaders. They are not natural enemies of all power, because they

73 Bauman, *Legislators as Interpreters*; “Culture as the Ideology of Intellectuals”; “Love in Adversity.”

74 For a critique, see Finkelkraut, *The Defeat of the Mind*.

need power to display their competence, that is, to fulfill their social function of intellectual leadership and canonizing and disseminating culture.⁷⁵ To achieve this, they often act collectively and present their cause as universal, kind of embedding it in the “process of civilization,” whereby they isolate the culturally dominated and oppressed groups. They identify their position with “the culture,” therefore standing out from the “uncultured” masses. However, this is paradoxically followed, although they are separated from the social groups they see as uncultured, by the interpretation of their task as the enlightening and “civilizing” of precisely those groups. Bauman⁷⁶ regarded this intellectual strategy insincere and opined that in this process the reference to culture serves only ideological goals: culture is the ideology by which intellectuals protect their own separatism and privileges. Here, knowledge appears both as the facilitator of social emancipation and as a form of rule. In Bauman’s view, intellectuals aim at presenting their authoritative position in society as simple cultural hegemony.

Bauman argues that the long-flourishing relationship of intellectuals and the state has come to an end, because the place of ideology and mobilization has been taken by the “panoptical” system of rule and control. Intellectuals are forced into more and more demarcated, specific roles by the joint effort of the state and the market. The public that would listen to the arguments of general social visions that go beyond details is gone, and the latter gave way to specific projects. Political power can restrict intellectual activity by the means of resource withdrawal, surveillance, and censorship, whereas the “masses” observe the cultural hegemonic attempt of intellectuals with different taste and a complicated way of expression with suspicion. The intellectual has an equally ambivalent and mutually suspicious relationship with the representatives of political power and the less educated masses, and the intellectual often reacts to this situation by retreating to the world of professionalism.

Bauman writes that, in the era of specialization, intellectuals can be divided into two groups: those who serve more than one interests and those who serve only one. In this new situation, the togetherness of the intellectuals can be demonstrated only by public political participation and transparent resolu-

75 Bauman, *Legislator and Interpreters*.

76 Bauman, “Culture as the Ideology of Intellectuals”; “Love in Adversity.”

tions. Bauman believes that intellectuals strengthen their identity more often through acts of rebellion. Yet the needed unity is lacking, competition in particular issues overrules the joint representation of universal values.

Debray⁷⁷ argues that we can isolate three institutional ages in the social functioning of intellectuals. The first one is the “university cycle,” where significant intellectual careers were mainly pursued in the university-academic world. The second, “publishing cycle” lasted from 1930 to the end of the 1960s, when the top of the intellectual profession came from the editors and columnists of opinion-leader journals, papers, and magazines. This third cycle started after 1968, when the role of traditional university and literary intellectuals was taken over by media celebrities. Debray points out that in the information society, where the functions of information and entertainment are connected, universities have lost their monopoly for defining the reputation of intellectuals. Public intellectuals’ statements are judged by the market, which puts opinion-leaders even further from traditional intellectual roles.

In the last two decades, a growing number of researchers have underlined the fact that the social position of intellectuals is less and less fixed, and therefore explanations starting from the classical theories of intellectuals are less and less valid. Thomas Medvetz⁷⁸ holds that today’s intellectuals acquire social influence by “commuting” between more than one social positions, and they speak in different roles according to their current status. While social positions remain important, the intellectual is no longer anchored to an institutional position. Medvetz does not dispute Aron’s claim⁷⁹ that the development of social division of labor requires increasing professionalization from intellectuals. But he believes that intellectuals try to defend themselves against the professionalization that is forced upon them, and they will try to sell their knowledge and ability to mold public opinion in more markets simultaneously. He also conducted empirical research to corroborate his claim. Analyzing the career of intellectuals working in American think tanks, he revealed that expert intellectual paths unfolded in the gravitational field of four different types of activity: (1) academia, (2) politics, (3) business, and (4) media.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Debray, *The Intellectuals of Modern France*.

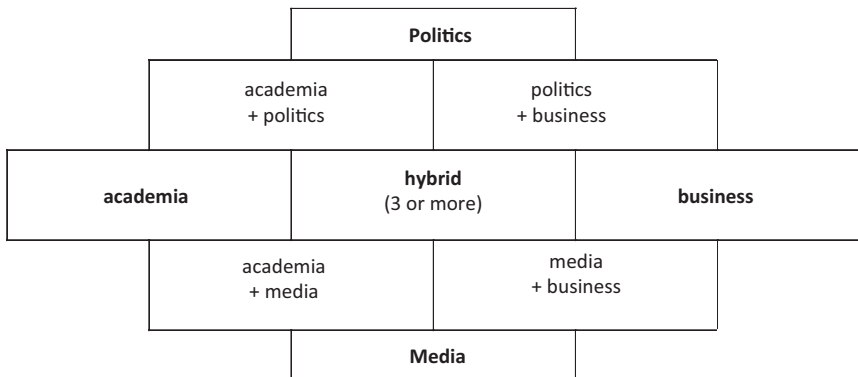
⁷⁸ Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*.

⁷⁹ Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*.

⁸⁰ Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*.

As Table 6 shows, various combinations of academic, political, business, and media activities of intellectuals can occur. The intellectual path starts in the university, therefore academic activity is the potential starting point as well as background of the career of those working in think tanks. But their activity is divided between academic life and politics, or between academic life and the world of media. These activities may temporally separate and alternate during one's career, but it is also possible that one's activity tries to embrace more than one field. Many intellectuals do not give up teaching and go back to the university to hold lectures, because they need to test their ideas in an interest-free environment as well. It can happen that someone is a professor but also fulfills an important role in editing a medium, or they give advice to certain political parties, politicians, or they found an own company and try to operate their own knowledge as a business enterprise. Medvetz calls those whose activity involves at least three of the above-mentioned categories *hybrid intellectuals*. In the contemporary capitalist systems, the slow dissolution of traditional intellectual roles brings the disappearance of "pure types" of the intellectual vocation, and previously unseen overlaps, career combinations, and hybrid intellectuals roles emerge. Medvetz sees the hybrid intellectual as the most characteristic form of intellectual after the millennium.

Table 6. The career background of intellectual experts working in think tanks



Source: Medvetz⁸¹

⁸¹ Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*, 167.

Eyal and Buchholz⁸² go even further when, instead of putting an emphasis on overlapping intellectual positions and the hybrid types thereof, they analyze comments made on public issues. Similar to Medvetz, the authors hold that the role and status of intellectuals in the radically changed social environment greatly differs from the roles and aspirations which characterized the intellectuals in the 20th century. Accordingly, the authors propose a new approach instead of the classical definitions of intellectuals. In their view, the research of intellectuals is in need of a paradigm change, similar to when Foucault introduced the concept of discourse in place of truth and ideology, or when Bourdieu replaced the concept of class with social space.

Eyal and Buchholz believe that not only are social position and group status inadequate starting points for the research of intellectuals but also the trans-contextual nature of intellectual thinking. The authors refuse to derive the concept of intellectuals from normative commitment to universal values, too. They argue that the basic unit of research must be moved from the social type and attributes of intellectuals toward the analysis of *interventions*. By this, they mean that contemporary research should not focus on intellectual positions; instead, its subject should be the public interventions (remarks, speeches) themselves, or the specialized knowledge, discourses, and knowledge forms that manifest in them.⁸³ For them, importance lies in not who talks but in what they say: it is not the established intellectual position that qualifies the comment, but the importance and quality of the comment qualifies the commenter. The actors lose their importance vis-à-vis the content and form of their expressions, or rather the space of activity, the fields of public discourse, and the scholarly networks where these interventions happen and intellectual knowledge circulates.⁸⁴ In this approach, the image of lonely intellectuals gives way to the networks of mutually recognized knowledge and the concept of *epistemic communities*. These communities operate outside bureaucratic hierarchies but involve think tanks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the knowledge networks of academic institu-

82 Eyal and Buchholz, "Sociology of Interventions."

83 Eyal and Buchholz, "Sociology of Interventions," 120.

84 Eyal, "Antipolitics and the Spirit of Capitalism"; *The Origins of Postcommunist Elites*; Posner, *Public Intellectuals*; Sapiro, "Forms of Politicization."

tions as well.⁸⁵ The authors underline that these contemporary networks are informal, interdisciplinary, and transnational.

2. INTELLECTUALS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Under what conditions do intellectuals join radical social movements? Earlier, answers to this question came from theoreticians of revolution. Tocqueville⁸⁶ saw the change of behavior of intellectuals as a precondition for revolution. In his view, the intellectuals, who are the producers of system-sustaining ideology, may renounce loyalty if the representatives of power are unable to resolve crisis situations. When intellectuals renounce loyalty and change sides from the power to the challengers, it is a significant event of every successful revolution. This thesis by Tocqueville had a profound effect on the analyses of revolution of the 20th century.⁸⁷

Another modern theoretician who used the notion of collective action to outline the anatomy of revolutions, Tilly,⁸⁸ made a distinction between revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes. The former is a precondition of the latter, but a revolutionary situation does not necessarily result in a revolutionary outcome. Tilly identified the mutually exclusive political claims to possessing sovereign power as one condition of revolutionary situation. Such cases may lead to political stalemate, which is characterized by multiple sovereignty, that is, the prevalence of dual power most of the time. Intellectuals have an important role in calling the legitimacy of the old power into question. This can happen if the challengers of the prevailing power are supported by people who can offer a trustworthy, new narrative to society.

But not every revolutionary transformation is accompanied by violence. There are cases when revolutionary situations resolve without violence: when the “weapon of criticism” or the culture of critical discourse *per se* is enough to make a nonviolent, “velvet” revolution happen. Which are the circumstances under which intellectuals radicalize but no full-scale revolution happens? What types of intellectuals participate in rebel or protest movements?

85 Eyal and Buchholz, “Sociology of Interventions,” 132.

86 Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*.

87 Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*; Davies, “Toward a Theory of Revolution.”

88 Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*.

From the related literature, I rely on the works of Karabel,⁸⁹ Eyerman,⁹⁰ and Eyerman and Jamison.⁹¹ Karabel distinguished the “moralist” and “realist” branches of the literature. According to him, representatives of the moralist tradition approach the concept of intellectuals from a normative, idealized point of view, and emphasize what the intellectual *must* be like. The authors of this tradition hold that intellectuals must, in every case, represent the truth, be provocative, stand up to the manipulations of power, unmask deception, and confront those in power with the truth. Among the representatives of moralist view we can find, according to Karabel, authors like Zola, Orwell, Kolakowski, or Havel.

In contrast to them, the position of the representatives of the realist tradition was that intellectuals cannot be regarded as a special social stratum when it comes to bringing about social change. Based on the positive description of the aforementioned authors there is little support for the claim that intellectuals are a “genetically” rebellious social group. In their view, this aspect does not differentiate intellectuals from other strata. This theoretical tradition is represented by the likes of Michels, Bauman, and Foucault.

Intellectuals often tend to see themselves as superior to the political or economic elite from moral, cultural, or cognitive aspects. That is why they experience dissonance as a result of their subordinate position in the elite.⁹² The dissonance typically remains within peaceful limits, because the intellectuals on the one hand and the representatives of the political and economic elite on the other hand realize their mutual interdependence. Within the elite, intellectuals are in a subordinate position compared to the members of the political and the economic elite. However, in special historical situations the intellectuals might stand up to other elite groups—or support such revolts—to strengthen their positions.

Karabel⁹³ lists the social conditions that might turn intellectuals as an independent social group to not only oppose the regime but even to rebel against it as follows:

89 Karabel, “Toward a Theory of Intellectuals and Politics.”

90 Eyerman, “Intellectuals and Progress”; *Between Culture and Politics*.

91 Eyerman and Jamison, “Social Movements and Their Intellectuals.”

92 Karabel, “Toward a Theory of Intellectuals and Politics.”

93 Karabel, “Toward a Theory of Intellectuals and Politics,” 211–14.

- If the intellectuals are well organized, politically radical, but subordinate social group, or related to such groups.
- If society lacks a strong business class.
- If there is a high ratio of “relatively unattached” intellectuals to those employed by large-scale organizations (for the latter lose their critical potential due to their organization indoctrination).
- If the regime is moderately repressive, meaning it lacks the means and/or the will to stamp out dissent (which therefore has a room for maneuver).
- If the ruling group is weak or divided.
- If the state is unable to protect “the people” or the “nation” from economic, political, or military encroachments from other states that occupy more powerful positions within the world system.
- If there are sharp boundaries between social groups, which do not allow for effective, joint action.
- If there exist historically grounded cultural repertoires of resistance to authority, which can be activated in the moments of crisis.

Intellectual groups voice their opinion with particularly great volume in crisis situations, when political rules lose their credibility and moral norms appreciate. It is common to cite in relation to the political role of intellectuals, the French intellectuals—Zola, Sartre, Bourdieu—who started social debates with some of their comments. A similar role was played by American intellectuals during the protest against the War of Vietnam, by the youth of West German universities at the time of revealing the Nazi past of the generation of their parents in the second half of the 1960s,⁹⁴ or even by the Central European intellectuals in the 1980s and during the regime change.⁹⁵ Since it has been often claimed that Hungarian intellectuals came to power almost like a class in 1989, I will use Karabel’s criteria to test the validity of this argument in the given context. I will return to these dimensions in the concluding chapter of the book.

As research confirmed, nonviolent resistance campaigns turned out to be more successful than violent ones because they were more inclusive and

94 Cf. Kurzman and Owens, “The Sociology of Intellectuals.”

95 Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*; “Resistance and Dissent”; Isaac, “Central European Dissidence.”

made it easier for outsiders to join. According to Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), nonviolent campaigns are more likely to attract higher level participation than violent campaigns because the barrier of participation is lower. They also pointed out that high levels of participation can activate numerous mechanisms to improve the odds of success. This book is partly inspired by their argument when it investigates how a closed group of vanguard intellectuals could manage to transform themselves to open network-builders and movement-organizers due to social pressure. This is the logic of rolling transition. In the case of Hungary in the 1980s the democratic opposition based on a trust-network of marginalized intellectuals which grew large over the years by becoming a social movement and later a political party, while still maintaining its trust-based character in collective action.⁹⁶

Finally, the last approach I discuss here deals with the role the intellectuals fulfill with social movements. According to Eyerman and Jamison,⁹⁷ social movements can be seen as series of acts which produce new types of knowledge. The authors reversed the elitist thesis of Lenin about the vanguard—which claims that the revolution must be led by the party as an ideologically educated, committed, and class-conscious vanguard. As opposed to this, the authors argued that it is not the intellectuals who control the movement, but on the contrary, social movements create the new type of intellectuals. Movements change the fixated identity of intellectuals, tip them out of their routine, and therefore create new opportunities for the intellectuals to play new roles in the movement.

The thesis of Eyerman and Jamison is similar to that of Gramsci in that intellectuals are the product of social praxis. Yet it is also different, as the former links the emergence of “organic intellectuals” not to class origins but the movement. “Organic intellectuals” are recruited not from those with working-class background but those who participate actively in the movement. In this sense, the function of social movements is twofold: they offer a new type of knowledge beyond old knowledge forms, and they also grant an opportunity for a new type of intellectual, beyond established intellectuals, to emerge: the movement intellectuals.

96 On the barriers of participation, cf. Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, and on the role of trust, cf. Fukuyama, *Trust*.

97 Eyerman and Jamison, “Social Movements and Their Intellectuals.”

Thus, there are two types of intellectuals in politics: (1) the established intellectuals, whose social recognition is based on knowledge, erudition, and institutional embeddedness, which however may not be used in a quickly changing political environment; and (2) the movement intellectuals, whose intellectual identity stems directly from the movement. The given structure of opportunities for the movement and its participants depends on the type of the political system, that is, that movement activists can cooperate with what kind of organizations, in what kind of social space, and against what kind of opponents.

Movement intellectuals can play a crucial role in the process of radicalization, because they are the manifestation of the identity of the social movement. Furthermore, their activity has an effect on the thinking of the established intellectuals. Partially because they stand up to them, and partially because the more open-minded groups of the established intellectuals can be co-opted into the movement. Naturally, this depends not only on them but also on the social environment where the movement stems from, and which defines the outcome of political radicalization. Tension appears in every radical movement between traditional and new, “movement” knowledge, just as between their carriers, the established intellectuals and the movement intellectuals.⁹⁸ Table 7 provides a comparison of classical and contemporary movement roles of intellectuals.

The role of the established intellectuals is important particularly in the period before the formation of the social movement, when they are the first to identify a burning social problem that reaches the stimulation threshold of the media (or the underground press). Their criticism provokes social debate, which opens new room for political action. The emerging political activity puts forward alternative goals, and the participants develop the appropriate strategy accordingly. Then arrives the moment of movement intellectuals, who are brought to the forefront by their activity: They start a new movement or organization, give it a program, and define the identity of the movement.

In short, it is usually the established intellectuals who raise the problem, but there is a need for external reaction so the issue will be regarded important by the susceptible, critical social groups. This is where the younger,

98 Eyerman and Jamison, “Social Movements and Their Intellectuals.”

new intellectual groups (often students) enter, and they make the problem politically palpable and share it with the wider circles of society. At this point, the movement may recruit professional intellectuals, the specialists of a certain field, who contribute their knowledge to the common knowledge capital of the movement. In parallel, the movement activists also acquire the necessary professional, political, and communicational knowledge that is indispensable to the success and the popularization of the goals of the movement. If specialists want to participate in the movement, they pick up the language and system of symbols of the movement and take its identity; in exchange, movement activists learn, beyond “movement knowledge,” the professional aspects of their cause. The movement intellectuals are comprised of these smaller groups, and their members become intellectuals by the movement itself. In the period of the movement’s consolidation, they will be the leaders, managers, and communicators of the new, professional organization.

Table 7. Intellectual roles in social movements

ESTABLISHED INTELLECTUAL IN THE MOVEMENT	MOVEMENT INTELLECTUAL
They fulfill the role of ideologist.	They are qualified activists: the difference between erudite leaders and the masses decreases.
Established intellectuals offer ideology to the followers of the movement (class-like privilege).	There is no formal leader, new problems are answered by jointly discussed, <i>ad hoc</i> solutions.
The role of mass media is negligible.	Mass media becomes important.
Movement activists may reach the level of established intellectuals only as an exception.	The movement intellectual may decide to co-opt some established intellectuals to increase the movement’s prestige.
The renowned, leading intellectual has a place in the movement because of their preexisting, widespread prestige.	The movement intellectual is known by a smaller circle, emerges from local conflicts, and proves their prowess in movement politics.
They originate their legitimacy from their knowledge/position.	They originate their legitimacy from the movement.

3. INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

What was the role of various intellectual groups in Central European regime changes? What was their role in delegitimizing the communist system, forming political language, creating the various political opportunities of the period of transition, and defining the character of the new democratic system after the Cold War?

Central Europe has a long tradition of the political participation of intellectuals, particularly the intellectuals of the humanities. In the 19th century, it was the writers, poets, journalists, historians, and polymaths who preserved, cultivated, and refreshed national culture and language. They laid the foundations of the nation-state as well. These educated reformers wanted to import as many elements of Western societies as possible in their own countries. As they were the knowledge elite of the country who were thinking in broad perspectives, it was among their main goals to facilitate social progress and foster the emergence of a Western-type middle class and the introduction of radical social reforms through their reform bills. A significant part of critical intellectuals were national liberals in the 19th century, whereas they later supported more radical theories of equality. They believed that their knowledge and erudition licensed them to be the “living conscience” of the nation. Accordingly, intellectuals strove to preserve their national identity under foreign oppression, and fight for freedom and democracy in antidemocratic times.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the two concepts of traditional intellectuals and professional intellectuals were historically divided. But in this respect, even Central Europe and Eastern Europe followed different cultural traditions. The less developed a country was, the wider the gap that existed between the educated knowledge elite and the uneducated masses. The widest gap particularly applied to Russia, where intellectuals had, almost like a social class, a closed caste-like group identity. Bottomore writes that the term “*intelligentsia*” “was first used in Russia in the nineteenth century to refer to those who had received a university education which qualified them for professional occupations.”⁹⁹ As this meant only a small segment of society, the

99 Bottomore, *Elites and Society*, 70.

concept of “intelligentsia” had psychological as well as sociological content, but it was also characterized by a peculiar code of morals and behavior.

The historian Michael Confino¹⁰⁰ described the public attitude of traditional Russian intellectuals by five traits as follows:

- A deep concern for problems and issues of public interest.
- A sense of guilt and personal responsibility for the state and the solution of these problems and issues.
- A propensity to view political and social questions as moral ones.
- A sense of obligation to seek ultimate logical conclusions—in thought as well as in life—at whatever cost.
- The conviction that things are not as they should be, and that something should be done.

The classical description of Confino can be applied to the groups of radical intellectuals in many other countries as well. Concern for public issues, the sense of guilt, personal responsibility, moralizing, the affinity to radical solutions, as well as the conviction of the necessity of change was, albeit in different proportions and intensity, in every group of intellectuals who participated in the struggle for changing the political system. The traditional intellectuals of Eastern Europe did not see itself as a status group or a broadly interpreted new middle class. Rather, they saw themselves as the secular, social grouping of chosen people tasked with a political and moral mission.

Critical intellectuals are a group of intellectuals who, first and foremost, view the prevailing order of power on an *ethical-normative* basis. In their famous volume, Konrád and Szelényi described intellectuals as schizophrenic social actors who are characterized by both *telos* and *techne*, teleology and rational knowledge, or in other words the tension between strive for transcendence and genetic-historical determination.¹⁰¹ We speak about social actors to whom bolshevism offered the first chance historically to organize themselves not only as an order (as in pre-capitalist societies) or a stratum (as in market societies) but as a class—moreover, as a class with a chance at power. As I mentioned above, the authors defined the concept of intellec-

¹⁰⁰ Confino, “On Intellectuals,” 118.

¹⁰¹ Konrád and Szelényi, *Road to Class Power*.

tuals as the owners of trans-contextual knowledge, who legitimize the social position they occupy only with their knowledge. Thus, when we speak about critical intellectuals it refers only to a certain group of intellectuals which reflects on political conditions from a moral-universalist perspective as well.

In Central Europe, the separation of the categories of “traditional” and “professional” intellectuals was not this clear. As Central European intellectuals in the beginning of the 20th century had more opportunity to live for their occupation, they were not in need of forming a homogeneous stratum isolated from society.¹⁰² For example, intellectuals in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were not comprised of exclusively radical social reformers. Professionals, artists and scholars, white-collar workers from public administration, and a growing number of modern technocrats existed in the society as well.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the backward state of the region did not allow intellectuals to flourish in either culture or politics.¹⁰⁴ As a result, many of them became supporters of the left or right-wing “social revolutions” in the period of World War I.

In the 20th century, it turned out that dictatorships did not need intellectuals. Rather, they needed propagandists, experts with professional technical knowledge, or perhaps loyal artists who legitimize the system. After World War II, forceful sovietization of the countries of Central Europe began. The new communist governments tried to develop their own “organic” intellectuals by targeting the formerly oppressed social strata (the working class and the rural population). As a result of the high level of social mobility, young people from the working class could finally get a university degree. Origin, that is, belonging to a social class became the most important aspect of selection, together with party membership. In this context, the concept of intellectuals was often replaced by the category of “intellectual workers,” whose task was to spread, without questions, the ideology and politics of the system among the subjects.¹⁰⁵ Indeed the intellectuals in the state socialist era were usually called “intellectual workers.”¹⁰⁶ Such were the censors, propagandists, the journalists of party papers, teachers, mentors, and the members of other, generally intellectual occupations who were ready to give up their

102 Mazsu, *The Social History of the Hungarian Intelligentsia*.

103 Lukacs, *Budapest 1900*.

104 Ignóty, “Radical Writers in Hungary.”

105 Huszár, *Az elitől a nomenklatúráig*.

106 Huszár, *Értelmiségiek, diplomások, szellemi munkások*.

autonomy for the benefit of survival, better living, higher position, or state rewards.

In the beginning, class-based discrimination was exercised by the countries of the Soviet bloc in the same manner, but they diverged in for how long this policy was enforced. The 1960s saw the strengthening of the reform wing of the communist parties and this soon led to the abolishment of class-based university enrollment. For reform communists required experts, not ideologically dedicated but professionally useless “organic” intellectuals. From the 1960s, those in power became more welcoming toward technocratic intellectuals among their ranks: those who earned a degree not because of their party function but their knowledge. The career of this type of intellectuals was the inverse of that of cadre intellectuals. They first got a degree, and only entered the party later. They were sought to be co-opted into the system.

The strategy of co-opting intellectuals was particularly effective in Kádár’s Hungary. Citing to the narrow room for political maneuver, representatives of the regime tried to convince technocrats to help make the operation of state politics more rational and effective in order to make economic reform without political reform possible. They believed that, by fighting off the counterselection of experts, the state socialist system can be politically operational. Researches of social stratification of the era concluded that representatives of the technocracy had reached the top echelons of social hierarchy, almost the same level as leading politicians.¹⁰⁷ This was the basis for the theory of the rising intellectual class in the 1970s.¹⁰⁸ At this time, it seemed that the alliance of technocracy and bureaucracy will last, technocrats will get into leading position, and therefore the intellectuals will even be able to organize as an independent class of power.

However, the strategy of co-optation was not successful everywhere in Central Europe. In Czechoslovakia after 1968, this development was arrested by “normalization,” that is, returning to the emptying, bureaucratic practice of existing socialism. Dictatorship was built on a very thin social base, and it excluded the intellectuals almost entirely in most of the countries. The leading political formula in Hungary at the turn of 1960s and 1970s was the so-called “new mechanism,” or the reform of decentralization and mod-

¹⁰⁷ Ferge, *Társadalmunk rétegződése*.

¹⁰⁸ Konrád and Szelényi, *Road to Class Power*.

ernization. In Poland, it was the promotion of consumption, which aimed at pacifying society. In Romania, “national communism” gained ground. However, the political elite of Czechoslovakia and the GDR did not deviate in any sense from Brezhnev’s ideology of developed socialism.

Konrád and Szelényi formulated their thesis about the class power of intellectuals in a peculiar historical moment. In a situation when the Stalinist period of state socialist order was replaced by the post-Stalinist period, which meant that the character of dictatorship became more permissive and economically less centralized than the classical totalitarian model. In the Stalinist period, the bureaucracy successfully—and often brutally—defeated the power aspirations of intellectuals. But in the post-Stalinist period, the same bureaucracy lost the revolutionary ideological legitimation it had relied on. To reinforce the bases of its power, the bureaucracy needed the intellectuals who could legitimize the system by their professional knowledge. From the point of view of legitimation, certain post-Stalinist systems grew more similar to the traditional authoritarian regimes, because they preferred to avoid the arguments of ideological legitimation and relied on socially existing mentalities instead of centrally directed ideology.¹⁰⁹ They tried to base their system not only violence but on technocratic rationality provided by the intellectuals. During the Soviet occupation, they could trace the totalitarian features of the system back to the oppressive foreign power and argue that the “Hungarian model” that exists in an historical “lee” can operate at a relatively appropriate level of efficiency compared to other countries of the socialist camp.

In Hungary, as a first sign of moderation of the system, the party bureaucracy sought to let back and even socially integrate the intellectuals who had been convicted after the revolution of 1956.¹¹⁰ Economic reforms presented an opportunity to the intellectuals to get back to the vicinity of decision-making positions on grounds of their professionalism. And as the bureaucracy had not then abandoned the idea of “planned” and top-down governed society—for they wanted to prove the “superiority” of the state socialist system vis-à-vis the “anarchic” market conditions of Western societies—it was not unfounded by Konrád and Szelényi to believe that intellectuals in posi-

¹⁰⁹ Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*.

¹¹⁰ Ständeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*.

tions of “planning” will not be satisfied with their humble contribution to the technocratic legitimization of the system. Accordingly, they assumed that intellectuals would acquire class power by hiding their teleological aspirations behind professional knowledge and combining the two as “rational redistributors,” kind of modern mages who stand behind the control pedestals of society. They started from the presumption that the post-Stalinist strategy of co-optation was just an interim phase in the history of socialist systems. They argued that in the third phase of socialism after the temporary alliance of intellectuals and bureaucracy the intellectual class would defeat the bureaucracy and become the dominant actor in the political sense as well. This was further justified by the works of the period which reported about the subordination and vulnerability of the workers, planting doubt about the official thesis of “the power of the working class.” No wonder such works could be published only in samizdat form back then.¹¹¹

However, social development took another direction and Szelényi¹¹² had to acknowledge that the bureaucracy turned out to be more stubborn in the fight for staying in power than he and Konrád had assumed. First, the party bureaucracy marginalized the philosophers who questioned the ideological legitimacy of the system on the basis of Marx’s original ideas. They were followed by the technocrats of the reform era. This was related to international events: the defeat of the 1968 Prague Spring and the repression that followed¹¹³ indicated that Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership were quite aware of the legitimacy deficit of their system. To maintain their power they changed their policies and, unlike Szelényi and Konrád, they were not “optimistic” toward the humanization of the regime within the limits of existing socialism. As Hirszowicz elaborated systematically, the resistance of bureaucratic order was more enduring than expected.¹¹⁴

Unexpectedly, the cadre bureaucracy did not loosen their grip on the intellectuals but on social groups which seemingly did not aspire for power. Thus, the system encouraged small enterprises and the actors of the “second economy.” Although some people cited Lenin’s claim about small production reproducing capitalism, party bureaucracy did not consider this a dan-

111 Haraszti, *Darabbér*.

112 Szelényi, “East European New Class Project.”

113 Tóké, *Opposition in Eastern Europe*; Eyal, *The Origins of Postcommunist Elites*.

114 Hirszowicz, *Industrial Sociology; Coercion and Control*.

ger. Despite earlier campaigns against the petty bourgeoisie, the pragmatic leadership of Kádár sacrificed the remnants of teleological ideology on the altar of social peace. And, if the party bureaucracy was not Marxist anymore, the reform intellectuals could not be revisionist either. If there is no *telos*, the intellectuals certainly can retreat to the ditches of technocracy, but they cannot be mages of redistribution anymore. An order-like social stratum, the intellectuals could remain near power, which means that backsliding into the previous model or neo-Stalinist restoration did not happen. But the dream of class power, if there was one, ultimately faded.

Intellectuals of the era can be better described by Max Weber's concept of status group rather than the Marxian class concept. It was a stratum that fulfilled traditionally separated functions from other social strata. But even this circle can be divided into the groups of creative-independent, technical-employed, and political-critical intellectuals, although some overlaps are possible. The holders of power could work with the subordinated technical-employed intellectuals more easily than with creative-independent ones, and they had an even more conflictual relationship with the political-critical intellectuals who questioned the legitimacy of the system. The latter meant the biggest threat to the communist leaders because they could not be integrated into the system.

Being independent from and having a critical relationship to the system, politically committed intellectuals gained social influence by disputing and interpreting the values of the system and questioning its legitimacy because they raised normative questions. As the examples of Havel, Solzhenitsyn, or Michnik indicate, this group accumulated considerable moral capital in the oppressive system. They became credible actors whose comments were heard by many. In contrast, the technical-employed intellectuals relied primarily on their knowledge capital and network of contacts, operated within the limits of the system, and tried to expand these limits by the means of reforms.¹¹⁵ Among creative intellectuals, we can find the politically marginalized artists who could not be integrated by the system and therefore tended to support or join the political-critical intellectuals.

The anti-reform wave of the 1970s on the one hand and—internationally—the policy of *détente* and the growing emphasis on human rights gave

115 Kovács, "Reform Economics."

another opportunity to the critical, opposition group of intellectuals to raise their voice. The political ambitions of technocracy had already failed vis-à-vis the resistance of the nomenclature and reforming the system from the inside seemed less feasible.¹¹⁶ The strategy of new evolutionism, elaborated by Michnik¹¹⁷ and rejecting both violent revolution and the internal reform of the system, stemmed from the ideas of the Polish opposition. Their aim was to revive civil society and change the authoritarian system step-by-step.¹¹⁸ The background to this goal was supported in Poland by Solidarity, which organized strikes and formed an alliance between various groups of intellectuals and the workers.¹¹⁹ In Czechoslovakia and Hungary, however, finding an alternative to the system remained the cause of a quite small, although increasingly influential, circle of opposition intellectuals.¹²⁰ While civil society in Poland included the masses of workers as well, the concept in Hungary was mainly the slogan of educated urban groups.

Back in 1968, intellectuals on the two sides of the Iron Curtain cultivated ideas about a society with a human face without the hope of cooperation and sometimes even against each other (for example, leftist intellectuals in the West criticized the consumer society which was a dream to come true). In the 1980s, the situation changed. As the counterpart of loyalist groups, the dissidents emerged, who did not only oppose dictatorship but were outside the “compromise” that was forced upon the society. During the years of the Cold War, dissidents gained certain international political recognition as the voice of political alternative within the communist bloc.

The groups of critical intellectuals had a significant role in the regime changes of Central Europe. They contributed to delegitimizing the communist system, forming political language, creating the various political opportunities of the period of transition, and defining the character of the new democratic system after the Cold War. The ideas and principles the intellectuals of Central Europe based their political thinking on affected not only the mode of transformation but also the development of the new institutional

¹¹⁶ Verdery, “Theorising Socialism.”

¹¹⁷ Michnik, “A New Evolutionism.”

¹¹⁸ Raina, *Political Opposition*; Rupnik, “Dissent in Poland.”

¹¹⁹ Mitrovits, *A remény hónapjai*.

¹²⁰ Bugajski, *Charter 77's Decade of Dissent*; Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*; Skilling, “Independent Currents in Czechoslovakia.”

system. In the 1980s, one of the chief ideas of Central European intellectuals was the creation of a civil society based on human rights¹²¹ but civil society was, paradoxically, both the goal and precondition of liberation. The Polish opposition tried to strengthen civil society through developing alternative institutions and independent social movements.¹²² And although they were much more isolated, the Czech and the Hungarian opposition tried to copy the Polish example. In the 1980s, the strategies of the Western and Central European critical intellectuals began to converge.¹²³ Environmentalist and peace movements in the East and the West followed similar ideals, and they also shared a mistrustful sentiment toward internationally institutionalized political power that sustained the bipolar world order.

The community of critical intellectuals were greatly inspired by the revived ideas of Central European cooperation,¹²⁴ which they hoped to lead to resolving the conflicts stemming from belonging to military blocks and nation-states. In Poland, the experiment of changing the regime did not come from the outside but from the society. However, in Romania and the GDR the internal drivers of change were very weak and therefore the changes in the external political conditions played a vital role. Hungary and Czechoslovakia were between the two extremes: there were dissidents and domestic anti-system forces, but these were weak to make a change happen on their own.

In the phase of transition, opposition intellectuals participated in the deliberation of the directives of liberation, changed public discourse, restructured the topics of public life, organized social movements, wrote programs, and founded parties. They enjoyed widespread popular support in several countries, as it is proven by strikes, petition campaigns, demonstrations, and other acts of symbolic relevance. The peaceful revolutions of 1989 were not the achievements of the intellectuals—they could not have done it on their own—but of those social groups that were independent from the intellectuals or the political elite but formed an alliance with the intellectuals to

121 Rau, *The Reemergence of Civil Society*.

122 Arato, "Civil Society against the State"; "Empire vs Civil Society"; Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland*; Ekiert, *The State against Society*.

123 Arato, *From Neo-Marxism to Democratic Theory*; Goldfarb, *Beyond Glasnost*; Konrád, *Antipolitics*; Havel, "Anti-Political Politics."

124 Judt, "Dilemmas of Dissidence"; Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," Schöpflin and Wood, *In Search of Central Europe*.

put pressure on the system.¹²⁵ This underlines that, without examining the role of intellectuals, we cannot understand the regime change of 1989. The “architecture” of the constitutional framework of the new system was first and foremost an accomplishment of the intellectuals who participated in the Roundtable talks.¹²⁶ Roundtable talks introduced the changes in Poland and Hungary, while in Czechoslovakia and the GDR such talks concluded the process of regime change. The former reformers and dissidents first became “transformers” and later, leaders of parties and public administration. In this special historical moment, some intellectuals could feel the appreciation of the value of their social role, that their deeds carry great moral and political support.

1989 offered numerous opportunities to the politically active intellectuals. Intellectuals were the protagonists of peaceful revolutions as program authors, movement leaders, negotiators, and representatives of new trends who were happy to comment in the finally free press. Later, they became party leaders and political experts and advisors. Many such well-known intellectuals could be named in the Central Europe of 1989 in general and in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary in particular.¹²⁷ Even in countries where negotiations started only after the fall of the old regime, several intellectuals had the opportunity to prepare the democratic transformation and assume a leading role in the process.¹²⁸

It is worth comparing the role of intellectuals before, during, and after the regime change. In 1989, the mostly peaceful processes of revolution changed a regime that had grown out of an intellectual utopia. After the fall of state socialism, politically active intellectuals had no such intense desire to implement their ideas of the system at all costs; to put ideas before people again. These “rectifying” revolutions¹²⁹ did not bring as many novelties as their predecessors, for their aim was the import and local establishment of the tech-

125 Konrád and Szelényi, “Intellectuals and Domination”; Renwick, “Antipolitical or Just Anticommunist?”

126 Bruszt, “Negotiated Revolution in Hungary”; Bozóki, “Hungary’s Road to Systemic Change”; Elster, “Introduction”; Tőkés, *Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution*.

127 They included, among others, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jan Olszewski, Bronisław Geremek, Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń in Poland; Václav Havel, Petr Pithart, Jiří Dienstbier in Czechoslovakia; Doina Corena and Andrei Pleșu in Romania; and János Kis, József Antall, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Sándor Csoóri, Árpád Göncz, Péter Tölgyessy, and László Sólyom in Hungary.

128 Such role was assumed by Zhelyu Zhelev in Bulgaria, Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia, László Tőkés and Doina Cornea in Romania, as well as Jens Reich and Stefan Heym in the GDR.

129 Habermas, “What Does Socialism Mean Today?”

niques of freedom that existed in the West.¹³⁰ After the success of democratic transitions, the majority of intellectuals chose to refrain from politics. The prophet-type role of 19th century intellectuals was replaced in the region by the Western-type role of professional intellectuals. Former opposition intellectuals became party politicians, NGO activists, journalists, or university professors. The intellectuals who wanted to stay in the neighborhood of politics but also to preserve their previous universal standpoint became the critics of new democracies in the name of an ideal concept of democracy or the nation.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Krastev and Holmes, "Imitation and Its Discontents."

¹³¹ The former type of intellectual appeared mainly in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the former GDR, and Romania, while the latter became typical in the former Yugoslavia and its successor states.

CHAPTER II

The Political Context: Censorship and Co-optation

I. CENSORSHIP AND THE PRESS IN THE LATE KÁDÁR ERA

Although in some distant ways the democratic opposition was born out of the revolution of 1956 and the reformist ideas of 1968, it appeared as an independent group only at the end of the 1970s. Earlier, the dissidents directed more sporadic and isolated acts of criticism against the socialist regime. From 1981 onward the dissidents started to define themselves as a tightly knit and increasingly well-organized democratic opposition. Yet before discussing this, I describe the political context: The practices and institutions the communist party leadership used to scrutinize public expression and restrict the freedom of speech.

1.1 *THE PRACTICE OF CONTROLLING THE PRESS*

How did censorship work in Hungary in the 1980s? The answer to such a question and the study of the structure of public expression are inseparable from the country's political system. Hungary had a dictatorial regime from 1948 until 1989, and restricting the freedom of speech, the censorship was a vital part of this system. However, the period cannot be regarded as uniform. The years from 1948 to the early 1960s, except the revolution, displayed the traits of totalitarianism, which ended with the careful opening of the regime's cultural policy.¹ After the early 1960s until the dissolution of the

¹ Standeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*.

system may be regarded as the era of a post-totalitarian system. There were variations though in the practicing of power. Thus, the regime was reform oriented between 1963 and 1971, followed by the dominance of anti-reformist trends between 1971 and 1978. The regime was once again reform oriented in 1979–1984, and the period from 1985 until 1989 may be described as a period of gradually disintegrating dictatorship. The two latter stages saw the appearance of a systemic opposition, a struggle between reformers and hardliners within the regime, a surge ahead of the reformers, the manifestation of inner conflicts, and the ultimate erosion and collapse of the system. The last period was aptly described as “discursive dictatorship.”² The weakness of a system built on coercion manifested in the paradoxical attitude of arguing with its opponents. The regime change was partially preceded and partially accompanied by the victory of the Gouldnerian “culture of critical discourse” over the party state’s jargon.

Getting there was a long road. In the following, I describe the principles behind the regulation of the press and media as reflected by party resolutions, then I will analyze the operation of censorship and the main features of the public expression in the 1980s. There was no Press Act on the statutes until 1986. The 1949 Constitution formally declared the freedom of the press, and, at the same time, announced that the leading force in society was the communist party.³ Naturally, these two constitutional declarations were contradictory, and it was the unlimited political power of the party which held sway. There was no legislation on censorship because the system did not need it; legislation would have meant the blunt acknowledgment of the limited freedom of the press, and it was easier to exercise party control without such legal norms. The politicians operating within the system often stated that there was no censorship in Hungary, and they were somewhat taken aback when, in 1981, the writer István Eörsi demanded the introduction of censorship at the congress of the Hungarian Writers’ Union, arguing that the boundaries would then become obvious, and then writers would know within what limits they could write “freely.”

2 Csizmadia, *Diskurzus és diktatúra*.

3 The Constitution of 1949 contained the following passage: “In accordance with the interests of the workers the Hungarian People’s Republic guarantees freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.” For an analysis, see Monori, “Média és rendszerváltás,” 13.

The expectations of those in power concerning the press came in the form of party resolutions. The basis for the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party's (MSZMP) media policy was laid down by the 1958 resolution. According to this decision, which was never withdrawn by the leadership, the "task" of the media was to follow and popularize the policy of the Central Committee of the MSZMP. Thus, the press a means of propaganda, that presented party policy, and its duty was to influence and educate public opinion along the lines expected by the party. The "critical" activities of the press were only needed to attack the negative features, which hindered the realization of party policy. At the same time, individual publications were stated to be "autonomous," hence party control was essentially exercised through those journalists who were members of the party. It was mandatory for all working journalists, even those who were not party members, to join the Association of Hungarian Journalists (MÚOSZ), which was under party control. Hence a journalist who was not a party member and did not conform to the expectations of the party state, could be called to hold responsible either "professionally" or "ethically" through MÚOSZ. Beside all this, the system of personal dependency was still present. Only party members could become editors-in-chief or leading associates of the more prominent papers. The editors-in-chief were under the control of the party leadership until 1989.

According to the party resolution of 1958, "The press should be partisan, it should base itself without reservations on the dictatorship of the proletariat, and its stand-point should always be a class stand. Party control should be asserted in the entire press, because only in this way can the partisan stand of the press safeguarded properly and the assertion of views alien to Marxism-Leninism avoided."⁴ At the same time, the Central Committee of the Party started a battle against "oppositionism, carping, outsidersness, political non-membership, and against the unsubstantiated charges, which lack corrective judgment, and against the hunting of sensations and curiosities, which are still present at some places."⁵

Gradually, from the mid-1960s, milder wordings were added to the initially tough points, stressing "ideological persuasion" as the main instrument of control.⁶ Kádár's philosophy that "who is not against us those are

4 Jakab, *A tömegkommunikáció*, 15.

5 Lajti, *A sértődékeny állam*.

6 Jakab, *A tömegkommunikáció*, 40.

with us” started to gain ground. The ideology was represented more and more by the leading articles, and the other pieces had to be loosely formed to them. By then the party was making a demand that “the entire quantity of information” be presented to the public, except for facts whose publication would be detrimental to the national interest. This was expressed even more strongly—the duty to give information was not optional—in the 1986 Press Act which was the only legislative act on the press in the Kádár era. But the criteria for national interest were not expressed in practice, each organ of the state had the authority to decide what information it wished to share with the public, and what it would classify. As such the need for comprehensive information and the duty to supply it remained a dead letter.

The Party resolution of 1975 was a good example of the spirit of the anti-reform campaign of the seventies. For the first time, in addition to the need to set positive objectives, it referred to the Party’s adversaries, even if they were not precisely defined: “We will strengthen the ideological struggle against bourgeois and petit bourgeois ideology and against the different unscientific world views and we take a resolute stand against the enemy ideas and the malpractices detrimental to socialist public thinking. For this purpose, the radio, television and the press would also be put to their proper use.”⁷

Though it has never been written down, it was common knowledge among Hungarian journalists that they were not supposed to touch upon certain taboo issues. These were: (1) Criticism on the Soviet Union; (2) Questioning Hungary’s membership of the Soviet military system (the Warsaw Pact), and the stationing of Soviet forces in Hungary; (3) Criticism of the socialist economic and political system, and finally, (4) Any real assessment of the revolution of 1956. The suppression of the last was the genesis of Kádárisms, which officially deemed 1956 a “counter-revolution.”

In addition, some issues were temporarily taboo because of the political needs of the day. These covered a broad range of topics. For example, in the late 1970s when the MSZMP demanded that the euphemism of “a situation of multiple disadvantage” should be used instead of economic poverty of people had to be used, but not out of any desire to be politically correct. Mention of the lack of political representation for Hungarian minorities living abroad was also a taboo, because—according to the official stance—it

7 Jakab, *A tömegkommunikáció*, 85.

would have endangered the good relationships with neighboring countries, which were also members of the same communist system. The political leadership loosened the rein on this question from the mid-1980s when they sensed the people's growing lack of confidence in them. This loosening happened mostly in an *ad hoc*, unpredictable way.

Communist cultural policies were based on selective repression and associated with the name of György Aczél, a leading communist politician, who set up the categories of "Prohibit, Permit, Promote."⁸ Works by writers committed to socialism and by the so-called fellow-traveler authors were supported; ideologically neutral works, or writings not sympathizing with the system but having a marginal influence were tolerated; finally, works classified as "oppositional and hostile" were prohibited.

The dissident writer Miklós Haraszti remembered this period as follows:

By my whole attitude, it was the fight against censorship, and personally self-censorship that brought me into the opposition. The main motive for me was always the freedom of opinion and the free press—later I regarded this as the real stake and thrill of the regime change, and the only possible and genuine change.⁹

It seemed that loosening the limits of writing and the freedom of speech were among those fundamental issues that could bring the ideologically heterogeneous intelligentsia to a common platform.

1.2 MECHANISMS OF INFORMAL CONTROL

In the 1980s, signs of economic liberalization and the political dissolution of the system appeared. The way in which press was controlled increasingly moved from normative regulation toward *ad hoc* interference, which often made conditions for the working press unpredictable. However, unpredictability made journalist more and more resourceful and independent since any adjustment to a "central line" was made impossible. The decision on what could be published and what could not was increasingly dependent on

⁸ Agárdi, *Nemzeti értékviták és kultúrafelfogások*.

⁹ Interview with Miklós Haraszti, 1997.

individuals and less on the centrally accepted principles. Opportunities for tactical journalism were greatly enhanced.

In analyzing these conditions, which had become chaotic by the second half of the decade and were often difficult to comprehend, we may follow István Hegedűs in differentiating between preliminary control and retrospective adjustment.¹⁰ Preliminary control was exercised in four ways: through (1) the screening of news and information; (2) institutionalized internal information; (3) *ad hoc* orders; and (4) individual responsibility of editors-in-chief.

Preliminary control was exercised through the Hungarian News Agency (*Magyar Távirati Iroda*, MTI) screening news and information, which had a monopoly position in this regard. Consequently, the MTI's operation became totally intermingled with those of the political authorities.¹¹ Screening the news was done by the MTI in cooperation with the agitprop department of the Party and under its guidance. The official news agency was particularly keen on only getting news about Warsaw Pact countries only from news agencies in those countries themselves, and not from any Western source. The ironic consequence of this policy was that the public often learned about an event abroad from an announcement published as a disclaimer from a particular news agency. This led to sophisticated, skeptical readers who became able to read between the lines and who received with suspicion, or rejected any kind of, propaganda for success. In many cases the MTI did not even publish a disclaimer, choosing complete silence instead. Incidentally, the fact that the socialist states would only incorporate each other's official news outlets caused serious problems. At the time of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe in April 1986, the information given out by the Soviets was simply not sufficient for the Hungarian public, thus they tried to get the information from other sources. In such cases, the MTI chose to publish false information with the objective of soothing the people's worries, thus discrediting itself even more in the eyes of the public. All during this time, MTI published a weekly compilation translated into Hungarian under the title *Articles from the International Press* which was sent to editors and senior staff as well with the intention of providing them with background information.

¹⁰ Hegedűs, *Sajtó és irányítás*; "Sajtó és irányítás a Kádár-korszak végén."

¹¹ Hegedűs, *Sajtó és irányítás*, 13.

The agitprop department of the Central Committee of the MSZMP and the Information Bureau, a state organ, also institutionalized internal information. At regular meetings high-ranking functionaries provided information on the party and government's current positions. In addition, appeals were made to the press on whether it should or should not deal with certain topics, or if it was a question of more important domestic or foreign events, a press plan was put forward which spelled out precisely in what way certain papers should deal with certain events.¹² Apparently there were no direct, formal prohibitions. These were expressed in practically each case in the form of "requests" or "recommendations," which were nonetheless compulsory. The agitprop department held a meeting for editors at least once a month, and once a week for the editors of the national dailies (who were members of the Party anyhow). This was presided over by the secretary of the Central Committee in charge of the media.

Alongside institutionalized internal information, *ad hoc* orders played a major role. These orders were never committed to writing, just as in the case of the meetings of editors-in-chief. Control was exercised mostly through the telephone or personal contact. Those in power laid great emphasis on leaving no traces behind them in any particular case, beyond an outline of general principles. However, it was the individual responsibility of the editors that proved to be the best means of censorship. The appointment or dismissal of editors was carried out at the highest level (Politburo, Central Committee), thus an editor depended on the elite of the nomenclature for his very living. The editors of the party's national daily (*Népszabadság*) and its theoretical monthly (*Társadalmi Szemle*) were members of the Central Committee. There was a frequent cross-assignment between party headquarters and *Népszabadság*: not infrequently, its editor continued his career in the party headquarters apparatus and his place was taken by someone from another newspaper, but also from the party headquarters. However, in the case of some politically less exposed papers (such as economic weeklies, literary periodicals) the principle of individual responsibility of editors resulted in a slackening of censorship along with more room for journalists to maneuver in. At these papers, the editor was often closer to the journalists than to the bigwigs on party headquarters and thus they performed their

12 Hegedűs, *Sajtó és irányítás*, 13.

function as a censor to a lesser degree. It frequently happened that they were “willing to take the blame” at the party headquarters in the interest of the paper for articles regarded as more sensitive.

Kádár’s cultural policy tolerated these anomalies until they acquired political undercurrents. One of the MSZMP’s main objectives in controlling the press was to hinder politically tendentious publications. For a decade, the efforts of a group of populist writers to launch a journal of their own were frustrated (because they were deemed politically dangerous), yet the editors of practically all the periodicals could be easily included in the camp of populist writers. It was easier for the individual responsibility of editors to control those heterodox politics of their own. Some younger writers’ request for a literary periodical aimed at their own generation was also turned down. Nevertheless, the same circle evolved spontaneously around the literary magazine *Mozgó Világ*, which the authorities attempted to break up by appointing a loyal, outside editor. The editorial staff, however, supported their former editor (who was also a party member), which led to the dismissal of the entire editorial staff, in one of the biggest press scandals of the 1980s.¹³ A similar story happened to the literary monthly *Tiszatáj*, published in Szeged, which had temporarily become the place the populist writers were crystalizing around.

Preliminary control was exerted over books as well. The state publishers had to apply for permission from the publishing directorate of the Ministry of Culture to publish each and every book; ecclesiastic publications were approved by the State Office of the Churches (*Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal*, ÁEH); and private publications had to be presented to the Ministry of Culture in manuscript form.¹⁴ The preliminary censorship of the publishing directorate was abolished only in 1988.¹⁵

Retrospective adjustment was the function of the agitprop department or those supervising the press within the Information Bureau. If some articles that the political leadership regarded as undesirable did slip through the intricate net of preliminary control, those controlling the press availed themselves of the technique of retrospective adjustment. The means employed were the following: (1) Lecturing over the telephone; (2) Demanding a report

13 Németh, *A Mozgó Világ története*.

14 Kőszeg, “A könyvkiadói cenzúra Magyarországon,” 239–48.

15 Murányi, “Nyomdafestéket tűrt csak.”

of justification from the editor-in-chief; (3) “Dressing-down” after summons to appear in person; (4) Pillorizing in front of a professional audience; (5) Refusal to pay bonuses; and ultimately, (6) Dismissal.¹⁶

However, by the late 1980s, both these agencies and the top party leadership were working with less and less coordination; if the censor was a reformer or a conservative, the assessment was different. One politician praised the press, while another criticized it for the very same thing. All this expanded the room for tactical maneuver. The four deputy editors of *Népszabadság* rotated weekly and they undertook responsibility for the contents of the paper: one allowed more, another allowed less. Thus, a journalist with a sensitive article would wait for the week when the politically more tolerant editor was in charge.¹⁷ More critical articles could appear one week and “softer” ones the following week, in one and the same paper. Indeed, the threshold of tolerance often differed within the same issue.

Notwithstanding these tactical tricks, the above-described system of control did enforce self-censorship. No freedom of writing existed in the press until 1988. What developed was a kind of latent pluralism through the readers’ ability to read between the lines. In the 1980s, *Magyar Nemzet* was the favorite newspaper of the intelligentsia who were not members of the communist party. *Magyar Nemzet* usually did not publish straightforward propaganda articles or pieces excessively supporting current party politics; it radiated a hidden, though tangibly solid, civic tone, which was based on the themes, voices, and the views of the intellectuals who contributed to it. After Kádár was removed from power in 1988, it was this paper which published most of the news about the new parties and movements. This was partly due to the fact that the editors of the newspaper enjoyed Imre Pozsgay’s support as chairman of the Patriotic People’s Front (*Hazafias Népfront*, HNF) and later as minister of state. Of the weeklies (aside from the university weeklies which had a limited readership) it was the reformist economic weekly *HVG* which went furthest, still using a refreshingly neutral language of the economic technocracy. Among the monthlies, *Valóság*, a paper on social theory tolerated by the influential culture boss, György Aczél since the 1960s, and still retained its popularity, took the lead. Although *Mozgó Világ*, which

16 Hegedűs, “Sajtó és irányítás a Kádár-korszak végén,” 32.

17 Hegedűs, “Sajtó és irányítás a Kádár-korszak végén,” 35.

managed to slip out of party control (between 1979 and 1983), as well as *Medvetánc* (from 1981) and *Századvég* (from 1986), which were launched as university periodicals, were far more critical and radical.

1.3 THE COLLAPSE OF SELECTIVE REPRESSION

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, a new problem was posed to the controllers by the appearance of an underground opposition press (*samizdat*), which did not seek any license to publish bypassing censorship altogether. In 1979, when István Bibó, the independent political thinker of the greatest influence in the post-1945 decades, died, a group of the opposition published a *samizdat* volume to which several eminent intellectuals contributed. Party headquarters classified these contributors along a scale of political loyalty and opposition; here again the objective was to hinder the development and broadening of an alternative political camp. Consequently, certain contributors to the *Bibó Festschrift* did not suffer reprisal, primarily those whom party headquarters wanted to retain in the first, official public sphere. Others were summoned to party headquarters, where they were subjected to severe “discussions.” A third group was allowed to retain their jobs but not to teach at university. There were some who were removed from their jobs and were unable to find state employment for years. Finally, there was a group who had had no jobs to begin with, and who were subjected to official monitoring. The Party had their phone tapped and other methods of intimidation, such as the withdrawing their passports.¹⁸

The Kádár regime typically applied the tactics of selective repression and social isolation against the opposition. These tactics have been used relatively successfully for some years: those active in Hungarian democratic opposition did not increase in number and they were unable to communicate their message to the rest of society in the way their Polish counterpart had succeeded in doing. Members of the democratic opposition for years felt that they had been living in a hermetically isolated “intellectual ghetto,” and they also voiced their frustrations.¹⁹ Parallel to this however, the circle of those who became producers of oppositional ideas gradually expanded. What typ-

¹⁸ Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*.

¹⁹ Kenedi, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék válsága*.

ified them was irony, escapism, ideological value-neutrality, and/or a radical attitude best described as *épater le bourgeois*.

There was a writer, Péter Esterházy, who incorporated the words “self-censorship” into his text, making it visible and hence ridiculous. When he reached a point in a sentence, which could be regarded as sensitive, he put the word “self-censorship,” and then he continued the sentence. As this was a recurrent motif, reading was like doing a crossword puzzle, which the author deliberately built into his thread and made it a part of the novel.²⁰ All this was already a step forward compared to the parables with overtones favored by writers in the 1970s. Parables in a historic setting were a typical product of the compromise between intellectuals and authorities. Taboo subjects could not be discussed explicitly but it was possible to write veiled criticism, taking one’s examples from the distant past, thus sending messages to one’s contemporaries. Some well-written parables kept the attention of intellectuals on the boil for months, especially when the “message” with overtones left it an open question whether the author is critical or apologetic to the system. No doubt the parable had its own unequalled masters, but the real skills of the authors and the savor of the genre laid in the ability to wink in two directions, inviting the “conspiratorial” agreement of both the authorities and the public. That is why some tart and disrespectful writings that stood apart from the consensus but nevertheless legally published, as well as the jaunty neutrality of the new irony that related to the existing “consensus” in any way (but fundamentally questioned it) came as a breath of fresh air.

Since the dissidents appealed to human rights acknowledged by the Helsinki conference, pursued a strategy of self-limiting radicalism, and later became relatively well known because of Radio Free Europe, it became increasingly difficult for the political leadership to take stern measures against them. The names of the leading opposition figures were well publicized in the West as well, which provided them some protection.

The policy of “Prohibit, Permit, Promote” was not rigid. For “good behavior”—that is, making gestures of loyalty—a writer could move upward in category, and conversely, for “bad behavior” one could move downward. It happened that some, otherwise frequently published, authors were condemned to one year’s silence, others were put on a list of prohibited works for

20 Esterházy, *Kis magyar pornográfia*.

a longer or shorter period of time.²¹ In addition, those in charge of cultural policy made efforts to widen those fault lines (populists vs. urbanists) which had long existed within the Hungarian intelligentsia, with the view of dividing the opposition and semi-opposition groups.

In Hungary in the 1980s, there was no formal censorship office working under a uniform pattern. The censorship was exercised through different, preliminary and subsequent screening systems. Editors-in-chief, and the party apparatchiks monitoring them, were the censors at printed papers, while the publishing directorate censored book publishing. This office stopped certain books from being published for years, but it could permit some of them as “closed publications” with restricted circulation.²² There was always a chance of a politically delicate product to get through, but this could not be counted on in advance. The soft dictatorship of the late Kádár era had an indirect censorship, which was “velvet” in its operation.²³

The changes of the structure of the public sphere have been analyzed by several scholars from a theoretical perspective. We can differentiate between the periods and structures of “tolerant repression” and a “double public sphere” by the dimensions of legal-illegal and political-nonpolitical.²⁴ The concept of a double public sphere was introduced by the sociologist Elemér Hankiss, who argued that it was a manifestation of a typical feature of the system, the detachment of formal and informal structures.²⁵ The concept of tolerant repression regarded as valid until the mid-1970s, while the double public sphere characterized the subsequent period until 1988. This differentiation carries important heuristic value, but selective repression seems to be a more accurate concept than tolerant repression. For certain topics (such as the interpretation of 1956) and certain media outlets regarded as particularly important by the party leadership, repression remained intolerant up to the end of the 1980s; in spheres regarded as marginal, creative authors enjoyed greater room for maneuver.²⁶ Control of the press in comparison with the totalitarian period can be described as “tolerant repression”; however, this did not hold true equally for every paper. It was more tolerant inso-

21 Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*.

22 Murányi, “Nyomdafestéket tűrt csak.”

23 Haraszti, “Emlék és panasz 1956-ból.”

24 Sükösd, “From Propaganda to Öffentlichkeit in Eastern Europe.”

25 Hankiss, *East European Alternatives*.

26 Bozóki, “Censorship and the Structure of Public Sphere.”

far as it was selective. For instance, policymakers consciously permitted certain periodicals to perform a safety-value function for the intelligentsia, and in this manner a regulated flow of criticism could be maintained. Thus, criticism in the official press was almost automatically treated as “constructive criticism,” and what was not included in it was necessarily called “destructive.” Censorship held often the means and place of publishing more important than the content.

The system of selective repression can be best described as one of concentric circles, where political control was the strictest in the circle closest to the center (that is the party headquarters), and control gradually weakened moving outward. Specialist periodicals without political features, published at less frequent intervals and small in readership were in the outer circle. These journals played an important role in the dilution of the dominant narrative by offering samizdat authors a chance to enter the first, official public sphere. Literary periodicals enjoyed as much attention as the social science periodicals; control of periodicals of small circulation devoted to music, fine arts, natural sciences, and hobbies was quite slack.

Indeed, the periods of selective repression and double public sphere cannot be separated from each other distinctly. Although the spread of samizdat meant the emergence of a double public sphere from the 1980s onward, selective repression survived within the official sphere. It was the objective of orthodox forces inside the party to make the availability and resonance of samizdat literature insignificant, and when this failed, the practice of “double publishing” (i.e., in both spheres) was prohibited. Yet, in the attempt to prohibit any crossover between the two spheres, the very existence of the other sphere was implicitly acknowledged. The dualism of the legal (first) and the illegal (second) public sphere mainly characterized the period between 1981 and 1986. The Press Act of 1986 still meant no guarantee of freedom of the press, but it was more liberal in certain respects like allowing associations to found new outlets. Nevertheless, the license had to be approved by the Information Bureau. A positive feature was that legal remedy could be sought at the courts in cases of dismissal, and the Act imposed an information obligation on the state bodies.²⁷

27 Halmi, “Kell-e nekünk sajtótörvény?”; Monori, “Média és rendszerváltás.”

In the 1980s, a dual objective was discernible in the party control over the press, and this reflected the struggle between hardliners and reformers within the party. Living standards were declining and the Party responded primarily by economic liberalization. However, this liberalization simply made the regime's lack of legitimacy even more transparent. State socialism, it turned out, was only acceptable by the society as long as it brought improvement in living conditions. It was at this time that there was a backlash of the long successful Kádár's strategy, which—lacking political legitimacy—tried to maintain social peace through political neutralization and material compensation.²⁸ As the performance of the regime fell off, people automatically turned away from it. Parallel to this, regular samizdat publications began to appear in Hungary from 1981. These underground periodicals had a very limited circulation, but since they were featured on Radio Free Europe, their uncensored articles reached broader and broader groups in the country. The political leadership could not afford to have brutal showdown with the emergent opposition groups among the intelligentsia. On the one hand, this would have put into danger the possibility of drawing on foreign credit needed to keep up the level of consumer consumption and social tranquility. On the other hand it would have destroyed the positive international image the reformist outlook of the Kádarian MSZMP which grew out of the practice of liberalizing the dictatorship. Hence, the objective of the communist leadership was to divide the emergent opposition groups and to isolate them within society.

The readership of the samizdat periodicals grew in number, and the proportion of authors publishing in these papers under their real name and not a *nom de plume* also grew. The topics and the critical tone gradually influenced the press after 1986, which accordingly became increasingly critical. More attempted to violate the ban on "double publishing," writing to both the first and the second public sphere. The gray zone, with its mediating role, which developed around 1986, had an important role in this, as the ideas expressed in the underground were brought to a broader public. Members of the opposition received invitations to address different university clubs and meetings that were organized by individuals acting without official sanction. The most memorable case was a public debate in the autumn of 1983, organized upon

²⁸ Szabó, *Politikai kultúra Magyarországon*.

the dismissal of the editors of *Mozgó Világ* and attended by approximately 300 university students at the Faculty of Law of Eötvös University. The event turned into a political face-off between the deputy minister of culture and the present members of the dissidents and university students, and it ended with a loud opposition victory.²⁹ At the same time, the economist reformers who mainly had contact with state officials also radicalized.

The reformers thought that the one-sided, propaganda role of the press, oriented from the top, should be changed and its mediating function should be allowed to work in both directions. It was the hardliners who held that precisely because conditions becoming more difficult and people becoming more uncertain direct control of the press needed to be maintained, as an important task of the press was to strengthen “confidence in socialism.” At that time there was an open dispute going on in the party about how the press could meet contradictory requirements: the objectives of the political leadership and the demands of the public opinion. These reformers and the hardliners reacted differently to *glasnost* initiated by Gorbachev in the Soviet Union: reformers demanded further liberalization and even democratization, while hardliners wanted to limit the effect of Gorbachev’s position to the process of Soviet internal policy only, saying that *glasnost* was simply a delayed version of what had already been accomplished in Hungary in the 1960s.

As a result of these struggles within the MSZMP, control of press lost its “principled” nature, and more and more unpredictable “manual control” became typical of the 1980s. From that time, even the party resolutions lost their practical relevance; as a symptom of the disintegration of the system, control of the media was characterized by rapidly changing and often contradictory orders. All this broadened the room for maneuver of those working in the official press, and thus the accelerating process pluralizing the press was able to get under way. Through the rapid growth in the number of those demanding political change and through the increasing strength of the mediating sphere that gradually filled the “gap” between the two spheres, the earlier model of a “double public sphere” became obsolete by 1987. The transformation of this structure of public sphere took place similarly, but

29 Németh, *A Mozgó Világ története*.

incomparably faster than, the 18th-century evolution of political publicity as described by Habermas.³⁰

From 1988 onward, political taboos were challenged one after another. At first the need for Hungarian membership in the Soviet-led Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) was questioned, then the need for reform was increasingly changed to a demand for a change of the regime. In October 1988, the Publicity Club (*Nyilvánosság Klub*) was founded, which primarily brought together journalists working in the official press but critical of the system. The reformers inside the party were speaking of the need for consensus; this demand took on a critical edge in the party internal struggles. However, by that time it was evident to the journalists who founded the Publicity Club that no consent could be imagined under the given circumstances and consensus with the orthodox wing of the party was simply not possible.³¹

By the end of the 1980s, the dual public sphere with its latent pluralism was replaced by a public sphere openly plural in its structure. In 1989, a multitude of new outlets was formed as the earlier licensing obligation had been replaced by a notification obligation.³² The latent pluralism of intraparty lobbies, interest groups, and intellectual camps were replaced by articulation of politics through the multiparty system.

2. STRATEGIES OF CO-OPTATION: "INTELLIGENTSIA-POLICY" IN THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

The rise and the fall of cultural politics of Kádár's Hungary is hallmarked by two communist politicians, György Aczél and Imre Pozsgay. They held different views on the cultural and political public sphere of the Kádár-system. Aczél tried to integrate the high-standard but not "hardline" tendencies into the system, while Pozsgay was more apt to let the different intellectual tendencies be articulated independently. In the decades following the amnesty of 1963, a sort of consolidated communism appeared in which it was mostly Aczél who actualized the "intelligentsia policy" of the Kádár regime.³³

³⁰ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*.

³¹ Gálík et al., "Javaslat a nyilvánosság reformjára."

³² Judit Bayer, "Sajtó- és médiajog," 168.

³³ Révész, *Aczél és korunk*.

Pozsgay, on the other hand, started to question and break down this consolidated compromise in a time when the one-party system was declining. In the following, my observations about the policy of György Aczél are presented in contrast to the policy of Imre Pozsgay.

In the time of the Kádárist interest-seeking and symbolical politics built on half-said, half-hidden ideas, the figures of Aczél or Pozsgay had become almost mythical in the eyes of the older generation. But these ties did not bind the new generation. The revolutionary process in Poland that was stopped by the introduction of the state of war had a great effect on the majority of the generation that was already becoming politically conscious. The Kádárist anti-Polish propaganda campaign, which was to emphasize the advantages of the Hungarian “reconciliation” model, seemed to be unsuccessful among younger people. In these matters neither Aczél, nor Pozsgay dared to risk even speaking in any other tone than the official. Because of that, many young people believed that there were reformers among the more influential members of MSZMP, but nobody could count on them in more serious matters.

The Kádár regime was a dictatorship even when it was declining. Obviously, it was not the “dictatorship of the proletariat” but of the one and only Party over the society. It was not accidental that later the first and most important demand of each Eastern European anti-regime movement was that the sentence declaring that the Party was above all laws should be erased from the constitution. Hungarian communist leaders, including Aczél, considered the Soviet Union their “brother” in their speeches. Compared to this, it was secondary that Aczél was not liked in Moscow, and Kádár was suggested to dismiss him. Kádár was aware though that if he had dismissed Aczél, the next one to go would have been himself.

Kádár was raised by stepparents and Aczél in an orphanage, so their childhood had many things in common; they were both outcasts.³⁴ Neither of them was a Muscovite within the communist movement. Both of them were imprisoned in the Rákosi-era of the 1950s, they were even in the same prison for a short while. They could trust each other, since they got disillusioned from Stalinism at the same time and in similar circumstances, and they were both suspicious of the reform-communists of 1954–1956. As the

34 Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza*.

party leader after 1956, Kádár knew that Aczél was devoted to the communication with the intelligentsia. He also knew that his system would be bearable until he can favor some social groups, and until he can maintain the pretense of communicating with them. Kádár knew that he would need Aczél because Aczél was able to speak the language of the intelligentsia. The career of Aczél started to boost when the restoration of the communist regime was finished, that is, in the beginning of the 1960s.

Aczél was able to talk to those members of the intelligentsia who, after years of defeat and humiliation, accepted the consolidation of the 1960s. They were the basis of his policy in the next two decades. On the other hand, he had problems with others. For example, the attendees of the 1981 student conference in Budapest, influenced by the revolutionary events in Poland, had almost gotten to the point of establishing a new youth organization, independent of the Communist Youth League (*Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség*, KISZ). Aczél believed neither changing KISZ, nor establishing a new organization was a real option. In the beginning of the 1980s, Aczél represented outrun compromises against those who were seeking a new, democratic beginning.

Many people gained hope from what Pozsgay did in the 1980s. His independent views and sometimes brave rhetoric suggested a careful but determined politician. The populist and reformist communist Pozsgay managed to build bridges toward the groups of the populist intelligentsia. In 1985, the Hungarian electoral law was changed so that multiple nomination was made possible, and the law required nomination committees to accept two candidates. Some members of the opposition took advantage of this case and they ran for candidacy at the parliamentary elections. At several caucuses, only striking fraud could prevent the candidacy of some dissidents.³⁵ In the room, the dozens of students who supported the opposition candidate sat down next to faithful party members who were sent there by the officials. When it came to the open vote, the official candidate won, although it was evident that most votes went to the other candidate. The local electoral committee, working under the aegis of the Patriotic People's Front (HNF) and obviously following party orders, "forgot" to count a few dozens of votes. The fraud itself was not so unusual; that it was so arrogantly obvious was. Many

35 Namely László Rajk, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, János Tóth, and others.

could not come over the feeling that, as the leader of the HNF, Pozsgay was responsible for the events. This was when it became obvious that his policy was defined by a “reformers okay, opposition not okay” principle.

2.1 CELEBRITIES, SEIGNEURS, CONFIDENTS, AND HIS “COURT”

The period of the significant political influence of Aczél was between the middle of the 1960s to the middle of the 1980s, which coincided with the successful years of the Kádár regime. In contrast, the age of Pozsgay was the 1980s that saw the decline of the system. The cultural policy of the restoration after 1956 was hallmarked by the name of István Szirmai,³⁶ while Aczél’s name meant consolidation, Kádárist compromises, the world and political culture of obligations and interest seeking. Aczél tried to achieve in intelligentsia policy what Kádár achieved in social policy. Thus, Aczél did not have an independent policy, and his name became inseparable from that of Kádár. He was a “reformer” in the same way, if we can use the word reformer at all in connection with him, as Kádár: he was interested in making the dictatorship more bearable. He did not wish institutional changes but that the system would go swimmingly. He did not consider the democratic deficit as systemic problem but the consequence of smaller mistakes that needed to be corrected. He never looked for solutions in institutional reforms but in the informal deepening of the Kádarian political culture. He softened the dictatorship by the Byzantine type of policy based on personal relationships, individual rewards, and punishment.

Aczél wanted to convince the prominent artists of the age to serve the system or, if they did not want to, at least get them to live peacefully in the regime. Aczél did not want to organize a team for himself but a “royal household,” and he even wanted to keep the symbolically most important people near “the court.” He made every effort to make it impossible to go round him if one wanted to apply for favors or benefits. That is why his political style can be called Byzantine, as it was based on “favor-management.”³⁷ He set out from the idea that if he pacified the most excellent, the most influential, and those intellectuals with the most cultural and social capital, the rest

³⁶ Ständeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*.

³⁷ Révész, *Aczél és korunk*.

of the intelligentsia would follow them and would accept the situation. He called this model creation and imitation “consensus.” To achieve this, it was vital for Aczél to be on communicative terms with the most important and excellent, appearing as their patron.³⁸ Maybe he thought: if the “court” had not taken censorship so seriously, while quality culture is patronized (within certain limits), the intelligentsia would not miss democracy. Aczél knew the nature of human vanity perfectly well and thus he influenced the greatest through their vainness. He attempted to espouse prodigious talents as soon as possible.³⁹

The intellectuals around Aczél can be classified into different groups. The above-mentioned excellencies, from Kodály through Lukács to Illyés, can be called the *celebrities*, by which I mean people who became nationally and internationally famous and highly esteemed, irrespectively of political systems. In his dealings with them, Aczél chose to ask, flatter, carefully threaten them but he could not direct them. For example, the philosopher György Lukács openly told him that if he had not been allowed to publish his books in Hungary, he would go on smuggling them abroad. Irrespectively of these incidents, the communication between Aczél and the celebrities was cordial. He endeavored to achieve the state of “mutual appreciation” for himself—and the system represented by him.

The second group contained the *seigneurs*, meaning those intellectuals who got into key positions with the help of Aczél, and thus from an institutional point of view they depended on him. Through them, Aczél was able to control the intellectuals working in the cultural and higher educational institutions (universities, institutes, theaters, editorial offices) in an effective way. Since the policy of Aczél was based on them, I will return to this group analyzing it in more detail.

The third, much narrower, group was that of the *confidants*, with whom Aczél played cards and talked about his political intentions freely. But the members of this group never rose to the level of the celebrities, nor did they

38 Like the composer Zoltán Kodály, novelists like Tibor Déry, László Németh, and István Örkény, the philosopher György Lukács, the pianist Annie Fischer, the poet Gyula Illyés, the film director Miklós Jancsó, and others.

39 Pianists Zoltán Kocsis and Dezső Ránki got the prestigious Kossuth Prize in their twenties. But there were others, like novelists Péter Nádas, Péter Esterházy, István Eörsi, the poet György Petri, or the leading figures of avant-garde culture, with whom he could not do anything with.

control the institutional system directly.⁴⁰ They were personally important for Aczél.

Finally, the fourth group—which used to be more heterogeneous and loosely organized—can be called the *halo*. First, this included all those who did all they could to be near Aczél, while he did not find them worthy of including in the first three groups. Second, those can be counted in this group who came into temporary contact with Aczél. These people did not serve his cultural policy regularly but could be used by him at any time in any case.⁴¹ The members of the halo could count on Aczél's help—in return of their occasional services—in their minor problems.⁴²

For circles of the social scientist intellectuals, Aczél's greatest success in cultural policy was the maintaining, toleration, and the protection of the periodical *Valóság*. From the middle of the 1960s to the end of the 1980s, *Valóság* was the representative social science journal of the regime. Beside this, the book series Library of Social Science is worth mentioning, for this series gave an insight to Western scholarship.⁴³ Taking into account that Aczél had no insight on the Hungarian social science as a whole, he attempted to develop a “seigniorial system” and wanted to keep the control over cultural policy through them. If one reads the members of the editorial committee of the periodical and the book series, and one lists the theater-managers of the age, editors of literary periodicals, leading university professors, publishing managers, then one gets the influential network on which György Aczél could depend in controlling cultural life. This of course does not mean that all those members of the cultural elite, who were in institutional top positions at that time, were necessarily the followers of Aczél. There were some who were loyal to him in all aspects, but there were also skeptics, careful critics, or “autonomous” people who “had several irons in the fire” and who looked into many political directions.

40 Among them were the influential communist actor and theater director of the age, Tamás Major, and the scientist, János Szentágothai.

41 Among them was the servile journalist János Hajdú, whose article attacked some dissidents (Sándor Csoóri Miklós Duray) and was perfectly in line with Aczél's intentions.

42 Like change of flats, car allocation, passport, commission, and so on.

43 The series involved the Hungarian translation publication of the works by Max Weber, Robert Merton, Norbert Elias, Erving Goffman, Perry Anderson, Alexander Gerschenkron, George Herbert Mead, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Bourdieu, and others.

Aczél did not mean to organize a team around himself, but he wanted to win the symbolically most important intellectual celebrities and attempted to control the institutional system of cultural policy through his seigniorial net. The forming of factions, a pejorative term in the Bolshevik terminology, was far from him.

2.2 REFORMERS, CIVILIAN GROUPS, AND SYMPATHIZERS

Imre Pozsgay seemed to be a team organizer, as opposed to Aczél at least. His main objective was not the stabilization but, first moderately then more and more radically, the reform-like transformation of the *status quo*. He had tried to draw to himself those who were unsatisfied with the extant situation and wanted to change it one way or another. He wanted such critical intellectuals around him who were not in top positions themselves but had more and more influence on those intellectuals who were indeed in position and yet separated themselves from political opposition and were less and less loyal to the leaders of the system. To surround himself with such people was for Pozsgay hard in the beginning, as minister of education and culture, but as the leader of the HNF it became easier.

Pozsgay later recalled:

I saw this first when I was a minister [. . .] I, too, had to deal with the signature movement of Charta '77: this was the first time when I had to officially connect to an openly opposition initiative. [. . .] I had private conversations with Sándor Csoóri, then came a small group of mainly movie directors, Károly Makk and others were at my office. Indeed, this was the moment I realized that the opposition and opposition thought live among us, and I would no longer be able to avoid this problem.⁴⁴

After Pozsgay was removed from the government in 1982, he spent a whole month in the United States as a guest of the US government. He met the Hungarians living there, including the politician and Congressman Tom Lantos, the historian Béla Király, and those Hungarian emigrants who were professors at Harvard, Columbia, and the Rutgers University. He later said

44 Interview with Imre Pozsgay, 1997.

“it was a strange experience to meet all those fifty-sixers in New Jersey, as a guest of the Hungarian Communion of Friends. Well, this was a turning point in my life, no question.”⁴⁵ This visit reinforced his openness to meet semi-opposition groups on a regular basis. In the Patriotic People’s Front, he continually expanded his network of contacts to the representatives of various social organizations. He was a regular of the saloon of intellectuals, organized at a private apartment, and he gained considerable attention when in 1985 he accepted the invitation of the independent *Rakpart Klub*,⁴⁶ where he agreed to debate with hundreds of opposition-leaning students.

One of Pozsgay’s most important political appearances took place at the Lakitelek meeting in September 1987,⁴⁷ where he provided great help to the Hungarian Democratic Forum in its starting and appearance as an independent political movement. In his own words:

I never made a secret from that, because of my career, pedigree, intellectual qualifications, origins or limits I sympathized mainly with the populist-national intelligentsia. Aczél and I often debated why he did not give more equitable, greater space to their operation. But up until 1987, I believed that this opposition movement, starting from two directions but going toward the same one, could eventually meet.⁴⁸

It is worth noting that the fall of Kádár meant the fall of Aczél and the rise of Pozsgay. At the 1988 Communist party conference, Aczél anticipated charges by a self-critical speech, and thus he temporarily kept his position in the Central Committee, but it proved to be only his swan song. The great political period of Pozsgay lasted from the Lakitelek meeting in September 1987 to February 1989. After he declared that Revolution of 1956 was a popular insurrection, and not a counter-revolution as the official narrative held, the Central Committee of MSZMP accepted, after long debates, the multi-party system. This was also a personal victory for Pozsgay who risked being expelled from all party functions. As the minister of state of the Grósz gov-

45 Interview with Imre Pozsgay, 1997.

46 Rakpart Klub was a popular music and discussion club attended by students and opposition-minded people.

47 Agócs and Medvigy, *Lakitelek 1987*.

48 Interview with Imre Pozsgay, 1997.

ernment, Pozsgay played a great part in the liberation of the press. He also supported the acknowledgment of the rights of free association, which made the founding of political parties possible.

It is true though that Pozsgay's becoming a democrat was not a period free of contradictions. He did not speak out in June 1988 when police dispersed public demonstration of the democratic opposition by force.⁴⁹ He also turned against the nascent Danube-movements—which set off the regime change—when he voted for the building of the Nagymaros Dam. The relationship between Pozsgay and the radical opposition was thus spoiled, because the Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége*, SZDSZ) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, Fidesz) then discerned that Pozsgay wanted to provide privileges to the organizations of the populist opposition. However, this also indicated that Aczél was by then not in the picture; Pozsgay on the other hand was a major character in politics. By 1989, when the time of the Roundtable talks came, there were hardly any major political-social organization which was not in some way connected to Pozsgay through their leaders, who were personal acquaintances or, in some cases, even protégés of Pozsgay.⁵⁰

Pozsgay was a relentless team organizer, but he did not prove to be very effective. He started MDF off in Lakitelek, which “dropped” him as early as the fall of 1989, when a candidate was appointed against him at the elections of the president of the republic, just like at the elections in the Sopron constituency in the spring of 1990. It was in vain for Pozsgay to parley with József Antall and Zoltán Bíró, leaders of MDF, in the summer of 1989, since MDF—run by Antall—by November 1989 did not see the future president of the democratic republic in him anymore. The reformist circles within the MSZMP were only waiting for Pozsgay's sign to split the party into two.⁵¹ But Pozsgay warned them to be more cautious and thus he became isolated from his followers within the party, missing the historical moment. He played a decisive role in the Roundtable talks in the summer of 1989, in

49 It was a commemoration to the execution of Imre Nagy, prime minister during the 1956 revolution.

50 This circle included József Antall, Sándor Csoóri (MDF), Sándor Keresztes (Márton Áron Association, then the KDNP), István Kukorelli (HNF), Károly Vigh (BZSBT), Mrs. Judith Thorma Asbóth (MNOT), István Stumpf (MISZOT), National Council of Hungarian Youth Associations), János Márton, Gyula Fekete, Csaba Varga (Veres Péter Veres Association, then MNP), Tivadar Pártay and Vince Vörös (FKGP), Mihály Bihari, László Lengyel (MSZMP), Zoltán Bíró (MSZMP and MDF).

51 Ágh, Géczi, and Sipos, *Rendszerváltók a baloldalon*.

the MSZMP transformational congress in October 1989, but after the referendum in November 1989 he was defeated even in his own district, and received a place in the new, freely elected Parliament only from the party list as a weightless politician. After the elections, he became isolated in the MSZP, and he finally left the party in December 1990. His new party, the National Democratic Alliance (*Nemzeti Demokrata Szövetség*, NDSZ) remained unimportant. After four years of passive work as a representative, he got out of the Parliament as well.

Pozsgay's and Aczél's different strategies of political relationships and network building draw an outline of the age—and also their positions—they worked in. In the time of Aczél, the political system was more static and stable. He had more time to confirm his influence and to build a relatively hierarchic network of relationships. The intellectual-political world that surrounded Aczél changed only slowly: in his closest circle, we can find the chosen confidants, then came—with equal importance but different roles—the celebrities and the seigneurs. While the celebrities were important for Aczél because of the symbolic legitimating of the system, the seigneurs were significant in the upper control of cultural policy. Outside of these was the halo, some members of which wanted to use their relationships pragmatically (i.e., for their own interests) and they wished for nothing more, while some others were eager to get closer to the inner circles and thus to power.

The environment of Pozsgay however, mostly because of the speeding political changes, was not so structured. The fluctuation between the political-intellectual circles was much bigger and the circle itself was much more flexible. While Aczél was able to give out positions, Pozsgay could only provide the hope of a position. While it was Aczél himself who stood in the middle of the halo's concentric circles, the relationships of Pozsgay had no signs of people nucleating around him. Coming out of the state party's protective shell, he had to fit in to a decentralized, flexible, coreless network. He had to work in such a political-interrelational structure, which he could not only shape but had to adapt to it. Instead of celebrities and seigneurs, Pozsgay had occasional allies and devotees, but in the currents of political confrontations following the regime change all these supporters of his fell away. Those who followed him in 1988 were not necessarily with him in 1989. Those who were his allies in 1989 did not follow him in 1990. Being a reformer in a moment

of a change of regime meant momentary popularity and then rapid unpopularity. The circle of temporary allies could not consolidate into a halo.

György Aczél was a man who wanted to keep the Kádárist compromise, even in the period of economic decline; Imre Pozsgay, on the other hand, was openly declaring a need for a new consensus. Aczél was talking about “socialist democracy,” while Pozsgay spoke about democratic socialism. While Aczél spoke of “socialist patriotism,” Pozsgay talked about a “rising nation.” Aczél attempted to canonize poets such as Endre Ady and Attila József within the framework of the system, by using the expression “revolutionarism of everyday life,” while Pozsgay tried to recall the words of populist writers from 1956 with growing emphasis.⁵²

It would be an over-simplification if one wanted to describe Aczél as an urbanist and Pozsgay as a “*népi*” (populist) and distinguished between them only along these lines. Both of them belonged to the nomenclature, to the leading politicians of the dictatorship. But while Aczél wanted to transform it into a dictatorship “with a human face,” Pozsgay wanted to reform and then surpass it. While Aczél could not and would not communicate with the groups standing more or less outside of the system, Pozsgay endeavored to gradually widen communication with the different “half-legal,” semi-oppositional social groups and organizations. Through supporting high culture and dividing the already (historically) divided groups of the intelligentsia, Aczél served the stability of the Kádár system in the 1970s. Pozsgay, however, emerged to a leading position in cultural policy only later, when political stability slipped and the status of the regime became uncertain. He realized that his own political career rests upon his ability to step out of the circles of elite culture, and to expand his circle of supporters among the marginalized groups of the intelligentsia. The name of Aczél will be remembered alongside the party, government, and political system of János Kádár. Pozsgay’s name, even though he fulfilled leading positions in the Kádár regime, will be remembered alongside 1989, the Roundtable talks, and the dissolution of the state party. That is the real difference between them.

The two strategies of co-optation were formed by the different presumptions. Aczél was the cultural politician *par excellence* of the Kádár regime, and every step of his policy served the Kádarian *status quo*. His starting point

52. Pozsgay often referred to writer László Németh and poet Gyula Illyés.

was that only worse could follow Kádár, and he built his political hinterland on those with institutional background accordingly. He also devoted special attention to be in contact with the best writers and artists, whom he tried to co-opt through discretionary help, rewards, change of flats, and travel opportunities. Aczél traded with the favors the power could grant to the seigneurs, and this was a successful strategy until the system was stable, there was seemingly no political alternative, and there were no factions in the unity of the central control of the party.

When Pozsgay tried to connect to the populist intelligentsia he was led by various ideas. On the one hand, he wanted to loosen the Aczélian structure of cultural politics, and on the other hand, he wanted to rely on a group he could more easily communicate with, and which was not a beneficiary of Aczél's cultural policy. These were the people he could trust without a doubt in his fight for a new hegemony, as well as the expansion of his influence. Until the death of Brezhnev in 1982, the Kádarian cultural policy of Aczél was unquestionable. But this hegemony later slipped and was indeed questioned more and more by the emerging opposition pressures. From Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985, Pozsgay's policy that focused on building alliances and favoring the coalition of populist "reform" groups gathered steam. As we will see, this policy had its golden age during the erosion of the system but it failed as when the multiparty system emerged.

CHAPTER III

Dissident Intellectuals: The Culture of Critical Discourse

This chapter examines the self-reflection, identity, and strategic concepts as those developed in the public discourse of the democratic opposition in Hungary. By public discourse I mean “the forms of expression typical to an era or the collection of rules related to the usage of these forms, generated and maintained by a smaller circle of intellectuals, the elite of humanities.”¹ Since the state socialist regime was constructed on an all-encompassing, salvationist ideology, culture was always an important terrain of control for communist leaders.²

As state socialism was originally based on ideology, the first ones to criticize it were revisionist philosophers who wished to correct the mistakes of the theory. This formed the core of the dissidents, the philosophers inspired by György Lukács.³ Later the group of critics expanded with those sociologists who, analyzing reality, were not interested in the problems related to the coherence and false presumptions of the theory but rather stressed the contradiction between theory and practice. This had a crucial effect on the groups outside the dissidents, including literature, drama, and film as well. This effect also became mutual, which further reinforced the critical culture of the decade. In the end, the similar ideas of various interacting groups led to a new philosophical base, the doctrine of human rights. This was no longer a correction to the earlier paradigm but rejected it altogether. The stance

¹ Kuczi and Becskeházi, *Valóság* 70, 68.

² Cf. Tismaneanu and Luber, *One-Hundred Years of Communist Experiment*.

³ György Lukács was a leading Marxist philosopher of the 20th century. On his impact on the dissidents, cf. Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*.

of “provocative exercise of our human rights”⁴ was philosophical, moral, and political at the same time. This helped the democratic opposition represent the culture of criticism on the level of politics as well.

For large segments of the Hungarian society, the 1970s meant a decade of “welfare socialism,” and the rise of petty bourgeoisie. However, the end of the decade saw a series of events that often shocked the public. Among these were the first significant increase in prices of the Kádár era, the growing burden of debt, and the beginning of the Hungarian credit crisis. Internationally, the Soviet intervention to Afghanistan, the NATO double-track decision about missile deployment, and the consequent series of peace demonstrations in Western Europe are worth mentioning, as well as the Western boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, and, most importantly, Poland’s self-limiting revolution.⁵ All of these changes had an impact on the rise of democratic opposition.

The changing situation narrowed the room for communist politicians to justify the “legitimacy” of their power. They could no longer claim that state socialism would create greater freedom and equality than the capitalist democracies of the West. They no longer referred to the “justness” or “better future” of the system. The superiority of the communist ideology was no longer mentioned. The picture of straight line of development that had been prevalent was now refuted. A growing number of people only wanted to maintain their existence, to survive. Increasing prices and low wages also prevented the leaders of the regime from referring to the inexpensive products. What had indeed seemed cheap was suddenly, in a societal sense, rather expensive. For the 1980s when the communist leadership was becoming more open toward discussion, it was lacking the arguments it could lay out.

1. OPPOSITION GROUPS

Dissidents and critical intellectuals turned public discourse to a critical direction, therefore creating the kind of speech community that Gouldner described as the “culture of critical discourse.”⁶ This speech community, that gained strength in the 1980s, was not only the community of the dissi-

4 Kis, *Mi a liberalizmus?*

5 Ascherson, *The Polish August*; Staniszkis, *Poland’s Self-Limiting Revolution*.

6 Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*.

dents; young people with degrees in humanities and social sciences, reform economists, and some members of the *népi* (populist) writers were involved. The culture of critical discourse was characterized not by respect for authority but the room for rational debates, in which presuppositions had to be justified. This presumed the presence of a relatively free and independent subculture, where the people engaging in discourse could argue with general approaches, independent of the given context.

To maintain the “legitimacy” of the system, János Kádár and his followers often used historical arguments, presenting an undifferentiated picture of the past, particularly the period of the interwar Horthy regime.⁷ Beyond history, they also often used comparisons to neighboring countries, which always put Hungary on the positive side. They tried to stress that Hungary retained solvency, the supply of goods was ensured, and the Kádár regime was still more flexible and livable than other regimes in the Soviet bloc. They underlined that the intelligentsia was less exposed to censorship, and experts were let in the circle of leaders as well. They desperately tried to prove that the leadership was in good hands, and they were able to manage the deepening crisis in a pragmatic way, and to increase the country’s “competitiveness.” They believed that they—unlike other Soviet bloc leaders—had accumulated enough trust of the society to speak to them “honestly.” Indeed, they found fewer principles of legitimation when it came to discussion with the public.

1.1 THE FLOWERS OF DECAY

The transformation of social conditions quickly gave rise to various types of critical behavior. This was not pluralism yet, rather an embryonic manifestation of critical, opposition attitudes and forms of behavior. However, behind the formal structures, in the realm of informality the collective forms of detachment, exit, and protest appeared more prominently. Independent art which had emerged in the 1960s took on an increasingly more political character a decade later.

The resurgence of cultural pluralism was marked, at first, by certain new art groups and the subcultures of underground music. The charm of rep-

7 Szabó, *Politikai kultúra Magyarországon*.

representative bands was only increased by the serious directorial preparations observed at concerts, that their songs were not played by the radio, and that they could not issue records for a long time. Beyond the lines that could be interpreted as opposition messages, the lyrics of the better bands also reflected on global problems related to the survival of humanity. The various anti-system underground rock and punk bands broke away from the allegoric, metaphorical forms of expression typical to the literary and artistic parables of the 1970s. Some rock bands were banned but most of them could exist on the periphery of the music world.⁸ At this time, direct political confrontation was less important than the strengthening of independent culture. The cultural space that was forming in the informal world involved various literary-artistic groups.⁹ These circles often overlapped and maintained vibrant communication.

The demand for noncommunist, self-serving art and pure aesthetics was fueled by the plethora of sociographies and various forms of documentaries which were created in the exploratory zeal of the second half of the 1970s. For investigative sociographies, while they did try to raise public awareness, typically stayed beyond the boundaries of reformist illusions. Their writers believed that pointing out the discrepancies between theory and reality will convince the party officials about the necessity of reform. For the artists, however, the approach of reforms was replaced by escapism. The representatives of the new aesthetics believed that sociographic disclosures that investigate separate cases can only have a partial effect. The critical element of this behavior was precisely the rejection of reformer illusions, and it led to new artistic experiments. At this point one should mention the strengthening alternative lifestyle movement, which could be politically dangerous in a regime based on monopolistic power. What they had in common was the intensification of escapist tendencies.

This was the context in which the political opposition initiatives appeared. Who belonged here were the ones barred from academic life; the ones who lost their job on a gesture of solidarity (such as a signature in a

8 Kürti, "Rocking the State"; Szemere, *Up from the Underground*.

9 Those included the wider circle of the *Fölöspéldány* (Excesscopy) group, the Attila József Circle of young writers (JAK), the avant-garde István Ötley Circle, the Studio K, the Lajos Vajda Studio, the *Műcsarnok* Art Kino, New Wave punk-rock groups, and the Club of Young Artists. Cf. Szőnyei, *Az új hullám évtizede*; Klaniczay, *Ellenkultúra a hetvenes-nyolcvanas években*.

petition campaign); the ones who protested out of their religious belief; the ones who were officially harassed as marginalized artists; and those ambitious youngsters who wanted to become scholars but were not accepted to state university.

The ideology of the group developed only gradually. The leaders of state socialism argued for a long time that history is none other but linear development, leading to the realization of idealistic socialism. In the official ideology, “real existing socialism” was one step on the road to social harmony. Every real wrongdoing of the regime was trivialized as such “mistakes” that meant no diversion from socialist development. It was difficult to break away from this way of thinking, and to develop an alternative ideology. The revolution of 1956 in Hungary was anticommunist, but it was not antisocialist. Many revolutionaries believed that the Stalinist dictatorship could be replaced by a humanitarian, cooperative, democratic version of socialism.¹⁰ In other words, they refused to believe in central control and the omnipotent state, but they believed in the socialist market of voluntary associations and cooperatives. The ideological situation was similar in 1968 as well. In Czechoslovakia, Dubček and his followers rejected the Moscow-type communist road but continued to believe in “socialism with a human face.”¹¹ They believed that democracy and communism can be reconciled, and communism can be reformed on these grounds.

The circle of populist writers was strong and influential. This group gained increasing importance in the 1970s, mainly through the balancing politics of writer Gyula Illyés. The populist writers regarded the sociographic, exploratory tradition of the 1930s as their intellectual fountainhead. The members of this middle-class group saw themselves, following the populist-nationalist ideology, as the drafters of the issues of the fate of the people. They found the left-right division irrelevant in face of the problem of the nation’s collective identity and the dimension of social “up” and “down.” They took on the role of representing the social “down” by emphasizing anti-elitism and declaring the prevailing elites “aliens,” that is, ones against the true interests of the nation. While they were called *népi* writers in Hungarian, literally meaning “of the [general] people,” they were often called populist due to their rhetoric

¹⁰ Lomax, *Hungary 1956*.

¹¹ Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia*.

in Hungary as well as the West. The populist writers rejected the open denial of state socialism, but despite events of tactical cooperation with the authorities they were trying to form an independent political line. Their criticism of the regime was moral: they claimed the system failed to see that crisis comes from the moral crisis of the nation. Populist writers occupied significant positions in the cultural life, and the writers who were not communists predominantly found their place among their ranks as well.

The populist ideology was an original proposal to overcome the disadvantages stemming from the “late,” half-hearted social development of the region. This had appeared earlier in Russia in the first half of the 19th century, in the debates of *zapatniks* (Westernizers) and Slavophiles, and later evidently among the *narodniks*.¹² The idea had been prevalent among the predecessors in Hungary as well, in the debates between the authors of two journals: the populist *Válasz* and the urban circle of *Szép Szó* in the 1930s. This division split the reform era’s program of “homeland and progress” and stressed the opposition of these two values of integrity and modernization. The populist system of values was based on the idea of organic development and its promoters argued that the nation must not follow global ideas which would alienate it from itself but create its own ideology fitting to its collective identity.

The populist writers had a significant role in art, especially in the field of lyric poetry. They formed a rather hierarchical camp, at the helm of which was the “prince of literature,” an intellectual leader of unquestioned legitimacy. This structural position was fulfilled by Gyula Illyés until his death in 1983, after which Sándor Csoóri took on his mantle and maintained the position until the mid-1990s. They believed that in the issues of national fate, they should cooperate with anyone: with the dissidents, with other groups of social scientists outside the opposition, or even with the reform communists.

The normative ideal of the group was the people, built from small communities and recognizing itself primarily by national values (and less by individual or international ideas). The mission of the people in this utopia was a third-way program of “Garden Hungary,” rejecting both capitalism and socialism. The model was based on a romantic vision of history, in which liberty appears as the shared commitment of individuals and communities

¹² Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism*.

to a specific purpose. Personal liberty was not an end in itself; the nation was. Accordingly, liberty that does not serve the prosperity of the nation, but makes some rich and some poor, is not genuine but barefoot liberty, which was counterpointed by the program of “to Europe, but each of us.”¹³ Change that leads to “barefoot liberty” is not real transformation, only a change of surface: not social revolution, but the color change of a servant elite.

For the populists, society was a fundamentally moral phenomenon, and the economic and political changes are to be judged from a moral perspective as well. As they believed that the moral deep structures of national existence are not influenced by the political and economic spheres *per se*, they saw every ideology regarding the latter as external, ideas that only scratch the surface of the essence of national existence. They were interested in the congruence of ideologies and the “nature” of the people, and what social cost or effect an ideology would bring. The populists represented the issue of national minorities in the neighboring states, and the negative consequences of industrialization: the decrease of population, the growing number of divorces, the dissolution of families, the early deaths, the questions of birth control, and any deviance in general that could be interpreted in an ethnic-national framework. They had an ambivalent, critical as well as compromising attitude toward every government as they had an ambivalent attitude toward politics in the first place. For them, the only acceptable form of politics was moral or moralizing politics. They denied both the state and irrationalism of the East and the “cold” political rationality of the West. Populist attitude toward reform was defined not primarily by market-oriented change or party pluralism but the values of solidarity understood on a national basis.

Strive for the balance of constructive criticism was a characteristic feature of an early representative of the peace movement, the Dialogue Peace Group (*Dialógus Békecsoport*) yet this apolitical attitude was soon changed by the more radical stance of Danube Circle (*Duna Kör*) in 1985. Demand for autonomy and readiness to be constructive merged in these groups, which promised with the emergence of a new political culture. When the members of the Dialogue debated whether it should become an organization, grassroots, anarchist, and representative democratic principles clashed in the opposition of the “radical-autonomist” and “moderate-constructive”

13 Csengey, *Meztélábás szabadság*.

groups.¹⁴ Although they could not achieve political results in the short run, the demand for a new type of collective action was important. The memory of the movement and its values was kept in the collective memory of the participants, which meant significant political experience for the transition to democracy. A group of activists who learned a culture of dispute and techniques of movement organization was trained and later, in other forms, reorganized. This is proved by the story of Danube Circle which made an environmental issue an issue of genuine democracy. Against the party state's plans of the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam the Danube Circle protested with a slogan that resonated with many: “dam or democracy?”

What these movements shared was the openness, flexibility, and the refrainment from explicitly stating any end goals in political ideology. They did not expect their followers to give their life for the movement and therefore create a kind of movement elite. Their arsenal included direct action and using the streets as open demonstrations, reminiscent of the traditions of early labor movement and the 1968 student protests in the West. The peace group carried out numerous collective, peaceful demonstrations in Budapest at busy squares and the pedestrian streets of the city center. Contrary to the previous decade, the 1980s saw single issue movements advocating the protection of life and the environment. The weakening influence of Marxism gave way to an aspiration to learn about the Hungarian national past, as well as the liberal tradition.¹⁵ The third-way ideas and the ones that were historically closer to the tradition of Western philosophy became visible. But not even the third-way movement was unidirectional, as it included both populist and liberal socialist ideas. Populism advocated the synthesis of contradictory ideas on the basis of understanding national character; liberal socialism tried to transcend two evils, capitalism and state socialism, and attempted to mix the advantages of liberal and socialist thought.

The real political alternative to the regime, however, appeared when the dissidents formed the Hungarian democratic opposition. The history of the opposition is well-documented in Hungarian language, particularly in the monograph of Csizmadia, his interviews, as well as the works of other

¹⁴ Haraszi, *The Velvet Prison*.

¹⁵ Körösi, *Értelmiség, politikai gondolkodás és kormányzat*.

authors.¹⁶ The circle that defined themselves as democratic opposition involved the strongly anti-system philosophers, historians, and sociologists, who were fired from their jobs and fought for radical reform. Describing the ideological development of this closely knit group of mainly Budapest-based people, we need to distinguish two stages: (1) From the Marxist revisionist philosophy of Lukács to the liberal socialism and democratic humanism emerging from the writings of István Bibó (the 1970s); and (2) from Bibó to Western liberalism (the 1980s). The ideological turn came about when critical intellectuals in Central Europe were able to step out of the Marxist framework of criticism. Gradually, they were able to drop the idea that the system could be reformed.

The attitude of the dissidents toward politics changed a great deal between 1977 and 1981. The beginning can be characterized as cultural or “lifestyle opposition,” meaning the provocative behavior of a group of mainly freelance intellectuals. Upon the state of emergency in Poland in December 1981, the dissidents were at crossroads: detachment from the system morally and financially and being generally irritating for the party bureaucracy were no longer enough. In 1981, the group focused, preserving its cultural elements, more on offering a program, finding alliances—practically, becoming political opposition. They aimed to follow the path of the Polish dissident intellectuals, in a country which was not characterized by the same circumstances.¹⁷ They were realists so they would not become revolutionaries, and their group would not become a radical sect. Realizing that their social base was moderate they tried to be more open toward, and start a discourse about the idea of radical reform.

The example of the Polish opposition spurred the dissidents to elevate the ideas of human rights and civil society to the level of opposition politics. These concepts turned out to be powerful ideological instruments in their fight against late socialism.¹⁸ First, they had to formulate a strategy that brought them closer to Havel’s ideal of “living in truth.”¹⁹ Secondly,

16 Bozóki, “Die Politik der Opposition in Ungarn”; “Die Demokratische Opposition in Ungarn”; Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*; “The Hungarian Democratic Opposition”; Havas, *Beszélő Összeiadás*; Kis, *Az összetorlódott idő*; *Mi a liberalizmus?*; Laczó, “Post-Dissident Hungarian Liberalism”; Schöpflin, “Opposition and Para-Opposition”; Szabó, “Dissent and Opposition.”

17 Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*.

18 Arato, *From Neo-Marxism to Democratic Theory*.

19 Havel, *Living in Truth*.

they had to organize themselves outside the system of institutionalized mendacity. Thirdly, they had to turn into a force that can represent the majority, one that can credibly call for the end of the system. While they characterized themselves as an independent, anticommunist group, the dividing line between “us” and “them” had to be made visible in the eyes of the people.

1.2 THE RISE OF SAMIZDAT

Cultural opposition in the early years meant that opposition intellectuals showed its independence, first of all, through its behavior and lifestyle. This meant more than parties or solidarity projects in which they defiantly practiced human rights. For example, by organizing the Fund Supporting the Poor (*Szegényeket Támogató Alap*, SZETA), part of the opposition tried to give particular and practical help to the needy. This was accompanied with some early works like the samizdat volume *Marx a negyedik évtizedben* (Marx in the Fourth Decade), edited by András Kovács;²⁰ the private journal call *Napló* (Diary) started by Mihály Kornis in 1976;²¹ the anthology *Profil* (Profile) by János Kenedi;²² or the book of György Bence and János Kis, on Soviet-type society.²³ The need for self-definition and the forming of identity dominated the dissidents’ discourses. By the beginning of the 1980s, these activities were gradually accompanied by the first samizdat publications, the “flying universities” that was organized in private flats,²⁴ and the various solidarity acts in form of petition campaigns.

In the 1980s, the various groups of the nascent opposition increasingly sought the opportunity for dialogue with those circles of the intellectuals which were inside the system. Although it took a long time until their messages reached the general populations, they found immediate resonance with mainstream reform intellectuals. Four samizdat journals (*Beszélő*, *Hírmondó*, *Demokrata*, and *Égtájak között*) played an especially important process in this. Radio Free Europe amplified and disseminated these ideas to the wider public. In the following I briefly describe these journals, then

²⁰ Kovács, *Marx a negyedik évtizedben*.

²¹ Barna et al., *A Napló*.

²² Kenedi, *Profil*.

²³ Bence and Kis, *Határozott forradalom*. Published under the pseudo-name Marc Rakovski.

²⁴ Szilágyi, *A Hétféli Szabadegyetem és a III/III*.

I turn to examining opposition groups with respect to their strategic goals, relationship to power and society, declared policies, and identity-forming relations and views in various social and political phenomena.

The most important samizdat journal was *Beszélő*. It was first published by the editorial team²⁵ in late 1981, after the events of self-limiting revolution and state of emergency unfolded in Poland. The journal published high-quality analyses and the writings of many of the dissidents who later became political actors during the regime change. *Beszélő* was published, using stencils, in 27 issues between 1981 and 1989.²⁶ The editorial team was made up by the leading figures of the democratic opposition. The journal combined theoretical, strategic, practical, and investigative articles and reports, and a great number of leading opposition figures published in it.²⁷ Thus, the journal was closely associated with various opposition groups, especially Otilia Solt's SZETA. It supported the poor who did not even "exist" officially, as the regime's language only knew of people with multiple disadvantages.

The editors and authors of the underground *Beszélő*²⁸ took everything the system hypocritically claimed about constitutionalism and the freedom of speech seriously. They discussed subjects that were regarded as taboo, and the journal always had the name, address, and phone number of the editors on its first pages. The risk they took regarded not only their freedom and job, but it also involved a range of unpleasant consequences, such as the revocation of their passports, continual supervision by the secret police, or the confiscation of their writings.

In the introduction of the first issue of *Beszélő*, János Kis wrote that their goal was to communicate with the general population. "To the best of our ability," he wrote, "we wish to assist the quietly clamoring masses in painting a better picture of themselves in a period when two tiny minorities—the country's leadership and the opposition—are loudly arguing with each

25 The editors of the samizdat *Beszélő* were Miklós Haraszti, János Kis, Ferenc Kőszeg, Bálint Nagy, György Petri, Otilia Solt, and Sándor Szilágyi.

26 *Beszélő* was published in 1,500 copies, but its circulation reached 8,000 by the end of the 1980s. Monori, "Média és rendszerváltás."

27 The authors were mostly belonging to the democratic opposition. Those who had official jobs typically published under pseudonyms.

28 *Beszélő* was first a samizdat publication (1981–1989), then a legal weekly (1989–1996), and finally a monthly (1996–2012). This book deals solely with the samizdat period of the journal.

other.”²⁹ This introduction did not define a clear political program. The editors did not want to give a program, but worked at disseminating information so that “the quietly clamoring masses” would be able to understand and disseminate it further in the future. It was truly the effort of intellectuals whose trust was in the power and influence of words on social processes. The first couple of issues mostly disseminated information about different social groups and different areas of life. The function of these articles was to find out who would react to them, to know who the editors could contact and commission articles from in the future. The journal’s profile was shaped by the feedback it received and the political events that were under way in the first year of the journal’s existence. At first, *Beszélő* reported on those social groups who disobeyed the rules, thus bringing practical examples of challenging the rules of a dictatorial regime. It showed the areas of life where society expressed opposition to the regime. The hope was that by publicly acknowledging these isolated attempts, *Beszélő* would help people who were active on one area learn about and get in contact with others. In the long run, they hoped, isolation could slowly give way to the opportunity of joint opposition action.

Given that *Beszélő* was not only a journal of social criticism but also a forum of the democratic opposition, another aim, namely that of a political program, soon surfaced. The twentieth, 1987 special issue of *Beszélő* published the comprehensive program.³⁰ It demanded constitutionalism, freedom of the press, social security, human rights, but first and foremost the replacement of the party general secretary János Kádár.³¹ They call attention to such taboos as weakening the ties between Hungary and the Soviet Union, the problems of Hungarians living outside the borders, and the place of the real history of 1956 in collective memory.

The second samizdat journal worth mentioning is *Hírmondó*. It first appeared in November 1983, and 26 subsequent issues followed until 1988.³² It was the successor of *Tájékoztató*, which only appeared three times in the

29 Kis, “Lapunk élé.”

30 Haraszti et al., *Társadalmi szerződés*.

31 Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*, 391–95.

32 *Hírmondó* was edited by Gábor Demszky and Róza Hodosán. In the early period András Nagy and Otília Solt were also part of the editorial team.

spring of 1983.³³ In the introductory issue, its goals were defined in the following way: *Hírmondó* “wishes to focus on the efforts at the democratic renewal of the countries of the region.”³⁴ This promise was kept to the end. More than half of the articles in each issue were devoted to topics about Central Europe. They published articles that had appeared in the underground media of region (especially Poland). Full reports and analyses from emigrant publications and Western papers were regularly featured. These reported on the situation in Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. The two most published free thinkers were Adam Michnik and Václav Havel. The editors of *Hírmondó* also incorporated articles on democratic and progressive developments in Yugoslavia. Finally, they also regularly published reports on illegal grouping and those persecuted in the Soviet Union as well as made interviews with those emigrated from the Soviet Union to the West.

The third samizdat journal to be mentioned is *Demokrata*. It had 41 issues between 1986 and 1989.³⁵ The paper published articles of authors regardless they used their real name or not. It was, however, reluctant to publish “fascist, racists and chauvinist writings as well as articles that advocated violence as the primary means of the domestic political struggle.”³⁶ Most of the articles were penned by the editors who, except the chief editor, preferred to remain unidentified.³⁷ In the first issue they committed themselves to pluralist democracy. “*Demokrata* greets its entire democratic readership [. . .] whether they be advocates of bourgeois, Christian, social or popular democracy. [. . .] Thus, *Demokrata* aspires to be the practical outlet of the struggle for democratic freedoms. This is what we wish to add to the samizdat press. That is, we do not intend to be competitors to the already existing journals of the samizdat movement. Rather, we intend to supplement their theoretical content and message. We aspire to be both activist and up-to-date.”³⁸ It was

33 András Nagy edited the journal in 1985–1986. The most frequent authors were Gábor Demszky, András Nagy, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Pál Szalai, Mihály Vajda, György Konrád, György Krassó, and György Gadó.

34 Beköszöntő, 1983: 1.

35 *Demokrata* was edited by Jenő Nagy.

36 *Demokrata*, 1986b: 1.

37 György Gadó left *Demokrata* in 1986 and founded *Magyar Zsidó* (Hungarian Jew) in 1987.

38 *Demokrata*, 1986a.

because of its practical, shorter, and easy-to-understand content that Radio Free Europe described *Demokrata* as the “tabloid of the opposition.”³⁹

Unlike *Hírmondó*, which concentrated on explicating the intellectual heritage of Central Europe, writings in *Demokrata* concentrated on uncovering the workings and lies of the power elite in Hungary. Instead of being broad and analytical, most of its content was critical, subjective, and related to current events. In their writings, opposition figures belonging to *Demokrata*’s circle displayed provocative, conflict-oriented, radical behavior, which was in contrast with the restrained attitude of large parts of the democratic opposition.

Finally, *Égtájak között* was run by younger people, originally as an outlet of the Vox Humana Circle, a student community in Budapest. It first appeared at the Faculty of Arts of Eötvös Lóránd University in November 1984 as a Central European essay journal. In 1985, censorship forced them to type, and later use stencils, to duplicate their independent issues. As a university paper, it published six issues and a special literary issue legally. Later, 13 samizdat issues were published until 1989, and every issue had a distinctive subtitle.⁴⁰ A *Demokrata*’s column, “From the history of the samizdat press,” published a self-analytical piece about *Égtájak között*. This said that *Égtájak között* did not want to be a conventional journal. Instead, it was devoted to “be documenting human fates. [. . .] Most of the contents of the journal are devoted to life situations and the extremity of social existence [. . .]. We mostly publish self-defensive imprints of lives which insist on maintaining individual autonomy.”⁴¹ *Égtájak között* regularly reported on police persecutions (warrants to appear at and shadowing by the police, police raids, and confiscations) and paid concentrated attention to the conditions of the imprisoned and the fate of “the dismembered Hungarian people.” Dialogues over peace and problems relating to culture, education, and the arts also had a felt presence in the issues. *Égtájak között* was the only samizdat publication that regularly published fiction, poetry, and graphics.

39 The editors replied as follows: “Radio Free Europe recently introduced our paper. *Demokrata* was called the tabloid of the opposition [. . .] we believe this is not true, neither to the facts nor to our intentions. We want to make a simpler, more popular, more fresh paper for the readers than our appreciated samizdat competitors, but not a tabloid.”

40 *Égtájak között* was edited and written by Gyula Bartók, Mikolta Bognár, Olga Diószegi, Zsolt Keszthelyi, Ervin János Lázár, László Rusai, and József Talata.

41 Rusai, “Színek – *Égtájak között*,” 21–22.

Égtájak között enriched the opposition discourse by giving voice to alternative ideas. Instead of a party-centered democracy, the editors advocated the idea of a community-centered democracy where attention was not concentrated on power and its holders. They recommended that besides creating local democratic forums, the societal energy released by the groups that aimed at broadening the public sphere and not at grabbing political power should be utilized.⁴²

Several short-lived journals and samizdat published existed in the 1980s, some of which also published significant opposition writings.⁴³ These journals and publishers created the infrastructure for the readers of the second public sphere.⁴⁴ An underground band founded an alternative record label, breaking the monopoly of the state's Hungarian Records Company.⁴⁵ The democratic opposition and the people around them spent years so that uncensored thoughts could find their way to the public. They also tried to inform isolated readers about each other, to bring them together, and to form a community of counterculture in the end.

2. THE DISSIDENTS BETWEEN STATE AND SOCIETY

One of the most conspicuous features of the position of the nascent democratic opposition was that they placed themselves between the communist party state and the society. While opposition figures with close ties to *Hírmondó* linked democratic values to Europe's intellectual heritage, those publishing in *Demokrata* reached back to the national past, the 1956 revolution, which they described as a national democratic revolution and viewed as an absolute ideological and moral capital. This was the pillar that they relied on in their regime criticism.

42 Talata, "Feladataink."

43 The samizdat journals were the following: *Hiány* (Shortage), *Közép-Európai Figyelő* (Central European Observer), *Magyar Figyelő* (Hungarian Observer), *Magyar Október Szabadsajtó* (Hungarian October Free Press), *Magyar Zsidó* (Hungarian Jew), *Máshonnan Beszélő* (Speaker from Elsewhere), *Szféra* (Sphere), *Tájékoztató* (Prospectus), *Túlélés* (Survival), *Túlpartról* (From the Other Coast). Among samizdat publishers, one needs to mention *AB Független Kiadó* (AB Independent Publisher), *ABC Független Kiadó* (ABC Independent Publisher), *Hitel Független Kiadó* (Credit Independent Publisher), *Artéria Kiadó* (Arteria Publisher), *Katalizátor Iroda* (Catalyst Office), *Magyar Október Kiadó* (Hungarian October Publisher) and *Szabad Idő Független Kiadó* (Leisure Time Independent Publisher).

44 On these papers and publishers, see Hodosán, *Szamizdat történetek*.

45 It was the Trott Records. Cf. Szemere, *Up from the Underground*.

The dissidents believed that the public sphere could be widened only if they become mediators between the power holders and the society. According to their views, “a truly democratic thinker must not think about his own wishes, but rather the means by which he can facilitate the expression of the popular will.”⁴⁶ “We, the writers of the ‘second public sphere’, cannot undo the boycott of the 1984 Olympics, but still can shout at the Hungarian Olympic Committee.”⁴⁷ Beyond the expression and the transmission of public opinion, those publishing in *Hírmondó* also saw their role in shaping public thinking. “The semi-Orwellian man, the schooled peasant, is very useful for those in power. [. . .] We should do something so that the ambition for professional and human productivity goes hand in hand with the desire to be free and emancipated citizens who are equal before the law.”⁴⁸

Ironically, it was often the writers who talked about the necessity of mediation and the expression and shaping of the public will that most often questioned the possibility that they could, indeed, do something meaningful to this end. As they recognized, intellectuals cannot take over the people’s burdens, for “the intellectuals are very far from the common man.”⁴⁹ This distance was partly created by the regime and partly was the result of their intellectual superiority *vis-à-vis* ordinary citizens. Their social image was based on their idea of superiority and rationalism. Mihály Vajda wrote about this, saying “We must not seek to our basic problems a universal solution in the name of some abstract rationality; every society [. . .] must find the solutions fitting to its traditions.”⁵⁰

They saw it as a privilege to be able to voice their views. Gáspár Miklós Tamás wrote, “The freedoms we achieved for ourselves are unfair privileges as long as others do not have them. I think it is better that we have them than if no one has them, but only if we use them to expand these rights to others.”⁵¹ The plurality of the articles makes generalization difficult, but it was not uncommon that dissidents referred to the people and the popular will as abstract constructs, not taking the internal stratification of society into account. The authors of *Hírmondó* described themselves in terms

46 Tamás, “Van a Bajza utca sarkán egy kis palota,” 27.

47 *Hírmondó* editors, “Gyepől és kurázsi,” 3.

48 Nagy, “A romániai magyar értelmiség jelenéről – jövőjéért,” 62.

49 Tamás, “Amiért mégis,” 39.

50 Vajda, “Megcsalt nembeliség vagy megvalósult orosz történelem,” 54.

51 Tamás, “Van a Bajza utca sarkán egy kis palota,” 26.

of being excluded from and defenseless in the face of power as often as they defined their role as mediators. "Paternalism is prone to equate opponents with enemies. [. . .] This way of thinking is best exposed in writings where opposition is carelessly identified with adversity in one and the same sentence. If this identification is real [. . .], then writers fall outside the realm of the law and constitutional protection. From then on it is a matter of political will to treat them as outlaws."⁵²

When discussing their stubbornness in fighting power, they primarily highlighted the emotional and moral aspects. In the face of the falsity of power, they viewed themselves as the holders of moral justice. They thought that power could not touch the moral justice. "Regardless of the softening of power, it is unimaginable that [for them] an opposition figure is right, and the police is wrong. [. . .] Gábor Demszky was not simply arrested by the police, but they also tried to cuff his hands. Demszky protested vehemently and finally he prevailed. Those who like symbols may even find one in this story."⁵³

The intellectuals of *Hírmondó* regularly reported and analyzed the atrocities committed by communist power elite: keeping people in custody illegally, bureaucratic atrocities, and corruption. Not only did they see themselves as being excluded from and stigmatized by power, but they formed a group that "neither hopes nor desires the responsibility to govern."⁵⁴ They did not discard dialogue with power, but they excluded the possibility of exercising it.

As opposed to this, those with close ties to *Demokrata* did not think that such self-limitation was possible in the long run. The authors of *Demokrata*, with mostly plebeian attitudes, identified the nation with the people of which they were a constitutive part. Their goal was not to mediate between power holders and the society but to give voice to the people by expressing their alleged demands to help them to come to power. While *Hírmondó* stressed the importance of the political and geographical chances and limitations, in *Demokrata* concerns about the relationship with the power elite was dominant. They defined themselves in opposition to power and the *status quo*. There were several defining features to their opposition to power. The

52 Konrád, "A tömbrendszer halálos dramaturgiája," 8.

53 Nagy, "A romániai magyar értelmiség jelenéről – jövőjéért," 60.

54 Tamás, "Üdvözlét, óvás és kacaj," 4.

authors of *Demokrata* saw themselves less as excluded from power and more as robbed and suppressed by it. For being robbed and suppressed is a more serious grievance than simply being excluded. The opposition being robbed from the chance to organize has been central to several articles.⁵⁵

Accounts of police atrocities, house searches, and interrogation were often published in *Demokrata*. Those publishing here saw their situation to be quite dramatic. This was related to the fact that they did not apply the rules of conspiracy, which resulted in their being subjected to police atrocities more often. In contrast, *Hírmondó* had a strict system of conspiracy, always separating the circles of editors, suppliers, mediators, and manufacturers. They were especially careful to conceal the last link of the chain, the printers, from the eyes of the police.

There were a wide range of issues discussed on the pages of *Demokrata*: the role of the church, emigration and emigrants, Hungarian minorities abroad, problems concerning the Roma population, the presence of the Russian army, those who refused to serve their compulsory time in the army, Judaism, environmental protection, and popular culture. But, regardless the chosen topic, their discussions always ended in the criticism of the dictatorship and thus every issue was defined as crucial for deciding the nation's fate. Unlike them, those writing for *Hírmondó* preferred to talk more generally about questions that were crucial the fate of this generation.⁵⁶

We are much more impressed by how millions in Poland stand by their free trade unions that have been defamed, squelched, and forced underground, and by the way they protect and hide the leaders of Solidarity. [...] We send them our greetings on the occasion that their hard times in prison are over. We wish them strength as well as health to their future struggle. We also long for the appearance of hundreds of such intellectuals as Kuron, Michnik, Lipski and such workers as Walesa, Bujak and their colleagues here in this country.⁵⁷

Hírmondó only used pathos in articles that they penned about others. They never went so far as to talk about their own achievements in this

55 F. Reymund, "Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat," 22; Gadó, "Nem húznak karóba," 4.

56 Vajda, "Megcsalt nembeliség vagy megvalósult orosz történelem," 54.

57 R-ó, "Emberi arcú rendőrállam?" 1–2.

fashion. As opposed to this, *Demokrata* often described Hungarian politics and their own oppressed situation in dramatic terms. Those writing for *Demokrata* felt it to be their duty to uncover the workings of the regime. Their discourse concerning the regime was based on the use of concepts such as mock democracy,⁵⁸ socialist democracy,⁵⁹ and enlightened absolutism.⁶⁰

If you wish, the Hungarian regime maybe seen as liberal: after all opposition thinkers and activists do not face political trials. There are other methods. "Let's take his fingerprints, take a numbered picture of him, with this we can humiliate him and make him feel the smell of prison. We show him that if he does not accept the carrot, we'll use the stick."⁶¹

These opposition figures approached compromise, which the opposition makes with the dictatorial power elite in mock-democracies, in moral terms and, hence, refused to consider it. "Would an honest political movement accept a compromise? In the foreseeable future there is no reason to expect such a compromise between those in power and in the opposition that would allow the opposition to maintain its political integrity."⁶² Another author added: "With all respects to the intellectual legacy of István Bibó, the failure of his suggestions signal that compromise is not among the political means in this region."⁶³ The opposition categorically refused the idea of compromise, understood as a negative that can bring unforeseeable consequences: "No. This regime is made up of cheaters. We should not aim at fair play and consensus with them. Rather, we should tell the truth. The louder and clearer, the better."⁶⁴

The ultimate and often-voiced goal of *Demokrata* intellectuals was to bring down the regime: "What is the value of an opposition that cannot bring down either the government or the regime?"⁶⁵ "Democracy can only be victorious

⁵⁸ "Mintha-ország."

⁵⁹ "Milyen fa."

⁶⁰ Serfőző, "A lényegét nem lehet kikerülni."

⁶¹ Br-Ávó, "Reszkessetek demokraták!" 3.

⁶² Sasváry, "Ellenzék a hódoltságban," 17–18.

⁶³ "Két program," 23.

⁶⁴ F. Reymund, "Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat," 21.

⁶⁵ Sasváry, "Ellenzék a hódoltságban," 18.

when party dictatorship is abolished.”⁶⁶ Assessing their relationship to power, however, those with close ties to *Demokrata* mentioned their fear regularly. As often as they mentioned their own fear, they also expressed their belief in their ability to raise fear in the power elite. They attributed the fear of the power elite to the moral superiority of the opposition: “the situation is such that Goliath must be afraid of David. Besides, this fact makes it even more pronounced that Goliath’s power is a morally fallen one.”⁶⁷

The relationship of the opposition to society was not free of contradictions. It followed from the atomization and neutralization strategies of the Kádár regime that the dissidents could not equate themselves with society and could not express their own demands as the demands of the society. Occasionally they expressed their dissatisfaction with the silence of society. They were afraid that society would not identify with their goals and that it would not even understand them. They were torn by dilemmas that were never even raised in Solidarity in Poland. So how did they see their own value for society?

They took upon themselves to be the torchbearers whose task was to pronounce value judgments: “The torch must be held up high even if it cannot perfectly substitute sunshine and the torchbearer cannot rush the sunrise. But the light of this torch must always be directed at real values and not at cheap imitations and scrapheaps.”⁶⁸ *Demokrata* returned to the metaphor of light frequently. They believed they can lead by example, spurring the people to act. They believed that it was their responsibility to talk about the suppressed past as well.

This past mainly referred to the suppressed revolution of 1956, which was brought up not only because of its thirtieth anniversary. The year 1956 was the most obvious point of reference to question the legitimacy of the Kádár regime. They gave practical pieces of advice to help efficient demonstrations. These included the description of how to make leaflets and stamps, or painting templates. These members of the opposition did not speak from the position of an elite, but followed the inner call: both the moral and the practical were integral parts of their identity. The conflict between the so-called elite and the radical-plebeian opposition became especially intense in 1988–1989.

66 Serfőző, “A lényeket nem lehet kikerülni,” 12.

67 F. Reymund, “Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat,” 22.

68 Sasváry, “Ellenzék a hódoltságban,” 19.

In 1989, the opposition agreed to a compromise with the power elite that the plebeians found unacceptable. The latter group remained in a marginal position and police atrocities toward them intensified.

To sum up, dissident intellectuals in Hungary wanted to give voice to demands for freedom, and to those who had no chance to present themselves in the public sphere. In *Hírmondó*, emigration was not a characteristic subject of the opposition's discourse either. The only exception was the issue with opposition philosopher, Gáspár Miklós Tamás who had immigrated to Hungary from Transylvania and was offered an emigration passport by the officials. This particular case was selected for discussion on purpose. Tamás did not see emigration as one's free choice, but as something one was pressured into by the power elite. The opposition categorically refused to back such a solution. With the words of Gábor Demszky:

To the hell with such offers! [...] The power elite may live with this method again in ten years against those who could not be controlled by other means—job loss, ban on their employment, atrocities—in the meantime. In the end, the cultural police would simply force them out of the country. What else can be said upon seeing this bad omen then, “Let the power elite leave. We’ll be fine without them.”⁶⁹

Unlike *Hírmondó*, *Demokrata* regularly had the issue of emigration on its agenda. When analyzing cases, authors expressed their acceptance of emigration. Emigration was thought of as something individuals had the right to choose. They did not judge emigration negatively from the point of view of a collective responsibility for the fate of the nation. *Demokrata* continued “holding the hands” of the emigrants by urging them to keep in contact with the opposition. From this they hoped to grow intellectually and that the emigrants could maintain their Hungarian identity. “We welcome,” they wrote, “the writings of the democrats living in emigration on our pages. This may be beneficial for both parties: this would enrich us with new ideas and reasoning and help them preserve their ties with the country and think like Hungarians even when abroad.”⁷⁰

69 Demszky, “Menjenek el talán ők,” 24.

70 *Demokrata*, 1986c: 19.

The democratic opposition in Hungary saw the influence of the emigrant intelligentsia larger than their own. They often overestimated their impact. They opined that widening the flow of information between the emigrated and domestic intellectuals will help those at home in their anti-system activities.

The intention of mediating between the power holders and the society was a problematic strategy to start with for the groups of the opposition. The dissidents knew that their place, in opposition to the system, was on the side of the society, but it took them years until they found their voice that the people actually heard. They had to find those topics, keywords, and strategies that made them real molders of critical discourse, that is political actors.

3. THE TOPICS OF THE SAMIZDAT JOURNALS

Apart from the new types of discourse and their anti-system stance, the samizdat journals differed from the party state's media also in their selection of topics. Dictatorship deprived politics from its original meaning—a form of acting for the common good of society—but the dissidents wrote about moral politics. If topics like nationality and Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries were regarded as taboo, this was the reason opposition journals reported about them. If the official media did not discuss the activity of the corrupt and neutralized churches, the innovative role of alternative base groups, the unofficial peace movements, or the group of conscientious objectors, these topics did appear in the banned journals of opposition intellectuals. The authors shed new light on the topics of environment and culture as well. In the following, I give an overview of these forbidden topics and approaches.

3.1 MORAL POLITICS

The politics of the opposition was moral, but not moralizing. It was looking for those political fundamentals upon which the opposition to the oppression can be built. As one of the most active members of the dissidents recalls, “we accepted the theory of nonviolent revolution of Martin Luther King, a human rights revolution, and a liberal change. It was made clear that every generation must participate in this change, there cannot be violent change,

there cannot be exclusionary change. The only qualitative change I hoped for and brought an infinitely, truly radically new quality to the society, was the free press.”⁷¹

In the debates of the opposition circle close to *Hírmondó*, the ideal of a democratic East-Central Europe based on the respect of human rights was one of the most often discussed, basic topics. “We, the Hungarian opposition, must turn to the democratic traditions of Eastern Europe and the democrats of the other Central European states should do the same. [...] any tendency toward isolation would only make the already questionable prospects of democracy in Eastern Europe more hopeless.”⁷²

The opposition circles of *Hírmondó*, *Demokrata*, and *Égtájak között* were committed to nonviolence and the protection of human rights. Among them *Hírmondó* turned out to be the most influential. “*Hírmondó* is an independent publication and is free of censorship. As a matter of principle, it only refuses to publish writings inciting racism or war with other people.”⁷³ Among their leading authors Tamás claimed that “individual and collective human rights must be demanded for everyone, including national minorities.”⁷⁴ Konrád added: “We are more interested in the right of the minorities to existence in a democracy than the power of the majority. We demand respect for freaks.”⁷⁵ They took a decisive stand by the Roma population, which was most affected by discrimination, As Ottília Solt stated: “I believe that today the Roma need the protection of the democrats especially. [...] I wish to call attention to the fact that today there is no organization representing the Hungarian Roma: whoever speaks up for them must do so as a private individual.”⁷⁶ They believed in the strength and power of the written word. They defined themselves as members of the civil society, that is, they saw themselves as people who do not delegate responsibility to their superiors, like soldiers, but accept responsibilities.

For the authors of *Demokrata* the single most important historical point of reference, which was regarded as a moral achievement, was the revolution of 1956. “In the current standing of the economy, political matters and

71 Interview with Haraszti Miklóssal, 1997.

72 Szalai, “Amivel nem tudok egyetérteni,” 55.

73 *Beköszöntő*, 1983: 1.

74 Tamás, “Nyílt levél Mihai Korne-hoz,” 27.

75 Konrád, “A tömbrendszer halálos dramaturgiája,” 5.

76 Solt, “A korlátoltság vagy a faji uszítás rabja,” 54.

the public sphere, the recognition that the national democratic revolution of 1956 was one of the most important events of Hungarian history in the seventy years passed since 1918 is more and more widespread. It left such an ideological and moral capital to us that it can be successfully invested for a long time by the political forces working for national renewal.”⁷⁷ The authors of *Demokrata* continuously discussed the false official picture of the revolution. “In the face of multiplying troubles, it became obvious that the rights and property we still own is due to the anger, determination and sacrifice of 1956.”⁷⁸ They stressed the need for pluralism and independence: “The democratic opposition must aim at shaping public thinking and raising awareness to the need for democratic progress and national independence.”⁷⁹

The authors of *Égtájak között* picked autonomy as their most important value, which they felt to be the precondition to make everyday life livable and bearable. They distanced themselves from those who, startled by independent existence, “tried to follow through the official censorship, which often results in the distortion of personality and leads to alcoholism, the need for psychiatric treatment or suicide.”⁸⁰ The practice of “one party vs one opposition” did not fit their quest for autonomy, either. The different opposition groups of *Égtájak között* positioned themselves outside the “monolithic opposition” and voiced their criticism from this position. The criticism consisted in disapproval of intolerance and the assimilation of independent groups, which the monolithic opposition used to strengthen itself. According to an editor, “Should autonomy exist, they immediately strive to abolish it. Autonomy has no tradition. There are only reservations and misunderstandings. We do not even know what taboos we violated with our existence.”⁸¹

Morality and the demand of politics based on truth were not quite as much part of the identity of the authors writing in *Égtájak között* than they were for the authors of *Demokrata*. Yet these themes regularly appeared on the pages of *Égtájak között*: “General moral premises as well as getting to

77 F. Reymund, “Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat,” 22.

78 *Név nélkül*, 43.

79 Sasváry, “Ellenzék a hódoltságban,” 18.

80 Talata, “Levegőt! – Alternatív közművelődési koncepciók,” 16.

81 Talata, “Levegőt! – Alternatív közművelődési koncepciók,” 8.

know the suppressed national past and culture can serve as points of orientation. We must keep banging our fists on the table.”⁸²

3.2 THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

The authors of *Hírmondó* often called themselves cosmopolitan to oppose provincialism. The democratic opposition was described as only having interest in domestic minorities whereas the populist writers were said to focus on Hungarian minorities abroad. Yet this was not the case. *Hírmondó* articles give evidence to the fact that the democratic opposition wrote about the problems of the minorities abroad as often as they wrote about the problems concerning the discriminated minorities at home. It is a different question how it related to the problems of those abroad. In this respect, the authors of *Hírmondó* did not only differ from populist writers but also from the *Demokrata* circle. The former did not necessarily link concerns about the situation of Hungarians abroad to the discourse over national consciousness. Rather, they associated it with universal human rights, which was also an often-mentioned theme in *Hírmondó*.

Another defining element in the discourse of the opposition circle of *Hírmondó* was their identity as Central Europeans. The introduction of *Hírmondó*, which was an attempt at self-definition, defined Hungarians living abroad as an integral part of the nation both from a cultural and an ethnic point of view. “*Hírmondó* is going to publish a great amount of news about the oppression of Hungarian-speaking minorities outside our borders.” However, “we do not agree with those of our fellow countrymen who place the national issue above all other problems. The problems of the Hungarian minorities abroad are inseparable from the global problems of the region.”⁸³

The two opposition groups disagreed in the solution. The circle of *Hírmondó* put their trust into the democratic movement of the region. As they wrote, “We agree that the Hungarian government should intervene to prevent their forced assimilation, but [...] we expect the solution of the issue to come from the democratic movements.”⁸⁴ In contrast, the *Demokrata* cir-

82. Diószegi, “Interview,” 3.

83. *Beköszöntő*, 2.

84. *Beköszöntő*.

cle considered the interference of the Hungarian government as the key to improve the situation, less idealistically.

Regarding the question of borders and the situation of ethnic Hungarians living outside the Hungarian border, *Hírmondó* intellectuals did not get submerged in reviving the past and rejected even the theoretical possibility of border revisions. Instead, they advocated more “permeable” borders, that is, more freedom for individuals. “If borders could be crossed freely, it would do a service by making the exchange of information about each other and equal development possible, which would ease the revisionist tensions.”⁸⁵ Instead of states, they were thinking in terms of peoples, and believed that the proposal for open borders emphasizes the rapprochement and the joining of forces of the people, and not the states, of Central Europe.

The nation as a concept and the idea of 1956 as a linchpin or a positive force that would shape the nation’s future were pronouncedly present in the discourse of opposition figures close to *Demokrata*: “Many signs give evidence to the fact that the capacity for a fresh start exist and the nation is finding its way back to the heritage of 1956, which is the only path toward self-esteem and liberty.”⁸⁶ As another author claimed: “How insincere was the calculation through which the beneficiaries of 1956 hushed up the soul and ambitions of the nation!’ [. . .] Oh, when will October 23, the persistent light—the eternal spring—in the national autumn, finally be a red-letter day?”⁸⁷ However, the fact that the opposition was committed to the national question did not mean that they propagated one single solution. They opined that progress in Hungary must be void of “integral nationalism,” for the belief in “the absoluteness of one’s own nation” is none other but chauvinism.

In sum, the circle around *Hírmondó* believed that the solution to the problems of Hungarian minorities would come from the democratic movements of the region, while the circle around *Demokrata* expected the solution from the Hungarian government. The latter defined themselves primarily through their relationship to the power elite. Of course, they did not think that a word from the Budapest government would solve the problems

85 *Hírmondó* editors, “Határainkról,” 1.

86 Kármentő, “Az elnyomás csöndje,” 13.

87 Öskü, *Demokrata*, 34.

in Transylvania, but they condemned the government for not advocating the case of Hungarian abroad on international forums.

3.3 CHURCHES AND PEACE ACTIVISM

In the first issues of *Beszélő*, Christian communities, national identity, and the problems concerning Hungarian minorities abroad were not subjected to debate in the way that the task of the opposition, its relationship with society, and the power elite did. From this period, writings about the Adventist church⁸⁸ and Catholic dissidents⁸⁹ are worth mentioning. The article concerning the latter made general conclusions about the relationship of identity and ideology in the context of discussion over the possibility of the free development of the “clerical profession” and the effects of a compromise between the state and the church. As it formulated:

The state exercises total control over the churches and directs their lives indirectly. No longer do we have a chance to protect ourselves legally. [...] Some try to do something by making themselves believe that the power elite is ready for the dialogue of good will and only awaits their signals. The politics of bluff of the “peace priests” deceive many other priests who deserve a better fate. These people do not think about the fact that the agreements published in the framework of pompous ceremonies only gives them crumbs of the rights that Christ’s church and men had been entitled to all along. In return for these concession they serve the state, which has not given up on silencing dissidents. Their mantra is “compromise” and “realism”.⁹⁰

The opposition discourse did not evaluate the efforts of the Catholic Church as something one should identify with. The church was mostly described as an integral part of the power elite. “Since the Mindszenty trial⁹¹ the Catholic church has been in the deadly embrace of power. Its leadership has clung to power to protect their positions in this world. We see the recre-

88 Iványi, “Kitaszított adventisták.”

89 Wildmann, “A magyar katolikus másként gondolkodókhoz.”

90 Wildmann, “A magyar katolikus másként gondolkodókhoz,” 24.

91 Cardinal József Mindszenty was imprisoned by the communists after a show trial in 1948.

ation of church figures who desperately cling to power. We do not expect any progress from above.”⁹² At the same time the opposition was also concerned with the chance of religiousness in the world of power after the failure of religious institutions. They saw hope in those Christians, and the communities they formed, who found the deeper dimensions of religion and accepted smallness and service to others.

What the dissident authors of *Demokrata* thought about Judaism as a religion was condensed in the way they welcomed their sister publication, *Magyar Zsidó* in 1987. Many did not understand the need for such a journal. Nonetheless, they expressed their opinion in the framework of pluralist, democratic ideals. According to them, “in the orchestra of growing democratic public thought, there is not only room for a new instrument, but it must also have an important role.”⁹³ Jewish religion was seen in the light of faith and the search for values, and its followers were placed alongside Catholics and Protestants, because all three groups were seen similar in their desire to live by their faith in a world that is in search of values. The *Demokrata* supported religious Jews in their desire to openly accept their religiousness.

The samizdat *Beszélő* devoted regular attention to peace movements and conscientious objectors, that is those who denied military service. An entire article was devoted to peace movements within the Catholic Church.⁹⁴ The authors of *Égtájak között* named the withdrawal of Soviet troops as the fundamental condition of peace. They raised their voice as the spokesmen of the occupied nation and their reasoning often referred to 1956. Their argument resembled in many ways the thoughts of one of the emblematic figures of the opposition, György Konrád. “Is the situation where no country’s troops stay at the territory of another country only a dream? On October 23, 1956, Hungarian youth happily shouted their catchphrase: ‘the soldiers of every country should go home.’ I love this catchphrase ever since and find it even more actual from the distance of a quarter century than I did back then.”⁹⁵ They also spoke up against armament from time to time. They believed that who should rule the world is a senseless question. First, no country has the

92 Wildmann, “A magyar katolikus másként gondolkodókhöz,” 25.

93 *Demokrata*, “Megnyugtattak,” 22.

94 Haraszi “Nem ütni és nem visszautni.”

95 Konrád, “A cenzúra reformja?” 5.

right to do so, and second, the victory of neither would survive the destruction of nuclear holocaust. Besides the senselessness of the race of superpowers, the opposition often returned to the weakness of the Hungarian army as well.

Demokrata paid special attention to those who refused to serve their time in the armed forces. They saw it to be their task to follow these cases and inform the public about them: “the disinterest of the public—partially due to lack of information—is also responsible for the imprisonment of thousands and thousands of young and peace-minded Hungarian men for years by the Kádár regime just because they denied to serve in the army.”⁹⁶ A few members of the democratic opposition had committed themselves in a public announcement to follow the case of Zsolt Keszthelyi and his fellow sufferers. They also suggested policy change that would allow these young people to complete their military service in the form of civilian service, such as nursing. “Until the new legal guarantees are not in place, people who were sent to prison for being conscientious objectors should be given amnesty and set free.”⁹⁷ The issue of human rights was repeatedly mentioned but not discussed theoretically. Rather, the practical relevance of these principles for the opposition was examined.

3.4 ENVIRONMENTALISM

Beszélő started to deal with environmental issues after 1984. This step was mainly due to two issues: the international agreement between the Hungarian and the Czechoslovak communist parties about building a dam at Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros on the Danube and, later, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986. Environmental protection quickly got on the agenda of the democratic opposition. Besides supporting articles, soon environmental circles, groups, and movements also appeared. These organizations did not resemble political parties and supported a cause that the communist party could have supported just as well. They did not fight for a multiparty system, they only wanted clean air and water. Their power of regime criticism did not

96 Typically, the cases that were named were those where the denial of military service was not based on religious or pacifist motives. One of these cases was that of Zsolt Keszthelyi: he refused to serve in an army that was not controlled by a democratically elected government. Cf. “Keszthelyi Zsolt börtönbüntetése.”

97 “Keszthelyi Zsolt börtönbüntetése.”

come from their political ideology but was due to their potential to organize. For citizens, it was less risky to attend green protests than to attend events directly organized by the opposition. Protest against the building of the dam at Nagymaros was based on public civilian action, advocacy by the Danube Circle and the petition campaign for a referendum.⁹⁸ These helped do away with the society's fear of the system step by step.

Hirmondó's articles on environmental issues can be divided into two groups. There were the articles that stood up against political, economic, and technological concentration of power; and there were the ones that called attention to the dangers of a hypothetical "green dictatorship." Environmentalism became an important element for the identity of the journal when a column devoted to the subject was started. Again, two stances appeared within the opposition. One group defined themselves as environmentalists; the others, while they also emphasized their commitment to the issues of the environment, were critical toward the "apolitical" environmental movement.

The former saw their advocacy of environmental issues as a part of their opposition to the political, economic, and technological concentration of power. "Atomic energy is dangerous and its use results in a totalitarian, centralized police state. [. . .] The deep motivation behind the protests against the use of atomic energy is rooted in the disillusionment of technological and economic development [. . .] Thus, the decentralization of the use of technology has a great political impact, which may be a cure against the worldwide tendency of economic and political power concentration."⁹⁹ This environmental discourse was characterized by strong value judgments. At one point it was directed against Austria which decided to invest in building the dam at Nagymaros. On the other hand, it was precisely the moral implacability of the environmentalists the other opposition group criticized. "The greens present their professional reasons with moral pathos, protecting and demanding fundamental right to healthy life. The ideology of the green movement reviews the practices concerning production and consumption, which raises our concern. [. . .] We find it important to make it clear that an

⁹⁸ Haraszti, "Duna-dosszié."

⁹⁹ Endreffy, "Atomenergia, demokrácia, decentralizáció."

alternative terror over necessities, a hypothetical green dictatorship, is also a negative utopia.”¹⁰⁰

The *Demokrata* dissidents eagerly identified the environmental problems but criticized the environmental movement. The democratic opposition agreed with green goals but took exception to their means that they regarded as amateurism.¹⁰¹

Environmental issues were supported by some authors on principle, interpreting them in and of themselves as ecological problems. Others, however, believed these issues to be of practical importance to undermine dictatorship and expand the realm of free speech.

3.5 CULTURAL CRITICISM

In its first issue itself, *Beszélő* reported about the *Bibó Festschrift*, which was the first joint and comprehensive intellectual effort in Hungary ever since the existence of the Petöfi Circle in 1956.¹⁰² In the memorial book dozens of authors praised and analyzed the views of the social philosopher, István Bibó, who had been imprisoned and then were neglected by the Kádár regime.

Beszélő also discussed the movements of university students described as “hesitant rebels,” which was inspired by the self-limiting revolution of Solidarity and protest against censorship, early on.¹⁰³ Later the journal devoted a long article to book censorship practices, stressing the point that, despite the official propaganda, censorship did exist in Hungary.¹⁰⁴ Another article analyzed in detail the judicial proceeding against a punk band in Szeged that displayed a critical attitude to the regime.¹⁰⁵ In general, however, the opposition was not interested in the underground cultural scene and only mentioned it occasionally. Punk bands were mentioned sporadically and only when they were subject of judicial proceedings.

The Writers’ Association, which sharply criticized the cultural policies of the regime and the practice of informal censorship at their pentannual meetings, occupied a special place in the Kádár regime. As I already mentioned,

¹⁰⁰ Demszky, “Csernobil.”

¹⁰¹ *Demokrata*, “Egy elmaradt tüntetés után.”

¹⁰² Szabó, “Bibó Emlékkönyv.”

¹⁰³ Szilágyi, “Tétova zendülők.”

¹⁰⁴ Kőszeg, “A könyvkiadói cenzúra Magyarországon.”

¹⁰⁵ Haraszti, “A szegedi punkháború.”

at the 1981 Congress of the Writers' Association, the well-known opposition writer, István Eörsi, suggested with irony that formal censorship should be introduced, because then at least writers would know what they can and cannot write about. He reasoned that in Kádár's "soft dictatorship" the censorship rules are not clear, which leads to arbitrary editorial censorship as well as to self-censorship. He believed that instead of the internalization of censorship, it would have been better to have formal censorship, because in that case authors could more clearly see where power lies and could better preserve their integrity.

As much as it could, the democratic opposition followed the problems that the editors of literary magazines faced, including the official attempts to replace chief editors and take over certain magazines. *Beszélő* dealt with the problems concerning the monthly, *Mozgó Világ*, already in its second issue.¹⁰⁶ *Beszélő* also paid attention to the conflicts involving the József Attila Circle, a group of young writers, disseminated information about the publications of the second public sphere and the samizdat boutiques that sold opposition publications, and kept publishing documents relating to the 1956 revolution.¹⁰⁷ Understanding culture in the broader sense, including the typical norms of social coexistence as well, we need to observe that in the debates and journals of the democratic opposition the situation of women and feminism did not appear. The world of dissidents, just like the rest of the society, was characterized by male dominance. Women as a social group was first mentioned only in 1988 when the Madzsar Alice Group of Fidesz organized an all-female demonstration against the building of the dam at Nagymaros. Feminism was understood at the time as a synonym of being hostile to men, and several participants the opposition circles also shared this interpretation.

Cultural issues were rather forced in the background by social issues in the samizdat journals. On the other hand, the authors of *Égtájak között* regularly discussed their relationship to the arts, viewing themselves as friends of the arts. They did this in a context where publishing in the legal and illegal public spheres and the underground publication of artistic and literary mate-

¹⁰⁶ Szilágyi, "Zabolátlan szerkesztők."

¹⁰⁷ It brought news about the appearance and content of *Magyar Füzetek*, *Magyar Figyelő*, and *Szféra*—all published in Paris, about the Monday free university of the opposition and the cultural programs of SZETA.

rials had no practice. They published the works of such artists that were marginalized or silenced by the official canonizers. These two sentences give testimony to their attitude: "We could fend off the responsibility. But we were all accomplices, after all."¹⁰⁸

4. THE HISTORICAL MEMORY OF THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION

In the following, I examine the vision of history appearing in the writings of the democratic opposition in their samizdat publications of the 1980s.¹⁰⁹ Which were the most important elements of the historical memory of the opposition, and how did it differ from the interpretation propagated by the Kádár regime? I believe the answer to this question sheds some light on the politics of the democratic opposition during the regime change, and even on the sociology-inclined political discourse that appeared in the late Kádár era and became dominant in the 1990s.¹¹⁰

Obviously, the democratic opposition that originated from the dissidents had a different vision about the 20th century than the communist party. The identity of the democratic opposition was rooted in ideas that were in opposition with the official ideology: without an independent memory there would have been no opposition. It was characterized by a truth-seeking attitude that differed from the party state's propaganda regarding key moments of Hungarian history. Samizdat publications in Hungary mostly dealt with current affairs rather than historical ones, yet these journals were linked to the desire for the existence of an alternative, independent memory. This independent memory was not the consequence but the cause of the establishment and the functioning of the opposition.

I reconstruct this memory with special focus on those points of the opposition discourse that reflected on the most emphatic elements of the historical vision of the communist party. At this point, I do not aim at placing the opposition discourse in the context of the various groups of the intellectual public sphere of the 1980s. It is true that some scholars published regime critical writings in their academic community even before the samizdats, more-

¹⁰⁸ *Égtájak Között* editors, *Égtájak között*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ I primarily focus on publications in *Beszélő*, but I contrast them to the articles of *Demokrata* and *Hírmondó*.

¹¹⁰ Szűcs, *Az antalli pillanat*.

over, so these publications could build on each other in hidden ways.¹¹¹ Here my goal is only to outline the historical vision of the opposition vis-à-vis the prevailing communist power.

Beszélő mostly dealt with current affairs, and it focused on the changes that concerned Central and Eastern Europe. The topics the journal covered can be classified into four broad categories: (1) The examination of and debate over current political and economic issues; (2) The characteristics and role of the Hungarian democratic opposition; (3) Raising and examining issues that the regime treated as taboos; (4) Reviews and descriptions of books that were published either illegally or abroad and talked of political or moral questions; and lastly (5) The introduction of legal and illegal democratic organizations, their documents and activities.

In the examination of all these issues aimed at serving present needs, the focus was on issues that were relevant and problematic in the 1980s, including the crisis of the economy and possible solutions to it; censorship and the opposition press; the situation of Hungarian minorities abroad; the relationship of the churches and those in power, coercions and persecutions; the military power seizure in Poland in 1981 and the illegalization of Solidarity. History was not among the focal issues of these journals. The only exception was the revolution of 1956 in Hungary. Not only did the opposition take it upon itself to articulate its own interpretation of the revolution on the pages of *Beszélő*, but also aimed at introducing its events through the eyes of the participants in the form of interviews, memoirs, and documents. This way they made 1956 an event open to research, which would not have been possible without the publication of information that was not open for research. However, the contributions about the revolution did not look upon this event as history, because they thought that it was an unresolved, thus living problem of the society. They believed that the silence surrounding the memory of 1956 and the retaliations after the revolution were the fundamental lies of the Kádár regime. Therefore, if the opposition could tell the truth about the revolution, then they could substantially contribute to the deconstruction of the regime.

¹¹¹ Institutes of history, sociology, economics, and philosophy were among the regime-critical think tanks in the second half of the Kádár era.

The description of the past and present of Hungarian minorities, the situation of the churches, the political and economic periodization of the years following 1956 and the descriptions of the characteristics of these periods were frequently discussed in *Beszélő*. Furthermore, it openly talked about issues that the Socialist regime treated as taboos: the 1947 coming to power of the Communists and the fate of the other parties, the situation of the Jews, and Hungarian emigration after 1945.

Besides questions directly concerning Hungarians, the contributors of *Beszélő* reflected on the social, political, and economic processes of the neighboring countries, particularly Romania and Czechoslovakia. The Polish changes preceding the 1956 revolution by a few months, the Prague Spring of 1968, and the military coup in Poland in 1981 also played an important role in the analyses.

4.1 REVOLUTION, RETRIBUTION, AND CAPITULATION

The dissident intellectuals who contributed to samizdat publications demanded democratic freedoms, which was without a doubt going against the mainstream. What must be seen is that most intellectuals of the Kádár era broke with the independent, critical, and democratic tradition of intellectuals. The opposition referred to the “Bibó forgetting” phenomenon,¹¹² which also mean that the opposition discarded the 1956 demands for democracy and independence.

In the beginning, the opposition gave up its illusions upon the shock of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, although this was true mainly to the younger generations. As years passed by, the revolution of 1956 became an increasingly important starting point in the historical memory of the opposition. Fifty-sixers played a large role in this, constantly reminding the younger generation that 1956 should have already crushed their illusions about the system.¹¹³ Miklós Haraszti expressed it in the following way: “Since ideals do not, but only tanks matter, everyone seeks his or her own recipe for getting on in life. Mine could only be a private recipe: we treat spinelessness with

¹¹² Csurka, “Bibó-felejtés.”

¹¹³ Fifty-sixers included István Eörsi, György Krassó, György Litván, Miklós Szabó, Miklós Vásárhelyi, and others.

reading forbidden literature.”¹¹⁴ While the Communist regime referred to 1956 as a counterrevolution incited by imperialists against “people’s democracy,” the opposition talked about a revolution that was the result of social unity and that demanded democratic changes and political rights.

What was the 1956 revolution in reality? Was it a revolution, national uprising, counterrevolution, war of independence, a crushed rebellion? The demand for pluralist democracy? Or did it demand independent, self-governed, democratic socialism instead of state socialism? The opposition offered several alternative interpretations. One of these claimed that the revolution in 1956 in Hungary was the first loud outcry of the people of Eastern Europe. It was a radical expression of demands that, as Sándor Szilágyi wrote, has not been heard in any other countries of the region ever since. “It was the 1956 revolution that expressed the squelched will of the peoples of Eastern Europe, living under Soviet occupation and in Communist regimes for 1. national independence, 2. multi-party system, 3. representation of the workers’ interest (through workers’ councils), and 4. freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, and press.”¹¹⁵

According to another interpretation, 1956 was a spontaneous cooperation of the workers. Thus, it was not possible to talk about 1956 as the overthrowing of the power of the people. One of the workers’ leaders of 1956, Sándor Rácz expressed this the following way:

What I believe is the greatest shame is that the regime did not aim at increasing and deepening the self-awareness of the workers after 1948, but ruined workers’ unity, on which the power of the workers should have been developed, by the institution of the informers’ system. In 1956, the deceived workers clearly realized this and supported and defended the revolution as long as they could. They did so, because they understood that it was possible to build a society that was free of exploitation in Hungary. I consider as my obligation to fulfill their commitments the most important political-historical deed in the history of the Hungarian workers’ movement.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Haraszti, “Emlék és panasz 1956-ból,” 709.

¹¹⁵ Szilágyi, “Legyünk az emberi jogok őskeresztényei!” 696.

¹¹⁶ Rácz, “A Munkástanács, mint egy pecsét hitelesítette a forradalmat,” 353.

The third possible interpretation of the revolution is also closely linked to the role the intelligentsia played after 1956. *Beszélő* did not only claim that intellectuals played a decisive role in the revolution but also that this role influenced their post-revolution behavior. In his ironic introduction, János Kis, a leading figure of the democratic opposition, wrote:

It is said that nothing is happening in Hungary. The people are happy that it is left alone and do not have to deal with politics, can build their houses in their free time, raise the poultry, and bungle. The intellectuals shut themselves off into the ivory tower of culture, and leave politics to politicians. The churches collaborate with the state. Old-fashioned reactionaries and civil democrats died out and the revisionists of the Communist movement could never rebound again after their defeat in 1956.¹¹⁷

Among other things, *Beszélő* wanted to disprove this. They wanted to prove that dissidents are present in national politics again. They follow and criticize the steps taken by those in power, and continue in the democratic tradition that appeared to be lost. This led to surprising victories: by the early 1980s not even the country's leadership denied the existence of the democratic opposition. János Kádár, the general secretary of MSZMP, speaking at a meeting of party activists in 1985 described the situation in the following way:

As for intellectuals, most of them have a positive attitude and support our socialist goals. A small minority, perhaps following fashionable trends, has a tendency for effusiveness and only see the negative side of everything.¹¹⁸

For a long while after 1956, politics was characterized by the absence of opposition, and the silence of intellectuals. That is why it was a novelty that at the end of the 1970s the democratic opposition got organized. The *Beszélő* circle sensed that after 1956 the relationship of the leadership and the opposition changed fundamentally. The communist leadership redefined its politics: It left space for various "progressive ideas," and wanted to pre-

¹¹⁷ Kis, "Lapunk elé," 11.

¹¹⁸ Kádár, *A békéért, népünk boldogulásáért*, 5.

serve the monopoly of Marxism by persuasion and not by coercion. This was Kádár's "Hungarian way." The economic boom that followed the repression after 1956 made a certain kind of compromise between the regime and the intelligentsia possible. In exchange for the unquestionability of its political monopoly, the party made allowances to culture, consumption, social habits in everyday life. The leaders of the regime saw this as their own success.

The Kádárist compromise, or better to say, social capitulation, was the fundamental point of reference for the democratic opposition. This capitulation was often presented as a deal which was made after the 1956 revolution, a symbolic agreement between Hungarian society and the leading political elite. It was interpreted differently in various samizdat publications, yet the authors agreed that the revolution must not be forgotten. For if society forgets 1956, that will be the greatest victory of the regime over the contemporary and future opposition forces. To prevent the revolution falling to oblivion, the editors of *Beszélő* made it a policy to mention 1956 in each issue. At the 1985 Monor meeting of dissidents, István Csurka described the situation that was the consequence of the "deal" in the following terms:

Hungarian society today is the result of a bad, one-sided, opportunistic, yet also efficient and useful compromise. This forced compromise was made after the crushed revolution and war of independence. We were forced into it but the deal was not entirely useless or ineffective. The nation also gained with it. The country gained the "happiest barrack" image as a result of the compromise. For sure, life in the 1960s and 1970s became more human and bearable. [. . .] The happy barrack life went on above a huge barrel covered by a thick lid to hide its rotting contents. After November 4, 1956, blood, heroic death, workers' council, the beauties of the revolution, the ecstasy of one week's freedom, and self-consciousness were thrown into the barrel. Later the thousands who were hanged, and the beatings and humiliation of the imprisoned were also thrown into the barrel only to be covered by the lid of forgetting. The main condition of the deal was to forget and be silent. "Who is not against us is with us," said János Kádár. But it was only possible not to be against them if one was able to forget.¹¹⁹

119 Csurka, "Új magyar önépítés," 28.

According to the narrative of the democratic opposition, the decade after the revolution passed by the silence of the Hungarian intelligentsia. This was the consequence of the crushing of the revolution and the imprisonment of the activist intellectuals. Those who had resisted emigrated, became mute, or served those in power to secure a livelihood. In the 1980s, the old communist and revolutionary intelligentsia no longer existed. The leaders of the opposition, moved closer to the strategic aim of liberal democracy step by step through the chosen policy of radical reforms.¹²⁰ They all agreed that most people were disillusioned by the regime, but some served the power elite while others tried to find a way out of the general economic and political crisis. As Konrád put it, the vacuum of “block nationalism” sucked in most of the official and opposition intellectuals alike in both the East and the West.¹²¹

Thus, the opposition’s view of the compromise of the 1960s was fundamentally different from the official interpretation. As the poet György Petri said—and most of the opposition agreed with him—it was not possible to speak, in the given circumstances, about a compromise:

Since the social compromise no longer exists, it is time to call attention to the fact that it never existed. What we called a compromise—and many people called it so—was indeed just common resignation. A compromise necessitates partners of comparable standing. The post-retribution society in the 1960s was only able to acknowledge things rather than to agree to them.¹²²

Petri thought that opposition intellectuals took part in public life in the 1960s not because they were persuaded that Kádárism was right, but because they were willing to silence their own conscience for certain concessions.

Another writer, István Eörsi believed that the compromise did exist, but it was based on the fear of the events of the period before 1956 rather than on the success of Kádárist politics.

Those whose fate was to be silenced or persecuted during the Rákosi era did not fare any better. Fear was written in their bones and now

120 Faragó, *Nyugati liberális szemmel*.

121 Konrád, “A tömbrendszer halálos dramaturgiája,” 225.

122 Petri, “Az unalmas válság,” 112.

they serve in silence and with resignation those whom they despise. "It can only get worse", they say with a whisk when they meet the desire for change. The mute compromise that the Kádárist state made with its citizens is based on the memory of Rákosi, Soviet intervention, and the galloWS.¹²³

Both opposition writers, Eörsi and Petri, agreed that intellectuals subsided into silence in the 1960s. They disagreed on whether this was the outcome of the regime's concessions, or it was based on the fear of the Rákosi regime. Interestingly, while the official propaganda and the democratic opposition agreed that the 1960s was characterized by the lack of open opposition, the communist leadership differed on this point privately. János Kádár's speech at the MSZMP Politburo in 1982 testifies to this:

[. . .] many in this room referred to the fact that opposition has constantly existed since 1956. That is true. And the problem with it was that we tried to fight it in our own way. I am not sure how the hell to say this, but in the political active part of society the opposition was in majority around December 1956. I think I can say it this way. And how did it become a minority? Think of what methods we used and how we use them at the time. That leaves us with some experience for today. [. . .] But if you remember, we persecuted the big fish: those who murdered an individual or masses of people. We did not care what people said on trams or anywhere else.¹²⁴

According to Kádár, the opposition was not mute after 1956. The leadership did not use total retaliation against some of them. No wonder that the democratic opposition found such an understanding of the post-revolutionary consolidation entirely false. Using documents available at the time, historian János Rainer M. published an article in *Beszélő*, in which he counted the number of people who fell victim to the retribution and see who these people were. His findings contradict the concept of limited retribution. In reality retribution was rather broad, it targeted certain large social groups: young

123 Eörsi, "A Szovjet Emberről," 207.

124 MSZMP Politbureau, "A PB március 30-i ülése," 45.

and middle-aged workers, and the intellectuals who supported them. Rainer's estimates showed that 350–400 people were executed in Hungary between December 1956 and the end of 1961; about 90 percent, for their participation in the revolution. He added, "Sixteen thousand people were imprisoned, several hundred executed, and tens of thousands were sanctioned in other ways after the government promised impunity for participants."¹²⁵ The interpretation of retaliations was closely linked to the criminal trials of the post-revolutionary period. The opposition questioned the regime's claim about "fair retributions" where only the "traitors" of the people were called to account. Post-revolutionary retribution did not initiate show trials, a known practice of the Rákosi era, but the free interpretation and constructive classification of facts continued. The process of retributions "was most likely started by the political leaders because they had no other means to break social opposition. The desire for revenge of the pre-revolutionary old party apparatus that came to power again made this process especially brutal."¹²⁶

The opposition also called into question the claim of the representatives of power that even those who committed major crimes were given the opportunity for a fair trial and to defend themselves and that the people were adequately informed after trials. This was simply untrue. For example, the people did not get fair information about the execution of the former Prime Minister, Imre Nagy, after the events. The leaders of MSZMP said nothing about when and where Imre Nagy was arrested, when and where interrogations took place, who the prosecutor and the members of the court were. "They did not list the names of the witnesses. The picture they gave of the proceeding, the evidence, and the defense strategy of the defendants was confusing and incomprehensible. Twenty-five years passed since then, yet the outlets of power have added nothing to the fragment and false information published in 1958."¹²⁷

According to one of the most important self-justificatory narratives of the Kádár regime, the regime broke with the political practice of Stalinism. The editors of samizdat publications saw it differently. They thought that there was a perceivable continuity between the Stalinist dictatorship of Rákosi and the Kádár regime. They found the proof in the fact that the political prison-

¹²⁵ Rainer, "Adatok," 656.

¹²⁶ Rainer, "Adatok," 661.

¹²⁷ *Beszélő* editors, "Ami elvárható," 445.

ers of the Rákosi era were not rehabilitated as late as the 1960s: "The present political leadership has claimed since 1956, that it broke with the sins of the past. However, it did not compensate the victims of those sins (apart from a few rehabilitations) or the cruelly punished opponents of that regime in any way. What is more, the present regime only continued punishing them."¹²⁸ The other manifestation of political continuity was the eagerness with which the Kádár regime used the skills and the desire of the police and judicial cadres for revenge in order to solidify its own power. What set the democratic opposition apart from the official policy makers was that they disclosed this continuity and turned against it. This characterized the dissidents as well. As an opposition historian pointed out, the authors of *Bibó Festschrift* represented diverging points of view. "What is the uniting point then? It is that they do not accept the continuity with Stalinism and that they are committed to a future that should not incorporate this historical phenomenon."¹²⁹

The opposition realized that while there were continuities with the Rákosi era, the attitude of society has changed: it became more fatigued, more resigned, and more opportunistic. It was deprived of its history; things were decided without them and above their heads. István Csurka wrote, "Since November 4, 1956, Hungarians do not live their own history. This did not happen after defeats in previous wars. It happened in the soul of the people."¹³⁰ The hope that prevailed after 1945 was lost for good after 1956. The possibility of liberty disappeared because none of the superpowers were interested in changing the geographic status quo of the Cold War. In 1956, the United States did not risk a third World War to liberate Hungary. Consequently, Soviet power were cemented in Central Europe for decades. As the dissidents often recalled, people in the region lost their right to shape their own history.

This greatly differed from the famous metaphor of Gyula Illyés, the concept of a "historical lee." The writer who interpreted the balancing politics of the 17th century Prince of Transylvania, Gábor Bethlen, as a positive example, used that metaphor to express that the nation no longer required martyrs for its survival but rather the everyday work and intelligent acts of the people. For life is more important than liberty. A scholar interpreted the

¹²⁸ Kőszeg, "Huszonöt év után," 420.

¹²⁹ Szabó, "Bibó Emlékkönyv," 48.

¹³⁰ Csurka, "Új magyar önépítés," 29.

standpoint of Illyés as follows: “We betrayed the heroes, not as part of the nation’s original sin but as a consequence of foreign oppression. To fight this, the 1960s require not the kind of Titusz Dugovics [a mythical Hungarian soldier who made a heroic act of self-sacrifice—A. B.] but the construction workers of the country.”¹³¹

In connection with 1956, *Beszélő* mentioned a lot of personalities who were forgotten or disapproved by the regime and people in the younger generation could not hear about.¹³² To understand the role fifty-sixers played, interviews were made with the survivors. In case of those who had died or were executed, personal recollections of others, speeches, and court reports were used to remember them. István Bibó was discussed extensively, who was called the only remaining representative of the dissident tradition in Hungary. “In the 1970s there was a Bibó renaissance: his writings were duplicated, published as samizdat literature and served as starting point for debate. The duplicates reached even those whom other critical thoughts rarely penetrated.”¹³³ The rediscovery of Bibó was inspired, beyond that he was an outstanding democratic thinker, by the fact that he was the only person among the above-mentioned who had no communist past. “István Bibó was not required by the Hungarian consolidation because in his most important essays he pointed out the ambiguous nature of the [Austro-Hungarian] Compromise of 1867 with unambiguous accuracy.”¹³⁴ The Compromise of 1867 was that act of Ferenc Deák which the Kádár system always wanted to compare itself. But after the *Festschrift*, the MSZMP quickly reappraised the role of Bibó. This was followed by the posthumous publication of his writings by official state publishers.

It had the effect of a great revelation when *Beszélő* published the minutes of the three meetings of the Workers’ Council of Greater Budapest. It was founded ten days after the Soviet invasion of Hungary, on November 14, 1956, and the Worker’s Council operated until December 9 when its offices were closed, and their leaders arrested. No minutes were made during these meetings; but the possibility that the archives of the Ministry of Interior

¹³¹ Vasy, *Hol zsarnokság van*, 68.

¹³² Besides Imre Nagy one needs to mention the name of Sándor Bali, the leader of the Workers’ Council of Greater Budapest, as well as other key figures such as Géza Losonczy, Miklós Gimes, Pál Maléter, József Szilágyi, and Miklós Vársárhelyi.

¹³³ Szabó, “Bibó Emlékkönyv,” 48.

¹³⁴ Csurka, “Bibó-felejtés,” 419.

have copies of the minutes that were recorded secretly through informers cannot be refuted. The minutes published by *Beszélő* were put together from the notes jotted down by the participants of those meetings.¹³⁵ The message of all this to the late readers was that there were different possible forms of social opposition during the autumn of 1956.

4.2 ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Anniversary celebrations symbolically bring back the forbidden event to the world of normality. Acts of remembrance lose their political edge when those become routine-like anniversary celebrations. Thus, collective remembrance can be interpreted as the self-healing or self-defense of a wounded society. The repeated rites of remembrance have the potential to turn forbidden, unusual, or even abnormal events and forms of behavior normal, processable, and acceptable. However, this happens only if the power holders do not want to force their own interpretation of history on society.

The independent historical memory of the democratic opposition and its reconstruction must be distinguished from the academic interpretation of the post-communist era. These works analyzed the position of the past opposition, and its place in the politics of memory.¹³⁶ In this book, I analyze the former question but not its historiography. Early documents about anniversary celebrations show that the behavior of the state and the opposition sharply diverged. The opposition tried to canonize what the state was forbidding. Samizdat journals also diverged to some degree: reports about events that can be regarded as anniversary celebrations mostly appeared in *Demokrata*, sometimes in *Hirmondó*, and only sparsely in *Beszélő*. Those events meant to serve remembrance, or rather non-forgetting, on behalf of civil society.

Demokrata and *Hirmondó* found anniversary celebrations particularly important. In Hungary, these were commemorative occasions; in Poland, Mayday had a similar function, and workers demanded changes when they celebrated Labor Day. Remembering the commemorative events was also a frequent phenomenon in Hungary, as several opposition reports pointed it

¹³⁵ KMT, "A Munkástanács," 621–29.

¹³⁶ Renwick, "Antipolitical or Just Anticommunist?"; Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*.

out. Examples are the reports of *Hírmondó* about the 1972–1974 anniversary celebrations of the 1848 revolution on March 15, and those of *Beszélő* about the celebrations of the 1956 in private homes. These made a clear distinction between official and private red-letter days, emphasizing their opposition. The national holidays of the regime were linked to the 1917 Soviet revolution and the Soviet occupation (“liberation”) of Hungary on April 4, 1945. The opposition celebrated the beginnings of two Hungarian revolutions: the one that started on March 15, 1848, and the other, which started on October 23, 1956.

Beszélő had a special column devoted to 1956. These were mainly obituaries and various documents. As the opposition writers noted on the 25th anniversary of the revolution, there have always been people who remembered the anniversary of the revolution.

On the first anniversary, a few college students walked through the streets that protesters took the year before. As a punishment they were denied the opportunity to study forever. Commemorations had to be held in private homes. They became intimate personal affairs. They also testify about the fact that some dozen or thousand people did not forget the revolution, gathered with their friends and fellow prisoners, or lit a candle for their dead, the unknown Hungarian rebels and the Russian privates who died. The police were fearful of those October days. On the night of October 21–22, 1957, they arrested five hundred people as a precaution. Similar arrests were made for many years to come even if on a smaller scale.¹³⁷

Police action was more visible in 1981 than in the previous years.

For months, the official propaganda whispered that the Party was preparing for a more realistic evaluation of the sad events and wanted to raise the taboo concerning 1956. Then as an anticlimax there was even more intense press propaganda than before, using well-known slogans about the counterrevolution of factory-owners and landowners and the mistakes made by the Rákosi and Gerő leadership. Still, the twenty-fifth

137 Kószeg, “Egy icipicit igazítottak a világon,” 96.

anniversary was different than the ones before. It was the first time that it was commemorated by the public sphere: the second public sphere.¹³⁸

In the years of the Kádár regime, the representative body of the Hungarian Writers' Association met once in every five years. These meetings always had tense moments when the representatives of the power elite and the writers did not agree. But only in 1986 did disagreements end up in open confrontation. No confrontation happened during the 1981 general assembly despite it taking place on December 12 and 13. The second day was memorable because military government was introduced in Poland on that day. Opposition writer György Dalos commented on this in the following way:

We do not note it to blame anyone, but the assembled Hungarian writers did not feel it necessary to express their concern over the fate of their Polish colleagues. They already knew what their Polish colleagues are only to learn now. They do not raise their voice and do not sacrifice the attainable for their principles. They politely clap when György Aczél tells them that he prefers those who write literature to those who write their names on petitions.¹³⁹

The democratic opposition organized a two-day conference at a private home in Budapest on December 5–6, 1986, on the 30th anniversary of 1956. The 70 participants of the conference made the first objective attempt to recall the events of the revolution. The authors, participants of the revolution, and young intellectuals tried to view events from the distance of history and treated it as a subject of scientific research. Participants also called their personal memories and experience to their aid to supplement their analysis of the unclear issues concerning the revolution. The debate was based on studies that had been given to the participants earlier.¹⁴⁰ Later, a shortened version of the minutes of the debate was published.¹⁴¹

The year 1986 was a turning point in historical memory, for after the 30th anniversary became a topic of discussion in the broader public. The debates

¹³⁸ Kószeg, "Egy icipicit igazítottak a világon," 97.

¹³⁹ Dalos, "Írók egymás közt," 114.

¹⁴⁰ Papers were written by Ferenc Donáth, János Kis, Imre Mécs, Jenő Széll, and Miklós Vásárhelyi.

¹⁴¹ Decsy, *A forradalom előzményei, alakulása és utóélete*.

at the opposition conference in 1986 still held the possibility for both the continuation of and breaking with the past. According to the evaluation of János Kis, published in 1987, the anniversary of 1956–1957 was not yet history:

Hungarian society could not come to terms with its total defeat. Similarly, those in power could not shake off the weight of victory. The economic and political crisis that has grown deeper and deeper in the 1980s is the crisis of the regime that has been restored thirty years ago. The restoration sent the demands of the revolution—neutrality, multi-party system, and economic self-governance—into exile. [. . .] The opportunities of Hungarian society remained at the level where they were in 1947, which made it impossible to catch up with the West.¹⁴²

Anniversary celebrations right before the transition treated the revolution as part of the history of recent past. The revolution was cemented as part of the “unfinished” past in 1988–1989, when the younger generation that had no direct memory of the revolution entered the political scene. The message of the opposition was clear: the political and economic crisis may end only if society gets rid of the regime that restored after crushing the revolution of 1956. The crisis regards not isolated spheres: it is the crisis of the system. Approximately a year later, when the Committee on Historical Justice (*Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottsága*, TIB) was founded in June 1988, the new political actors went beyond mere the commemoration of events. The leaders of TIB made it clear that they found it important to objectively assess the whole post-1945 era, the particularly the revolution.¹⁴³ This meant the radical acceleration of events. This did not mean that the problem of historical justice was forced into the background. Rather the function of this issue changed. The scholarly interest to the past gave way to the utilization of 1956 for political ends. *Demokrata* paid special attention to the reports about and remembering the historical forgeries of the power elite when it published its thematic issue about the revolution in June 1988.

¹⁴² Kis, “Vég és kezdet,” 617.

¹⁴³ *Demokrata*, “1956 special edition,” 6.

What appeared to be a distant ideal for the leaders of the democratic opposition at the end of 1986 became reality. The Roundtable negotiations between the outgoing communist elite and the democratic opposition took place in 1989, a new constitution was ratified, and the democratic republic declared. In that year, many of the participants saw a direct link between 1956 and 1989, albeit this was mainly a theoretical construction. As the political sociologist Bill Lomax noted, revolutions start when ordinary people enter the public arena, and thus actively shape historical events. “However, after the revolution it is the political elite and intellectuals who harness the fruits of victory. [. . .] the history of revolutions is not written by the masses who started them, but by their intellectual advocates, or the political leadership, that is, those with whom revolutions are identified with in the end.”¹⁴⁴ They create the linguistic, conceptual, and visual framework of remembrance, and they canonize the history of events.

4.3 CENTRAL EUROPE REDISCOVERED

Underground publications of the opposition often compared the three violent turning points of the history of Soviet satellite states: The events of 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, and 1981 in Poland. At the least they discussed what results these three bottom-up processes brought. According to *Beszélő*, the process of recognition of 1956 took a long time, because Central European intellectuals originally defined it as a national uprising and only in 1981 and in the wake of events in Poland was it re-evaluated as a revolution. As one of the editors, Ferenc Kőszeg formulated:

Between the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the appearance of the democratic oppositions, the Marxist opposition figures saw 1956 as a national uprising at best. They did not think it was a social revolution and they believed that, as opposed to the Prague Spring, the Hungarian uprising did not bring a desire for “socialism with human face” any closer. The weakening of the Marxist socialist utopia, the discovery of ideas about a self-limiting revolution, and the spreading of the hope from Po-

¹⁴⁴ Lomax, “Recenzió Pongrácz Gergely könyvéről,” 3.

land were all necessary for opposition thinkers to see 1956 as a revolution. [. . .] The twenty-fifth anniversary represented this turn.¹⁴⁵

István Eörsi, who was imprisoned for years after 1956, went further and reasoned that it was only the Hungarian national uprising in 1956 that fought the Communist regime in the ideological dimension. Instead of state socialism, Hungarian revolutionaries demanded socialism with representative democracy, workers' councils, and the making of state property into public property. He thought that ideals were no longer central in the following two confrontations. Naturally, this can be questioned as the specter of democratic socialism was still alive during the Prague Spring in 1968, whereas the idea of a democratic, Christian-socialist republic appeared in Poland in 1981.¹⁴⁶ Communists in power promised material gains in Hungary in exchange for consolidation, but they could not do the same in Czechoslovakia and Poland. As Eörsi stated:

For the existing power structures, only attainable or credibly promised goods and allotments served as legitimization. This turn across Europe was brought not by 1956, but the beautiful and doomed year of 1968. It was then that it became clear that there is no Prague Spring or student movements in Paris or West Berlin that could transform the "already existing socialism" into ideal socialism or abolish the adversities of capitalism. In the West, student movements as well as workers' movements suffered a general defeat when workers abandoned their parties. It was this defeat that the Polish workers repeated on the Eastern part of the continent in different historical and organizational settings in December 1981, when their head was chopped off by Jaruzelski who loudly pronounced that "I am the lesser of two evils."¹⁴⁷

István Csurka, who could still legally publish as a writer but was getting closer to the populist opposition circles, described 1956 as a singular event. According to him, "it is the national consequences of the revolution

145 Kőszeg, "Egy icipicit igazítottak a világon," 97.

146 Cf. Garton Ash, *The Uses of Adversity*; Mitrovits, *A remény hónapjai*; Mlynar, *A Prágai Tavasz*; Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*.

147 Eörsi, "A másság ünnepén," 530.

that makes all the difference. Until today this has been the first and largest of explosions. This explosion by nature could not be self-limiting. What followed in Czechoslovakia and Poland were already self-limiting events.”¹⁴⁸ Csurka’s choice of words—“self-limiting revolution”—is interesting not only because it refers to the wording of István Bibó, and the sociologist and Solidarity activist Jadwiga Staniszkis,¹⁴⁹ but also because a few years later the Hungarian transition was described in the same terms, which then referred to the rules of the Roundtable talks and the equality of the participants.¹⁵⁰

János Kis also called attention to the differences of political consolidations after the three crises in Central Europe. He recognized that, in Poland, the powerholders used different methods than others had during earlier restoration. “In Hungary after November 1956 and in Czechoslovakia after August 1968, the Soviet-type political regimes were restored in their entirety. [. . .] As its revolution, the counterrevolution in Poland also differs from earlier examples. [. . .] Three years after December 1981, this process is far from being completed and it is unlikely that it will ever be.”¹⁵¹ The Polish restoration was an unfinished process because the Polish leadership had no more power to carry out completely. Contributors of *Beszélő* opined that the Hungarian communist system had only the coercive capacity to carry out restoration, while it lacked legitimacy; in contrast, the Polish leadership had neither enough capacity, nor legitimacy. This remained so up until the very end of the 1980s.

As for the national issue the dissidents agreed that many political problems were rooted in the fact that the borders of the nation and the state were different, albeit they never wished to establish homogeneous nation-states. Beyond that, the opposition was divided over two contradictory interpretations of the situation. This disagreement was the consequence of the different social traditions that resurfaced as the populist and urban views.¹⁵² In later samizdat issues, the deepening crisis and the maturing of the democratic opposition resulted in a more clearly defined division between the populist and urban groups. According to historian Miklós Szabó, “the main

¹⁴⁸ Csurka, “Az első áldozat nevében,” 29.

¹⁴⁹ Staniszkis, *Poland’s Self-Limiting Revolution*.

¹⁵⁰ Bozóki et al. (1999–2000).

¹⁵¹ Kis, “Lengyel fejlemények – magyar tanulságokkal,” 13.

¹⁵² Bozóki, “The Illusion of Inclusion.”

goal of the populist side was to achieve the appearance of ‘popular democratic nationalism’ as the official policy. [. . .] Contrary to this, the urban position held that if its representatives joined the official anti-nationalism [. . .] they could perhaps carefully hide a few thoughts in their articles about the ideals of the smitten revolution. The populist side did not see this possible.”¹⁵³

On the pages of *Beszélő*, the representatives of the urban, liberal view most often voiced their concern over the lack of legal rights for Hungarians outside Hungary. As opposed to this, the followers of the populist position painted a dramatic picture of “national extinction.” While the former believed that national question was primarily a political issue, the latter built their reasoning on the idea of a cultural nation. Miklós Duray, member of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, wrote about this in the following terms: “When it comes to the question of national minorities, we Hungarians are most interested in the fate of the Hungarians who found themselves outside the borders when historical Hungary was cut to pieces. It plays a decisive role in the relationship of the Hungarian and neighboring nations, that is, the politics of Central Europe.”¹⁵⁴

Csurka, on the other hand, argued that “there are some who gloat over this process [i.e., the decline of the Hungarian nation—A. B.], whose actions only serve this deadly process. However, to be able to continue with the process of ethnic annihilation, they hide their gloating and blame nationalism on those who dare to raise their voice about national annihilation.”¹⁵⁵

All contributors agreed that the nation was struggling with problems that was the consequence of the new borders instituted by the Trianon peace treaty. They thought that Hungarians outside our borders lived deprived of their legal rights. Populists argued that the cause behind legal deprivation was the cultural and moral decline of Hungarians in Hungary, which prevented them from successfully lobbying for Hungarian minorities. The followers of the Westernizing tradition attributed legal deprivation to the repressive nature of political regimes. State socialism did not ensure freedom of speech, which could have been the fundamental means of representing and furthering the cultural and legal interest of minorities. At the same time, they pointed out that dictatorships in the region that lacked legiti-

153 Szabó, “A magyar neobarokk új korszaka,” 503.

154 Duray, “A magyar kisebbségek és az egyetemes magyarság közötti kapcsolatok problémái,” 370.

155 Csurka, “Az első áldozat nevében,” 23.

macy attempted to create it by using nationalist propaganda and victimizing Hungarians. The Kádárist leadership was also held responsible for the situation because it did not advance the interests of Hungarian minorities. Thus, while the populist view saw the Hungarian issue as cultural, for the liberals it was a primarily political and legal problem.

The problems concerning Hungarian minorities were framed within the issue of Central Europe as well. Many asked the question whether Central Europe existed but *Beszélő*'s answer was an unequivocal yes. Not on the level of the states but on the level of the society and personal relations, and as a historical formation. For the opposition, Central Europe was, first and foremost, a cultural bloc. As an opposition critic, Sándor Radnóti wrote,

In the Eastern bloc Central Europe stands for the desire to belong to the West and for anti-Soviet feeling. The division of Europe—if we disregard the bleeding wound of Berlin—is best signified by the differences between Vienna and Budapest or between Vienna and Prague. We cannot pretend that this difference does not exist; it would be self-deception on our part, and from the West, it would be offending tact. If any virtual unity—Central Europe is one—serves the purpose of covering these differences in the name of a beautiful dream, then understanding will remain negligent and illusionary.¹⁵⁶

However, Central Europe came to be artificially sustained as a political-military unity. It was an area ruled by Socialist regimes and the Warsaw Pact. According to Konrád, “our life and thinking were depressively defined by the East-West schizophrenia. The ruling social-political reality of today is no longer that of the nation state but of bloc states. It is not social reality that determines political reality but on the reverse.”¹⁵⁷ Members of the democratic opposition agreed in that Central Europe was not created in Yalta. It had existed before that, and it is defined by common historical experience. However, socialism isolated it by forcing Socialism on it and inserted it into the bipolar world order as counterweight to “the West.” This definition was finally accepted by the people of Central Europe because it

¹⁵⁶ Radnóti, “Grand Café Mitteleuropa,” 343–54.

¹⁵⁷ Konrád, “A tömbrendszer halálos dramaturgiája,” 223.

corresponded to their experience. However, instead of the official propaganda about an ideal social order, they saw the region as being defined by the lack of freedom. The fact that Europe was torn into two pieces and its Eastern part isolated were accepted relatively easily by Western Europe. East to the Iron Curtain, Europe ended. The authors of the samizdat journals believed that the division was not only the fault of socialist regimes but also of Western European states that renounced the people living in the other part of the continent.

4.4 *THE TABOOS FALL: THE SITUATION OF MINORITIES*

The Rákosi regime decided to make the issue of minorities a taboo. Earlier, Hungarians living outside the borders were an unavoidable issue for every Hungarian government after 1918. The Stalinist regime could ignore this subject for two reasons. First, communism was an international ideology that did not think in terms of nations but social classes. This suggested that the common goals of the international proletariat were more important than the Hungarian national interest. The second reason was linked to the anti-fascism advocated by the regime. Since communists contrasted themselves with fascism, the revisionist goals of the Horthy era, which was defined in unequivocally fascist terms, fell outside the possible courses of action in foreign affairs. Every policy that fought for the rights of Hungarian minorities or listed their grievances carried the danger of appearing similar to the inter-war foreign policy that led to the tragedy of Hungary in World War II. Thus, up until the end of the 1950s, one cannot speak of independent Hungarian foreign policy.

This only changed somewhat in the 1960s, when the communist leadership rediscovered the minority question. Based on the so-called ideology of “dual attachment,” they argued that national minorities have cultural ties with their mother nation, but as citizens of another state they are required to keep themselves to the legal order of that state. The principle of non-intervention prevented the regime from making public attempts in order to improve the situation of ethnic minorities abroad, but behind closed doors negotiations were going on with the Czechoslovak and Romanian leadership concerning culture and education. Nonetheless, in order to preserve the unity of the bloc, Hungarian leaders never made public statements about the

situation of Hungarian minorities or the discriminatory measures brought against them.

The members of the democratic opposition found this approach unacceptable. As early as the first two issues of *Beszélő*, a report about the history of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia after 1945 was published. According to it, Hungarians in Czechoslovakia were entirely deprived of their rights in 1945–1948, and the Stalinist takeover did not bring any improvement in 1948 either. Deportation, forced relocation, and the confiscation of property characterized the late 1940s. The period after 1965 was characterized by the strengthening of nationalism at the expense of minorities.¹⁵⁸ The advocates of the interests of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia¹⁵⁹ often expressed their views in *Beszélő*, which also published their autobiographic novels and an interview with Miklós Duray. In connection with this, István Eörsi bitterly noted that

only from these books did I learn about the fact that after 1945, the Czechoslovak state and its constitution was built on racist foundations. It declared its intention to create a Slavic state and built it on the deprived rights of non-Slavic inhabitants. I am appalled to learn that Hungarian peasants had not been allowed to take part in the land reform and 97 percent of Hungarians had no voting rights, social security insurance or pension. I was even more surprised at reading that the Communist leaders were openly and proudly racist.¹⁶⁰

Besides the case of Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian minority in Romania received the greatest publicity in the opposition press. An analysis of the situation of Hungarian intellectuals in Romania proved that, since 1966, the role of minority intellectuals in social and cultural life decreased both in comparison to the ratio of Hungarians within Romania and to the number of minority intellectuals in Romania. “The number of people who belonged to the minorities and had a university or college degree decreased further and this process has hit the Hungarian minority especially hard.”¹⁶¹ Gáspár

158 Fényi, “A csehszlovákiai magyar kisebbség történetének kronológiája,” 35–40.

159 Miklós Duray and Kálmán Janics.

160 Eörsi, “Egy újságcikk és a realitások,” 563.

161 Nagy, “A romániai magyar értelmiség jelenéről – jövőjéért,” 599.

Miklós Tamás accused the Kádár regime with that the guided and censored Hungarian public sphere was silent especially with respect to Romania. “They describe the famine there with cautious irony, they wink meaninglessly in the distance as they discuss Hungarian literature in Romania, but both poverty and the oppression of Hungarians go unmentioned. [...] The most important things—solidarity, compassion, and indignation—are not voiced at all.”¹⁶²

According to the poet Sándor Csoóri, a leader of the populist intellectuals, Trianon was the cause of the minority neurosis and the divided conscience of and the conflict between the peoples of Central Europe. Yet Csoóri saw the post-1956 changes in Hungary in a positive light. He thought that “finally we are believed” in international politics as consequence of both the revolution and the economic reforms that happened after the revolution. Therefore, he argued, it was time for Hungarian politicians and intellectuals to stand up for the rights of Hungarians outside Hungary.¹⁶³

Somewhat related to the minority issue, but in a domestic terrain, *Beszélő* also discussed another taboo of the Kádár regime—the situation of the Jews in Hungary. According to Marxist ideology, capitalism is the result of harmful processes whether they are cultural, religious, or patriotic. Thus, Marx believed that the victory of socialism would end anti-Semitism and the Jewish problem as well. From this respect, Marxism did not break with the assimilationist paradigm of the nationalist movements of the 19th century, which optimistically claimed that the Jewish population would melt into the greater society after their equal rights are granted. Despite this theoretical position, neither the Jews nor anti-Semitism disappeared, which created some tension between the theoretical principles and their realization in practice. The Kádár regime “resolved” this tension by denying the existence of the problem. It claimed that the “counterrevolution” of 1956 allowed for numerous expressions of anti-Semitism, but the consolidation that followed did away with these anti-Jewish tendencies. Although the state accepted the existence of the Israelite church and under strict limits allowed its operation, it did not acknowledge the possibility of the existence of a religious

162 Tamás, “Éhség és terror Romániában,” 147.

163 Csoóri, “Eltemetetlen gondok a Duna-tájon,” 48–58.

Jewish identity and unequivocally denied the presence of anti-Semitism in Hungary.

This taboo was refuted by *Beszélő*. On the one hand, they called attention to the Jewish participants of the revolution who got more severe punishment because their origin or identity.

It was the origin of Gábor Földes, the talented communist director of the theater in Győr, that caused his downfall. Even though famous colleagues spoke up for him and everyone knew that Földes did not encourage anyone to make public tribunals but tried to save the life of ÁVH agents who fired at crowds and many of whom were later lynched. The Presidential Council decided that it would not look good if of all those on death row it would be a Jew who was pardoned in Győr.¹⁶⁴

When the peace movement, SALOM, wrote an open letter to the national representatives of the Hungarian Israelites and demanded the redefinition of the relationship between Jews and Hungarians in 1984, *Beszélő* did not only publish the letter but also several reactions to it. The critical analysis that János Kis wrote about the letter claimed that

since the turn of the 1960s and 1970s [. . .] the number among Jewish youth who want to openly accept their Judaism, feel togetherness with the Jewish Diaspora of the world and Israel, and have the special Jewish traditions has increased. SALOM voices the claim of these young people when it breaks with the hundred years old principle of assimilation. Although we acknowledge the right of the individual to assimilation, we believe that the Jews of Hungary should not assimilate but integrate into the society of their homeland. That is, instead of doing away with all the differences between Jews and non-Jews, the aim is that Jews preserve their tradition, become a minority and find their place in Hungarian society that way.¹⁶⁵

According to Kis, this did not mean assimilation, at least not in the way that official propaganda claimed. This was different, because “Jews almost

¹⁶⁴ Kőszeg, “Huszonöt év után,” 422.

¹⁶⁵ Kis, “A Salom nyílt levele,” 58.

entirely live and behave like any Hungarians, its environment still singles them out. It is a vain attempt to try to assimilate. It only leads to a compulsion to prove minority complexes, and humiliating exposures.”¹⁶⁶ The members of the democratic opposition did not deny their urban roots, but they did not want to become the followers of the urban traditions of the 1930s. For they did not accept the application of the urban-populist divide, that was often used with anti-Semitic undertones, for the situation of the 1980s. The communist party from the position of power denied this dichotomy for itself, but it used it to manipulate the opposition into dividedness. Accepting this dichotomy would have only led to the emergence of internal cleavages, and to the disorganization of opposition forces.

4.5 ALTERNATIVES IN ECONOMIC POLICY

In the Kádár regime the question of Soviet alliance was a taboo, as well as everything that connected to it. One could not question the country's position in the Warsaw Pact just as they could not question its membership in Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). At any rate, the issue of reforming the system of economic planning was officially recognized, which manifested primarily in the so-called “new mechanism” introduced in 1968. The next two decades saw the rise and fall of several reformer and anti-reformer factions, which also constantly fought each other within the communist party. While these debates and fights were naturally framed by the unchangeable principles of socialism, the relative flexibility of the system allowed the question of the relation between “plan” and “market” to be always on the political agenda.

Most of the Hungarian samizdat publications attentively followed the alternatives that were worked out in the area of economic policy. The history of the 1968 “new economic mechanism” was analyzed in numerous comprehensive studies already before the regime change.¹⁶⁷ The beginning of economic reforms in Hungary should be dated to 1963 when Rezső Nyers, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, created an informal economic advisory body to start the reforms. His suggestions became the basis

¹⁶⁶ Kis, “A Salom nyílt levele,” 59.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Berend, *A magyar gazdasági reform útja*; Lengyel, *Végkifejlet*; Ungvárszki, *Gazdaságpolitikai ciklusok Magyarországon*.

for the comprehensive reform package. Changes were necessary because by the mid-1960s it became clear that economic growth slowed in the Soviet bloc. This included the inadequacy of agricultural production, technological and scientific research and development, and the imbalance of payments. These phenomena were confusing because socialist propaganda claimed that CMEA countries would catch up with the level of economic and industrial development of the capitalist countries.¹⁶⁸

Economic reforms were introduced in East Germany in 1963, in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in 1965, and in Hungary in 1968 as answers to the unfavorable economic tendencies that were contrary to official expectations. Hungarian reforms started in agriculture when small-scale private farms were allowed. However, after the democratization in Prague in 1968, repressive measures were made stricter and this did not favor the survival of Hungarian reforms. Although Kádár expressed his official commitment to reforms after the Soviet intervention, he had to make a U-turn in the early 1970s. This, however, was never admitted as official policy. The leadership talked about “corrective measures” and “temporary difficulties,” but these did not correspond to the size of the real crisis. By the early 1970s, “it became clear for Kádár that the reform policy of 1968 cannot be continued and that the leadership in Moscow demanded scapegoats.”¹⁶⁹ Kádár realized the threatening nature of the situation, utilized the division in the politburo, and in the end only two reformists, Rezső Nyers and Jenő Fock had to resign, but he could stay in power.

Economic depression of the 1970s called a new reform generation into being. “As the emphasis was moved over to the secondary economy, it became clearer by the day that progress would sooner or later will clash with the biological limits of self-exploitation. It became obvious that for certain groups this was not the right direction: growing inequalities made their mark.”¹⁷⁰ That is, in the face of official propaganda, which said that the country was continuously moving forward to “mature socialism” and that difficulties were temporary, the opposition claimed that the difficulties were rooted in the nature of the system. The Kádár regime tried to maintain living standards, at least, but the sources of growth—which were cheap Soviet raw

168 MSZMP, *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt VIII. Kongresszusának Jegyzőkönyve*, 579.

169 Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza*, 197.

170 Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza*.

material and later Western credits—had dwindled by the end of the 1970s. The regime could only silence the dissatisfied population with further concessions. However, this would have ended in the abolishment of the regime.

Yet, it is remarkable that the authors of samizdat journals had not committed themselves to the capitalist system until the late 1980s. Their articles suggested sympathy toward a kind of mixed system. They did not differ from the reform economists in this respect who, out of necessity as well as conviction, had been working on various combinations of plan and market. As capitalism was advocated openly by neither the economic reformers of the party nor the opposition-leaning economists, this area showed the smallest theoretical disagreements between the representatives of the two camps.

In the last decade of the Kádár regime, there was practically no economist who would have defended the orthodox planned economy, just as the opposition did not support free market capitalism for a long time. Matters of economic history and policy showed the least disagreement between the power holders and the opposition. The representatives of the regime emphasized continuous development, whereas the opposition thinkers underlined various crashes and political waves. The agreement in basic questions often meant overlap in membership as well¹⁷¹ as it was not uncommon that the same economists participated in the party state's workshops who later visited opposition events.

4.6 THE PERCEPTIONS OF NORMALITY

One of the main building blocks of the Kádár regime was the perception of normality, in which “normal” life equaled the opportunity for an apolitical existence. Thus, normality also equaled the lack of historical reflection. The official media of the time often used the deceiving strategy of normalization, painting unusual or “heroic” deeds in irrational colors.

The official propaganda often used the illusion of normality to prove the futility of resistance after 1956. The story of Tibor Pákh's hunger strike exemplifies this well. In his case, political activism was claimed to be and treated as a form of mental illness.

¹⁷¹ Kovács, “Reform Economics.”

Tibor Pákh, the 59-year-old lawyer, was imprisoned for twelve years after 1956 because he wrote political essays. His imprisonment was not longer, because he was declared to be “mentally unfit” for good in 1971 and the rest of his sentence was abolished after he received electroshock “treatment” and was put into insulin-induced coma on a regular basis. For Tibor Pákh went on hunger strike in prison to protest for the human rights of the imprisoned. [. . .] In October 1981, he protested when his passport was illegally revoked. It was then that he was taken to the National Mental Institute. He underwent forced treatment in the hospital: he was intravenously given drugs to modify his consciousness and was fed forcefully. At this point, this could no longer be kept secret, because 57 intellectuals and many international organizations spoke up for the inhuman and dangerous “treatment.” Finally, Tibor Pákh was released from the hospital, but he did not get his passport back.¹⁷²

The authorities treated Pákh’s protests as mental illnesses, that is, paranoia based on false political ideals and schizophrenia which resulted in an eating disorder. It did not occur to authorities that his life could be saved by providing remedy for the legal offenses that were committed against him and not only by “treatments” that endangered his life and destroyed his health. What is more, legal offenses continued, so Pákh went on hunger strike again in October 1982. As one samizdat journal reported, the procedure was the usual. “He was taken to a mental institution by force, drugged, tied down, and fed forcefully. It must have occurred to those who knew the antecedents or signed the petition in 1981 that the psychiatrist might be right. Or as it was posed in *Beszélő*, ‘Is it not too extreme to risk one’s life for a passport?’ Or another related question: ‘Was it reasonable and right to collect signatures and turn to the domestic and international public on behalf of Tibor Pákh?’”¹⁷³ To answer this question, a French professor Charles Durand arrived in Budapest in 1982 and spent a few days talking to Tibor Pákh on several occasions. He concluded that one was declared mentally unfit for truthful protest.

¹⁷² Krassó, “Dr. Pákh Tibor ’elmebetegsége,” 480.

¹⁷³ Pákh, “Beszélgetés Pákh Tiborral,” 82.

We, psychiatrists, have to fight the wrongful use of psychiatry. Tibor Pákh feels that he is being persecuted in Hungary. On the basis of my experience, I must tell that this is not a delusion but the reality. For three days, we were continuously followed by persons who, I assume, belong to the police.¹⁷⁴

Those publishing in *Égtájak között* dealt most intensively with the hardship that fell upon the imprisoned. They called attention to the victims of “psycho-prisons” and forced psychiatric treatments. Besides putting pressure on the authorities, they found it important to keep in touch with the imprisoned: “It was impossible to tell when and who will be let in, or which of us could meet and make contact him. It was important to tell him that the outer world is paying attention to his case. While staying there, he was medicated without examination or diagnosis.”¹⁷⁵

Another sensitive issue for the system from the perspective of “normality” was the existence and activities of Hungarian emigrants abroad. Right after 1956, the official communist position classified the emigrants into two groups. Those who emigrated between 1945 and 1947 were described as “the fascist supporters of the Horthy regime;” and those who left in 1956–1957 were called “counterrevolutionaries.” Both groups were positioned as “extreme” vis-à-vis those (normal) Hungarians who stayed home. The attempt to identify the two groups in terms of ideology was perceptible in the beginning, too.

The opposition not only disapproved the position of the regime, but identified the controversies hidden in it. As István Orosz wrote,

Since 1945, more than one million Hungarians have left the country as a result of all those historical processes and social shocks that accompanied the violent imposition of socialism. Vast majority of them were forced into emigration because the socialist regime saw them as enemies. This attitude was accentuated by death threats, prison sentences, forbidding them to practice their profession, and by strict sentences in their absence. The official opinion about the emigrants did not change until the end of the 1960s: communist party propaganda described them as radical rightist, reactionary, fascist, and counterrevolutionary. Following *dé-*

¹⁷⁴ Pákh, “Beszélgetés Pákh Tiborral,” 83.

¹⁷⁵ Vox Humana Kör, “Rusai Lászlóról,” 36.

tente in the 1970s and the Helsinki agreement, the universal condemnation of emigrants was replaced with a less extreme view, which divided emigrants into good and bad ones. The “good” emigrants were those who were ready to cooperate with official Hungarian organizations, and the “bad” ones were those who refused to do so.¹⁷⁶

Thus, the name of the enemy changed but not how it was treated. The criterion of normality remained loyalty to the system. Samizdat publications treated works written in emigration as an integral part of Hungarian culture. However, almost without exception, these works were all to be banned according to the communist power elite.

4.7 HISTORICAL MEMORY

The closer Hungary was to the regime change, the stronger the voice of the democratic opposition was and the more untenable the historical vision of the official propaganda became. The opposition’s original intent, to mediate between society and the power holders, gradually gave way to anti-system politics. After 1987, the stability of the Kádár regime was no more and Hungarian politics entered the age of uncertainty.¹⁷⁷ Ex-communists, reformers and members of the opposition began to discuss the opportunities of economic reform and later the steps of a democratic transition together. While the one-party system *de jure* existed until the new, constitution of autumn 1989, political pluralism *de facto* emerged between 1987 and 1989.¹⁷⁸

As I mentioned, the analysis of historical processes was focal to neither *Beszélő* nor the other samizdat journals. Yet their political discourses did include numerous recurring historical motifs, which allow us to outline the most important elements of the independent memory of the democratic opposition. Virtually every reference in samizdat journals to the past concerned only the period after 1945. The dissidents almost completely refused the official interpretation of post-1945 history but paradoxically they seemed to agree that for them history started, in political terms, in 1945. The differences are summed up in Table 8.

¹⁷⁶ Orosz, “Az idegenbe szakadt demokratikus hagyomány,” 501.

¹⁷⁷ Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*, 360.

¹⁷⁸ Bozóki, *Politikai pluralizmus Magyarországon*.

Table 8. The historical narrative of the state socialist system and the democratic opposition

TOPIC	THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE REGIME	THE POSITION OF THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION
HISTORY	The flourishing of history came after 1945	There is no flourishing, but also focusing on the period after 1945
THE SOCIALIST SYSTEM	Socialist system started in 1948, although the Rákosi era had errors and vicious mistakes	1948 meant the elimination of the opposition and democracy, followed by the cruel dictatorship of the Rákosi era
1956	It was a counterrevolution	It was a revolution
THE KÁDÁR REGIME	New slogan: "Who is not against us is with us"	There was no substantial break from the traditions of the Rákosi system
	Strict but just steps after 1956	Brutal retribution after 1956
	Compromise with society	No compromise, only capitulation
ECONOMY	Continuous economic development	No continuous development but the circulation of reforms, slowing downs, and crises
SOCIETY	Problems are generated by the forces of the past but the situation is improving	Chronic problems exist (e.g., poverty, emigration, exclusion of minorities, and small denominations)
NATION	Problems of nationality are the ruins of history which can be resolved through internationalism	The Hungarian nation is not identical to the territory of the state; this creates political problems, as well as duties for the state
NATIONAL MINORITIES	Problems of national minorities are the ruins of history which can be resolved through internationalism	<i>Populist writers:</i> the issue of national minorities is a cultural and moral problem. <i>Dissidents:</i> the problem of national minorities is related to the nature of the political system
EUROPE	In terms of history, the socialist world system is superior to Western capitalism	Western social order ensures pluralism and human rights, but catching up is possible
CENTRAL-EUROPE	What matters is the community of socialist people's democracies; geographical position and cultural similarities are secondary	Definitive events (1956, 1968, 1980–1981) are similar. Cooperation between Central European opposition forces, the Hungarian, Czech and Polish dissidents is needed

The memory of the 19th century faded, the only events marking its political importance practically being the student protests commemorating March 15, 1848. The official propagandists who described Kádár as a tireless worker of compromises also tried to compare him to Ferenc Deák, the architect of the Austro-Hungarian compromise in 1867. Indeed, neither this nor the Széchenyi versus Kossuth debate of the 1840s,¹⁷⁹ that sometimes emerged, reached the level of politics. The disagreement in the interpretation of the 19th century did not constitute a significant cleavage between the party state and the democratic opposition.

The assessment of the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, if mentioned at all, was negative from both the regime and its opposition. The representatives of the communist power had no right to speak about it officially and tried to resolve the conflict by the rhetoric of communist internationalism. The opposition understood the geopolitical situation created by the Treaty as final, they rejected revanchism and focused on the individual and collective rights of the Hungarian minorities in other countries instead. One reason the Treaty was not in the focus of attention was that the fundamental ideology of the Horthy era (while its representatives signed the Treaty) was the denial of the peace agreement, and nobody wanted that era back: neither the communists, nor the democrats.¹⁸⁰ The idea of national communism was never strong in Hungary, as opposed to Poland and Romania, as they could not go back symbolically to the Horthy era.

Looking back from today, one can also observe the complete silence that surrounded the massive deaths of the people sent to forced labor, the disaster of the Hungarian Second Army at Don River in 1943, and the Holocaust, including the deportation of nearly half million countryside Jews and the period of terror in Budapest in 1944. The Kádarian social policy of appeasement avoided every historical subject that would politically divide or structure the society. The environment of freedom of speech and democracy was required to start the discussion about and processing of the great traumas of the 20th century. The Kádár regime did not want to make such severe issues a topic of social discussion, and the democratic opposition did not have the means to do so.

179 It was a debate whether Hungary should follow the strategy of reformism or radicalism. The former was promoted by Széchenyi, the latter by Kossuth.

180 Cf. Kende, *Az én Magyarországom*; Egry, *Otthonosság és idegenség*; "A Fate for a Nation."

Similarly, the Horthy era was never a question of debate among the power holders and the opposition, which evidently followed from that neither of them wanted to “return” to the Horthy system politically. Communist sometimes painted the participants of the revolution of 1956 as if they wanted to restore the Horthy regime; the democratic opposition categorically denied this. *Beszélő* and other samizdat journals emphasized that 1956 was the uprising of students, the intelligentsia, and workers, all of whom were far from the Horthy regime. While the communist power defined itself against the Horthy regime and dissociated itself from the Stalinism of the 1950s only mildly, the democratic opposition was against the heritage of both the Horthy and Rákosi eras, as well as the Kádár regime.

Of the 27 issues of the samizdat *Beszélő*, only two mentioned events before the communist takeover in 1947–1948, and only in passim. In one of these pieces, István Eörsi identified the post-1956 period with the oppression of the Bach-era that followed the crushed revolution and war of independence in 1848. He stated, “If we want to sincerely approach the memory of 1956, we have to start out of an independent consciousness. Official political positions help us in this, since—unlike during the reign of Francis Joseph—it cannot even attempt to make the revolution a part of its traditions.”¹⁸¹

The crucial year of 1945 was must less discussed. Members of the opposition did not discuss whether that regime change was liberation and/or an invasion, a question debated after 1989. The authors of samizdat did not write about Law I of 1946, which practically created the republic, and had little to say about the semi-democratic coalition period between 1945 and 1947. These were mentioned later by József Antall during the Roundtable talks in August 1989, arguing that the new, democratic republic of 1989 needs to be built on the fundamentals of the laws of 1848 and 1946.¹⁸² The ambivalent position of the democratic opposition later in SZDSZ, the Hungarian liberal party, which did not support the bill that proposed to make February 1, “The day of the Republic,” commemorating the republic of 1946.¹⁸³

Beszélő treated the communist takeover of 1947 and the role of other parties in this in such a way that helped do away with the taboo that concerned this issue. The official communist narrative talked of the “voluntary union”

¹⁸¹ Eörsi, “A másság ünnepe,” 530.

¹⁸² Antall, “Felszólalás az Ellenzéki Kerekasztal,” 565–68.

¹⁸³ Cf. Szűcs, “Napok romjai.”

of the Hungarian Communist Party (*Magyar Kommunista Párt*, MKP) and the Social Democratic Party (*Szociáldemokrata Párt*, SZDP) in 1948, which resulted in the creation of a united workers' party, the Hungarian Workers' Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*, MDP). However, the union was preceded by the so-called "salami tactics" of the communist party, and election frauds in 1947. *Beszélő* proved these, as well as the opposition of the social democrats, by publishing relevant contemporary documents. The publication of the memorandum of the social democratic Peyer group was also closely linked to the issue of emigration, since Károly Peyer left the country in 1947 and became a prominent member of social democrats abroad.

Beszélő published the full version of the last speech of the Christian Democratic politician, István Barankovics, which he made in December of 1948 and was "the last great expression of opposition in the Hungarian parliament after 1945."¹⁸⁴ In his speech, Barankovics focused on three issues—the relationship of state and church, the issue of small and medium sized private property, and the question of human rights—to criticize the communists.

Beyond the examples above, there were no other references to earlier historical events in *Beszélő*. What could explain this omission? The reason could be partially tactical: the contributors thought that the facts of the distant past are not efficient enough to pressure the dictatorship for a reaction. On the other hand, samizdat publications focused on current, and not past, problems, especially on those that unmasked the repressive nature of the state socialist regime. The roots of repression could in part be found in the Soviet occupation, and in part in the authoritarian regimes emerging after World War I. Since criticism targeted the Kádár regime, it was obvious that the greatest attention should be paid to events and processes that could question the legitimacy of that regime.

It is clear from the samizdat documents that the democratic opposition was against the antidemocratic history of Hungary just as much it opposed the communist system. They tried to define their identity and political program, not on the basis of the past but detached from it. Rejecting the idea of reviving Marxism, they proposed radical reform, liberal democracy instead of democratic socialism, and the Western model of market economy instead of a third way. They did not believe in "organic" development, which had

184 Szalai, "Bevezető Barankovics István utolsó beszédéhez," 193.

often led the country to astray, but in fundamentally “inorganic” (i.e., radical) transformation.

From the point of view of historical memory, the revolution of 1956 was the most important historical theme and the common denominator for the pluralizing Hungarian opposition of the 1980s. There was no common point in the interpretation of 1956 between the regime and *Beszélő*. The journal already expressed protest by simply calling 1956 a revolution as such, analyzing it, and refuting the silence that the regime forced on society, which the contributors called “national forgetting.” Beyond this, opposition writers systematically rebutted official propaganda. They showed that, in 1956, a revolution erupted based on broad social unity, defining its goal as the democratization of the system. Consequently, Imre Nagy’s government was not made up of traitors, and the retribution and trials following the revolution were not legal in any sense. They showed that the new apparatus in power, which was led by János Kádár, did not entirely break with the traditions of the Rákosi regime. What is more, at the beginning it used the same tactics to consolidate its power. Finally, the democratic opposition pointed out that, following retributions, Hungarian intellectuals subsided into silence in the 1960s, but this was not the consequence of accepting the social compromise. Rather, it was based on the fear of Stalinist restoration and on resignation about what could not be changed.

The assessment about the role of intellectuals relates to this last point. While the early issues of *Beszélő* described the 1960s as the era of silence, later issues partially reassessed this position and pointed out that among intellectuals the populist and urban views started to appear again. In 1987, *Beszélő* openly identified these two opposition movements: the followers of the populist position tried to add a patriotic flavor to their statements, whereas the representatives of the urban position tried to communicate an anti-nationalist stance to the public. While the former viewed the problems of the nation from a cultural point of view, the latter treated it in terms of a political program. Thus, the national question was one of the problematic issues discussed by the democratic opposition, and this was the cleavage along which different opposition positions developed. The populist “third way” position believed that the Hungarian nation was in a moral crisis. In contrast, the urban position blamed the economic and political crisis on the regime and its leadership. The differences between these two positions could be most clearly seen in their treatment of Hungarian minorities abroad. The issues

of poverty, the situation of Jews in Hungary, and Hungarian emigrants and minorities abroad found their way to public discussion. The dissidents pointed out that the situation of the Hungarian minorities in Romania and Czechoslovakia could not be treated as solved despite the internationalist nature of socialist ideology. They found similar faults in the traditional treatment of the “Jewish question,” which was based on religious and assimilationist policies. For the opposition, Hungarian emigrants were not a group of “fascists,” as the official propaganda claimed, and could not be divided into good and bad types. Rather, they were treated as an integral part and constituent community of the nation.

The samizdat writers accepted the existence of a division between East and West but renounced the interpretation of the official propaganda. They saw that freedoms were lacking in east of the Iron Curtain, and it was obvious to the opposition that the Soviet bloc would never catch up with Western Europe economically. Although the dividing line in the Cold War resulted from World War II and became unquestionably clear with the building of the Berlin Wall, the economic differences were linked to earlier historical developments. Dissident intellectuals saw Central Europe as a geographic and historical unit. They identified the turning points of the recent past in the events of 1956, 1968, and 1980–1981. *Beszélő* regularly let Polish and Czechoslovakian intellectuals voice their views, commemorated the anniversary of the Prague spring, and followed the fate of Solidarity—the movement of independent Polish labor unions. Thus, the opposition mostly meant Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary by Central Europe, which had a common historical heritage. These peoples experienced both fascism and communism, and gave life to democratic opposition, critical publicity, and independent civil society.

The democratic opposition refuted the official economic self-definition of the system, which was based on the Marxist evolutionary ideal. According to the opposition, the situation after 1956 was not only characterized by improving economic trends but also by inconsequential reforms that were followed by slowing downs in the process of execution. The democratic opposition sharply opposed the system in all those questions that concerned recent events and future perspectives. But as both the system and the opposition rejected the old world of pre-1945, the democratic opposition did not question the historical interpretation of the Kádár regime entirely. What they questioned was the self-definition of the regime, and its historical, political determinants.

5. THE DEBATE OF THE BESZÉLŐ CIRCLE ON STRATEGY

On December 13, 1981, the Jaruzelski *coup d'état* ended the Polish self-limiting revolution, suppressed the Solidarity movement and independent trade union, and declared a state of emergency. The showdown happened according to the usual scenario, except for the fact that Soviet troops were not called in this time. Although many relieved upon hearing the news about the state of emergency, which they thought of as the lesser evil, most independent intellectuals and their followers were shocked and saw the Polish change as another severe defeat of democratic attempts.

A decision regarding the questions "Who are we?" and "What do we want?" had to be made by the Hungarian radical thinkers, the intellectuals who clustered around the samizdat journal *Beszélő*. They had to decide whether they wanted to stick to the traditional behavior of the mainly cultural opposition, laid down between 1977 and 1981, or whether they should attempt to form their opinions through political means. The group of radical thinkers could not be regarded as the opposition until they did not formulate the political alternative of the prevailing power in a coherent program. This was first done in October 1982, in the 5-6th issue of *Beszélő*.¹⁸⁵ The great debate on opposition strategy starting with the article of János Kis in 1982 had a vital role in their decision of taking up the role of political opposition.

5.1 PERSPECTIVES OF THE FUTURE

Although the first issue of *Beszélő* appeared in November 1981 (i.e., just a few weeks before the introduction of the state of emergency in Poland) the shock evoked by the changes and Jaruzelski's *coup d'état* could be felt on the pages of *Beszélő*. The journal appeared when it became questionable whether it was worth continuing its publication. Based on the experiences of 1956 and 1968, some were expecting an anti-reform, conservative turn, and another long "ice age" of restoration.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ *Beszélő* editors, "Hogyan keressünk kiutat a válságból?"

¹⁸⁶ Among the pessimists was the philosopher György Bence who decided to leave the circle of his former co-author, János Kis. That caused a major consternation among the dissidents, but it has not slowed down the formation of the democratic opposition.

János Kis, in his article, argued against such a view of the events. "I would like to convince my friends, that this parallel is deceiving. Whatever the fate of the opposition groups will be, the *status quo* will not consolidate."¹⁸⁷ Kis supported this audacious statement by pointing out that the economic decline in the region was caused not only by temporary reasons. Poland's Solidarity broke the legitimacy of the systems of "existing socialism" for good. The word "reform" was again mentioned in Hungary (although it was not articulated in official circles for a long time), not as a part of a comprehensive concept of economic change but as the only hope for political survival. The legitimacy of the system became relative, and it was more and more based on the provision of material goods. When one accepts the dimension of material rationality, one excludes the dogma of infallibility at the same time, and this inevitably leads to pluralism in the long run.¹⁸⁸

Unlike its predecessors in 1956 and 1968, the democratic attempt in Poland did not only come out in support of certain principles. It also stood for the guarantee of livelihood. The working-class movement came up against the "the state of the proletariat." Based on this fact, Kis said, the beginning of the 1980s was not only the time of restoration and reaction in Eastern Europe, it was also the era of the growing economic and political crises. And these crises, Kis opined, would not spare the Soviet Union either. Naturally, Gorbachev's ascendance to power could not be foreseen. But the economic and political bankruptcy made it possible for a character like Gorbachev to step forth within the counter-selected Soviet leadership.

When assuming the disintegration of the political system, what opportunities were there for the opposition forces? The Hungarian opposition started from the supposition that both the revolution and the top-down reform of the system were useless attempts. However, between the two extremes, a radical reformism appeared, the new evolutionism, which did not concentrate on the transformation of the system but on the strengthening of social autonomies.¹⁸⁹ At first, the Hungarian strategy—in contrast to the opposition strategy in Poland—was a legalist one, which took the fiction of the right to freedom, which was declared in the constitution, for granted. In a way, it had some "antipolitical" characteristics. The fact that throughout the

¹⁸⁷ Kis, "Gondolatok a közeljövőről," 115.

¹⁸⁸ Oltványi, "A közel- és távolabbi jövőről, avagy a demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon," 277.

¹⁸⁹ Michnik, "A New Evolutionism."

debate neither Kis nor most speakers mentioned “civil society” as an end to the activity of the opposition shows that the Hungarian opposition was not prepared to be effective outside its own realm. What Kis wanted to do was to put an end to this attitude and argue for the need for new forms of opposition activity: “No matter if we have been doing it right or wrong: we cannot continue in this fashion. [...] The provocative exercise of our freedoms is not enough anymore. [...] Either the opposition has things to say about the big issues of politics, or its influence, size and organization will slowly decrease.”¹⁹⁰

Kis argued that a political initiative could only come from the circle of the opposition, because this was the only group outside the Kádárist “consensus.” The author was happy to see that more and more people engage in opposition activities but concluded that this group could start on the road of political opposition only if it had an ideology. The way he outlined this was quite broad and inclusive: human rights, liberal democracy, national independence, national autonomy, and the useful elements of the socialist tradition were the main pillars. While its starting point for the ideological debate was not fully developed, the article already contained the seeds of a radical, left-liberal political worldview.

The ensuing debate in *Beszélő* lasted from May 1982 to February 1984. It gradually formulated the strategy that the circle around the *Beszélő* acted upon in the second half of the 1980s.¹⁹¹ The debate formed a unique intellectual puzzle and from it the cornerstones of the political and ideological activities of the opposition took shape. Such questions as the evaluation of the situation, the goals and possibilities of the opposition were answered. Except for István Orosz, the rest of the contributors agreed with Kis’s evaluation of the current situation. Orosz argued that “the main goal of *Beszélő* is to increase the size of the reform-minded dissident intelligentsia.” He argued that not only the Kádárist “consent” made after 1956 should be disregarded, but also “the one made by the radical thinkers after 1973, i. e. the behavior of the bureau-protected opposition.”¹⁹² Orosz was different from the others in that he thought that the democratic opposition did not stand outside of

190 Kis, “Gondolatok a közeljövőről,” 120.

191 Contributors to the debate were Tamás Bauer, István Eörsi, György Konrád, Csaba Könczöl, Zoltán Krasznai, Zsolt Krokavay, András Lányi, Bálint Magyar, Ambrus Oltványi, István Orosz, József Sebes, Miklós Szabó, Erzsébet Szalai, Pál Szalai, József Székely, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Mihály Vajda, and András Vízi. The debate ended with a reply by János Kis.

192 Orosz, “A Hivatal-védte ellenzékiesség,” 188.

the consensus but was on the margin of it. But Orosz remained alone with his opinion in the *Beszélő* debate, and when Kis rejected his position in his response¹⁹³ he voiced the joint position of the opposition.

5.2 POLITICAL GOALS

The idea of consensus appealed to almost all the participants of the debate. Nobody was thinking in terms of “the worse, the better”; everybody wanted to create a consensus with about crisis management and economic reform, based on the openness of the public sphere, the reform of the system of interest representation, and constitutionalism. The expression of the need for a new consensus went beyond the columns of *Beszélő* and became a part of the political discourse of the “first public sphere” later on. For example, the samizdat debates were quite useful to Imre Pozsgay, who proposed a new national consensus in the second half of the 1980s. However, the program of consensus for Pozsgay was a tool to have the plans of the reformers accepted within the party. While this is not to be underestimated, his Gorbachev-like rhetoric was not enough to attract a genuine majority in the pluralizing Hungarian society. The program of *Beszélő* had a substantial effect on the forming opposition forces as well.

The atmosphere of the era is illustrated by the fact that the neutrality of the country, or Finlandization advocated in 1956 appeared as an unreachable dream. Instead, the economist Tamás Bauer suggested a sort of “Illyrization” of Hungary, that is, the adoption of the Yugoslavian model. In Yugoslavia, the one-party system remained untouched, and the political police was intact, but the role of central economic planning was taken over by market forces and the workers’ collectives. Bauer made it obvious that “while the goal of Finlandization is political pluralism, ‘Illyrization’ is less ambitious: it wishes to create pluralism based on the representation of interests, being faithful to the ideology of Kádárism, but consistently bringing it through.”¹⁹⁴ Today, it is hard to understand how the collective representation of interests would have been faithful to the ideology of Kádárism. The point of the

193 Kis, “Másfél év után, ugyanarról.”

194 Bauer, “Az optimista alternatíva körvonalai,” 264.

system was rather its sloppiness; it functioned as the secret net of informal, order-like, mutual assertion of interests.

As the comments of the debate show, there was no opposition consensus over goals. Many of the contributors to the debate outlined a leftist program. András Lányi offered, as an alternative to the nationalization of society, the socialization of the state.¹⁹⁵ József Székely wanted an alternative socialism that was based on workers' democracy.¹⁹⁶ Gáspár Miklós Tamás, who was the first to refer to the intellectual traditions of József Eötvös, Oszkár Jászi, and István Bibó, expressed his opinion in the form of a somewhat anarchistic comment: "the ideology of the opposition should be anti-state and anti-authoritarian."¹⁹⁷

The national problem appeared emphatically first in the contribution of Zoltán Krasznai¹⁹⁸ and András Vízi,¹⁹⁹ but in relation to the Soviet-Hungarian relationship almost all the speakers referred to it. György Konrád named the self-determination of the society as a goal,²⁰⁰ while Bálint Magyar emphasized the development of the *citoyen* as a precondition of change.²⁰¹

Political theorist Pál Szalai leaned toward the idea of a multiparty system based on democratic socialism, in which the workers' collectives owned the means of production. In his ideal, pluralism existed not only among the parties but there was an agreement about the property relations. He seemed to admit the need for market economy, but he also added that "from a political point of view, it would result in a tug of war between the central and the company bureaucracy if it did not go hand in hand with the strengthening the workers' councils."²⁰²

The sociologist Erzsébet Szalai took a similar view. Her article concerned the social conditions of a liberal alternative, although her definition of the latter differed from what it would mean later, during the regime change. In her understanding, the liberal alternative meant the coexistence of economic units realizing different modes of production, which would have happened

195 Lányi, "A magyar ellenzék programja," 271.

196 Székely, "Reform és ellenzék," 268.

197 Tamás, "Amiért mégis," 465.

198 Krasznai, "Jelszavaink legyenek: haza és haladás."

199 Vízi, "Kommunisták és ellenzékiek."

200 Konrád, "Adottságainkból kell kiindulnunk."

201 Magyar, "Polgárokká kell válnunk."

202 Szalai, "Remény – remény nélkül," 194.

if economic and political institutions had been split. However, she argued that the liberal alternative must be accompanied by a democratic alternative, where “the broadest layers of society—and mostly the large-scale industry workers—will or at least could establish their own institutions,” by which she most probably meant the worker’s councils and trade unions. According to Erzsébet Szalai, “these would mean a guarantee that new—albeit historically well-known—exploiting relationships could not emerge from the co-existence of all sorts of modes of production.”²⁰³ Hence, to prevent the liberal alternative from leading to capitalism, the democratic representation of interests could have meant a guarantee. In her article, democracy and capitalism appeared as mutually exclusive, so the liberal alternative for her did not fully exceed the borderlines of the socialist paradigm.

One of the most up-to-the-point comments came from Ambrus Oltványi, who had already stated in the title of his article that the aim was to fight for and achieve *democracy*. In his article, Oltványi proved to have an outstanding foresight of the future. He argued that the chances of a democratic, pluralistic development should not be measured in the short run, but “from a decade-long perspective.” Oltványi considered the shaping of a self-limiting market the key question, for “market economy is easily imaginable without democracy but democracy without market economy is hardly achievable.” With this comment, he foreshadowed debates that would come five years later among Hungarian political scientists. Unlike many other contributors then, Oltványi did not believe in the coming of democratic socialism. Referring to a seminal study of Mihály Vajda, he stated that “socialism should be kept alive as a counter-tendency against the main tendency of capitalism, but it should not be ‘realized’.”²⁰⁴ The writer and poet István Eörsi did again something similar when he quoted the managerial socialist apprehensions of the economist Márton Tardos.²⁰⁵

Mihály Vajda had a distinctly different view from the other contributors of the debate when he wrote: “The new democratic political community does not have to form the opposition itself but, through critical publicity, it should facilitate the formation of a real opposition within the power

²⁰³ E. Szalai, “A liberális alternatíva társadalmi feltételeiről,” 366.

²⁰⁴ Oltványi, “A közel- és távolabbi jövőről, avagy a demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon,” 280.

²⁰⁵ Eörsi, “Csto gyelaty?” 181.

elite.”²⁰⁶ In other words, the democratic opposition must not strive only to grab power, but its goals must also include widening the sphere of critical discussion and dissolving the strict order of the party state.

What mainly distinguished the democratic opposition from the reformers within the system was not their understanding of the situation or their demands. Rather, they differed in their marginalized position, as well as their strategy which concerned a longer run. After the reforms of 1968, the democratic opposition no longer believed that the desired goals can be reached by top-down reforms. When I describe the behavior of the democratic opposition as radical reformers, I do not think mainly of the differences in the content of their demands (while those are also notable compared to the intentionally blurred ideas of the reformers within the system) but of the strategic differences. While the reform-communists of the age who concentrated in different “reform committees” behind closed doors “prompted” mostly to the men in power, the opposition tried to “prompt” to the society as well.

5.3 *THE POSSIBLE WAYS OF CHANGE*

Kis’s proposal about a “more than reformist but less than revolutionary” strategy of radical reformism was opposed by István Orosz, who was the only one to argue for a revolution. “We need to step away from the margin and bear the consequences,” he argued. Orosz thought that there was no middle ground: the opposition had to decide whether it wanted to pursue a popular front policy “with the reformer intelligentsia or with the working classes.”²⁰⁷ And it may call itself “opposition” only if it sides with the latter. Orosz’s argument was radical but simplifying for the fault line between those acquiesce in the consensus and those seeking change did not lie between the “intelligentsia” and the “working classes” even at that time.

Indeed, Kis also drew a hard line between those standing outside and inside the Kádárist “consensus.” He did not seem to realize how false the “consensus” itself was and that some of those standing within it were against this false consensus for hypocritical (i.e., existential) reasons. Many contributors pointed this out, emphasizing that the democratic opposition must

²⁰⁶ Vajda, “Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság,” 458.

²⁰⁷ Orosz, “A Hivatal-védte ellenzékiesség,” 189.

avoid social isolation, because it could lead to a political avant-gardism burdened with a sense of mission. According to István Eörsi, the problem of standing “inside” or “outside” the regime cannot be restricted to a moral question. The good strategy might be, he said, the rapprochement between the radical opposition and the reformists, based on some kind of division of labor, and on the conscious changing of “outsider” and “insider” behavior.²⁰⁸ Others argued that this insider-outsider division was inexpedient for tactical reasons as well, because instead of attracting the fellow travelers on the inside, it excluded them from opposition activities.²⁰⁹ Referring to the Polish example, Bálint Magyar suggested the civic tactics of “sticking to the constitution” and the strategy of forcing the power elite to deal with the situation—the opposite of the “proletarian tactics” of confrontation—should be followed. He believed this strategy could avoid compromise since it saw the reform-process that would remove obstacle as its goal.²¹⁰

The dichotomy of “civic” and “proletarian” was problematic not only from tactical but also theoretical considerations, for political behavior was not determined by class status. Yet these observations infiltrated into the activities not only of the democratic opposition, but of the broader opposition of 1989. The peaceful demolishing of the system and forcing the state party, the MSZMP, to deal with the situation through the Roundtable negotiations testifies to this. Following the “civic tactics” suggested by Magyar, the opposition set such an example that could be successfully used by others, for example the members of the Independent Lawyer’s Forum (*Független Jogász Fórum* FJF), who initiated the Roundtable negotiations in 1988. The rejection of the “proletarian tactics” expressed not only that the dissidents preferred peaceful transition over revolution but also that the opposition, in spite of earlier considerations, renounced the cooperation and joint action with the working class. Indeed, the Hungarian opposition could not repeat the success of their Polish counterparts in this respect.

According to Pál Szalai, the oppositional group should define its strategy on the basis of its policies not on the formal, changing division of inside and outside. He did not think it was advisable to start cooperation with the left-wing of MSZMP or the anti-liberal, middle-class heirs of noble nation-

208 Eörsi, “Csto gyelaty?” 183.

209 Könczöl, “Levél Kis Jánoshoz,” 192.

210 Magyar, “Polgárokká kell válnunk,” 190.

alism. At the same time, he suggested, “attention should be given to the democratic trends within MSZMP” and “to the revival within Hungarian Catholicism.” Through these comments, Pál Szalai elaborated on some topics, which would become important in the future: (1) The opposition needed more than one ideology. (2) He called attention to some of the antidemocratic traditions of the aristocratic middle class and pointed out the dangers of cooperating with certain groups within these circles.²¹¹ Just like Pál Szalai and István Eörsi, most of the contributors emphasized the advantages of cooperation with groups outside the opposition especially at the strategic level. But they put the emphasis on different points. Tamás Bauer stated that the reform initiatives should come “basically from the ‘good king’, the party leadership, the government” while the radical thinkers should play a catalyst role and would have to “reveal and formulate the social needs and endeavors.” According to Bauer, in the course of reform, it would have been more advisory to “talk about autonomous social initiatives than about the opposition movement” and it would have been proper if the underground press “had come to a half-legal state” and thus it would “automatically lose its peculiar oppositionist label.”²¹²

Ambrus Oltványi agreed that the first and second public spheres should be more traversable but argued that legality should not be achieved by the suppression or abandonment of the views of the opposition. After all, the acceptance of political autonomy was just as alien to the nature of the Kádár regime as the open tolerance of the opposition. Oltványi counted on the power and the opposition “to live permanently side-by-side,” and he trusted that the autonomous powers of the society would be allowed to take part in the forming of the reforms coming from above. As if he had foreseen the future, he stressed that, “although only four decades after the dictatorship came into power, such a transition proved to be realizable in post-Franco Spain.”²¹³ To support his statement, Oltványi quoted Adam Michnik: “If I searched for a suitable example for the tasks ahead of us, I would mention Spain: behold a society, which—thanks to the more sensitive forces of the power and the opposition—found its way out of a shameful dictator-

²¹¹ P. Szalai, “Remény – remény nélkül,” 194.

²¹² Bauer, “Az optimista alternatíva körvonalai,” 266.

²¹³ Oltványi, “A demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon,” 279.

ship to democracy.”²¹⁴ Michnik wrote these lines as early as the mid-1970s. Thus, we could even say that the transition in Spain—with its democratizing post-authoritarian elite and its strong trade-union movement—was something like the first evidence of the “self-limiting” strategy Michnik elaborated on. With some stretching of the analogy: the first “Moncloa pact” of Central Europe was the Gdańsk Agreement in August 1980.²¹⁵ The violation of the agreement was not the fault of Solidarity. It was because Gierek, Kania, Jaruzelski, and their comrades were not backed by the Soviet Union of Gorbachev but that of Brezhnev.

But who should agree with whom in a country where the power was in the hands of an aging clique, and where the word “reform” could be mentioned only in certain periods and even then only with regard to the economy, and where there was no sign of independent organizations for the protection of interests? Erzsébet Szalai mentioned a few social groups that could have been the potential allies of the opposition because those either started or supported change: (1) democratic opposition, (2) the intelligentsia that worked in official social science institutions,²¹⁶ (3) the younger, reformist generation of the apparatchiks, and (4) the heterogeneous groups of young skilled workers, university students, artists, technicians, health workers, and small entrepreneurs. The latter had already had minor clashes with the regime, therefore some kind of a net-like cooperation with them seemed imaginable.²¹⁷ In addition, she mentioned the generation that was socialized in the 1960s and had just entered the gates because these people wanted to build a career and the ideological attitude was far from them. Out of them grew the second generation of the state party; they formed the new technocracy.²¹⁸ Oltványi also emphasized the importance of generation change, through which “possibly more and more of those will enter the apparatus who—unlike those members who dominate and can be there only because of counter-selection—will be able to hold ground among the conditions of pluralism and competition

²¹⁴ Michnik, “A New Evolutionism.”

²¹⁵ The analogy is stretched because the Gdańsk Agreement was a precondition for democratic transition, whereas the Moncloa Pact in Spain was an acceptance and guarantee of democracy after it had been achieved.

²¹⁶ Mainly at the Institute for Historical Science and other academic institutions, while some worked at the background institutions of ministries, like the Financial Research Institute of the Ministry of Finance.

²¹⁷ E. Szalai, “A liberális alternatíva társadalmi feltételeiről,” 366–67.

²¹⁸ E. Szalai, *Gazdaság és hatalom*.

with the help of their training and efficiency. Thus, they will not have to cling to the dictatorial means of power at any price.”²¹⁹ These hypotheses by Szalai and Oltványi have been proved by the changes of 1989, as well as those later analyses²²⁰ which argued that cultural capital was a major element of successful peaceful transition.

Most of those who contributed to the debate in *Beszélő* found it important to preserve diversity within the opposition. They pointed out that those who want pluralism in the civil society could not endeavor to suppress it within their own circles. In many ways it was the age of resurgence of civil society. In his writings at the time, social theorist Andrew Arato²²¹ considered the changes in Poland as the rebirth of the civil society. With that in mind it is even more surprising that in the debate only three people²²² used the concept of civil society. In the tradition of the Enlightenment, civil society was imagined as an antidote to the state, with the task to “free itself from the guardianship of the state.”²²³ “Civil society and political state are by nature struggling with each other,” stated Mihály Vajda.²²⁴ For Konrád, “the organizational space of civil society was the world of informal relationships,” which is characterized by autonomous speech, and its primal bearer is the young intelligentsia.²²⁵

The historian Miklós Szabó was on the opposite opinion. He thought that the role of civil courage was to help coming out from passive informality so characteristic in the Kádár regime: “We must be careful not to increase the number of informal organizations” but “to claim strong autonomies.”²²⁶ There was a significant difference between the two approaches. Neither Vajda nor Konrád agreed that the democratic opposition should become a political opposition, because then it would have inevitably had to strive for power. According to the then antipolitical Konrád, the opposition “is democratic when it is not a political but a social opposition.”²²⁷ Meanwhile, Vajda said

219 Oltványi, “A demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon,” 275.

220 Konrád and Szelényi, “Intellectuals and Domination.”

221 Arato, “Civil Society against the State”; “Empire vs Civil Society.”

222 Konrád, Oltványi, and Vajda.

223 Oltványi, “A közel- és távolabbi jövőről, avagy a demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon,” 281.

224 Vajda, “Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság,” 458.

225 Konrád, “Adottságainkból kell kiindulnunk,” 453.

226 Szabó, “Szubkultúra vagy politikai ellenzék?” 363.

227 Konrád, “Adottságainkból kell kiindulnunk,” 453.

that it was not a political opposition that needed to be established but a critical public sphere where the “social criticism of politics” could be exercised.²²⁸

Seeing their antipolitical stance, one might think that the democratic opposition was generically anti-power, disapproving not just the communist power but any power. This is not true—not even in the case of Zoltán Krasznai, who wrote about a moral revolution, and Gáspár Miklós Tamás, who called for a moral reform. Most dissidents did not think in terms of powerlessness but, following István Bibó, in terms of power balance, new consensus, and new social contract. Nevertheless, this resulted in a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward the concept of power.

Konrád thought that striving for power was a heritage of communism and he rejected it on that ground. For him, political opposition seemed inherently antidemocratic. “The *sine qua non* of democratic opposition is that it should be democratic, i.e. post-communist in its operation and its self-image, and thus it should deeply revise the traces and habits of the communist opposition.”²²⁹ And Mihály Vajda said, as if he had foreseen the structural problems that would plague the liberal party, SZDSZ that grew out of the democratic opposition: “Do not restrict the basis of the new democratic political community! For it can easily happen that most of the members come from somewhere else. Not only from other outsider circles but also from those groups that earlier condemned the activity of the ‘opposition’.” In his own words:

We cannot take it upon us the new tasks of a new situation just because we are called the “opposition” right now. Even if there really is a new situation, it is not certain that solutions need to be given by those who were in the “opposition” in another situation; it is not sure either, that those who take up the new responsibilities will feel like the heirs of the opposition of 1977–81.²³⁰

Vajda talked as if he had known the future. Konrád said the following words about the same phenomenon: “Our task is to help *others* gain their

²²⁸ Vajda, “Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság,” 459.

²²⁹ Konrád, “Adottságainkból kell kiindulnunk,” 453.

²³⁰ Vajda, “Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság,” 457.

freedom.”²³¹ Roads split at this point, at the question of political or nonpolitical opposition. It was obviously not by accident that neither Vajda nor Konrád became professional politicians. Some others modified their views and pursued political career in the 1990s.

Several contributors agreed with the proposition of János Kis's article and thus hurried the open undertaking of political opposition. “We need to acknowledge that political goals can only be achieved by political means,” wrote András Lányi.²³² Within the framework of political opposition, Orosz wanted confrontation, Lányi, social pressure, Szabó, two-sided negotiations, and Tamás, besides demanding political reforms, emphasized the need for “ethical renewal.” “Dark decades may come or may not; we need morals that can be upheld both in good and in bad times. We cannot prepare for a certain future, only for the period of a lifetime.”²³³

Krasznai opined that the opposition has to prepare for many possibilities. The time of confrontation, which Orosz proposed, could come, but if the leadership were reform-spirited, then “even a historical compromise can come about between the government and the opposition on the common platform of advancement and national interest.”²³⁴ Indeed, such a compromise would come about in the Lakitelek meeting in 1987.²³⁵ However, it occurred not between the leadership and the democratic opposition but between Imre Pozsgay, who was at the periphery of the party leadership, and populist writers, who worked themselves out of the democratic opposition, seeing themselves belonging neither to the opposition nor the pro-government forces.

The primary significance of the 1982–1984 debate in *Beszélő* was not the outlining of an ideology but the correct assessment of the situation and the development of an opposition strategy. The contributors could not foresee the collapse of the system. Yet the experience of the Polish “semi-revolution” of 1980, as well as the analysis of the situation in Central Europe told them that the collapse will inevitably happen. Many articulated the conditions necessary for the collapse, especially Pál Szalai. He argued that

231 Konrád, “Adottságainkból kell kiindulnunk,” 454.

232 Lányi, “A magyar ellenzék programja,” 272.

233 Tamás, “Amiért mégis,” 470.

234 Krasznai, “Jelszavaink legyenek: haza és haladás,” 374.

235 Agócs and Medvigy, *Lakitelek 1987*.

Democracy may break through in this region 1. if democratic movements in many Eastern European countries act at the same time. 2. if the process of democratization happens within and without the communist party in parallel. 3. if the Soviet leadership is enlightened enough to settle for the conservation of its military sphere of interest, and it is willing to make a deal with the movements of Eastern Europe to permit at least a limited democracy.²³⁶

The words of Pál Szalai show exceptional clairvoyance. As it later turned out, communist systems in Eastern and Central Europe fell in a domino-like manner. Second, the peaceful nature of the transition was made possible by the fact that the Hungarian communist leadership was divided, unlike the opposition movements. Third, an “enlightened” Soviet leader, Gorbachev, emerged, who gave up the Brezhnev doctrine and allowed these countries to follow their way. While Szalai deduced the conditions of regime change in a correct, logical way, Zoltán Krasznai made predictions: “If the tendency of equalization [stemming from economic degeneration] persists, the crisis will reach the trough at the same time in many countries of Central Europe. This can happen in the second half of the 1980s.”²³⁷ The crisis did not happen at the same time and with the same intensity in Central European countries. But the crisis of the Soviet Union provided the opportunity for change. And the legal-minded, critical political culture that the radical thinkers tried to popularize in the course of becoming political opposition had a major role in that the Hungarian story did not unfold as the story of most post-Yugoslavian countries did.

Maybe these dissidents did not realize how stubbornly the values and structures of prewar Hungary, which were thought to be extinct, survived in Kádár’s paternalist dictatorship. Initiators and participants of radical political change tend to underestimate historical path-dependency anyway.²³⁸ Maybe they had illusions about the viability of a “socialist mixed economy,” and their ideology was, at many points, unclear. This is understandable as their primary binder was not a positive change of values but their marginal-

²³⁶ P. Szalai, “Remény – remény nélkül,” 193.

²³⁷ Krasznai, “Jelszavaink legyenek: haza és haladás,” 370.

²³⁸ From the path-dependency literature cf. Jowitt, “The Leninist Legacy”; Vajda, “Mentalitások”; Magyar, *Stubborn Structures*.

ized position and political opposition to the system. What should come as a surprise is not what was missing, but how many things they foresaw. They had to address people very different from them. Even in their marginalized position, the people belonging to groups of the democratic opposition managed to develop those civic methods which allowed them to retain integrity and allowed others to apply them when the time for change has come. The samizdat writings in *Beszélő* were not cold-blooded contributions to scientific debates. About half of the writings of the above-described debate were published under pseudonyms, in fear of retaliation. These are anguished, bold, passionate, and hopeful articles, written by intellectuals who could not resist autonomy even in the lawless world of wiretaps and house searches.

CHAPTER IV

From Moral Principles to Political Action

I. THE IDEAS OF THE DISSIDENTS

Philosophically, the leading figures of the Hungarian democratic opposition went from the neo-Marxism of 1968 through the liberal socialism of István Bibó to left-leaning liberalism up until the 1980s.¹ In terms of practical action, this was accompanied by a radical attitude of rights defending which had been exercised by the Polish opposition first. The novelty of the 1982–1984 debate of *Beszélő* was the discussion of which ideology should be followed, which thus became the topic of an open discussion in opposition circles. The opposition started seeing itself as a political opposition during the debate, and this led to the birth of the first political program. The ideologies of the dissidents were rather versatile, as it can be seen from the main issues discussed in the samizdat journals as well. The ideas of anarchism,² liberal and democratic socialism,³ radical democratic and green ideas,⁴ and later the ideology of classical liberalism. It was equally important for the dissidents to represent alternative cultural endeavors vis-à-vis the official culture of the state. During the 1985 European Cultural Forum which was hosted by Budapest members of the opposition organized a counter-forum, which was attended by well-known Western authors as well.⁵

¹ This left-liberalism has been shaped by the writings of John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin.

² Tamás, *A szem és a kéz*.

³ P. Szalai, "Meghaladható-e a liberális demokrácia?"

⁴ Endreffy, "Atomenergia, demokrácia, decentralizáció."

⁵ Müller, *Európai Kulturális Fórum és ellenfórum*.

Looking at the whole decade, however, the most important element was the representation of human rights. This idea created consensus among different groups of opposition and provided common ideological ground for action. Nevertheless, the opposition was influenced not only by human rights, and below I discuss other ideas as well which appeared periodically but also forcefully. These include the ideas of humanization of power, disobedience, antipolitics, and the notion of civil society. This section is devoted to these ideas, and I close this part with a discussion of human rights.

1.1 HUMANIZATION OF POWER

The democratic opposition tried to follow a Bibó's attitude toward politics,⁶ they supported the development of market economy, but they believed, without using the word "capitalism," that market inequalities can be eliminated. This stance aimed at the reconciliation of the basic values of freedom and equality, political democracy, and socialism. The key to reconcile these ideas was the third element of the classical triad: fraternity, that is, the idea of solidarity. According to this perspective, the essence of socialism was not nationalization and the planned economy but socialization and economic partnership. They wanted to implement democratic processes in the economy as well as politics. This idea is the precise opposite of what would later be called neoliberalism. While neoliberalism argues not only for market economy but market society, reducing social relations into economic terms, Bibó argued for a democratic society where market processes can also be humanized and democratized. Neoliberalism aims to turn social processes into market ones; Bibó's liberal socialism wants to turn market processes into democratic ones. The neoliberal schools follow the principle of methodological individualism, while Bibóian analysis also emphasizes various contextual (historical, cultural, social psychological) factors.

For Bibó, self-government in politics was mirrored by cooperatives in agriculture and self-management in industry. The program of free cooperation was based on the idea of social, as opposed to state or private, property, and wanted to subordinate the market to this principle. The idea of "free cooperation of free individuals" denied both the competitive system

6 *Bibó Festschrift.*

of classical liberalism and the dictatorship of the impersonal state. It aimed at recreating the personalism of pre-capitalist societies without the element of hierarchy. Instead of centralization, liberal socialism stressed the importance of decentralization in the working of political and economic bodies. The idealistic vision of “cooperative man” underlined the importance of dialogue, cooperation, and communicative rationality. It rejected the fetish of economic growth and was willing to limit economic efficiency in the name of social solidarity. Because of this, the Bibóian third way was attractive to the democratic opposition for a long time. As a democratic and liberal socialist thinker who believed in the humanization of power, István Bibó built his political anthropology on the primacy of cooperation over selfishness, and elimination of alienation over the profit motive.

The opposition of the state socialist system was heavily influenced by Bibó also because he saw the meaning of European social development not in the exclusivity of a single idea or mode but in the harmonization of various modes of social organization.⁷ He believed that the Western-type liberal modes of freedom are reconcilable with the striving for a socialist society without exploitation. The humanization of power was a basic aspect for Bibó, he aimed at the creation of a mixed system—following Oszkár Jászi and the Hungarian anarcho-democratic traditions⁸—because he rejected the existence of one dominant mode of social organization. In his normative view, social principles need to be harmonized for the greatest possible freedom and equality of the members of society. He was a supporter of systems of equilibrium, which do not swing toward extremes. To achieve this, he spent much effort to examine the principle of separation of powers. He tried to implement this idea vertically as well as horizontally, so that power is distributed in a way that everyone gets just as much power as he can contribute to the common good, but no one has unlimited power that could be abused. He would have preferred to cut up power into as small pieces as possible, so that everyone gets a share, but no one gets too much. His ideal society was a kind of anarchic society, which meant that the system of checks and balances can work on every level of communities.

7 Bibó, *Összegyűjtött munkái; Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination*.

8 Bozóki and Sükösd, *Anarchism in Hungary*; “Third Way Utopianism.”

Another manifestation of the influence of Bibó was the dissidents' ambivalent attitude toward the phenomenon of power. They knew that democracy without power was unthinkable but wanted every power to be under institutional control.⁹ Besides the liberal philosophy of law and ethics, Bibó also drove the members of the democratic opposition to see power as dangerous *per se* and to use institutions to keep the power of persons in check. This was a strong critical stance against the existing state socialist systems on the one hand, and a wide and inclusive ideology to gather various opposition ideas on the other. Bibó's ideas were served as the umbrella the outcasts of the Kádár regime could stand under for the first time.

By the mid-1980s, the Hungarian democratic opposition had gradually developed its own ideology, which was centered on the values of a socially balanced, Western-type liberal democracy, human rights, and the acceptance of a social market economy. However, the second half of the 1980s saw the marginalization of third-way ideas in the debates about the future of liberal democracy. For a long time, the opposition was middle-of-the-road between the ideas of free socialism and democratic capitalism. Bibó wanted to combine the advantages of contradictory structures, based on the idea that nonviolent procedures, free and tempered lifestyle, and self-limiting political culture make social hysteria and cataclysm avoidable. Pál Szalai showed in numerous writings that the oeuvre of Bibó was pervaded by anthropological optimism, and the possibility of human emancipation.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Bibó's proposal regarded the optimization of social functioning and the avoidance of social hysteria, not the perspectival form of an ideal human community.

A legal theorist, Béla Faragó, who lived in emigration and was one of the critics of the opposition, pointed out in an important writing that the Bibóian third-way ideology can be hardly reconciled with the principles and the practice of liberal democracies.¹¹ This problem was also seen by János Kis, who had broken with Marxism in the 1970s but could not disregard the Marxian critique of capitalism with respect to the lack of systemic solidarity.¹² Marx's criticism of capitalism had such an effect on Kis that he

9 Bence and Kis, *Határolt forradalom*.

10 P. Szalai, "Bibó szocializmusképe ürügyén."

11 Faragó, *Nyugati liberális szemmel*.

12 Kis, *Mi a liberalizmus?* 27.

could accept Bibó's ideas about the *external* humanization of capitalist societies only as a temporary solution. They were primary only until he found a more coherent theoretical solution than the combination of contradictory modes of system operation. Such a solution was offered in the works of John Rawls¹³ and Ronald Dworkin,¹⁴ who proposed the *internal* humanization of the market system and argued for equality while not rejecting capitalism. They described a liberal democratic system where tested methods are applied to help the disadvantaged and reduce inequalities. In this system, justice prevails in fair procedures, whereas equality, in the equal respect of human dignity. This theoretical turn allowed the democratic opposition to accept capitalism and try to remedy its deficiencies from within the system.

As Rawls created a new theory of contract, it is obviously not a coincidence that Kis and his co-authors chose the title *Társadalmi szerződés* (Social Contract) to publish the program of the political evolution of the circle of *Beszélő*.¹⁵ This was also an obvious reference to the acceptance of the Rousseau from the tradition of French Enlightenment. In the former sense, *Társadalmi szerződés* can be seen as a call for a consensus where the participants do not see their interests in advance and therefore can, behind the "veil of ignorance," conduct unbiased negotiations about the country's future. Practically, this idea manifested in the Roundtable talks in 1989.

1.2 ANTIPOLITICS

The idea of antipolitics, elaborated by György Konrád,¹⁶ received broad attention internationally.¹⁷ Its impact was more modest in Hungary which was only partially explained by the fact that the Hungarian edition of his book was published five years after the English-language version. Another factor was that antipolitics explained the dominant mentality of intellectuals and their critical approach to the political system, but it said less about political action. It was a point of reference rather than a program. Konrád argued that dissidents must renew politics and the precondition of this was

¹³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited."

¹⁴ Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*.

¹⁵ Haraszti et al., *Társadalmi szerződés*.

¹⁶ Konrád, *Antipolitics*.

¹⁷ Cf. Havel, "Anti-Political Politics."

to renounce the official ideology of the state, as well as the politics institutionalized on its basis. Antipolitics did not call for passivity but active civil politics, which was just as different from the nonpolitical attitude of the apathetic masses as it was from the hierarchical system of command. Konrád believed that personal responsibility in the opposition to the system cannot be avoided: every person has to step out of the framework and narratives of the system, and if they achieve this, it will have a liberating effect on them and their environment. Getting out of the cage of ideological thinking, people can appear as citizens, that is, self-conscious actors who are aware of their rights. In his book entitled *Antipolitics*, Konrád rejected collectivism, and expressed his belief in individual freedom and the personal, independent political action of free individuals.¹⁸

The idea of antipolitics meant not simply free people but the encouragement of thinking, common sense, and turning against political schemes. Konrád saw these as a primary task of the opposition. For him, individual wisdom is a value which can be obscured neither by serving the community nor institutional recognition and career advancement.¹⁹ For the peoples of Central Europe, the opportunity may present itself if the logic of the Cold War and the division of Europe into two halves are rejected. In place of the iron curtain, Konrád imagined a dialogue to reconcile the informed citizens of Europe. He believed that there was a chance of loosening the framework of Yalta, decentralization, and gradual moderation, and these processes might lead to nonviolent change where balance would be preserved.

Konrád believed serving the state was a wrong way for the intellectuals, which must initiate change from the outside, not the inside. The alternative of state existence is antipolitics, which is the action of everyone who do not want to become politician, and renounce every form of power politics. Antipolitics is based on and grows out of gradually strengthening meetings, forums, communal gatherings. A kind of counter-power that does not want to become power itself. Antipolitics depends on the power of the public, but it works only if it is backed by civil courage and participation.

What does antipolitics have to do with the intelligentsia? The task of the “antipolitical intelligentsia,” Konrád wrote, is to offer alternatives and pro-

¹⁸ Konrád, *Antipolitics*.

¹⁹ Konrád, *Antipolitics*, 200.

voke dialogue that goes beyond country borders. This cannot be expected by the international ruling class, which is too weak and narrow-minded for the task. The members of the antipolitical intelligentsia share perspectival thinking and are past power politics; their aim is to ensure the civil control of the prevailing government. In Konrád's view, the antipolitical was far from the apolitical. He believed that apolitical actors cannot reject the notion of becoming the agents of political fight, and therefore they cannot get rid of the charm of power. Antipolitical people can be more successful than apolitical ones only if they do not accept the framework of political fight and turn the fight into a play. Konrád wrote that the intellectuals should not get power because the most talented people should be visionaries, not bureaucrats. The best cannot subject themselves to either state or corporate censorship because it is not their duty to serve others. The future is the global intelligentsia, who embrace internationalism much more than workers who are divided by states and corporations. Thus, antipolitics was more a program of the intelligentsia than of the society. One could find the theory attractive or repulsive for the same reason, its exclusivity and elitist interpretation.

The idea of antipolitics had a stronger effect in the long run than it did right after its publication. It had little effect on the strategy of the Hungarian democratic opposition. Nevertheless, it did express a typical way of thinking of the Central European opposition, which would already be a tradition 20 years later.²⁰ The idea of antipolitics has become a part of the romantic concept of the intelligentsia, which is based on idealization of educated people with free time. It reflected on the opportunity that the free-floating intelligentsia found in its way of life *vis-à-vis* that of the Taylorization of intellectual labor. This approach included skepticism toward institutionalized politics, support for the representation of a nonviolent but radical attitude, as well as the deliberate attempt to dividing power.

1.3 DISOBEDIENCE

Disobedience as a part of the arsenal of democratic opposition can be traced back to the tradition of civil disobedience, but the two were not identical.

20 Renwick, "Antipolitical or Just Anticommunist?"; Cizewska-Martinska, "The Meaning of the 1980s' Anti-Politics Legacy."

Civil disobedience means breaking such rules and legal regulations that are morally disputable. It accepts the state's right to rule, as far as it stems from the will of the people, but it does not accept the state's moral superiority. The state has the right to make laws and enforce the legally codified rules of social operation, but it cannot abuse its right and violate the natural rights of the people. The fact that the state, as a chosen group of people, can maintain the monopoly of legitimate use of violence does not mean that it can go against the moral norms of society.

Whether civil disobedience is legal is a pointless question: it is not by definition. Civil disobedience is not a right, it is a moral duty in the given situation. Civil disobedience is based on the recognition that law is not the expression of absolute justice but a system of controlling behavior. In a legitimate state, the law cannot be completely detached from the consensus of the citizenry, but even if it complies to it in almost every respect it naturally cannot cover all the moral norms. The regimes that tried to resolve morality in legality mostly became dictatorships. Accepting the duality of legality and morality is necessary to talk about a system where civil freedom may exist. It follows from this that, against the *legal* measures of the state, the citizens can freely express their *moral* reservations.²¹

The goal of civil disobedience is to force the state to fulfill the social function it has been created for, and to stop it from stepping over its own social boundaries on grounds of positive law. Civil disobedience is not revolt against the state: it is defining the boundaries of state operation. It is an indicative act which is never total, only partial; not conspiratorial but open; not utilitarian but motivated by morality. Civil disobedience warns the state against creating "unjust law"; and that the disobedient voluntarily accepts punishment demonstrates that they are on the side of "just law." Civil disobedience is a product of liberal social philosophy, which holds that people can think and form moral judgments about themselves or others independently. In other words, they are able to judge the deeds of the legitimate state on the basis of natural law principles embodied in constitutionalism.

The liberal moral foundations of disobedience have been laid out by Henry David Thoreau in a famous essay.²² He argued that it is one's moral

21 Bedau, *Civil Disobedience in Focus*; Bozóki, "A polgári engedetlenség eszméje és gyakorlata."

22 Thoreau, *Resistance to Civil Government*.

duty to subordinate their deeds to their conscience. Civil disobedience, this way, is a higher form of obedience: fidelity to universal human justice. For if the state goes beyond the duty of defending individual freedom and starts limiting it, the duty of the individual is resistance: denying tax payment, accepting the potential to going to prison, protesting, and refusing to cooperate in any form of unjust action. Thoreau argued that these lead to a peaceful world. If everyone acts like this, war can be eliminated. He believed that the tyranny of the majority must be resisted, too, because otherwise the minority loses its own consciousness. But if the minority chose resistance over conformism, the state would not dare to imprison the members of minorities, and therefore it could be forced to stop the war.

In Thoreau's view, accepting the state's punishment for disobedience is worth it, much more so than compliance to the state. "Under a government which imprisons unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison" for this avoids even the appearance of moral community with the government.²³ He claimed that a state may be based only on the individual and individual freedom, and therefore "the best government is that which governs least."²⁴ His liberalism was liberalism before democracy, which is testified by the following, typical sentence: "For my own part, I should not like to think that I ever rely on the protection of the State."²⁵

Accordingly, the liberal understanding of civil disobedience presupposes a political culture where individual freedom is regarded as a basic value. This is not true to every culture; we cannot even say that it is true to every constitutional democracy. However, within these limits civil disobedience means disobedience of the citizen, which may be exercised by any citizen regardless of their class position. The liberal understanding of civil disobedience also requires that one's actions can be morally justified.²⁶ They object to excessive power but do not question the existence of the state, or the legitimate nature of its laws. Their objective is to warn the state about its immoral deeds and therefore contribute to their elimination. Civil disobedience accepts the legal order: after all, it accepts punishment; the demonstrative action wants to ensure that the legal order is not too detached from human morality.

²³ Thoreau, *Resistance to Civil Government*.

²⁴ O'Sullivan, "Introduction," 6.

²⁵ Thoreau, *Resistance to Civil Government*.

²⁶ Weber, *Civil Disobedience in America*.

Thus, the classical liberal understanding believes that moral politics is ultimately possible; it believes that politics and morality can be reconciled with each other and with the existence of the state.

This is precisely what has not been accepted by the anti-statist, libertarian anarchist followers of disobedience. They regard the state as evil *per se*; the state cannot be made moral; therefore, disobedience must target not certain immoral acts of the state but the state as a whole.²⁷ Indeed, that state law expects compliance from individuals is unjustified. As the authority of the prevailing law is based on state power rather than the natural law, individuals cannot be forced to follow its rules on basis of moral considerations. And against unjust law, the duty of the individual is not only disobedience but resistance. Thus, those who accept the libertarian anarchist standpoint have seen civil disobedience less as a single, demonstrative action of denial that depends and reflects on the actions of the state and more as one step toward social revolution.

Civil disobedience is often identified with passive resistance. However, whereas passive resistance stems from the lack of capacity of violence, not from moral refusal and the voluntary renouncing of violence. It can be an early phase of a violent movement as well as its last phase after defeat—a kind of behavior that is fired by the hope or memory of revolution or national independence. Passive resistance is the means of social self-defense in a situation where the majority is against the political system, but they are (either yet or already) in a situation where they cannot realize their will. Yet they are neither defeated nor won over: this can still lead to the strengthening of conflicts, to social explosion or open confrontation. When the consensus between the leaders and the led about the nature of the system is lacking, this latent state of war can always lead to collective movements of disobedience. This is not about the kind of norm violation represented by civil disobedience, where the violation of a norm still accepts the existence of norms and indeed warns the state to comply with them; this is a kind of collective action that calls for questioning, eroding, sabotaging norms. Such action typically takes place when most citizens question the legitimacy of the political system.²⁸

²⁷ Scheuerman, *Civil Disobedience*.

²⁸ Such passive resistance emerged in Hungary after the revolutions of 1848 and 1956, in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet occupation in 1968, or in Poland in 1981–1982, after the introduction of the state of emergency.

In terms of its political goal, the nonviolent strategy of disobedience known as noncooperation, popularized by Tolstoy²⁹ and especially Gandhi,³⁰ occupies a middle-of-the-road position between classical civil disobedience and passive resistance. Ideologically, while passive resistance is the weapon of the weak, nonviolent noncooperation is the abstinence of the strong. The means of violence must be excluded because man cannot know absolute justice, therefore they have no right to punish either. As opposed to passive resistance, such resistance is admittedly active; it is conscious self-limitation against the unconscious and involuntary cooperation in evil. While civil disobedience means resistance against the immoral rules of the state, noncooperation means complete renouncing of cooperation with the state in the case it has become utterly corrupt. For Thoreau, disobedience is individual action, whereas for Gandhi it is a coordinated act of the masses. It is the kind of “metapolitical” process which does not belong the legal forms of politics but strictly avoids the use of means that would contradict its goals.

Conscientious objection, which was quite typical in state socialist systems, can also be regarded as passive resistance rather than civil disobedience. For conscientious objectors turn against not certain unjust laws of the otherwise legitimate system but illegitimate state coercion. They reject even symbolic cooperation in the maintenance of an oppressive regime which has been created without their compliance.

The “new evolutionism” of Adam Michnik³¹ and the strategy of “provocative exercise” of human rights³² show many similarities to the above-outlined principles of civil disobedience, which have also inspired Central European dissidents. Yet these anti-system initiatives and movements cannot be regarded as *civil* disobedience in the sense that they would have accepted the framework of the system and called for its moral correction. The acceptance of the system is marked by the fact that people who engage in civil disobedience voluntarily accept the legal consequences, including jail or some other form of state retribution.

Solidarity in Poland did not simply use the method of civil disobedience. It printed samizdat journals, offered alternative legal aid, and maintained

²⁹ Tolstoy, *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence*.

³⁰ Gandhi, “Duty of Disloyalty.”

³¹ Michnik, “A New Evolutionism.”

³² Kis, *Mi a liberalizmus?*

free universities. It built an alternative society outside the state, and ultimately wanted to overthrow the system. Flexible and ready to compromise in its means, it retained integrity in its goals. New evolutionism meant precisely that the opposition finally found, after unsuccessful revolutions and reform attempts, a strategy which was built on the nonviolent but firmly resistant behavior of civil society. The Polish opposition leaders could use this strategy because they were backed by millions of workers.

In Hungary, the strategy of new evolutionism of Michnik could work only on the micro level, because the Kádár regime destroyed trade unions and other forms of collective interest representation. There was no massive initiative against the system that could have been organized into a political force. In the beginning, the strategy of Michnik was appropriate only to mediate between society and the power holders, but with the creation of *samizdat* it was successful in the breaking and reforming of the structure of the public. The actions of the Hungarian dissidents were sometimes eerily similar classical acts of civil disobedience in the West, but their disobedience had different motives and goals. They exercised disobedience to call attention to the absurdity, oppressiveness, and illegitimate nature of the entire system, and they tried to demonstrate that the culture of critical speech can be created in opposition to the system. Disobedience aimed at showing an alternative to the loyal or neutral, apathetic attitude toward the system.

1.4 CIVIL SOCIETY

The revival of the concept of civil society has been the subject of vast scholarly literature.³³ In Central Europe, the notion of civil society meant primarily the political strategy against the oppressive state.³⁴ Critical intellectuals in the 1980s agreed that civil society was always on the opposite side of the state. While the state represented institutionalized power and authority, civil society meant autonomy, voluntary self-organization, autonomous action, independent movements, as well as domination-free communication.

33 Cf. Arato, "Civil Society against the State"; "Empire vs Civil Society"; *Civil Society, Constitution, and Legitimacy*; Myant, "Klaus, Havel, and the Debate over Civil Society"; Pollack and Wielgohs, *Dissent and Opposition*; Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society*; Tamás, "A Disquisition on Civil Society."

34 Vajda, "East Central European Perspectives"; "Civil társadalom és demokrácia"; Bernhard, "Civil Society and Regime Change."

The starting point of the followers of the idea of civil society was that, if the oppressive nature of the state cannot be changed, the goal must be the self-organization of a moral-based society.

The discourse of the democratic opposition embraced the concept of civil society only in the first half of the 1980s. After that, however, many saw the essence of democracy in the expected triumph of the above-described, anarchic-ethical civil society over the state. The Hungarian dissidents had taken the concept of civil society from the Poles, and they also saw their task in the cooperation with the workers in the beginning. For the Solidarity movement was born, following the bitter experiences of isolation and breakdown of protests in 1968 and 1970, out of cooperation between social classes, the joint organization of intellectuals and workers. The Hungarian democratic opposition had to give up this goal soon, after which the idea of civil society was mainly used to encourage regime-critical initiatives of the middle class.

In the notion of civil society, the world outside the state appeared as a moral community. The Czech opposition writer, Václav Havel,³⁵ returned to an earlier philosophical understanding of civil society, which presumed that free society was based on the sum of virtues of autonomous citizens. Originating in the works of Burke, this interpretation of civil society claims that the concept crosses class lines, and is not related to a particular ideology. Understanding civil society as a moral community could be powerful in the second half of the 1980s because it allowed the possibility of identification for liberal as well as conservative groups. Speaking about the “small circles of liberty,” after Bibó, represented an alternative to both the Rousseauian general will and the Kantian categorical imperative. The idea of civil society organized on morals, which—by the intentions of Havel—turn from abstract ideas to the concrete individuals,³⁶ proved to be an appropriately wide platform for the participants of nonviolent, democratic change. The philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás³⁷ claimed that the Hungarian opposition was creative in using the concept of civil society when they built, as a counterpole to the oppressive communist state, a strategy of liberation on its basis.

35 Havel, “The Power of the Powerless”; *Living in Truth*; “Anti-Political Politics.”

36 Elshtain, *Real Politics*, 7.

37 Tamás, “The Legacy of Dissent,” 188.

As it appeared in early philosophy, the concept of civil society was not a revolutionary idea, and it referred to as auxiliary to the state, not as its opponent. However, the antagonism of civil society and the state—which originates more in Paine than in Burke—offered a good strategic opportunity to the Central European intelligentsia to present the state as necessary evil. Some regarded strong state as a sign of weak democracy, and vice versa.³⁸ Nevertheless, this axiomatically positive interpretation of civil society was valid only until the party state was untouched. Civil society was often identified with democratic social movements, which fight for “real democracy” in opposition to the prevailing institutions. In the 1980s, many theoreticians believed that political parties and governmental institutions are generally nondemocratic,³⁹ and therefore they are to be replaced by the unwritten, noninstitutionalized consensus of civil society.

The year 1988 was politically the year of civil society understood as a flexible, informal, active social movement. The year 1989, however, was when political parties were developing their principles and programs. By 1989, the decade-long strategy of civil society had become tactics toward the goal of cooperation and coordinated political action of the opposition against communist power. Roundtable talks in Poland meant the victory of the opposition strategy based on civil society; in Hungary, they meant the beginning of a new period, the successful cooperation of opposition elites.

The Opposition Roundtable of 1989 brought a pragmatic reinterpretation of the dream of unified civil society, known from the example of Poland and Solidarity.⁴⁰ It gradually transformed the loosely organized groups of opposition to fit into the political reality of emerging party pluralism. The Roundtable talks in Hungary meant the stage where the new, pluralist political elite and their experts exposed themselves, whereas in Poland they meant the victory of the single umbrella organization of civil society over the party state.⁴¹ The concept of civil society still had considerable rhetorical value during the Roundtable talks. When opposition groups appeared as the representatives of civil society *vis-à-vis* the power holders, this argumentation was politically successful as it contributed to the party state's

38 Vajda, “East Central European Perspectives.”

39 Konrád, *Antipolitics*.

40 Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition*, 270.

41 Ziolkowski, “The Roots, Branches and Blossoms of *Solidarnosc*.”

retreat. However, it soon became clear that the old idea of a unified civil society⁴² rather belonged to the practices (and later, the myths) of anti-totalitarian movements than to future democracy based on pluralism and divided interests.

The strategy based on civil society was successful in discrediting the communist state but became more problematic in the post-communist period when the consolidation of new democracy also required the acceptance of the state. Yet this was hampered by the firmly rooted principle of “civil society against the state” as well as the negative East European experience. Some analysts called the anti-state interpretation of civil society as the last ideology of the old, Central European intelligentsia.⁴³ On the other hand, certain actors of civil society started operating as nongovernmental organizations, financing themselves from international funds and state benefits while focusing on a single social problem. Such professionalization also contradicted the romantic notion of civil society which continued to exist as an anti-institutional, anti-state tradition focusing not on specific issues but the entire horizon of society.

1.5 HUMAN RIGHTS

The Hungarian opposition, just like the Czech and Polish dissidents, stood on the moral grounds of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations,⁴⁴ which acknowledged inalienable human rights not as “gifts” from the state but as the innate rights of every person. This became more important in the 1970s, for in the Final Act of the 1975 Helsinki Conference the countries of the Soviet bloc officially accepted human rights, which naturally included the freedom of speech, media, assembly, and association.⁴⁵ Whether countries met the conditions of the Final Act was monitored by Helsinki Watch, a newly founded civil rights institution that soon became an international federation, and Helsinki committees were formed in several countries.

42 Keane, *Civil Society and the State*; Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*.

43 Beyme, *Civil Society and Political Theory*.

44 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

45 Kis, *Mi a liberalizmus?*, 231

After the international convention and its institutionalization, the idea of human rights became more emphatic in international politics. Its political advantage was that it did not judge certain political systems but focused on the grievances of individuals and groups, which however led to political consequences for the countries that violated rights. In the idea of human rights, the acknowledgment of human dignity did not depend on the goodwill of the state but was taken for granted. János Kis put it as follows:

When it comes to defending people who are persecuted or discriminated by the violation of human rights, there is no room for political deliberation. There can be no external benefit for which we should leave them to their fate. If the moral rights of people are violated, we must protest as strongly as we can [...] not because solidarity may bring new allies to the movement, although that is a possibility. We must protest because someone's dignity has been hurt, and this is unacceptable. We must protest so the violation of their rights is recognized as such. It is made clear: citizens do not receive their fundamental rights from the state—we *have human rights* (emphasis original).⁴⁶

The idea of human rights was important also because this way the members of the opposition could prove that they stand outside the system but not outside the law. Moreover, they represent fundamental rights *vis-à-vis* the system. They made it clear that resistance has a serious constitutional, legal foundation. The normative model of human rights that Kis adapted was the common denominator which practically every member of the heterogeneous group of pacifists, “antipoliticians,” social democrats, liberals, anarchists, liberal socialists, fifty-sixers, and plebeian radicals could accept.⁴⁷ Maybe it is not an exaggerated statement that the dissidents became liberals after 1989 because they found liberalism as the ideology which had human rights and the legal protection of individual freedoms at its center.

The idea of human rights was not one of the issues among many for the democratic opposition. It was the basic idea which pervaded all the others. One could support antipolitics or reject it, take part or stay away from acts of disobedience,

⁴⁶ Kis, *Mi a liberalizmus?*, 203.

⁴⁷ Kis, *Politics in Hungary*.

be closer to liberal or social democratic tradition—but they agreed that the idea of human rights is accepted as the final reference point of political action.

2. THE IDENTITY OF THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION

After the debate on strategy, among the members of the opposition between 1982 and 1984, the attention of the opposition shifted toward the creation of an action program. The program-making article, “How to find a way out of the crisis?” had already appeared in the middle of the debate.⁴⁸ It proposed solutions that gave the public a bigger and more active role than before. The role of the opposition was seen to shape public opinion and exert pressure through it. They believed that the state will only act when public opinion keeps them under moral and intellectual pressure. Proposals concerned the following issues: financial information, public debates on economic policy, the renewal of interest representation, the conditions of a well-functioning public sphere, legal conditions of interest representation, and the reform of book and magazine publishing. Publishing was used as an example of how a proposal can be put into practice gradually.

The activities of the opposition intellectuals became well known by 1985–1986. In June 1985, the opposition meeting at Monor⁴⁹ which was attended by 45 Hungarian thinkers was a milestone in the history of cooperation of the dissident intelligentsia and other anti-system groups (populists, reform economists). This was already demonstrated with the keynote speakers coming from different groups.⁵⁰ The demonstrative joint conference of the populists and the dissidents was a powerful political message. For their cooperation was not devoid of conflict. One well-known dissident said later: “Maybe the most important difference between the populist opposition and the democratic opposition was their attitude towards the power: they were ‘permitted’ to publish in the Aczél era, took the opportunities, and were in negotiations. They made numerous deals. They always had a propensity to accept the ‘decent national communists.’”⁵¹ An opposition policy was formed, which

48 *Beszélő* editors, “Hogyan keressünk kiutat a válságból?,” 233–38.

49 Rainer, *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve*.

50 The keynote speeches were given by István Csurka, Sándor Csoóri, Tamás Bauer, and János Kis. Cf. Rainer, *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve*.

51 Interview with Gábor Demszky, 1997.

first lead to the Monor meeting of 1985, to the conference on 1956 in 1986, and to lectures at universities and clubs. It also contributed to the birth of the first program in 1987. Finally, it also had a role in the organization of the Network of Free Initiatives. Without such an adaptive but politically coherent strategy, the democratic opposition of the 1980s could have easily become unsubstantial in the period of the transition.

In the second half of the 1980s, the accelerating pace of political activity led the opposition to the movements that later turned into political parties during the regime change. At this point, we may also mention their contact with the small denominations which were oppressed in the Kádár era. This was made possible by the samizdat journals. The story is told by one participant as follows: "I joined Faith Church in 1987, but the contact had been made earlier, in 1986. It was then that the Church was attacked by the communist press which granted no opportunity for defense. The Church wanted to reply on numerous forums, but only the *Beszélő* provided space for that. [. . .] The Church and the democratic opposition then got in contact, with the cooperation of Gábor Iványi, Ferenc Kőszeg, and others."⁵² The existence of democratic opposition became known by broader circles of society.

The definition of democratic oppositional identity was summarized by Ferenc Kőszeg as follows:

What is the democratic opposition? It certainly cannot be called a movement, because it is too small for a movement: it has no means or an organization that could link sympathizers together. [. . .] Its members would obviously refuse to be labeled a party as well. There are few things they are more averse to than the Bolshevik tradition of an elite party, composed of a group of intellectuals who claim to be destined to lead the fight. [. . .] The democratic opposition in its present form is an opinion and behavior shaping group. [. . .] Once disobedience happens too often, the dividing line between the behavior of the opposition and others is blurred [. . .]. In this increasingly politicized world the opposition, whose gestures and genesis make it a political grouping, must engage in politics as well. [. . .] It is only the opposition that has criticized the actions of the government publicly and without concealment for seven years. This

52. Interview with Péter Hack, 1997.

work gives us moral authority that, despite our weakness and isolation, provides us with the chance to be listened to when we speak and not only within our own circles.⁵³

Thus, the opposition believed it had influence not because they were many, had expertise or an effect on society, but their moral capital. This was rational in the given circumstances, where moral capital in the last years of the disintegrating system was met by great political demand. Yet moral capital could be a point of reference only in times of radical change. In consolidated democracies, this is less important as political influence is defined by the results of the democratic elections, not moral stance.

The June 1987 special issue of *Beszélő*, entitled *Társadalmi szerződés: a politikai kibontakozás feltételei* (Social Contract: The Conditions of Political Progress), published the comprehensive program of the *Beszélő* intellectuals.⁵⁴ Despite the title, resembling Rousseau, the contract reflected the opinion of one group of the opposition. The document made it clear that the consensus of the Kádár years was over and “Kádár must go” because Kádár personified the restoration of 1956–1957 and his name represented the whole era.⁵⁵ No wonder that the first sentences of the text appeared as revelation.

Despite the radical start, the program itself was quite temperate. The authors said that a radical political turn was necessary, but without a social consensus the nation will not rise. New policies must be sought, but the members of the power elite will only engage in dialogue if they understand that they must negotiate with more than just the closed circles of intellectuals. The authors also stressed the necessity of an economic stability package, which builds on political change. The goals of the revolution of 1956 were still considered valid: multiparty system, self-government at the workplace and at settlements, national self-determination, and neutrality in foreign policy. This was the last “Bibóian” document of the opposition, demanding constitutional limitations on one-party rule, parliamentary sovereignty, a government responsible to parliament, freedom of press codified in law, legal protection to employees by giving them the right to assembly and to the pursuit of their interests, social security, and fair social policies. Indeed, the pro-

53 Kőszeg, “Ne csak építkezz . . . Politizálj,” 701–02.

54 Haraszti et al., *Társadalmi szerződés*.

55 Kis, “Mit képvisel a Beszélő?” 691.

gram was not radical even in its age, as if it tried not to scare away potential followers. Capitalism and multiparty system were not discussed: its foremost aim was to have civil rights ensured.

This program of the *Beszélő* circle marked the end of the phase when the democratic opposition appeared only as the opposition of the system. In 1988, the question was not the identity or position of the dissidents but their active role in the pluralizing and more and more public process of regime change. The former dissidents developed first into a wide network and later into a liberal democratic political grouping, which turned into a party in 1988.

3. OPEN NETWORK-BUILDING AND PARTY FORMATION

From the end of 1987, the democratic opposition formed out of freelance, fired, “free-floating” dissident intellectuals, faced new tasks. This did not mean mediation between the power and the society any longer, or disobedience against the party state, not even the further elaboration of the idea of a human-rights based civil society. The task at hand was practical political action. First and foremost, they had to make people aware of the crisis that was constantly spreading through more and more layers of society, and to make clear that this was a crisis of the system which cannot be solved without the opposition forces. They gradually moved from a radical reformer standpoint to a liberal one. The Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) which was founded by the core of the group in November 1988 was neither social democratic nor civic radical but had a clearly liberal image, standing for the quick transition to market economy and adopting the modernization pattern of the West. The members of the group believed it more than others that liberal democracy can be realized in Hungary relatively soon.

3.1 FORMS OF ORGANIZATION

The supporters of radical reform disagreed in its content and mode of implementation, but they agreed in its direction and necessity. Among regime-critical groups, single issue movements were in a more advantageous position in the sense that they attacked not the entire system but only some of its critical points. These included peace and environmentalist movements, as well as town and heritage conservation and nature-lover groups. These groups were

in a paradoxical situation as they were, in a sense, “nonpolitical” political movements, which did not present political alternatives but defined themselves as thematically confined social movements. Their goal was to gain the necessary professional knowledge so the experts of the party state cannot question their competence. They tried to avoid direct political involvement as much as they could for a long time, as it would have been proof to the charge of leaning toward the opposition.

Up until the last years, the Kádár regime tried to maintain the tradition that political opposition may appear only if it is disguised in culture, literature, or philosophical discourse, and therefore any opposition stance also appeared in the colors of cultural politics. But in the period of decline there were many who no longer wanted to follow the resigned, relativistic real politics of their predecessors. Even beyond the circle of dissidents, the demand appeared to replace the earlier deals based on personal connections with the guarantees of rule of law and pluralist political institutions, and therefore replace the privileges of a selective public sphere with the rights of a democratic public sphere. In the period of passing censorship, this still required intense civil activism. Independent grassroots institutions forming outside the state provided a safety net for the new forces of opposition. This period saw the mushrooming of clubs and debating societies, the revival of the college movement, and the emergence of various kinds of reform ideas.⁵⁶ First places where critical intellectuals could meet were created,⁵⁷ followed by the university-related venues which provided room for debate for university students and young intellectuals.⁵⁸ The Soros Foundation provided significant support to the strengthening of civil and professional public sphere.⁵⁹ Communities discussing politics in relation to certain professions, issues,

56 Diczházi, *Körök kora.*, Szilágyi, *A Hétfői Szabadegyetem és a III/III.*

57 Such places included Rakpart Club, Józsefváros Cultural House, Jurta Theater, Kassák Club, Kossuth Club, Institute for History at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Library of Parliament, Institute for Financial Research, Petőfi Hall, Széchenyi Library, Tinódi Cinema, and others.

58 These included Independent Socio-Political Circle, Interdisciplinary Scientific Student Circle, Bibó College, Erdei Ferenc Circle, Club Council, Rajk College, Ráday College, and others.

59 Nóvé, *Tény/Soros.*

social positions, and religious beliefs appeared,⁶⁰ and later also did explicitly political and often proto-party organizations.⁶¹

The main question of 1988 was whether opposition groups can put their ideological differences aside in favor of achieving the common political goal, the realization of pluralist democracy. In Hungary, the populist and dissident groups of the opposition often went in parallel but there were some periods when they were going in different directions. In 1987–88, it seemed there was no hope for opposition unity. Notwithstanding both groups wanted democracy, they wanted to achieve it through different tactics and with different people. After the successful joint appearance at the 1985 Monor meeting⁶² and parting company in autumn 1986,⁶³ the groups of the opposition found each other only two and a half years later, in Spring 1989 when the Opposition Roundtable was formed. Political cooperation became a real option only after their organizational identity was established. After Pozsgay's appearance at the 1987 Lakitelek meeting and his speech there, circles of the democratic opposition feared that permanent cooperation can be formed between the populists and the reform communists speaking for a democratic socialism. This would have meant that the party state can expand its social base while remaining within the boundaries of the broadly interpreted reform and "model change." As a result of the strong political identity of these groups as well as their mutual mistrust, competitive multiparty system emerged in Hungary earlier than democracy.

The year of 1988 was special because the era of dissidence ended but the negotiations to lay the foundations of a new constitution had not started yet. The opposition left the environment of libraries and private flats, and they appeared on the streets. Massive demonstrations not seen since 1956 had started in the country, among which the most important ones were the June 1988 demonstration against the leveling of villages in Romania and the

60 These circles included: Bethlen Foundation, Dialogue Peace Group, Danube Circle, Independent Legal Service, Young Lawyers' Circle, Independent Lawyer's Forum, Inconnu, Refuge Committee, National Association of Large Families, Council of Socio-Political Clubs, Petőfi Cultural and Tradition-Preserving Association, Széchenyi Casino, Széchenyi Society, SZETA, Committee for Historical Justice (TIB), and small denominations and religious base-communities.

61 Among the proto-party organizations, see Kovács Béla Political Society, Márton Áron Society, Independent Committee for Defending Transylvania, Rákóczi Alliance, Republican Circle, Liberal Circle, New March Front (ÜMF), Veres Péter Society.

62 Rainer, *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve*.

63 Hegedűs, *Ötvenhatról nyolcvanhatban*.

series of demonstrations organized by Danube Circle against the building of Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam. In addition, there were the demonstrations on March 15 and October 23, and smaller demonstrations, during which hundreds of thousands of people were mobilized nationwide.

This was the year when Network of Free Initiatives (SZKH) and Fidesz were formed, MDF became a political organization, SZDSZ was founded, and Independent Smallholder's Party (*Független Kisgazdapárt*, FKGP) was re-established. In this year, János Kádár was removed from power at the party conference⁶⁴ and his follower, Károly Grósz, was also put in a defensive position by the younger generation of reformers within the party. In Moscow, Gorbachev defeated his conservative opponents, and the communist leadership in Poland was forced to realize that political revival is impossible without Lech Wałęsa's Solidarity. The risk of participating in the opposition decreased, petitions were signed by more and more people from different walks of life. We may say with some pathos that in this year Hungarian society appeared on the streets.

First, the dissidents created a new critical public sphere, then most of them became active political actors. After a Call was issued in March 1988,⁶⁵ SZKH was founded on May 1. It elected a temporary council and issued a statement,⁶⁶ trying to act like an umbrella organization for the opposition. SZKH included numerous opposition groups, from the dissidents through the representatives of civil circles to small denominations. According to one of the leaders of the democratic opposition, "what was important for us is to be in a situation when we can organize together with future political elements. [...] This was the form that was acceptable for not the opposition but those who agreed to cooperate with it, and this was the reason that SZDSZ was formed only months after the Network of Free Initiatives."⁶⁷ This was not the only ground of opening, the rapprochement of the democratic opposition and the reform intellectuals also accelerated. The reformers of the late Kádár era saw the historical opportunity in cooperating with and using the trustworthy actors and their political capital to legitimize their own economic and political goals. As the liberal politician, Gábor Demszky who

64 MSZMP, *Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt országos értekezletének jegyzőkönyve*.

65 SZKH, "Felhívás a Szabad Kezdeményezések Hálózata létrehozására."

66 SZKH, "Van kiút!"

67 Interview with Kis Jánossal, 1997.

served as Mayor of Budapest between 1990 and 2010, claimed: “Those who were really at the radical front line of the opposition soon found themselves in the same group and began to work with people who had more expertise in constitutional law and economics. Thus, we had the luck to get in contact with the professional elite. This is how SZDSZ was formed.”⁶⁸

One of the most conspicuous deficiencies of the Hungarian opposition movement was the political passivity of the workers. While there had been opposition ideas about seeking alliance with the workers, following the Polish example, but this had not been realized. Not only because the Hungarian dissidents were a much weaker political force than their Polish counterparts but also because the selective oppression of the Kádár regime was much more successful in isolating the intelligentsia from other groups of society. The more realist members of the opposition were aware of this. The historian Miklós Szabó, who later was a politician of the SZDSZ, said in 1989: “How wide our scope is difficult to ascertain. Earlier I had debates with the actionist representatives of the movement. They proposed that we go to the gate of the factory and try ‘enlighten’ the workers. I was firmly against this, and not because I was afraid of potential police intervention. It was because I could very well imagine how the workers would have reacted: we would be lucky if they did not spit on us, seeing our motive as some gentry entertainment.”⁶⁹ Thus, the possibility of an anti-system alliance that would cross class lines was excluded, and the dissidents were driven to seek political cooperation with middle class groups, mainly from Budapest.

The newly formed party of former dissidents, SZDSZ was a mixture of various liberal, social democrat, liberal socialist ideologies, as well as green values. The Statement of Principles of the new party put it as follows:

We, Hungarian democrats, are the successors of all those who tried to make the heritage of the triadic slogan of the French revolution political reality. We want to be a part of that Europe which has achieved greater development in the last two hundred years than humanity had in its entire history before. We want an independent, democratic, welfare state.⁷⁰

68 Interview with Demszky Gáborral, 1997.

69 Bossányi, *Szólampróba*, 213.

70 SZDSZ, “Elvi Nyilatkozat.”

As an umbrella party, the SZDSZ being formed wanted to be the successor of the progressive forces of the modern history of Hungary.⁷¹ The statement which involved this later became the preamble of the official party manifesto.

There is difference, however, between the criticism of theory and the judgment of political action related to theory. The program of political democracy, free association, solidarity, and sociality was popular in opposition circles in the 1980s as well. They often quoted the idea of Bibó, who claimed that the adoption of Western “modes of freedom” is not contradictory to the goal of a society free of exploitation. Building capitalism was not on the table then, but this changed in a few months. While many had turned to it with sympathy when it came to criticism state socialism,⁷² the political influence of the idea of liberal socialism was weak during the regime change.

In March 1989, SZDSZ accepted the *A rendszerváltás programja* (Program for Regime Change) published in book form⁷³ which closed the early period of creative chaos in the liberal party. In this year, opposition intellectuals took up new roles: from theoretical and political forerunners and marginalized actors with moral prestige they became party founders, founding fathers, constitution makers, and legislators. As soon as free elections were possible, the dissidents gradually stepped out of their old opposition role and many of them continued their political career within the framework of the newly created democratic order.

As the party of “freedom and solidarity,” SZDSZ tried to balance between the right-wing and left-wing values of freedom throughout its existence in general and in its first years in particular.⁷⁴ For a long time, this organization was liberal in both economic and cultural sense, and therefore it was unique among European liberal organizations. Among the former dissidents in the period after founding the party, Gáspár Miklós Tamás represented the values of conservative liberalism, István Eörsi did the values of social democ-

71 The names of Lajos Kossuth, István Széchenyi, József Eötvös, Oszkár Jászi, Anna Kéthly, István Bibó, Zoltán Szabó, Imre Nagy, and Ferenc Donáth were all mentioned, representing the progressive forces.

72 Cf. the young economists who followed the footsteps of Tibor Liska (who developed ideas of self-management and “socialist entrepreneurship”) and the young sociologists who were closer to the principle of equality and focused primarily on the underprivileged.

73 Magyar and Pető, *A rendszerváltás programja*.

74 Tamás, “Irányzatok az SZDSZ-ben.”

racy, whereas János Kis represented a left-of-center liberal position.⁷⁵ As an analyst pointed out, “the liberal faction of the democratic opposition stood up as the foremost actors of the democratization process but their interpretation of democracy did not include the conditions of society-wide participation and institutional control.”⁷⁶

The period of party formation sometimes brought painful personal losses for the transforming political forces. Conflicts were sometimes of practical or strategic nature—whether they should become civil community organizations or professional parties—but in some cases they had a distinctly ideological edge. I illustrate the political motivations of the leaving dissidents by presenting the standpoint of four opposition activists: Pál Szalai, Erzsébet Szalai, György Krassó, and Jenő Nagy.

The political theorist Pál Szalai was called the “last radical”⁷⁷ for his support of the views of civic radicals as well as the consistently negative position toward the interwar Horthy regime. Pál Szalai welcomed Network of Free Initiatives (SZKH) and wanted to participate in its work, and he supported the gradual, peaceful nature of democratic transition. He welcomed the founding of SZDSZ, because the Statement of Principles of the new party also embraced liberal socialist, social democratic, and democratic socialist values. When SZDSZ was formed in November 1988, Pál Szalai joined the party but only to leave in spring 1989, being disappointed after the first party conference adopted the party manifesto⁷⁸ which he did not find left-wing enough. For him, it was unacceptable that the new liberal party turned away from ideological pluralism only half a year after it had been underlined in the Statement of Principles. Pál Szalai could identify with SZKH on ideological and tactical basis, but he left SZDSZ for ideological reasons. For him, ideological consistence was more important than the success of the movement or party.

Erzsébet Szalai, a sociologist was among those dissidents who were active members of SZKH but did not join SZDSZ, because they found party founding a betrayal of civil organization and even civil society.⁷⁹ In her view,

75 Gagy, “Beágyazott kritika.”

76 Gagy, “Beágyazott kritika.”

77 Fehér, “Szalai Pál – az utolsó radikális.”

78 Magyar and Pető, *A rendszerváltás programja*.

79 This was the reason why some other activists also stayed away from the new party.

the SZKH was not the germ of a future party but a civil initiative where horizontal organization and the deliberative understanding of democracy were important. Accordingly, she saw the foundation of SZDSZ as a coup, and did not join the party either. She did not refrain from taking part in politics, though, and was close to Liga, the new democratic trade union. During the Roundtable talks, she also took part in an economic committee as the delegate of Liga. When she noticed that economic negotiations were not important for the participants, she left that position as well. Later, Erzsébet Szalai was among those who issued the Democratic Charter, that is, she returned to civil, movement-like politics. Based on this, despite her brief episode of participating in the Roundtable talk, one can consider her primarily as a movement intellectual.

György Krassó, a dissident economist, did not join SZDSZ but created his own radical, Hungarian October Party (*Magyar Október Párt*, MOP). He was more indulgent toward the liberal ideological image of SZDSZ. He could not join the party because he was abroad, and when he returned, he found it unacceptable that SZDSZ conducted closed-door negotiations about the future rules of democracy. He opined that the party colluded with the communists and betrayed the revolutionary strategy of 1956 because, as part of the new elite, the party negotiated “above the people’s head.” When he returned, Krassó’s intention was not to establish a new party. Yet, upon the encouragement of his followers, the plebeian-radical party was founded with his leadership in summer 1989.⁸⁰ He was the only dissident who not only rejected the process of transition and the “elitist” strategy of SZDSZ, but also offered a revolutionary alternative to gradual transition by founding his own party and constantly criticizing the roundtable elite. However, not even MOP—which referred to the tradition of 1956, the worker’s councils, and radical plebeian democracy—could successfully address the politically passive workers. True, Krassó’s party was formed only after the other parties, but this does not mean that the latter would have already taken all the best powers of the workers. Rather, most workers did not resonate with either the above-mentioned values or the party’s militant anti-communism and anti-elitism. Due to his early death in 1991, Krassó did not have an opportunity to develop his regime criticism. Krassó renounced existing parties and civil

80 Krassó, “Statárium és happening.”

organizations, the negotiations, the new electoral law, as well as the entire process of peaceful transition. Among the dissidents discussed here, he was the only one who founded a party vis-à-vis the mainstream liberal party of the democratic opposition. By political intentions, Krassó was a revolutionary who represented the revolutionary alternative of the regime change.

Finally, there was one dissident, Jenő Nagy—who was particularly active as the publisher and editor of samizdat journals—who did not even join the Network of Free Initiatives because he found already that a top-down project of the democratic opposition. In his view, the democratic opposition was already organized too hierarchically, and he did not see SZKH any different. “On the surface, SZKH was planned to be like a people’s front which would have coordinated organizations which were independent from each other and from any center. In practice, however, they had a board ‘elected’ with virtually limitless power to everyone’s neck, the most memorable act of which was the cancellation of the peaceful street commemoration on October 23, 1988.”⁸¹ One of the members of the opposition in the 1980s, Jenő Nagy not only refused to join SZKH but also rejected every opportunity of political activity he could follow. From 1988 on, he stayed away from every political movement, including the Democratic Charter. His attitude resembles the character of an intransigent member of the resistance who was just as critical toward the political activity of the democratic opposition as he was toward the party state. He made no compromise and chose to draw back instead.

What the movement of these four opposition intellectuals demonstrates is that the future political activity of the former dissidents was not at all evident. It was not clear either, which type of action the former members of the democratic opposition should follow in the framework of democratic politics. These issues first arose in 1988 and had a definitive effect in the next years. It became obvious that one type of opposition activity does not automatically lead to another type of activity, and a significant part of the participants indeed do not want to take part in every period of opposition politics with the same enthusiasm and commitment.

MDF faced similar dilemmas. At first it was formed as a debating society because the organizers did not want to “go too far” compared to their expected followers in terms of defining the form of organization. They did

81 Nagy, “Magyar? Demokratikus? Ellenzék?” 186–87.

not want to be more radical than society. One of the organizers of MDF, Csaba Kiss talked about this right after the regime change as follows.

In the first Lakitelek meeting, it was obvious to us—the group of 8–10 organizers—that we would not finish the day by founding an organization. The Statement essentially included two conditions: the intention to create a Hungarian democratic forum and to form independent media outlets. The reason we did not want to define what this *forum* could be exactly was that we were worried about the power hampering our development already in the period of organization, and because of the fear the people had. First, we imagined events of public political debates, the professional analysis of burning issues. This 1987 attempt may be best defined as a peculiar initiative of civil society.⁸²

Yet in the first year, MDF defined itself as a social organization rejecting both government and opposition, meaning it stood between MSZMP and the democratic opposition. This was a source of political problems for the party afterward. Kiss believed this was, on the one hand, a tactical issue: to give time to those who join to overcome their fear. On the other hand, they really found the dissident-organized democratic opposition very far from their behavior. They defined the democratic opposition mainly by cultural traits.

We cannot ignore what happened between September 1987 and of 1988. In the first half of 1988, a real *forum* was formed in Jurta Theatre, where everyone was welcome and could share their opinion. That in this period MDF tried to find a middle lane between the opposition and the government can be explained by that we found the radical opposition a kind of avant-garde, the reconnaissance team of democracy, the way of which can be undertaken by very few only.⁸³

This careful strategy was beneficial for MDF as the membership of the organization reached 10,000 people by the beginning of 1989. People were

82 Kiss, "Az MDF önképe és az átmenet," 124.

83 Kiss, "Az MDF önképe és az átmenet."

more willing to join a political enterprise that involved less risk. In comparison, SZDSZ had around 2,000 members at the time. SZDSZ could catch up in terms of organization only in the autumn 1989 petition campaign and the victory of the “Four Yes” referendum; however, the labels “moderate” and “radical” stuck with MDF and SZDSZ, respectively, up until the first elections.

It was only after the regime that voices blaming the entire regime-changing elite for the lack of stronger mass mobilization and a classical revolution amplified. István Csurka, who belonged to the radical wing of MDF, put it as follows: “An embezzled revolution? Well yes because it did not happen at all. Because it remained and has still been confined to those intellectual limits from which it started, because it remained on the level of deals and side deals, because its further fate is not in the people’s hand either but in the hands of competing elites.”⁸⁴ In this narrative, both main parties became “pact parties” for they allowed communists to transform their power. Moreover, they became “traitors” because they did not place the power in the hands of the people.

3.2 *THE RHETORIC OF CRISIS*

The end of the 1980s public discourse was dominated by different forms of symbolic politics. By symbolic politics I mean politics which is not concerned with questions of economic redistribution but attempts to blaze a trail for a new political structure by replacing the old machinery of power in the name of new values and new ideas. Symbolic politics offered an attractive, normative vision, the elements of which were the slogans of civil society, human rights, multiparty system, democracy, and return to Europe. As I showed above, the historical narrative of the democratic opposition did not go back to the period before 1945 but focused on the future. The conservative liberal József Antall (MDF) added legitimizing references to the past when they tried to draw parallels between the process of negotiated regime change and similar events of Hungarian history, and therefore to embed the events in tradition. This was indispensable for the spread of symbolic politics in society and for achieving the mass support the powers of the regime

84 Csurka, “Meg nem történt forradalom,” 138.

change wanted. Opposition strategy building on moral credibility attracted outsiders into the political life. A discourse drawing up moral demands and reanimating cultural-ideological cleavages was created by the opposition intelligentsia.

In the beginning, the dissidents defined their regime criticism from a normative, moral, and universal perspective. The criticism of others, who believed themselves to be experts of certain areas, represented more practical, reformist differences of opinion. They could keep their jobs. While the former group worked to delegitimize the system, the latter wanted to “rationalize” it by pointing out its dysfunctional properties. As the regime liberalized, the role of professionals (jurists, economists) appreciated on the side of the opposition. They could now criticize the system still on a professional basis but with a political edge for the violation of human rights and the dysfunctional economy. They were those who joined to write party programs in 1988, who presented the policies of the party at its meetings, and who appeared as the experts of the opposition parties in the Roundtable talks of 1989.

In one of his books, Albert O. Hirschman presents and offers a critique of conservative arguments against progressive reforms. Hirschman differentiates three kinds of typical arguments brought up against any kind of radical change: perversity, jeopardy, and futility. According to the argument of perversity, “the contemplated action will bring disastrous consequences”; the argument of jeopardy states that “the new reform will jeopardize the older one”; and the argument of futility claims that “the contemplated action attempts to change permanent structural characteristics (‘laws’) of the social order; it is therefore bound to be wholly ineffective, futile.”⁸⁵

Overviewing the discursive fights of the 1980s, we can see that the standpoint of the opposition was quite often attacked on the bases of perversity, jeopardy, and futility from the side of the MSZMP. First, it was a typical message of the whispering propaganda of the Kádár leadership that opposition actions would only provoke the Soviets to remove Kádár which will bring disastrous consequences. Secondly, reformers within the party often argued that the reform demands of outsiders must be approached with caution because they can easily hamper ongoing reform processes initiated

85 Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction*, 167.

from the inside. Finally, the third argument was voiced, claiming that the demands disguised as reforms of the opposition powers indeed aim at overthrowing socialism, and therefore everyone who wants to keep the achievements of socialism must not be at the tail of the enemies of order. The changing of public discourse in the can be understood as a series of replies to these arguments that defended the *status quo*.

The intellectuals had a decisive role in the preparations and negotiations of the regime change by reformulating every issue. The party jargon gave way to scholarly inclined, critical mode of speech.⁸⁶ Intellectuals who were critical of the regime took it for granted that the state socialist system was in crisis. Public discourse was gradually and irresistibly taken over by the rhetoric of crisis, which became of the key categories of 1988. The rhetoric of crisis made it obvious that things cannot go the way they used to.

From reformers through sociologists to writers, the *crème de la crème* of critical intellectuals saw that Hungary was in crisis, and they also suggested that the old communist leadership has no idea as to how it could be resolved. In the beginning, speaking about economic crisis was easier because the criticism of economic policy fit into the reform traditions of the regime. Reform economists held lectures about the deepening economic crisis all around the country. The populist writers claimed that society was in deep moral crisis, by which they meant demographic crisis, the crisis of traditional values, and the fate of Hungarians abroad. But this was still not a criticism of the whole system. The latter appeared in the popular discourse when the democratic opposition started to speak about a political crisis as well, pointing out that this situation requires radical turn. Catching up, social scientists started public debates about the radical reform of the system, corporatism, and democratic socialism. As a result, when the turn of 1987–1988 came not even the question of party pluralism and liberal democracy were taboo. More and more people demanded democracy, which could be effectively countered by MSZMP not even rhetorically because they called their own system democracy with an adjective (“the people’s” or “socialist”).

The state socialist system was ideologically driven so its leaders respected their own professional intelligentsia and believed they would justify the system’s superiority. When social scientists, renouncing the politically expected

86 Kuczi and Becskeházi, *Valóság* 70.

role of “organic intellectuals,” started to attack the system on the language of rational criticism, the leadership of the state party felt that the unification of reform intellectuals and the opposition must be stopped. Attempting to avert the coalition of the democratic opposition, the media intellectuals, the reform economists, and the critical social scientists, the leaders of MSZMP resorted to acts of deterrence. Among other things, they demonstratively expelled four renitent intellectuals from MSZMP: Mihály Bihari, political scientist; Zoltán Bíró, ministerial advisor; Zoltán Király, journalist; and László Lengyel, lawyer and economist.⁸⁷ However, this act did not result in the expected deterrent effect as it stopped neither the internal putrefaction of MSZMP nor the spread of independent organizations. János Kádár rarely gave interviews by then, but he felt that even he must respond to the social science-inclined rhetoric of crisis that was taking over public discourse. He convinced virtually no one when he said in March 1988 in a television interview that “there is no crisis.” Kádár’s message was just more fuel to the fire, and he fell in two months.

There were numerous reasons for the success of the crisis rhetoric of the opposition. First, the geopolitical environment changed. After Gorbachev’s coming to power, *glasnost*, that is, open speech (“the culture of critical discourse”) became an official line of politics in the Soviet Union. Earlier restrictions started to loosen up, and the leaders of cultural venues started to give their institutions to meetings of independent intellectuals. The other reason of the success of the rhetoric of crisis was the unusually high social respect and esteem the status of intellectual carried. When the people met—in social, workplace forums, reader-writer meetings—the “famous people” they had sometimes seen on television, tens of thousands of people adopted the regime-critical perspective they heard from experts they deemed trustworthy. After all, during the era of dictatorship it was the intellectuals who “substituted for” democracy and kept national consciousness alive.⁸⁸ Finally, the third reason of the social effect of the discursive turn was that the message of crisis did not sound alien to the layperson interested in politics. This was their everyday experience.

87 Ács, *Kizárt a párt*.

88 Cf. Petri, “Az unalmas válság,” 122.

Accordingly, the starting point of the founding documents of newly founded parties and organizations in 1988 was the assertion and analysis of the crisis. The founding document of Fidesz from March 1988 stated, "We are in a severe and probably protracted period of crisis of the society of Hungary and the Hungarian nation."⁸⁹ The Call to form the Network of Free Initiatives began with the following sentences: "The economic and political crisis of our country is constantly deepening. The society does not believe that the government is able to stop the decline."⁹⁰ In a few weeks, 726 people signed the Call, mainly researchers, later university and college students, other intellectuals, and around fifty workers.⁹¹ Two months later, the Council of SZKH spoke in a more optimistic manner: "It might appear that dissolution and decline cannot be reversed. We should not believe this. The crisis of state socialism can be a new beginning and there is a way out of it."⁹² Finally, we can clearly see the pace of radicalization from the manifesto of SZDSZ, accepted in March 1989. It expressed there was not just a regular economic decline, but it was a fundamental crisis of the system, which therefore cannot be corrected with partial reforms, but it all must be changed. Accordingly, the opposition response to the crisis of the system became the program for a regime change.⁹³

The discursive turn could be noticed not only in the rhetoric of crisis. Where state bureaucrats said *population*, opposition intellectuals did *society*, and when the system accepted the term *society* the latter took one more step and started to speak about a *society of citizens*. And this just went on: a fight for hegemony, for the reconquering of the language of freedom. In Hungary, when the bureaucrats did not even dare to entertain the thought of *reform*, regime-critical intellectuals were talking about it. When the state party officially accepted the need for reform, the intellectuals took another step and stressed the importance of *radical reform*. When the leaders of MSZMP saw that *model change* inevitable, opposition intellectuals introduced the concept of *regime change*. They were always one step ahead.

89 Fidesz, "Nyilatkozat," 24.

90 SZKH, "Felhívás," 149.

91 The list was published in the first issue of 1988 of *Hirmondó*.

92 SZKH, "Van kiút!"

93 Magyar and Pető, *A rendszerváltás programja*.

In the discursive fight, dissidents and other critical intellectuals always managed to push on social discourse by introducing new terms that suggested even more radical change. The culture of critical discourse emerging in the 1980s was spreading slowly but surely, with tactical compromises but no opportunism regarding principles. It spread over forums of debate and the gradually liberating press until it became the hegemonic mode of expression.⁹⁴ By the end of the 1980s, the neoconservative line of thought had also appeared among Hungarian intellectuals, particularly economists and political scientists. They rejected any “third-way” idea as utopian, including the populist writers’ concept of the cultural nation and every post-Marxist, humanist version of democratic socialism based on voluntary association. They were suspicious toward the concept of civil society as well. They saw it as the romantic, left-wing concept of the dissidents, and believed that it relegated the concepts of self-regulating market economy, the rule of law, pluralist democracy, constitutionalism, and individual freedom into a secondary category of importance. The social-liberal wing of the intelligentsia saw constitutionalism as the fulfillment of the idea of civil society from the 1980s, while it also recognized the forming political parties as the potential oppressors of the unified civil society. On the other hand, the right-wing group of liberals saw political parties as a continuation of civil society. The left-liberals believed that strong party system meant weak civil society, the second group believed that strong party system was precisely the sign of strong civil society. However, they did agree in following the pattern of Western democracies.

Opposition leaders gradually got rid of the reformist narrative and took on a more confrontational style. As far as the political opponent is concerned, the pragmatic nature of state socialism meant the members of the party state were less devout believers and more careerists and opportunists. They had neither the spirit nor the preparedness to fight on an ideological basis. The tactics of the opposition was to identify opportunists with the party, the party, with the communist ideology, and communism, with the past. This narrative successfully stigmatized and forced party members in a defensive position. In parallel, they simplified the communist period by pri-

94 Bozóki, “Rhetoric of Action.” The discursive fights of the 1980s can be best described by the concepts of hegemony (Gramsci), culture of critical discourse (Gouldner), and new evolutionism (Michnik).

marily depicting it as the implementation of a forcefully imported idea that was alien to the Hungarian society and therefore has no part in Hungarian history. The purpose of this rhetoric was to identify the enemy, to symbolically “eradicate” the past it represented, and to identify the enemy with its darkest characteristics.

Anti-communism unified nationalists and the radical democratic opposition against the system, and it isolated the communist subculture (party members, bureaucrats, the members of the apparatus, the servants of the system etc.) from the rest of the society. Drawing the line between “us” and “them” helped those in the “gray zone” pick their side. Public discourse reduced historical thinking to choosing between black and white. This served the political purpose of showing that the majority of society is on the good side vis-à-vis the communists who represent only the oppressive minority. In this discourse, technocratic reformers and the followers of democratic socialism were blurred as “reform communists,” suggesting that these people had more to do with orthodox and militant communists than with any kind of reform. This phenomenon signs a kind of amnesia, the selective and quickly transformed memory of the past. Opposition groups interpreted the heritage of the revolution of 1956 in different ways: for the left, it was the first genuine democratic socialist revolution, whereas the right referred to it as a fight for national independence, an example of resistance against the Soviet Union. The rhetoric of crisis also served the purpose of forcing the technocrats of the old system to defense. In the opposition discourse, departing from the past meant drawing a line between democracy and dictatorship and emphasizing the politics of “new beginning.”

The more the transition proceeded, from raising awareness to the crisis through voicing the necessity of reform, and the idea of model change, the more permeable the formerly strict boundaries of the official and the informal public sphere became. One of the leading figures of the dissidents, Gábor Demszky said:

I saw it quite clearly in the beginning of the 1980s that [communist] history was coming to an end. I had a strong commitment that this must be done, and there can be change in our lifetime. [. . .] Beyond political demands, how to make, build up, and maintain a democratic regime, how

power can be exercised in it—we were not prepared for that. From 1989, a process of insanely fast learning began.⁹⁵

The first changes took place in the informal space, and the groups that were against the system tried to gradually gain formal acknowledgment of the autonomy of informal spaces. Political public discourse in Hungary quickly radicalized. In the beginning of 1989, even the MSZMP's view of the Revolution of 1956 changed, calling it a "popular revolt" instead of a "counterrevolution." It did not take long from this to openly call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops: this demand was voiced in June, at the time of the reburial of Imre Nagy. The verbal changes meant the falling of every taboo, and the Hungarian press of 1989 was dominated by great political disclosures. The representatives of the system had nothing more to say: the linguistic context they used, and were accustomed to, radically changed.⁹⁶ At the end of this accelerating process, the regime collapsed. The opportunity to reformulate the rules of the game and to expand the circle of political actors taking part in the process arrived.

95 Interview with Gábor Demszky, 1997.

96 Cf. Bozóki, "Intellectuals and Democratization in Hungary"; Szabó, "Dissent and Opposition"; Bajomi-Lázár, *A magyarországi médiaháború*; Monori, "Média és rendszerváltás."

CHAPTER V

Regime Change and Elite Change

Nonviolent transitions became fascinating topics for elite theorists in the past decades. In this chapter, I will focus on the explanation of Hungarian transition from an elite theory point of view. First, I contrast the dynamics of transition in Poland and Hungary by stating that the Polish transition was equally decade long, but it was initiated by workers and intellectuals in a broad and inclusive social movement, the Solidarity (*Solidarnosc*). Afterward, I discuss the role of agency in the elite-driven Hungarian transition by underlining the role of reformist and technocratic professionals outside the democratic opposition. Unlike the dissidents, these pragmatic groups followed the ideology of modernization. I argue that the roundtable transition can be understood as a form of elite settlement, which contributed to the political change significantly from co-optation via cooperation to competition.

1. PATTERNS OF TRANSITION: POLAND AND HUNGARY

Lawful revolutions are results of a longer process of learning,¹ but they embody not just the revived patterns of historic past. The changes of Central Europe cannot be understood without considering the impact and legacy of the previous freedom fights of the region (1953, 1956, 1968, 1970, 1980–1981), but in 1989 the accelerating political processes affected each other, like dominos, in the countries of the region.

The opposition in Poland was incomparably stronger than the Hungarian opposition, the reasons for which led back at least to World War II. The

¹ Held, *History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*; Ekiert, *The State against Society*.

Solidarity trade union and social movement which was formed in August 1980 had ten million members at its prime, which practically covered the entire society. Solidarity included both workers and intellectuals, party members and outsiders, state employees and self-employed peasants. It was a real social coalition against the system, backed not only by millions but also strong social institutions, first and foremost the Catholic Church. The ideology of the movement was inclusive, encompassing a very wide spectrum of ideas including traditional national Catholicism, social conservatism, democratic (catholic) socialism, anti-communism, and pro-West liberalism. The leading institutional and ideological supporters of the opposition were the Polish Catholic Church and such charismatic figures as Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński of Warsaw and Karol Wojtyła of Kraków, the latter became the head of the Catholic Church as Pope John Paul II from 1978 onward. Papal visits to Poland attracted hundreds of thousands, and every such meeting equaled to an anti-system demonstration.² The Polish opposition was able to leave the public sector and create alternative social institutions (second public sphere, samizdat journals, presses, legal aid services, schools, free universities, social networks, etc.). In short, the Polish democratic opposition had significant social support and an inclusive ideological platform which was backed by the Catholic Church, an institution comparable to the party state in terms of nationwide organization. This was further fortified by the support of the Vatican and the special attention of the United States in the new waves of the Cold War.

Compared to the size and organization of the Polish opposition, the opposition in every other communist country was just a group of isolated dissidents. Being a member of the Polish opposition was a question of pride and honor, reflected by widespread social appreciation which also provided protection. No wonder the leaders of the communist systems of other Central European countries could handle the dissidents much more easily, either by isolating them or by sending them away from the country (like in the GDR). Dissidence in other countries lacked social embeddedness, external institutional support, and widespread appreciation and protection. Thus, they had to operate in a more isolated way surrounded by the atmosphere of fear. Isolated East German dissidents

2 Pope John Paul II visited Poland during the period of long transition in 1979, 1983, 1987, and 1991.

were pressured by the authorities to leave for the West, but the Polish opposition was resistant to such opposition-breaking techniques of the party state.³ The countercultural context they lived in was so strong that for them leaving the country would have meant running away: they consciously decided to stay and to resist and organize further.⁴ Official sanctions only made them stronger.

In contrast, the Hungarian opposition was well-circumscribed group of middle class, typically younger, Budapest-based intellectuals. Being based in the capital, they were similar to the Czech dissidents of Prague, although the latter were artistic intellectuals while the background of the Budapest-based intellectuals was mainly in humanities and social sciences. The main doctrine of the Hungarian dissidents was human rights, which was powerful but lacked the historic tradition and narrative force which Christianity had. The Hungarian opposition referred to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution as intellectual predecessors; for the Polish opposition, religious belief was an integral part of their fight for freedom. Given the Hungarian Catholic Church was much more efficiently corrupted by the Kádár regime, the dissidents could not hope for support from the largest church and turned to small denominations instead. However, the Hungarian society was much more secularized than the Polish one, and therefore the lack of church support per se was not a crucial break in opposition organization.

Inside the country, the Hungarian opposition did not have a strong institution supporter like the Poles. They received support from outside the country from the Soros Foundation, but its ideas of free society spread in the country to a lesser extent. The scholarships and infrastructural support of the Foundation, useful as they were,⁵ could not make up for the lack of traditional internal institutional background. On the other hand, the Polish opposition faced a tough, combatant state party which introduced martial law in the country for one and a half years at the end of 1981 and the leaders of Solidarity were put under house arrest.

³ Flam, *Mosaic of Fear*.

⁴ Michnik, "A New Evolutionism."

⁵ Nývelt, *Tény/Soros*.

Table 9. The differences between the Polish and Hungarian opposition movements

	THE POLISH OPPOSITION	THE HUNGARIAN OPPOSITION
THE CHARACTER OF THE MOVEMENT	widespread movement crossing social classes and reaching millions	small number of Budapest-based intellectuals, middle class group
OPPOSITION LEADER	worker, elected trade union leader	freelance intellectual, informal leader
IDEOLOGY	Christian socialism, Catholicism, Patriotism, civil society	human rights, civil society, minority rights
EXTERNAL SUPPORT	Major support: Catholic Church, Vatican, US	Less decisive: Soros Foundation, US
OPPONENT	combatant state party	“indulgent” state party
POLITICAL REGIME	military dictatorship, corporatism	selective party state dictatorship, paternalism

Historically, the Polish negotiations began as far back as August 1980: in the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk. Polish dissidents were the pioneers in initiating open negotiations with the communists in the region.⁶ The first talks between the activists of the newly formed Solidarity and the leaders of the communist party marked the beginning of the end of the system. The self-limiting revolution of Solidarity in 1980–1981 established a model for other opposition groups in Central Europe. Hungarian dissidents maintained vivid contact with their Polish colleagues and attempted to learn and locally apply the strategic and tactical methods of the Polish opposition.⁷

Before Solidarity, people in the Soviet bloc had two major attempts of different type to change communist rule: a revolution (in 1956 in Hungary) and a reform (in 1968 in Czechoslovakia).⁸ Although both changes proved to be internally successful and enjoyed popular support, they both provoked Soviet military intervention and were not able to resist the overwhelming military power of the Red Army. Any sort of resistance seemed to be hope-

⁶ Ascherson, *The Polish August*; Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*.

⁷ Mitrovits, *Tiltott kapsolat*.

⁸ These were preceded by the first protest in East Berlin in June 1953.

less. The solution for this deadlock came with the idea of new evolutionism, which was a strategy based on the Gandhian⁹ “non-violent non-cooperation” with the oppressive party state and the revitalization of civil society.¹⁰ This strategy aimed at separation from the state and strengthening civil society to make it prepared for future negotiations on rights and freedoms.¹¹ It was an intellectual break with the idea of reforms and preparation for real, meaningful talks.

The long transition of Poland lasted for a decade from the Gdansk negotiations through the military regime and then, finally, to democracy. As it was Poland where the transition came first, the Polish opposition had to behave in the most cautious manner. By refusing reforms and shallow negotiations, Solidarity was able to create a political vacuum around the communist party. It was able to make clear that there was no other solution for the crisis than entering negotiations with the Solidarity. Accordingly, the Polish Roundtable talks which took place between February and April 1989 aimed less at the creation of a full-fledged democracy, and the participants rather agreed in concrete issues.¹² Their first task was to restore legality and grant legitimacy to Solidarity. Next, they agreed on holding half-democratic elections where the result was partially predetermined.¹³ The Roundtable talks closed the period of declining state socialism.¹⁴

The task of the Polish and Hungarian Roundtable talks was to extricate their countries from dictatorship. In contrast, the East German and Czechoslovakian Roundtable talks occurred only *after* their revolutions.¹⁵ Therefore, in the latter cases, the goal of their negotiations was the establishment of the institutional order of the new regime, since they had already disengaged themselves from their dictatorial regimes. Poland was the first “roundtable country,” but they had to pay the price of ending up with semi-free elections in 1989. True, even these elections caused to a political landslide.

9 Gandhi, “Duty of Disloyalty.”

10 Michnik, “A New Evolutionism”; Arato, “Civil Society Against the State.”

11 Ekiert, *The State against Society*; Stokes, *From Stalinism to Pluralism*.

12 Among them the most important was the re-legalization of Solidarity.

13 Osyatinski, “The Roundtable Talks in Poland.”

14 Pelinka, *The Politics of Lesser Evil*.

15 Bozóki, *The Roundtable Talks of 1989*.

Hungary was the second to attempt a fundamental political change. The intention of the Hungarian negotiators was to follow the Polish path but to go further and achieve more than the Poles did. It was considerably easier to run second than to be the path-breakers. Only in the case of Hungary did the Roundtable talks achieve both goals simultaneously: freeing Hungary from the old regime and creating the institutional order of a democratic regime.¹⁶ Thus, the negotiations represent, in the words of Arendt, not only an end of an era but the beginning of a new one.¹⁷ Every serious political actor of the regime change could express their opinion during the Roundtable talks of 1989.

The Hungarian negotiators often referred openly to the Polish precedents. The Liga trade union sent delegates to Poland to learn the first hand experiences of the Polish negotiators.¹⁸ They realized that the Polish opposition could arrive at a compromise with the communists on semi-free elections because they were much stronger than the Hungarian opposition. The Polish opposition could afford to accept substantial compromises in the early stages of transition because they were strong enough to mobilize the masses on the streets and change the results of the Roundtable talks later on. The Polish dissidents could accept a compromise without damaging their political credibility. In the spring of 1989 the Hungarian opposition could not risk that yet. In Poland, the semi-free elections of June 4, 1989, had far-reaching consequences. The former communist satellite parties distanced themselves from their “mother” and helped make a new majority in the parliament with the Solidarity. In Hungary, it was not until summer 1989 that the by-elections confirmed that the opposition had gained strength.

Yet the Polish Roundtable talks were educative not only to the Hungarian opposition but also the representatives of power. The latter saw how quickly the landslide victory of the Polish opposition in the Senate elections changed the political balance reached in the negotiations. A delegate of the MSZMP at the time remembered as follows: “I was in Poland, where we checked the local roundtable talks. We had a number of practical political experiences.

¹⁶ Bozóki, *The Roundtable Talks of 1989*.

¹⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*.

¹⁸ Interview with László Bruszt, 1997; Interview with Csaba Öry, 1997.

We obviously rejected the Polish model, so that we would carry out some kind of compromise elections.”¹⁹

Both in Poland and Hungary international factors also played a role in the success of the negotiations: the visit of US President George H. W. Bush, and the support of the Soviet chief party secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev. Interestingly, neither Gorbachev, nor Bush, urged the Hungarians to speed up the tempo of the transition. They rather warned them that the process of democratization should be kept controlled and the direction of the changes is more important than their speed.²⁰ Internal pressures from the population and external support from the Western democratic community were both extremely important, but it was the politically active domestic agency, the intellectuals, who could actually manage the process. They formed the negotiating delegation to the Opposition Roundtable.

It is true that, neither in Poland nor in Hungary, any of the negotiating partners' positions were legitimized by democratic election. Electoral results confirmed the previous efforts only later. In a way, democracy was created by nondemocratic ways. Still, the emerging political society clearly supported the opposition-groups' struggle for democracy. In Poland, the party state was defeated by civil society that appeared relatively homogeneous as it existed under a single umbrella organization. In Hungary, the competing intellectual groups of the divided opposition laid the foundation for the multi-party system. With some simplification we can say that in Poland there was democracy before pluralism, while in Hungary there was pluralism before democracy. Looking at from historical perspective, the Polish transition was mass driven while the Hungarian transition was rather elite driven.

2. ELITE CHANGE: THE RISE OF REFORM INTELLECTUALS AND THE TECHNOCRACY

The transition involved the gradual convergence of reform intellectuals and the democratic opposition, which had become close cooperation by 1989. However, that year not even the seemingly homogeneous pro-reform intellectuals were unified. Some of them specialized in bureaucratic, administra-

¹⁹ Interview with András Tóth, 1997.

²⁰ Békés, “Vissza Európába.”

tive, technocratic roles; others insisted on the idea that the system may be reformed only from the inside (i.e., as a party member, linked to the reigning government). And a third group, the real reform intellectuals, grew more and more critical toward the system and the role of party intellectual. They gradually converged with the democratic opposition. Their cooperation was one of the preconditions of the rolling transition. They could place those activists to the front line who could be best in performing in the given moment.

The groups of technocrats, party intellectuals, and pro-opposition reform intellectuals cannot be sharply distinguished due to significant overlaps. Usually, reform intellectuals and technocrats were, too, party members, and they were open to representing professional positions even as party intellectuals. Genuine difference could be found in the mentality each group represented. Over time, these concepts came to refer to sets of different people, for those who identified as party intellectuals or technocrats in the beginning of the 1980s often radicalized by the end of the decade, and most of them identified as reformists. Their earlier place was taken by others. The radicalization of reform intellectuals pulled more and more party intellectuals and technocrats into their group, contributed to changing their identity, and facilitated the regime change. Szalai analyzed the groups of the counter-elite and distinguished between three groups: the technocracy of the late communist era, the democratic opposition, and the reform intellectuals floating in between. In the latter group, she included both the reform economists and the group of populist intellectuals.²¹ From these groups, I scrutinize in more detail the dissident intellectuals (where the democratic opposition came from) because of their standing outside the system and greater political significance. I do not consider populist intellectuals as reform intellectuals because of their “meta-political” nature, literary-artistic character, as well as its cultural critical attitude and compromising strategy.

I argue the role of reform intellectuals becomes significant if we compare it to the technocracy and the loyal party members. For the former represented a different identity and mentality from the latter. The social “bridg-

21 “Firstly, the Western, pro-market *late Kádár technocracy* growing up within the ranks of power (and its bureaucracies), secondly, the *democratic opposition* (deprived of its positions) standing outside the ranks of power and primarily committed to democracy and civil rights, and, thirdly, the *new reformist intelligentsia*, which is still in state positions but committed to the ideas of reform (thus floating in position between the two previous groups).” E. Szalai, “A rendszerváltás útelágazása.”

ing” role of reformists was necessary for the democratic opposition in an era when it became clear that alliance with the workers was not going to happen. The reform intellectuals turned the focus of dissidents to economic problems, and opened channels to them which facilitated the peaceful regime change. Distinguishing party intellectuals and the technocracy is necessary because these groups formed their identity based on different preferences. The technocracy considered “apolitical” professional knowledge and bureaucratic reliability as most important, whereas the party intellectuals considered political loyalty. That these groups turned in a reformist direction was provoked by the inevitability of regime change. Without that, their identity—unlike the reformists—would have remained unchanged. The difference between the groups of technocrats and party intellectuals disappeared only by the end of the Roundtable talks of 1989.

Critical intellectuals were divided in the decade after giving up Marxism. Social scientists who could keep their jobs in the anti-reformist course of 1970s turned to their profession, while the entrants of the 1970s started empirical research. The cooperating members of these groups formulated their critical observations in the language of their scholarship in the new reform era on the turn of the 1970s–1980s. For the economists, the internal criticism of economic control was primary, although their writings did contain the germs of social and even regime criticism. Unlike earlier, intellectual reform groups in the 1980s were led not by philosophers or sociologists but economists. They knew the most about the critical economic condition of the country, they had access to insider analyses and statistics, and they were able to present alternatives with a critical edge, in the language of economic reform, but still in a way that was acceptable to politicians. Their position was further strengthened by the fact that the heydays of the Kádár era were legitimized by economic competence.

2.1 REFORM ECONOMISTS

The members of this group were often called as reform economists. They enrolled in the party during their university years because then the consensus held that if one wants change, it can be most easily achieved within the party. There was one who, based on her recollection, hesitated about whether to enroll but then “my father said that criticism from the outside really made

no sense.”²² Some of them surely believed in the possibility of reform and called for a kind of self-managing socialism. Others proposed, out of conviction or tactical considerations, “market socialism,” a combination of planned economic and market redistribution.

The representatives of the group were the “Dimitrov Square Boys,” who arrived in the public discourse from the Karl Marx University of Economic Sciences which was on the square then named after Dimitrov. One of the negotiators of MSZMP in 1989 said that

the Dimitrov Square Boys was the category that covered the economists who graduated in the second half of the sixties and the first half of the seventies. So mainly around 1968. And this generation had relatively important representatives in the party and state leadership by the 1980s. [. . .] I also heard the category used in a sense that “so, they are the so-called reformist titans who try to act against the pedantic old crocks.” This is one line of explanation. The other explanation is that, I think, that these Dimitrov Square Boys still collaborated with the power back then. Both have some truth in them. Probably this dual approach is right. [. . .] As people in leading positions in the governing apparatus, they absolutely engaged in self-censorship, it can be observed in their writings as well.²³

Another opinion claims that “this whole layer started from the belief that they are enlightened reformists [. . .] and therefore it is the best if they are at the helm.”²⁴ Consequently, leading representatives of the Kádár regime could believe that accepting economic rationality was the essence of the Hungarian model, that is, everything which put that country in a more beneficial position *vis-à-vis* other countries in the Soviet camp. The deepening of the crisis brought the increasing influence of economists who step up as the guides of the solution.²⁵ By the 1980s, a more radical group of reform intellectuals had grown up, who were finally able to acquire wider intellectual

²² Interview with Ágnes Balázs, 1997.

²³ Interview with Ferenc Vissi, 1997.

²⁴ Interview with András Vértés, 1997.

²⁵ Critical analysis of this view is provided by Böröcz, “Vanguard of the Construction of Capitalism”; “Reaction as Progress”; “Hungary in the European Union.”

support to the cause of reform. An economic researcher assessed the position of the group as follows:

I think I have a lot to thank to Rezső Nyers [the father figure of reformist communists who introduced the economic reforms in the 1960s—A.B.] [...] There were some intermediary people, who could perfectly speak the cadre language that Nyers cultivated but they also knew the language he did not. [...] They could speak to the enlightened people in the apparatus, and to the opposition as well. [...] For there were intermediary people who brought and carried messages. It worked like this.²⁶

In the beginning of the 1980s, there was observable difference between the old-style central planners and the younger researchers who had a rather reformist position already then. The latter were in regular contact with economists who, due to their views, were *persona non grata* around power. Professional contacts were formed and, as a result, blacklisted researchers could be involved by the technocrats in planning for the middle term.²⁷

The institutional background of the reform intellectuals was provided, beyond academic research institutes, by the Financial Research Institute of the Ministry of Finance. The debates in the Institute gathered increasing attention, and politically active circles were formed.²⁸ The second reform generation of the Kádár era was forming, the members of which did not know back then that their task will not be that of a reformer but a “transformer.” The Institute was peculiar because it was too scientific and independent for the politicians, whereas scholars found it too political and embedded in the circles of the party state. People who worked there felt privileged as they had access to the insider statistical data and analyses which showed the true status of the economy. However, they had to pay for their privileged position. Instead of books, they could only write inside papers with restricted circulation. But as censorship limited the publications of others as well, they were not significantly disadvantaged compared to their researcher colleagues in academic institutes. They rarely could go to Western institu-

²⁶ Interview with Mihály Laki, 1997.

²⁷ Interview with András Vértess, 1997.

²⁸ Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*, 169; Pogány et al., *Lámpások az alagútban*; Gagy, “Beágyazott kritika.”

tions, but they could go to China and Yugoslavia. The papers written on the basis of confidential data were debated in the Institute, where a few representatives of the opposition were invited as well. Reform economists tried, from the position of state-permitted insiders, to mediate between the politicians open toward reforms and the opposition of the system, and they often cut deals with the representatives of power as well.²⁹ As a dissident later explained: “We published the writings of reformists under pseudonyms, and there was enough communication between us anyway. They had stronger belief in inside reforms and the possibility of changing from the inside than we, the so-called radical opposition did.”³⁰

The most obvious sign of a writing of a reform economist, distinguishing it from scholarly papers, was that the reformists formulated proposals for “the politics” at the end of each of their “materials.”³¹ A reform economist was never satisfied with the exact diagnosis of the case at hand. They also wanted to do something for the success of reform. Most of the reform economists believed that if their research analysis is correct then so are their political conclusions. At first, they never even considered that research competence and political competence might be two different things; they believed that the competence they have is equally valid for doing politics and science. In short, the reform economist was always, by definition, dissatisfied with the not properly radical, ambiguous political execution of the reform they proposed.

By political function, the reform economists were first and foremost communicators who perfectly spoke the economic jargon. They could communicate with politicians, scholars, and those with and those without positions alike. Moreover, their best communicators gradually stepped out of the public discourse of universities and institutes and learned to speak the language of the society. Many of them went to the country on community forums where, lecturing about the necessity of reforms, strove to become the social catalyzers of change. They had a genuine overview of the processes going on in the country because they had the opportunity, given their position, to visit factories and develop a much more direct contact with the workers than either the dissidents, the top advisors of the party state, or the ordinary intel-

²⁹ Kovács, “A reformalku sűrűjében.”

³⁰ Interview with Gábor Demszky, 1997.

³¹ Sárközy, *Egy gazdasági szervezeti reform sodrában*.

lectuals could. László Lengyel, one of their most active representatives who had been expelled from MSZMP in 1988, described the situation in that year as follows:

I have given lectures since 1975. This gives tremendous insight, and great experience to me. At first, this meant 10–15 lectures per year. Last year, seventy-two. These are mostly companies now. I am a regular at many places. Year after year, I see the workers and engineers who said something in 1981 and now, in 1988, also say something. It is very interesting to compare. An important characteristic of my operation is that I practically carry news from one end of the country to another.³²

In the end of the 1980s, the workers did not accept a lecturer from the party apparatus, but a reform economist (who also had a party membership book) was welcome.

When someone goes to lecture with a colleague from the Central Committee. The humiliation a colleague from the Central Committee has to endure! [. . .] People at my age who joined the apparatus all complain: they cannot explain why they are at the party center. In a way that the audience does not say that they won't attend at all, or attend only to yell "bastard" in his face.³³ [. . .] I can hardly mention an intellectual who has company contacts. Who could get inside any of the different social strata without a problem. The real tragedy is that there is no organic contact between intellectual groups and worker groups.³⁴

The most important social function of reform economists was to bridge this social gap: to engage in discourse with the strata outside the intellectuals, to raise awareness of the crisis in the wider public, and to spread the idea of reform. For a long time, they had expected that an enlightened group within the party would come to power and carry out change. This had led them to politicians like Pozsgay and Nyers. From the mid-1980s, the reform economists emphasized with more and more determination that Hungary

32 Ács, *Kizárt a párt*, 11.

33 Ács, *Kizárt a párt*, 13.

34 Ács, *Kizárt a párt*, 17.

was in crisis, by which they primarily meant economic crisis and crisis of confidence. It was not until 1988 that they stated the political crisis as well. Recognizing the need for change led them to their most famous joint work, the critical study entitled *Fordulat és reform* ('Turn and reform')³⁵ which was debated by various professional-intellectual groups as well as the theoretical economics team of the MSZMP.³⁶ The collapse of the previous dual public sphere was shown by the fact that the study was published not only by an independent journal, *Medvetánc*, but its text was read in Radio Free Europe and an abridged version was published by the *Közgazdasági Szemle* (Journal of Economics) which was close to the party.³⁷

The reform economists became the popularizers of expertise and technocratic knowledge via the rhetoric of crisis, and in that role they had much to do with that the society endured the deep transformation crisis in a surprisingly calm and patient manner. The reform economists interpreted their role as modernizers, moreover, they believed that they were "lanterns in the tunnel."³⁸ About reforming the system, a participant remembered as such: "Some deeply believed that the system can be reformed, but also thought that this system would exist forever and then one ought to do something. [. . .] Others, however, did have a genuine belief."³⁹

The effect of this group could be strong because in the Kádár regime various social strata were isolated from each other, and mobility was also low. However, this mobility between the strata could be realized by the reform economists as free-floating intellectuals. Based on their knowledge, they were heard out in academic workshops; their party membership allowed them to meet the leaders of the system; their critical approach brought them close to the dissidents; and finally, their structural position and emancipatory attitude made them able to talk to the factory workers as well. They had access to every circle, and yet they did not belong to any of them. They were no scholars, no party soldiers, no members of the opposition, and they were no leaders of the workers either, but they had a taste of each of these roles. As if they were following the guide of Mannheim: they tried to synthesize the

³⁵ Antal et al., "Fordulat és reform."

³⁶ For an analysis of the context of the *Fordulat és reform*, see Gagy, "Beágyazott kritika."

³⁷ Interview with László Antal, 1997.

³⁸ Pogány et al., *Lámpások az alagútban*.

³⁹ Interview with Mihály Laki, 1997.

impulses which they received from various groups of society. They entered the spotlight when the system was ideologically depleted. The appearance of reform economists was, therefore, inseparable from the crisis of the system.

The rhetoric of crisis, that they cultivated, was effective not only because the system was really economically broken but also because their own group existence was legitimized by the crisis. If there is no crisis, the group of reform intellectuals does not exist. True, they were not the sole users of the vocabulary of crisis, which was taken up by the members of the populist opposition as well: however, they talked not so much about the crisis of the system but rather the historically determined, moral crisis of the nation.⁴⁰ In the situation of vacuum that had been developing gradually, the reform economists made economic rationality the ideology substitute of the ideologically empty regime. This worked until a new, democratic regime was built in place of the collapsed old one. In the 1990s, the group of reform economists dissolved because their historic mission ended. In the competition of parties and ideologies, they could no longer belong to more than one group at once, nor represent “economic rationality” as an independent ideology.

Despite they appeared as a unified group before the politically interested audience, the reform economists were not homogenous. Fundamentally, there existed two approaches, two schools: the more economic-inclined were the monetarists, while the more sociology-inclined became the institutionalists.

The *monetarists* were interested in the system of regulations, the “control pedestal,” and therefore they were closer to the circles of power. They lived off the information published by the party state to a restricted audience, and thus their scholarly activity gradually colluded with the party state. They were obviously more competent than the experts of the party bureaucracy, based on their education, openness, and system of networks. No wonder that after the regime change, in spite of the distrust of the new ruling political elite, they became CEOs of banks, economic policy makers, important party advisors, and the leading officials of governmental institutions.⁴¹ They usually continued their professional career, only a minority of them became party politicians. Their thinking was formed by the then strengthening ideology of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, but they did not become anti-

40 Csengey, *Mezítálas szabadság*; Csúrka, “Meg nem történt forradalom.”

41 E. Szalai, *Gazdaság és hatalom; Útelágazás*; Gagy, “Beágyazott kritika.”

democratic liberals because the need for democracy was deeply engrained in the domestic critical thinking. The monetarist representatives of the liberal economists sometimes appeared to accept the idea of “first *perestroika*, then *glasnost*,” and refer to the economic success of South Korea and Chile. They argued that the political and the economic sphere cannot be changed at once, that is, there should first be economic reform, private property, and capitalism, and only then should there be democracy. However, they held a minority opinion vis-à-vis those who believed that economic reform without political reform is not possible.⁴²

The *institutionalists* were more interested in the actual social consequence of reform, or the social output of the economic policy of interest reconciliation. This way, they became more and more sensitive toward political oppression, the popular support of the reform, and gradually converged to the democratic opposition. Later, they became the critical sociologists of the new democracy, as well as the newly founded capitalism.⁴³

Besides the reform economists one should also mention the sociologists who researched inequality, the “second economy,” poverty, and the issue of social inequality in general. This was the period of the nascent political science as well, which had grown out of jurisprudence and “scientific socialism,” turning against their doctrines. Key figures of Hungarian political science temporarily grouped around certain reformist politicians as well. In official ranks, they represented professional rationality but never not gave up their teleological ethos which they wanted to see applied in politics.⁴⁴ By the end of the 1980s, this group was paralleled by the circle of legal scholars, mainly constitutional lawyers, who had influence over decisions but also often criticized the various bills incompatible with the rule of law; provided legal advice to the representatives of the newly forming parties and initiatives; or worked on a new constitution. It was a sign of the relative flexibility of the Kádár regime that the members of these groups could be kept in the vicinity of the official institutional system until the end.

42 The monetarists included, for example, Lajos Bokros, István Csillag, and György Surányi. Their influence is shown by that the former two became ministers, the latter was twice the head of Hungarian National Bank. Cf. Sebők, *Paradigmák fögységében*.

43 The institutionalists included economists who later became economic sociologists.

44 Kovács, “Reform Economics.”

2.2 *THE IDEOLOGY OF MODERNIZATION*

The common denominator of reformist intellectuals was the ideology of *modernization*. Referring to the results of the enlightened technocracy, they emphasized that neither reform nor model or system change is conceivable without professional knowledge. They tried to combine this modernizing professionalism with the promise of social pact and corporatism which would ease conflicts. However, the idea of modernization is not the same as modernity. The slogan of modernization meant a top-down management of processes by the technocratic center instead of the support of the spontaneous processes of civil society. In other words, the argument suggested that there are the “modernizers” on one side and those to be modernized on the other side. The populist left, which represented the vague policy of third way had little influence in the leadership of MSZMP, just like the old communists. The proposal of reform intellectuals to the party leadership was to give up the dictatorial and ideological policy of Marxism-Leninism in favor of a practical, pragmatic, “neutral” direction which fits to the requirements of the crisis as well as modernization. The word “pragmatic” here meant the economic crisis required a change of structure, and the party state cannot engage in welfare policies under the given circumstances. It suggested that the solution was modernization, marketization, the dissolution of party state dependencies, and therefore the party leaders had no choice but to act as modernizers.

The quick adoption of modernization theory in late communist and post-communist Hungary was spectacular. Originally, the theory of modernization was a product of American sociology and political science of the 1950s.⁴⁵ Its central idea was the universally applicable theory of linear economic and political development, the stages of which affect significantly, albeit in different ways, the opportunities of political democracy. The distinction between “developed” and “developing” countries stems from this terminology. In the Cold War period, the political application of the theory of modernization was successful in ensuring the superiority of the Western world over the Soviet-type countries. While the latter rejected the Western use of the term, they tried to represent a different but still modernizing alternative of devel-

45 So, *Social Change and Development*.

opment. In the 1970s, the theory of modernization in Western social science slowly gave way to the paradigm of globalization.⁴⁶

When the representatives of Hungarian reform economics and political science spoke the language of modernization in the 1980s, it had a critical function toward the state socialist regime. Thus, the idea of modernization was naturally interpreted in an ideological sense. In the second half of the 1980s, the reform rhetoric that referred to the need for modernization and convergence to the West successfully disarmed the arguments of anti-reformist politicians and therefore it had an important role not just in the easement of the system but also in convincing the old elite that peaceful transition had no alternative. At the same time, the argument for modernization suggested to the competent members of the old elite that they had nothing to fear from reform or even the regime change, as their professional knowledge will be required in the new system as well. It promised that systems may change, but the “enlightened” modernizing elite will stay in place.

Later, several reform economists were critical toward their previous role. As one of them pointed out:

I took part in every kind of reform committee game. [. . .] There were others who were practically like-minded but they thought that reformism was bullshit because it leads nowhere. We were not convinced that it does, either. I thought the system would become more flexible if we started reforming it here and there. [. . .] The system collapsed because of the collapse of the economy of the Soviet Union. The internal forces, no matter how much we could play reform, we had no chance to reform that much.⁴⁷

As the transition was on the way, it became less clear who moves who: the politicians move the intellectuals, or the intellectuals move the politicians? The professional intellectuals who had been promoted politicians or advisors to legitimize Prime Minister Károly Grósz and his program in 1987 gradually turned away from him, which contributed to his fall in 1989. The ability of influence of this group near the party is exemplified by the pre-regime

⁴⁶ Roberts and Hite, *From Modernization to Globalization*.

⁴⁷ Interview with Károly Attila Soós, 1997.

change Ministry of Justice, which was in the hands of the “professor trio” of Kálmán Kulcsár, Tamás Sárközy, and Géza Kilényi. On the one hand, they contributed to the acceleration of the regime change by formulating a liberal Association Act. On the other hand, in the field of the economy they facilitated for the nomenklatura and state enterprise leaders to accept the Company Act and the act on transformation, both of which offered legal opportunities for spontaneous privatization.⁴⁸ It seemed that those politicians had strengthening positions who were endorsed by influential groups of intellectuals. One of the participants of the reform debates remembered as follows:

In Hungary, there already was an experience with reforms; we thought that we were much more experienced than the Czech or the Poles who had just come to power. We had already seen what happens to the various exact models when they need to be realized. And we trusted neither the radical shock therapy nor the success of voucher-type privatization. Everyone was looking for much more sophisticated solutions. The consensus within the whole macro-economist elite in Hungary was in that.⁴⁹

A significant number of reform economists worked with the economic committees of the Roundtable talks of 1989. They were forged together by reformist traditions, and the real difference between them was not in the party they happened to represent but whether they represented the reform economist tradition or not.

2.3 *THE TECHNOCRACY*

The success of the rhetoric of modernization had a great impact on the technocracy of the late Kádár era. In the end, the set of reform economists showed partial overlap with the world of the late Kádár technocracy. While those more inclined toward social criticism appeared in the Opposition Roundtable, the representatives of the technocracy of the late Kádár era

⁴⁸ Their successes were acknowledged by the new political elite. After the regime change, Kulcsár became an ambassador, Kilényi became a judge at the Constitutional Court, and Sárközy became a presidential advisor.

⁴⁹ Interview with László Urbán, 1997.

were in the negotiating delegation of MSZMP during the Roundtable talks of 1989.

The more the old regime declined, the more the technocrats freed from the leash of the party state, the less they took the proposals of the people of the party center seriously, and the more the self-confident they became. It is clear from their statements during the interviews that they found themselves to be authorized to solve the problems, primarily on the grounds that they had access to central information. They often referred to the fact that they had dealt with this before, and therefore they know how to run the economy. As politics was a quite negative term for their ears, everyone who did not approach problems from a "purely professional" angle was deemed unauthorized or incompetent. As one of them characteristically and self-confidently put it: "My starting point was that politicians were not simply corrupt but the greater problem was that they were idiots, too."⁵⁰ A similarly characteristic statement claimed that "the reforms of economic command tried to be explicitly apolitical, because success could be achieved on technocratic grounds. [. . .] And then, you know, the regime change came up."⁵¹ So they saw the democratization as a confounding factor which hampered professional work. At first, the technocrats did not even consider the idea of regime change. They were trying to correct the given model of socialism, and they were already happy with not being so much dependent on politicians. Later, when the issue of regime change was unavoidable, they often changed their argument and said that they had already started the transition ten years before, and that work just came to fruition.

In the interpretation of the majority of technocrats, the turn of 1989 meant that they had to expand their base because of the accelerating changes, and they had to bring in to the negotiations the opposition (who they already knew from professional circles) and the satellite organizations of the MSZMP of the negotiations (who they believed to be incompetent but had significant popular support as advocacy groups). Instead of negotiations, the technocrats often talked about "consultations" by which they wanted to emphasize the superiority of their own technocratic knowledge. For them, the National Roundtable talks, "this trilateral consultation series

⁵⁰ Interview with István Tömpe, 1997.

⁵¹ Interview with Márta Nagy, 1997.

was the fending off or re-education of the obsessions of some people who were rather uneducated in the issues at hand and held populist attitudes by character.”⁵² According to a similar opinion, “I interpreted the whole period back then as knocking at an open door. Why the hell we need this whole hype when the things that happened—apart from the socialism-capitalism debate—were essentially the same as what we had wanted to build up and do in economic policy, income policy, market building.”⁵³

The members of the technocracy were not older than the reform economists. They also typically graduated from law or economic school in the beginning of the 1970s and joined the party in parallel, although they thought that professional knowledge and party membership were separable. As the times changed, they began to see themselves as insider reformers and tended to look down on those who tried to analyze economic processes “from the outside” (i. e., without party membership and administrative position). Technocrats refrained from value-based or ideological thinking and insisted that, during the 1989 Roundtable talks, they represented not the party state but the ministry that sent them there. Although they were members of the party, they identified as experts who represent the view of the profession and do not politicize. But there were some, like Miklós Németh who later became prime minister,⁵⁴ who gave up their position as university lecturers out of professional career ambitions to work in one of the groups of the MSZMP Central Committee.⁵⁵ The career of Németh shows that party membership and sufficient loyalty made movement between the roles of reform intellectual, technocrat, and party intellectual. This eventually led to the paradoxical situation that Németh broke with the party that delegated him, giving up the role of party intellectual.⁵⁶ He returned to his previous technocrat identity, whereby his goal was not the realization of “liberty, equality, fraternity” but the “managing” of the transition. After MSZMP was dissolved, the decisive majority of technocrats did not leave for its successor, MSZP, but continued as party outsiders which was also a liberating experience.

⁵² Interview with Márta Nagy, 1997.

⁵³ Interview with György Radnai, 1997.

⁵⁴ Oplatka, *Németh Miklós*.

⁵⁵ Interview with István György, 1997; Interview with Zoltán Gál, 1997.

⁵⁶ Tóké, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution*; Oplatka, *Németh Miklós*.

Several members of the technocratic group were also university professors therefore they were part of the state administration as well as the system of higher education. They felt the taste of complete independence in 1989. According to a recollection “this one year, from March 1989 till May 1990 was the best. When there was no party control, when the government had broken free of the controller and made decision in a sovereign way and thought, just like we did, that finally we decide about these things, not those stupid guys at the ‘White House’⁵⁷ but now this sparkingly clever group with brilliant ideas. This was a fantastically good feeling, because they wanted, they needed, one would work nights after nights because he knew that next day this issue will be raised. One felt that he can directly arrange things.”⁵⁸

By the time of the Roundtable talks, the normative social models of the reform intellectuals had transformed. Earlier, economists had discussed the compatibility of plan and market; sociologists, the changing of the internal structure of redistribution; constitutional lawyers, socialist constitutionalism; and political scientists had discussed democratic socialism, corporative pluralism, or a new compromise. At the end of the 1980s, the normative model for economists was private property based, self-regulating market economy; for sociologists, the welfare state; for constitutional lawyers, the rule of law; and for political scientists, representative democracy based on a multiparty system.

3. THE ROUNDTABLE TALKS AS ELITE SETTLEMENT

Political science literature often depicts transitions as elite games.⁵⁹ The analyses start from the presumption that democracy cannot be created without dialogue between the elite and the counter-elite, where both parties are ready to discuss the conditions of transition. The fact that the regime change in Hungary happened by negotiation, by an agreement of the elites, invited analysts to focus on the actors of changes.

The last two decades of the 20th century in Central Europe saw the new rise of elite theory. Researchers of different schools—Marxist class analysis,

57 In the 1970–1980s slang of the apparatus, “White House” referred to the building of the party center.

58 Interview with György Jutasi, 1997.

59 Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*; Gunther et al. (1995); Colomer, *Strategic Transitions*.

Weberian sociology, functionalist stratification research, New Class theories—all started assessing the accelerating changes of politics and society, but many of them soon ended up with elite-centered research. The classical theories of elites⁶⁰ were complemented by new approaches which put the emphasis on the change of elites, which they saw as an integral part of profound social change. Political elite researchers had to change focus after the decades of more static “Kremlinology” and “Sovietology.” At times of rapid social change, the significance of the decisions of political leaders increases, and therefore the scholars of transition also recognized the importance of elite research.⁶¹ Most scholars agreed not only that democratic transition was an elite-driven process but also, following Huntington,⁶² that reliably operable democracy can be created only by the elites and it cannot be expected from the masses. Why did the elitist approach become so popular?

3.1 THE REDISCOVERY OF ELITE THEORY

Elite theory at first saw democracy and elite rule as two phenomena that coexist but are also contradictory. Michels⁶³ opined that the parliamentary political elite has, because of its tendency toward oligarchy, corrupted democracy and therefore representative democracy is just a hypocritical form of elitism. For decades after Michels, elitism was identified with fascism or at least charismatic rule. It was treated as a theory which has nondemocratic answers to the questions of political classes, governing, and social equality. The decades after World War II were dominated by the theory of democratic elitism which placed elitism within the framework representative democracy understood as competition. In the end of the 1960s, the debate between the supporters of democratic elitism⁶⁴ and those of participatory democracy brought temporary victory to the latter side.⁶⁵ The general view held that elitist democracy was the ideological pair of modernization theory, which was too subject to heavy criticism in the 1970s.

60 Michels, *Political Parties*; Mosca, *The Ruling Class*; Pareto, *The Rise and Fall of the Elites*; Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*; Mills, *The Power Elite*.

61 Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*; Schmitter, “The Consolidation of Democracy.”

62 Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

63 Michels, *Political Parties*.

64 Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

65 Cf. Bottomore, *Elites and Society*; Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism*.

At the time of state socialist regimes in Central Europe, a simplified version of Marxian class theory was used as the official interpretation of society. According to this view, socialist society is based on a “two classes and one layer” model. First, there is the proletariat which, as the “class in power,” rules in alliance with the peasantry; and there is a subordinated layer of intellectuals, called “intellectual workers,” who help the former in realizing their historic goals. In most of the region’s countries, social sciences adhered to the official ideology. The scholars who represented official views used a simplified version of class theory, while dissident sociologists attempted to disqualify that and criticize the system via New Class theories.

During the 1980s, popularity of elite theory was coming back.⁶⁶ Elite researchers gave up the formerly dominant class analysis and turned their focus from structures to actors. Referring back to the works of Schumpeter,⁶⁷ they went back to the position that the concepts of elite and democracy are not irreconcilable. This means for the democratic transformation that even an elite that did not come to power by democratic means can create the institutional conditions of a new democratic order if they are committed to democratic principles. In the literature of democratic elitism, the focus moved from structures to actors, from path dependence to institutional choices and institution-building. Concepts like transition, roundtable talks, constitution-making, compromise seeking and breaking, strategic choices—all of these reflected on the importance of elites and the significance of political elite research. Thus, both the historic and the intellectual conditions were given to the revival of elite theory.⁶⁸ Social science in Central Europe changed course: it dealt with social change instead of the *status quo*, the revived cleavages instead of social stratification, and elite analysis instead of class analysis.

The focus on the elites became generally accepted because elite theory captured the essence of post-communist transition better than New Class theory could. In addition, the idea of elite change was heavily influenced by the renewing social theory of the 1980s. According to the already cited observa-

66 Field and Higley, *Elitism*; Domhoff and Dye, *Power Elites and Organizations*; Burton and Higley, “Elite Settlements”; Higley and Burton, “The Elite Variable.”

67 Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

68 Cf. Higley and Gunther, *Elites and Democratic Consolidation*; Etzioni-Halévy, *Classes and Elites*; Finocchiario, *Beyond Right and Left*; Bozókí, “Elite Change in East-Central Europe.”

tion of Foucault,⁶⁹ power does not necessarily belong to a class and it is imaginable not only in vertical terms, but it encompasses every field of social life. The theory of Bourdieu⁷⁰ about the various forms of capital opened the door for research about the convertibility of various forms of social resources and capital goods. Michael Mann⁷¹ described society as organized power networks: this view called for rethinking power from a general historical and theoretical perspective. The research of radical social change brought new ideas to elite theory as well, which formulated new hypotheses about the transformation of elites.

One of the most important new approaches was the thesis of elite settlement by Burton and Higley,⁷² which emphasized the role of elite groups in rapid political changes. The authors did not think to use their theory for explaining transitions between two different regimes, they rather explained how elite settlement can recreate order within a disintegrating system. The application of elite theory to elite-driven transitions was formulated first in the neoconservative intellectual atmosphere of the 1980s, when scholars of comparative politics stressed the importance of a minimalist or “modest” interpretation of democracy. In this view, it is an essential part of democracy that decision making by elected elite groups is relatively uninterrupted by the masses. According to Huntington, democratic institutions “come into existence through negotiations and compromises among political elites calculating their own interests and desires.”⁷³

In the light of this, Burton and Higley claimed that elite settlement leads to stable democracy. As they write:

Elite settlements are relatively rare events in which warring national elite factions suddenly and deliberately reorganize their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements. Elite settlements have two main consequences: they create patterns of open but peaceful competition, based on the “norm of restrained partisanship” [...], among all major elite factions; and they transform unstable political regimes [...]

69 Foucault, “The Subject and Power.”

70 Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital.”

71 Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*.

72 Burton and Higley, “Elite Settlements.”

73 Huntington, “Will More Countries Become Democratic?” 212.

. .] into stable regimes, in which forcible power seizures no longer occur and are not widely expected.⁷⁴

This approach was soon understood more broadly. As the manifestation of peaceful transition to democracy was very similar to an elite settlement, the scholars of democratic transition tended to approach the entire process from the viewpoint of elite behavior. According to this thesis, elite settlement as a quick renegotiation and rearrangement of political conditions was important to elites to avoid revolutionary violence. Elite researchers found that the form and legitimacy of political change was to a large extent dependent on the composition, behavior, and quality of the political elite.

The theory of elite settlement was interpreted as an alternative to the theory of revolution, by focusing on the behavior of the main actors of a negotiated regime change. Burton and Higley listed five characteristics of elite settlement: (1) Elite settlement is accomplished quickly; (2) It includes face-to-face, partially secret, negotiations; (3) It is recorded in formal, written agreements; (4) It reflects forbearance and conciliatory behavior; and (5) It requires experienced political leaders. The thesis of elite settlement was complemented by other, empirical research in the vein of transition studies, which interpreted the process of transition as a combination of various forms of elite games.⁷⁵ The overlap between the elite settlement theory and the conceptualization of transition through negotiations turned out to be striking. The theory of democratic elitism was largely supported by the transformative processes of the Third Wave of democratization.⁷⁶

3.2 THREE THEORIES OF POST-COMMUNIST ELITE CHANGE

As for the theories of post-communist elite change, three of them proved to be influential. First, I refer to the works of Elemér Hankiss⁷⁷ who used Bourdieu's theory of four forms of capital⁷⁸—economic, political, cultural,

⁷⁴ Burton and Higley, "Elite Settlements," 295.

⁷⁵ Cf. Bruszt and Stark (1992), Colomer, *Strategic Transitions*; Higley and Pakulski, "Revolution and Elite Transformation in Eastern Europe"; Higley and Burton, "Elite Settlements and the Taming of Politics"; Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*.

⁷⁶ Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

⁷⁷ Hankiss, *East European Alternatives*; "Reforms and the Conversion of Power" (1989).

⁷⁸ Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."

social—in an innovative way to describe the regime change as a conversion of power. He believed that the elite will never give up power voluntarily; to do this, it requires special incentives or exigency. Hankiss argued that in 1989 such motivation was present in the negative sense, as in the prospect of losing power, as well as the positive sense, as in the possibility of conversion of power. According to his conjecture, the political leaders and their followers who contributed to the reform processes of state socialist systems of Central Europe did not do it for the common good or freedom but for their own well-conceived interest. The starting point of Hankiss was the coexistence of various forms of power in society, and when the communist elite faced the decay of the *ancien régime* it got an incentive to convert its power to other fields. Hankiss's thesis of conversion of power by convergence offered an explanation to what motivates the elite in changing the regime. He claimed that the communist elite achieved this by the legalization of "spontaneous privatization," a process which has been frequently interpreted in the political discourse as a means of elite survival through the corrupt and below-price acquisition of state assets.

Hankiss believed that the formerly communist, now pragmatic elites would be able to get rid of the discredited system while preserving their influence.⁷⁹ He expected that the winners of the transition would create a *grand coalition*, whereby the layer of former bureaucratic leaders merges with the management of state enterprises and the entrepreneurial elite. He opined that the notion of reform was just a cover to hide the convergence of the elites which was taking place in the background of the transition. The potential new elite, he argued, would not come from outside influential circles but it would comprise everyone with enough political influence to step on the road to enrichment. In Hankiss's view, this was the price of bloodless, peaceful transition. Although his examples were from Hungary, Hankiss extended the scope of his analysis to the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. When his book was published, his theses were heuristic but he formulated one of the most important hypotheses of elite transformation of Central and Eastern Europe. However, later research revealed that Hankiss was only partly right. Elite reproduction was dominant mainly in the economic sphere, but the

79 Hankiss, *Kelet-európai alternatívák*.

political sphere experienced more rapid and profound change.⁸⁰ Elite circulation, that is, the change of elites turned out to be a more powerful process than elite reproduction, and it led to the almost complete replacement of the elite in a short time.

Secondly, the thesis of *political capitalism* by Jadwiga Staniszkis⁸¹ was similar to that of Hankiss. It argued that the former nomenklatura used its political power to accumulate substantial personal wealth. Staniszkis believed that the chief beneficiary of the privatization process was the ruling elite of the communist system, which could thereby preserve its leading position in the society. Staniszkis foresaw the emergence of new bourgeoisie consisting of leading cadres and the members of the former nomenklatura, and she described this process as “political capitalism.” She assumed that the outgoing political elite can design capitalism according to its own needs. Staniszkis described this as a hybrid form of Westernization.

Staniszkis examines six forms of the combination of power and capital, and enlists both the advantages and disadvantages of political capitalism. Looking at privatization through realist glasses, she stated that “there is no rational privatization without capital.” Among the disadvantages of political capitalism, she mentions “compromising the idea of privatization of state sector in the eyes of society” which makes them unenthusiastic about the new regime and prevents their active participation in public matters. This harmonized with the pessimist assessment of Jowitt⁸² about the expected survival of the ghettoized, mistrustful, Leninist political culture of East Central Europe which is incapable of the democratic control of power. Among the advantages of political capitalism, Staniszkis observes that it made the systemic transformation easier and quicker because members of the nomenklatura had not opposed the process at all but were interested in its success. Both Hankiss and Staniszkis accepted Bourdieu’s thesis of different forms of capital, and they believed that the conversion of political capital into economic capital would be the dominant social process in elite change of the post-communist transition.

Thirdly, the form of conversion of power was at the center of the works of Erzsébet Szalai, who formulated a thesis about *technocratic continuity*.⁸³ In

80 Szelényi and Szelényi, “Elites during the Postcommunist Transformation.”

81 Staniszkis, “Political Capitalism in Poland.”

82 Jowitt, “The Leninist Legacy.”

83 E. Szalai, *Gazdaság és hatalom*; “Rendszerváltás és hatalom konvertálása”; *Szereppróba* (1993).

the 1980s, she did empirical research in state owned big socialist firms and she agreed with Hankiss that managers of state companies had been prepared for a special spontaneous privatization which had been designed to combine political and economic capital. However, Szalai claimed that it is not the whole nomenklatura which could implement this large scale conversion but only their younger and more educated elements. She interpreted this process as an increasing struggle between the old elite and the emerging new technocracy. She predicted that the younger, better educated, technocratic new elite would control the process of economic transformation which accompanies the political transition. Szalai's hypothesis was more complex than those of Hankiss and Staniszkis, and this influenced later researches as well. "Those who relied exclusively or overwhelmingly on political capital for their power and privilege (i.e. the old elite) are likely to be downwardly mobile, while those who combined cultural and political capital (i.e. the new technocracy) are better positioned to achieve positive privileges in terms of economic capital today."⁸⁴

The theses of Hankiss, Staniszkis, and Szalai were powerful statements about elite change in Central Europe, and they were all formulated at the late 1980s. Later theses about the composition and function of the post-communist ruling elite were elaborated in the interpretive framework of democratic elitism, or at least in relation to it as the dominant approach.⁸⁵ In these writings, intellectuals appeared only as supporting actors: their political influence reached its peak during and immediately after the regime change, later it began to decline.

CO-OPTATION, COOPERATION, CONTESTATION

International literature on democratic transitions distinguishes moderate and radical opposition, and underlines that the success of transition is ensured mainly if the reformers of the declining system and the moderates of

84 Szelényi and Szelényi, "Elites during the Postcommunist Transformation," 618.

85 See Higley and Pakulski, "Revolution and Elite Transformation"; Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, "Post-Communist Managerialism"; *Making Capitalism without Capitalists*; Higley, Pakulski, and Wesolowski, *Post-Communist Elites*; Higley and Lengyel, *Elites after State Socialism*; Wasilewski, "Three Elites of the East Central European Democratization"; Ilonszki, *Szakértők és pártemberek*; Best and Higley, *Democratic Elitism*; Körösi, "Beyond the Happy Consensus of Democratic Elitism"; Ványi, "Elitcsere és kései elitreprodukció."

the emerging opposition are the central players of the negotiations. Usually building on the experience of Latin-America, this approach cautions against radicalizing opposition coming to the fore too much because it holds that radical demands might jeopardize the success of transition.⁸⁶ In Hungary, however, the definition of the content of political change had been continuously changing until the summer of 1989. The scenarios of reform, model change, and regime change existed virtually in parallel. Reform included co-optation, model change understood as cooperation, and regime change meant contestation on the level of elites.

The strategy of co-optation was a favorite means of the Kádár regime to maintain social peace and integrate the intellectuals. However, at the time of the decay of the system it became harder and harder to maintain co-optation, and it required ever more creative ideas from the leaders of the system. In this chapter, I analyze how co-optation changed in the 1980s, and how it was replaced first by cooperation and eventually open contestation between the new political forces.

While the regime change in Hungary can be characterized mainly by the cooperation of the old and the new elite,⁸⁷ we would be exaggerating by saying that the transition was exclusively the game of elite groupings. The pressure of civil society was continuously felt during the last few years of the Kádár regime. The politically active intellectual elite defined how the negotiations would go, but there was considerable interaction between the acts of the masses and the elite during the process. In the protest on March 15, 1989, the speakers demanded unity because they realized the dangers of the divisibility of the opposition. Tens of thousands of people attended the picnic of the independent trade unions on May 1, and about 200,000 people were present at the reburial of Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs on June 16. All this showed the strong social support of the opposition. The opposition negotiators could feel the same support after the September agreement as well when they initiated a referendum on the unresolved issues of the negotiations. In the matter of three weeks, they managed to collect 200,000 sig-

86 Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

87 Cf. Bozóki, Körösnéyi, and Schöpflin, *Post-Communist Transition*; Bruszt and Stark, "A politikai játéktér újraformálása Magyarországon"; Schiemann, *The Politics of Pact-Making*; Tordai, "A Társadalmi Szerződéstől az alkotmánybíróság határozatáig"; "A Harmadik Köztársaság alkotmányának születése"; Tökés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution*.

natures on the streets. The negotiated revolution of Hungary was not only the business of small, well-organized groups of the elites. The opposition was backed by masses who could be quickly mobilized.⁸⁸

The form of political change was given by the quick renegotiation of the political and institutional situation and the adaptation of the country's constitutional order to the changing circumstances. However, the change of the economic sphere was realized through a much more complicated mix of elite co-optation and elite convergence. The younger, more educated members of the technocracy had no competition within the elite. For various reasons, but they were personally interested in the success of the transition. The economic-managerial elite could not have been shut out of the benefits of the economic transition.⁸⁹

The dynamics of the transition was related to overlapping circles and loose groups of the opposition, which changed as the transition was going from one phase to another. Different protagonists, different circles and groups were brought to light by considering progressive reform ideas, the strategies of co-optation, the visions of "socialist pluralism," model change, and radical reform just as the negotiated regime change or the mass mobilizing politics of "Let the people decide!." Although in many cases these scenarios can be distinguished in time—the less radical options gradually gave way to the concepts expressing the necessity of more fundamental change—they run parallel to each other more than once. While some groups were still doing politics by the spirit of considering progression, other had already begun looking for more radical solutions to the political crisis. The dynamics of the regime change influenced the situation assessment, political identity, and resultant political strategy of the radical opposition groups as well.⁹⁰ Yet in numerous cases this was due to the change of power relations within the organizations. The dynamics of the regime change had an effect, not only on inter-organizational relations but it also changed the composition of those groups that defined the politics of each organization.

In a narrower sense the Hungarian transition occurred between 1987 and 1990.⁹¹ Reform was the agenda of the first year. In a certain sense, the his-

88 Cf. Hofer, "Harc a rendszerváltásért szimbolikus mezőben"; Arato, *Civil Society, Constitution, and Legitimacy*; Rainer, "A rendszerváltás és az ötvenhatos hagyomány"; Renwick, "Az eliten kívüli erők szerepe a rendszerváltásban."

89 Szalai E., *Gazdaság és hatalom*; Higley and Lengyel, *Elites after State Socialism*.

90 Bruszt and Stark, "A politikai játéktér újraformálása Magyarországon."

91 Ripp, *Rendszerváltás Magyarországon*.

tory since the economic reform of 1968 had been the history of restarting and withdrawing, sometimes overt but more often covert, implicit reform attempts. While there had been no fundamental change in the top echelons of power of the communist party until 1988, this was the time when the leader of the MSZMP's reform wing, Imre Pozsgay developed his network which would become important later. Developing contacts with various social and cultural groups, Pozsgay followed a strategy of co-optation to realize his reform ideas. He went to the various nonofficial clubs, supported traditionalist circles as well as moderate social initiatives. His popularity stemmed from that he offered an alternative, not only to the elderly leader, János Kádár and his circle but also to the middle-aged generation who wanted to overthrow Kádár but insisted on maintaining the system.⁹²

Within the state party, Pozsgay had to form a temporary alliance with Károly Grósz, a long term party-apparatchik to overthrow Kádár because his internal support was not enough to carry out the mission with success. To remove Kádár, one had to mobilize the apparatus, something Grósz could do. Pozsgay was popular outside the party, but Grósz had the party machinery in his hand. Grósz could have maintained his influence in the broader party membership only if he had been able to isolate MSZMP from society. But in a dissolving dictatorship, the party state was not what it had been. Instead of adhering to the Leninist principle of "democratic centralism," the party membership demanded stronger ties to the society. There was no chance to lead the party in the old way anymore, by bureaucratic control. However, Pozsgay was helped in his successful fight against hardline cadres precisely by his openness and good relationship to the party state's reformers and to the semi-opposition groups outside the party. The walls of the party state continued to break after Kádár was removed. Reformers of the communist party still acted by the strategy of co-optation. They tried to use their existing relationship with opposition organizations to channel more and more political power from the conservatives of the party state to them or their clients.⁹³

However, the scenario of co-optation was nullified when the Opposition Roundtable was formed in March 1989, and that it later gained strength.

92 Emblematic figures of this generation were Károly Grósz and János Berecz.

93 For example, participants of a New March Front event lauded Elemér Hankiss' theory to form a grand coalition of the reformers of the party and the state, managers of big corporations, and the new entrepreneurs, as a political goal to be realized. Cf. Lázár, *Az Új Márciusi Front*.

MSZMP was opposed no longer by unorganized and divisible opposition groups: the institution uniting the forces of the opposition under the principle of consensus was created. There was no chance for any reformer of the party state to co-opt the ones from the side of the opposition. When MSZMP attempted at dividing the EKA, it failed. The only way the communists could involve the opposition to the solution of the crisis if they open negotiations about the fundamental change of the political system. The logic of co-optation gave way to the logic of cooperation.

The strategy of co-optation worked until there was a need for wide fronts and “weak ties,”⁹⁴ that is, in the early phase of the regime change, during Gorbachev’s *glasnost*. By the spring of 1989, however, Pozsgay must have seen that political action built on sympathy *per se* was not enough. Public opinion started to turn about him when, in April 1989, he did not quit MSZMP and start a new democratic reform movement. Failing to quit, he could not show the path to his followers, so he tried to keep up their sympathy by his personal popularity and language which differed from the party jargon and built on the ideas of nation, democracy, and socialism.

In the summer of the 1989, the National Roundtable talks were at the center of political life. In the beginning, it seemed that starting the negotiations was according to Pozsgay’s plan. As it had been known by then that MSZMP would nominate him for the position of president, it was easy for Pozsgay to concede to the opposition that wanted to dethrone the state party. He could kill two birds with one stone: weaken the state party while increasing his own chances. Gradually dropping the burden of the state party, he could have emerged as the president of the nascent Republic of Hungary, and he was justified in expecting his opposition allies negotiating in EKA not to hinder early presidential elections in exchange for his concessions. Organizations in the gravitational field of Pozsgay tended to accept such a compromise. However, he failed to organize these circles behind him effectively, and his People’s Front-like strategy came to fruition without him being able to harvest its fruits. Elemér Hankiss, a well-known representative of EKA, recalled:

I sensed horrible tension between the two camps. Nevertheless, the consultation was very civilized, very calm. [. . .] The whole thing had very

94 Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties.”

high stakes in a psychological sense, so that we can sit down and talk. That was the first time they sat down with the opposition. And by this, they brought the opposition into public politics.⁹⁵

The phase of co-optation was replaced by cooperation, which primarily meant strengthening the unity of the opposition vis-à-vis the state party. The speedy dynamics of change quickly gave way to József Antall a chief negotiator of MDF and the circles developing around him. Antall became politically active in 1988, and his network originally included the elderly leaders of the historical parties (FKGP, KDNP), as well as some prominent figures from MDF and BZSB only. Antall became the leader of the moderate right during the Roundtable talks, and for a long time he managed to balance between the reformers of MSZMP and the radical democrats of EKA. Antall was a principled anti-communist but in practice he was a rather cautious politician. Due to his central position and prestige, he had probably the broadest and most effective of all circles in the definitive months of 1989. While Pozsgay built his network for years, Antall achieved the same in 1989 in a matter of months by making himself and his party unavoidable during the talks. An addition benefit for Antall was that he became stronger within his own party as well, and by the end of the summer it had become obvious that he would be the next leader of MDF.

The witnesses had mixed feelings about the behavior of József Antall. Some believed he was too old-fashioned, while others thought this advantage came from this very trait. Someone pointed out his special ability to balance:

Antall was very adept in assessing various power relations, and when it had to be summarized after a day of debating where we stood, he was masterful in this, and he always favored those a little bit who wanted more politically. He could present it, he said such periodic sentences that were accepted even by the softer line, [so] he was very adept in dealing with the participants.⁹⁶

According to another participant,

95 Interview with Elemér Hankiss, 1997.

96 Interview with Tamás Tirts, 1997.

Antall had a great sense of informal politics: that is, when, who, what should be said during the break in three words, and then go on with the negotiations accordingly. And another one had to be told another three words. He was excellent in that. And he was just as calm and cumbersome in EKA, which was good political tactics with him, not only a stylistic flaw, I think, but political tactics, too, that speeches had to be long and cumbersome, because then you need to speak about practically nothing, and you can avoid substantive answers. I think he did this consciously.⁹⁷

In the committee dedicated to constitution-making, the delegates of MSZMP also had high opinion of Antal: "I didn't realize for a long time that he wasn't a lawyer because his comments were so professional. What I noted rather was that how much the others listened to him. Most of the times, the last word from the side of EKA in that delegation was said by Antal."⁹⁸ The negotiations were attended by some artists as well, who noticed something else in Antal as well, and formed a more pronounced opinion. For example, a renowned movie director remembered him as follows: "That was the first time I met József Antal, and I said to myself: Can it be that he'll be prime minister? Then we're in trouble. [...] I met him once or twice later, it was completely obvious that he's an extremely vain man ... it seemed to me he had a very malformed soul."⁹⁹

Péter Tölgyessy, a top delegate of SZDSZ, who negotiated with him on a daily basis, characterized him in an interview as follows:

József Antal was the carrier of one of the significant traditions of Hungarian history. His family showed the best traditions of the Hungarian political class. [...] In 1990, he did not simply want to put an end to state socialism and the Kádár system, he was trying to revive the conservative-liberal tradition that had been broken in 1947. He hoped to lead the right-wing voter to modern Europe.¹⁰⁰

Pozsgay remembered Antal as someone who excelled at the negotiating table, and this paved his path to party leadership. "I don't want to talk about

⁹⁷ Interview with Viktor Orbán, 1990.

⁹⁸ Interview with József Kajdi, 1997.

⁹⁹ Interview with Miklós Jancsó, 1997.

¹⁰⁰ Kasza, *Metamorphosis Hungariae*, 27.

him based on disappointment and disillusionment, because history will certainly give him credit for many good things, especially that he agreed to govern the first term, simply he made fatal mistakes in my opinion. I'm not sure that he should have agreed to it."¹⁰¹

The tactic of co-optation was driven by the soft-liners of the MSZMP, while cooperation was orchestrated by them and the representatives of the moderate wing of the opposition. The radical opposition parties had a much harder time to build an effective network. For their political activity openly aimed at being not the followers but the makers of change. They strived to be always one step ahead the changing political atmosphere. Coming from the democratic opposition, the leadership of SZDSZ was more cohesive and closely knit. According to a participant, "It can't be debated that homogeneous leadership was a strength of SZDSZ for a long time. The leading body of the democratic opposition, which used to make *Beszélő*, they organized SZDSZ, and certainly led the party."¹⁰² However, SZDSZ did not have much opportunity until the summer of 1989 to build a social following. The Network of Free Initiatives brought many people into the gravitational field of SZDSZ, but the effect of this was less observable a year later. The leaders of the party found sympathizers in the liberal circles of the liberalizing press, and they were close allies with the Liga trade union. According to a recollection: "Finally we were sitting there, and it was amazing to see that all of a sudden one becomes a great man out of nothing, of obscurity. There were three such people: Viktor Orbán, Péter Tölgyessy, and József Antall. The others? They could not come to the fore so much."¹⁰³

The SZDSZ during the Roundtable talks was hallmarked not by the former dissidents but first and foremost Péter Tölgyessy, who belonged to the newcomers in the party, but he did not have supporters in other parties. One of the participants remembered the role of Tölgyessy as follows:

Great many things that were achieved by the Opposition Roundtable, [...] and what was achieved by SZDSZ outside of it, were led and developed by Péter Tölgyessy, he had a decisive role. [...] I think of him as a politician of great caliber and a very talented man who needed such

¹⁰¹ Interview with Imre Pozsgay, 1997.

¹⁰² Interview with Miklós Szabó, 1997.

¹⁰³ Interview with László Vitézy, 1997.

an issue to be motivated enough, and this was the level at which he could really create and work. And then there were other things that did not motivate him that much, or at all, and he was not really interested in those issues either. For instance, he does not know how to organize the party or lead it on the operative level. As if he was born to make the development of the comprehensive, constitution-level political reform ideas.¹⁰⁴

The relationship of SZDSZ and Fidesz in the negotiations can be best described as symmetrical, as opposed to the asymmetrical relationship of MDF and the smaller right-wing parties. Maybe this handicap of SZDSZ and Fidesz contributed to that, when in September 1989 these parties were in the minority regarding the issues that had been left open at the negotiating table they found a take-off point in turning directly to society. They felt that they had nothing to lose. For although they did not want to jeopardize the results reached at the negotiating table, in several questions they did not accept the compromises the moderate opposition found acceptable. Thus, they initiated a referendum in those issues which the negotiations had not resolved. The following table summarizes the reorganization of elite groups in each phase of the democratic transition.

Table 10. Declared goals and dominant elite networks during and after the transition

PERIOD	DECLARED POLITICAL GOAL	THE RELATION OF MSZMP TO THE NEW ORGANIZATIONS	DOMINANT ELITE GROUP
1987	reform	co-optation	Reformers weakening the regime from inside (Pozsgay)
1988	model change	cooperation	MSZMP leaders overthrowing Kádár (Grósz, Pozsgay, Nyers, Németh)
1989	regime change	contestation	followers of Antall (MDF) and the leaders of SZDSZ

104 Interview with Gábor Demszky, 1997.

Three types of opposition behavior could be identified at the Roundtable talks. Those were, as John Schiemann called them, the “ultra-moderate,” the “moderate,” and the “self-limiting radical” positions, which sometimes complemented each other and sometimes competed with each other.¹⁰⁵ Focusing on domestic politics, the success of the Hungarian regime change was the result of the fortunate constellation of several factors. First, as the time passed it was more and more in the interest of the reformers of MSZMP to make an agreement with the opposition, they tried to mobilize their contacts in this direction. Second, it was crucial that the success of the moderate opposition, represented by MDF, managed to neutralize the “ultra-moderates” and even steer them to the path of regime change, and that this aim was supported by the “self-limiting radicals” of SZDSZ as well. In other words, the reorganization of the political playing field was done by the cooperation of radicals and moderates; they were divided not by strategic but tactical differences. Third, it was important that the success of the referendum of the radicals managed to divert the moderate opposition from an agreement that would have led to a Polish-type early power-sharing with the dominant groups of the old regime.

It was the joint effect of these factors that was able to ensure that the Roundtable talks left with only a very few political “mines” which the voters would have had to circumvent in the new democratic period. The changing political goals of “reform—model change—regime change” corresponded to the behavior of elite groups described as “cooptation—cooperation—contestation.” Different groups of the opposition have been maneuvering in these conditions by rotating themselves in that period of rolling transition.

105 Schiemann, *The Politics of Pact-Making*.

CHAPTER VI

Negotiated Revolution: The Strategy of the Opposition

In this chapter we arrive at a new scene of rolling transition, the Roundtable talks, which brought new actors in the spotlight. In the following, I shall discuss the dynamics of the Roundtable negotiations by highlighting the strategic choices of the opposition and elaborating the interactions between the delegates of EKA and the MSZMP. The negotiations covered several issues; here I will examine the stages of the negotiated revolution and the constitution-making process in the negotiations of the decaying and the ascending political elite. After the Roundtable talks, some issues still left open, those were solved by the referendum of November 1989. This chapter covers the most crucial period of transition, from the Act on Associations of January 1989 until the free elections of March 1990.

1. THE MEANING OF THE ROUNDTABLE TALKS

The Roundtable negotiations of 1989 were part of the bargaining process between the outgoing and incoming political elites, but their substance was a change of revolutionary importance.¹ As a renowned scholar of negotiated revolutions, Jon Elster wrote:

¹ Cf. Bozóki, *Konfrontáció és konszenzus; Alkotmányos forradalom*; Bozóki et al. (1999–2000); Bruszt, “Negotiated Revolution in Hungary”; Ripp, *Rendszerváltás Magyarországon*; Sajó, “Roundtable Talks in Hungary”; Schiemann, *The Politics of Pact-Making*; and Tökés, *Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution* among others.

The Roundtable talks were a peculiar political phenomenon. They embodied a form of bargaining between the government and society that bore no resemblance to the usual relationships between those two entities. In democratic political systems, society restrains the government through electoral mechanisms. In non-democratic systems, the restraint is indirect and implicit, through the government's calculations of how far it can go without creating social unrest with all its costs and risks. [...] It is very different, however, from the explicit bargaining of the Roundtable talks. By accepting an overt confrontation, the regime admitted what everybody knew—that it had no claim to represent the interests of the society over which it was governing. This unmasking of hypocrisy had major psychological and political consequences.²

Ending the old regime had to start with the process “unmasking,” since the system was ideologically based on promises of enlightenment which contradicted to its everyday political practice. Everybody was aware of this discrepancy and knew that dictatorial politics is based on a lie. By “unmasking of hypocrisy” the opposition had to present a democratic alternative to participate in the negotiations and to compete successfully in electoral politics. The fact that the then organizing opposition broke with the idea of reforming the party state, and they turned to society, also made clear that they distinguished legitimacy from legality. The notion of “radical reform” the Hungarian democratic opposition often referred to also meant this. However, the fact that several similarities could be observed in their political language facilitated the congruence of the democratic opposition and the new reformist intellectuals. The formation of a counter-elite, and its social base, aiming at peaceful and democratic change made it possible to proclaim that the system was not legitimate but legal, that is, transition to a legitimate system is possible within the framework of the law.³

The peaceful transitions hallmarked by the Roundtable talks took a novel approach to the issue of starting a democracy, and thus set new challenges to the political thinking about revolutions. Distinguishing legality from legitimacy, the members of the opposition expressed that the system was illegiti-

² Elster, “Introduction,” 3.

³ Kis, “Between Reform and Revolution.”

mate. And yet, they did not go and “storm the Bastille.” Instead, they created the possibility of an elite arrangement by maintaining the fiction of legality. They put the principle of rule of law before revolutionary justice-making. Maintaining legal continuity in terms of the process, the negotiating parties avoided continuity with the dictatorship in terms of the content of cardinal laws.

This process was a witty solution to the problem of political regime change, but later it raised moral problems in the period of democratic consolidation. For even if the transition was not unequivocally revolutionary, its result, the democracy, was fundamentally different from the previous system. Many people realized only later that informal networks and structures survived in the new democracy. Moreover, as the transition in several countries, including Hungary, was not about going *back* to democracy, but this was the first time a fully fledged democracy was established, it was questioned whether informal practices were just the legacy of the communist system or indeed deeper phenomena that had been developing for centuries. The negotiated transition was an informal way out of state socialism, but the world of informality necessarily prevailed.⁴

From this point of view, distinguishing legitimacy and positive legality may be problematic. The opposition was adept in exploiting the gaping hole between the informal-political rules of the dictatorship and its formally declared constitutionality. But in the old system, neither the citizens, nor the communist politicians in power saw this discrepancy as important. On the one hand, the system was not seen legitimate in the first place, because they know that it is ultimately based on sheer force. On the other hand, they knew that its legality is only the right of the stronger, and positive law *per se* deserves no respect as not even those who created it took it seriously. The legal culture of the system was not characterized by facing the duality of constitutionality and legality but by relativizing the law and finding personal loopholes. This is deeply engrained in post-communist societies as well. Thus, we can interpret the distinction between legality and legitimacy as a useful fiction created for the success of the regime change, but it was not backed by popular consensus. On the level of the elites, it was easier to get rid of the old system with the distinction, but it had the disadvantage of not making the

4 Böröcz, “Informality Rules”; Lauth, “Informal Institutions and Democracy.”

moral content of the regime change sufficiently perceptible for the broader society. Many people believed that the old practices go on the within new frames. The debates following the regime change—on issues such as corruption, democratic deficit, the deficiencies of the social acceptance of democracy, social justice, or the relation of the new system to the past—helped the citizens face this problem afterward.

2. FROM MODEL CHANGE TO REGIME CHANGE

The structure the Hungarian Roundtable negotiations was complex: It included political and economic talks on three levels between three main negotiating partners (MSZMP), Opposition Roundtable (EKA), and the so-called Third Side which was a group of the satellite organizations of the Party. Topics of political talks were centered around the following six major themes: constitutional issues, party law, electoral law, criminal law, media and publicity, and the political guarantees of nonviolent transition.⁵

At first, the participants of the 1989 Hungarian Roundtable talks wanted to create the cardinal laws necessary to hold free elections and therefore to peaceful transition. They wanted to leave constitution-making to the freely elected parliament. However, this initial plan was overwritten by the dynamics of the regime change. Eventually, opposition forces did not avoid the constitution-making process which they previously refused but later accepted. This is how the democratic constitution came into being together with institutions which proved to be durable. The political outcome of the elite settlement was passed by the old parliament, and the so-called “Four Yes” referendum settled the still open questions. The constitution-making process was closed by the April 1990 agreement between the MDF and the SZDSZ, which guaranteed governability, and by the new law on municipal governments in summer 1990.

While the preamble of the 1989 democratic constitution explicitly stated the constitution was only temporary, this indicated only the bashfulness of the “founding fathers” and not that they regarded the constitution-making process invalid. Those who wanted to start constitution-making again in the decades after 1990 always cited this passage about the constitution’s formal

5 These topics were discussed in detail. Cf. Bozóki, *The Roundtable Talks of 1989*.

temporariness,⁶ but they also stressed that constitution-making was not exigent. Therefore, they also accepted that the democratic constitution, created in 1989–1990 and informally reinforced by the referendum, was appropriate to create and protect pluralist democracy.⁷

2.1 TACTICAL MANEUVERS

The need for formulating a new constitution was first raised in the May 1988 party conference of the MSZMP, when János Kádár was removed from power.⁸ On January 1, 1989, a constitutional draft committee was formed within the Ministry of Justice with the task of revising the constitution. The ministry's draft⁹ was accepted by the parliament in March 1989, but the detailed elaboration of the legal text was postponed due to the emergence of opposition parties, the formation of the Opposition Roundtable, the preparatory meetings of the Roundtable talks, and the accelerating political changes in general. Opposition forces entered the political arena as challengers to the MSZMP.

However, constitutional change could begin already before constitution-making was on the agenda, by accepting a few important laws. In January 1989, the Association Act was passed in the parliament. The existence of various political organizations—which had all referred to the constitution—was thereby legalized. The Association Act meant that party formation was liberalized in Hungary, and the creation of legal framework opened the political opportunity toward a multiparty system.¹⁰ However, the leaders of MSZMP tried to detach political parties from social organizations, arguing that the legal conditions of party operation would be set only in the later Party Act. According to the recollection of the then Deputy Minister of Justice and member of the constitutional draft committee, Géza Kilényi, “after the law

6 The 1989 constitution of Hungary started as follows: “In order to facilitate a peaceful political transition to a constitutional state, establish a multi-party system, parliamentary democracy and a social market economy, the Parliament of the Republic of Hungary hereby establishes the following text as the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary, until the country's new Constitution is adopted.” *A Magyar Köztársaság Alkotmánya*. (The Constitution of the Republic of Hungary) Budapest: Novissima, 2006.

7 Halmi “Az 1949-es alkotmány jogállamosítása”; Tordai, “A Harmadik Köztársaság alkotmányának születése.”

8 MSZMP, *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, 262.

9 Kilényi, *Egy alkotmány-előkészítés dokumentumai*.

10 Bozóki, *Politikai pluralizmus Magyarországon*.

on the right of association categorically stated that political parties can be founded on this legal basis, the party leadership was alarmed and wanted to buy some time. The Ministry was ordered to put a sentence in the Act saying the operation and registration of parties will be set in another law. It was clearly for the purpose of buying time.”¹¹

The supporters of Imre Pozsgay proposed a constituent assembly. The plan—in the version of creating “national committees”—was also entertained by New March Front (*Új Március Front*, ÚMF) which was a reform group of intellectuals close to MSZMP and informally led by Rezső Nyers.¹² Eventually, the plan failed because of the lack of agreement on who should convene the assembly and who should be invited. There was a risk that some of the opposition forces would not be invited to the constituent assembly, and therefore the constitution it makes would not reflect the will of the people. The proposal was thus quickly removed from the agenda.

At this point, only internal pressure and political courage were needed for the ruling party to recognize the multiparty system. When the MSZMP leader Károly Grósz traveled abroad at the end of January 1989, Minister of State Imre Pozsgay used the opportunity to proclaim—referring to the findings of the historical committee he had convened—that 1956 was a popular uprising. Although the notion of popular uprising was not equal to revolution, the sheer fact that the genesis of the Kádár regime was revised surprised the society. For one of the taboos of the system was, as mentioned above, that the interpretation of 1956 as a “counter-revolution” cannot be questioned. Because if the leaders of the system acknowledge that 1956 was not a counter-revolution then they cannot deny that the regime of Kádár, and its coming to power was paved by Soviet tanks, oppressed the people, and served foreign interests. The top bodies of the state party discussed the disloyalty of Pozsgay in February 1989. Contrary to expectations, the fight strengthened the reformist wing and the communist participants acknowledged that what happened in 1956 was a popular uprising. It was even more important,

11 Interview with Géza Kilényi, 1997.

12 According to the recollection of László Antal, the New March Front wanted to fulfill a role of integration vis-à-vis the official party line. It was the idea of György Aczél that a political organization should have a legitimate way which is not directed by the MSZMP. The founding document of New March Front was accepted and Rezső Nyers was announced as its leader. But it was forbidden for Nyers, a member of the politburo, to sign it. The statement was published in October 1989 only, when the initiative had long failed. Interview with László Antal, 1997.

however, that MSZMP accepted the idea of multiparty system, which could finally be codified.

Yet this did not mean that the party state was ready to run in free and fair elections. In February 1989, MSZMP leaders thought that they only encourage the operation the parties which accept the current constitution which recognized the leading role of the state party, and that multiparty system can exist only as "socialist pluralism." They wanted to keep the reorganized historic parties—primarily the Independent Smallholders' Party, the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, and the Hungarian People's Party—as potential allies for a future coalition. In addition, they maintained good relations with the strongest new party, the MDF. Pozsgay, as the populist-leaning representative of the reform wing of MSZMP had been cooperating with MDF since the 1987 Lakitelek meeting, and he had good relations with some smaller groups from that camp as well.¹³ Minister of State Rezső Nyers tried to link reform communists and social democrats by promoting the New March Front.

Independent political organizations issued a joint statement to welcome the multiparty system was recognized by MSZMP, although they resented that the state party still refuses to officially recognize 1956 as a revolution. The same organizations began preparations for the independent, worthy celebration of March 15 (the revolution of 1848) and called the government to officially declare October 23 (the revolution of 1956) a national holiday. The leaders of the Danube movements announced that they had collected 124,000 signatures to hold a referendum in the issue of the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam. In the weeks before March 15, 1989, MSZMP speeded up the negotiations it separately held with each opposition organization.¹⁴ These talks were criticized as tactics of "divide and conquer" by numerous opposition organizations.

In 1989, March 15 was a national holiday for the first time in decades. Adjusting to the rituals of the previous years, the official celebration in

13 Like Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society and Hungarian People's Party.

14 On the turn of February–March 1989, the representatives of MSZMP held bilateral negotiations with the representatives of the Independent Smallholders' Party, the Veres Péter Society, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (MSZDP), the Münnich Ferenc Society, and the Hungarian Federation of Resistance Fighters and Antifascists (MEASZ). In addition, they met the delegates of the National Committee of Hungarian Youth Organizations (MISZOT), the Hungarian People's Party, and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ).

Budapest was in the garden of the Hungarian National Museum. The opposition side gathered at the statue of 1848 revolutionary Sándor Petőfi and followed its path that became traditional in the 1980s. At various stations, political speeches were given. In the evening, the opposition organized a torchlight procession to Buda Castle. The demonstration in Budapest was attended by more than a 100,000 people—which was five times the attendance of the official celebration—and attendance rates were similar in every country town as well. As a result, opposition groups felt legitimate: they were justified in thinking that they are not only backed by isolated groups of student and intellectuals, but supported by greater and greater circles of society as well.

The celebration of March 15 was a fight for historical memory. On the streets, demonstrators linked the demands of 1848 and 1956 visually as well as verbally, and they applied them to the situation in 1989 as well. An emphatic point was to contrast János Kádár and Imre Nagy, recalling the genesis of the Kádár regime and underlining its moral indefensibility.¹⁵ The successful demonstration channeled the changes that had taken place mainly on the level of elites to public discourse, and further encouraged the leaders of new political groups to cooperate and jointly realize the common demand of the two revolutions: the freedom of Hungary.

2.2 PREPARATORY TALKS BETWEEN THE OPPOSITION ROUNDTABLE AND THE MSZMP

The successful demonstration of March 15 had landslide political effects for both the MSZMP and the status of the opposition. As for the state party: the dissolution following the January statement of Pozsgay accelerated. From April, reform circles of the party were formed all over the country and several hardline leaders were removed from party leadership. Representatives of MSZMP met, behind closed doors, with the representatives of the freshly formed Opposition Roundtable in April to discuss preparations for the National Roundtable talks. The government of Miklós Németh, which was practically composed by a bunch of technocrats by that time, stopped the building of the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam in May 1989. The cabinet dis-

15 Hofer, “Harc a rendszerváltásért szimbolikus mezőben.”

tanced itself from the statement of Grósz who talked about the possibility of an economic state of emergency. The division between the Party and its government led to a stalemate in which MSZMP could not bloc the reburial of martyr prime minister Imre Nagy anymore. The reburial was recognized as a political event which made clear that the conservative forces of the party were unable to reverse the transition.¹⁶ In parallel, the opposition parties resisted the temptation to make separate agreements with the MSZMP, which thus could not divide them. The political conditions of opposition cooperation were created right after the March 15 demonstration.

On March 22, 1989 the Opposition Roundtable (EKA) was formed by eight organizations in Budapest, at the Faculty of Law of Eötvös Lóránd University.¹⁷ It was preceded by the beginning of the Polish Roundtable talks in February with the representatives of the most important political forces of Poland (Solidarity, the communist party, the Catholic Church, official trade unions, and satellite parties).¹⁸ The Hungarian opposition believed that following this model—the only model at the time—was reasonable despite the differences in the political situation of the two countries.¹⁹ The question at this point was: Who will initiate the cooperation of the opposition forces?

This was when the Independent Lawyer's Forum (FJF) entered the scene. Originally, it was formed in November 1988 with the aim of mobilizing the passive stratum of layers to help the democratic and peaceful transformation of the system. FJF did not belong to any opposition organization but to the opposition in general, and it wanted to facilitate the process which would lead to free elections. After the successful demonstration of March 15, an FJF representative, Imre Kónya proposed to the forces of the opposition to start negotiations immediately about the most pressing issues of the transition, particularly suffrage. The Lawyer's Forum offered to organize the negotiations, and to contribute to the elaboration and reconciliation of the stand-

¹⁶ Kalmár, "Modellváltástól a rendszerváltásig."

¹⁷ The eight organizations which created the Roundtable were the following: Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Endre Friendship Society, Alliance of Young Democrats, Independent Smallholders' Party, Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Hungarian Democratic Forum, Hungarian People's Party, Hungarian Social Democratic Party, Alliance of Free Democrats. The Christian Democratic People's Party—as a ninth member—joined the Opposition Roundtable only in June.

¹⁸ Osyatinski, "The Roundtable Talks in Poland."

¹⁹ Interview with László Bruszt, 1997; Interview with Csaba Kiss Gy, 1997.

points of the different sides.²⁰ This meant that the political activity of the opposition moved from the movement period to a new dimension: an intellectual group literally undertook a legislative, constitution-making role.²¹

The members of the Opposition Roundtable (EKA) agreed unanimously at the inaugural meeting, that only such organizations can be part of EKA which regard popular sovereignty as one of their goals, reject the privileges or power monopoly, and do not form alliances with such organizations. To ensure their unity, the participants agreed in procedural rules which ensured that the decisions of EKA will be consensual, that is, the negative vote of a single organization could mean the use of veto power.²² This rule proved to be a force of unity. From here on, every member organization of EKA needed to consider whether its own, different vote is important enough to insist on it and prevent the decision making of EKA. This did not mean the member organizations could only vote "Yes": they often abstained or expressed that their "No" vote is not a veto but only serves to make EKA's internal lines of power visible. The principle of consensual decision making, which was later extended in a more sophisticated form to the National Roundtable as well, had a great impact on the then forming democratic political culture.

With respect to constitution-making, EKA proposed that an agenda item of the negotiations with MSZMP must be "guaranteeing the democratic conditions of constitution-making, given that the Opposition Roundtable does not consider the current process of constitution-making democratic and expedient." The EKA also wanted to discuss "creating the conditions for free and democratic elections that ensure constitutional development, given that the Opposition Roundtable considers the current Parliament, established through non-democratic elections, unsuitable for constitution making."²³ The early documents do not state that the EKA itself wants to be part of the process of constitution-making. Indeed, they only called the MSZMP to stop preparations for one-sided constitution-making.

The reaction of MSZMP to the formation of EKA was increased activity. Although the separate negotiations it wanted could not be concluded,

20 At the same time, SZDSZ also had the same initiative, but they eventually had withdrawn it, believing the proposal should not come from one of the opposition parties.

21 This realized in concrete terms what Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislator and Interpreters* had expressed metaphorically: the intellectual as "legislator."

22 Bozóki et al., *A rendszerváltás foratókönyve*.

23 Bozóki et al., *A rendszerváltás foratókönyve*, 86, 87.

the MSZMP tried to convene a consultative forum where every opposition organization, with the exception of Fidesz, while most of the organizations of the later Third Side were invited. This was a tensile test for EKA. If they attend without Fidesz, they give up unity and the first step of the “divide and conquer” tactics of MSZMP succeeds. The opposition parties decided not to accept the invitation. As a result, they fortified solidarity between the new parties, ensured the maintaining of the Roundtable, and reinforced its of operation of consensual decision making. EKA now existed as a genuine political force.

At the same time, MSZMP continued to weaken. Within the party, the reformist movements gained ground and urged the state party to give up not only its power monopoly but its hegemonic role to ensure its own reformation. It was upon their pressure that the party leadership lifted the ban on internal factions, renounced the direct control of the press, and dissolved the cadre lists (the *nomenklatura*) which listed fields of employment where positions could be fulfilled only with the prior approval of the party. In April 1989, the reform circles of MSZMP convened a national party forum. They had great expectation toward this event and thought that the reform wing would secede from the state party. However, Pozsgay rejected the proposal. He probably believed that he would be able to crowd out the hardliners and therefore by leaving, splitting the party, and starting a new one would be beneficial only to his opponents who could get rid of him this way. True, a reorganized left-wing movement outside the party could have had more credibility but splitting the state party might have endangered the success of peaceful transition.

In May–June of 1989, the internal pluralization of MSZMP accelerated. Reform circles all over the country called for negotiations, and they even contacted the Opposition Roundtable. On May 1, independent trade unions organized a picnic in the People’s Gardens in Budapest with tens of thousands attending. Local opposition roundtables emerged in the country, and the joint opposition became a countrywide movement. The paramilitary Workers’ Militia was put under the control of the government. The party leadership organized a party conference to the autumn of 1989, which eventually became—upon the pressure of the reformist groups—a full-fledged party congress. The party leadership was caught between a rock and a hard place.

Following the increasingly radical steps of the Németh government, some people with close ties to the cabinet argued that negotiations should be carried out not between MSZMP and EKA but the government and the parties so the declining MSZMP would not appear with too much weight. However, it was important for EKA to negotiate with the real possessors of power and thereby have a change to draw a clear line between itself and the representatives of the old regime. Thus, the EKA rejected the negotiations with the incumbent government, and maintained the idea of bilateral negotiations with the communist party. This is how the opposition wanted to distinguish “them” and “us.” Had the regime been already happened, the opposition could have negotiated about political questions with the government. But this was not the case in the summer of 1989: the opposition had to negotiate with MSZMP, the “ruling force of society” as the communist constitution put it. At this time, the Németh government did not strongly oppose democratic transition, and therefore it could not be a symbol of the old regime either. The state party, possessed of the monopoly of power, was the manifestation of the old system, as well as the main obstacle of the regime change.

A reformist ministerial participant remembered with regret: “I felt that our ministry followed a rather strong reformist spirit, and we shouldn’t let this reformist spirit go. [. . .] But this was in the interest of neither political force. For the MSZMP, because it knew that it can no longer control the government, the government’s fight for independence had already been won. And for the EKA, because it was not interested in recognizing that the government follows independent politics, it was interested in blurring it with MSZMP.”²⁴ However, as two of the most important leaders of MSZMP (Németh, Pozsgay) were also important members of the government, ministerial officials showing their independence from the party state had no political credibility. On the other hand, although they had to represent the MSZMP in the negotiations they were given remarkable freedom, almost a free mandate to do so. “Directly, we felt that we were subject to a single political instruction, the instruction of Pozsgay, that we must reach an agreement.”²⁵

²⁴ Interview with István Somogyvári, 1997.

²⁵ Interview with István Somogyvári, 1997.

As part of the preparatory, non-public consultations between the EKA and the MSZMP in April 1989,²⁶ the issue of constitution-making was discussed, but at this point the EKA delegates refrained from constitution-making before the formation of a new, democratically elected parliament.

In the view of the Opposition Roundtable the goal of the negotiations is to reach an agreement between the parties about the legal acts which are prerequisite for the democratic transition, as well as the date of general elections. [. . .] The Opposition Roundtable considers the current Parliament unsuitable for constitution-making, therefore it does not want to make a political agreement about this issue, because that would mean narrowing the room for maneuver for the new Parliament. Based on the same considerations, it finds continuing the discussion about the institution of the president of the republic and the constitutional court untimely.²⁷

As the passage of time only favored EKA—as both the reformist circles and certain groups of society mobilized—the MSZMP had to take a step: the reburial of Imre Nagy on June 16 and the July visit of US President George Bush were coming. While in the beginning of June millions of TV viewers saw the bloody suppression of the student demonstration for democracy at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the Western pressure on the Hungarian political leadership became more explicit. US foreign policy, which followed a rather cautious policy of Eastern Europe when Bush was elected, now realized its growing room for maneuver. The US Ambassador to Hungary,²⁸ who visited opposition parties personally several times, made it clear that the American president supports the peaceful, democratic way of transition, but in case of unsuccessful negotiations the financial support of the US may be questioned. So MSZMP decided to pre-empt the events.

But even within the member organizations of EKA, the opponents to negotiations needed to be convinced. The writer Dénes Csengey tried to persuade the delegates of MDF this way:

26 The preparatory talks were attended by László Sólyom and Péter Tölgyessy from the side of EKA, while MSZMP was represented by Imre Forgács, István György, and András Tóth.

27 EKA – MSZMP, “Az Ellenzéki Kerekasztal.”

28 Ambassador Mark Palmer.

Dear friends, now this is about a political agreement, we must put our revulsions aside.[. . .] If we say “without trauma”, if we say “without fight”, if we say “without blood”, and this is what we say, then we must say “with negotiations”. And then we must not show our revulsion but be there at the negotiations, we must make our demands clear, and take what is rightfully ours anyway: Hungary.²⁹

On June 10, 1989, the agreement about starting negotiations between MSZMP and EKA was signed in the building of the party center. Both parties felt that they had to explain why they started negotiations with each other. Speaking in the name of EKA, a legal scholar, László Sólyom reflected on the problem of legitimacy:

Considering the future, we must see that neither party here represents the Hungarian people. At the same time, it is obvious that beyond their own membership [. . .] they enjoy significant support of the population. Who supports what and how much should be decided by the elections? This whole series of negotiations is legitimate if [. . .] its most important task is to create the conditions of free elections. [. . .] These negotiations will be truly substantive because we will formulate legal acts indispensable to democracy, and the governing party has committed itself in this document that legislation must not precede political agreements.³⁰

The only question that remained was which rules need to be repealed so the popular will can manifest without prior restrictions in the free elections. The parties agreed that power is based on popular sovereignty, and sovereignty cannot be monopolized by political force. This opened the way toward substantial negotiations.

2.3 *THE REBURIAL OF IMRE NAGY*

MSZMP leader Károly Grósz promised in July 1988 that, if the family wants to bury Imre Nagy he would not want to stop them, but he underlined

²⁹ Csengey, *Mezítábas szabadság*, 53.

³⁰ *Megállapodás*.

that the political rehabilitation of the former prime minister cannot happen. Family members insisted on a worthy burial for Imre Nagy. It was organized with the help of the Committee on Historical Justice (TIB) which arranged the excavation of the unmarked graves of the convicted fifty-sixers. This made it possible, as well as the accelerating political changes, to exhume the ashes of the martyr prime minister and organize a worthy reburial. In the beginning of June 1989, the Central Committee of MSZMP issued a statement which lauded the life and work of Imre Nagy and expressed its wish to make the last honors and worthy burial a symbol of national reconciliation. The leaders of MSZMP were afraid of this day. They understood that they had to reach an agreement with EKA about the timetable of the negotiations before the day of the burial, otherwise they might face crucial political defeat. They wanted to avoid that the burial becomes a social “day of judgment” of the party. Thus, the coming reburial had a beneficial effect by accelerating the negotiation process.

The burial on June 16, 1989, was the symbolically most significant event of the transition. Two hundred thousand people gathered on the Heroes' Square in Budapest, and the event was broadcast live on TV so it could be followed by millions. Five coffins were placed outside the Arts Hall, five of which contained the earthly remains of martyrs of 1956.³¹ On the proposal of Árpád Göncz, the sixth coffin was left empty: it represented all those “lads of Pest” who gave their life for the revolution. The ceremony was opened by Árpád Göncz, former 1956 convict and the president of the Hungarian Pen Club,³² who later became the President of the Republic. After him, speeches were given by other fifty-sixers, including convicts and people who had been sent away from the country. Miklós Vásárhelyi emphasized the consequences of the democratic transition, Béla Király underlined the personal example of martyrdom, Imre Mécs spoke about the necessity of reconciliation, whereas Sándor Rácz emphasized the issue of foreign military groups stationed in Hungary. It was the speech of the young Viktor Orbán, who spoke “on behalf of the Hungarian youth,” which caused the greatest political resonance. His speech was based on the realization that 31 years after the execution of Imre Nagy it was not only about a ceremony of burial but

³¹ Imre Nagy, Miklós Gimes, Géza Losonczy, Pál Maléter, and József Szilágyi.

³² Between 1990 and 2000, Árpád Göncz served as the President of the Republic of Hungary. Cf. Kim, *The Transition to Democracy in Hungary*.

an event which had direct, regime-changing political consequences beyond the mere act of remembrance. The speech was the first open attack on reform communists, who were described by Orbán as people who still share party membership with the executors of the retaliation after 1956. The novelty of the speech was that it did not try to distinguish Pozsgay as a “good communist” from the “bad communists” of the party. On the contrary, it treated MSZMP as a single bloc and rejected it as such. This was in sharp contrast to the strategy of most of the opposition parties.

The event on the Heroes’ Square was a turning point in the Hungarian transition. First, psychologically it helped people get rid of fear: from here on, not only party leaders and reform committees but the society could speak freely about 1956. Second, after the burial, 1956 was once again interpreted as a revolution in public discourse. The burial rehabilitated not only Imre Nagy but, through him, the revolution itself, and provided a powerful argument for removing the system which was born out of crashing the revolution. In short, the burial was the burial of the regime as well. Third, the taboo of Soviet military groups stationed in Hungary fell also. Although discussion about potential solutions for troop withdrawal had already begun behind closed doors, the issue was on the agenda of the country’s popular discourse from June 16. Fourth, as an important result of this day, not the “national reconciliation” which MSZMP had propagated came into being³³ but a new stage of democratic transition began. It became clear that genuine national reconciliation means none other but democracy. Fifth, the burial of Imre Nagy can be considered as a turning point also because it revealed that substantial groups of society had been committed to democracy, while the reformists of MSZMP still spoke about model change at this point.

The lawful revolution of Hungary cannot be understood without the anti-regime demonstrations of 1989, that is, without the role of the forces outside the elite. The transition could be peaceful precisely because the MSZMP realized that the use of force could have provoked resistance on the streets. The Roundtable talks proceeded smoothly not only because of the self-limiting behavior of the participants, but because the majority of citizens was behind the demands of the opposition parties. While democratic legitimization on free elections was missing at the time, the opposition parties

33 Kenedi, *Kis állambiztonsági olvasókönyv I–II*.

could rely on the support of the people. While the formation of EKA cannot be understood without the success of the demonstration of March 15,³⁴ the June reburial of Imre Nagy which was seen live on TV by millions, played a huge role in the retreat of MSZMP. Finally, the quick withdrawal of the party from workplaces and the dissolution of the Workers' Militia cannot be understood without the autumn 1989 petition campaign, which was followed by the success of the "Four Yes" referendum. What mattered was not just the distance which undoubtedly existed between the people and the elite but also the interaction between them which dynamized the regime change.³⁵ In critical moments, the elite-driven transformation was pushed on by popular support.

The reburial was not followed by counterattacks of the hardliners within the communist party. Thus, the reformists had a change to realize their victory over their opponents in personal changes on the top of the leadership as well. Accordingly, from July Károly Grósz was no longer the first person of MSZMP: the single-person control of the general party secretary was replaced by a party board of four members.³⁶ In this arrangement, for a few months Rezső Nyers became the "first among equals," and the reason for change was the vertical spreading of power. After June 16, the internal political fights between the reformers and hardliners of the party became less important vis-à-vis the peaceful fight of the powerholders and the opposition in the eye of the society. It did not matter that the reformists won over the opponents of reform if the society, by bidding farewell to the reform communist Imre Nagy, bid farewell to reform communism as well. At this point, the reformists went so far in the reorganization of the structure of power that there was no turning back for them: they declared by the beginning of the negotiations that they support the principle of free elections and the program of complete regime change. From here on, popular opinion was less interested in the renewal of MSZMP because they focused on the opposition parties instead. Later, this led to the breakthrough of MDF and SZDSZ in early autumn, respectively, to the Fidesz becoming known, as well as the

34 Hofer, "Harc a rendszerváltásért szimbolikus mezőben."

35 Renwick, "Az eliten kívüli erők szerepe a rendszerváltásban."

36 The four members of the party board were Károly Grósz, Miklós Németh, Rezső Nyers, and Imre Pozsgay. The Political Committee of MSZMP was replaced by a 22-member political steering committee which was led by the board quartet.

success of the by-elections, the referendum, and finally the parliamentary elections.

Three weeks after political rehabilitation, on July 6, 1989, Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs were legally rehabilitated as well. The Supreme Court acquitted the innocently executed former leaders, and on the same day János Kádár died. The Kádár era ended in political, intellectual, and personal terms. The burial of the soft dictatorship's leader was attended by 10,000 people, basically thanking the former party leader that his politics in the 1960s and 1970s did not go on as it started after 1956. Besides this strange gratitude of survival, the need for peace, and nostalgia one could also feel relief. The eyes of the people turned to the Roundtable talks which defined the internal political life of the country.

3. CONSTITUTION-MAKING AT THE NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE TALKS

Unlike in Poland where there was only one Roundtable for all political forces, in Hungary the opposition parties formed a Roundtable of their own to find common political platform for the remaining part of the transition. This was the Opposition Roundtable that entered negotiations with the MSZMP and its satellites, called the Third Side, in the summer of 1989. These talks, formally trilateral, were called as National Roundtable talks. In the period from the Polish elections in June till the East German political landslide in November, Hungary was at the focus of international attention. At this time, the Hungarian Roundtable talks represented hope for the continuation of democratic turn in Central Europe.

As EKA did everything to avoid the success of “divide and conquer” tactics, it always sought to conduct bilateral negotiations with MSZMP. It did not want to negotiate with the government or the ministers but directly with the party, which the current constitution declared the possessor of power. The opposition parties wanted the two groupings to sit across each other: the state party on one side, and EKA on the other side. The leaders of EKA wanted to present the negotiations as dialogue between the power and the society, which would have illustrated that the powerholders did not belong to the people. One of the main protagonists of the opposition gave the following assessment:

The MSZMP had a double goal. First, to divide EKA into its pieces, and second, to manipulate the public to believe that it represented not simply a party but the mass of organizations which represent the citizens. [. . .] In other words, to hide as much as possible the fact that there are two opposing sides, namely the side of democracy and striving for freedom and the side of dictatorship and the system of privilege. [. . .] The EKA defined it clearly: we see one single task of these negotiations, to make free elections happen even without constitutional legitimation.³⁷

MSZMP did not agree to bilateral negotiations. György Fejti, who argued for a tougher negotiation strategy for the MSZMP, insisted that “if we must negotiate then let us avoid bipolar negotiations—that ‘power and opposition’—and have a third side as well, and then everyone who counts in the country can be involved.”³⁸ For EKA, it was difficult to accept that the negotiations would not be bilateral but, with the participation of the satellite organizations MSZMP invited, trilateral. In response, they built in two checks which ensured the negotiations would be substantive: each side had to have a single position (need for consensus); and the Third Side cannot prevent the first two sides from concluding an agreement. Eventually the parties agreed to have the MSZMP-invited social organizations—as a separate side, representing a consensual position—at the negotiating table. This is how the Third Side became part of the negotiations, while they announced right in the beginning that they would support the agreement of MSZMP and EKA, and therefore they accepted their limited negotiating position.

3.1 *THE STRUCTURE OF THE TALKS*

On June 13, 1989, the negotiating parties signed a memorandum of understanding in the Parliament. On one side, the representatives of MSZMP sat,³⁹ on the other, the EKA represented by nine organizations.⁴⁰ Finally, the

³⁷ Interview with György Szabad, 1997.

³⁸ Interview with István György, 1997.

³⁹ MSZMP was represented by Károly Grósz, Imre Pozsgay, and György Fejti.

⁴⁰ The EKA member organizations included BZSBT, Fidesz, FKGP, Liga, KDNP, MDF, MNP, MSZDP, and SZDSZ.

Third Side consisted of the representatives of seven organizations.⁴¹

The first plenary session began with the opening statements of Károly Grósz (MSZMP), Imre Kónya (EKA), and István Kukorelli (Third Side). Grósz cited the requirement of peaceful transition and emphasized that the process had been started by the party state. As he explained, “we need to find a peaceful way of transition to democracy which is based on multi-party system and the competition of parties. [. . .] The Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party aims, together with other political forces, at developing a democratic and socialist constitutional state that enforces the will of the people.”⁴²

Representing EKA, Imre Kónya underlined that Hungary belongs to its people and the negotiations are not about the distribution of power among the participants but finding the way toward free elections.

It must be pointed out that the goal of the negotiations is to ensure peaceful transition from the dictatorial system of rule to a representative democracy which truly enforces the will of the people. During the negotiations, we do not want to distribute power between us and the current holders of power. We do not want to be part of the exercise of power above the people’s head, without asking them first. Our goal is that the citizens of our country can and will decide on who, what political forces they entrust with the exercise of power for the period between one election and another.⁴³

Given the negotiating parties agreed in the goal to be achieved already at the beginning—a representative democracy based on a multiparty system and formed in free elections—their task from here on was “only” to discuss the way of transformation. EKA insisted on holding the negotiations in the Parliament building. This had a symbolic meaning, which was explained by a leading figure of the negotiations as follows: “What we wanted to negotiate was not the future of Hungary but the conditions which are needed for free elections. [. . .] We wanted to show this symbolically by not going

41 The Third Side included: Left Alternative, Democratic Youth Community (Demisz), Patriotic People’s Front (HNF), Hungarian Federation of Resistance Fighters and Antifascists (MEASZ), National Council of Hungarian Women (MNOT), Münnich Ferenc Society, and the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT).

42 Grósz, “Felszólalás,” 16.

43 Kónya, *Felszólalás*, 19.

to a neutral place but negotiating in the Hungarian Parliament. Indicating that, while there is no legal authority vested in this something to be formed, it will indeed essentially fulfill the task which is a task of a parliament.”⁴⁴ The Opposition Roundtable did not consider the communist Parliament as legitimate.

After the opening ceremony of the National Roundtable talks, the parties put forth the points and the order of the negotiations. They agreed to form 6–6 expert working committees to discuss certain political and economic topics; their agreements are sent on the so-called middle level of the negotiations to the leading politicians of the parties; finally, conclusive agreements could be reached in the plenary sessions of the negotiations. The working committees of the political negotiations covered the following topics: (1) issues regarding the constitution, including the legal standing of the president and the institution of a constitutional court; (2) the principles of the party act and party financing; (3) the principles of electoral law; (4) the principles of modifying criminal law and rules of criminal procedure; (5) the issue of the public sphere and the principles of the information act; and (6) the guarantees of nonviolence of the transition.

In the following months, the old and new political groups developed Hungary’s new constitutional system. In a way, they took on the role of the parliament as well as the function of a constituent assembly by creating a constitution that was new in its substantive items. In a somewhat elevated tone, we can say that the intellectuals of EKA carried out the special project that had been described in various ways by many from Plato to Bauman: the project where the philosophers, the writers, or the politically active intellectuals planning the future behind the “veil of ignorance” are given the opportunity to develop the institutional order of the country.

On the other hand, the economic negotiations were less significant than the political ones, and they were not successful either.⁴⁵ Originally, the MSZMP politicians believed that the political results can be made conditional on the economic negotiations and the resultant sharing of responsibility. Whereas the technocrats of the party wanted to win the support of

44 Interview with Péter Tölgyessy, 1997.

45 The idea to have economic committees with a same weight as political ones came from the MSZMP, and it was supported by the organizations of the Third Side and even the independent trade unions represented in EKA.

opposition parties to the unpopular measures of the economic liberalization program. Other participants sought the opportunity to discuss economic democracy, worker self-management, and the creation of social property in these committees. Finally, the trade unions tried to compensate for their decreasing weight in the population this way. All these expectations turned out to be illusions. One of the reasons might have been that the government had already passed the laws that helped spontaneous privatization (Company Act, Act on Transformation), so the most important issues had been dealt with before the entering of EKA. Another reason was that the opposition was not completely willing to participate in the development of economic alternatives for the new system without knowing the real situation of the country.

According to a participant, “the economic negotiations did not make too much sense. What really made sense were two things. One was to achieve that the opposition would not say something radically different from MSZMP about debt repayments. The other was the property reform. The spontaneous privatization had already been happening, the power transformation of MSZMP on every level, especially in the major companies. The position we reached on this was that pillage must not be permitted.”⁴⁶ Another participant said that “in the committees working on the economic front, the implicit strategy of EKA was not to make agreement.”⁴⁷ According to a third opinion:

The real cleavage was not between the MSZMP at the time and the opposition but between these two groups and the Third Side with quite leftist views. [...] But the reformist spirit had already been in there Hungary at the time, and everyone was infected. I can say that on the level of generalities everyone spoke the same language. Multi-party system, private property, market economy. [...] The representatives of MSZMP were reformers, the followers of the liberal line of economics. [...] The economic team, especially the team of Fidesz, was doctrinarian liberal. We were devout libertarians, but we condemned spontaneous privatization because we said it was the transformation of power. MDF better considered the

⁴⁶ Interview with Bertalan Diczházi, 1997.

⁴⁷ Interview with István Balás, 1997.

conditions of Hungary in its program, there idea was a more balanced transition. [. . .] It was never even raised that sooner or later a layer of owners would emerge, and from them who would become the great capitalists, major entrepreneurs, or what role should foreign capital play. We discussed a thousand things, but not the most important issues.⁴⁸

In the Roundtable talks, the half traditionalist and half third way and alternative socialist economic views of the delegates of the Third Side were overshadowed by the latent alliance of the reformist-technocratic-liberal groups of MSZMP and EKA negotiators. Negotiations about the issues of economic transition took place only months later at the attempt of the Blue Ribbon Commission (*Kék Szalag Bizottság*) and the Bridge Group (*Híd-csoport*). The members of these groups were either independent economic experts or ones with ties to the opposition parties.⁴⁹ They published the results of their work in 1990.⁵⁰

3.2 *SHIFTING POSITIONS*

Already after the opening session, EKA had to realize that it will have to deal with constitution-making to a much greater extent that it had planned. Only a few days passed since the ceremonial opening of the negotiations when EKA changed its position. They realized that peaceful transition was not possible with the old constitution, only revolution, and therefore they had to discuss constitutional changes in a systematic manner. The Ministry of Justice had started the elaboration of the finer points of a new constitution and was not happy to see that the work had to be stopped because of the starting Roundtable negotiations. MSZMP was interested in setting the presidency and the constitutional court, so that it can preserve its power at least to some extent.

However, the main reason the negotiators of EKA had to change the constitution was to remove the mention to the leading role of the state party, and

48 Interview with István Harmati, 1997.

49 Interestingly, George Soros was member of the Blue Ribbon Committee (*Kék Szalag Bizottság*).

50 Híd-csoport, "Híd a közeli jövőbe"; Kék Szalag Bizottság, *Gazdasági programjavaslat*; Lengyel, *Végkifejlet*.

to institute the legal guarantees of multiparty system and free elections. As Imre Kónya of the opposition said:

Previously the rights which had been part of the constitution were not enforced. But now the multi-party system is really working [. . .] so it needs to be modified. These problems, however, can be solved by a few changes. That is why we need to change the constitution. We simply need to remove the paragraph which says that the leading force of the working people is the party of the working class [. . .], we need to remove, for example, the limitations which are written next to each freedom that [they] cannot be exercised against the interest of the society. [. . .] And there are a few such passages of the constitution, if we solve this, then the constitution will work very well until a new constitution is not made.⁵¹

The paradox of legitimacy was created by that, in theory, powers with no legitimacy had to create legitimate political situation in the country. The creation of a legitimate political situation required active intervention: a constitution had to be created which allows the Hungarian people to express their will in free elections. There were some even on the side of the opposition who believed that “because of the question of legitimacy, the whole negotiation cannot really be regarded as democratic.”⁵² Others, however, opined that the later “feedback from the voting population was terribly important, and the fact that there were no demonstrations whatsoever against EKA meant to us that the country is indeed happy that changes are happening on the grounds of negotiations. There were no voices that questioned the legitimacy of this group.”⁵³

EKA could not return its mandate, saying its legitimacy can be questioned. For if they did that, there would not have been democratic transformation. The possible withdrawal of the organizations of EKA would have meant putting the decision in the (still not legitimate) hands of MSZMP, who would have been unlikely to go further than model change. During the negotiations, EKA applied two lines of argument to bridge the problem of legitimacy. On the one hand, it referred to the support of the people,

⁵¹ Kónya, *Fel szólalás 1989. június 20-án*, 123.

⁵² Interview with Csaba Kiss Gy, 1997.

⁵³ Interview with Imre Furmann, 1997.

and they believed this was justified by the various mass demonstrations and other kinds of support from the people. On the other hand, EKA referred to the historically existing, traditional methods of the Hungarian legal system. In uncertain situations, they tried to choose the kinds of solutions which had a precedent in the legal history of Hungary. The reference to the "historical constitution" has become a substitute for the missing legitimacy, and thus the involvement of EKA in constitution-making happened in a cautious, step-by-step manner. If there was no other argument, earlier precedents and historical analogies emerged. This required negotiators who knew these precedents and understood the analogies.

The argument of György Szabad in a middle-level negotiation on June 21, 1989, showed the change of the opposition's position. Szabad underlined that the creation of a new electoral law is the most important, but this requires changing the constitution as well, to remove the constitutional reference to single-party rule. He added that EKA was ready to discuss other institutions as well (i.e., the presidency and the constitutional court) provided that the discussions do not aim at legislation but the elaboration of principles: "Let us note that we expect the laws about the introduction of the institution of presidency and the setting up of a constitutional court to be created also by a new parliament, composed on the basis of the results of free elections. However, this is far from saying that we are not ready to formulate such basic principles at the current inter-party negotiations which would facilitate the legislative work of the to-be-elected parliament in this respect."⁵⁴ The Third Side wanted to create both institutions before the free elections, because it regarded the constitutional court and the presidency as the guarantees of stability, the manifestation of national unity.⁵⁵

The expert-level negotiations in the working committees which started in the end of June showed the efficient cooperation of the delegates of the three parties. Several people emphasized the collegial, intellectual character of the working committee negotiations. "It had a different atmosphere, there was no rigid political opposition, because the one sitting opposite me was not a politician. They were lawyers, a university professor sat half opposite me from the third side, and two officials from the side opposite me."⁵⁶ In the

⁵⁴ Szabad, "Felszólalás 1989 június 21-én," 148.

⁵⁵ Kukorelli, "Felszólalás 1989. június 20-án," 149

⁵⁶ Interview with Katalin Kutrucz, 1997.

case of every issue where the parties reached an agreement it was approved by the middle-level negotiations without a substantive review. However, in the case of the issues where no agreement was reached the delegates at the middle-level negotiations had a decisive role: they had to find a political compromise solution for the controversial issue.

The I/1 working committee of EKA was the most important committee it dealt with the issues of constitution. It set an example for the other committees, and the negotiators included the top figures of the Opposition Roundtable.⁵⁷ The representatives of MSZMP were not apparatchiks either but university professors and lecturers,⁵⁸ who were mainly coming from the public administration and constitutional law departments of ELTE Faculty of Law. According to the recollection of an MSZMP negotiator,

This was a very hard fight because we had to revise great many things. It required extraordinary attention because the other side was very well prepared. [...] It was not like that there was a text, and we debated that text. No, there were theoretical and ideological trends behind this. We had to constantly adjust ourselves to what the other side said. These things were terribly enjoyable from a scholarly point of view, as we practically went through the constitution paragraph by paragraph.⁵⁹

In the first statement of the committee, the representatives of EKA stated that Hungary should be a republic, a democratic constitutional state, where power is based on popular sovereignty and popular sovereignty is exercised by the people directly or via elected representatives. They declared that public authority shall not be possessed exclusively by a single person, social group, or political party; that political parties may be formed freely, but parties may not exercise public power directly; and that no party shall act with the aim of acquiring or exercising power by force. The constitutional proposal of EKA rejected war as a solution to international conflict and recognized the supremacy of international law, and emphasized that the Hungarian state

⁵⁷ The EKA delegation to the I/1 working committee included József Antall, historian; Imre Boross, lawyer; Imre Kónya, lawyer; Péter Tölgyessy, legal scholar; and Viktor Orbán, lawyer.

⁵⁸ The MSZMP expert-level delegation included György Jutasi, István Somogyvári, Péter Szalay, and István György as professors, and József Kajdi as lawyer in public administration.

⁵⁹ Interview with György Jutasi, 1997.

strives to achieve cooperation with all the peoples and countries of the world and promotes the nurturing of relations with Hungarians living outside its borders. In the proposal of EKA, the recognition of human rights appeared as an unquestionable starting point: “[. . .] the Republic of Hungary recognizes inviolable and inalienable fundamental human rights. The respect and protection of these rights is a primary obligation of the State.” The proposal stated that “the economy of the country is a market economy, in which public and private property shall receive equal consideration by the State.”⁶⁰

EKA's understanding of its role changed fundamentally in a mere few weeks. While at the beginning of the negotiations MSZMP wanted more comprehensive constitution-making and EKA was wary of the comprehensive revision of the constitution—saying that only those laws should be repealed which are in the way of free elections—a month later MSZMP started arguing that it is enough to deal only with the most important issues because the finer points belong to the authority of the freely elected, new parliament. The reason EKA conducted a thorough revision of the constitution was that it found it dangerous to agree only in the issues the MSZMP wanted (presidency, constitutional court). For it might have happened—which EKA wanted to avoid—that the new constitutional court would have defended the old constitution, that is, the old status quo vis-à-vis the adherents of democratic transition.

The position of MSZMP was formulated by Géza Kilényi in the middle-level session of the National Roundtable negotiations:

We believe there is a public consensus in the question that this country needs a new constitution built on new, principled bases. Accordingly, we do not consider as a goal the comprehensive reform of the Constitution of 1949. Our position is that now in the transitional period only certain legal institutional guarantees need to be created, or those changes need to be performed in the effective text of the constitution which are indispensable to the undisturbed operation of parties. For this reason, we cannot accept that style of negotiation that aims to make us plow through every single provision of the constitution from the first one to the last, because that could possibly take years.⁶¹

60 Tordai, “A Társadalmi Szerződéstől az alkotmánybíróság határozatáig,” 79–80.

61 Kilényi, “Felszólalás 1989. július 27-én,” 646.

In contrast, Péter Tölgyessy of the opposition emphasized that, while then only the two issues were important to the MSZMP, the EKA believed that every institution that was dangerous from the point of view of guarantees needed to be revised, lest the constitutional court be used to prosecution of the opposition.

There is no need for setting the President of the Republic in the period of transition; this may belong to the authority of a credible Hungarian parliament with legitimate authority. For this reason, we believe that a temporary solution needs to be constructed, the essence of which is that, by abolishing the Stalin-type Presidential Council, the narrow powers of the head of state be exercised, as a temporary solution, by the Speaker of the National Assembly.⁶²

The EKA also stated that as the new constitution was not ready yet, therefore they saw the creation of the Constitutional Court to be without cause. In his response, Kisényi argued that if they considered the National Roundtable and the old parliament legitimate enough to create an electoral law then they must see it just as legitimate when it came to creating the law on the presidency. He cited the fact that the April Laws of 1848—which were legislated as part of the revolution with the aim of modernizing the Kingdom of Hungary into a parliamentary nation state—were also adopted by the feudal Diet of Hungary.⁶³ In Kisényi's view, the trilateral negotiations could happen precisely because doubts can be raised only in relation to the political legitimacy of the parliament elected in 1985, but its legal legitimacy "can hardly be questioned." He argued it was pointless if the negotiating parties question each other's legitimacy: "If we go down this road, we will conclude that nobody is legitimate, for if the parliament is not legitimate then the government is not legitimate either, because the government was

⁶² Tölgyessy, "Felszólalás 1989 július 27-én."

⁶³ Kisényi cited the 1848/I resolution of the Diet, which stated: "The sessions of the Diet of Estates shall be declared continuous until the creation of all the laws which are needed under the given circumstances to guarantee freedom, order, independent constitutionalism, and ensuring national interests, while legislative work shall be continued in a new council of representatives convened on the basis of popular representation." Kisényi, "Felszólalás 1989. július 27-én," 651.

elected by the parliament. But, with all due respect, why are the newly organized parties legitimate, which have been elected by nobody?"⁶⁴

Responding to this point, György Szabad of the EKA argued that the real question of debate between the negotiating parties is not legitimacy but the manner the issues are to be discussed. He underlined that the National Roundtable does not have to legislate in every issue. He reminded of the agreement of the three negotiating parties, which stated that the goal of the negotiations is to define the principles and rules serving the political transformation. There is no need to legislate in everything, there are places where it is enough to agree in principles. He emphasized that in the issues of the presidency and the constitutional court the EKA was ready, not for legislation but the formulation of principles. As an historian, he could not miss the opportunity to answer the argument of the April Laws and cite Lajos Kossuth, who interpreted the situation back then as follows: "We believed that only those laws can and should be created which were to be created by the force of the setting sun, providing the basis which a rising force, which is decided upon by the country of popular representation, can freely build on."⁶⁵

In the end, the parties agreed that issues of the election of president, the creation of the electoral system, and the date of the elections are to be removed from the authority of the working committees, and they will be decided as political (as opposed to professional) issues, on the middle-level political negotiations.⁶⁶ By this time, Géza Kilényi, who supported the initiatives of the government instead of those of the MSZMP, had already gotten into conflict with Pozsgay and Fejti, and resigned from the negotiations. From here on, the issue of legitimacy of the negotiating parties was removed from the agenda.⁶⁷

3.3 MAJOR STEPS FORWARD, LIMITED RESULTS

By the end of August, the negotiations had achieved considerable progress. The negotiating parties had virtually rewritten the constitution, removing every clause that defended the one-party system. A speech by József Antall

64 Kilényi, "Felszólalás 1989. július 27-én," 651.

65 Szabad, "Felszólalás 1989 június 27-én."

66 Tölgyessy, *Felszólalás 1989 augusztus 3-án*.

67 On the problem of legitimacy, see József Bayer, *A politikai legitimitás*.

in one of the debates of EKA was a turning point with respect to the negotiations as well. For Antall outlined a legal tradition, or an historical “bridge” which had its spiritual pillars in 1848, 1946, and 1989. Antall argued that the genuine predecessors of the peaceful transition of 1989 were the April Laws of 1848, as well as the Law I of 1946 on the legal standing of the President of the Republic. Both legislative precedents rested upon the peaceful agreement of opposing forces, and so they represented pattern for 1989. While the supporters of regime change were filling the streets with the name of Imre Nagy and the demands of the revolution of 1956, in the negotiations and regarding institution-building the historical narrative began to gain ground that emphasized the essential similarities of the bloodless transformations of 1848, 1946, and 1989.⁶⁸

As I mentioned above, the symbolic starting point of the historical vision of the dissidents was 1945. It was only years later in the nineties that 1944—that is the Holocaust as an absolute starting point—would be attached to the liberals’ collective historical memory. This slightly changed when SZDSZ was formed, and historical references appeared to some of the outstanding moments of Hungarian history that followed the spirit of the Enlightenment. These included some notable events of the 19th century, as well as the activity of Lajos Kossuth, István Széchenyi, and József Eötvös. However, as the political philosophy of SZDSZ (and Fidesz at the time) concentrated on the future, historical references to the Hungarian past were isolated and could not become a unified narrative. The ones who were able to build such a narrative were the MDF, which had grown out of the group of populist writers. In the historical vision of the right, the thousand years of Hungarian statehood formed the base to which political events connected only as superficial processes. The historical past of Hungary was surrounded by “pride and prejudice”: the conservatives proudly identified with it the attitude of the liberals was more critical. The liberals wanted to build democracy while avoiding the mistakes of the historical past; the conservatives wanted to build democracy by integrating the traditions of the past into the democratic edifice.

From this point of view, it is not surprising that the historical arc of 1848, 1946, and 1989 came from József Antall, who was one of the chief negotiators of MDF. The proposal was felicitous because it offered a common plat-

68 Antall, “Felszólalás 1989. augusztus 23-án,” 287.

form for liberals and conservatives. The liberals accepted the construction which connected the progressive moments of institution-building of the history of Hungary. To the conservatives, it provided with the experience of “grand narrative” as it treated 1989 not as a simple exceptional revolutionary moment but as a station of organic development, thereby integrating it into Hungarian history.

Antall's proposal not just politically rehabilitated Law I of 1946, which cited Law III of 1848,⁶⁹ but also elevated it to the rank of fundamental point of reference for democratic institution-building. The proposal was adopted by EKA, and it was surprisingly easily acceptable to MSZMP as well. Accordingly, the parties agreed that the tasks of the President would be fulfilled temporarily by the Speaker of the National Assembly, assuming the powers listed in Law I of 1946. This meant that the President was relatively “weak” by its powers, confined to a balancing role and not constituting an independent center of power. The President was vested with the symbolic power of general-in-chief, and the function of President was defined in a way that the head of state shall be the guardian of the democratic functioning of the state organization and embody the unity of the nation.⁷⁰ According to the recollection of an MSZMP negotiator, the issue of the presidency “was a highly sensitive issue. So, it was clear that a pact existed. The people did not speak about this, and yet everybody knew that a pact exists: Pozsgay will be head of state, Antall will be head of government.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, the compromise was accepted by MSZMP.⁷²

The member organizations of EKA had an important debate about the issue of the official coat of arms of the republic. The parties realized that if the whole constitution is changed then so should the coat of arms of the People's Republic. Not that the old coat of arms was an obstacle to holding free elections. But it just could not be justified that, if the regime changes, why the coat of arms of the dictatorship remains unchanged. In his speech, József Antall pointed out that this question might be worth a referendum, but in that case the decision would be postponed by months and therefore the new constitu-

69 Antall, “Felszólalás az Ellenzéki Kerekasztal 1989. augusztus 29-i ülésén,” 565.

70 Kalmár and Révész, “Az I/1. számú munkabizottság,” 22.

71 Interview with István György, 1997.

72 This is how the communist Mátyás Szűrös, the Speaker of the National Assembly became the temporary president of the Republic from October 1989 till the summer of 1990.

tion and the old coat of arms would temporarily coexist. The dominant group of EKA demanded the so-called Kossuth Coat of Arms, whereas a minority argued for the historical crowned coat of arms. As a compromise, Antall proposed that the Kossuth Coat of Arms—as the coat of arms of the revolution of 1956—should be the official state coat of arms, but the crowned coat of arms should be allowed in addition for religious celebrations and other events of historical reference. For in 1989 it was without a doubt that the most parties of the opposition stood behind the Kossuth Coat of Arms. Antall also believed this when he made his proposal. “The society will be misled with the coat-of-arms issue. This is an opportunity for manipulation, together with the crowed coat of arms.”⁷³ There, Antall was right. Not so much later, MSZMP started publicly arguing for the crowned coat of arms as the more “heraldically authentic” solution considering the entire history of the Hungarian people. Thus, the state party broke the consensus in the Kossuth Coat of Arms. The historical parties also publicly endorsed the crowed coat of arms, and therefore EKA could not have a unanimous position in this issue. In the end, the debate was decided by the new parliament: the crowned coat of arms was chosen.

MSZMP insisted that the new constitution must include the word socialism.⁷⁴ However, this was hotly debated within EKA. Radicals like Viktor Orbán saw it as an impermissible moral concession.⁷⁵ Their position was that no ideological reference should be allowed in the new constitution because that may expand the opportunities of constitutional interpretation in antidemocratic directions. Yet MSZMP was adamant, and eventually EKA accepted to feature the word *socialism* on two conditions: if the expression “socialism” is included only in the preamble of the constitution; and even there it is balanced out with the values of “civil democracy.” On the September 4 meeting of the Roundtable talks, the parties eventually agreed to the following formulation in the new constitution: “The Hungarian Republic is an independent, democratic constitutional state where the values of both civil democracy and democratic socialism are realized.”⁷⁶

73 Antall, “Felszólalás 1989. szeptember 11-én,” 312.

74 The Preamble of Law XX of 1949 contained it as follows: “The Constitution as the basic law of the Hungarian People’s Republic ensures our achievements so far and our further progression on the road of socialism.” Cf. 1949. XX. A Magyar Népköztársaság Alkotmánya. (The Constitution of the Hungarian People’s Republic) Budapest: KJK.

75 Orbán, “Felszólalás 1989. augusztus 29-én,” 556.

76 Somogyvári, “Összefoglaló,” 303.

MSZMP had always favored the establishment of the Constitutional Court, which EKA had long opposed. According to the MSZMP's proposal, constitutional review could be requested only by members of parliament, parliamentary factions, and public officials, but the Court's decision could be overruled by the two-thirds of the parliament. In contrast, EKA demanded that constitutional review could be initiated by anyone, the Court should have the right to nullify laws, and its decisions could not be nullified by the parliament.

EKA stalled the agreement to the establishment of the Constitutional Court till the end, for its position was that first a constitution should be created that is worth defending.⁷⁷ As Péter Tölgyessy put it: "We insist that the constitutional court may be included in the text of the constitution only if the parties agreed on the whole. So, if we reached consensus on every issue of the constitution, then the last among the paragraphs we record should be the constitutional court."⁷⁸ However, a turn had happened by the September 15 middle-level meeting of the National Roundtable talks. There, Péter Tölgyessy and József Antall announced that EKA agreed to the establishment of the Constitutional Court, with the powers they listed, and they were ready to formulate the legal text in the available few days. Antall argued as follows:

Earlier, the position of EKA was too against the establishment of the Constitutional Court, or it did not urge the establishment of the Court in the transitional period. However, the fact that in terms of the institution of the presidency [. . .] and the issue of governance such a construction was accepted, based on the continuity of Hungarian public law, that it can agree to [. . .] meaning the institution of the presidency based on the Law I of 1946, it thus sees the establishment of the Constitutional Court justified.

In his next comment, Péter Tölgyessy contrasted the 1989 constitution-making with the 1949 Stalinist constitution, saying:

77 For example, on the meeting of the I/1 working committee on July 19, 1989 the delegation of EKA firmly opposed the establishment of a constitutional court, arguing that that can only belong to the competence of the new parliament. Cf. Bozóki et al. *Kerekasztal-tárgyalások 1989-ben*, 666.

78 Tölgyessy, "Felszólalás, Szeptember 15, 1989," 410.

Our position was that the Law XX of 1949 was not worthy of protection of constitutional review. This constitution, however, which we have created almost to completion together, is indeed worthy of constitutional protection. Thus, our view of the constitutional court changed, and now it appears precisely as a safeguarding element. [...] now the constitutional court defends a Western-type constitutional state.⁷⁹

As the assessment of the situation was accepted by both MSZMP and the Third Side, there remained only one condition to agree about: the delegation of MSZMP had to give guarantees that the parliament of the party state will not pack the Constitutional Court with their own people. The solution they developed was that the judges would be elected by several consecutive parliaments, and the first five judges would be elected in a parity system.⁸⁰ The law on the constitutional court was formulated in an accelerated procedure by the experts of the respective working committee, and therefore the negotiating parties could accept it already on the plenary session of September 18. The body came into being right after the new constitution was proclaimed, in November 1989.⁸¹ By the end of the Roundtable talks it was increasingly palpable on the side of the state party that the government was detaching from the MSZMP. One person recalled, “in August I already felt that only the government was negotiating, and the MSZMP was just exercising weakness behind it. The consensus-seeking politics of the Németh group became more and more dominant.”⁸²

However, no agreement was made about who—the parliament or the people—should elect the president of the republic. The president was going to replace the collective presidential body, the Presidential Council, and hold the powers defined in Law I of 1946. The MSZMP and the Third Side accepted that the president—a position which at the time Minister of State Imre Pozsgay had the most chance to attain—should be elected as soon as

79 Tölgyessy, “Felszólalás, Szeptember 15, 1989,” 413.

80 Two were appointed by the opposition, two, by the MSZMP, and the fifth member was appointed by the joint agreement of the two parties.

81 The parties negotiated about the legal standing of the State Audit Office as well. The body was established in the autumn of 1989, but its president was elected only by the new parliament. In addition, an agreement was made on the working-committee level about the parliamentary commissioner of civil rights (ombudsman), but the related law was created only in 1993.

82 Interview with András Holló, 1997.

possible in direct elections by the people. At first, EKA did not even want to negotiate about this institution because they held it was beyond the scope of the transition. Later, EKA took the position that, in a parliamentary democracy, the parliament electing the president is only constitutionally consistent solution, but they did not believe the leaving parliament of the dictatorship had the right to it. Eventually, they argued that until the new parliament elects the president of the republic the Speaker of the National Assembly should be seen as temporary president.

Notwithstanding the initial agreement, the unity of EKA broke up on this issue in August 1989. Five organizations (the historical parties: BZSBT, FKGP, KDNP, MDF, MNP) began to think that the president should, for the first time and as an exception, be elected by the people. Four organizations (the new organizations: Fidesz, Liga, MSZDP, SZDSZ) opposed this and rejected the proposal, referring to the dangers of presidentialism including the potential to jeopardize free parliamentary elections. Another point the parties could not agree on was when the president should be elected, that is, before or after the free elections. One of the participants remembered, "Pozsgay told us a few years later that they had indeed agreed with MDF that he would become president, there would be direct presidential elections, and in exchange he guaranteed that MSZMP would allow the free elections to take place. They made such a deal, into which the rest of the opposition was not involved."⁸³ Today, numerous reports about the close connection of Pozsgay, Bíró, Antall, and Csoóri exist. In their meetings, they discussed not only the presidency but also the position of the president of MDF and the plans to reform MSZMP as well.⁸⁴ It is a fact that the unity of EKA in the issue of the date and way of electing the president had dissolved by August 1989.

The legal regulation of parties was assigned to the I/2 working committee. Its experts agreed that every organization should be considered a party if it has a registered membership and agrees, it is officially registered, to be subject to the legal conditions of party functioning and financing. To preempt the question whether only parties can run in elections, the members of the committee agreed that any organization that runs in the elections

83 Interview with Gábor Fodor, 1997.

84 Pozsgay, 1989. *Politikuspálya.*; Lengyel, *Végkifejlet.*

falls under the Party Act. The proposal of EKA argued that MSZMP should account for its wealth and, in the spirit of equality of opportunity, should use it to finance the newly founded parties. Yet the negotiations stranded at this point as the MSZMP refused this method. They had a similar attitude of refusal toward the proposal that party organizations at workplaces should be outlawed. As virtually only the MSZMP was present at the workplaces, this meant that they wanted to ensure one-sided advantages to themselves before the elections.

The I/3 working committee reached an agreement on the electoral law. The result was a two-vote and two-round type Hungarian electoral system, combining the systems of county, individual and national compensational lists. The complexity of the law was later subject to several criticisms. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the electoral system created in the transition worked relatively well for the two coming decades, meeting the criteria of representation, representativeness, and governability at the same time. The negotiations of the I/4 working committee were similarly successful, which modified the dictatorship's criminal law and rules of criminal procedure. The issue of the public sphere, however, remained unsolved: the I/5 working committee developed the conception of a committee that would have supervised the impartial spread of news, but it failed out of personal reasons. For the committee was unable to find five citizens who were politically "above all suspicion" and accepted by all the negotiating forces. The working committee had to deal with both current issues—the transparency of the National Roundtable itself—and preparing laws such as the Information Act, therefore it could not reach longer-term findings. A reason for this was the problem of the supervision of public media, and a consequence was the so-called "media war" waged between 1991 and 1995.⁸⁵

Finally, the last, I/6 working committee wanted to create the guarantees of peaceful transition, or more precisely to create legal guarantees to avoid violent solutions. This committee achieved half success. While several compromises were made in the issues of the military and the police, it could not resolve disagreements in some fundamental issues. The delegation of MSZMP did not accept to exclude civil disobedience from the concept of violence, neither did it accept the proposal of EKA to dissolve the Workers'

85 Bajomi-Lázár, *A magyarországi médiaháború*.

Militia—which was the state party’s own armed force formed at the end of 1956—immediately and without legal successor. According to the recollection of one an MSZMP negotiator, the party had “one single rigid political claim, taboo, that the dissolution of the Workers’ Militia can be accepted under no circumstances.”⁸⁶ This latter issue was debated on the middle-level negotiations as well, but the MSZMP firmly resisted the idea to dissolve the armed force immediately and without legal successor.

The parties of EKA had different assessments of the political relevance of these debates. Within EKA, “the Five” argued that the achievements already made must not be risked, and the agreement should be signed to secure them in spite of the disagreements in further important issues. They believed that agreement in the unresolved issues can be achieved later, in a newer round of the negotiations. In opposition, “the Four” held that there were no political guarantees until the Workers’ Militia exists, until the election of the president precedes parliamentary elections, until MSZMP does not account for its wealth, and finally, until it does not leave workplaces. After long maneuvering, the apparent unity of EKA could be sustained until the plenary session of September 18, 1989. Eventually, SZDP decided that they would sign the agreement only if the passage about the election of the president is removed, whereas Liga abstained from signing the agreement. SZDSZ and Fidesz were the two organizations which still refused signing the agreement, but they waived their veto right and did not prevent other organizations from signing it in the name of EKA. On September 18, the plenary session of the National Roundtable talks ended the negotiating phase of the democratic transition.

The agreement reached at the negotiations was, as promised, submitted to the parliament and it was debated by the last parliament before the regime change, where it passed with minor modifications.⁸⁷ The adoption of cardinal laws meant that comprehensive constitution-making took place in Hungary in October 1989. As a result, the parliament voted to replace the “people’s republic” with the constitutional framework of democratic, parliamentary republic. The laws on party functioning and financing, election of representatives, abolishment of the Presidential Council, and redressing “the

86 Interview with András Holló, 1997.

87 One of these modifications changed to electoral law by making the electoral system more disproportionate. This change of the law proved to be fatal later on.

verdicts related to the popular uprising of 1956” were adopted.⁸⁸ It was proclaimed that Hungary was a parliamentary republic, an independent democratic constitutional state, where the values of both civil democracy and democratic socialism are realized.

The year 1989 was the first one when the people could freely celebrate October 23, the day of the outbreak of the revolution of 1956. Although this day had not been declared a national holiday yet, the Németh government scheduled the proclamation of the Third Republic to this day.⁸⁹ “It was an incredible achievement from a constitutional perspective, because it was realized that a proposal born outside the parliament received the parliament’s seal of approval.”⁹⁰ By adoption of the new constitution, the party state legally ended. In this peculiar situation of political vacuum, the Speaker of the National Assembly, who proclaimed the republic, was elected temporary President of the Republic. That night, 100,000 people gathered at Kossuth Square, before the Parliament building, while millions were watching on TV as fifty-sixers⁹¹ gave speeches to commemorate the revolution and its victims.

The constitutional revolution of 1989 achieved most of the demands of the demonstration of March 15. Social fears were dissipating, and the last, mobilizing anti-communist period of democratic transition began. Little more than two weeks after the republic was proclaimed, Hungary fell out of the focus on international interest because revolutionary changes started in the neighboring countries.

4. FROM THE REFERENDUM TO THE FREE ELECTIONS

The main political event of the summer of 1989 was the negotiation series of the National Roundtable. However, the people knew little about the negotiations, they did not know what was happening in the Parliament’s conference room. In their initial agreement, the negotiating parties agreed that the plenary session would be public, but the talks in the working commit-

88 The modifications of the criminal law and the rules of criminal procedure had already been passed in the September 27 session of the parliament.

89 Interview with György Jutasi, 1997.

90 Interview with Péter Szalay, 1997.

91 Jenő Fónay, Sándor Rácz, Gyula Obersovszky, Mária Wittner, and György Krassó.

tees led to a closed session. The substantial negotiations took place in the working committees and the middle-level negotiations, and the press was not allowed to attend the middle-level talks until August 1989. In the end of July by-elections took place in the districts which had been given up due to the opposition's actions of recalling representatives. The candidates of MDF, who were supported by the opposition parties won by landslide and became the first freely elected representatives after more 40 years. These events shook the confidence of the leaders of MSZMP that they could win the parliamentary elections.

In the beginning of August, there were already more than 200 citizens of East Germany at the West German Embassy in Budapest, waiting for entry permits. Every week, further thousands and later tens of thousands East German "tourists" visited Hungary in the hope that they can soon leave for the West. By the end of the month, more than a thousand citizens of East Germany escaped through the green border between Hungary and Austria, and 300 others escaped through the border near Sopron which was temporarily opened for the Pan-European Picnic in August.⁹² By this time, the number of East German refugees who did not want to go back to the GDR had increased so much that they were placed in refugee camps. Still in August, Gorbachev officially apologized for the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. This made it obvious that the Brezhnev doctrine which kept the governments, reformers, and opposition movements of the surrounding countries in fear was defunct. The leadership of Gorbachev made it clear that no one should count on Soviet military intervention, every country should follow her own way.

The Németh government, which had already started intense diplomatic maneuvers for the refugees, was encouraged by the events so much that it decided to coordinate action plans with the West Germans. On September 10, they announced that East Germans are free to leave the country for Austria. The communist leadership of East Germany accused Hungary with the violation of international law, which was refused by Miklós Németh. The refugee question was also a test of the patience of the Soviet Union. As a

92 Reuters reported that the number of people who escaped through the border grew to 6,000 by the end of the month.

result, the case of the Hungarian transition was now entirely in the hands of domestic political forces.

After the agreement was signed in September, public attention turned to the extraordinary congress of the MSZMP which was held in early October. The delegates decided that the state party would dissolve itself and transform into a new party, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), which was also the legal successor of MSZMP. The MSZMP was the first in the line of the communist parties of Central Europe to make this decision.⁹³ The new party started its first congress immediately. They decided that former membership in the state party did not mean membership in the new party as well, so people had to re-join, but the MSZP regarded itself as legal successor with respect to the state party's wealth. The congress elected Rezső Nyers the president of the new party. In his first speech, he emphasized the need for party organizations at workplaces. Given the campaign for the referendum which wanted to abolish such organizations had already begun, Nyers' resolution still questioned the democratic commitment of the new party. The congress proposed the parliament should make October 23 "national commemoration day," reinforced Pozsgay as the presidential candidate of MSZP and made a promise that the party will account for its wealth as well. The new party charter abolished the rigid, Bolshevik-type party hierarchy, "democratic centralism." A few months later it turned out that only 30,000 people joined the new party, while its predecessor had had 700,000 members. In October 1989, it could be seen that the successor party would lose the elections.

The political actors who hoped for the continuation of the negotiations after September 1989 thought that some unresolved issues were not enough reason to refuse signing the consensus that had been achieved. However, those who believed the continuation was uncertain argued the democratic transition was not guaranteed until every cardinal issue was resolved. They proposed a referendum to decide in the open issues.

Eventually, the negotiations did not continue, and the open issues were decided in a referendum. However, when the agreement was signed on September 18, and Péter Tölgyessy, the representative of SZDSZ, demanded

93 The example was later followed by the Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Romanian, and East German parties as well.

a referendum, it was far from certain that this initiative would happen. Then, SZDSZ looked too small an organization to carry out such a campaign successfully, while those who could initiate the referendum *ex officio* did not want to do so. As one of the party leaders remembered: "Back then many people thought that it was just a silly idea. But the SZDSZ proved that it can make the referendum. This was a huge achievement. We organized it and 200 thousand signatures were collected."⁹⁴

The question was finally decided on September 24, at the meeting of SZDSZ in Sopron. The delegates were excited to announce that they must give effect to Tölgyessy's demand, and a signature campaign would be started. According to the recollection of one of the key actors, "we reached the 'Four Yes' referendum, which I regard as the most important voting, the most cathartic experience of the regime change. [. . .] This is related to Péter Tölgyessy, for he was the one to convince the attendees of a Sopron conference of SZDSZ to start the movement to initiate the referendum."⁹⁵ The four questions of the referendum were the following: (1) Should organizations related to the MSZMP be banned from workplaces? (2) Should the MSZMP account for its properties owned or managed by it? (3) Should the Workers' Militia be dissolved? (4) Should the president be elected after parliamentary elections? Originally, those who formulated the questions wanted a fifth question as well, about the guarantees of the impartiality of the public radio and television. Yet this was such a difficult issue that it was impossible to make a single yes-or-no question out of it, so they abandoned it.

The referendum initiative was supported by the other party that had not signed the agreement, Fidesz. Although the youth party did not participate in the collection of signatures as intensely as SZDSZ did, its actions created an atmosphere which drove the support of more and more people toward the initiative. The signature campaign was unexpectedly successful, as if the citizens believed for the first time that they can really do something for the regime change. They were standing in long queues just to write their names in the signature sheet. Within three weeks the activists of SZDSZ collected 67,000 signatures already, which was enough by the current rules to compel the parliament to consider calling the referendum. The signatures contin-

94 Interview with Miklós Haraszti, 1997.

95 Interview with Gábor Demszky, 1997.

ued to accumulate afterward as well, and the unexpected success had strong impact on other actors of the political life as well. MSZDP, the representative of which signed the agreement in September, now joined the petition campaign demanding the referendum.

The representatives of the FKGP signed the agreement in September without exceptions, which was criticized by their more radical members who saw the agreement as simple collusion with the communists. "The members of the Political Committee were almost without exception old smallholders who had been representatives or county leaders. These were people with decades of harassment or imprisonment. To these people, any kind of communist was simply unacceptable. No matter how reform communist, still a communist."⁹⁶ The leadership had enough power to change its previous careful policy, and the party joined the signature campaign.

The success of the initiative affected the government of Miklós Németh as well which, turning against the resolution of the founding congress of MSZP, banned party organizations from workplaces and dissolved the Workers' Militia. At the same time, the government took action to dispose the members of the Workers' Militia of their weapons. This way, the success of the signature campaign provided good opportunity for the Németh government to demonstrate its relative independence from MSZP, to detach from the successor of the state party, and, somewhat pre-empting the decision of the referendum, taking away its political edge. In these days it was commonplace among government members that there is indeed no need for a referendum, for its questions have already been decided by the government at its own discretion. However, by the time the parliament conceived a meeting—the last session before the proclamation of the republic, and the session where cardinal laws were passed—the Speaker had already had a massive pile of signature sheets on his desk, which compelled them to call the referendum.

Considering the temporary legitimacy deficit of the Roundtable talks and its participants, the "Four Yes" referendum has a special place in the regime change. This was the moment when society could be mobilized by "yeses" or "noes." The radicals tried to interpret the event as a referendum about the rejection of the old system and as a manifestation of popular sov-

96 Interview with István Prepeliczay, 1997.

ereignty. Others simply saw it as another station of peaceful transition. A politician of SZDSZ assessed the events as follows: "MSZP would have performed well if Pozsgay had been president, simply because it would have been the president's party. Not the one to be voted out, not the public enemy, not the party of the old system, but the president's party. This was the heart of the issue. This was a fundamental issue to us, especially because it was clear that the geopolitical danger had passed."⁹⁷

The public discourse was divided mostly over the question of presidential elections. SZDSZ, which was the first to initiate the "Four Yes" referendum, did everything to avoid presidential elections before the parliamentary elections. The parties that supported the referendum believed that even if the powers of the president were defined rather narrowly in the Roundtable talks it would not be opportune for Hungarian democracy to deviate from the model of parliamentarism. They did not want a directly elected president who could have argued, before the free elections, that he had stronger legitimacy than the government formed at free elections.

The initiative put the strongest party of the opposition, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) in a difficult position as well. The party wanted to remain loyal to the agreement signed in September. For it feared that otherwise MSZP might also terminate the agreement, which could have also meant that it would not submit the cardinal laws to the parliament. In addition, the first president of MDF, Zoltán Bíró—who had been expelled from MSZMP in the spring of 1988 and had high hopes in the close cooperation with Imre Pozsgay—believed that this nationalist left was going to be the basis for the later cooperation of MDF and MSZP. Eventually, the decision was made in the second national congress of MDF in October. While the delegates expressed their dissatisfaction with the referendum initiative of SZDSZ, they did not want to look as if they were supporters of the communists. They made one of the founders of MDF, Lajos Für, a historian, the challenger of Pozsgay as a presidential candidate. Even more importantly, Antall, who had earned his fame during the Roundtable talks, replaced Bíró in the position of party president. Regarding the referendum, the leadership of MDF decided that they would join neither the pro-referendum small coalition of SZDSZ-Fidesz-FKGP-MSZDP, nor the "three yeses, one no"

97 Interview with Miklós Haraszti, 1997.

MSZP, nor the “four noes” MSZMP. Instead, they called the citizens to boycott the referendum. However, it displayed the MDF as a hinderer of the processes of the most dynamic phase of the transition. It seemed as if MDF did not want to “let the people decide.”

By November 1989, the international political atmosphere had radically changed since the beginning of the signature campaign. As a result of the protests of hundreds of thousands of people in Leipzig and Berlin, the Berlin Wall fell in the evening of November 9. The image of East Berliners sitting on the top of the wall and celebrating with champagne appeared in every news outlet around the world, and made the fall of dictatorship in Europe both visually relatable and symbolically irrevocable.⁹⁸ The process was crowned by the “Velvet revolution” in Czechoslovakia, the most spectacular events of which—the protests at Wenceslas Square in Prague, the appearance of Alexander Dubček and Václav Havel in the celebrating crowd, and the collapse of the Czechoslovakian communist system—happened a week before the Hungarian referendum.

The last two weeks of the Hungarian referendum campaign were the most intense weeks of Hungarian politics for four decades. The political scene experienced intensifying anti-communism and also sharpening rivalry between the two leading opposition parties, the MDF and SZDSZ. This raised attention to the events even among the apolitical voters. To the message of the MDF: “We won’t go, we won’t vote!” the SZDSZ replied with the following slogan: “Who stays at home, votes for the past!”

The referendum was held on November 26, 1989. Despite the boycott call of the largest opposition party, the turnout was 58 percent of the voting population, which rendered the referendum valid. In three questions out of four—the questions about the MSZMP’s wealth, the party organizations at workplaces, and the dissolution of the Workers’ Militia—the ratio of “yes” votes was over 95 percent. It was clearer than ever that the support of old communist politics in the country had been gone.⁹⁹ In the fourth question, however—which asked whether the president should be elected only after the parliamentary elections—only 6,000 votes out of 4.2 million turned the

⁹⁸ Sonnevend, *Stories without Borders*.

⁹⁹ Babus, “Népszavazás 1989.”

scale in favor of “yes.”¹⁰⁰ Overall, the result meant that the MSZMP’s scenario for the regime change had failed. Pozsgay conceded defeat the day after the referendum.

With respect to the success of peaceful political transition, the dividedness of the opposition did not turn out to be a confounding factor. That the parties signed their agreement on September meant that the consensus they had reached would not disappear, and in October both the cardinal laws and the new constitution could be born—and so did, as a result, the Third Republic. On the other hand, the refusal to sign, the subsequent referendum initiative, and finally the success of the November referendum allowed the Hungarian opposition to avoid a temporary pact with the communist leaders, which would have decelerated the process of transition. The peculiarity of the Hungarian political transition was that it was negotiated until the limits, but it did not stop at that point: by the referendum, society was given a chance to close the past.¹⁰¹

On March 25, 1990, free elections could take place in Hungary. Even if the participants did not “foment a revolution,” as József Antall famously put it, they still achieved the replacement of a dictatorial regime by a democratic system. The constitutional court represented the arguments of the lawful revolution and favored, in a controversial ruling, the rule of law vis-à-vis a law on retrospective justice which was submitted by the representatives of the new, democratic government and accepted by the parliament.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the historical line between the old and the new order was drawn clearly by the act of free elections. As a result of the elections, the mandate to form a new government was given to József Antall, historian and the president of MDF, who decided to form a coalition government with the smaller but historically close center-right parties (FKGP, KDNP). The parliamentary opposition was composed of SZDSZ, MSZP, and Fidesz. The governing conservative coalition gained 60 percent of the seats, while the ex-dissident liberal opposition had 30 percent, and the ex-communist socialists 10 percent.

100 The ratio of Yes votes was 50.07 percent, the ratio of No votes was 49.94 percent. Cf. Babus, “Népszavazás 1989.”

101 In December 1989 the last “domino” of the region fell as well: the Romanian revolution caused the fall of the Ceaușescu system. On December 24, 1989, tens of thousands of people expressed their solidarity with the Romanian revolution at the Heroes’ Square in Budapest.

102 Kim, *The Transition to Democracy in Hungary*.

Antall soon realized that the high number of laws requiring two-thirds majority would make democratic governance impossible because legislation would practically become dependent on the opposition's approval. Yet we can speak about responsible governance only if the elected government may also pursue a policy contrary to the previous government. Therefore, Antall initiated negotiations with the leaders of the largest opposition party, SZDSZ before the formation of the new parliament. The MDF-SZDSZ agreement reduced the number of laws requiring two-thirds majority and stated that "the Hungarian Republic is an independent, democratic constitutional state"—that is, it removed from the constitution both the reference to democratic socialism and the balancing reference to civil democracy.¹⁰³ The agreement restored the status of the president according to Law I of 1946. The signatories of the document made it clear that the president would be elected by the parliament, which is the common procedure in parliamentary systems.¹⁰⁴ The agreement also stated that ministers are responsible directly to the prime minister. It also extended to issue of the person of the president: in exchange for the reduction of the number of laws requiring two-thirds majority, the MDF agreed to support Árpád Göncz to become the first president of the Third Republic.

Eventually, Law 1990: XL, which partially modified the constitution was passed by the new parliament, the result of which was the creation of "a liberal basic law that combined the German and Anglo-Saxon public law with the Hungarian traditions."¹⁰⁵ The constitutional institutions were created by the intentions of the opposition, with expressly parliamentary and rule-of-law content. A constitution was made that helped political rotation, that is, the prevalence of competing parties and the enforcement of alternating policies. A participant summarized the lessons as follows: "I hope to every generation to experience something like this. When things are clear and obvious when one knows that rational things must be done."¹⁰⁶ The 1989 constitution allowed for intense political fights within the framework of liberal democracy.

¹⁰³ The agreement was signed by József Antrall, István Balsai, Imre Kónya, Katalin Kutrucz, and László Salamon from the side of MDF, and by János Kis, Péter Tölgyessy, and Iván Pető from the side of SZDSZ.

¹⁰⁴ MDF-SZDSZ, "A Magyar Demokrata Fórum és a Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége."

¹⁰⁵ Tordai, "A Harmadik Köztársaság alkotmányának születése," 500.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Gábor Bencsik, 1997.

5. IMAGINED DEMOCRACY: FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

How did the participants imagine democracy? Which were the cornerstones upon which the main actors of the regime change could build a new institutional order? To what extent can the result of these “roundtable revolutions” be seen, not only as a break with the past but as a new beginning?

Of the most salient political values of 1989, the following must be discussed here: freedom, popular sovereignty, representative government, non-violence, and democracy based on extended consensus. The prevailing vision of the framers of the new democracy was that of a democratic welfare society which would “return to Europe,” combining the features of a market economy, representative government, and international neutrality.

5.1 FREEDOM AND POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

Among the political values espoused by the participants of the Roundtable talks the idea of freedom was primary, understood both as a liberal and a democratic value. Individual freedom as a liberal value meant that people could finally exercise their human rights and civil liberties. They were free to talk to one another openly, both in private and in public. The press would be free, and the right of association and party formation would be guaranteed as inalienable rights of all citizens.

The founding fathers understood freedom primarily in a negative sense, meaning the freedom from oppression, that is, independence from the state, the party, the policy, the military, the government, and generally from every illegitimate intervention there is.¹⁰⁷ Freedom mainly meant individual freedom back then. Freedom was interpreted not as a right to something—although this was too included in the right to travel—but rather as freedom *from* something, particularly freedom from the party state’s intervention and tutelage. It meant genuine liberation.

This concept of freedom was the cumulative outcome of two major ideological-political influences. First, the legacy of dissent in Central Europe, which valued high human rights and equal human dignity,¹⁰⁸ as well as

¹⁰⁷ Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty.”

¹⁰⁸ As expressed in the writings of Václav Benda, István Bibó, Václav Havel, György Konrád, Milan Kundera, Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, Jan Patočka, and others.

innate and inalienable human rights.¹⁰⁹ Second, the impact of the then dominant Western neoliberal, neoconservative ideologies which took the ideal market as a role model and ranked the concepts of individual freedom and spontaneous order before any kind of collective freedoms.¹¹⁰

The democratic conception of freedom was understood as popular sovereignty, reclaimed after so many decades of Soviet domination. The idea of popular sovereignty begs for the definition of political community. Nationalism and democracy are not far from each other as they both refer to the connection between the popular will and the political community, albeit with different definitions of “the people.” Where the civic movements of the political community clearly demonstrated their commitment to democracy the end of communism meant to be a beginning of a regime based on a new system of values. Where, however, the political conditions had not existed, especially in the case of nondemocratic federations, political leaders referred to popular sovereignty to reinterpret the popular will in a nationalist way. Popular sovereignty was interpreted as national sovereignty, by which they meant the sovereignty of the leaders of the system. When the boundaries of political community—and therefore the identity of the democratic state—were questionable, the democratic traits of the new system were easily distorted by the discriminative interpretation of sovereignty which divided the community of citizens.

In Hungary, the concept of popular sovereignty appeared at the time of the regime change in at least three interpretations. The most basic interpretation was that the citizens of the country can decide their future in free elections and elect the government they prefer the most. The minimal requirement of democracy is that the popular will manifests in free elections. Second, popular sovereignty also meant that the people have the right to referendum and popular action in order to express their political preferences between elections as well. It was a consequence of this interpretation that the participants of the Roundtable talks chose the means of referendum to solve the unresolved issues of the negotiations.

Finally, the concept of popular sovereignty was associated with the ideas of self-governance and self-management, which were supported by every

¹⁰⁹ *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Boaz, *Libertarianism*; Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*.

opposition party. The opposition wanted to revive the concepts of public administration Ferenc Erdei and István Bibó had developed decades before, building on the principle of territorial decentralization. One of the leaders of MDF believed at the time that the key elements of popular sovereignty were the local governments. The claimed that if the country would be divided into administrative units by the division of labor between the territories, the countryside would no longer be disintegrated. At the same time, these new units would be the cornerstones of a representative democracy building from the bottom up. In this discourse, a conception of freedom and sovereignty appeared which held that individual freedom may prevail to the fullest if everyone can take part in exercising and controlling power as much as possible. Accordingly, local power is not an executor of central commands, but it organizes from below, and expresses the will of the local community of citizens.

5.2 REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

In the eye of the opposition participants of the Roundtable talks democracy was understood as a representative form of governance, wherein people exercise their constitutional powers not so much directly as through the activity of their elected representatives. If democracy has three major components:¹¹¹ competition, participation, and civil liberties, then it is significant that the Hungarian regime changers emphasized the first and the third components and tended to ignore the second. As communism had based itself on the forced, involuntary “participation” of the masses, people grew distrustful of the value of top-down political mobilization. They came to prefer a negatively liberal, “non-participatory” democracy. They emphasized, instead of the republican behavior of taking an active part in public issues, getting rid of government tutelage and acting independently from politics. This tendency correlates with the high value of individual freedom understood mainly as negative freedom.

However, this did not mean that the opposition parties rejected the means of referendum and popular action guaranteed by the state socialist system. The former was exemplified by the above-described “Four Yes”

¹¹¹ Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy*.

referendum, whereas the latter, by the initiatives of recalling certain representatives. The movement of recalling representatives contributed to the destabilization of the Kádár regime, and opposition actors used this means successfully to remove some of the most hated MSZMP representatives. To fill up the vacant positions of recalled representatives, the law prescribed the calling of by-elections, each of which was won by the opposition. This motivated the negotiators of MSZMP in the Roundtable talks to renounce the idea of an electoral system based purely on local districts and to accept a half-list, half-district system.

Yet the opposition parties never thought for a second that the system of recalling representatives should be preserved for after the free elections. They argued that this procedure was irreconcilable with the idea of representative democracy based on free elections, the primacy of which was called into question by none of the parties.

5.3 NONVIOLENCE

All three sides of the National Roundtable took the principle of nonviolence seriously. The participants of the Hungarian regime change insisted on peaceful means. Nonviolence was as highly prized as freedom. The participants' commitment to nonviolence, their genuine desire to reach consensus through negotiations, is one of the legacies of 1989. Ordinary people had no wish to repeat the revolution of 1956, and their behavior was also influenced by the evolutionist strategy of the opposition. The communists, still in power with an increasingly pragmatic mentality, also wished to come through the crisis without resorting to violence. Each side was anxiously anticipating the need to respond to the violence of the other, but no side was going to make such moves. Fortunately for all, no one initiated hostilities.

During the Roundtable talks, a whole working committee was dedicated to the guarantees of nonviolent transition. There, the opposition demanded the immediate dissolution of the Workers' Militia without a legal successor, as well as the detachment of the security services from the Ministry of the Interior. These issues were partially symbolic, but it would really have been risky if civilians had the opportunity to acquire firearms easily. While MSZMP resisted this demand until the end, the Németh government unexpectedly had the weapons of the Workers' Militia collected.

Nonviolent conflict resolution was ensured by the then still living legacy of self-limiting political actions. Even the so-called radical opposition was, in fact, quite moderate by comparison with other radical democratic opposition formations in other transitions to democracy, especially in Latin America. This ideal of moderation was the result of the decade-long cooperation of the democratic opposition groups of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.¹¹²

The reason for the importance attached to nonviolence lies in the violent legacy of 1956. In Hungary, everyone wished to avoid another bloody revolution. But even in the countries of repeated mass mobilizations, none of the parties wanted to initiate violence. The movements of the GDR and Czechoslovakia consciously kept their revolution “velvet.”

5.4 BROAD CONSENSUS

Working hard to achieve a consensus as widely as possible was another, similarly important principle of the negotiators. The legacy of 1980–1981 was a real starting point for the negotiation process, not only in Poland, but, indeed, all over East Central Europe.¹¹³ In Hungary, building democratic institutions through negotiations had lasted for three months. As a result, consensual democracy came to be seen as the ideal form of democracy.

This was further related to the style of negotiation adopted within EKA. Its intellectual representatives negotiated with an almost free mandate at the beginning, and they had to reach consensus that way. Negotiating an exceptional, “original position” behind the “veil of ignorance,”¹¹⁴ rational arguments and expertise had a much greater role than party commands. According to a recollection: “All of us were granted quite a lot of freedom. In the end, the whole EKA negotiation created a political culture of negotiation, the essence of which was that everyone negotiated freely, with a relatively broad mandate. We had to tell our organization regularly what we represented, where we achieved success, where we did not, but there was no

¹¹² The high moral value placed on nonviolence among political ideals was discussed and re-evaluated ten years later, in connection with the NATO air strikes in Yugoslavia. One camp felt that the intervention violated the legacy of 1989, while another felt that, in the final analysis, freedom was more important than nonviolence.

¹¹³ Kemp-Welch, *The Birth of Solidarity*.

¹¹⁴ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 39.

strict control. So as the others couldn't really understand what we were talking about, those in our parties had not much clue about it either."¹¹⁵

The negotiators consented to the continuation of transitional institutions beyond the period of transition, thereby allowing those institutions to become established as integral parts of the new democracy. This consensus-seeking behavior was later harshly criticized by the radical right, which wanted a more sweeping change in the power relations of the elite. Prime Minister József Antall, leader of the governing MDF at the time, told the radicals that they "should have fomented a revolution."¹¹⁶ He expressed his belief that revolutionary justice-making may be done only by a classical revolution, while in a lawful revolution one must respect the principles of the rule of law.

Yet broad consensus cannot be regarded as the only or even the ideal form of democracy. The necessity of consensus also depends on the level of the conflict. A consensus should inevitably be reached on the institutional framework of the democratic system, as well as the forms of democratic procedures: for example, in the constitution and most important laws of the democracy, which require qualified majority. Not every agreement needs to be put in a legal form, democracy has an implicitly accepted customary law. But consensus on policy issues cannot be part of any definition of democracy. A democratic order includes the clash of ideas, open and fearless political debate, as well as the divergence of views and opinions. However, the transition was characterized by a broadly defined notion of consensus, a reason for which was that the agenda involved mainly extraordinary, longer term, constitutional issues.

This was followed by the principle of minimizing conflict. It was not easy to accept that democracy is about conflicts: conflicting values and interests, the institutional regulation of which is better than if they were suppressed. In a democracy, conflicts are not dysfunctional but constitute the very essence of the functioning of the system.¹¹⁷ In the roundtable-type of transitions it was not easy to understand that the point is not to eliminate conflicts in the name of consensus, but to channel them through functioning democratic institutions. It is fair to say that EKA was an internally divided politi-

¹¹⁵ Interview with Péter Hack, 1997.

¹¹⁶ Böröcz, "Tetszettek volna forradalmat csinálni . . ."

¹¹⁷ Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflicts*; Hirschmann, "Social Conflicts."

cal union, yet EKA achieved successes as the cooperative, consensual body of the opposition. Its members built their identity around the idea of consensus, which was reinforced by the institution of veto rights. A good example for legislation based on consensus was the regulation of the media. One of the participants remembered that the issues of

“the media was included in the MDF-SZDSZ pact. What mattered were two things: first, to include in the constitution the need for two-thirds majority to adopt a media law. Two: until then, temporarily a neutralizing power structure should be created, the essence of which was the law on appointment; the prime minister proposes [someone], the parties agree [...] and the president who is also appointed by the pact agrees. We described the mechanism of complete consensus with this temporary law on appointment that would have lasted until there is no media law; this is what failed. This was the reason for the media war. It worked only once, when Csaba Gombár and Elemér Hankiss were appointed, who were proposed by Antall.”¹¹⁸

The participants of the Roundtable talks wanted to establish a moderate, smoothly functioning democratic regime and later they tended to stigmatize each other as the enemies of democracy in case of situations with sharpening political conflicts. They were all convinced that only their interpretation of democracy was true. The high prestige of consensual solutions affected the period of post-communist democracy as well. The 1989 “founding fathers” intended to place the building of the new, democratic institutional system on a basis of broad consensus, whereas the representatives of the old system tried to retain some power in forming the agenda even after they were out of power. All sorts of rules strengthening the stability and governability of the system were created, including cardinal laws in a broad scope of political issues. Apparently, the founders believed that liberty would be guaranteed by increasing the number of decisions requiring two-thirds majority. In the end, a democracy was born which virtually cemented governments between two elections: it became practically impossible to overthrow them from the outside, but governance itself became very difficult. Because of the high number of laws requiring two-thirds majority, the government was dependent on the opposition in fundamental issues. The constitution forti-

¹¹⁸ Csaba Gombár became president of the Hungarian Radio, whereas Elemér Hankiss, of the Hungarian Television. Interview with Miklós Haraszti, 1997.

fied the position of the government but at the same time it partially deprived it of responsibility.¹¹⁹

Behind all this was the ambivalent attitude of the “founding fathers” toward power. They wanted strong democratic power based on broad popular mandate, but they also were averse to power. To ensure governability of the country, they over-secured the political system vis-à-vis other subsystems of society. They overestimated the people’s want for stability and did not consider that the illusion of stability would lead to the loss of the system’s flexibility in the long run.

In the formal sense, Hungarian democracy was the most stable system in Central Europe for 20 years because almost every coalition government completed its term. Yet formal stability came with a price: regulation hampered the self-correction of the system. The Hungarian constitutional system, to ensure governability, guaranteed the power of the government for its whole term, but it also hogtied the reigning government with the system of cardinal laws. These solutions elevated to the rank of the constitution were counterproductive. In the 2000s, the illusion of institutional stability stabilized only the prevailing crisis.

5.5 BACK TO EUROPE!

Finally, the most important principle was the idea of “back to Europe!” The political visions of the opposition were based on the idea of Hungary’s return to Europe and the new Hungarian politicians, just like politicians of other new democracies, assumed that “the West” would be eager to welcome the newcomers into the world of welfare democracy. Now we can safely state that—in spite of quick membership in the European Council and later associate membership in the European Union—this was not so much the case. It was not until the end of a long historical process that Hungary could join the NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004.

The MDF initially advocated the idea of a popular third way, small-scale ownership capitalism “with a human face” between the polar opposites of global capitalism and the Soviet system. In the autumn of 1989, however, the party abandoned this idea. When Zoltán Bíró was replaced by József Antall

119 Bozóki, *Virtuális demokrácia*, 244.

in the position of party president, the party oriented toward Western Europe and followed Adenauer's and Erhard's idea of a social market economy which reflected the hope for a gradual and less painful transition.

Liberal parties were influenced by contemporary neoliberalism and advocated the principle of state-free market economy, which regarded deregulation, privatization, and the quick dissolution of state socialist regulations standing in the way of liberal market economy as the primary tasks. In terms of foreign policy, "Finlandization" served as a model for how Hungary might overcome its past, and the example of Austria was repeatedly raised as well. Both cases suggested a neutral military status for Hungary, which was the best opportunity that the opposition could hope for at the time. Only from 1990 did some politicians begin to raise the possibility of joining NATO. At that time, the European Community (from 1992: Union) was still a far more popular option than NATO, because it was identified with social welfare. Initially, the Hungarian population did not fear any external threat enough to be eager to join NATO. This public attitude began to change somewhat after the coup in Moscow in August 1991, and, more visibly, after the war in the former Yugoslavia.

The positive vision of Europe which was shared unanimously on the turn of the 1980s and 1990s requires a more nuanced approach in light of the many criticisms raised in the decades following the regime change. Melegh argues that the strengthening of the Europe discourse was proof for the elitist character of the regime change.¹²⁰ While the dominant discourse of state socialism could be described as the paradigm of competing modernities (the fight of the two world systems), this gave way in the period of the regime change to the "civilizatorian, hierarchical mode of speech" which is known from the history of postcolonial capitalist societies. In this mode of speech, the path of Hungarian development was primarily interpreted in comparison to the West and the ideas attributed to it. The question of convergence from and divergence to the West became the most important point of reference for Hungarian analysts. The culture of critical public discourse which had emerged in opposition to the Kádár system reached consensus in the idea of convergence during the Roundtable talks. This mode of speech described the Soviet Union as "Asian despotism" and was successful in discrediting

¹²⁰ Melegh, *On the East/West Slope*.

the system of the countries of the Soviet bloc. The strength of the hegemony of this discourse manifested in the fact that convergence to the West was accepted by the former dissidents, populist writers, socialists, reform economists, and the representatives of the new technocracy as well. It is no exaggeration to say that whole political generations of 1945–1947, 1956, and 1968 supported the idea of back to Europe.¹²¹

By the time the country saw the formation of the new parliament, every parliamentary party agreed to the goal of joining Europe as soon as possible. It became a new national goal. In the decade following 1989, the Hungarian political class was unified in its conviction that the consolidation of the new democracy would be guaranteed by joining to the European Union. This does not mean that these expectations must have been grounded; indeed, the unanimous support of the idea and the lack of debates about it indicate how great the illusion was. Later interpreters and critics of the convergence discourse are right to point out the undifferentiated, unreflective nature of the Europe vision of the Hungarian political elite, and also how far this vision was from international realities.¹²² But at that time this was not just the elite's business; society harmonized with the negotiators of the Roundtable. The introduction of world passport, the elimination of travel restrictions, and the tearing down of the Iron Curtain brought the immediate experience of Western travel to hundreds of thousands of Hungarians. The idea of returning to Europe appeared not just in the elite-dominated public discourse. It enjoyed widespread popular support.

Very few from Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia questioned that these countries were part of Europe culturally. In their eyes, the return to the luckier peoples of the "European family" seemed to be a quick, self-evident, automatic process. They presupposed that Western states would value their long struggle for democracy and would be ready to pay the price of their reintegration. The Central European left regarded "Europeanization" as a process of political and economic modernization. The right, on the other

121 The liberal-conservative József Antall, the writer Dénes Csengey who came from the circle of populists, the socialist Gyula Horn, the liberal Viktor Orbán and Iván Pető, the Christian democrat László Surján, the smallholder József Torgyán, the entire generation of 1956 and 1968, as well as the economic and cultural elite—they all supported the idea of "back to Europe!"

122 Csizmadia, *Diskurzus és diktatúra*; Melegh, *On the East/West Slope*; Böröcz, "Hungary in the European Union."

hand, argued that the major cultural characteristic of Europe is Christianity, which is shared by these countries. Consequently, Europe for them was not a program but a state, which they assumed to be restored almost automatically after the collapse of communism.

6. THE PAST REVISITED: HISTORICAL REFERENCES

Did the experiences of the past define the opposition negotiators' vision of the future? Was there any noticeable link between their past and imagined future? What did they want to break with, and what did they want to carry on?

Concerning past references, participants of the Roundtable talks in Hungary were working hard to legitimize the regime change. They tried to use symbols and historical events to emphasize both continuity and change. Images of reform and revolution were utilized simultaneously, alternating between them.

6.1 THE REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION

In Hungary, most participants of the regime change were eager to avoid repeating the model of action set by the Revolution of 1956. They wanted to make revolution without blood and violence, at the negotiating table. The only exception was the radical-plebeian Hungarian October Party (*Magyar Október Párt*, MOP), which would not participate in the Roundtable talks—true, it was not invited either—because it wanted to avoid collusion with the communists over the quarry of power. The party opted for a revolutionary strategy, thereby marginalizing itself in the political life. Krassó's party stated that the parties at the Roundtable talks were only pursuing their own interests and not the common good. All the other parties were determined to move from dictatorship to democracy by nonviolent means, and rejected the revolutionary path.

Yet it had to be considered what can be saved from the legacy of 1956 for 1989. The crushing of the revolution by the Soviet Red Army and the 1958 execution of Imre Nagy, the prime minister of the revolutionary government, made the political position of those who supported János Kádár, and associated themselves with his policies, morally untenable. To remind

the public that the regime had been born in a state of “original sin”¹²³ was the best way for the opposition parties to evoke the moral lessons of 1956. The reference to the traditions of the Revolution was important insofar as it helped the opposition distinguish itself from the Kádár regime, and to denounce it on moral grounds. The question was simplified to the decision between the truth of Kádár or Nagy. While Kádár was the symbol of the politics of mendacity, the martyrdom of Imre Nagy symbolized the opportunity of “living in truth,” as Havel put it. It seemed obvious: one can be a supporter of democracy only if they choose to “live within the truth.”¹²⁴

While for some speakers at the reburial of Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs Nagy was a political role model, for the young radical, Viktor Orbán, Nagy was an honorable person only because he had renounced his communist beliefs and shared the fate of his people.¹²⁵ However, it soon turned out that no one in the opposition wanted to adopt Nagy’s ideas of a democratic socialism or follow the revolutionary practice of 1956. After June 16, 1989, when communism received its moral death sentence, the legacy of the revolution of 1956 faded away as well.

Thus, the participants of the Roundtable talks were obliged to search for historical precedents which were more suitable to the idea of lawful revolution. Hungary’s long history had produced some similar patterns of change, which could offer some symbolic points of reference for the tasks of 1989. First and foremost, there was the “lawful revolution of 1848”¹²⁶ when the strata of the lesser nobility initiated a bloodless revolution, that is, the transition from a more traditional to a more civic and liberal regime. In early 1849—just like in 1989—it was the old parliament that passed the necessary bills for change and put in power the notable Lajos Batthyány cabinet. Historians at the Roundtable talks¹²⁷ often referred to the example of 1848 as a model worth emulating even at the end of the 20th century.

123 Shawcross, *Crime and Compromise*.

124 Havel, *Living in Truth*.

125 Orbán, “Beszéd a Hősök terén.”

126 Cf. Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*.

127 József Antall, András Gergely, György Szabad.

6.2 *THE TRADITION OF INSTITUTION-BUILDING*

There were no long-lasting institutional achievements of the Revolution of 1956 which could have been used in 1989. The original institutions of the revolution, the worker's councils and cooperatives, were regarded as romantic, humanistic, socialistic efforts for better socialism, inadequate means for making democracy. One of the slogans of the time stated that there was no economic democracy without political democracy. The decline of Tito's self-organizing worker's cooperatives in Yugoslavia just reinforced this conviction.

Hungary and other countries had to reinvent and reconstruct examples of successful institution-building from their history. The rebirth of political life after World War II offered a good reference point, particularly Law I of 1946 on the legal status of the President of the Republic. Adopting this law, the opposition aligned itself with the parliamentary traditions of Hungarian politics over any other presidential system or the tradition of monarchy.

The post-World War II rebuilding of the country was often quoted to compare it to the enormous task of the near future. In line with this metaphor, communism was frequently compared to the destruction of war. Democratic politicians sometimes remarked bitterly that post-communist society lacked the enthusiasm and optimism of the post-World War II generation. The year 1945 was clearly a "new beginning" in the Arendtian sense, even if it had been halted by the communist coup. The year 1945 also offered the legacy of a peacefully established democratic regime, based on a non-communist center-right umbrella party (which was the Independent Smallholders' Party at the time). Further back to history, 1848, the Springtime of the Peoples provided the idea of national liberalism, which demonstrated that the more traditional values of homeland can be brought into harmony with the ideal of progress. Interestingly, 1848 was more important historical reference as peaceful institutional change than a revolution and nationwide fight for freedom and independence. Both legacies were seen as favoring institutional rearrangement rather than revolutionary upheaval.

It was an important achievement of the EKA to establish the historic continuity of 1848–1945–1989, and thus to present itself as the proper heir of all the peaceful, yet radical, democratic traditions of the history of Hungary.¹²⁸

128 Antall, "Felszólalás 1989. augusztus 23-án," 287; Kis, "A víg esztendő."

Poland rediscovered the legacy of General Józef Piłsudski, while Havel, the newly elected president of Czechoslovakia referred often to an early founding father, Tomas G. Masaryk. The Baltic countries, liberated from the Soviet Union in 1990–1991, tried to dig deeper to reconstruct national, liberal, and/or democratic traditions from their pre-Soviet past, back to the early 20th century.

In Hungary, despite some right-wing governmental efforts to revitalize the Horthy era (1919–1944) and to make it somehow more respected, past nostalgia embraced rather the “peaceful times” before World War I. Many saw Austria-Hungary as the era of economic development, constitutional liberalism, and early European federalism.¹²⁹ The common characteristic feature of post-communist transformations as “rectifying revolutions”¹³⁰ was that they tried to recover continuities and to reconnect present societies to the broken, pre-communist past.

The idea of Central Europe had a significant role in the rediscovery of the traditions of institution-building. This geographical term had different political and ideological meanings in the 1980s.¹³¹ First and foremost, it was the legacy of dissent and the recurrent fights for freedom in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. These were forged into a regional tradition by the dates of 1956, 1968, and 1980.¹³² Second, by the revitalization of Central Europe, most people thought a project to recreate historical similarities between the cities of the region. Third, it had some historical resonance to the Habsburg Europe as a reference in the post-Iron Curtain period. Fourth, and finally, some people revived the pre–World War I German concept of *Mittleuropa* advocated by Friedrich Naumann and other German national liberals. The attractiveness of Central Europe was precisely in its versatility. These thoughts have been partly swept away by the attractiveness of a larger unit, the European Union. Yet the idea of Central Europe has not been forgotten: it contributed to the formation of the Visegrád countries, a cooperation between Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, and Hungary. In addition, a new

129 Fejtő, *Rekviem egy hajdanvolt birodalomért*.

130 Habermas, “Mit jelent a szocializmus ma?”

131 Borsody, *The New Central Europe*; Schöpflin and Wood, *In Search of Central Europe*; Garton Ash, *The Uses of Adversity*.

132 Neumann, “Forgetting the Central Europe of the 1980s”; Todorova, “Isn’t Central Europe Dead?”

interpretation of the concept appeared in the 1990s, when it was used to distinguish the region from the post-Soviet space and the Balkans.

Among foreign historical and political precedents, explicit references were made to the Spanish path to democracy, after the 1975 death of Franco. The Spanish path was taken as a model for several later democratizing countries.¹³³ In Hungary, both the government and the opposition studied the Spanish transition quite thoroughly.¹³⁴ The most obvious historical precedent for the Hungarians was, of course, Poland. The ideas of an “ethical civil society”¹³⁵ and the new evolutionism were taken from the Polish opposition. Members of the Polish and Hungarian opposition had had frequent personal contacts, and long-standing friendships linked Hungarian dissidents with those in Poland. Activists of the new Hungarian trade unions were eager to establish links with Solidarity as well, in order to learn some of their negotiation strategies.¹³⁶

6.3 BREAK AND THE NEW BEGINNING

The Roundtable negotiations of 1989 created an unprecedented historical situation in Hungary and some other countries in which a political elite was able to draft a constitution and create the institutional frameworks of a democracy without bloodshed. Dissident intellectuals continually spread the culture of critical discourse in society, and they found allies to this in the more and more critical reform intellectuals. In the shadow of a regime that was growing more and more uncertain, the operation of critical intellectuals first blurred the boundaries between the first and the second public sphere, and later it contributed to the radicalization of media intellectuals working in the state radio and television, as well as the radical change of the structure of the public sphere. The cornerstones of the new system were laid during the Roundtable talks, where intellectual groups in the cloaks of various

¹³³ Maravall and Santamaria, “Political Change in Spain”; Casanova, “A spanyolországi demokratikus átalakulás tanulságai.”

¹³⁴ Polish dissidents were already aware of the importance of the Spanish path. In Hungary, a group of Spanish politicians and scholars visited Hungary in the summer of 1989 and met the representatives of the government as well as EKA.

¹³⁵ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 255.

¹³⁶ The leaders of Solidarity warned the representatives of Liga not to let the negotiations happen behind closed doors, and always insist on the publicity of the negotiations. Vászárhelyi, *Az ártatlanság kora*, 116.

parties could act in the position of a constitution maker. Trying to find their place after the regime change, one group of intellectuals became party members and even members of parliament, while another active group went back to movements and understood its role as contrasting the new democracy to the principles of constitutionalism and the rule of law.

But was fall of the old system, after all, a new beginning of a democratic era? As I have mentioned, according to the classical theory of Arendt¹³⁷ a revolution has three phases: the first one is the weakening of the legitimacy of the old regime, the second one is liberation from the old regime, and the third one is the beginning of the construction of a new institutional order. Liberation *per se* does not bring freedom: revolution might happen only if the political systems before and after the change are clearly distinguished. Finally, after the caesura the members of society must experience a “new beginning” to truly acknowledge their newly won freedom. The common lived experience of the creation of new institutions and a new constitution, that is, of the “foundation of freedom” is what distinguishes revolutions from aimless revolts.

Contrary to this, the break with the past in Hungary occurred rather symbolically on June 16, 1989, when the prime minister of the revolution of 1956 and his fellow-martyrs were reburied officially. This moment made clear that 1989 fulfilled many claims of the revolution. However, revolutionary changes happened without a revolution taking place again, and also without fulfilling all the demands of 1956, many of which were illusory.¹³⁸ Parallel to the continual references to the Revolution of 1956, the participants quietly abandoned the ideas of 1956.

The first phase of reconstruction occurred at the National Roundtable between June and September 1989. These negotiations could be interpreted both in the framework of the old and new regimes. On the one hand, it was a peculiar “social debate,” therefore it *de jure* remained within the framework of the communist legislative process. On the other hand, it was a functional equivalent of a “constitutional assembly,” an emblematic feature of all major revolutions. Participants of this constitutional revolution acted with-

¹³⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*.

¹³⁸ Rainer, “A rendszerváltás és az ötvenhatos hagyomány.”

out popular legitimacy, but they had a good reason to presuppose the existence of popular support.

Since nobody elected the participants of the Roundtable talks, they were eager and worked hard to get some positive feedback from the society. As one of the participants put it: "Just like Münchhausen, we had to pull on our own hair to get of the morass, this is the reality of history [...] where not even the parties could find solid soil under their feet."¹³⁹ During the course of the Roundtable talks, the establishment of the institutional order of the new regime preceded the popular legitimacy of the "founding fathers." And that made a difference, because usually the logic of revolutionary action is the following: (1) the destruction of the old regime; (2) the revolutionary (popular) legitimacy of the "founding fathers"; and finally (3) the creation of the new institutions of the new regime. In Hungary, however, after the first step came the third, and then the second one. The institutional order and its creators were legitimized in March 1990 only, at the first free elections.

Perhaps that is exactly the reason why the Roundtable talks became somehow ambivalent legacies, both in Poland and Hungary, in the next decade. The history of the negotiations *per se* excluded the possibility of thinking about them as "clean" revolutionary processes, for the negotiations of 1989 were tainted by the inclusion of the former communists. MSZMP leaders also had their say in the creation of the new democracy. Although they were sitting on the other side of the table, they were there, and their points were taken into account on several occasions. Some think it corrupted the genesis of the new democracy, because it means negotiations, that is, talks, communications, compromises, interactions, and personal contacts between the outgoing and incoming elite. The interaction and cooperation of these two groups undercut the interpretation of the democratic transition as a classical revolution, which the radical critics of the "velvet revolutions" wanted to see. Paradoxically, break with the past happened with the participation of the people of the past. Many of them were personally interested in change because they managed to amass wealth or they simply avoided moral or legal prosecution. The legacy of 1989, the self-limiting "negotiated revolution" became an uneasy tradition for those who would have preferred to repaint themselves as uncompromising revolutionaries.

139 Interview with György Szabad, 1997.

The moral break of June 1989 was not followed by a widely perceived revolutionary-political break later on. At the beginning, many people did not even realize that radical changes were taking place. As the negotiations of the National Roundtable became public only after one and a half months, the view prevailed that the people of continuity are indeed stronger than the representatives of breaking. Popular dissatisfaction with the regime change also fueled this perception of the negotiations: as a secret, nondemocratic, conspiratorial, well-designed elite-game over the head of, or even against, the masses. The most “revolutionary” phase of the lawful revolution occurred in the autumn of 1989, starting by the signature campaign and closing with the referendum. The revolutionary process was seemingly fulfilled, yet it never received full recognition. Although citizens could clearly distinguish the system before the change and after it, they were reluctant to acknowledge the process which took place between these two systems as a profound change.

There were some in the later political debates who contrasted 1989 with 1990. They saw 1989 as the year of transition with compromises, whereas they regarded 1990 as that of the free elections that embodied popular sovereignty. These reservations might have been related to the fact that the negotiations in 1989 were still dominated by the intellectuals. However, the aim of the “eighty-niners” was, as they made it clear already at the first meeting of the Opposition Roundtable, none other but to lead the country to free elections where the popular will can freely manifest. This was a process which took several months, starting at the beginning of 1989, gaining civil legitimacy from the reburial of Imre Nagy and the “Four Yes” referendum, and ending with the free elections in 1990.

One of the most important topics was the issue of the publicity of the Roundtable talks. A participant opined that this was where EKA committed the greatest mistake:

It was unbelievably bad that we agreed to that the Roundtable talks wouldn't be public. The commies wanted it, and the MDF eventually came around, this unfortunately gave rise to the idea that the negotiations were happening above the head of the people, that in political style we were being on the commies' level. They should have been dragged to the public field. Had the debate gone in public TV broadcast for weeks, the people could have experienced the whole thing. But this way? Earlier,

price risings had been announced now that there would be free elections. I think this was a decisive mistake.¹⁴⁰

Beyond the initial exclusion of the public from the negotiations, another problem was failing to accomplish a law on the press. This mistake was caused by that, even if the opposition's groups of different worldviews managed to cooperate successfully within EKA, their mutual mistrust in personal issues did not dissolve. In autumn 1989, at the time of the revolutionary enthusiasm of the international turn, these did not seem like irreparable mistakes. These mistakes became palpable when the radical forces won the "Four Yes" referendum, because Minister of State Pozsgay changed the news programs of the public television, appointing his own man to its helm. This once again deepened the cleavage between SZDSZ and MDF that is the liberal and populist groups. The opposition cooperation of the Roundtable talks broke up in the electoral campaign, and the changes in the media environment questioned the framework of the competition as well. SZDSZ was convinced that Pozsgay would take revenge for the lost referendum, while MDF thought that SZDSZ was supported by the soldiers of the media. This had a poisonous effect in the years after the elections, and it widened the gap between the former opposition parties. The change of the television programs most certainly contributed to that the elections were won by the party growing out of the circles of the populist writers and regarded as a "calm force," the MDF. Nevertheless, competition went according to democratic rules, and in the spring of 1990 the people were free to choose among the competing parties and decide about the future of the country. In 1989, the rule of law was born; in 1990, democracy.

The price to pay for peaceful transition was not small. The critical approach to 1989 pictured the Roundtable talks as the safety net whereby the younger generation of communists could, at least in the economic sense, preserve themselves for the future. If we study the process in the light of this criticism, we can readily see that the talks were structured to address, at least theoretically, both political and economic issues. However, the political negotiations proved to be far more important than the talks about the economy. Why did that happen?

140 Interview with Tamás Deutsch, 1997.

The EKA, which favored a negotiated settlement, insisted that they were there to legislate new, fundamental bills which lead to the free elections. The major goal of the members of EKA was to achieve popular sovereignty and pluralistic democracy, and they fiercely opposed any alliances between organizations which would have resulted in a power monopoly. The member organizations of EKA were interested in bringing about institutional changes necessary for a new democracy. They did not engage in in-depth discussions about privatization and economic transition because they did not feel entitled or empowered by the people to discuss issues of economic policy. At the very beginning of the talks, the EKA delegates even resisted re-writing the constitution. Later they changed their minds, though, but it tried to limit its role to participate in the creation of cardinal laws. They insisted that decision making about other issues belong to the mandate of the freely elected parliament and the new, legitimate government.

However, economic change was to prove more challenging than political change in the longer run. One can set up a new institutional order in a matter of months, but controlling the processes of privatization, and putting into practice the plans of economic transformation, already require the power of the executive. Indeed, the negotiators of the opposition were not at all certain whether they should control privatization at all—and they were right about that, for they had no opportunity to do that. Quick economic power-transformation began, and the opposition had to deal with this fact. As an activist of the new trade unions said:

Respected economists told us state property must go to private hands as fast as possible. No matter how, the mechanisms didn't matter, the accompanying processes didn't matter, we must privatize quickly. There was zero debate on this. While the market transformation was going on a huge scale, month by month, privatization was going on in the perfectly uncouth way prescribed by the company act and the act on transformation. [...] Economic processes, redistributive mechanisms just weren't dealt with. What was dealt with was the revenue which was the basis for redistribution. [...] They did not enlighten the society that what was happening was the redistribution of economic positions.¹⁴¹

141 Interview with János Dávid, 1997.

Eventually, the members of EKA acceded to spontaneous transformation. They thought that it was not against the founding of the new system if entrepreneurs, managers, and the business actors can start creating market economy as soon as they could. They thought that, if they wanted capitalism, they cannot hamper spontaneous privatization.¹⁴² They also assumed that if the communists privatized then there would not be political backlash. And the most important thing for them was to get rid of the old system. For the opposition, the economic “leeway” of the elite groups of the Kádár regime seemed to be the best guarantee against the restoration of the system. In their view, it did not matter much who would be the new propertied classes, what mattered was for such classes to come into being as soon as possible. The most important thing was not whether morally acceptable or politically reliable elements became the new owners, but to cement fundamental political changes. They thought this way, perhaps because they faced a *fait accompli*: the outgoing communist technocratic elite had already secured their role in the economic transformation. New laws dealing with the future of state-owned enterprises and with economic transformation had been already been passed before the negotiations,¹⁴³ and therefore these topics were not at issue at the Roundtable talks. Committees discussed possible approaches to privatization, new agrarian policies and related economic issues, but they did not come to any agreements, partially because of the lack of data. Economic transformation played out without them.

While political and constitutional transformation came under relatively close public scrutiny, the games of economic transformation were beyond social control. The early legislation of the outgoing government and its installation of expert committees to determine the strategy of economic transformation fit the Kádarian model of top-down reform much more closely than the case of the political negotiations. The latter were carried out by considering democratic criteria, while economic transformation was discussed to effect only by the technocratic circles of the reigning power. According to a participant, “the regime change could be made only because the regime-changing elite was naïve. Had we foreseen what would later happen, the

¹⁴² Laki, “Az ellenzéki pártok gazdasági elképzelései.”

¹⁴³ Law VI of 1988 on economic companies, and Law XIII of 1989 on the transformation of economic organizations and economic companies.

whole thing would've been a lot more mazy. We had to be naïve, and we had to pay the price for it."¹⁴⁴

In a "cost-benefit" analysis of the outcome of the Roundtable negotiations, it cannot be doubted that the political institutional system of pluralist democracy came into being. In this sense, the investment came to fruition. Still, many people felt that the new system was done without their participation, or even against their will, and that the redistribution of wealth was effected without social controls. While the majority of the negotiators of the Roundtable talks decided to leave politics, in the interviews we conducted with them the critique of the regime change appeared as a very strong motif. For example, one of our interviewees said, contrary to the views that regard the regime change as a success story, the following: "Since the regime change, in a lot of fields, not in actual politics, but on the level of local governments and public administration, or in the relationship of the citizens and the state the situation is worse than it was earlier. Citizens are more vulnerable. Formerly, the bureaucrat was afraid at least, they had a boss, they were afraid. Now in places they feel that there is nothing to be afraid of. And the people do not know their rights better now than they did before. The main problem is that the people do not have a civic consciousness, they have a vassal's consciousness."¹⁴⁵

The primacy of institution-building overruled a number of other aspects at the time of the regime change. According to the recollection of György Szabad, the Speaker of the National Assembly at the time, in the first period the key issue was the creation of the pillars of the constitutional state.

We held the position that such constitutional frames need to be created which are strong enough, so the forces of economy and society can be dynamized within them for the benefit of the transformation. This sequencing was not random. I adopted this thought on the basis of the failure of Gorbachev. [He] did not realize that the regime needs, not to be reformed but changed. And when he finally realized to some extent the inevitability of this, he was already late: the constitutional institutions needed to carry out the reforms were not available to him. For if there is

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Gábor Bencsik, 1997.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with János Sík, 1997.

no institutional order of constitutionalism, reforms may lead the country into anarchy.¹⁴⁶

As it later turned out, the Hungarian system ended up at the other end of the scale. A relatively quick detachment of the institution-building elite took place from the broader groups of society, the members of which started to alienate from the system. All the citizens for whom the constitutional institutions were developed had harder and harder time to endure the social costs of economic transformation, and it did not take very long for them to turn against the new, democratically elected government. Short of strong trade unions, they felt that the interests of the investors who gained ground after the regime change were more important to the government than their lives. Many of the workers, low-earners, public servants, and pensioners could feel that, while they had been vulnerable to state socialism before the regime change, they now became the victims of post-regime change capitalism and globalization.

Melegh¹⁴⁷ argues that the regime-changing elite almost realized the project of a New Class by its Europe discourse and own endeavors of global opening. While this program had enjoyed popular support in 1989, later it became unpopular during the time of high inflation, unemployment, and the breakdown of the labor market. Left-wing parties were discredited already at the starting point of the new regime, and they also fell victims of their own modernizing-centrist policies; their voters, unsurprisingly, turned to the extreme right-wing, populist forces who offered security and protection. From this argument, it follows that the regime change of 1989 as an “intellectual project” brought about a new cleavage in the Hungarian society, which led to the outcome that elitist liberal democracy was replaced by populist “illiberal democracy” two decades later. Institution-centered democratic elitism was certainly present during the regime change of 1989, but it did not characterize the previous period of open network-building of 1988. It would take another book to investigate whether (and if so, how and to what extent) the former participants of the regime change are responsible for the political changes that happened two decades later. This is still a burning question of political debates.

¹⁴⁶ Kasza, *Metamorphosis Hungariae*, 23.

¹⁴⁷ Melegh, “Passzív forradalmak.”

Nevertheless, the old regime had collapsed and the institutions, created in the negotiations of 1989, survived for two decades. The “ending” was obvious, just as the “new beginning.” But the latter turned out to be much more complex, multifaceted, and controversial than it was seen at that time. But however we define the concept of change, there is no doubt that 1989 represents the borderline between the old regime and the new one.

CHAPTER VII

Intellectuals as Legislators

In the Roundtable talks of 1989, hundreds of people participated, altogether in three delegations. We have a great deal of data about the social and political background of the 573 former participants.¹ In the following, I analyze the political motivation, early life, and social background of the negotiators. As mentioned above, by using the term “legislators,” I refer to Bauman’s theory of intellectuals. He claimed that the role of public intellectuals was transforming. While they used to be in the center of policy making, thus they were “legislators,” by now their role is more limited in modern societies. Instead of drafting laws, literally or symbolically, their role is restrained to translation or interpretation between different social groups. Intellectuals today are functioning as interpreters, who help different segments of modern, multicultural societies to communicate with each other.²

The difference of opinion between the so-called “historical parties” and the grassroots movements of the 1980s formed a long-lasting cleavage among the member organizations of EKA. This appeared in political attitudes, different social and generational experiences, as well as the forming political strategies. Hence in the following I discuss separately the new organizations that grew out of the anti-system opposition movements and the historical organizations of the older generation. Since this book concentrates on the anti-system initiatives that emerged from the circle of dissident intellectuals, first the role of that group is going to be analyzed in more detail. Then I will analyze the historical parties, the members of which were characterized by broken lifeways. Finally, I briefly assess the representatives of MSZMP.

¹ Elbert and Bozóki, *Portrét és életrajzok*.

² Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*.

For I believe that seeing the role of the other side is indispensable in terms of comparison.³

I. WHO WERE THEY AND WHAT DID THEY WANT?

The political behavior of the agents that emerged in that situation of political vacuum were strongly determined by the historically influenced cultural patterns brought from home. Naturally, the analysis of youth socialization and the early life cannot provide on its own satisfactory explanation of political behavior performed under certain circumstances. It can be presumed that the more routine-like democratic politics is, the lesser role innovations based on experiences from home or youth socialization play. However, the case in 1989 was not that some people had to adapt to an already functioning democracy, on the contrary, they had to create the new regime and its traditions as well. The competition for owning traditions and making others accept them, that is, the development of the identity of the new democracy was just as much a part of constitutional revolution as the task of institutional change.

More than one-third of the participants were born between 1944 and 1953. The regime-changing generation was mainly composed of the generation of 1968. This generation was deeply affected by the reform period of 1967–1972 in general and the Kádárian new economic mechanism in 1968 which also coincided with international changes. The cultural and political movements of the late 1960s had a profound effect on many of them.

The second most populous group was comprised of the youngest ones. One-fourth of the participants was born after 1954, meaning that they were below 35 in 1989. They grew more and more unsatisfied with the reforms which had always fallen into ashes. In total, 64 percent of the negotiators were under the age of 45. This is remarkable, because up until the second half of the 1980s the old system had been led by an aging group, the first generation of communists, who even saw 50 years old politicians as “youngsters.” On the other hand, the more compromising members of the state party, who participated in the Roundtable talks, belonged to the less ideologically bound and more pragmatic second generation. Although the dele-

3 In this book, I do not discuss the organizations and actors of the Third Side.

gates of MSZMP were a bit older than the others on average, they were much younger than the first generation of communists.

One of the reasons for the smoothness of democratic transition was that a generation change had already happened in the lower and middle ranks of MSZMP. This was particularly observable on the lower levels of the negotiations, which were attended not so much by party bureaucrats but rather young experts from the ministries. By various gestures indicating the distance between their title and actual position, these experts tried to convince the opposition that they were there not because of their own volition but because the party had sent them there, the party which they really had little to with ideologically by then.

The newly formed opposition parties struggled with a constant lack of cadres. Therefore, if anyone drew attention to himself or herself by professional performance, no matter if they represented the MSZMP, they could ensure their future position in the state administration. This aspect was important mainly during the political negotiations, because the economic negotiations were indeed meetings of people who had known each other well and debated these questions in scholarly institutions already. Only the scenes were different.

Within the Opposition Roundtable, several generations were represented. The oldest ones, by the members of BZSBT, FKGP, KDNP, and MNP; the youngest ones, by Fidesz. These generations brought a variety of historical experiences to the Roundtable. The generation which had been socialized in the Horthy era, between the two World Wars; the post-World War II generation; the fifty-sixers; the generation of 1968; the generation of the late Kádár regime and the transition. The oldest participants were the most politically cautious during the negotiations, while the younger participants represented more radical positions. The Third Side was not characterized by a certain age group.

While the elite of the negotiations was more highly educated and a great deal more innovative than the last rulers of the Kádár era, they remained traditional in terms of gender representation. As many as 87 percent of the participants were male, and only 13 percent were women. Among the representatives of EKA, the share of women was only 8 percent, whereas among the negotiators of the Third Side their ratio reached 21 percent. This is mainly explained by the fact that the National Council of Hungarian Women was

among the organizations of the Third Side. On the other hand, the Third Side played the smallest role in the negotiations, which indicates negative correlation between the importance of political organizations and the participation of women in the respective organization. Generally, the more “historical” an organization was, the fewer women appeared among their ranks, and the closer a party was to the state, the smaller chance it offered to women for upward mobility within the respective party.

Analyzing the education and former career of the participants, the data show that almost every participant had a university degree. If we regard people with university degree intellectuals, at least in a formal sense, then we can say that 90 percent of the negotiators were comprised of intellectuals. One-third of the total number of participants—the relative majority—was classical “freelance” intellectual, while the others came from the legal and administrative sectors and the state-owned enterprises. Seventy-five percent of the delegates of MSZMP were professionals working in the government or public administration. Most of the MSZMP delegates identified as experts rather than party cadres.

Among the organizations of EKA, independent intellectuals had a decisive majority: their share reached 70 percent. Courtesy of the participation of Fidesz, there were more than a dozen university students among the negotiators. The parents of 50 percent of the intellectual participants were also intellectuals. Among the members of MDF, SZDSZ, and Liga one could easily find second- and third-generation intellectuals as well. First-generation intellectuals made up the majority of MSZMP representatives. Such cohort appeared in the FKGP and in Fidesz as well.

Regarding the members of the 12 working committees, it should not come as a surprise that the working committees dedicated to economic issues were dominated by people with economic degree. In the political working committees, the major role was given to lawyers, in line with centuries of Hungarian tradition. They had majority in every political committee except one: in the working committee dealing with the reform of public media, there were more people with degrees in liberal arts.

While 50 percent of all participants of the negotiations were born in Budapest, the others were born in the small and large cities and villages in rather equal distribution. During the talks, though, they usually lived in Budapest. The overrepresentation of Budapesters had a reason, namely that

the negotiations took place in the Parliament building. Those who lived far from the capital could not afford to travel multiple times every week. However, more importantly, at the time of the transition, Budapest was the only place where opposition parties and organizations had already taken roots.

Several participants knew each other from civilian or scholarly life. According to a participant, "at the other side of the table sat my official boss, the president of the Central Statistical Office [KSH]. And I sat here, on this side. Of course, we knew each other. I was a deputy head of a department at KSH."⁴ Another participant said: "There the whole atmosphere was like, these people had negotiated before, in the HNF, on the forums of social debates, in speech or writing, but EKA was the organizational form where it was suddenly revealed who was standing where, things just straight off explicated, that what flag under which one goes to the negotiation. This was a very new thing."⁵

By their political past, those who had memories of the short-lived democratic turn after 1945 were clearly distinguishable from those who gathered experiences in the movement period or lacked even such experiences. This is related to the relationship of EKA delegates and the old system: their loyalty moved on a wide scale from prosecutor of the party state⁶ to opposition members fired for political reasons. Only 10 percent of the participants had such experience that can be called at least moderate dissidence or active opposition participation. I regard as active opposition participation the signing of numerous petitions, spreading samizdat journals, attending lectures at the underground flying university, and participation in opposition gatherings or movements. Ninety percent of the participants were passive in the Kádár era: presumably, this ratio reflected the proportion of dissidence in the society. As far as the negotiators' post-negotiation activity in party politics is concerned: one-third ran in the first free elections in the spring of 1990, and only one-fifth did in the second elections in 1994.

The opposition negotiators were divided over tactical and strategic concerns. Three types of standpoints could be distinguished within the opposition. As mentioned above, I follow Schieman's typology by calling those as

4 Interview with Ferenc Gegesy, 1997.

5 Interview with Péter Győri, 1997.

6 Tibor Füzeszy, one of the chief negotiators of KDNP, had been a prosecutor until the spring of 1989.

“ultra-moderate,” “moderate,” and “self-limiting radical” groups.⁷ Members of the ultra-moderate group could have imagined a model change that would have been even more modest than the Polish model, where power was shared between the communist president and the opposition prime minister (BZSBT, KDNP, MNP). In contrast, the opposition representatives of the moderate standpoint insisted on free elections but to achieve this they temporarily agreed to a Polish-type construction (MDF, and initially FKGP). Finally, the third group of “self-limiting radicals” did not question the results of the negotiations and would not want to endanger their codification either. However, they initiated a referendum in the questions which were still open (Fidesz, SZDSZ, MSZDP, and later FKGP).

The first standpoint allowed for strategic, while the second, for tactical concessions. Those who took the third standpoint were worried that even tactical concessions give such opportunities to the other side which can be turned into strategic advantages. Thus, the representatives of the third position were somewhat mistrustful toward the tactical concessions offered by the moderate opposition circles. Nevertheless, in the end the different shades of opposition groups did not have to make a compromise on the result, only on the method, of the negotiations. The organizations of EKA which could have accepted strategic concessions as well were under the control of organizations which had their differences, less in strategic but in tactical questions. The moderates successfully controlled the ultra-moderates so they could not make too early and far-reaching compromises. The task of the radicals was, on the one hand, to behave in a self-limiting way, but also on the other hand to warn the moderates about the limits of their tactical concessions. The EKA was characterized by the careful balance of internal conflicts, and, despite its fragility, it managed to maintain its unity for a long time.

The participants of the negotiated revolution of 1989 came from many different directions; their early lives showed remarkable variance. In a historical moment, they found themselves at the negotiating table, sitting next to each other, and they discussed the questions of democratic transition. Most of those who participated in the negotiations were intellectuals, from academics to university students and from an internationally renowned movie director to a museum director. There were people in whose lives the negoti-

7 Schiemann, *The Politics of Pact-Making*.

ations turned out to be a genuine turning point, whereas others made only a short visit to politics without any more permanent consequences. Some joined the newly formed parties and became the *crème de la crème* of the new political class. Others either entered the economic or business sphere or returned to their original profession. For the youngest generation, it was a pilot game, the first political challenge, a chance to try their claws. For the oldest generation, it was a bonus game, a chance to realize their decade-old dreams and to conclude their career before they went off the stage. For the losers of the Kádár regime, like those who were displaced or humiliated, the whole process was political retribution. For the winners, that is, the leading economic and political layer of the communist system it offered the chance of freely walking away. Some of the negotiators changed their lives fundamentally as new and hitherto unknown opportunities opened to them in political participation and elite belonging.

Interest in politics was a driving force for several participants, who nevertheless saw their role as incidental and adventitious. One of them recollected as follows: "Actually it was quite by chance that I got involved. Suddenly one step just followed the other, we were drifting with the thing, the events themselves formed us and we, too, formed the events, but after a while this was completely mixed up that we make our roles, or the roles make us or both at the same time."⁸ Another activist remembered as follows: "There was neither time nor chance or opportunity for coordination, the whole thing was done by improvisation. Almost everyone represented himself, albeit in the cloak of a certain party."⁹ A fellow saw it similarly: "At that time there were ten thousand active people, everyone visited everything, so there was a huge cadre bustle. There were some who were inside this and that and there. It could be that one was in the MDF and then joined SZDSZ, so everyone was looking for their place. Looking back, I do not see this as a bad thing. Everything was so diffuse, people were constantly moving, a lot of 'crazies' appeared as well, they also joined and left everything. It was that kind of good anarchist period."¹⁰ According to another participant, EKA "really

8 Interview with Csaba Öry, 1997.

9 Interview with János Sík, 1997.

10 Interview with Mihály Laki, 1997.

was a team back then: there were political debates, but emotionally nobody was against the other.”¹¹

The opposition elite of the negotiations was younger and better educated than the members of the old elite. Most of them had a degree in economics, law, or liberal arts. The majority came from the circle of freelance intellectuals, a part came from the government bureaucracy. Their political behavior clearly indicated that they did not want a revolution: in many respects they simply wanted a better-functioning, more honest, democratic political system where there is more freedom and no oppression. Ideological and political pluralization accelerated and became visible during the formation of movements and parties. However, organizational pluralization was combined with close political cooperation only during the Roundtable talks which had a decisive effect on elite formation. The exceptional historical moment of the regime change brought to light several new rival groups and a new political class. This is what Dahrendorf called the period of “constitutional politics,”¹² which he contrasted with the period of normal politics.

2. THE OPPOSITION PARTIES WHICH GREW OUT OF DISSIDENT SUB-CULTURES

Contemporary writings and later recollections claim that the two leading parties of the Opposition Roundtable were the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ).¹³ These were the two parties which—alongside Liga union, which was also intellectual-based, and Fidesz, which had a partially different social composition but took similarly sharp positions—had grown out of the social movements of the 1980s. These movement initiatives first turned into a “forum,” “network,” or “alliance” so that they can integrate as parties of decisive strength into the nascent Hungarian democracy.

The two parties were different from each other culturally, particularly in their differing answers to the modernization dilemma which had occupied Hungarian political culture for many decades. MDF regarded the movement

11 Interview with Tamás Deutsch, 1997.

12 Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*.

13 Kiss, “Többpártrendszer Magyarországon”; Ripp, *Rendszerváltás Magyarországon*; B. Tamás, *From Dissident to Party Politics*; Elek, *Rendszerváltoztatók húsz év után*; Bába, *Rendszerváltoztatás*.

of populist writers as its most important intellectual predecessor, whereas SZDSZ—which had emerged from the democratic opposition of the 1980s—carried the legacy of Western-oriented, radical, liberal, and social democratic trends. The populist grouping argued that the problems of the Hungarian society can be solved by developing a genuine Hungarian way, building on our preexisting characteristics. The urban grouping argued the best solution was to introduction of the patterns of modern, liberal democracy that had developed in the West. While both groupings had to face a common enemy, this made them tactical rather than strategic allies for a long time.

In both groupings, we could find the cultural structures and intellectual currents of the Hungarian intellectuals. Moreover, they were the first to elevate these cultural differences on the level of politics during 1988–1990.¹⁴ An early founded party, MDF attracted the best and most active members of change-seeking rural intellectuals who soon made it the strongest and most famous movement of the new opposition. Members of the democratic opposition had spent a decade together in underground cooperation, and while it was more radical and had a more organized leadership, it could “open up” much more slowly. Nevertheless, it was able—first by forming the Network of Free Initiatives and, later, SZDSZ—to attract most of the Budapest-based elite intellectuals, the best of the free intellectual careers, and also those radical rural groups which were not satisfied with the moderate politics of MDF.

Both groupings were strong: MDF had a broader membership and widespread support, while SZDSZ had a developed and coherent program for the regime change. It was key to the birth of Hungarian democracy that the opposition’s two strongest “tribes” were ready to negotiate in 1989 and reached an agreement not just in tactical but now also in strategical issues. The Opposition Roundtable was the only proper framework to develop a joint strategy—the strategy of peaceful and democratic transition.

2.1 THE HUNGARIAN DEMOCRATIC FORUM

The MDF was created in September 1987 as an intellectual movement carrying the legacy of populist writers.¹⁵ After one year of functioning, the loosely

¹⁴ Csizmadia, “Utak a pártosodáshoz.”

¹⁵ Agócs and Medvigy, *Lakitelek 1987*.

organized association of intellectuals was turned into a political organization in September 1988. The founding document of MDF acknowledged that the multiparty system was inevitable, but the founders did not propose to transform the MDF into a party yet. In the beginning, the dominant voice within the party was anti-capitalist, advocated a leftist third way, and shared a plebeian and protestant ethos.¹⁶ It urged cooperation with the populist wing of the reform communists, and to facilitate this MDF was defined as a moderate, centrist political organization.¹⁷

The “founding fathers” of MDF were intellectuals who wanted to revive the populist ideology of the interwar period.¹⁸ While it was shaken by the radical social changes after World War II, the populist idea survived in cultural, literary form. The “elders” of the populist writers had an ambivalent relationship to the Kádár regime.¹⁹ Unintendedly, their romantic criticism of Western modernization and consumerism played into the hands of the anti-reformist forces of the regime. On the other hand, by reviving national traditions and putting the long-time taboo of the issue of Hungarians abroad on the agenda they also undermined the bases of the system’s stability.

The older members of the group that founded MDF—such as poet Sándor Csoóri, writer István Csurka, and historian Lajos Für, all of whom belonged to the second generation of populist intellectuals—had personal acquaintance with greats of the populist writers.²⁰ They were born on the turn of the 1920s and 1930s and brought up in the era when the old Hungary collapsed and the post-World War II Hungary, albeit it initially embraced the social reformist ideas of the populists, eventually developed into a totalitarian dictatorship. Although some of them flirted with the communist party in their youth, they had become supporters of the revolution by 1956. In the 1960s, they joined the critics of consumer socialism, and later they had an ambivalent relationship to the organizing democratic opposition.

Another group of founders belonged to the third and more and more fragmented generation of populists. Most of them were first-generation intellectuals who discovered the works of the populist authors as univer-

16 Interview with Zoltán Krasznai, 1997.

17 MDF, “Alapítólevél.”

18 Lengyel, *Útfélen*.

19 Gyula Illyés, László Németh, and Péter Veres.

20 Ács, *Kizárt a parti*; Bíró (1993).

sity students. The leader of this younger group was Zoltán Bíró, whose career was different from other members. While the others were mostly outside the communist party and often employed in an intellectual status below their education, Bíró was a member of MSZMP and represented the case of the populist idea from a position of power. He worked in the apparatus of the Ministry of Culture from 1971, and later when Imre Pozsgay was appointed a minister, he became one of his closest colleagues. Initially, Bíró was more like an ambassador to Pozsgay than what he really became by 1988: someone who politically repositions the populist tradition.²¹ Yet, their relationship was later elevated to the level of political alliance when the populist camp decided to form an independent intellectual movement, the MDF.²²

After the efforts of the populists to lobby for an own journal and for the official recognition of the problems of Hungarians abroad proved unsuccessful,²³ they sought contact with the democratic opposition. They attended the Monor opposition conference, organized under conspiratorial circumstances. However, the opportunities for opposition cooperation seemed to slip away when the populists refused to go to the conference the democratic opposition organized on the 30th anniversary of the revolution of 1956.²⁴ Moreover, when the 1987 program of the democratic opposition was published, the populists opined that the *Beszélő* circle created a *fait accompli*, putting the emphasis on opposition rivalry rather than cooperation. As a response, the populists decided to organize their own conference, one that was organized more openly and among the invitees was, beyond the broader circle of populists, Imre Pozsgay as well. The Lakitelek meeting in September 1987 represented a new political strategy: the populists renounce their opposition stance in exchange for publicity and the support of Pozsgay.²⁵ Nevertheless, the mere fact of the meeting was a polit-

21 Bíró, *Saját út*; Tókécs (1998: 208).

22 The cooperation was based on the old personal relationship between Imre Pozsgay and Zoltán Bíró, who had been expelled from MSZMP in April 1988. When Pozsgay was a Minister of Culture and Education (1976–1982) Bíró worked with him as a head of department. Had the *glasnost* of Gorbachev stabilized on its 1987–1988 level, there would have been no obstacle before the co-optation policy of the reform communists. Bíró who left MDF in the autumn of 1990 and Pozsgay who left MSZP once again reunited in 1991, when they founded the National Democratic Alliance (NDSZ). However, the party remained unsuccessful, and was dissolved in 1995.

23 Bíró, *Elhervadt forradalom*, 11.

24 Hegedűs, *Ötvenhatról nyolcvanhatban*.

25 Pozsgay made it possible to publish the Lakitelek Memorandum. *Magyar Nemzet*, November 14, 1987.

ical act that accelerated the political processes of the regime change. Even though MDF always followed more careful tactics than the SZDSZ, in the two years following the Lakitelek meeting liberals wanted to catch up on the bigger and more influential MDF. But this could only happen when the international political environment changed and the processes of radicalization in domestic politics synchronized the sentiments of citizens with the radical politics of SZDSZ.

The group that founded MDF mainly consisted of writers, historians, and other people educated in humanities.²⁶ They were later joined by some of the practicing lawyers of the Independent Lawyers' Forum,²⁷ as well as members of a previously lesser-known circle of the reform economists.²⁸ "We are not the kind of guerilla-type fighters who want to protest the past system like the mayor of Budapest [i.e., Gábor Demszky—A.B.] who was beaten up by the police [...] We had nothing whatsoever, only our extremely poor family background. Then, let me ask, on what grounds would someone have rioted?"²⁹ a representative of the MDF said.

From the beginning of 1988, the "forum" character of the MDF mainly appeared in the more and more widely attended debates organized in the Jurta Theater about constitutionalism, political reform, or the status of Hungarians abroad. The reputation of the party was further enhanced by the great protest in Budapest in June 1988 against the leveling of villages in Romania. Supported by the Pozsgay led reformists, MDF became the most important "alternative" organization. In this moment, MDF was positioned to strike the balance between reform communists and the radical opposition.

The real force of MDF was in organizing in the rural areas. In the first half of 1988, many teachers, public educators, poets, physicians, club leaders, and local community organizers joined MDF as a (then) only opposition grouping, which also followed the traditions of the populist intellectuals. As Imre Furmann, an influential organizer of MDF, remembers:

Like many others, I went to the politics from literature. We founded the first Forum of the countryside in our apartment. After this, he involved

²⁶ Zoltán Bíró, Dénes Csengey, Sándor Csoóri, István Csurka, Lajos Für, Gyula Fekete, Imre Furmann, Géza Jeszenszky, Rudolf Joó, Csaba Kiss Gy, and Sándor Lezsák.

²⁷ István Balsai, Balázs Horváth, Imre Kónya, Katalin Kutrucz, and László Salamon.

²⁸ Péter Ákos Bod, Katalin Botos, Béla Kádár, Mihály Kupa, Tamás Szabó, and others.

²⁹ Interview with Katalin Botos, 1997.

me more and more intensely in the organizer network of the Forum. [...] Maybe that is why the later membership elected me to a very prestigious position in the national leadership.³⁰

The party leadership was dominated by “creative chaos” for a long time. As another activist remembers:

I met Sándor Lezsák in the city, and he asked me why I never went to leadership meetings, they have no economist. I said, “because I’m not a member of the leadership.” “No problem, we’ll co-opt you”, he said. It turned out that they co-opted a large leadership, all kinds of people, anyone who went there became a member of the leadership. This was when Antall started to show up in the MDF.³¹

In the parties which had a higher number of critical intellectuals the question of “party or movement” was a serious problem. In the beginning, MDF under the leadership of Zoltán Bíró did not want to become a party, because the founders did not want the party to degenerate from the comprehensive representation of the “cause of the Hungarian people” into the representation of partisan interests. As Sándor Csoóri later admitted: “In the beginning, I imagined the MDF as a movement which, even if carrying the germs of a party, will remain a spirit- and thought-maturing movement for a long time.”³² In the beginning of 1989, MDF was already looking for the possibilities of reconciling party operation and operation as a movement, and its political identity changed accordingly. After long debates, the March 1989 conference of MDF tried to resolve the conflict by declaring that MDF was *both* a party and a movement. While its 1988 founding document stated that it did not want to accept “government or opposition labels, nor the compulsion to choose,”³³ the 1989 program of the party already defined the MDF as an independent, ideological-political movement. “A social organization,

³⁰ Interview with Imre Furmann, 1997.

³¹ Interview with Zoltán Krasznai, 1997.

³² Csoóri, *Nappali hold*, 299.

³³ MDF, “Alapítólevél.”

which is built upon the voluntary activity of individuals and communities who feel responsible for the future of the Hungarian people.”³⁴

From the side of the rival opposition, this was interpreted as follows:

Csoóri and Csurka had a concept of legal operation. The structure that Csurka later created: “Hungarian Way”—the movement, “Life and Justice”—the party. Way, life, and justice, these three were unified in what they originally imagined as MDF, that is, the mother organization does not become a party, it won’t go to battle, but will send out electoral parties which are tasked with acquiring foundations, rightful shares for the mother movement, which itself is the mosaic nation. And when these parties necessarily get worn out in politics, then this movement would send out a new one. [. . .] They could achieve something, the foundation empire of Csoóri practically reflected this, but they lost the battle to Antall in the issue of transforming into a modern party, a party that represents Christian democratic values. One cannot live this “movement-party” double life, modern democracy doesn’t tolerate this. Antall won in this regard, and by this movement he, in political terms, took the power from them within the party which they had founded.³⁵

The formation of EKA in March 1989 practically decided the question of party or movement. But the process was not devoid of conflicts. A participant of the Roundtable talks, later minister, remembered as follows:

What I said about the negotiations continually buttressed the intent within the MDF to transform the movement into a party, which the MDF managed to do with tremendous wounds and amazingly high blood loss. But it had to be done, for otherwise it wouldn’t have been able to articulate its political will in the parliament. As a lawyer, I was always there at leadership meetings. [. . .] There were sharp disagreements about this within the leadership. With József Antall, we consistently argued that we must do it.³⁶

³⁴ Kurtán, Sándor, and Vass, *Magyarország politikai évkönyve*, 520.

³⁵ Interview with Miklós Haraszti, 1997.

³⁶ Interview with Balázs Horváth, 1997.

The leadership of MDF experienced the formation of EKA as a loss of prestige, but they did not want MDF to stay out of it either. Thus, they sent the new politicians from the second line of the party there. They did not know that by this step they renounced the opportunity of leading the political transition as well as their own organization. In the spring of 1989, the MDF still envisioned a long transition, its leaders believed the free elections would be won by the reform communists. Their initial strategic aim was to gather a constituent assembly, either immediately or—for the sake of democratic legitimacy—after the elections. They also believed that in the first parliamentary term MDF would only be a strong opposition party, and it would come to power only later in a more mature state. That is why the leaders of MDF regarded the negotiations of EKA only of limited and temporary importance.

Initially the delegates of MDF included several prominent members of the populist intellectuals. From the spring of 1989, however, lawyer László Sólyom and historian György Szabad started to assume a leading role. They were only loosely tied to MDF back then, and their early life and political ideas significantly differed from those of the founders, too. True, Szabad belonged to the generation of Sándor Csoóri but he was never enchanted by “world-changing” ideologies. The fact that he was openly Jewish also distinguished him from the populists, who were often accused of anti-Semitism. László Sólyom, who attended the first meeting of EKA still in the name of the Independent Lawyers’ Forum, was born to a Catholic, middle-class family declassing in the 1950s. As professor of law, he participated in the formation of a series of nongovernmental organizations of great variety, among them the liberal-spirited Publicity Club, the environmentalist Danube Circle, and the Christian democratic Márton Áron Society. He fulfilled his most important role in the initial phase of EKA, during the preparatory talks of EKA and the MSZMP.³⁷

The internal dividedness of MDF over strategy was later commented on by one of the negotiators as follows:

Bíró and Csurka saw EKA as a secondary battlefield. The primary battlefield was the crisis of the MSZMP. Until July they believed, very

37 Sólyom became Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court (1990–1998) and later President of the Republic (2005–2010).

wrongfully, that Pozsgay will come to the front as a sure victor, and they thought that they would support from the various competing wings of the party the relatively most favorable one, that of Pozsgay. Had they considered a historical perspective they could've realized that that had not been the case for a long time, because that was still the tactical world of reform communism. At that time, we, together with Sólyom and Antall, had completely different goals: parliamentary democracy. Thus, the roundtable to us [. . .] was the main battlefield. They saw it as a tactical side game.³⁸

However, these views were invalidated by the changes in the international environment which also appreciated the role of EKA. In June 1989, the Roundtable talks were undeniably the center of politics.

The leading representative of MDF in the Roundtable talks was József Antall, who, like Sólyom and Szabad, came from a middle-class family of public officials in the interwar period. Yet for him the communist turn meant not only social declassing but the break of a starting political career. Antall wanted to a politician his whole life: to him, the transition also meant an opportunity to continue his previously interrupted political career. His father was politically active in the FKGP in the 1940s, and during World War II he earned timeless merits by organizing aid for the POWs fleeing to Hungary. Immediately after the war, he became Minister of Reconstruction. The young Antall participated in the relaunch of FKGP in 1956, but later he completely distanced himself from public life. He taught at high school and got through the Kádár regime on the periphery of scholarly life. While he consciously spent this time with networking, he kept a distance from the dissident intellectuals, and therefore he was almost completely unknown in opposition circles until 1988.³⁹

Because of his family traditions and respective political contacts, Antall was close to the old smallholders trying to revive FKGP. They also had great confidence in him, partially because of his father and partially because of his outstanding—compared to them—political knowledge. Although he was active in the Kovács Béla Society which prepared the relaunch of the FKGP,

³⁸ Interview with György Szabad, 1997.

³⁹ Révész, *Antall József távolról*, 29.

he did not enter the party itself. He was aware of the flaws of the attempt, and by this time he already imagined his political career in the MDF. But for the sake of organizing the right-wing political camp, he maintained contact with the veteran smallholders who had great confidence in him. This could be seen in the Roundtable talks as well: "Vince Vörös always inspired me to follow what Jóska Antall says," remembered one of the chief negotiators of the Smallholders' Party.⁴⁰ However, FKGP saw not only a potential ally but a rival as well, and therefore it encouraged the old smallholders not to let intellectual groups coming from the outside lead the party. This is shown by the fact that in the beginning of 1989 Antall—who at that time was openly in the MDF but still enjoyed high respect as the advisor of the president of the party—strongly supported the expulsion of those intellectuals who revolted against the old smallholder leaders.

Antall was also a member of BZSBT and the Márton Áron Society. After KDNP was formed, Antall was asked to be its operative leader. Yet, although he knew only Sándor Csoóri and György Szabad from the leaders of the Forum, he considered the MDF to be the best opportunity to create a future right-wing camp as well as his own political career. Participating in the Roundtable talks was the real springboard for him, the opportunity he captured and which sent him to the peak of his career, in the prime minister's chair.⁴¹ In the negotiations, Antall's negotiating partners were truly amazed by his historical knowledge, meaning not only the history of Hungary but that of 20th century Western Europe. He often presented his arguments as natural consequences of the politics of the past,⁴² whereas the way he embedded contemporary events in the European past made him a unique character among the actors of EKA. While half of the negotiators had deficient knowledge of these subjects, to say the least, the other half of them often showed outstanding erudition in legal and constitutional theory, philosophy, history, sociology, and literature. Yet it was not in all cases that they were able to combine this knowledge and put it in such perspective that would have coherently buttressed their political arguments. This was something Antall could do.

An opposition actor saw the later prime minister this way:

⁴⁰ Interview with Imre Boross, 1997.

⁴¹ Debreczeni, *A miniszterelnök*.

⁴² Szűcs, *Az antalli pillanat*; "Napok romjai."

Antall entered a negotiation. I sat down, there was a man completely unknown to me, and in minutes I noticed two things: first, that how skillful he was in manipulating these historical parties, especially the smallholders, and second, how well he played table tennis with Tölgyessy, indeed how much they understood each other and spoke the same language, and how adept he was in presenting the jointly achieved result as his own success.⁴³

Another participant emphasized the important role Antal played in the domestication of historical parties.

The MSZMP involved all kinds of phantom parties, like fake Smallholders, fake Christian democrats, and fake Social democrats. I saw this as a communist trick back then. [...] In the negotiations, József Antal pacified these parties in an excellent way, so there was no problem with them. [...] Nevertheless, it was these buffers settled into the Kádár system who had, well, completely hair-raising acts during these negotiations. I think we owe a great debt of gratitude to Antal who disciplined these people and particularly, well, convinced them to shut up, and to utter not a single word.⁴⁴

Another participants, an academic negotiator of MDF, also clearly referred to the historical parties by saying this: “EKA debated its position under very hard circumstances, because there was a tremendous difference in the quality of the different party delegates, so we weren’t always able to speak the same language.”⁴⁵ A fellow, lawyer member of MDF who was also a regular attendee of the leadership meetings of MDF until June 1990, regarded Antal as the greatest politician of the second 50 years of the 20th century.⁴⁶ According to a “considering progressive” participant, “if we take that the whole change of power took place without a hitch, that was thanks to two people: one was Antal, and the other was Pozsgay. Both showed ability to compromise and political maturity.”⁴⁷

43 Interview with Ferenc Kőszeg, 1997.

44 Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 1997.

45 Interview with György Szabad, 1997.

46 Interview with Dániel Dobozy, 1997.

47 Interview with Károly Vigh, 1997.

Besides Antall, the Roundtable talks also brought to fore the “new boys” who belonged to the professional background of MDF. This is where they founded their career and fortified their party identity. To them, it was a great opportunity to leap forward that during the negotiations the leadership of MDF did not control the delegates of the party, they had no duty to report regularly. “Antall dominated these processes, so it was clearly his job, with full authority. The leadership rarely considered this issue, but not because they were not interested in it. [. . .] The leadership outsourced this task.”⁴⁸ Other participants corroborated that the participants of the Roundtable talks negotiated with a practically free mandate. “I must tell, there was never a debate within the leadership on whether I represented correctly or well the position of MDF. Frankly, the leadership had absolute and unconditional confidence in me—which also meant unlimited liability, of course.”⁴⁹

In their social characteristics, the members of this group were more similar to the FKGP and the particularly the middle generation of KDNP than to their own populist contemporaries in the MDF. Almost without exception, they came from middle-class families of public officials which were decaying in the interwar period when they were born. Those who were born in the 1940s additionally experienced wartime collapse and their parents losing their jobs. As they were no longer considered as class aliens during their university admission in the mid-1960s, they managed to secure an intellectual career. Their family background excluded political involvement in the Kádár regime, but they avoided even the slightest political resistance as well. They remained intact *vis-à-vis* the system, not only politically but also culturally, in their lifestyle and values, in which the religious stance had a central role.⁵⁰ It is not a coincidence that many of them worked as lawyers, many of them came from old lawyer families. This traditional profession secured good livelihood and relative freedom even under the decades of the Kádár era. While earlier they did not voice their concerns, when legal ways to do this appeared they tried to find ways of political participation. Beyond their values, it was because of their political flair and sometimes pure chance that they ended up in MDF.

48 Interview with István Balsai, 1997.

49 Interview with Balázs Horváth, 1997.

50 Interview with István Balás, 1997; with István Balsai, 1997; with Balázs Horváth, with László Salamon, 1997.

For the second half of 1989 it became obvious that MDF can run in the elections only if the party cannot be charged with cooperation with the reform communists. Sensing the amplifying anti-communism of the public, the Lakitelek founders had to make a pragmatic turn: the Forum became a party in October 1989, a new president was elected, and its movement wing became one of the party's currents. In the position of party president, a political intellectual (Bíró) was replaced by an intellectual politician (Antall). The choice was vindicated by results. Starting from a beaten position at the end of the November 1989 referendum, Antall's tactics proved to be successful vis-à-vis both the SZDSZ and the MSZMP.⁵¹ The party became the winner of the first free elections with its slogan of a "calm force" and its program which promised more painless economic transition.

It was József Antall who made MDF a modern political party. While the populist critical intellectuals found their home in the MDF, they saw Antall as an outsider politician who took power out of their hands.⁵² Antall kept the populist group away from the government, and he tried to neutralize them in a way that he divided MDF into three ideological currents. He defined his own position as the center of MDF, whereas he tried to neutralize the liberals and the populist-nationalist group in opposition to each other. He followed an essentially similar strategy toward the economists with various economic-policy views who had been invited to the government by him.⁵³

The kind of improvisation based on intellectual conviction which had been present in the Roundtable talks did not disappear automatically after the formation of the Antall government either. This is exemplified by the history of the law on local governments, which is recalled by the former Minister of the Interior as follows:

The creation of local governance was a key element of the program of MDF from the first moment. [. . .] It was accepted by everybody that the alpha and omega of the creation of democratic public life and civil society was local governance as a way of thinking. [. . .] This requires a frame-

⁵¹ Kolosi et al. "The making of political fields."

⁵² The status of Antall and Tölgyessy within their respective parties show several similarities. Both came relatively late and had to get in from the outside. Both tried to behave primarily as politicians. They understood each other very well. Their names hallmark the MDF-SZDSZ pact after the elections.

⁵³ Lengyel, *Útfélen*.

work, because if local governance doesn't get a legal frame, it won't have any weight, then you can't organize the citizens' will. Ever since I was a lawyer, I was interested in this. [...] We did it with five or six people, without any practical experience, building on our theoretical knowledge and the blind faith that there will be strong local governance in Hungary. [...] We thought that there was a self-conscious and disciplined, civic core who liked our messages. Now I know that there was not, because such way of thinking that displayed and accepted civic values could not exist. That was our wrongful estimate of the situation; maybe we put the emphases in the wrong place.⁵⁴

The new politicians brought into the party by Antall worked with ambition, but in terms of the leading ideologies they were not competitive with the Lakitelek founders. Moreover, the mistakes of the government the party started losing popularity. The poet and ideologue Sándor Csoóri formulated his sense of loss as follows: "... the intellectuals became party-organizer and power-grabbing technicians rather than putting the weakened body of the Hungarian people on the medical drip of the great ideas of humanity."⁵⁵ Antall was able to pacify Csoóri by putting the World Federation of Hungarians under his wings, which the poet was free to form into a "movement" at his whim as president. By this step, the prime minister let some portion of the movement spirit of MDF slip away. But the others were not satisfied with this solution. Even without saying it, the formerly populist intellectual politicians believed that an outsider politician who represents a partially different, conservative-Christian democratic value system may stay in his position only until he is clearly successful. However, the economic transition of the regime change caused serious social traumas which politically hit the governing party as well. In the eyes of several populist intellectuals, politics was not a task but a mission and service, whereas they say their role not as the facilitators of daily political consensuses but as the ones who solve the "issues of national fate." Many of them were unable or unwilling to follow the mechanical operation of parliamentary politics.⁵⁶ Thus,

⁵⁴ Interview with Balázs Horváth, 1997.

⁵⁵ Csoóri, *Nappali hold*, 365.

⁵⁶ Interview with Gyula Fekete, Jr., 1997.

they once again found an opportunity to voice comprehensive critique in the name of the people.

There was no time for the members of MDF to shake together, although the need for this was articulated by several people: "After the victory of the 1990 elections I always said that that was when MDF really needed to be organized, for it to have a base, because we had been just swept together by the wind, the whirlwind of history. I read it in an interview with Lech Wałęsa that getting out of communism is going to be a long march. That was my opinion, too."⁵⁷

The internal critics of the government were dissatisfied with the results of the transition, and to bring about the change they wanted to change MDF to their image. István Csurka and his circle used this moment to launch an attack against the politicians of the government in August 1992, which induced deep crisis of the MDF. The essay Csurka published, summarizing radical right-wing views can be seen not only as a document between populist and centrist politicians⁵⁸ but also as the endeavor of "taking power back" of the ideological intellectual group that could not and did not want to integrate into official politics. However, Antall crowded Csurka out of the MDF in 1993, who responded by founding the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (*Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja*, MIÉP). For a single term, the radical right-wing party won parliamentary seats in 1998, but it disappeared after 2006, giving way to the emerging new right-wing radical party Jobbik.

After the transition, MDF was a parliamentary party for 20 years, with eight years in government. The MDF participants of the Roundtable talks benefitted from the regime change because many of them attained high political positions. József Antall became Prime Minister (1990–1993); László Sólyom became the first Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court (1990–1998), and later President of the Republic (2005–2010); György Szabad became Speaker of the National Assembly (1990–1994). In addition, the party delegated several former EKA-participant ministers to the Antall and Boross governments.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Interview with Csaba Kiss Gy, 1997.

⁵⁸ Csurka, "Néhány gondolat."

⁵⁹ The following MDF negotiators became ministers: István Balsai (Minister of Justice, 1990–1994); Péter Ákos Bod (Minister of Industry and Trade, 1990–1991, later Governor of the Hungarian National Bank, 1991–1994); Lajos Für (Minister of Defense, 1990–1994); Balázs Horváth (Minister of the Interior, 1990–1993); Géza Jeszenszky (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1990–1994); Béla Kádár (Minister of In-

2.2 *THE ALLIANCE OF FREE DEMOCRATS*

The SZDSZ was created in November 1988 as the political party carrying the intellectual legacy of the democratic opposition of the 1980s. Radicalizing intellectual groups mainly turned to the liberal party which put forth a radical program of regime change. This party combined the previous democratic opposition and its supporters on the one hand and a larger group of the liberal reform economists,⁶⁰ members of smaller religious congregations, and the fifty-sixers of Imre Nagy circle⁶¹ on the other hand. Following their similar goals and modernist, Western attitude, these Budapest-based groups understood each other. The more heterogeneous society of reform economists and the seemingly more homogeneous opposition did not see each other as opponents but as strategic allies.

The intellectual members of the democratic opposition were young rebels of the 1960s, whereas many of their parents had worked on the realization of an opposite kind of regime change 20–25 years before in the second half of the 1940s. Many of them were petty bourgeoisie families of Jewish origin, who survived the Nazi persecutions—in some cases, returned from death camps—and after World War II did not want to become potential victims of either Nazism or anti-Semitic prejudices ever again. The only kind of capitalism they knew was the “neo-baroque” system of interwar Hungary,⁶² and they found liberal ideas weak and incapable of self-defense. In 1944, having survived a racist regime sensing its military defeat they joined the supporters of class struggle and “people’s democracy,” thereby becoming the volunteers of the dictatorship and class-based oppression that replaced race-based oppression. The generation of the parents had not been able to integrate in an ultimate sense due to the racist ethnopolitics of the 1930s, therefore it tried to find its identity in the universalist ideas of socialism that offered a radically new humanism. When their eyes finally opened, they realized that they

ternational Economic Relations, 1990–1994); Imre Kónya (Minister of the Interior, 1993–1994); Iván Szabó (Minister of Industry, later Minister of Finance, 1991–1994); Tamás Szabó (Minister Responsible for Privatization, 1992–1994).

60 Such as Tamás Bauer, István Csillag, Károly Attila Soós, and Márton Tardos.

61 Such as András Hegedűs B., György Litván, Imre Mécs, Miklós Szabó, and Miklós Vásárhelyi.

62 See the description of “neo-baroque society” at Gyula Szekfű: *Három nemzedék* (Three generations) Budapest, 1920.

could not even trust each other anymore and had also become the soldiers or toys of tyranny by the 1950s.

The youngsters coming from this environment rebelled, first, against the integration of their parents into the establishment and, second, against the “petty bourgeoisie” practice of the system of the 1960s which was based on lies and petty complicity with the power. They felt that, while Mátyás Rákosi, the dictator of the 1950s had not been able to break the backbone of the Hungarian people, János Kádár and his “soft dictatorship” did it. The youngsters adopted patterns of rebellion from the West via the New Left, the cult of spontaneity, beat music, Marxist renaissance, participatory democracy, counterculture, sexual revolution, anti-colonialist protests, and the movements expressing solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the Third World.

The turning point for this generation was the 1968 Prague Spring. This was when they realized that the Soviet Union was ready to repress not only the armed revolution of 1956 in Hungary but also the peaceful, idealist reform movement of Czechoslovakia that advocated the humanization of socialism. From this point, there was no turning back to reformism in terms of ideas: the process of becoming anti-systemic opposition began.⁶³ Many people defected, but those who stayed in Hungary found themselves in a familiar position: in the role of being members of the “opposition-enemy” grouping as defined by the establishment.

The most important representative of this group was philosopher János Kis, who originates from a middle-class Jewish family. Members of his family were killed in the Holocaust. His mother, the only survivor became a devout communist, and Kis could start his studies in a special school for the children of the apparatchiks. Studying philosophy at the university, he became a pupil of György Márkus and tried to reconcile Marx’s writings in political economy and (especially early) writings in philosophy. Eventually, this endeavor led to the rejection of Marxism. By the mid-1970s, the “derived Marxism” of Kis and his co-author, György Bence had become the generally accepted position of the left-wing Hungarian reform intellectuals.⁶⁴ Although Kis became a member of MSZMP in 1966 he, along with other intellectuals, was

63 Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*; Heller, *A bicikliző majom*,

64 Tökés, *Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution*, 189.

expelled due to his renitent views in 1973, after which he lost his job. Forced into internal emigration, Kis soon turned from being an esoteric philosopher of humanistic socialism (as opposed to “existing socialism”) into the leader of an influential opposition group based on human rights.

After the introduction of the state of emergency in Poland, the publication of the samizdat *Beszélő* and the dialogue with other intellectual groups made up the democratic opposition of the system. Members of this closely knit group knew each other very well but they were isolated from the outer world for a long time. They had to be open to communicate the ideas of human rights, radical democracy, and later liberalism in an articulate, popular way to a wider audience. The leading role of János Kis in the 1980s manifested in two ways. On the one hand, his influence was significant in terms of strategy for the democratic opposition, particularly through his orienting articles in *Beszélő*. On the other hand, Kis participated in the organization of dissident circles, signature campaigns, the underground free university, and the street demonstrations like anybody else, meaning his leading role prevailed in a direct way as well. In the 1980s he parted ways with his friend and collaborator, György Bence. The reason of their break was their different interpretation of the Jaruzelski putsch, that is the installation of martial law in Poland in 1981.⁶⁵

In the beginning of 1988, the circle of the democratic opposition had to realize that they can achieve success in democratic politics only if they transform from political avant-garde to a wider and looser social-political alliance. The first attempt at this was the Network of Free Initiatives (SZKH), which was created in May 1988 with the fifty-sixers, environmentalists, members of religious discipleship groups, radical economic reformers, university students, and other groups. The aim of the Network was to join up the already existing but individually weak civil social groups and initiatives for the realization of democratic transformation. This provided an opportunity for the sympathizers of the democratic opposition to “catch up” with their leaders in terms of anti-system radicalism, to join them in a somewhat looser framework, and therefore to integrate in a broader organization by sharing simi-

65 Kis was optimistic about the chances of a potential transition, because he interpreted the non-intervention of the Red Army as positive sign, that is the weakness of the Soviet Union. However, Bence did not share his friend's optimistic approach and saw a dark future to come to Central Europe.

lar principles.⁶⁶ The Network was created to fulfill this purpose. Usually, it is easier for civilians interested in politics to join peaceful movements with broad platforms than to more devoted and closed, “revolutionary” groupings because they have to take fewer risks. That is why peaceful movements and campaigns are more successful than initiatives accepting violence in international comparison as well.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the Network was new political ground for the leaders of the democratic opposition as well, who had to be credible and convincing among people who might not have known them or their previous deeds.

By the time the operating principles of the Network were established Kádár fell and political processes quickly accelerated in Hungary. The informal leader of the democratic opposition, János Kis was awarded scholarship and spent the academic year of 1988–1989 at the New School in the United States. For some of the opposition founders of the Network it became obvious that the time-consuming, participative but also uncoordinated operation based on a broad consensus of member organizations did not allow the organization to set the direction of the events. They saw that the time was ripe for party formation. They believed that if they fail to do this they might be marginalized in the following period.

Among these intellectuals, it was primarily the energetic organizer, sociologist Bálint Magyar who played a key role in the life of the movement and, later, forming party. Magyar took the initiative, because he was among those who were most impatient with the grassroots democratic but not so productive meetings of the Network’s council. Members of the Network who had joined primarily to increase their political influence urged party formation more explicitly. They were afraid that they would be left out of the stream of democratic politics—they, who were the most determined to reject the Kádár regime. Magyar represented their opinion, and the majority eventually agreed to party formation. Delegates from smaller denominations, who had joined the movement through the Network, also played a significant role in founding and naming the party. Later, from them “the group of Evangelic Christians was formed, which was joined mainly by those who had come

66 Kasza, *Metamorphosis Hungariae*.

67 Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*.

to SZDSZ from the Faith Church [*Hit Gyülekezete*] [. . .] This group was formed with around 300 members, and it operated for a while.”⁶⁸

It was their initiative to form the Alliance of Free Democrats in November 1988. In its Statement of Principles, the new party clearly accepted an anti-system stance, rejecting the idea of a third way.⁶⁹ The anti-system message of the party spread and soon brought significant radical groups to SZDSZ, including ones that judged the moderate politics of MDF—which also became a political organization in September 1988—too careful or “double-hearted.” While SZDSZ became the successor of the democratic opposition in intellectual and political sense, party formation in November 1988 was carried out not by the so-called “hard core” of the democratic opposition but the intellectuals close to the opposition.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, some intellectuals regarded the formation of SZDSZ as a putsch, and thus for a shorter period the Network of Free Initiatives based on its previous decentralization principles continued to exist. According to historian Miklós Szabó, who later served as an MP of the party:

SZDSZ was formed by firm political decision, I was an initiator and executor of this in the leadership. We left behind those movement partner organizations which really would have federalized the leadership of SZDSZ, and because of whom every leadership meeting was like a meeting of the orders of Poland’s Republic of Nobles in the 16th century. For it to operate as a political organization, a political party, we had to break with them. [. . .] This was not a substantial, big deal for me, but it was for some people, and they are heavily wounded, emotionally they have never really recovered from this.⁷¹

Among them, there was the circle of samizdat journal *Demokrata* (led by Jenő Nagy), the Inconnu Artist Group and the Bokor discipleship. On

68 Interview with Péter Hack, 1997.

69 E. Szalai, “Az értelmiség útja a semmibe?” 217.

70 For a long time, opposition members did not get passports, and when they occasionally did, they were often denied the right to travel abroad after they returned home. Maybe wanting to keep them away from the country, the Ministry of Internal Affairs allowed traveling upon scholarship to several opposition members in 1988. Therefore, Gábor Demszky, Miklós Haraszti, János Kis, and Gáspár Miklós Tamás were not in Hungary when SZDSZ was founded.

71 Interview with Miklós Szabó, 1997.

the other hand, Bálint Magyar and Ferenc Kőszeg played important roles in organizing the professional intellectuals of the party in the beginning of 1989. In the predecessors of SZDSZ, the main roles were assumed by sociologists and philosophers, they were later joined by economists and social researchers who were regarded as radical reformers by the public, and many of whom later participated in the economic working committees of the National Roundtable. Many of them were members of the Democratic Union of Scientific Workers (TDDSZ), and later they were related to the sociologist layer that represented Liga. It was Magyar who bridged the representatives of the previous democratic opposition and the various newly arriving intellectual groups. As the gray eminence of the democratic opposition, he had played a key role in the distribution of the illegal *Beszélő*, therefore members of the old opposition could trust him unconditionally. On the other hand, his dynamism, as compared to the leading figures of civil society, had a deep impression on the newly arriving, who could feel that they integrate into an ascending party. Magyar did not lose his job in the Kádár system, and he maintained regular contact with various layers of the society as an agrarian sociologist, documentarist, and journal editor. This gave him opportunity to put his network in the public sphere to the service of the party organization.

In the beginning, SZDSZ was an actionist party. This led to successes in the first period, but later it also led to strategic problems in the formation of the party's identity. The board of SZDSZ elected at the temporary and spring 1989 general meetings was based on the principle of collective leadership, which led to the increasing influence of the most active, organizer-type leaders. From November 1988 to June 1989, Magyar was perhaps the most active member of SZDSZ. However, János Kis returned at this point and soon took over the leadership of the party. As he remembers:

By the time I got home, the board of SZDSZ did not work, it had no meetings, then I, as I had been away at the time of the election, and I was not a formal member of the board, I organized it and put it at regular motion. Which of course meant that I wasn't the only one who could afford, while not being a member of the board to attend the meetings of the board, and in a decisive way, but there were others as well, so there was total chaos in the beginning in terms of who really leads the party.

In real, this was completely finalized only at the November 1990 congress of delegates.⁷²

Intellectuals with a background in humanities and social sciences were overrepresented within the core of SZDSZ, therefore the lawyers who joined the party later and participated in writing *A rendszerváltás programja* (Program for a Regime Change) had a chance to make a fast career in the party.⁷³ During the Roundtable talks, the young constitutional lawyer Péter Tölgyessy—who joined first as an expert and entered the party only months later—became the frontline representative of SZDSZ. At first, those who joined this venture were more motivated by professional than political challenge. Yet in a matter of few months, Tölgyessy became not simply the delegate of the party but the political and legal strategist of almost the entire opposition.

Tölgyessy's burst into politics came from practically nothing, he laid the foundations of his political career by his performance in the Roundtable talks. Not only was he unknown to many people, he himself had been in contact with only a few. He had participated in the development of *Fordulat és reform* (Turn and reform)⁷⁴ and sometimes he had also appeared as an expert in the events of local MDF organizations. But his political background was more insignificant than any of the more important actors at the Roundtable. Nevertheless, he started the negotiations with a mature concept of the constitution, and he soon managed to amaze his party and negotiating partners with his preparedness and vitality.

The dynamic performance of Tölgyessy radicalized the politics of SZDSZ. Even for the leaders of the party who had come back from abroad it took some time to take up the speed. Tölgyessy believed that Hungary must surpass the Polish model⁷⁵ and SZDSZ must sharply differentiate itself from moderate, centrist forces. While he was formally under the control of the board of SZDSZ, no one was more competent than him in the constitutional issues at hand, and therefore he—due to his expertise, stam-

72 Interview with János Kis, 1997.

73 Like Péter Hack and Péter Tölgyessy.

74 Antal et al., "Fordulat és reform."

75 In the summer of 1989, the Polish model meant that the opposition forms the government but the president is delegated by the state party.

ina, and zest—became one of the informal leaders of SZDSZ in months. Using his sudden prestige, he also started his own political acts, which meant a *fait accompli* for his allies as well.⁷⁶ It did not take much time for him to appear not only as an expert but as a liberal politician who was ready to take a public stance in confrontational situations as well. By September 1989, he was just as much a representative of the views of the radical-liberal opposition as was József Antall for the conservative opposition. One of his fellow party members saw him like this: “Tölgyessy grew this big, not really in the Roundtable talks but by the Four Yes referendum.” In the Sopron meeting of the party, which had to make a decision about the start of the petition campaign for the referendum, “he totally caught the people, everyone was electrified, and at once it seemed that there was a task, so everyone jumped into the petition campaign with impressive enthusiasm.”⁷⁷ SZDSZ was built up in an organizational sense by the referendum campaign, but this was possible only because the radicalizing public opinion had accepted the principle of consistent transition. In August 1989, the party had only 40 organizations in the country, but until the March 1990 elections this number grew to 600.⁷⁸

After the free elections, SZDSZ became an opposition party in the parliament. The governing coalition that came to power consisted of people who were not actively against the Kádár regime in 1956–1989 but often also such whose main strategy had been survival. In several points, their values were close to interwar Hungary, that is its traditional, paternalist politics which aimed at preserving state intervention. Very soon, it was formulated in the intellectual leadership of the liberal party that perhaps the party should become, once again, the opposition of the system rather than the opposition of the government.⁷⁹ They believed that the centralization attempts of the MDF-led government, as well as the rhetoric of the radicals of MDF may lead to a new “nomenclature,” the takeover of economic power, and the justification of consolidating a formally democratic but *de facto* semi-authoritarian regime.

76 In issues such as the law on the constitutional court, or the introduction of the institution of ombudsman.

77 Interview with Ferenc Kőszeg, 1997.

78 Interview with Péter Tölgyessy, 1997.

79 Kőszeg, *Lehetőségek kényszere*, 82–83.

The newly emerging idea of an anti-system stance also meant that the intellectual group that had been strikingly successful in 1989–1990 had a hard time finding its place, both in the new system and the suddenly formed political elite. The party membership and some of the public did not understand why the party, which had been successful previously with trenchant anti-communist rhetoric, focused only on institutional changes. Contradictory lines of criticism of the leadership of SZDSZ emerged. Some believed it to be too radical, while others accused it of turning away from its regime-changing radicalism, for the party opposed the initiatives aiming at retrospective justice. It was also debated whether regime change was possible without elite change. Fehér and Heller even stated that it was the peculiar feature of the “glorious revolutions” of Central Europe that “in this region, fundamental regime change happened without elite change.”⁸⁰ Yet the lack of elite change remains one of the most often cited reasons of social dissatisfaction after the regime change, and right-wing populists have tried to build a program around this.⁸¹ In 1991, formerly supportive intellectuals turned away from SZDSZ, and the party started losing popularity.⁸²

The internal life of the party was characterized by intellectual political activity, which benefitted informal procedures rather than strengthening formal, bureaucratic structures. Significant members of the democratic opposition were generally respected by the membership. For example, the influence of János Kis prevailed and after he returned to Hungary, he immediately joined the National Roundtable talks. He assumed a formal role in 1990–1991, when he was the first president of SZDSZ, but he remained outside of the parliament. From late 1991, he gradually withdrew from the first line of politics, although he still had significant informal influence in the years to come. According to a former dissident and one of the most significant politicians of SZDSZ,

Horrible disorganization is an old mistake of the party. While the right-wing media always claimed that this had been a phalanx, centrally led, firm, well-organized, centralized organization, it was a bunch of people organized higgledy-piggledy by a totally chaotic structure with no per-

80 Fehér and Heller, *Kelet-Európa dicsőséges forradalma*, 96.

81 Csurka, “Keserű hátszág.”

82 Gyekiczki, *Hol tart a szabad gondolat?*

sonnel policy. The leading body of SZDSZ was like the editorial staff of *Beszélő*, where everybody had an idea. [. . .] And when it is no longer carried by passion, then all this become conspicuous.⁸³

While arriving later, Tölgyessy's opinion was similar:

The board of SZDSZ—I don't want to use an offensive term—was not very effective, it was a low-efficiency, chattering group, and what I saw was that I simply had no time for that. I can tell with all certainty that [in the summer of 1989] two months passed that I attended one single board meeting of SZDSZ while the negotiations were going on with full force. [. . .] I think that substantially the board had no influence whatsoever on the flow of the negotiations.⁸⁴

After the 1990 elections, Tölgyessy was elected parliamentary leader of SZDSZ, but after just a few months, in the autumn of 1990 he was unexpectedly removed from his position. A fellow MP of his remembered the activity of the former constitutional lawyer politician:

He was a star of this group, and simply the whole community loved him. He was a terribly intelligent boy, extremely successful in doing what he was doing [. . .] but still his mistakes were noticed immediately. He is a secretive, lonely man who does not communicate well, and from this point of view he is bad at cooperation, not because he has different plans but he's simply like that. His parliamentary leadership was like he pressed documents to his chest, and he was running through the corridor, and the party was running after him, asking him what was in those documents. Because he never told us.⁸⁵

When Tölgyessy, who came from the outside, wanted to attain significant political role in the party, he found himself against the representatives of the old democratic opposition who were against him almost without exception. However, his removal was not well received by party members,

83 Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 1997.

84 Interview with Péter Tölgyessy, 1997.

85 Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 1997.

thus the intellectual party leadership—with its movement past—found itself against precisely the actionist membership it had strongly supported before. Paradoxically, Tölgyessy, who was not a movement politician, could later use this “movement wave,” when in the autumn of 1991 he was elected president of the party over the candidate of the former dissidents.⁸⁶ To the disappointment of the membership hoping for party unity, the majority of the old anti-system opposition refused to cooperate with the new president, and they withdrew uniformly from the board.⁸⁷ After a year of presidency, Tölgyessy was finally removed by the old party elite not by movement but, via the creation of platforms or organizational means.

Why was there aversion to Tölgyessy? Because SZDSZ had still been founded by the democratic opposition, and this had its own accustomed style, internal hierarchy, and Tölgyessy came from the outside. [...] The democratic opposition was a human-rights movement with civic radical mentality, which was between liberalism and social-democracy by ideology. [...] Tölgyessy was outside of this, and he really had more to do with the Hungarian legal traditions, which was somewhat suspicious to the civic radical mentality. [...] Finally, not every leader of SZDSZ was happy with Tölgyessy being in a good relationship with Antall; they couldn't really accept this.⁸⁸

The experience of leadership crisis had serious lessons for the traditional elite of SZDSZ, the key circle of which retained, in spite of dropouts, its dominant position until the millennium. After the regime change, SZDSZ was a parliamentary party for 20 years, with 10 years in government. From the Free Democrat participants of the Roundtable talks, Bálint Magyar became Minister of Culture and Education, later party president, and Minister of Education,⁸⁹ whereas János Kis, Péter Tölgyessy, and Iván Pető⁹⁰ became presidents of the party.

86 He was Alajos Dornbach, who had also been active as the lawyer of the democratic opposition.

87 From this circle, it was only Otilia Solt who was a trustee during the presidency of Tölgyessy.

88 Interview with Ferenc Kőszeg, 1997.

89 Bálint Magyar was the Minister of Culture and Education of SZDSZ in the Horn government (1996–1998), then he became party president (1998–2000); later he was Minister of Education in the Medgyessy government and the first Gyurcsány government (2002–2006).

90 The presidency of SZDSZ was fulfilled by János Kis in 1990–1991, by Péter Tölgyessy in 1991–1992, and by Iván Pető in 1992–1997.

2.3 *PARALLEL TENDENCIES*

The two largest opposition parties, MDF and SZDSZ were built on intellectuals coming from different directions. The core of SZDSZ was comprised of the intellectuals working in and around the democratic opposition, while in the core of MDF there were populist intellectuals—who had been balancing between the opposition and the government—and intellectuals who had spent the Kádár era in work isolation, away from politics due to various family traumas (related to the post-1945 years or 1956). At the birth of their respective political parties, the two groups went through similar phases but not at the same time. As far as their competition is concerned, MDF took the lead for a long time, but the liberals also managed to come to the fore several times in 1989. MDF was larger and less confrontational; SZDSZ was smaller and more radical. While the 1990 campaign slogan of MDF was “calm force,” the slogan of SZDSZ was: “We can, we dare, we do!”

These parties needed ideologies and values to be able to shake at least a part of the population out of its passivity. Both camps needed credible leaders, that is, moral authorities whose person guaranteed the program as well. This was the ideological-movement phase, the leading figure of which in the yet-to-be-formed MDF was Sándor Csoóri, whereas in the democratic opposition which would later form SZDSZ it was philosopher János Kis.

After this and now having a firm worldview and political program, the two groupings needed to stabilize their position. They had to become open in an organizational sense for those who would join the opposition. In this second phase of organization building, essayist and public official Zoltán Bíró in the MDF and sociologist Bálint Magyar in the SZDSZ fulfilled indispensable roles.

Finally, when the ideology and organizational character of the parties had developed, they had to participate in the negotiations about the regime change. Here, the question was no longer the future of their own organization but the future of the country's institutional system. This period may be called the negotiating, public law phase of constitution-making. It was this period when MDF found the historian József Antall and SZDSZ, the lawyer Péter Tölgyessy. The former became the first prime minister of the democratic period, whereas the latter became the parliamentary leader of the largest opposition party.

Both rival regime-changing parties managed to solve the challenges posed by the various phases of party development: both had a firm identity, an operational organization, and a well-developed program for regime change. All they had to do is to make an agreement—with each other, and with their opponents as well. The story of MDF and SZDSZ in the late 1980s was an example of cooperation and competition which was indispensable to the success of democratic transition. An SZDSZ participant described the electoral competition of the two parties as follows: “In the referendum about the presidential election, we won by crazy luck, by six thousand votes. [. . .] After that, we took a radical regime-changing momentum, and we didn’t realize that we should’ve slowed down a little bit. We had no electoral experience. [. . .] They were a little afraid of us, too, that we would make some huge reckoning.”⁹¹ During the 1990 elections, it seemed that SZDSZ was the radical party of regime change, while MDF was the moderate, “calm force.” The peaceful nature of the regime change is further demonstrated by the fact that the latter won.

Both grouping had to go through three different phases of party formation, this process is summarized in Table 11.

The leading groups of SZDSZ and MDF were basically composed of democrats who advocated the program of convergence to Europe. But they differed in that SZDSZ saw Europe as a desirable goal in terms of program and culture, whereas for MDF it was a geographical and historical given. In addition, MDF also featured more critical views toward the form of European integration, objecting to its elitism.⁹² There were debates about the economic transition as well: some argued that, instead of a parallel transformation of politics and the economy the market economy should be created first, because only that may be appropriate ground for stable democracy. Yet the majority view was that the creation of political freedom must not be postponed because the aim was not a Chilean-type long transition building on reform dictatorship but an unhampered transformation to Western-type pluralist democracy.

The leaders of these parties supported a plural political structure and a mixed economy which is dominated by the market. However, it was not their pro-market views *per se* that distinguished them from the liberal social-

⁹¹ Interview with Imre Mécs, 1997.

⁹² Csengey, *Mezítllás szabadság*.

ists—who flirted with the idea of “market socialism”—but that they believed in the primacy of private property vis-à-vis public property.⁹³ Their starting point was that a society may work well only if its subsystems function according to their own logic, that is, if politics is dominated by the logic of democracy and the economy, by the logic of the market. In their view, the functioning of these does not need to be hampered by integrating an alien logic into them *ex ante*; rather, their dysfunctional effects need to be compensated *ex post* by the creation of a separate institutional system (i.e., good social policy).

Table 11. The phases of pluralization and the key leaders of the two most important opposition groups

PERIOD	THE PHASES OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT	KEY LEADERS AND THEIR CIVILIAN OCCUPATION	
		MDF	SZDSZ
1985–1987	dissidence, protesting	Sándor Csoóri (poet)	János Kis (philosopher)
1988	networking, party formation	Zoltán Bíró (public official)	Bálint Magyar (sociologist)
1989	negotiations, constitution-making	József Antall (historian)	Péter Tölgyessy (lawyer)
1990 onward	parliamentary politics	<i>prime minister:</i> József Antall	<i>party president in opposition:</i> Kis / Tölgyessy / Iván Pető (historian)
		<i>parliamentary leader:</i> Imre Kónya (lawyer)	<i>parliamentary leader:</i> Tölgyessy/ Márton Tardos (economist)

Source: Bozóki and Karácsony 2002: 91

Their position was that the modernization of Hungarian society should follow this way as well, which was interpreted as the way for the convergence

93 Faragó, *Nyugati liberális szemmel*.

to Europe. Accordingly, a consensus was developed among them which held that, fitting to the neoconservative trends of the era, the best social policy is pro-market economic policy. At the same time, their basic values included individual freedom and the emerging grassroots practices of community politics: the entrepreneurial individual and the civil society. In this worldview, property appeared not as the limit but as the guarantee of freedom. In principle, they wanted the institutions of society to develop out of processes of self-organization, instead of being directed from above. Yet eventually they, fired by the regime change, indeed created these institutions quickly in a top-down fashion.

Their views on reform were positive at first but it later became ambivalent due to the quick deterioration of the concept of reform.⁹⁴ In this circle, there were many people even in the second half of the 1980s who believed that, while reform does not aim at changing the regime, it can eventually start processes which can act as catalyzers to a possible regime change.⁹⁵ However, the others in the circle saw the system *eo ipso* irreformable, and stayed away from the reform debates. For quite a few members of this generation, this system of values was less a political ideology and more a legally conscious way of life. In the first half of the 1980s, formulating views in support of liberal democracy was possible only in the second public sphere but they were not dominant there either. Yet, implicitly these views could be found in several economic studies and studies about social theory. The demand for market economy appeared more and more strongly in these writings, although the term capitalism was usually avoided. By 1989, however, this standpoint had become dominant in both parties.

The leadership of both intellectual parties observed each other with great suspicion. Although they were able to cooperate in an exemplary way in key moments, such as the summer 1989 Roundtable talks, their differences continued to deepen during the years. As I discussed above, this suspicion had its history dating back at least to the beginning of the 1980s. While the two intellectual groups had successful joint acts already then, their mutual griev-

94 Urbán, "Társadalomreformerség és politikai tagoltság."

95 The term "regime change" was first used in Spring 1989. The reformers of MSZMP thought about model change. The term "regime change" was introduced by SZDSZ in the book titled as *A rendszerváltás programja* (Program for a Regime Change) in April 1989 (Magyar et al., *A rendszerváltás programja*).

ances did not cease to exist.⁹⁶ The spiral of suspicion was strengthened as the dissidents interpreted the Lakitelek meeting almost as a pact between the populists and the reform communists. On the other hand, the democratic opposition created the Network of Free Initiatives, and invited MDF to be member organization. But this was seen in the MDF as an attempt to overcome the Forum, making it only a member organization of the Network. Indeed, the founding of SZDSZ was motivated by the fear from falling behind MDF as much as the frustration they felt because of the inefficient operation of the Network. Zoltán Bíró, the president of MDF disliked the idea of the MDF participating in EKA—his aim was still to make a side deal with Pozsgay—but the leaders of the party realized that they cannot stay out of the nascent cooperation of the opposition.

Despite all their conflicts, MDF and SZDSZ could cooperate successfully during the negotiations. One of the reasons for this was that in both parties the leading role was taken by pragmatic politicians vis-à-vis the former intellectual core. Yet, the rhetoric of sharp confrontation did not turn out to be expedient with respect to the political culture of democracy, because it mainly happened on the level of the political and culture elite. It did not meet the everyday experience of the wide layers of society, who were mainly concerned about losing their jobs, unemployment, and high inflation. The debate of intellectual groups overlooked this. The loudening elitist political discourse during the regime change contributed unwittingly to the fast alienation of society from the democratically elected political elite.

2.4 THE FEDERATION OF YOUNG DEMOCRATS

Fidesz was formed on March 30, 1988, from the members of various autonomous university clubs and student fraternities as a youth political organization. The youngsters who called the inaugural meeting wanted to have a letter of intent signed about starting an organization called Democratic Socialist Youth Society.⁹⁷ Viktor Orbán and his lawyer fraternity supporters, how-

⁹⁶ The communist cultural policy hallmarked by the name of György Aczél was interested in dividing the potential groups of the opposition. In spite of the successful opposition cooperation in the *Bibó Festschrift* and the Monor meeting, Aczél managed to maintain and even amplify the mutual suspicion between the “urban” and “populist” groups.

⁹⁷ Interview with Bertalan Diczházi, 1997.

ever, urged the immediate formation of the organization, with a name that does not include the word “socialist.” This latter proposal got the majority vote, and the youth organization—called Federation of Young Democrats—was formed that day.

According to an initiator of the meeting, it was still “hard Kádárism” back then:

I didn't want those guys I brought there to be expelled from the university. Essentially, proclaiming a new party could've also meant that the whole group would be put in jail, and there were some ideas like that. [. . .] But the Kádár system tipped and it was never carried out. Because of this I represented a more moderate line, out of my character I guess. But essentially it was me who thought the construction up. Otherwise maybe everyone would've gone to other directions.⁹⁸

The founding document of Fidesz not only contained comprehensive democratic goals but also named the political opponent, the Young Communist League. Fidesz aimed at breaking KISZ's power monopoly among the youth.⁹⁹ The university students and young intellectuals who created the organization never tried to hide it that they came together in hope of a new Hungary drastically different from the prevailing system.

The members of the organization met in the movement of student fraternities, and they were active in creating circles and clubs in the mid-1980s. It was at the 1985 Szarvas meeting of university clubs that those people who would later form Fidesz first met.¹⁰⁰ Later, these activists consciously prepared to replace the generations before them, not only in professional fields but also in politics. At first, becoming a politician overshadowed professional studies. The collectivist world of university clubs only transparent from the inside was favorable to the verbally skillful, fervent, talented future politicians whose radical appearance helped them exert considerable influence on their contemporaries.¹⁰¹

98 Interview with Bertalan Diczházi, 1997.

99 Bozóki, *Tiszta lappal*, 23–25.

100 Interview with László Kövér, 1997.

101 Bozóki and Karácsony, “The Making of a Political Elite.”

The appearance of the radical-liberal party of the youth was that of an intellectual or semi-intellectual group. This group, representing the radical generation of young critical intellectuals and composed of university fraternity students coming mainly from rural cities¹⁰² was the first one in the democratic transition to become an openly political organization. When I say “semi-intellectual,” I am referring to the fact that, while those in the core of Fidesz had university degrees and many of them worked in sociological research groups¹⁰³ and had the opportunity to study abroad,¹⁰⁴ the bulk of the community had no time to prepare for the intellectual role. They were novice lawyers, economists, scholars, educators, people trying to find a job in the beginning of their career. Many of them were also drafted after graduation.¹⁰⁵ These people stood up from university benches and went almost straight to politics. They were somewhat different from those Fidesz members who were a few years older and had had an intellectual career before Fidesz was formed. That group participated in the Roundtable talks with an intellectual identity.

The hard core—hallmarked by the names of Viktor Orbán, Gábor Fodor, János Áder, József Szájer, and László Kövér—began developing their organizations and participating in the Roundtable talks by the rules they had learnt in the movement of student fraternities. Most of them only partially developed the intellectual ethos that characterized and influenced the political behavior of the dissidents. At the time of the slow dissolution of the system, the members of Fidesz did not feel the strong resistance of the bureaucracy or the insurmountable taboos, and therefore their regime criticism was dominated by pragmatic behavior from the beginning. Apart from the threat of expulsion from the university, these young people had nothing to lose. Fidesz preferred doing actions which were fast, surprising civil society,

102. Particularly young lawyers and economists from Bibó, Rajk, and Széchenyi student fraternities.

103. János Áder and István Hegedűs worked in the Sociology Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the research group of Mihály Bihari, whereas László Kövér, Péter Molnár, Zsolt Németh, and Viktor Orbán studied in the Central Europe research group, funded by the Soros Foundation, led by Iván Bába and Ferenc Mészlivetz. Cf. Interview with János Áder, 1997; with László Kövér, 1997; with Péter Molnár, 1997.

104. They could visit foreign universities with the support of the Soros Foundation, for example, Iván Csaba, Viktor Orbán, József Szájer, László Urbán, and Monika Vig.

105. The drafting of Fodor in 1987 and Orbán in 1988 had political reasons as well. Interview with Gábor Fodor, 1997.

and presented the communists with a *fait accompli*.¹⁰⁶ In the beginning, the chief enemy of Fidesz was KISZ but later it was the whole system. The more and more crystallized aim of the circle of friends forming since the mid-1980s became the liquidation of late Kádarian structures.

Fidesz was mainly comprised of first or second generation of young intellectuals who had a strong demand for upward social mobility. This was their primary criterion of success. They staked almost their all upon a single cast, political success. Their closest counterpart was the post-World War II generation of “bright winds” the exception that their achievements were not due to “pulling out” from above but partially historical circumstances of vacuum and partially their own right. This grouping had no chance to take roots in the Kádár regime. During their university years, the most influential actors of Fidesz were close to the democratic opposition, invited their members to university clubs, and some of them even joined opposition activities. One of their leaders, Viktor Orbán, said the following:

What I saw from the beginning 1983 was that this political system was in constant retreat. I had never seen the communist system at full strength, in its brutality. Not even when they beat me and took me in for twelve hours on 16 June 1988, because the point was not that they took me in but that they had to release me.¹⁰⁷

It took many Fidesz-founders a decade to walk the path of social and geographical mobility and join the elite, something which took generations for others. The circle of young rural intellectuals was a significant group of Fidesz. As their parents belonged to the local elite and they had been raised in that environment, moving to Budapest was new to them only in terms of metropolitanism and university lifestyle.

The core of the group was composed of lawyers and economists. Inside the not-yet-party Fidesz, power aspirations were not intellectual but political in kind which had been formed in terms of political socialization by family,

¹⁰⁶ One of the most successful actions of early Fidesz was the recalling of unpopular communist members of parliament. It was because of this action that the summer 1989 by-elections resulted in opposition politicians joining the parliament for the first time in 42 years. Bozóki, *Tiszta lappal*, 130–33.

¹⁰⁷ Kasza, *Metamorphosis Hungariae*, 111.

school, military, and the changing mass communication in the Kádár era.¹⁰⁸ Sociologically, this can be explained by the dual mobility—fast intragenerational mobility from rural city to the capital and from nonintellectual family to intellectualism—of the core of the party. This was the typical path of mobility for the decision makers of early Fidesz, they had the strongest aspiration for power.

While one half of the community easily assimilated to the subculture of the Budapest-based opposition, the young university students who came from more disadvantaged status were more suspicious of both the official establishment of the party state and the university leadership, and even of the Budapest-based opposition elite. The latter did not want to assimilate into but surpass and overmatch the Budapest elite—which is a partial explanation of their later conflicts.

This group with the leadership of college students was further joined by groups who were preferred to be called “lumpen elements” by the propaganda of the state socialist system. The Workers’ Group of Fidesz was composed of young people from vocational training or schools whose demands leaned toward radical direct democracy and even populism—against not only the system and the communist leadership but the leadership of Fidesz as well. Yet at most protests this group was a natural ally of the multilingual children of the Budapest middle-class who made up the “downtown” Fidesz and found it sympathetic because of its fresh voice and alternative character. The cosmopolitan character of early Fidesz came from that latter group.

In a dictatorship that was dissolving, ideologically more and more void, and pervaded by the intellectual culture of skepticism and cynicism, the radical and rational appearance of Fidesz leaders was refreshing. An important reason for this was that education in universities was much freer in the 1980s than the previous decades. As a result, the members of the young generation studied not only rational argumentation but the democratic, constitutional reference points which had been laid out in the constitution but never enforced in practice. The leaders of Fidesz referred not to ideologies vis-à-vis the already disintegrating state ideology but to rights vis-à-vis the existing law. Early Fidesz was radical and anti-ideological at the same time. This might seem like a paradox because radical movements in the world are usu-

108 Róna-Tas, “Fidesz – Mi Desz?”

ally ideological. In this case, however, radicalism meant the radicalism of action.

The radicalism of Fidesz defined the behavior of the organization at the Roundtable talks as well as the various political events influencing them. Fidesz supported the unity of the opposition, but it was against premature negotiations with MSZMP and the politics of “national reconciliation,” which was dictated by the state party and supported by the moderate opposition. They argued that there was no reconciliation without breakup, and as there had been no breakup the first task is to make it happen, at least symbolically. That is why Viktor Orbán said in his speech at the reburial of Imre Nagy that youngsters respected Nagy because he had been able to break with his communist convictions for his people. At first, Orbán had a hard time having him accepted in the more moderate environment of the trilateral negotiations, because after his speech of June 16, 1989, he had the reputation of an extremist radical.¹⁰⁹ While Orbán was backed by the enthusiastic membership of Fidesz, this membership initially was taken more seriously by the police than the negotiating partners.

Compared to the pushing attitude of the core of Fidesz, their representatives adopted a more moderate attitude in the Roundtable talks. Although the relatively “moderate” representatives of Fidesz participated in the various levels of meetings, their more restrained style did not mean rejection of the radical program of the organization or its strategic plan of transition emphasizing the notion of breakup.¹¹⁰ According to a Fidesz negotiator, “everyone found themselves in this story as complete amateurs. How to negotiate, which political issues are important, how to moderate a negotiation [. . .] this was all learnt by the parties as we negotiated. The negotiating situation spurred us to think in a more rational, systematic way, theorizing was not very common.”¹¹¹ The committee negotiators of Fidesz reported to the party’s committee about the status of the negotiations every week, which meant regular change of information between the party leadership and the negotiating representatives. Those negotiating in each working committee were aware of the general directives of the party and the parallel processes of the negotiations. The meetings of the party’s committee were open, dis-

109 Interview with Viktor Orbán, 1990.

110 Petőcz, *Csak a narancs volt*.

111 Interview with János Áder, 1997.

cussions were friendly, there were no orders, and any Fidesz member could attend these meetings.¹¹²

The goal to be reached in the negotiations was the same for every delegate of Fidesz: to create guarantees for free elections and lay the foundations of a stable, democratic constitutional state. This was related to the criteria of the country's operability and peaceful transition, which was an important basic principle for the nonviolence advocate Fidesz as well. In some issues, the party played the role of a "battering ram," even more so as it was the least convinced among the opposition organizations about the inevitability of the negotiations. According to one recollection, "consultations of Fidesz and SZDSZ mainly manifested in a form that the SZDSZ tried to convince us to renounce table-upsetting radical solutions. They were in a kind of dilemma, we had nothing to lose, we were a youth organization, for a long time we hadn't even considered whether we would necessarily run if there were elections. [. . .] But they measured their positions to the MDF."¹¹³

The radicalism of Fidesz was formed by the demand, not only for regime change but also elite change. As Fidesz-negotiator put it years later: "I saw the role of Fidesz in a very positive light. I believe that Hungary needs a complete generational change within the elite. Fidesz was the beginning of this generational change, they said it radically that we must break with the past. [. . .] The role of Fidesz was to show an alternative."¹¹⁴ This sentiment was shared by many. This generational pathos also suggests that Fidesz was both an intellectual and an anti-intellectual party. Respect for the knowledge they could learn at the university on the one hand and demand for radical elite change on the other hand were both shared by the young politicians. The leaders of the organization made it clear many times that Fidesz does not want to be the youth supply of any political grouping.

During the Roundtable talks, Fidesz was a strategic ally of SZDSZ; in most fields and the most important issues, representatives of the two parties agreed. There was no substantial difference between the position of Fidesz and that of the other liberal party, thus its primary role in the regime change was to accelerate the process of transformation. As an interviewee put it, "Fidesz was the light cavalry of the opposition, who could be sent forth in

¹¹² Interview with Tamás Deutsch, 1997.

¹¹³ Interview with László Kövér, 1997.

¹¹⁴ Interview with István Harmati, 1997.

both the debates inside EKA and debates with the MSZMP. We were always ready to represent the most radical position, which was later the reference point for making a compromise.”¹¹⁵ However, this was not a mere tactical issue but stemmed from the deeply engrained anti-communist attitude of the politicians of Fidesz as well.

This did not apply to the economic negotiations, because the leadership of Fidesz did not regard those as important, the core of the party was not even represented. The negotiators of Fidesz were selected by economist László Urbán, a former member of the Rajk fraternity, after he was given a completely free mandate to do so by the leaders of the organization. Beyond his expertise, it was his student fraternity past which made him a credible actor for this role. A participant remembered as follows: “Urbán gave us the key word, ‘liberal economy’ we had talked, debated this over in the fraternity, the professional background was there. That is why he asked us, because from this respect we knew what we were doing.”¹¹⁶ They looked at the MSZMP negotiators sitting against them with a different eye than the Fidesz representatives at the political negotiations. According to an economist:

It was quite clear to me that this was no longer that MSZMP. We were very much into 1989, the Németh government was a technocratic group. There were these guys who graduated a few years before us in the university, and they tried to be professional. Say, György Surányi was the president of the Planning Office. These were kids who had been teaching assistants, and they had explained the two-tier banking system to us. This wasn’t like “here come the old Bolsheviks.” [. . .] They were apologizing that they were in government.¹¹⁷

The composition of the economic delegation was also formed by coincidences. As a participant recalled: “One of my colleagues at the Central Statistical Office as commissioned to write an article about financial regulation. This wasn’t really his cup of tea back then, we were sitting in front of each other, and he asked me to write it instead of him. I said, ‘I’d be happy to, finally I can write down what I think’. And I wrote it down, and then he

¹¹⁵ Interview with László Kövér, 1997.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Tamás Winkler, 1997.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Klára Ungár, 1997.

added as an ex-post remark that I should write to the end that I wrote this in the name of Fidesz. I said, 'this is really interesting, if Fidesz accepts what I write here, then naturally I'll write it to the end.' Whereas earlier, in fact, I'd heard about Fidesz only from the media."¹¹⁸ Later, this became the financial program of Fidesz, and its author became an economic negotiator of EKA.

The leaders of Fidesz claimed to have learnt much from the Roundtable talks. According to the recollections of one of their leaders, Viktor Orbán one year after the talks, "if those months weren't behind me now, I would be in great trouble as a parliamentary leader. I'd be in very great trouble. There, I needed refined political senses and instincts. [...] Compared to that, the parliament is a piece of cake, I'm telling you. Because the parliament has every kind of people, including politically weightless ones, while back there one would meet large calibers everywhere."¹¹⁹ But who were these people of large caliber, and how did the attitude of Fidesz differ from them? In retrospect, Orbán pointed out Tölgyessy with his broad constitutional knowledge and Antall with his historical knowledge, political shrewdness, and sense to informal politics. He added that these people of large caliber were not always able to translate their words into political action. As for the ideas formulated at the Roundtable, Orbán explained this process in the following way:

It was mainly us who could translate them to the level of concrete political action. What follows from this? Understanding the position of the opponent, how can we use this argument? If the argument is great and brilliant, how can we use it so the result will be what we want? In short, I immediately realized that almost nobody had this ability except me. There I never had any kind of inferiority complex. There I was sitting among people of great knowledge, but somehow I know how to do this branch of politics.¹²⁰

The 1989 Fidesz negotiating delegation was balanced in terms of participants from Budapest and the country (14–14 people). However, as far as gender distribution is concerned, males were extremely overrepresented: only 2

¹¹⁸ Interview with Antal Gyulavári, 1997.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Viktor Orbán, 1990.

¹²⁰ Interview with Viktor Orbán, 1990.

females were present alongside 26 males.¹²¹ From the 26 males, 22 had finished their compulsory military duties before university. Fourteen belonged to student fraternities in their university years. Moreover, 7 of the latter stayed at their fraternity even after graduation, where they took on the role of educator. From the seven educators, five were employed in the new Central Europe research group. Among the negotiators of Fidesz, 16 further people were in scholarly positions (in a university or research institute) whereas the others pursued free intellectual careers at the time of the Roundtable negotiations. Six negotiators had the opportunity to study in Western universities with Soros scholarship.

The oldest Fidesz delegate was born in 1952 and the youngest, in 1966. Two-thirds of them was composed of the 1959–1964 generation. Considering that one-fourth of Fidesz negotiators is still in the party elite, 32 years later, this shows extreme cohesion of the party leadership. While the circle surrounding Fidesz changed significantly in the decade following the transition—five negotiators were not party members at all, and 15 people left the party until 1995—the innermost core of Fidesz remained unchanged.

This core was forged so strong by common origin from rural cities, masculinity, respect for social hierarchy, and the desire to successfully get to the top of the hierarchy, as well as the years they spent together in closed organizations (military, fraternity). By the time of their emergence, their social conservatism coming from home had given way to following the liberal *Zeitgeist*—this is how Fidesz could be a liberal party in the years of the regime change. Having achieved fast and successful social ascendance, however, the party became part of the new political elite, and therefore in the 1990s it was easier for it to drop its liberal ideas and return to its traditionalist roots. From the 28-member delegation of Fidesz to the Roundtable, today 7 people—that is, almost one-fourth of the negotiators—are still party members, and they also remained influential politicians of the party.¹²² Those who come from intellectual families from Budapest and started an intellectual career were a mite farther from the decision-making center. The Fidesz supporting members of

121 From the females, one of them left Fidesz in 1990 and the other, in 1993. Interview with Andrea Pelle, 1997; with Klára Ungár, 1997.

122 Six of them come from rural cities: János Áder, Lajos Kósa, László Kövér, József Szájer, Viktor Orbán, and Tamás Tirts. The only exception is Tamás Deutsch, who was born in Budapest.

the former democratic opposition fulfilled the role of consultant or mentor in the organization.¹²³

Since the regime change, Fidesz has continuously been a political party, spent 13 years in government, and is in government at the time of writing. From among the Fidesz participants of the Roundtable talks, Viktor Orbán has been prime minister multiple times; János Áder became Speaker of the National Assembly and, later, President of the Republic; and László Kövér became minister first and, later, Speaker of the National Assembly. Gábor Fodor became a minister of another party.¹²⁴ Since 2010, the leadership of Fidesz has identified itself vis-à-vis the regime change.

2.5 THE DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

The Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions, or, in brief, Liga, was formed as the loose alliance of alternative union movements in the end of 1988.¹²⁵ Among the trade unions forming Liga, the most important one was the Democratic Union of Scientific Workers (TDDSZ) which was created in protest to the politically motivated intimidation of scientific research institutes.¹²⁶ As such pressure was targeted primarily toward scholars of the social sciences, the founders of the organization were also primarily social scientists.

The sociocultural background and early life of the members of this group was similar to the dissidents in several respects, and they were not unlike in generational terms either: most of them were born in the second half of the 1940s or the first half of the 1950s. While almost all of them came from intellectual families from Budapest, many of them chose intellectual careers

123 Like Péter Balassa, György Bence, András Kovács, and András Lányi.

124 From the EKA-negotiators of Fidesz, Viktor Orbán became prime minister (1998–2002, and 2010 on) and party president (1993–2000, and 2002 on), whereas János Áder became President of the Republic (2012–2022). László Kövér was Minister of Civilian Intelligence Services (1998–2002), Lajos Kósa was Minister for the development of towns (2017–2018), and Zoltán Rockenbauer was Minister of Culture (2000–2002). Gábor Fodor was Minister of Culture and Education in the Horn government (1994–1995), later he was Minister of Environmental Protection (2007–2008) and party president (2008–2009) as well. The present author was nonparty Minister of Culture in the first Gyurcsány government (2005–2006).

125 Tóth, “Semmi sem dőlt el és mégis minden eldőlt”; Vásárhelyi, *Az ártatlanság kora*.

126 János Dávid, Csaba Öry, and Júlia Szalai were among the most active members of TDDSZ. The three other trade unions comprising Liga were Modesz, PDSZ, and Humanitás. The first president of the organization was Pál Forgách.

only after detours. The cultural capital they brought from home and the experience of the years they spent as laborers or journalist trainee inspired them both to understand social problems intellectually and to solve them. As reformist economists or sociologists, they often concluded their analyses with proposals about what was to be done: they were familiar with the discourse based on the merging of the viewpoints of scholarship, charity, and politics. They wanted to remain within the boundaries of the scholarly institutional setup, but they tried to support the existentially “free-floating” members of the democratic opposition with job opportunities as much as they could.¹²⁷ In retrospect, a participant said the following:

We created TDDSZ [. . .] in a few minutes, everyone who lived or died appeared there. [. . .] Its novelty was that it wasn't founded by the hard opposition but that circle of dissidents who remained on the legal side in its operation in the 1980s. They had a peculiar dual thinking, they were dissidents, but didn't really want to leave the ground of legality. Indeed, the trade union meant an opportunity for this community existing by, and much broader than, the hard opposition.¹²⁸

Their political activism was inspired precisely by political attacks against the scholarly institutional system. The roots of the newly emerging conflict between social scientists and the political decision makers date back to the late 1960s. That was when the aim at a new legitimacy of the party state was proclaimed, trying to justify itself—breaking away from the previously existing propagandistic picture of reality—by a “scientifically confirmed” program of modernization. However, it soon became obvious that the demands of the power are only partially fulfilled by Hungarian social scientists: more than once their conclusions questioned the most important goals of the system. It is no wonder at all that the emergence of the pluralism of trade unions in Hungary started with a scholars' union. While there were strikes at several points of the country in 1988, the Hungarian society was not susceptible to the forms of collective interest advocacy. Thus, the formulation and repre-

¹²⁷ Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*.

¹²⁸ Interview with János Dávid, 1997.

sentation of collective interests became a pronouncedly intellectual task, and it was also blurred with the advocacy of the interests of intellectuals.

All this changed only when scientific workers were joined by the organizations of teachers, special needs teachers, cinematographic workers, and others. It became obvious that the new trade unions may be strong actors of the regime change only if they form a confederation. This eventually happened in the end of 1988. One of the founders of Liga defined the character of the confederation, in retrospect, as follows:

The most important principle of Liga was that free trade unions are imaginable only in a democracy, and [. . .] that an alternative confederation of trade unions has to be created which would represent another kind of model for trade unions in Hungary, building from the bottom-up. [. . .] On a national level, we believed that economic regime change will have such casualties and burdens that it can be done well—and that was our illusion—if great social agreements are made about the distribution of the burdens of crisis and transformation. [. . .] We represented a middle-of-the-way, social democratic position, the essence of which was the presence of civil contractual relations on the micro- as well as the macro-level.¹²⁹

Concerning the dynamics of the transition, the Liga aimed at mobilizing politically passive social groups by widening civil society, employing an evolutionist strategy. Involving pedagogues as well as artists and journalists who tried to expand the spaces of public sphere, Liga could not become an effective organization for a long time, rather it remained an intellectual interest group. True, its representatives were able to prevent the adoption of the government's antidemocratic bill on strikes, their appearance was more like the operation of a well-functioning think tank and not like a trade union: it was not its social weight but the arguments of its experts which forced the government to retreat.

Formally, Liga retained an observer status in EKA, but its representatives participated in practically every internal voting. They played an important

129 Interview with László Bruszt, 1997.

role in paving the road to the negotiations. A participant sees the role of the strategists of Liga with a critical eye:

In the history of Liga, there is an intellectual circle in whose lives this was partially scientific research and partially a small detour, that “how interesting, here is a regime change”, and “now we look around, we look at the workers now, what they do in a situation like this”. [. . .] I toured around the country as a “workers’ leader”. [. . .] I felt terribly bad in this role, but I greatly enjoyed that I could see things I wouldn’t have seen otherwise. I was somewhat an outsider in this whole thing.¹³⁰

There was someone at EKA who joined Liga in short of better options, only to be allowed to participate in the negotiations. “We [from the Independent Lawyers’ Forum] weren’t members of Liga, for some mysterious reason we had to choose some star. As I was sure that I didn’t want to join any party, Liga was the most obvious choice. It’s a party neutral community, so let’s choose that.”¹³¹

The activity of Liga at the negotiations of the National Roundtable was too only partially reminiscent of the operation of a trade union. Although it emphasized the importance of economic negotiations, it soon realized that the first item on the agenda was the change of the political institutional system, and it adapted to a political strategy accordingly. The negotiators of Liga participated in the talks with practically free mandate, but that was the usual case because of the parties’ low level of organization and lack of experts.

As several delegates of Liga were also members of the SZDSZ, the organization stood closer to SZDSZ at the time of the internal polarization of EKA.¹³² “The Liga didn’t have enough people to be sent to the various working committees, so it offered this place to the SZDSZ. So practically I was delegated by SZDSZ, by my name tag had Liga written on it. Because of this, I had no real connection to Liga, it exercised no control whatsoever. [. . .] Here it was absolutely entrusted to me—they knew me who I was, and they had some idea about my opinion about the issues—and in these heroic times

¹³⁰ Interview with Gábor Horn, 1997.

¹³¹ Interview with Pál Bártfai, 1997.

¹³² Szalai E., *Útelágazás*.

it happened that whatever the appointed person said was the position of the organization.”¹³³

The Liga lost its war against the National Alliance of Hungarian Trade Unions (MSZOSZ), the successor of the state socialist trade union during the 1993 trade union elections, and although it continued to exist it was relegated to a secondary role in the movement of trade unions. From the EKA-negotiators of Liga, István Csillag and Zoltán Pokorni became ministers, and the latter even assumed party presidency.¹³⁴

3. THE HISTORICAL PARTIES

The “historical parties” were characteristic participants of the Opposition Roundtable. These parties were formed before the communist rule, and when the system started to breakdown they first operated as civil organizations and later they reorganized upon the revival of their parties. Unlike the other opposition groups, these organizations defined themselves as parties. They often referred to the principle of legal continuity, that they were not legally disbanded and therefore have every right to restart the functioning of the party. Four historical parties—FKGP, MSZDP, KDNP, and MNP—participated in the National Roundtable talks. The Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society (BZSBT) defined itself not as a party but as a friendship community, but I analyze it alongside the historical parties because of generational similarities and the political cooperation that was formed between them.

The historical perspective played an important role in the entire political transition. In terms of ideas and visions, the Hungarian regime change brought movement not only toward the future but also the past, for emphasizing historical roots was a powerful element of the legitimacy of the nascent system. For the older generation, the new democracy also meant the late justification of Hungarian political culture and the democratic traditions of Hungarian history, as well as the “fixing” of the democratic development of Central Europe which had been started decades earlier and arrested by the

¹³³ Interview with Gyula Gaál, 1997.

¹³⁴ István Csillag was the Minister of Economy and Transportation of SZDSZ in the Medgyessy government (2002–2004). Zoltán Pokorni was Minister of Education of Fidesz in the first Orbán government (1998–2001), and later he became party president (2001–2002). Later, Gábor Horn became a state secretary and an influential politician of SZDSZ.

communists. For the older generation, the new beginning was the late fulfillment of an “old beginning.”

The historical parties bridged two distant periods of democratization, not only in ideological and historical terms but also organizationally and through personal lives. Yet the carrying capacity of this bridge was far from clear, as it had to bridge radical social changes of long decades. The answer is already suggested by the internally conflicted and often unsuccessful attempts at creating a modern identity.

By the core of these parties, there were perhaps only two historical parties in 1989 which could say that they were *not* intellectual formations: the Independent Smallholders’ Party and the Social Democratic Party. Intellectuals were “sent away” from both parties through debates, scandals, and party splits. Although some critical intellectuals appeared, together with the intellectuals coming from MSZMP, in the Social Democratic Party but they soon failed, the sympathizer advisory candidates left, and eventually the party itself failed, too, in the 1990 elections. The elite of the Smallholders’ Party was recruited mainly from rural farmers and the surviving former Smallholder politicians of the pre-communist era. The small number of intellectuals who later joined them had not belonged to the active anti-system intellectuals. Those who were dedicated to make the intellectual wing of the party strong, soon found themselves outside the party, which in the 1990s turned in a populist direction. In the case of the Christian Democratic People’s Party, which was organized relatively late, the party’s core already included some intellectuals bound to the church. First, they were the old, mainly Catholic intellectuals who had not fought against the collaborative politics of the church during the communist era, and second there were the younger intellectuals who were closer to the lower clergy and voiced critical views in smaller circles. However, the party leadership was composed of members of the older generation.

3.1 *THE INDEPENDENT SMALLHOLDERS’ PARTY*

Representing the interests of the landed peasantry, the history of FGKP dates back to the period before World War I. However, it assumed a significant political role after World War II when it received, with the support of the Hungarian people who feared a communist takeover, the most votes

in the first free parliamentary elections in 1945. The party united a variety of political branches already then, from clerical right to the patriotic left. The communists exploited the internal divisions of the party to neutralize it, becoming the victim of the infamous “salami tactics” by 1947. Its leaders emigrated or were arrested, the others were pushed to the background, and some of them who worked for the communist takeover later fulfilled representative but politically insignificant positions for decades. Among other things, they participated in the operation of the most important satellite organization of MSZMP, the Patriotic People’s Front, which provided an opportunity for the former smallholders to stay in contact with each other.¹³⁵

The re-founding of FGKP was done mainly by the third liners of the former party who lived through the forcibly apolitical decades in middle-level positions and without any significant conflict. They joined the party apparatus at a young age, and a few years later they had to experience its dissolution and the break in their own political career. As being a smallholder became the key element of their identity, their political strategy was mainly motivated by the restoration of the party as an organization. The members of this group came mainly from bourgeois intellectual families which declassed in the 1950s and had to endure further grievances after 1956. Through long byways, they developed average careers which they always felt as being restrained because of their class alien origin and outsider standing. Their interests pointed toward changing the system, and their values were also radically different from the already decaying dominant ideology. From the mid-1980s, they took part in the operation of various opposition and semi-opposition organizations with increasing intensity. They were noted primarily because of their organizational capacity rather than theoretical prowess.

De jure, the Smallholders’ Party was not disbanded during the decades of state socialism, and the idea of relaunching it was brought up as early as 1986. However, accepting the proposal of József Bognár, who was an academic, Member of Parliament, and a former smallholder politician, it was not revived as a party. Instead, the Béla Kovács Society was established within the HNF. This was a part of the co-optation strategy of Imre Pozsgay, who wanted to expand his base and room for maneuver vis-à-vis the hardliners of the communist party. The leadership of the Society, which included both

135 Ravasz, “A Független Kisgazdapárt újjáalakítása.”

the historian József Antall and the writer Árpád Göncz, wanted to establish good relations with both the HNF and the circle of reform communist Rezső Nyers.

Political transformation for the old smallholders meant not only the creation of political rules but, through the relaunching of their party, the continuation of their broken political career as well. They were not radicals in this sense, although they set out to represent the interests of the rural party membership whose property had been expropriated. After some initiatives in the country, the cautious veterans were convinced by a group of middle-aged expert intellectuals to form a party in the end of 1988. As the old smallholders were more and more crowded out of the new organizations which had started forming earlier, they ventured to create an opposition organization which, ahead of everyone, defines itself as a political party.

The formation of FGKP in November 1988 was mainly the result of the decisive action of Tivadar Pártay, who also became party president. The relaunch of the Smallholders' Party contributed to the development of the multiparty system because this was the moment when society realized that the emergence of parties other than the MSZMP was possible. For among the organizations which had been formed in autumn, 1988, neither MDF nor SZDSZ called itself a party. Its members were particularly averse toward this term because they believed that the word "party" had been discredited. They did not think politics based on civil society was reconcilable with party politics, even though they recognized that the movement must turn into a party at some point. There were some smallholders who criticized the behavior of opposition parties precisely on the ground of their firm opposition to party formation. "I was always on the barricades. I was there everywhere in the front line. I was happy with all kinds of movements. I was just fed up with them. I wanted to be a party member. [. . .] The member of a patriotic party, which cares about this country and starts the multi-party system."¹³⁶

Those who came from the outside recognized the modest intellectual prowess of the party and criticized the fact that the elders of the party vindicated party leadership. According to a critical position: "Unfortunately, the public image of the party was negative due to the many awkward, otherwise well-meaning, nice, but in terms of politics and general knowledge quite

¹³⁶ Interview with Pál Dragon, 1997.

uncouth elderly. With a mentality that ‘you have no clue about politics.’ This was their whole attitude. They were basically nostalgic and unfortunately they did it up the whole transition and the first parliamentary period.”¹³⁷

The members of the younger generation of the Smallholders’ Party knew that MSZMP can be forced into negotiations only by a unified opposition, therefore they argued for active participation in EKA. Thus, they were more radical than the older members in the tactical sense, although their policy standpoints were more moderate. The confrontations of the two groups defined the first years of the party. This was somewhat dimmed by the fact that the anti-communist members of the former veterans supported the political goals of the middle-aged group, and many of the latter realized that they must be loyal to the older generation, which has the trust of the membership, to pave the way for their advancement in the party.

The bridge between the older and the middle-aged generations was the lawyer, Imre Boross. For he belonged to the old smallholders, but his political attitude shared many traits with that of the young. He sensed the weakening of the arguments of legal continuity, but he also acknowledged that that was still the party’s most powerful resource. It was primarily his achievement that the FKGP joined the Roundtable negotiations. He realized the growing strength of EKA and focused his efforts within the party in this field. The position of the Smallholders’ Party was significantly different from that of MDF, MNP, and KDNP, and it was similarly to that of the Social Democrats, insofar as they rejected the election of Imre Pozsgay as president. Although the party had signed the agreement of September 1989, they later joined the “Four Yes” referendum initiative. Imre Boross explained the turn as follows:

I went to a gathering in Csongrád. To the people there, Pozsgay was a communist. There was no room for explaining that this was different. That he had shed his skin. We couldn’t explain such things to the masses. On this gathering, I firmly stated: We will elect the President of the Republic before the parliamentary elections! And the masses said: But he cannot be a communist! And cannot be Imre Pozsgay! The next day, An-

137 Interview with Zoltán Pungor, 1997.

tall called me up: “Imre, why don’t you like Pozsgay?” “Because the membership doesn’t like him,” I said.¹³⁸

Boross had serious political ambitions, but his competitors eventually forced him out of the party by the end of 1989.¹³⁹ In spite of the internal grievances and expulsions, the older leaders of the party—who shared a broken life—had enough inhesion so that the party could represent a uniform identity. It was not in the interest of MSZMP or its successor to weaken FKGP, because the smallholders mainly took voters from the other opposition parties.

The lawyer József Torgyán entered first on the side of Boross, and later, replacing him. Torgyán played a minor role in the Roundtable talks, but he soon became popular with the rural membership of the party. Giving passionate anti-communist speeches during the 1990 election campaign, Torgyán managed to attract tens of thousands of new sympathizers to the party. As a result of the successful campaign, FGKP became the third strongest parliamentary party with 12 percent of the votes on party list. The party delegated four members to the Antall government, but only the Minister of Agriculture, Ferenc József Nagy—who was also the president of FKGP for a short period—had participated in the Roundtable talks as well. József Torgyán was party leader for 10 years after 1991, and he became the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in the first Orbán government.

3.2 *THE HUNGARIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY*

With a similar historical background and a long history even more rugged than that of the smallholders, MSZDP became a significant political actor when Hungary was regaining consciousness over the ruins of World War II. Already then, MSZDP was divided between classical social democratic and communist platforms. The representatives of the latter had a serious role in the disillusionment and the communist takeover that soon followed regaining consciousness.¹⁴⁰ After the party merged with the Communist Party in

¹³⁸ Interview with Imre Boross, 1997.

¹³⁹ Boross, *Visszaemlékezés a változó világra*.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Endre Borbély, 1997; with László Dobos, 1997; with Dezső Jaczkó, 1997; with László Ság, 1997.

1948, to create the totalitarian Hungarian Workers Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*, MDP) the paths of the former social democrats radically diverged. Some of those who went on to build a career in the state party became unconditional apologists of the communist system. But there were others who became heavily compromised in the 1950s and still later they were crucial figures in starting the reforms of the party state.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, the “right wing” of the MSZDP—the ones who rejected the party’s defeatism—was even more in the way of the system than the civic parties. Most of them were forced into emigration, and many of those who stayed were incarcerated.

MSZDP was relaunched in January 1989 upon the initiative of four former members.¹⁴² All of them were old men with an eventful history and a political and professional career that had been broken by the communist system. The eldest of them, András Révész became party president. He and the other reorganizers of the party were former officials of the MSZDP, whose life saw its main turning point in 1948. They were all born in working-class families and joined MSZDP in their adolescence. However, the party merger was a tragic break in their career. They became political class aliens in an era when the popular social policy resulted in the enrollment of tens of thousands of young people from the working class to universities. Their marginalization was further enhanced by renewed persecution after 1956. Several of them worked as skilled laborers and could attain low-level administrative positions only later. Others were forced into temporary emigration.¹⁴³

However, the political changes of the 1980s compelled them to act as well.¹⁴⁴ This was facilitated by Rezső Nyers, who turned from social democrat to communist and reform communist, and whose aim was to build bridges between the state party on the one hand and left-wing reform intellectuals and other left-wing groups on the other hand. The old, formerly persecuted social democratic leaders first created the Social Democratic Movement, which was then followed by founding the party. This happened, in part, upon the urging of middle-aged actors who appeared around the great elders. Many of the former had left MSZMP in 1988 and had an ambiv-

141 Particularly Rezső Nyers.

142 Sándor Bácskai, Tibor Baranyai, András Révész, and Imre Takács.

143 Interview with Tibor Baranyai; 1997.

144 Márkus, *Forog a hinta*.

alent relationship to it: they knew that the state party was unable to renew in a social democratic direction, and therefore MSZDP (and personally themselves) had a good opportunity to catch on the democratic left. While the social democratic elders with working-class origins became class aliens in the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” members of the middle-aged generation emerged after 1956 in the period of moderation. Their left-wing views were strongly influenced by the social democratic politics of Western Europe. Yet as they were far from being the losers of the old system, their opposition identity was formed relatively late and only gradually.

Opinion polls conducted in the summer of 1989 showed that the Social Democratic Party had a high level of support. No wonder the state party recognized them as its chief rival, for they were situated on the left. The worry was mutual: the leadership of MSZDP was concerned about MSZMP because the leaders of the state party also claimed to be the heirs of old Hungarian social democracy. They pretended as if the party merger of 1948 had been voluntary on both sides. The communists believed that, while other parties only represent the inevitability of pluralism, MSZDP poses an existential threat to MSZMP.

The “historical wing” of the party which was composed of the older members of the party was concerned about the incoming former MSZMP-members. They were mistrustful toward them because they suspected that they could be undercover agents of the state party.¹⁴⁵ For example, three of the four intellectuals who had been expelled from MSZMP were in the party.¹⁴⁶ A prominent representative of the expelled was seen as a potential chief secretary by several social democrats, and he was also invited to speak at a party conference. According to an older attendee: “The problem was not that he came but the way he came. He said that this party—or rather this germ of a party—had no face yet, but in case he comes he would bring 40 of his friends, the *crème de la crème* of the intellectuals of Pest, and together they would make the party. Then Uncle András Révész stood up, and said ‘Please tell me then, should I put on a morning coat?’”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ The founders were suspicious of the activity of unionist Sándor Csintalan, legal historian Tamás Mihály Révész (the son of the party president), and lawyer György Ruttner.

¹⁴⁶ Political scientist Mihály Bihari as a candidate for chief secretary, László Lengyel as a simple party member, and Zoltán Király who had come from MDF as party president. The only exception was Zoltán Bíró, who was the president of MDF until October 1989.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Pál Benyó, 1997.

This conversation clearly revealed the anti-intellectual stance of the older generation of the party, which became ideological through their anti-communism. In their eyes, the overconfidence of the joining outsider intellectuals meant the intensifying peril of reform communism. Originally, MSZDP was the party of the simple working man who were suspicious of every outsider, that is, not “organic” intellectual. The anecdote also tells us how much the reform communist intellectuals despised and condescended to the old members of the MSZDP.

Members of the older generation vindicated party leadership to themselves on “historical grounds.” They devoted their whole life to social democracy and felt that the result of all their suffering in the previous decades cannot be that the party is now taken over by MSZMP members. More than once, their fear poisoned the party’s atmosphere: they tended to see every ardent youngster ready to help as a communist agent. This does not mean that MSZMP (and later its successor) was not interested in weakening the social democrats, for “the opposition leftism of the social democrats was quite a confounding factor in everyone’s eye.”¹⁴⁸ But it did not mean that either that many of the younger generation were not just as anti-communist.

Yet even some representatives of the historical wing of MSZDP had informal connections to certain communist politicians. This was the case for one of the founders, András Révész, who maintained good relations to certain leaders of the communist party through his family. This raised some eyebrows in the party. Internal conflicts and generational differences led to the formation of the Renewal Platform. Speaking about the older leaders of the party, one of the members of the platform opined that “their intellectual capacity did not allow them to actively participate in the Roundtable talks.”¹⁴⁹ The social democrats could not send representatives to every working committee. The chief negotiator of the party was one of the younger members, István Gaskó, who said that “our idea was a social market economy, which was later adopted by Antall as well.”¹⁵⁰ The escalating debates within the party were later followed by the formation of the Independent Social Democratic Party, which split from MSZDP and was inclined toward reform communism. “Révész once called me up, ‘look,’ he said, ‘I was pre-

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Iván Kaszás, 1997.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with György Fischer, 1997.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with István Gaskó, 1997.

sented with *a fait accompli*, I cannot do anything. I am already old, who should I hand down this party to?' He didn't really believe that the inflow of reform communists was what Anna Kéthly had asked him to do back then."¹⁵¹

The breaking of the unity of MSZDP was beneficial to MSZP, which entered the parliament as the only left-wing party. Deepening debates, the lack of coordination, and an unsuccessful campaign eventually led to the electoral failure of MSZP in 1990.¹⁵² As a result of the failure, the leaders and negotiators of MSZDP left the party in 1990–1992. A retiring party founder said that “it ended when the elder gifted the party away, gave it to Zoltán Király.”¹⁵³ Later the party was “bought up” by the former state-party minister, a rich capitalist László Kapolyi, who represented the social democrats alone in the parliament, as a member of the MSZP group.

3.3 THE HUNGARIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY

The Roundtable talks were also attended by the Hungarian People's Party (MNP), which was composed of intellectuals partially occupied with agriculture and partially, with the populist literature. It was reorganized as the legal successor of the National Peasants' Party which had been founded in 1938. That party was created by the middle-class intellectual group of the populist writers of the interwar period¹⁵⁴ with the aim of representing the destitute layers of peasants. The ideologues of the Peasants' Party believed that, instead of the dominance of the state and the market, the key to future Hungarian social development was cooperatives. Although the movement had a profound cultural impact on the public life of Hungary, its intellectual character prevented it from becoming truly influential in the political sphere. Its popular ideology was looking for a third way between the overly superficial and individualist societies of Western Europe and the overly collectivist Soviet Union. The communist collaborator wing of the party interpreted the latter in a way that, accepting the obligate axiom of dictatorship,

¹⁵¹ Interview with Pál Benyó, 1997.

¹⁵² In 1990, MSZDP got 3.55 percent of the votes which was below the electoral threshold. In 1994, it received only 1 percent.

¹⁵³ Interview with Sándor Bácskai, 1997.

¹⁵⁴ The left-wing of the Peasants' Party was represented by József Darvas and Ferenc Erdei (who made a compromise with the communists), its center was represented by Péter Veres, and its right-wing was represented by Imre Kovács. They were all writers and sociologists.

those points should be found far from politics which could put a human face on the system and make it more habitable.

Representatives of this view ran, albeit with some kinks, high-profile careers from the beginning of the 1960s. They attained positions at the helm of cooperatives and state farms, in ministry apparatuses and the leadership of the HNF. The function of these was precisely to satisfy the need for public activity of some people without granting any opportunity of genuine political action. While the party members who resisted the communists acquired experience of the discriminatory methods of the latter, the collaborators were taught by their own example that it is worth taking the odium of being “fellow travelers” for progress in smaller issues.¹⁵⁵ Thus, members of the Peasants’ Party in the HNF did not disrupt the system from the inside—as did the reform communists—but rather they build it from the outside. However, when the system did start to disintegrate, they saw the time was ripe to act as an independent political force. The first step was the formation of Veres Péter Society with the help of the HNF and its general secretary, Imre Pozsgay. One of their important institutional basis was the Research Institute of Agricultural Economics, formerly founded by Ferenc Erdei. The Institute was led by agricultural economist János Marton, who became the first president of the relaunched party in 1989.

In 1989, the leadership of the MNP was comprised of the elderly members of the Peasants’ Party and a small circle of middle-aged intellectuals who also belonged to the broader circle of Imre Pozsgay. Most of them were born in Budapest and they were first-generation intellectuals. In the 1970s, they became members of the communist party as young professionals in their twenties. Their relationship to the power was conciliatory. They formulated their criticism not in the language of politics but rather as cultural criticism, which was paternalistically soothed by this or that more emphatic representative of the political leadership. As public educators, sociologists, and journalists they were primarily interested in the analysis and organization of local communities, edited related journals¹⁵⁶ (from here came the secretary general of the party, Csaba Varga). Accordingly, their criticism concerned local social relations instead of the whole political system.

¹⁵⁵ Benkő, *A magyar népi mozgalom almanachja*.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Csaba Varga, 1997.

The National Peasants' Party was relaunched in 1989 as the Hungarian People's Party to drop its historical ballast, that is, the charge of collaboration with the communists. Regarding the decision, party president János Márton argued that "let this be a party which genuinely represents true civic values. What's first for a true citizen is to have existential security. [. . .] So they have no boss. They cannot be ordered, fired, they don't need to bow or be afraid for their job. [. . .] The other sign of a citizen, which is very important, that they think in several generations. Thus, they serve the longevity of the nation. Such thinking is manifested in the fact that they always subordinate consumption to growth. [. . .] In my interpretation, the People's Party would have been the political venue of the real Hungarian national citizens. [. . .] The layer I was expecting the most was the agricultural intellectuals."¹⁵⁷ Instead, the party was divided over internal conflicts: first, the cleavage between the former collaborators and the persecuted; second, the political disagreement of leftists and rightists; and third, the generational gap between the older and younger members (the former had no political ambitions anymore, but the latter had).

The party had a relatively unimportant role during the Roundtable talks,¹⁵⁸ and politically it appeared as the sister party of MDF.¹⁵⁹ The negotiators of the MNP received no instructions from the party leadership: "What they say was 'go' and 'do it.' 'You are an expert anyway, let's not waste time.'"¹⁶⁰ "Party discipline, we never even uttered this word. There was no party discipline whatsoever. Everyone said what they wanted, every time, and no one was ever held accountable."¹⁶¹

During the economic negotiations, the party tried to represent a third-way policy, which would have meant giving the lands to the peasants while running the agricultural cooperatives as professional centers.¹⁶² With regard to agrarian transformation, the party represented the interests of the peasants of the cooperatives because they found that "national poverty appeared

¹⁵⁷ Interview with János Márton, 1997.

¹⁵⁸ In the EKA, MNP was represented by László Kónya and the secretary general of the party, Csaba Varga.

¹⁵⁹ This perception is further enforced by the fact that, when János Márton resigned the party presidency at the end of 1989, the new president of MNP became the writer Gyula Fekete, who had left the MDF for the MNP.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with György Matúz, 1997.

¹⁶¹ Interview with János Marton, 1997.

¹⁶² Interview with László S. Hegedűs, 1997.

primarily in the rural area, where the people drifted below subsistence level.”¹⁶³ They wanted to give state property to the primary owners and then privatize the decentralized wealth, preferring owners from the “civil society” in the process. However, other political actors rejected this slow method of privatization. Accordingly, the third-way ideas were swept off the negotiating table by the organizations of EKA, in agreement with the MSZMP.

The appearance of MNP was just a passing moment in the history of the regime change. The party could not attain one percent of the votes in the first free elections. After the failure, the members and leaders of the party scattered, some of their experts joined MDF, and the party ceased its activities.

3.4 *THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE’S PARTY*

Among the historical parties, the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) was the last one to be relaunched, even though it is only this party where we can actually speak about historical continuity.¹⁶⁴ This apparent discrepancy stemmed from the party’s peculiar, subcultural character. Those who relaunched KDNP were inspired by their family background, and therefore they aimed not simply at the reanimation and representation of the party but of the institutionally independent catholic world as well.

That world existed in Hungary before 1948. It included student unions, folk high schools, the Hungarian Social People’s Movement, and the Christian Democratic (later: Democratic) People’s Party, which had grown out of movement. The system that these organizations comprised was almost completely dissolved by the state socialist dictatorship after the year of turning (for example, the many church schools were brought under state supervision). However, the Catholic Church could retain its the institutional independence, even though they had to pay for this with questionable gestures to the regime. And while the representatives of the Catholic Church stayed away from the starting opposition initiatives of the 1980s, they were able to broadcast a worldview that was markedly different from the official ideolo-

¹⁶³ Interview with Gyula Fábán, 1997.

¹⁶⁴ KDNP regarded itself as a successor of the Democratic People’s Party which had existed as an active parliamentary party in the 1940s, featuring people such as István Barankovics, Ferenc Matheovics, and József Ugrin. Interview with Sándor Karcsey, 1997.

gy.¹⁶⁵ The political moderation of the 1980s allowed them to relaunch their church organizations, which was also helped by the Patriotic People's Front led by Pozsgay. Yet, despite the blossoming of Christian-spirited public life, its organizers stayed away from the more and more active opposition movements. They operated in the nonpolitical segments of civil society, such as the Association of Large Families, the Association of Pensioners, the St. Stephen Association, and around the legal catholic journal called *Új Ember* (New Man). With the leadership of Imre Pozsgay, the HNF put a roof above these organizations, and therefore Pozsgay both co-opted them into the system and broadened the boundaries of the system.

The turning point was the creation of Márton Áron Society in 1988. It involved not only some extremely cautious former party officials but also middle-aged intellectuals who leaned toward Christian democratic ideology. The Society had an interconfessional basis. Among its members there were several Calvinists and future members of the MDF. Afterward, the younger members who sensed the acceleration of political changes convinced the hesitant veterans to start relaunching the party, which took place in March 1989. This way, two generations were represented in the relaunched KDNP. Members of the older generation had participated in the short period of livening political life after World War II. Their whole life was devoted to the Church and the Christian socialist organizations that appeared around it. Many of them found refuge here when the communist turn pushed them to the margins of society. Members of the younger generation were born after the World War; they could only know the meaning of Christian democracy from history books. All of them attended Catholic high school and being in a symbolically repressed position, developed strong bonds of solidarity.

Seemingly, a worldview that was able to encompass various generations provided firm foundations to the renaissance of Christian democracy. By 1989, however, it turned out that ideological unity had covered different political ambitions. By the late relaunch of KDNP, the Opposition Roundtable (EKA) had already existed, and for many people within the party it seemed natural to join. But the older members opposed this: they argued that the party had not been organized enough, and therefore it should focus on itself. They believed that their party does not have to apply terms like "opposition,"

165 Enyedi, *Politika a kereszt jegyében*, 74.

“right,” or “left,” but instead they can create a broad social unity on Christian worldview and pragmatic political activity. And to create such a party, it is much more important (theoretically) to develop the party organization and its pillar organizations than forming the political arena. “Within KDNP, it was a question of serious debate whether we should or shouldn’t join EKA. There were some groups of mainly older members who were afraid for the purity of the party or the movement, so to speak, should it get involved in politics. Which is quite ridiculous, that a political party should live by not getting involved in politics.”¹⁶⁶

Eventually, representatives of the younger generation were able to make joining to the EKA happen. Yet the party was represented in the negotiations by members of the older generation (Tibor Füzessy, lawyer¹⁶⁷ and György Szakolczai, economist), and thus it still took a rather moderate position. The lack of cadres of the party was palpable in the working committees, it was difficult to fill up the positions given to them. “It was very typical to the whole thing that almost everyone was unprepared. Like drowning people, we were gasping for air.”¹⁶⁸ Probably one of the reasons for the moderate position of KDNP was that too fast transformation was just as unfavorable to the reorganization of catholic-Christian political subculture as political backlash. Another reason was that KDNP was afraid of backlash within the state party and regarded the reform communist Pozsgay as the key to the success of peaceful transition. “The way we—and not only we—saw the near future was that the first elections are going to be won by the socialists. This is proved by the lot of two-thirds rules which were included in the version of the constitution which was proclaimed on October 23, 1989. [. . .] The whole of EKA wanted to tie the hands of MSZP.”¹⁶⁹ The leaders of KDNP opined that “the reform would be only half-finished until the elections, but it has to be continued. And with a basically socialist parliament only Pozsgay could provide some guarantee for the continuation of the reforms.”¹⁷⁰ This position was detected by others in the EKA as well.

166 Interview with György Szakolczai, 1997.

167 At the beginning of the talks, Füzessy worked at the Chief Prosecutor’s Office of Budapest, where his appearance was criticized. He decided to quit and take on a political role. Interview with Tibor Füzessy, 1997.

168 Interview with László Pallós, 1997.

169 Interview with Tibor Füzessy, 1997.

170 Interview with Tibor Füzessy, 1997.

An opposition participant said: “I noticed that KDNP, the MNP and in some cases the BZSBT practically relayed the Pozsgay-type MSZMP position within EKA. Be it the question of whether the word socialism should be included in the constitution, or the question of whether there should be direct presidential elections,”¹⁷¹ which would have been favorable to Pozsgay at that time.

In terms of the economy, KDNP argued for transition to social market economy on an anti-monetarist basis. Some of its representatives also opined that the country should not repay its national debt. “As far as the economic and financial processes are concerned, we basically continued what had been started under Kádár. In the spirit of monetarism, based on the proposals and often the orders of the World Bank and the IMF. Practically, the regime change was a regime change only to the extent of the reorganization of ownership relations, but as far as the macroeconomic system goes, we continued what had been started.”¹⁷²

Joining the Roundtable talks was favorable to KDNP because this way the party achieved countrywide recognition even before its official relaunch. Officially, KDNP had never been disbanded, but practically at the time of the Roundtable talks it was just an organizing society of intellectuals. Its political existence hinged on the fact that the member organizations of EKA took it in. According to one of the organizers, “there were few of us, and there was little energy for organizing the party. [. . .] We were very late, and somehow we had to make that up.”¹⁷³ It is telling that one of the negotiators of MSZMP was honestly surprised when one of his old colleagues introduced himself as a representative of the Christian Democratic People’s Party. In the end, KDNP was relaunched in September 1989, and Sándor Keresztes was elected party president. Starting at a disadvantage, the party managed to get into the parliament in the 1990 elections—as the smallest party—and it was included in the coalition government as well.

The success had several reasons. As opposed to the smallholders and the social democrats, the party was not divided over serious internal conflicts. They were more-or-less able to manage generational conflicts, and the historical name of the party alone was enough to attract hundreds of thousands.

¹⁷¹ Interview with László Kövér, 1997.

¹⁷² Interview with Ernő Rozgonyi, 1997.

¹⁷³ Interview with Tibor Füzeszy, 1997.

Another important factor was the decision of the party leadership not to make KDNP a denominational party, keeping it open to Calvinists as well as seculars.¹⁷⁴ Finally, the support of the Catholic Church and the direct external political environment of the party was important, too, because—as opposed to the case of the social democrats—parties with similar ideologies were not interested in weakening the KDNP.

Out of the 1989 negotiators of KDNP, Tibor Füzessy became a minister,¹⁷⁵ while the other participant later became party president.¹⁷⁶

3.5 THE BAJCSY-ZSILINSZKY FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY

The Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society (BZSBT) was founded by people born between the two World Wars, who first entered the political scene in the middle of the 1940s. They represented mainly national and leftist ideas, mainly as smallholders, social democrats, or communists. Most of them were born to bourgeois middle-class families, many of them abroad. As a result of their different family background from the mainstream of their generation, they were soon disillusioned about the new system.

The Society was founded in the beginning of 1986, by intellectuals who belonged to the older generation and whose career was broken after 1956.¹⁷⁷ BZSBT became politically active with the support of the HNF as an organization for culture, preserving folk traditions, and protecting minorities. Its main aim was to contribute to the resuscitation of national political traditions, and to call attention to the problems of Hungarians abroad. In the view of BSZBT, the constitutive element of the civil society to be organized was national identity. Its activities were supported by the Soros Foundation.¹⁷⁸ The Society organized several events with success. At first, the People's Front provided venue for their events,¹⁷⁹ but later they organized their meetings at the Institution for the Blind, the Petőfi Hall, and the Jurta Theater. The

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Sándor Keresztes, 1997.

¹⁷⁵ Tibor Füzessy was Minister of Civilian Intelligence Services in 1992–1994 in the Antall and Boross governments.

¹⁷⁶ György Giczay was the president of KDNP in 1995–2001.

¹⁷⁷ The most famous ones were the engineer István Domonkos, the librarian László Morvay, and historian Károly Vigh, and the lawyer Zsolt Zétényi. Interview with István Domonkos, 1997.

¹⁷⁸ Bossányi, *Szólampróba*, 13.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with István Echter, 1997.

peak of the BZSBT's activity was its leading role in organizing and conducting the June 1988 demonstration against the leveling of villages in Romania, where it was helped by its civil connections¹⁸⁰ as well as the good relations it had maintained with Imre Pozsgay.

In this group we could find the president of the Society, Károly Vigh. Already in the beginning of the 1980s, he got in contact with Pozsgay and the populist intellectual circle that supported him. He had a long-standing friendship with József Antall as well. In the beginning, BZSBT was an extremely open group, its members included MSZMP members as well as people who would later become smallholders, Fidesz or SZDSZ members. However, the Society's strongest tie which eventually developed into an alliance was with the MDF. It tried to fulfill a bridging role between the reform communists and the MDF.

During the economic negotiations, BZSBT argued that privatization should be public and conducted in a transparent procedure.¹⁸¹ In the issue of agriculture, "by our proposal, we reached a consensus that the cooperatives do not have to be broken up, anyone can quit if they want, but the wealth must be specified, and the land must have value. [...] Back then, EKA looked at cooperatives as Stalinist rudiments which need to be reorganized by Western principles."¹⁸² Finally, in social policy BZSBT tried to put the long-term issues of family supporting, child rearing, and educational policy¹⁸³ on the agenda.

BZSBT had no ambitions to become an independent party. In December 1989 the general meeting of the members decided, upon the president's proposal that BZSBT would not turn into a party because it had fulfilled its political role. Later they made an agreement with MDF about political cooperation.¹⁸⁴ After the Roundtable talks, the members of the Society scattered; only one of their negotiators¹⁸⁵ made it to the parliament on the party list of the MDF.

180 Here we must mention the Petőfi Cultural and Traditionalist Association of Szentendre and the Széchenyi Casino. Bossányi, *Szólampróba*, 15–17.

181 Interview with Ferenc Kováts, 1997.

182 Interview with Dezső Pálffy, 1997.

183 Interview with Ákos Haraszti, 1997.

184 Interview with Károly Vigh, 1997.

185 Zsolt Zétényi.

4. THE “MASS PARTY OF PROFESSIONALS”: THE MSZMP

On one side, there was the Opposition Roundtable composed of the dissident movements of the 1980s, the democratic opposition, and the representatives of the various groups of the short-lived semi-democracy of post-World War II Hungary. On the other side, there was the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP). According to the given political division, this party in the summer of 1989—as the communist state party, formally still in a monopoly position—represented the declining system vis-à-vis the more and more popular forces of the opposition.

The MSZMP fulfilled the function of a state party for decades in the Kádár regime. Despite its name it was not really the party of the workers. It was more the mass party of professionals with university degrees and the elite party of the workers, creating an unusual conglomerate of professional intellectual politicians. One of the most important cleavages within the MSZMP was generational, dividing the party into old cadres and “Young Turks.” The old cadres were not intellectuals, albeit some of their representatives of a newer vintage followed the expectations of the era and called themselves economists or historians. Those who got a degree among them typically acquired it at party institutions (such as the Lenin Institute, or later the MSZMP's Political College) or in the Soviet Union.

The inflow of intellectuals in the party started in the second half of the 1960s, which was related to the new economic mechanism introduced in 1968. Most of them wanted to be enrolled not to become politicians themselves but to have a smoother way in career, but to some younger intellectuals the KISZ was a springboard and offered an opportunity to enter the higher echelons of power as well. The communist party leadership preferred the ideologically less sophisticated technical intellectuals, and that was how young engineers¹⁸⁶ could ascend to the first line of the ruling elite.¹⁸⁷ Those who could not get that high belonged to the techno-bureaucracy, which was obviously more qualified than the old cadre apparatus. As politicians, they showed absolutely no sign of critical attitude and they supported the Kádár system until May 1988.

¹⁸⁶ György Fejti, Csaba Hátori, and László Maróthy.

¹⁸⁷ Nyíró et al., *Segédkönyv a Politikai Bizottság tanulmányozásához*.

At this time, however, the communist party was no longer the party of the generation of János Kádár. Those who—as young, uneducated, or party-educated cadres—flowed into the Hungarian Working People’s Party (MDP) on the turn of the 1940s and 1950s had become aged by the mid-1980s. Their places were taken, both in the central and the local levels, by the generation of the 1960s and 1970s, or the “second generation.” This generation was fundamentally different from the first one. Particularly, it was ideologically less and less communist; its “communist” position became a simple prerequisite of ascendance or upward mobility in an organizational sense. But it also happened that some of them received their diploma earlier than their party membership card. Simply put, the first generation was puritan, uneducated, and ideological, whereas the second one was careerist, educated, and pragmatic. The first generation saw itself (in the beginning) as revolutionary of everyday life as well, while the second generation valued professional expertise alongside political loyalty. The first generation hated capitalism, bourgeoisie democracy, and the West; the second generation looked at these with envy. Their lifestyles also differed: in its free time, the first generation hunted, the second generation played tennis.

In May 1988, Kádár was overthrown by a Károly Grósz-led coalition of occasion, which involved both the old-style communists who nevertheless were willing to sacrifice some old taboos on the altar of getting power; former party bureaucrats from KISZ who felt danger and wanted to leave the sinking ship as soon as possible; marginalized reform communists; as well as younger pragmatic careerists who mainly had degrees in economists and represented the values of economic efficiency. Leadership change happened under the banner of “reform” of obscure content.¹⁸⁸

Imre Pozsgay played a key role in gradual liberalization. He achieved significant political breakthrough when he cited the conclusion of the committee, he had tasked with investigating 1956 and called the revolution a popular revolt.¹⁸⁹ By this, he created such a situation within the state party in February 1989 that the party leadership accepted the introduction of multiparty system. The technocratic and ideological reformers who had been emerging within the MSZMP needed Károly Grósz as a head of government

¹⁸⁸ Schöpflin et al. “Leadership Change and Reform in Hungary.”

¹⁸⁹ Berend, *A történelem – ahogyan megéltém*.

and general party secretary only until he neutralized the supporters of the old system within the party.

Miklós Németh, who followed Grósz in the position of prime minister, justified his competence not only by having a group of good professional intellectuals but also by that *he himself* turned from a professional intellectual into a politician. For an outside observer, Németh was not as unlike his intellectual experts as Grósz was, who was proud that “we did the fifties” and during an American trip on July 1988 called the opposition members who had protested for democracy and the proper burial of Imre Nagy a month before “fascists.”¹⁹⁰ In November 1988, he threatened with the danger of coming “white terror,” and a few months later he threatened to introduce an economic state of emergency.¹⁹¹ Contrary to him, Miklós Németh wanted to detach his “expert” government from MSZMP and therefore to save the professional intellectuals turned politicians from the stigma of cooperating with old-style communists.

The emergence of ideological critical intellectuals in the MSZMP was related to the organization of reform circles. The reform circles were formed on the turn of 1988–1989 and involved mainly rural professional intellectuals who felt betrayed by, and turned against, the politics of the party leadership, realizing they had been on the losing side. Their only option was the radical renewal of the party, as well as the “liquidation of the structures of the Stalinist model” in the spirit of democratic socialism.¹⁹² An early statement presents the ideas of the initiators of the movement faithfully: “The reform circle would be a political debate forum strengthening horizontal relations within and the movement character of the party. It would operate unprompted, independently from the party hierarchy, so not as a commit-

190 The interview with Károly Grósz was published in the July 11, 1988, issue of *Newsweek*. According to Grósz, the protest on June 16 was “incitement toward fascist propaganda, chauvinism, and irredentism.” The representatives of the Network of Free Initiatives called attention to the untrue statements of Grósz and added: “It is not a new phenomenon that a communist general party secretary calls the proponents of democracy fascist inciters. However, now that general party secretary did it who had called himself a devout supporter of economic and political reforms for a year.” (Statement by János Dénes, János Kis, György Litván, Imre Mécs, Sándor Rácz, and Jenő Rónay.)

191 Grósz referred to the horror of white terror on November 29, 1989, during the party congress organized in Budapest Sportcsarnok. He mentioned the potential introduction of an economic state of emergency on the last congress of KISZ, in April 1989. Kalmár, “Modellváltástól a rendszerváltásig”; Ripp, *Rendszerváltás Magyarországon*.

192 Ágh, Gécz, and Sipos, *Rendszerváltók a baloldalon*, 55.

tee. Its aim is to collect and amplify reform ideas and influence decisions, as well as to join the vibrant political processes which started in the society.”¹⁹³

We may take two typical actors from the starting group. One of them, Imre Keserű was a high school teacher in Szentes. He voiced radical criticism of the party, by which he marginalized himself so much that he did not even enter the Hungarian Socialist Party in October 1989. Later, from December 1991 he was among the speakers of the Democratic Charta. He was the representative of the radical, non-compromising, “pure” movement standpoint. The other actor, József Géczi, was the adjunct of scientific socialism at the University of Szeged. He advocated more moderate, more realizable, reformist “people’s democratic” socialism. From this standpoint, he became a member of parliament of MSZP in Spring 1990.¹⁹⁴

The group echoed the views those reform political scientists had held a few years earlier who had oriented toward democratic socialism and social democracy.¹⁹⁵ However, the reform circles quickly radicalized politically, and in the April 1989 reform meeting in Kecskemét they saw little chance for the internal democratization of the party and most of them would have preferred a party split. But as Pozsgay had been convinced not to do this by then, the disappointed intellectuals of the reform circles focused their efforts on gathering an extraordinary party congress. By the summer of 1989, the events had accelerated to such a degree that the victory of the reform circle movement seemed probable, causing the inflow of more and more conformist party members to their ranks. Finally, by the reform circle movement—under the name of Reform Alliance—achieved a breakthrough on the October party congress, the group had already been so diluted that many reform circle intellectuals became disillusioned precisely by that victory.

MSZMP was represented in the Roundtable talks by its second generation. Moreover, the reason the negotiations could happen in the first place was that the party was dominated by this pragmatic, relatively reformist, more skeptic generation.¹⁹⁶ Members of the second generation needed party membership for social mobility because they also came from below, from poor circumstances, and their cultural capital was not enough for attain-

193 Ágh, Géczi, and Sipos, *Rendszerváltók a baloldalon*, 56.

194 Géczi, “Egy elfeljtett mozgalom.”

195 Such as Mihály Bihari, Elemér Hankiss, and Lajos Mátyás Szabó.

196 O’Neil, *Revolution from Within*.

ing an intellectual elite status. However, party membership was a way to cut the long road to political or economic elite. By social roots, they were not unlike the first generation; the difference was that they could already have university education, and their expertise was valued by the party as well. The top-down manipulated regime-changing reformers of the 1950s gave way to modernizing reformers who were supported only halfheartedly and with mixed feelings by the Kádarian establishment. The decay of the regime further facilitated their career because the leadership believed that it would be the expertise of the second generation that would save the system.

The negotiating delegation of MSZMP was recruited mainly from three places: the party center; ministry apparatuses; the secretariat of the Council of Ministers and Minister of State Imre Pozsgay. Accordingly, the members of the political working committees were selected György Fejti, a member of MSZMP's Central Committee who represented the party center; Imre Pozsgay, who represented the government; and the leaders of the Ministry of Justice. First, delegates of the party center could be found in every working committee. Their role was to supervise ministerial delegates and enforce the political strategy approved by the party leadership and defined by Fejti within the MSZMP delegation. Their role was similar to that of political commissars in the military. True, the party was already in such a condition then that even the majority of these "heelers" did not identify completely with the role assigned to them, and often they favored professional debates over political ones. When it came to debates, the delegates Fejti selected from the party apparatus usually advocated harder positions than other members of the MSZMP delegation. Nevertheless, there were no delegates, not even among those of Fejti who represented the position of the party's hardliners, because those circles were against even the fact that negotiations were started with the opposition.

The apparatchiks mainly played the role of herald, controller, or messenger between the party center and the participants of the negotiations. As one of them later said: "Here I had, to be honest, the least favorable position because here I was the only 'political commissar', but as that couldn't really be maintained in those circumstances, we sort of slipped through the fingers of the political leaders in the sense that reports were usually reports after the fact."¹⁹⁷ But one could find even among the people of the party center some

¹⁹⁷ Interview with István György, 1997.

who accepted the task of negotiations as a professional task, and they realized only during the talks that he had been sent to the front line of politics. This speaks volumes about the decades of the party state, where MSZMP in its monopolistic position acted, unsurprisingly, not as a political but as a directing-ruling organization. It gathered its political apparatus accordingly, consisting of loyal people with worker or peasant origins, coming from first generation intellectual families, knowing public administration, and having never gone abroad. "Had I not been so naïve as I was, I could've suspected that this wouldn't be just professional. Suddenly my mandate slipped to an entirely different road. [. . .] I just found myself in the middle of the negotiations. I'm not saying I regret it—just I wouldn't have wanted to do such things."¹⁹⁸

The negotiators from the party center accepted the idea of free elections, too, which ultimately guaranteed the success of the negotiations. However, they didn't think that they would lose the elections. "Rather, their aim with these negotiations was that, 'okay, let's blow off some steam, and somehow we would come to an agreement', but it was implicitly added that, 'but an agreement where we don't lose power in the process.'"¹⁹⁹ They grossly overestimated the power of the state party in the summer of 1989, many of them believing that MSZMP could remain in government with around 40 percent of the votes. But at that time not even the parties of EKA thought that MSZMP or its successor would end up below 15 percent. They thought that increasing the number of laws requiring two-thirds majority would be the way to rein the future government.²⁰⁰

The negotiating delegation of the state party was composed, secondly, of the bureaucrats and experts coming from the ministries. They were the numerical majority. Paradoxically, the party apparatus was underrepresented within the MSZMP delegation. The leadership of the Ministry of Justice complained that as an independent actor it was crowded out of the process of constitution-making. Eventually, the ministerial delegates of the MSZMP delegation were selected by deputy minister Géza Kilényi, who remembered the situation as follows: ". . . it was like a slap in our face that, from one

¹⁹⁸ Interview with István György, 1997.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Mátyás Budzsáklia, 1997.

²⁰⁰ The number of laws requiring two-thirds majority was diminished by the MDF-SZDSZ agreement, but it did not eliminate the inbuilt system of breaks. Later, this made governing the country more difficult.

moment to the other, the government as such would disappear [. . .], that the government would be there in the negotiations as an independent party, because *de facto* the government was already an independent politics-forming factor at that time. [. . .] This was humiliating to us on the one hand, and on the other hand it was regression compared to the earlier situation.”²⁰¹

As opposed to the volunteers of the Opposition Roundtable, the ministerial delegates were told to attend the Roundtable talks basically as part of their job: their minister ordered them to sit behind the name tag saying MSZMP. Their presence, therefore, was the indirect presence of the government as well. The attitude of these delegates was usually apolitical, they had been socialized to be executors, and as a result, they found the politicization of their professional role unpleasant. “I had never dreamt of a political career, and didn’t really feel like it, I’ve always wanted to be a professional, an expert.”²⁰² Another participant said the same: “. . . I’m not a political animal. At least I’ve never wanted to be a politician, I’ve always behaved and done my job in a way that I am a professional. We did discuss this, and we were guaranteed that we wouldn’t make statements there in political issues, only represent a professional position.”²⁰³ Later, many of them complained that the members of the opposition simply called them “communists,” lumping them together with the others. One of them remembered this as follows: “I joined not the MSZMP, I joined the government; what am I doing in the negotiating delegation of MSZMP? [. . .] I was sitting there at the table, but I basically felt like a cactus that had simply been put there. [. . .] From the first moment I asked myself the question what I was doing there.”²⁰⁴

The third and smallest group was composed of individuals who had ties to the circles of Miklós Németh, the head of the government or Imre Pozsgay, the Minister of State: that is, who belonged to the secretariat of the Council of Ministers or the Minister of State, respectively. These people were the loudest to claim that they had not been ordered to the negotiations but they were “commissioned” to represent MSZMP, so participation was not mandatory for them. It was typical of them to be younger than average, and they followed the pragmatist-reformist political line. Later, they

201 Interview with Géza Kilényi, 1997.

202 Interview with Ádám Forgács, 1997.

203 Interview with Edit Fluckné Papácsy, 1997.

204 Interview with Géza Kilényi, 1997.

were able to interpret their role from the outside, with irony. As one of them recollected: "Without a doubt it was problematic for me, because sometimes that funny situation occurred that people who had been my colleagues yesterday were now explaining to me from the other end of the table the hideous effects of Bolshevism."²⁰⁵

From the negotiators of economic issues, many of them had professional relationship to the economists delegated by Liga, MDF, and SZDSZ. Both groups originated from the reform economists of the generation of 1968. The people who sat at opposite sides of the table were those who had abandoned the state party in time and those who had not.²⁰⁶ According to the recollections of an MSZMP delegate, the opposition "sometimes blustered that we dispose over pieces of information. I felt that this was a make-believe because those who were sitting in front of us were at least as informed as we were. Let me just say that one or two people from the opposition were simply involved in the work of the advisory bodies of MSZMP, and if they couldn't acquire some hot data otherwise, there they could've acquired them."²⁰⁷ However, this was true only of the reform economists who negotiated under the banner of the opposition, because the economic participants of the historical parties of EKA had not been let in the circles of late Kádarian technocracy.

At the political negotiations, the delegates of MSZMP were the closest to the organizations of the Third Side and the farthest from the radical wing of the opposition. However, the situation in the economic negotiations was reversed: in economic questions, MSZMP was closer to the delegation of EKA than to the representatives of the Third Side. Several MSZMP delegates we interviewed underlined that MSZMP and the opposition fundamentally agreed in economic issues, which was partially true but also contained a bit of *ex post* self-justification from the negotiators of the state party: "The basic position was that there were no substantial differences between the opposition and our side. [. . .] As the Hungarian economy requires a great deal of capital, there is no other way than privatization. However, this was almost unacceptable to the Third Side."²⁰⁸ While the MSZMP and the dominant par-

²⁰⁵ Interview with István Tömpe, 1997.

²⁰⁶ Bozóki, "Intellectuals and Democratization in Hungary."

²⁰⁷ Interview with Tamás Draviczy, 1997.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Sándor Czirják, 1997.

ties of EKA wanted market economy, the delegates of the Third Side argued for various reformed “people’s democratic” or third-way model of socialism.

The MSZMP delegates to the political and the economic negotiations saw their own roles in a different way, and they also had different opinions about the historical significance of the negotiations. The ministerial delegates of the political negotiations, who were mainly young lawyers and “legal technicians” working on legislative preparations, experienced the talks as the great opportunity of their life, and they are glad to recall it. One of them said:

It really was a sublime experience, that these Roundtable talks took place within the walls of the Parliament. Experiencing this at the age of 31 was a truly great experience, both personally and professionally. [...] Simply the fact that one can actively participate in the preparation of those momentous laws that indeed created the machinery of the rule of law—this is something that to me as a professional, a lawyer, will always be unforgettable.²⁰⁹

In the view of another participant, “it was totally clear that what needed to be prepared was not a revolutionary process, and every extremism had to be excluded from this process. This was guaranteed. [...] It was obvious that civil rights must be granted to everyone, regardless of their earlier political behavior, and not only now but also later. [...] These were changes of world historical magnitudes, after all.”²¹⁰

Other ministerial delegates tried to distance themselves from the state party in their recollections. One of them said, “it was quite a surprise that the government-appointed delegation was put in the delegation of MSZMP. This created a conflictual situation for two reasons. First, it created a problem a conscience, that now who is who and how represents what. Second, that previously there had been no coordination between the delegates of the government and the MSZMP.”²¹¹ As the negotiations proceeded, the role of the delegates of the party center continually declined, and the influence of ministerial delegates increased. “We consistently identified as govern-

209 Interview with József Kajdi, 1997.

210 Interview with József Fehér, 1997.

211 Interview with Zoltán Tóth, 1997.

mental experts, still they called us MSZMP. It didn't feel well. [...] What I thought was not that I want to preserve this power structure to the MSZMP, not being an MSZMP member."²¹² The growing importance of professional aspects was not surprising, considering that the last phase of the negotiations required making bills that can be submitted to the parliament. The dominance of the professional element in the delegation of MSZMP also meant that the working committees focused mainly on professional, and not ideological, issues, which also facilitated the emergence of an atmosphere of mutual trust among the parties. The officials saw the political situation more clearly than the politicians of the party state.

It was absolutely clear to us that at the end of the transition we would definitely leave our position because our worldview, basic principles, and the resentment against us meant there wouldn't be a place for us. [...] So we weren't led by any motivation like paving the way for our own future, therefore we didn't have to give up our views.²¹³

However, the role of the ministerial experts delegated by the MSZMP looked different through the glasses of the party center. György Fejti remembered, "we had full mandate to determine the composition of the expert delegation, this depended exclusively on our own decision. Several excellent experts from public administration were involved in the work, in a lot of working committees. Later, this had the amazing 'advantage' that these people cooperated with EKA, as it soon turned out."²¹⁴ By the passage of time, professional connections and the need to survive proved to be more important than party loyalty. All those public administration experts who were not "paving the way for their own future" and only expressed their professional opinion eventually found their place in the new system as well.²¹⁵

The political negotiations had serious importance. For the new constitution, electoral and party law were formulated at the Roundtable negotiations, and that is where political agreement was made about them. We cannot say

²¹² Interview with Péter Szalay, 1997.

²¹³ Interview with József Fehér, 1997.

²¹⁴ Interview with György Fejti, 1997.

²¹⁵ József Antall selected many of his colleagues from those who had sat at the other side of the table during the negotiations (József Kajdi, György Szilvássy, Tibor Bogdán, Edit Fluckné Papácsy, and others).

the same about the economic negotiations, where the two main negotiating parties preferred stalling to decisions. The MSZMP participants who came from public administration felt their presence a nuisance, unnecessary at the economic negotiations; many of them had a bad opinion of the knowledge of their opposition negotiating partners, sometimes they looked down on them. They were those who were called the “Dimitrov Street boys” or the late Kádarian technocracy. Some of them made gestures that distanced them from the role of representing the MSZMP.

According to a participant of the economic negotiations, “the less significant representatives of the opposition achieved that there would be economic negotiations, the MSZMP government which had lost ground politically but really pulled off some economic decisions that can be seen important wanted to emphasize how much more important that was, so people would focus on that. So they found each other [. . .] but I felt that this was an insignificant place of history. The character of the negotiations was akin to those discussions we had had for two hours every day at the Financial Research Institute and with friends.”²¹⁶ Another participant said, “all of knew the personal circle of reform economists. Only earlier it wasn’t the case that I sit at one side and you at the other, but it was a debate in the circle of economists.”²¹⁷ A third recollection opines,

Now it is an historical fact that the economic dimension of the whole trilateral negotiation was secondary. Reform economists were somewhat characterized by regulatory illusionism. This gave way, after the regime change, to a legal illusion that good laws need to be created, the rule of law must be created, we need a law for this, for that, for sports, for non-profit etc. And if we have the law, then okay, because things will work just fine.²¹⁸

Members of the technocracy of the late Kádár era accepted party membership as an indispensable prerequisite of career but they did not think it was particularly important. Some of them assessed their role at the time with self-irony. “I joined MSZMP in 1987. [. . .] It really shows some good sense of

²¹⁶ Interview with István Csillag, 1997.

²¹⁷ Interview with Péter Kardos, 1997.

²¹⁸ Interview with Jenő Koltai, 1997.

rhythm, doesn't it? The truth is, I attached no importance to being inside or outside. [. . .] I went to membership meeting twice when I was enrolled, for the first and last time. I never thought, I wouldn't have thought even in 1988 that the system would change in my lifetime."²¹⁹ There was one who realized only then that his membership in the party signaled something to his broader environment, and therefore he later—as one who had already burnt his hands with fire—adopted an anti-party sentiment. Finally, another interviewee summarized the dilemma as follows:

. . . Being in a party, that's not something I could do. I'm not a good politician. I'm a politically active guy, but not a politician. [. . .] In '89, I found a solution that was appropriate for me. I joined MSZP, because I said that I owed this much to my friends. Then I soon quitted because I said that I owed this much to myself.²²⁰

An exceptional fact about the delegation of MSZMP is that it included ministerial delegates who were not party members as well.²²¹ According to a recollection,

Given the party state at the time, an expert of public administration had no other choice but to sit on the side of the party state. One wasn't given an order like that, of course, but it would've been hard to refuse it. To me, it caused a serious problem of conscience for days, for I had never been a party member in my life. [. . .] They caught me at professional vanity, I tell you honestly. This had two reasons: on the one hand, taking part in something like this is a lifetime experience, and on the other hand, there was no one else who specialized in what I did, and what was one of the key topics of the delegation. Finally I managed to persuade myself, and I was quite ashamed of myself when those on the other side called us communists, and we couldn't protest that, obviously, which sometimes was a rather unpleasant situation.²²²

²¹⁹ Interview with Henrik Auth, 1997.

²²⁰ Interview with István Tömpe, 1997.

²²¹ Moreover, there was even a negotiator on the side of MSZMP who was a member of MDF. Interview with Eszter Sinkó, 1997.

²²² Interview with József Kajdi, 1997.

Besides constitution-making and the more important political decisions there was little or no coordination between the leadership and the negotiating groups of MSZMP. The party center did not require regular cooperation with its delegation, either: they substituted that for the one-sided declarations read out by the delegates of the party center at the negotiations. The majority of MSZMP delegates heard that position right there for the first time. This weakened the cohesion of the MSZMP delegation. "There was no plan, I mean it was partially thought out on the spot, so there was no single plan but various concepts. [...] This was an organic development."²²³

The strategy of the negotiating delegation of MSZMP was primarily devised by Imre Pozsgay and György Fejti. Earlier, Rezső Nyers also tried to find connections to the opposition organizations and he seemed to be interested in the economic negotiations, but this interest soon dispersed after he became party president. Prime Minister Miklós Németh did not regret that he could stay away from the negotiations, and as a head of government did not have to represent the "sinking ship" of MSZMP. Minister of Justice Kálmán Kulcsár, who had concrete ideas about the reform of the institutional system and even accepted the presidential nomination of the HNF adopted a similar strategy. He tried to influence the lawyer expert delegates of MSZMP from the background, while he kept his person away from the negotiations. His influence prevailed only until his deputy minister, Géza Kilényi was present at the negotiations. General Party Secretary Károly Grósz made a speech at the opening plenary session in June, but later he did not attend the negotiations. Visiting party organizations and preparing for the congress, he must have felt the gradual dissolution of his hinterland.

In the end, there remained Pozsgay and Fejti as two opposing, complementary characters. Pozsgay was born in 1933 in a small village to a religious agrarian, craftsman family. He wanted to be a priest in his teens, which was a typical way of mobility for the sons of modest families. However, completely different ways of mobility emerged after the communist takeover. After his political "awakening," Pozsgay refused to attend religious education (he was the only one to do so among his peers) and he was a member of the communist party at the age of 18.²²⁴ The diligent student went on to study at

²²³ Interview with György Fejti, 1997.

²²⁴ Pozsgay, 1989. *Politikuspályá a pártállamban és a rendszerváltásban.*

the Lenin Institute, an elite institution of the time, and after he finished it, he became the headmaster of a rural town's evening school of Marxism-Leninism. Organizing the cultural life of the town, Pozsgay realized it for the first time how far he can get in the politically detached field of culture, and he can easily acquire intellectual supporters by introducing measures that favor the local social elite. In the 1980s, Pozsgay tried all this on the national level, first as Minister of Culture and later as the general secretary of the Patriotic People's Front, the largest mass organization with an own daily paper and hundreds of local organizations. In the years before the regime change, he was already backed by a large body of supporters. He changed role in 1988: abandoning the HNF, he became politically active in the politburo of the state party and the government of Károly Grósz, contributing to the removal of János Kádár.

When the negotiations of the National Roundtable began, Pozsgay was justified in believing that he could control the opposition, the "historical" wing of which started under the aegis of his People's Front. Previously, Pozsgay had acquired great experience in negotiating with intellectuals with critical views. He spoke their language, many of them looked up on him, there were some who even saw him as a new Imre Nagy in the second half of the 1980s. It is little exaggeration to say that most organizations and their representatives at the negotiations of the National Roundtable—from MDF through the People's Party and BZSBT to the populist-reformist branch of MSZMP—originated from Imre Pozsgay. At one point of the negotiations, Pozsgay even dared to go on vacation for several weeks and let György Fejti represent MSZMP in his absence. According to a recollection, "Pozsgay deliberately withdrew from the negotiations, and he wanted to return as some kind of peace angel, because his completely obvious aim was to become president of the republic in some way."²²⁵

The interviewees remember Pozsgay as keeping distance from his own party of which he was the formal chief negotiator. Yet it could not be said with certainty either that he represented the interests of the government vis-à-vis the party. Many of them saw him as a politically independent figure,²²⁶ to whom his position as Minister of State in the Németh government and the

²²⁵ Interview with Tibor Bogdán, 1997.

²²⁶ Interview with Géza Kilényi, 1997.

good connections he maintained with some opposition circles were equally important. Growing independent from the party was something Pozsgay himself acknowledged, too: "I was given mandate by the political committee of the party, which meant I was formally accountable, but I had a large room for maneuver [...] although in some issues they required preliminary consultation. I usually tried to avoid such consultations, and I tried to enforce the politics of *faits accomplis*."²²⁷

In contrast to him, his rival, György Fejti—who came from the Budapest University of Technology and had a regular cadre career—made the impression of a grayer, more pedantic, and sometimes actually fearsome party soldier. Fejti had logical and rational thinking in his own framework of interpretation, but he was not flexible enough to break with his original premises. Fejti was an outstanding colleague of Károly Grósz in the 1980s and later a leader of MSZMP in Borsod county. Unsurprisingly, it was harder for him to communicate with the writers, historians, philosophers, and sociologists who had just stepped into politics than his well-known party apparatus. Accordingly, Pozsgay could use his situational advantage in his side-games with Fejti and the apparatus, which temporarily increased his prestige in the media as well as among his opposition negotiating partners.

Indeed, the difference in the program of Fejti and Pozsgay was smaller than it seemed from their difference in style and tactics. Both accepted peaceful transition to multiparty democracy and the idea of free elections. However, Fejti could not think but within the given frame of the party, and in the process of transition he also accepted he wanted to ensure the best possible positions for MSZMP.²²⁸ Assuming that both wanted democracy, Fejti imagined that with the state party while Pozsgay, without it. And as the survival of the state party and democracy were clearly irreconcilable, many people feared that Fejti would be willing to jeopardize the success of democratic transition for the survival of MSZMP. Later, he himself denied this:

²²⁷ Interview with Imre Pozsgay, 1997.

²²⁸ Fejti agreed with neither the banning of MSZMP from workplaces, nor that the party state should account for its properties as part of the democratic transition. As he wanted to negotiate about the controversial issues in a package deal, he disapproved of the fact that the agreement was signed on September 18 despite some issues being unresolved. He believed that MSZMP should not sign anything until there is an agreement in every issue because an early agreement would later narrow the negotiating position of the party.

If we wanted to deal with things in a coup-like fashion—there were scenarios for this—then we could’ve run through that couple of important laws, announced presidential elections, we could’ve won that, too, we didn’t have bad chances for winning that, this is how we were thinking. [...] But it was obvious that there must be competitive elections, so we rejected the Polish example out of hand.²²⁹

Pozsgay rather sacrificed the state party, which was explained by his critics citing his presidential ambitions. After he became the presidential nominee of MSZMP in June, he remained much less loyal to his party. According to his insider opponents, the party had become a burden for Pozsgay by that time and he wanted to get rid of it as soon as possible, this is why he supported acts of internal deconstruction. In the logic of the party center, Fejti was decent and Pozsgay, indecent because Fejti did represent the party at the negotiating table while Pozsgay represented only himself. But the state party was a burden not only to Pozsgay it was irreconcilable with democracy, too. Whatever personal political ambitions Imre Pozsgay had for acquiring the position of presidency, in the issue of reforming MSZMP the changes justified him. Fejti became more and more insignificant in the last weeks of the negotiations, for the leadership of MSZMP broke up: Nyers, Németh, and Pozsgay broke with Károly Grósz.

At the end of the negotiations, MSZMP had at least three different visions of the future, all three related to the possible coalition government of the party after the elections. Miklós Németh and his circle of advisors mainly saw opportunity for cooperation toward urban liberal intellectuals; Pozsgay preferred the populist-national line. Rezső Nyers believed that the future coalition partner of MSZMP would be the Social Democrats.²³⁰

The successor Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) eliminated the word “worker” from its name.²³¹ With its new name, the party got rid of not only certain reminiscences of the party state but also the contradiction that existed between the declared goal of the party and the sociologically describable intellectual composition of its membership. It is a result of the experi-

²²⁹ Interview with György Fejti, 1997.

²³⁰ Interview with András Tóth, 1997.

²³¹ That is why its abbreviation changed from MSZMP to MSZP.

ence of the Roundtable talks that the government apparatus, that is, a significant body of the top level of the party state did not enter the new party. “We took it seriously what Miklós Németh said, that the government had basically no other responsibilities but one job, [...] to lead the country until the elections. It was an historical mission of Németh to do his, and he did it. It followed from this that we wouldn’t enter the successor party, because we couldn’t take on that role in that moment.”²³² Later, intellectuals in the MSZP led by Gyula Horn were needed only as diligent professional politicians or advisors. Those from the reform circles who stayed became party politicians, while Pozsgay left the party in autumn 1990. However, the initial legitimacy problems of the new party made it necessary to include some established intellectuals who represented the MSZP in its parliamentary group. To some of them, it was allowed to realize their intellectual identity in extra-party initiatives while not putting the internal stability of the party in danger.

Ironically, the sudden vacuum on the political left made MSZP, the former party of cadre intellectuals the main political beneficiary of the protest votes against social pauperization and increasing unemployment. In 1993, MSZOSZ, which was close to the socialist party, won the trade union elections in 1993, and MSZP won three of the five by-elections between 1990 and 1994. It took only two years to leave the political quarantine it had been relegated to at the time of the regime change and scored a landslide victory in the 1994 elections. Paradoxically, the party in power had to carry out economic transition on the one hand and become the left-wing, “blue-collar” party of workers and employees on the other hand. After 1994, it became the task of Prime Minister Gyula Horn to balance between the two traditions of the left: modernization and solidarity.

Altogether MSZP spent 12 years in government (1994–1998, 2002–2010), 10 years as the leading party of a coalition government and two years (2008–2010) in minority government with external support. MSZP did not disappear after its electoral defeat in 2010 but continued to exist as a mid-sized party. From the 1989 negotiating delegation of MSZMP, four participants²³³ became ministers of MSZP, while another one became a minister of

²³² Interview with László Varga Sabján, 1997.

²³³ From the 1989 negotiators of MSZMP, Judit Csehák became Minister of Health and Social Affairs in the Medgyessy government (2002–2003); Tibor Draskovics served as Minister of Finance in the first, and

MDF.²³⁴ But even some people from the Third Side found their way to the socialist-liberal government: the later Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány and two later ministers, arrived from there.²³⁵

Minister of Justice and Law Enforcement in the second Gyurcsány government and the Bajnai government (2004–2005, 2007–2009); Imre Forgács was Minister of Justice in the Bajnai government (2009–2010); and György Szilvássy served in various positions in the second Gyurcsány government (2006–2009).

²³⁴ Mihály Kupa, who negotiated under the banner of MSZMP at the roundtable in 1989, was Minister of Finance of the Antall government in 1990–1993.

²³⁵ Ferenc Gyurcsány represented Demisz, a youth organization, within the Third Side. He served as Prime Minister between 2004 and 2009. Péter Bárándy, who negotiated under the banner of SZOT on the Third Side in 1989, became Minister of Justice of the Medgyessy government (2002–2004). Magda Kósáné Kovács was Minister of Labor in the Horn government (1994–1995).

CHAPTER VIII

Interpreting Democracy: The New Movement Intellectuals

Just a bit more than a year after the establishment of a first democratic government a pro-democracy movement appeared on the scene which enabled the rise of a new group of activists, the movement intellectuals.¹ This initiative reflected on the disappointment of liberal intellectuals concerning the performance of the conservative Antall government and post-transition politics in general. Representatives of the Democratic Charter movement, initiated in the autumn of 1991, were afraid that the government would be captured by the radical Right, and they wished to confront that with basic democratic values to keep democracy alive. This movement intended to present a universal democratic position but at the end it helped left and liberal parties to come to power. Therefore, the Charter is an ambivalent legacy in Hungarian politics which reflects on the ambivalent stance of intellectuals on politics itself. The rise and fall of Democratic Charter represent the closing period of exceptional political influence of the intellectuals.

1. THE TYPES OF INTELLECTUALS ARRIVING IN POLITICS

International elite research demonstrates that in revolutionary times the elite changes not only in composition but also in the pattern thereof. The decaying, parochial elite representing the *ancien régime* is temporarily replaced by specialists who were marginalized for political reasons, mainly cosmopoli-

¹ Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements and Their Intellectuals*.

tan intellectuals with universalistic ideas.² However, as soon as this exceptional moment of history passes intellectuals have increasingly hard time finding their place in the framework of the new political regime, because their knowledge is depreciated and their influence decreases vis-à-vis politicians who live for everyday politics.

The year of the regime change was a milestone, various groups of intellectuals found themselves in the first line of organizing parties. According to the recollection of János Kis, “1989 was a wonderful year, as if it was all March. New friends everywhere. Addressing hundred thousand people on Kossuth Lajos square. [. . .] But this was not just a new beginning but an ending, too. The time of the democratic opposition was up. The heroic age when our chosen lifestyle carried moral and political importance ended.”³ Founded by former dissidents, SZDSZ quickly became the second strongest party of Hungary.

Party formation in the situation of vacuum forced and their previous moral stance urged the opposition intellectuals not only to represent the principles of democracy but contribute to their practical realization as well. The names of the dissidents were known to relatively many people because of their samizdat writings. A joiner, later mayor of a district of Budapest described this as follows: “When at the turn of 1988–89 it could be seen that there is a ten-percent chance that things will change, such an opportunity to take a life-changing path is presented only once in a person’s lifetime, then I immediately started to look for the whereabouts of the community whose writings I had been reading continuously for five years.”⁴ Many of the new arrivals interpreted political activity as a mission or at least as a response to the exceptional historical challenge.

Who should make history if not those who have plans, ideas, and normative models for that? According to a participant, “one suddenly felt the wind of making history. We never had a feeling that ‘now everything depends on us’, but everyone shared a notion that ‘something is happening, and I am too inside of it.’”⁵ For a moment, perspectives hitherto unseen opened for the intellectuals. “In this generation, which I was a part of, everyone had to decide what path they were on. Such generational experience is quite

2 Lasswell, “Agenda for the Study of Political Elites”; Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*.

3 Kasza, *Metamorphosis Hungariae*, 85.

4 Interview with Ferenc Gegesy, 1997.

5 Interview with Gábor Horn, 1997.

rare that someone in their thirties-forties can fundamentally change their career, that they have such great choices. Many people chose politics.”⁶ The rapidly changing stages and the sudden appearance of new faces made the dynamics of transition continuously rolling. Some activists were active in the movement scenes only, while others could transform themselves from activists in a trust-network to politicians.

Yet the bureaucratic, routinized political positions of institutionalized democracies were not attractive to many intellectuals who took part in the transition. Seeing that victorious civil society gives way to party elites tied to particular interests, many of them felt that the new system became different from what they had fought for. They later renounced the world of parliamentary democracy and decided to join movements as they did not want to give up their previous, critical position. By this, they underlined that the process of democratization had not been completed by the creation of institutions, and the new democracy requires civil control, too. In addition, they justly called attention to the deficiencies of democratic political culture. After 1989, the literature of lost illusions swelled to a surprising degree.⁷ Several writings suggested that some of the previous politically active intellectuals had fought less for institutional democracy and more for their own privileges.⁸ However, many intellectual politicians experienced their arrival in politics as drifting: a process which was not planned. True, in the Kádár era virtually no one could plan for this. According to a recollection:

I was interested in politics but I wasn't in it. [. . .] The aura, the atmosphere of the thing was like that it caught my interest. I got acquainted with spellbinding people. And, well, I was more and more sucked into the thing. [. . .] I was happy to go, and then they said that EKA negotiations would start, and someone with a law degree would not be bad there.⁹

6 Interview with László Bruszt, 1997.

7 Grass, “Losses”; Heym, “Ash Wednesday in the GDR”; Huyssen, “After the Wall”; Jörgensen, “The End of Anti-Politics”; Pithart, “The Intellectuals in Politics”; Reich, “Becoming an East German Dissident”; Siklová, “The ‘Gray Zone’ and the Future of Dissent.”

8 Bernik, “The Forgotten Legacy of Marginal Intellectuals”; Kovács, “Planning the Transformation”; Smolar, “From Opposition to Atomization”; Tismaneanu, “Truth, Trust, Tolerance.”

9 Interview with Mátyás Eörsi, 1997.

In the pluralist political system forming after the Roundtable negotiations, different intellectual types emerged in the first years of democracy with respect to politics and becoming politicians. Based on the path the former intellectuals arriving in politics chose, I distinguish below the types of “professional,” and “brooding” intellectual politicians, and the “quick retreaters.”

1.1 INTELLECTUALS TO BE PROFESSIONAL POLITICIANS

In the 1980s, no member of the opposition prepared to become a professional politician. The opportunity that suddenly presented itself caught everyone off guard. The first category is comprised of those former intellectuals who became professional politicians because they realized relatively soon that that was their real, “natural” occupation. It turned out then or soon after that, to a large group of intellectuals, the intellectual occupation they had formerly pursued was just a divergence in their life. They might have always wanted to become politicians, but they had no opportunity, or they did not want to collaborate with the old system and deliberately kept distance from politics. An intellectual who later spent 16 years in the parliament, said: “I didn’t prepare for a political career, but my research topics were always political, public law related. Yet I did not think I would ever become a politician.”¹⁰

Members of this group assimilated to the role of politician easily and they aimed at becoming professional politicians as soon as possible. To them, politics was not a “menial thing.” They lacked the otherwise common intellectual haughtiness vis-à-vis politics for they felt that they were getting the hang of politics, and they admitted to this openly. They easily identified with their political role, and they wanted to elevate to a professional level as soon as possible. As one of them stated: “Liga was important to my life in one respect: I learnt a great deal, therefore I arrived in party politics with a political education. How one can appear in front of people, how one can sell something in the papers. I grew up together with the current political generation.”¹¹

There were some former dissidents whose activity in the democratic opposition was almost automatically continued in EKA, and their participation there naturally drifted them further to parliamentary politics. “It was almost

¹⁰ Interview with Péter Tölgyessy, 1997.

¹¹ Interview with Gábor Horn, 1997.

natural to me to grow into the existence in the great organized opposition, or the Network which was the precursor of SZDSZ. [...] After all, it was up to me, but it was 'why not' that I would've had to explain. [...] Whereas from the previous experiences it followed that running in the elections, if not a duty, but a consistent continuation of what we had been doing up until then."¹²

Another politician was a lawyer in the 1980s, he had no role in the democratic opposition. But he had family-based motivations to oppose the system. His lawyer father participated in a revolutionary committee in 1956. Later, he was put under police supervision, got no job. Eventually, he had to work as a storekeeper at an agricultural company and died at a relatively early age. His son joined MDF at the first opportunity in 1988, and a year later he helped the party, with the consent of the party leadership, at the Roundtable talks. The lawyer who was described by his fellows as extremely ambitious was present at almost every subcommittee, from EKA he had a straight path to the parliament and, later, the government.¹³ He who was still unknown in May 1988 became Minister of Justice of the first freely elected government.

A young politician, who later became president of Fidesz, had a more gradual learning curve to professional politics. His path led from profession to unionism, then to sectoral politics and parliamentary membership, that is, the role of a professional politician. It is worth following the stations of this process:

I tried whether being a teacher and politician can be done simultaneously: they cannot be. I know what it was like when I was a good teacher and I also know what it was like when I was a bad teacher. That feels bad, it's not good to do that. I had to decide which one I choose, and I made a decision for several reasons. It's interesting, exciting, I hadn't done this yet, it pays more. One can indulge in exhibitionism here as well as there. [...] But for a long time I had a feeling that unionism is a more transparent, more accessible thing to everyday morality. It was a process of learning to me to learn unionism and slowly learn what politics means, too. So how these things build on each other. I approached politicians with prejudice for a very long time, just like everyone: so that this is power, the gravity

¹² Interview with Iván Pető, 1997.

¹³ Interview with István Balsai, 1997.

train, they would betray their mother. [...] Eventually I became a politician *de facto* without myself accepting it. So it happened sooner in reality than it did in my own decision. [...] When I made this decision, then I still had this idea, that either politics or profession. What was definitive was whether I could realize my professional ideas more efficiently in a party than in a trade union which became more and more closed as a small, intellectual club. This was one aspect. [...] Now this is not what I think but that there is no sector-neutral, politics-free public policy, so there is no pure professional issue, an issue of professional policy is also like a bullet in a handgun, it can be very beautiful, very round, and very well able to hit the target, but what we target with it is defined by politics. There is no pure science, no pure professionalism, no pure sectoral issue which is above that [...] that's naivety. [...] There exists even today the attitude of independent intellectual, which serves this as well as that, and refines the otherwise quarreling politicians; this is a very beautiful idea, but in most cases the haughtiness of independent intellectuals and the disdain of politicians serves self-deception. [...] In the 90 percent of cases these are not value-based debates or scholarly intellectual fights but tactical fights appearing in the cloak of value-based debates. But this is another issue, so it surely involves the paranoia, mania, and narrow-mindedness typical of all politicians. [...] This is how I became an education politician from an interested person, then a sectoral politician, and from that, maybe, a politician. But I don't really believe that, let us rather say that representative. There are many representatives but few politicians who would know not only the role but the play as well. And the bulk of the people know only the role, not the play, and the professional politician is distinguished by that he knows the play as well. They are not writing it, there are only very few who can do that, but they know that this is a play in which they act.¹⁴

A politician who started as a promising social researcher said the following:

I had a double self already from the beginning of the 1980s. Thus, I've always been passionately interested in politics, in political public life. But I

14 Interview with Zoltán Pokorni, 1997.

also loved my career, and particularly there where I was. [...] So there was some hesitation in me, but I'd be lying if I told you there was too much. For some time, I tried to do the two together but then I saw that this doesn't work in time either, and really it worked at the expense of both. [...] I wouldn't be doing this if I believed that I made a bad decision.¹⁵

Democratic politics had considerable attraction at the time of the transition. The concepts of lying, stealing, and corruption belonged, according to the general perception of the period, to the communist system, and therefore there were many people in the beginning who genuinely thought that in the democratic system of checks and balances popularly elected politicians would be surrounded by recognition and respect. Thus, becoming a professional politician seemed for many intellectuals like the logical continuation of their career.

*1.2 MISSION, SENSE OF DUTY, BROODING:
THE INTELLECTUAL POLITICIANS*

This group was composed of several heterogeneous, self-reflecting, and often brooding, intellectual politicians. Partially, it involved those who participated in politics because their "sense of mission" or sense of duty predestined them. They entered politics with idealistic, romantic feelings, and therefore they had an important role in the symbolic politics of the regime change, but their influence declined by the routinization of democratic practice. Others did it driven by the sense of duty, while again others had politician-like character earlier, too. As writers, they started to make politics not so that they would once be free to write, but they wrote so that they would once be free to make politics. However, for them neither writing nor politics remained an end in itself: both were subordinated to a higher idea, a moral goal.

The group also involved new actors who had not been active on the side of the opposition before 1989 but appeared when the hour of action had come and participated in the formation of the parties as well as the work of the Opposition Roundtable. One of them was a lawyer in the country, from there he was recommended to one of the opposition parties. "I received a

15 Interview with István Szent-Iványi, 1997.

two-line message from Imre Furmann to appear then and there at the door of the parliament, my name will be submitted, and they will tell me what to do.”¹⁶ Despite the vague orientation, the lawyer did a serious job in one of EKA’s subcommittees, and thus there was a straight line for him leading to the parliamentary group of the largest party after the elections. There he soon found himself in internal opposition, though, after which he left the party and organized a new one. But he did not manage to win a parliamentary seat for the second time, and after 1994 he returned to the legal profession.

A lawyer from Budapest who played a key role in the formation of EKA remembered:

I was called up by Uncle Gyuri Szabad, in agreement with Antall, to urge me to become a candidate, and I told him, “no, dear Gyuri, I have decided”. “Well”, he said, “drop by, let’s discuss it”, and then we spent a whole night with discussion, and Uncle Gyuri had this argument that “look, the parliament will be formed, and what are you going to do?” I tell him “I’ll remain a lawyer and will deal with legal issues”. He says “that’ll lead to nowhere; it will lead to that you convene once every year, and recall the heroic times with lots of beer.” I say, “well, there will be something, I’ll be a lawyer”. He says, “No. Politics will be happening now in the parliament [. . .] and there are a bunch of inexperienced people on this side, after all some of us have picked up some skill in the Opposition Roundtable, so it is your plain duty to do it.” So this is how he convinced me. This was the decisive point, that we had picked up some skill, and, let me add, some national reputation as well.¹⁷

One of his fellow representatives argued by saying that the most important reason for him becoming a politician was professional in kind.

What I saw was an opportunity. I experienced it during the Roundtable talks that a host of issues in my professional expertise which had been debated for years and we hadn’t been able to make progress because the ministry and various administrations had been against it [. . .] could

¹⁶ Interview with István Balás, 1997.

¹⁷ Interview with Imre Kónya, 1997.

be passed. [. . .] I didn't want to be a representative, when [. . .] called me up and asked whether I felt like running. I was brooding for a long time, finally after some long-long brooding at the end of October 1989 I said yes.¹⁸

A similar story was told by his fellow MP who arrived from the EKA negotiations to the parliament and became a politician.

In the beginning I observed things a bit from the outside, like inside as well as outside, and I was actually enjoying this. But they said that they wanted me. [. . .] "Then I'll drift off if everything settles, and then that's it, I'll have made a trip". Therefore, I finally ran in the elections, and went to conventions. I got a seat from the list. After that I spoke in the parliament, for the second time, the third time, and then my legs no longer turned into jelly.¹⁹

Politically active intellectuals long hesitated between the role of the intellectual and that of the politician. To them moral drive *per se* was not enough a reason to accept their new political role. They repeatedly had to answer the question: why do I make politics? The fight between their intellectual and politician selves remained undecided for a long time. Some decided to become politicians out of a sense of responsibility. Others attempted the impossible: to reconcile the two, trying to multiply themselves by piling intellectual and political occupations. Many of them became very popular with the voters because it could be seen that they had no thirst for power. They did not want to be politicians at all costs; to them, it would not have been a tremendous loss if their fate brings them to continue their intellectual occupation instead. For a long time, they made role-alienating gestures, but as the parties became more and more bureaucratized this attitude made them foreign bodies within their party. Some of them was crowded out, others gave up politics voluntarily, but their decisive majority became politicians. There was precedent even for such compromise that they retreated from the front line of politics and pursued their intellectual occupation but

¹⁸ Interview with Péter Hack, 1997.

¹⁹ Interview with Mátyás Eörsi, 1997.

they retained positions in the various, non-executive bodies of their parties. If we use Mihály Vajda's provocative definition for politician, namely a person who "can make unprincipled compromises if necessary,"²⁰ then those in this group have not become politicians.

Another participant of the Roundtable talks, who was a university professor and later became a member of parliament, named sense of duty and a moral drive as the two main reasons for his career change.

I'm an accidental politician, just as many others in Hungary in this time [...] I just got caught in this without any preplanning. I was interested in politics just as much as any intellectual, and when opposition movements became palpable, we and those who with a similar mindset it was obvious: it is our plain duty to join one of the branches of opposition, to help the democratic forces. [...] But there was another reason, too: I was a member of that committee of lawyers and historians which reviewed the show trials. That dirt and filth we saw there was really hard to stomach.²¹

In this description, participation in democratic politics appears as "purification" after the illegal acts of the decades before the regime change. She, Katalin Kutrucz, was kept in the parliament for two terms by political sense of duty, but she would go back and teach at the university as well. After her time in the parliament, she became the vice director of the Historical Office.

One of his fellows believed he was crowded out because of his eccentric nature. He wanted to stay in politics, while he also somewhat did not want to stay. There was a task he would have gladly done but as he was given no opportunity for that he accepted leaving.

Really, when they came to power, I was still in the board of MDF, but even there I was always a little pain in the neck. [...] I had different ideas about some things, and later I dropped out of this board. [...] I was a candidate of MDF, when we were still tight, and they put me to the end of some list of representatives. I never made it to the house of representatives. I didn't really want to make it, either. Well, I regret it, actual-

²⁰ Vajda, "Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság," 66.

²¹ Interview with Katalin Kutrucz, 1994.

ly I would've been happy to take part in the cultural policy for a bit [...] so, just a bit, about the character of the cultural government, I would've gladly taken part in it as a professional.²²

Intellectual politicians typically spent a single term in the parliament and turned away from official political activity only later.

Why did I stop? No drama there. One thing is that I'm lacking certain qualities to be a politician, and obviously, because of my role in the transition, I cannot be a private, that wouldn't make much sense either. [...] Look, if someone is not utterly stupid, has some rhetorical skill, and can write decently, and he has some energy, that's not enough. I'm not a good team player, I'm not the kind of man who can spend his time sitting in committee meetings. I can hardly tolerate boredom—and yet the whole political life is one gigantic meeting, it's hard for people tougher than me, too. Simply I have no patience for these things, then this cannot be done. So it would've caused great suffering to me if I had to stay in this.²³

One of his fellows also retired after four years in the parliament. Later, he assessed the period as follows:

I'm not blaming history and myself, it's up to everyone to judge, but anyway I spent a lot of energy in politics. I wrote tons of texts for SZDSZ which really shouldn't be preserved, and I hoped that by artificially tearing myself out of politics, by the liberating feeling I'd be shaped back to the kind of man I had been. This was the general reason for my exit. The other reason was political: it was clear that if the government changes, if the first peaceful change of government in Hungarian history takes place, then will, for the first time, the revolving stage work normally, in a European way in Hungary. This was the goal of my political life, not the rule of a certain party. In this sense, my promise that I'll leave politics when this comes into being had been due for four years.²⁴

22 Interview with Imre Kerényi, 1997.

23 Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 1997.

24 Interview with Miklós Haraszti, 1997.

Learning to take political roles was considerably easier for the members of the historical parties than for the representatives of the parties which had grown out of the movements of the 1980s. For the former involved, fewer critical intellectuals and more former politicians and their protégés. However, this caused serious headaches to many members of the larger liberal party, including János Kis, the first president of the party.

SZDSZ had no president until the beginning of 1990. It only had a board. Then the National Council convened to discuss the composition of the national and Budapest electoral lists of the party, and then they made the proposition which, I think, was quite natural at that time, that I should lead the national list, which I declined, and said that I didn't want to run in the parliamentary elections, I was determined that during that term I'd retire from politics. [...] And this was what led to that, after long persuasion I accepted a compromise that we create the position of president and I'll take it. Even if I won't run for a parliamentary function. It is due to this accidental circumstance that SZDSZ had a president at the time of the elections, otherwise it wouldn't have had one.²⁵

Intellectual politicians gradually drifted out of the front lines of politics and later, depending on their occupation, became CEOs, civil servants, or managers; returned to their original, literary, or scholarly occupation; or perhaps they continued to work among gray eminences as advisors. But even that happened that after a long break they showed up as a member or supporter of a newly founded party.

1.3 QUICK RETREATERS

Finally, I call those in the third group quick retreaters. They were those intellectuals interested in politics who interpreted the flirt with practical politics as a small detour in their lives due to the exceptional situation. As soon as they sensed the passing of the historical moment, they returned to their original vocation. We can also find among them people who might have felt like making politics but realized that they are generally unsuitable and drew the

25 Interview with János Kis, 1997.

consequences quickly. Representatives of this group did not regard themselves as politicians even during their short episode of politics and retired after the Roundtable talks or the free elections. However, they did not lose their interest in politics and some of them were later occupied as consultants, or appeared as organizers or supporters of associations, NGOs, and social movements.

There was someone who said that “I sensed party politics as a direct attack against my person.”²⁶ Others explicitly referred to the irreconcilability of intellectual and political occupations. A sociologist participant, founder of Liga, saw it as follows:

I said that “here’s a situation, an opportunity, and if it doesn’t play out, I can get out of it morally clean, and now that’s worth more to me”. [...] I’m sure there are some people who believed that a trade union was founded, I didn’t think that for a second. I didn’t want to make politics. I didn’t like this intellectual company. It’s a great shortcoming of intellectuals that they lack the skill to communicate with other layers.²⁷

Someone experienced his retirement as completely natural and has no sense of loss in retrospect either. “When there was a general meeting where Fidesz decided that it would become a party and run in the elections, I left. Because I experienced that processes were about to turn around, and Fidesz didn’t do things because it regarded them as important but because it was thought they would bring votes. I didn’t like that.”²⁸ There was a person who would have accepted the role of a politician, but he soon realized that this role is far from his character.

I made politics out of good will. I didn’t feel bad about becoming a politician, but I didn’t regard it as a life goal either. In this sense, I made politics on a principled basis. Therefore, I did everything “as it was”, not as a “good” politician.²⁹

Another quick retreator complained about the workload:

²⁶ Interview with Pál Bártfai, 1997.

²⁷ Interview with János Dávid, 1997.

²⁸ Interview with Andrea Pelle, 1997.

²⁹ Interview with Péter Hardi, 1997.

I realized this cannot be endured for a long time. For what the politicians do, if they take it seriously just a little bit, it quickly burns one out. Meanwhile I had a full-time job, and I wanted to think, or at least to do anything. [. . .] Then I gradually made up my mind that I'll exit from this issue.³⁰

A participant sensed contradiction between his vocation as an economist and his political job of interest representation.

Indeed, I dropped out, and I think this was typical to many economists, that the urgent tasks of transition and the unionist work grew contradictory. That is, there's need for layoffs during the transition, there's need for more flexible wages, there's need for painful changes, that's evident for an economist. But not for someone from a trade union.³¹

This explanation also reveals how dominant a role the idea of economic liberalism played in the regime change. For the participant who retreated by citing professional reasons did not even consider that the orientation of the economic profession can be other than neoliberalism.

There were some who occasionally fulfilled formal positions but were more in the position of advisors from the beginning and used their informal influence to control their organization. They were in the first line of retreaters during the regime change because they said it outright that they did not want to become political actors for a long time. A somewhat sarcastic recollection described them as follows:

A group of sociologists was totally there as the brain. Time and again they would come home, say something important, hustled, then left for America and hell knows where else, to do their own little research, living the normal life of the Hungarian scholar. [. . .] They had never had the ambitious to take part in this, they never took part in any competition, but came here, hustled a bit, then left.³²

³⁰ Interview with Antall Gyulavári, 1997.

³¹ Interview with János Gács, 1997.

³² Interview with Gábor Horn, 1997.

The free elections of 1990 brought Hungary to the era of democracy, but it was a long road until the differences between the identity of intellectual and politician became clear. For a long time, there remained transition between these roles, and this situation was more comfortable to the intellectual than to the politician. The new prime minister was bothered by the fact that the intellectuals listened to the words of a pianist more than his own. And when an intellectual politician made a mistake, the political class tried to relativize it as “part of his literary oeuvre,” raising laughs from the public opinion. A quick retreator who had participated in the Roundtable talks recalled the events as follows:

It was a strange situation that I didn't represent myself. [. . .] It was the first time when I had to represent an organization, and I thought that it was very strange because I said my personal opinion there, too, because there was no control behind me, the party had no official opinion. And then I started to think that the only worse thing could be if it had. Then I decided that this whole party stuff is not for me, I am too individualist to this, and I don't want to renounce this role that I always say my own opinion. [. . .] Then I asked whether I wanted to run, and I immediately said, without a moment of thought, that no.³³

One of her fellows in the People's Party had a similar opinion:

In 1989 I somehow didn't feel that I was part of a transition process, this was just a duty kind of thing for me, I'm an expert in something, and I had to stop them from doing something bad in the last minute. Then I could work on this with enthusiasm. [. . .] Since then, I've been asked to become a state secretary for four times, and they've said that this is my perversion that I always turn it down.³⁴

One of the intellectual activists of MDF was a quick retreator, but later he accepted a diplomatic position, became an ambassador for a while. Finally,

³³ Interview with Éva Voszka, 1997.

³⁴ Interview with Mária Zám, 1997.

he returned to the academic sphere and continued working as historian. He remembered this as follows:

I've been involved in politics two times, in 1983 at *Mozgó Világ* and in the autumn of 1988 when MDF became an organization and I joined immediately. Choosing a party depended on my personal circle of acquaintances, which is the Lakitelek and partially also the university and friendly milieu, the Eötvös Collegium. [...] I come from a rural intellectual family. I was on the national list both elections, but I always asked them to put me in the back of the list, because I didn't want to join the parliament. Rather, I just signaled my solidarity, fraternity.³⁵

The conflict between movement activism and professionalism appeared in several parties, and thus it can be seen as a concomitant feature of democratic transformation. It was disadvantageous to the political heirs of the democratic opposition that a considerable number of their 1989 opponents, that is, the representatives of the new technocracy of MSZMP members found their places in the forming government hierarchy and built links with the first representatives of a slowly forming new bourgeoisie rather easily. They would form the layer of "new clientele."³⁶ While the program of their most important political opponent, the leading MDF had advocated a "county of owners" and the creation of a national middle class and national bourgeoisie, eventually it made a compromise with certain groups of the reform intellectuals who attained considerable influence during the last decade of state socialism. The radical populist wing of the party, on the other hand, exerted strong pressure in a rather militant way to carry out their original program. A quick retreat from the People's Party who was also assistant state secretary in the Antall government gave up very soon: "I wasn't able to work with them, because governance back then was indeed hand-guided."³⁷ The government fluctuated between the permissive way of embourgeoisement and the interventionist way of "bourgeoisie creation," often alternating the two. According to the recollection of a Fidesz participant:

³⁵ Interview with András Gergely, 1997.

³⁶ E. Szalai, *Gazdaság és hatalom*.

³⁷ Interview with Mária Zám, 1997.

Back then we thought that one can do politics while also representing his own principles. And we didn't have to make many compromises. I absolutely call back those times with nostalgia and a positive feeling. We wrote amendments, speeches, we thought that was important. Then the situation was such that what we believed to the professional standpoint was also demanded and represented by the politicians. It happened only later—and I think that's okay—that the politicians made a decision that was in their interest, and they had to sell it, and the experts were trying to offer the professional justification or underpinning of that decision. But back in the day it was the exact opposite: what we decided as a professionally good and sympathetic opinion that was represented by politicians.³⁸

Imre Furmann, a legal advisor member of MDF, did not want to become a politician, and whenever he was asked, he offered other people instead of him. He believed that during the Roundtable talks,

We could learn a great deal of political culture, learn culture of dispute, entertain various forms of solutions, so that was a very strict but very good school of becoming a politician. [. . .] But I didn't run in the elections in 1990, it was the three of us with Csoóri and Lezsák who consciously refused to run. I interpreted my role in a way that I'll really make the party, I'll participate in the party life. I wasn't very good at direct politics, but I was eager to participate in the background work in the good sense, if I had any strength, that was it. I worked in the party as a grey eminence, this was practically unknown to everyone but the membership, which was very satisfied, as it totally elected me to the leadership. [. . .] In April 1993, I said that I wasn't longing for any position, I left them, and acquired my lawyer license. Since then, we've provided legal defense for Roma people whose rights were encroached because of their origin. I've developed a national network 120 lawyers have joined it.³⁹

The playing field of 1989 intellectual politicians continued to narrow, but in the world behind politics many of them found the role that fit their interest. Here,

38 Interview with Attila Fölsz, 1997.

39 Interview with Imre Furmann, 1997.

the careers of three aforementioned actors diverged. Among the quick retreaters of MDF, Csoóri became the leader of the Word Federation of Hungarians, a state-supported organization, while Furmann started over and built up a human rights NGO independently. Lezsák changed his mind and, as if he was escaping forward, joined parliamentary politics in 1994, and he has been there since. Others who didn't want to become politicians capitalized on their network from the time of the Roundtable talks, and were occupied on lower levels, as professional advisors of certain parties or experts at municipal governments.

A participant of the Roundtable talks, a theater director, talked about the role of intellectuals this way:

A poor man cooks with water, and the political history of Central European nations proves that every time comes someone, because there isn't anyone else but the nation's writer, composer, and poet, and the political role has to be played by the poets. But the thing is that artists, poets, and writers are extremely subjective people, and I think they're incapable of the art of balancing. Whereas politics is the art of balancing. [...] We are too egotistical, and our self is too much. We can only experience the world via our self, and we are intolerant. Usually, when the artist or the writers becomes a politician, they'll be intolerant. They cannot forgive 30-year-old grievances, cannot step over their own shadow, what makes them good writers, or good painters, because they are consistently what they are. I can only speak ill of those politicians who started as writers or artists. [...] But as there was no layer of politicians, the change of the regime really had to be done consciously by this layer, the intellectuals.⁴⁰

In the line of the causes of the conflicts created by intraparty movements one can also find the role confusion of those politicians who had been critical intellectuals.

It's strange how many people who acquired just a little bit of power became so much unlike themselves, it was strange that one got involved in such a political role and there they isolated from the problems they had grown out of. The politician no longer reads, save for those one and

40 Interview with Imre Kerényi, 1997.

a half pages which are given to their hand, no more. [...] This is a genre like this, I cannot be in any other way. I hadn't read for a long time then, too. In this respect, one is vulnerable to their advisors, the people around them, so I learned these things there that the most important thing in the politician's profession to learn selecting their coworkers.⁴¹

A significant part of the intellectuals of MDF and SZDSZ became politically active after a successful political career, and therefore for most of them there was a chance of return from politics. Many of them remained ambivalent toward the role of politician until the mid-1990s, and although those who chose professional politics began to pick up this role faster, the relative unity of the old intellectual groups had been broken by the mid-1990s.

From the point of view of the internal stabilization of the party system, a positive development was the realization that internal movements need to be steered outside the parties. However, this also called attention to the fragile legitimacy of the democratic institutional system, as well as the weaknesses of the organizations of interest representation. Although the situation was far from the "class power" of intellectuals, the pretense showed something else: in the Third Republic, the first President of the Republic was a writer, the Prime Minister was a historian, and the Speaker of the National Assembly was an academic historian. The president of the largest governing party was a historian, its parliamentary leader was a lawyer. The president of the largest opposition party was a philosopher, and its parliamentary leader was a legal scholar. Parliamentary debates represented high quality, the political duel was often accompanied by mental duel between the representatives of the government and the opposition. Certain better or worse formulations caused excitement in public opinion for a long time.

2. MOVEMENT-INTELLECTUAL POLITICS AFTER 1989: THE DEMOCRATIC CHARTER

Following the elections in 1990, the media, which had regained its freedom only one year before, provided a major opportunity for former dissidents. In these years, genuine exuberance of the intellectuals could be observed in

41 Interview with Csaba Öry, 1997.

the media. There is virtually no other period which saw such proliferation of interesting studies in Hungarian magazines and journals as after the fall of the system built on censorship and self-censorship. Yet many intellectuals watched political programs on television and read daily papers rather than magazines and journals. A feverish political interest prevailed among them.

2.1 THE OPINION LEADERS

Until 1988, most journalists were basically loyal to the Kádár regime. If they wanted to remain a journalist in the official press, they did not really have a choice. Earlier, only certain literary and social science journals could afford to publish studies written in a more critical spirit. The threshold of tolerance changed by the current political situation, but certain editors⁴² were quite adept in sensing the boundaries of censorship. Generally, they were characterized by the attitude that “I must be inside power even at the price of compromises because others who could be in my place would stop way before the wall; I, however, go all the way to the wall, even if I do not break my head on it.”⁴³ Most of them did not even reach this point. The party bureaucracy was keen on keeping the critical voices of the press isolated and properly counter-balanced, and the journals from supporting certain lines.

The emergence of samizdat journals made the public sphere bipolar, and they served as a kind of reference to the readers of the “first public sphere.” As I mentioned earlier the voice of the democratic opposition was further strengthened by Radio Free Europe, which called the attention of great many radio listeners to the existence of samizdat. All this had an impact on the official press as well, leading to that the editors of certain journals undertook open confrontation with the state. And while they rarely came out as winners, such scandals forced the representatives of cultural politics to make awkward explanations and questioned the shaky belief in the omnipotence of the party bureaucracy. From the mid-1980s, the strict line dividing the two kinds of public sphere weakened. In the form of university papers and journals with low circulation, a gray zone emerged which, following its medi-

42 Such as the editors of *Valóság*, *Tiszatáj*, and the old *Mozgó Világ*.

43 Konrád and Szelényi, “Intellectuals and Domination.”

atory nature, reflected on the ideas published in the second public sphere. The more and more free flow of critical ideas began.

This was the situation in Hungary when the *glasnost* of Gorbachev happened. The younger generation of journalists was soon affected by the change that took place at the dailies, as well as the intellectual and later political programs of radio and television.⁴⁴ The “revolution of words” took place, the victory of critical rationalism, whereby the critical intellectuals as communicators brought humiliating defeat both in the sense of *telos* and *techné* to the bureaucracy and its self-evidently old-fashioned mode of speech. As Konrád and Szelényi noted in a contemporary study, the “culture of critical discourse” created the alliance of the new emerging political elite and “mediacracy.”⁴⁵ The normative model of the journalists who facilitated the victory was the practice of mass communication of Western open societies. This was the ideology represented by the association they founded Publicity Club as well.

If there was a revolutionary element in the course of 1989 it was, first and foremost, the revolutionizing power of free thoughts that could be published. Moreover, to a certain extent the power of thought substituted for the revolution. It was enough to present certain demands symbolically or implicitly, the effect was still certain.⁴⁶ There was almost no need to foment a revolution, for everyone thought the same anyway. Obviously, this would not have been possible without the memory of the revolution of 1956, the survival of civil courage, the fear-dissolving effect of Gorbachev’s *glasnost*, the decade-long existence of samizdat, and the fast adaptation of the younger generation of the party bureaucracy. Still, the mostly bloodless changes of 1989 can be seen as the products of the explosion of mass communication which enhanced ideas at an incredible speed and broadcast them in a visual manner as well. Intellectuals put these radical ideas into words and displayed them in pictures and symbols. “I beg the pardon of those involved but turn in Hungary can be realized today only by having the intellectuals at the helm,” wrote Sándor Csoóri,⁴⁷ the leading figure of the populist intel-

44 Such was, in the radio, the program Bagoly (Owl), 168 Óra (168 hours), and Rádás (Encore), and in the television Hírháttér (News background), Napzártá (Ending of the day), and Panoráma (Panorama).

45 Konrád and Szelényi, “Intellectuals and Domination.”

46 Hofer, “Harc a rendszerváltásért szimbolikus mezőben.”

47 Csoóri, *Nappali hold*, 74.

lectual group at the time. However, in the everyday life of Hungarian society a “silent revolution” took place. The idea of embourgeoisement inspired the second generation of party bureaucracy as well. To the intellectuals, this embourgeoisement effect meant that, seeing themselves as the representatives of civil society, started to behave as legally conscious citizens.

In a situation of historical vacuum, the ideology-creator intellectuals who formulated ideas in the language of the era and were able to deal with the media had unquestionable victory over the bureaucracy of the old order. It achieved this as the occasional coalition of heterogeneous intellectual layers, orders, and “tribes” which wanted modernization, bourgeoisie order, and Westernization. This coalition was so mixed because the fundamentally order-like post-totalitarian society included certain germs of classes, as well as relatively more advanced, isolated layer interests. The technocrat intellectuals appeared as a layer, and they spoke a language that was similar to that of the opposition representatives of the *estate*-like political counterculture.

The old bureaucracy and the older generation of political leaders disappeared, and the technocratic and critical intellectuals could not find either a strong ally or a strong opponent in the “classless” society of the post-Kádarian world. The emerging vacuum indeed sucked in the intellectuals into politics. They defined their identity by comparing themselves to other critical intellectual groups, the ones they had already known. Under the leadership of intellectuals, quick party formation started, and pluralization succeeded by the reconstruction of certain elements of fragments of political legacy, by the recreation of the legacy.⁴⁸ Earlier several intellectuals feared that the economic reorganization started by a too slow embourgeoisement would not lead to democracy. An historian belonging to the democratic opposition, Miklós Szabó argued in several lectures in the 1980s that “private nest feathering” and petty embourgeoisement would not lead to democracy but hinder its formation.⁴⁹ Mihály Vajda, too, warned about the stability or even rigidity of mentalities.⁵⁰ In Hungary, institutional democracy was formed before capitalism, but the formation of the latter caused the fermentation of the order-like intellectual coalition.

48 Vajda, “Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság,” 67.

49 M. Szabó, *Politikai kultúra Magyarországon*.

50 Vajda, “Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság”; “Mentalitások.”

Post-communist transformation in some ways turned out to be the opposite of what Gramsci described. The case was not that every class birthed its own “organic intellectuals” but political intellectuals waited for the coming of their own “organic class” on which they pinned their hopes. Whereas until then they themselves provided political representation to their values, and many of them sacrificed their intellectual being as they became politicians. However, by the time the new capitalist class organized it became clear that it would not be the “organic class” of the intellectuals.

According to the researchers of elite change,

The distinctiveness of the new capitalist societies of East Central Europe is due to the coalition of class fractions and elites which currently rule them. This coalition constitutes a “power elite,” which controls the command positions of political, cultural, and economic institutions, and is busy making “capitalism without capitalists.” For the time being, this post-communist power elite does not look like a capitalist class [. . .], [n]or does it resemble the communist nomenklatura [. . .]. Instead, the new power elite of post-communism resembles most closely what Bourdieu has called “the dominated fraction of the dominant class in Western capitalism”: it exercises power principally on the basis of knowledge, expertise and the capacity to manipulate symbols, in short, “cultural capital.”⁵¹

These authors believed that this new leading elite, the “politocracy” of intellectual politicians on the one hand and the cultural elite on the other hand would form the “New Class” that leads the system. This is what they called post-communist managerialism, a concept referred to Burnham’s thesis of manager capitalism,⁵² albeit they also found the social environment of the post-communist system obviously different from that of the 1930s. The description concerned the diffuse social relations, the distributed and “recombinant property,”⁵³ as well as the situation of social and political uncertainty and the related legal uncertainty. The main rule-makers of the system were the financial managers

⁵¹ Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, “The Theory of Post-Communist Managerialism,” 61.

⁵² Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution*.

⁵³ Stark, “Recombinant Property.”

and those experts who worked at such foreign and international financial organizations which design local capitalism for the purposes of the global economy. The integration of the intelligentsia into this new power structure served the more efficient legitimation of the system, but this intelligentsia could only play the role of a subordinate, controlled faction within the power elite.

The analysis of Eyal and his colleagues offered a combination of elite theory and New Class theory, into which the authors also included certain parts of Szelényi's earlier theory about the intellectuals.⁵⁴ The analysis gave a faithful image of the chaotic period of the 1990s, yet it perhaps took the transitional interests of the power elite too seriously when it placed the function of control before property. The thesis of managerialism overestimated the stability of the coalition of leaders, technocrats, and political intellectuals as well. Later, it became obvious that the leaders and members of other elite groups were very much interested in property acquisition. After the years of anomie, they understood consolidation as solidifying wealth accumulation and making the process irreversible. Sensing the changing circumstances, Eyal and his colleagues refined the main theses of post-communist managerialism in their book published a year later.⁵⁵ They no longer perceived it as the beginning of a possible, historically unique social system, but as the early period of social conflict emerging in the wake of the birth of the new wealthy class.

When the state socialist system collapsed, not only did the third phase of socialism not come but we had to wait a little time for the return of capitalism as well. Intellectuals "won," not as an organized New Class but as the "vanguard of building capitalism."⁵⁶ Although critical intellectuals had been successfully marginalized by the Kádár regime for a long time, it had become clear by the time of the regime change that the gap between the ideas of opposition intellectuals and the society was not as big as they had thought. The intellectuals were forerunners, but they did not end up being alone. That is why they could return to society in 1991 when their representatives felt that they had to protect the freshly won democracy.

54 Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, "The Theory of Post-Communist Managerialism."

55 Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, *Making Capitalism without Capitalists*.

56 Böröcz, "Tetszettek volna forradalmat csinálni . . ."

2.2 BACKGROUND OF THE FORMATION OF THE
DEMOCRATIC CHARTER

Liberation from party state rule spurred many people precisely to not to be members of parties anymore, they would not “drag in the wake” of party politics, not even in the multiparty system. Defining this attitude as his own, an MSZMP participant of the Roundtable talks described it as follows:

When I got rid of the great burdens of my life and at last, I could quit this with impunity, then I did. When man grows wiser and wiser, and the older he becomes, the more he realizes that this is a game. There are only more important things like this in the world. [. . .] I think it's unimaginable that I'll once again listen to the speech of some chap I find dead boring, only because it's part of the order. Hell, no. I've already liberated my spirit, I'm already my own master to a degree that I'm not willing to accept the slightest limitation, neither in my thoughts or time. This cannot happen to me ever again.⁵⁷

This liberation that became a collective experience created the basis for those journalists, artists, and members of other intellectual groups who had been passive in the Kádár era to use their social capital to join—in various roles, with ties to various networks, in many cases existing as hybrid intellectuals⁵⁸—the post-regime change, less risky new movement politics.

In the following, I illustrate the role of the new, movement intellectuals after the regime change through the history of a political protest movement of intellectuals, the Democratic Charter (DC) which existed between 1991 and 1994. The movement served as the umbrella organization to several demands which were either different or interpreted in a different way. One of these demands was the reawakening of a formerly politically active but later depoliticized civil society and the representation of a democratic consensus “above” partial interests in the party pluralism that came into being in 1989. An opposition to authoritarian tendencies was also important; an emphasis on the idea of participatory democracy as opposed to the practice

⁵⁷ Interview with György Jutasi, 1997.

⁵⁸ Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*.

of an “elitist democracy” based on the idea of representation. The initiative was similarly motivated by the united opposition to radical right and the creation of an experimental field for a possible socialist and liberal political alliance within a political movement. Social, cultural, and political goals were mixed in the movement, of which not only participants but also organizers were often unaware.

While the DC was initiated, after the regime change, by intellectuals who had gone from the former regime opposition to the new political elite, Charter spokespeople and direct supporters were the joining media intellectuals, who were trained to become critical intellectuals by the movement and also allied themselves with literary intellectuals and the activating artistic intellectuals. The history of the DC is a peculiar verification to the Gramscian⁵⁹ theory of movement sociology⁶⁰ which holds that the movement as a cognitive praxis is itself such a social process of learning that offer opportunity to train for the role of critical intellectual. After the era of dissidence and regime opposition, the history of the DC can be described as the history of learning another critical intellectual behavior, the role of movement intellectual. The DC and the related new movement phase concluded the long decade of intellectuals.

In the 1980s, dissident intellectuals led an underground movement way of life. Their independence ensured that they had been the most outspoken critics of the Kádár regime. As a group, they served as an example for Hungarian journalists in the transitional period. This group efficiently mobilized the public in the autumn of 1989 to terminate communist party privileges, and by insisting on a referendum they blocked the way to a premature presidential election planned by those in power. This same group openly supported the taxi drivers’ blockade, a four-day-long unrest following price increases during which taxi drivers blocked the main roads and bridges of the capital, bringing traffic to a standstill in Budapest in October 1990. By supporting the taxi drivers, the group helped prevent the government’s use of force against those taking in the blockade. The democratic opposition in the 1980s was able to stimulate a political, though rather isolated, public, creating the missing link between state and society. The leaders of SZDSZ main-

59 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*.

60 Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements and Their Intellectuals*.

tained a dissident attitude for a long time, and the popularity of the new party grew as long as it was able to give a movement interpretation to its politics. The taxi drivers' blockade was the last chance for that; being in opposition to the regime or demanding to take over the government did not prove to be effective in this respect—society was unimpressed.

The emergence of representative democracy and a professional political elite slowly narrowed the playing field of a critical intellectual attitude. It was a painful experience for the SZDSZ leadership to realize that a considerable number of party sympathizers had grown disillusioned with politics. It turned out that a parliamentary democracy demands the replacement of antipolitical diction with an openly political one.⁶¹ Both the party leadership and liberal intellectuals were dissatisfied because they felt that the principles so successfully followed in 1989 were disintegrating, falling victim to the struggle for power in restoration "revolutionism."

Certain intellectuals created their own journals which were more or less independent from their party, deviating from or supporting the current "party line." Determined politicians acquired *Magyar Fórum*, which represented the Csurka wing of MDF. Intellectuals wavering between the roles of politician and intellectual edited the now weekly *Beszélő* which focused on social and political issues (SZDSZ). *Magyar Narancs* was edited, not by quick retreaters as the bi-weekly magazine gradually attained more independence and it completely detached from Fidesz in 1992. Good relations were soon developed between the liberal half of these journals and Budapest's society of journalist, while the journalists and politicians who leaned toward the government and the populist line attempted to establish a new association of journalists closer to them. First, in the autumn of 1991 they created the Press Freedom Club as a counterpart to the liberal Publicity Club. In March 1992, the Club resorted to the slogan of "press fairness" as it was renamed the Community of Hungarian Journalists (MÚK) and became an alternative association of journalists, in opposition to the long-existing National Association of Hungarian Journalists (MÚOSZ). However, this attempt did not bring the expected results, and although several journals were created or reorganized by the government⁶² the bulk of the journalist society was criti-

61 Garton Ash, *The Uses of Adversity*

62 *Esti Hírlap, Magyar Nemzet, Új Magyarország, Heti Magyarország.*

cal of the government's activity. Most of the journalists feared their independence in the so-called media war that broke out over the replacement of the respective leaders of state radio and television,⁶³ and they sympathized with Árpád Göncz, the President of the Republic as a check and balance to the government and with the opposition parties.

The liberation of 1988–1989 offered an ethical revolution for the media. Young journalists came to the fore, and older ones tried to change their attitude and give up their past submissive practices. Cutthroat competition started for keeping and winning over readership, which meant, in the democratic environment, that newspapers focused on news, interesting items, and sensations, not propaganda. As a result, most of the papers were strongly critical of the new government. Government politicians failed to realize that criticism would attract more readers than the apologies that fed-up journalists had been writing during the years of the dictatorship. Thus, a considerable part of the media became “opposition” naturally, due to the very nature of free press. It is no exaggeration to claim that the period of 1988–1994 was “the era of freedom of the press” for the journalists, who had already become independent from the state party and not yet become dependent on the new owners. The period of creative anarchy was followed by the period of strengthening dependence on the new owners, who were often backed by the new political forces.

Cracks appeared among the groups of the liberal intellectuals, which had never been completely homogeneous. When some of those groups were organized as a government coalition and some, as political opposition, a difference between their norms and models became apparent. The parties and persons who had formed the government coalition as “natural allies” could be divided further into two groups. One group was comprised of the followers of József Antall. They advocated a model of Western social market economy and multiparty democracy, but their rhetoric was that of pre-war politics. This approach expressed the conservative values of a return to democracy, which, however, was alien to the approach of the media after the regime change. No conservatism linked to modernity could come into being in Hungary; instead, conservatism appeared in its traditional form, in opposition to modernity. The part of the press called “liberal” was suspicious of

63 Bajomi-Lázár, *A magyarországi médiabáború*.

the conservatism of the Antall government primarily because it could not believe, of the traditional language, that it was a modern conservatism. Further, for historical reasons, its democratic grounds were felt to be rather unstable. In the second group were critical intellectuals turned into government politicians. They preserved their critical attitude, but it had been based on a romantic, antimodernist ideas even in the years of the Kádár regime. That is, in this second case, basic differences—not only linguistic and stylistic ones—existed between the liberal media and some politician-intellectuals turning toward populism.

These factors and a campaign against journalists by the MDF even before the 1990 elections strengthened the tendency of the media to sympathize with the opposition parties. In the debate of government and opposition parties, two different approaches to history appeared. One said that the four decades of communism had “interrupted” Hungarian history, involved a complete break with its continuity, and, therefore, history had to begin at the point where it had been broken. The other thought that communism had been a distorted kind of modernization which, despite its catastrophic effects, resulted in modifications in the structure and values of the society, so that after its fall, not the interwar status had to be taken as a starting point, but Western liberal democratic norms need to be followed. Both the media and the opposition parties interpreted the 1989 political changes in the latter way. Although regime change ended by restructuring the country’s institutions, a *Kulturkampf* between norms and models continued, and intellectuals turned politicians were especially sensitive to that.

The first years of the 1990s saw the beginning of the retreat of intellectuals from parties. In the Central European intellectual culture, demonstrative references to civil society meant resistance to the state.⁶⁴ Beyond the various orientations of political vocation and professional commitment, critical intellectuals had to develop a new form of action, a new kind of strategy for political interest representation. A strategy which does not restrict politically active intellectuals to various fields of professional or party-political activities but offers opportunity for self-realization. It seemed that political intellectuals may attain a dominant role in the vacuum that emerged after the regime change and before the consolidation of the new layer of professional

64 Coser, “The Social Role of Eastern European Intellectuals.”

intellectuals and the new class of owners.⁶⁵ After a few echoless attempts, a new intellectual political movement, the DC became an example for this.

2.3 FROM NEED TO MOVEMENT

In August 1991, some editors of the former Central European samizdat journals who were currently the publishers of the journals that carried the legacy of the former democratic movements met in Budapest. At the conference, the author György Konrád, the president of International Pen Club proposed a Central and East European Democratic Charter setting forth in a joint statement the minimum requirements of democracy for the post-communist countries of the region. Konrád wished to model the Charter on previous solidarity initiatives of the opposition such as the Czech Charta '77 and the related signature campaigns from the dissident era. He aimed to ease newly arising ethnic tensions that were about to bring armed conflict in several places. Participants of the meeting, however, rejected the proposal saying, "it's no use enforcing a romantic role of intellectuals that used to be topical in the past but is not so anymore." They argued that "key issues are now in the hands of professional politicians and the whole idea would come to some aborted drive of the highbrow."⁶⁶

What did not seem a feasible international project became topical in Hungarian domestic policy a few weeks later. A few days after the failed Soviet coup of August 1991, Imre Kónya, the head of the parliamentary faction of the largest governing party, the MDF, published an article⁶⁷ in which the politician urged a stricter policy by MDF regarding privatization, the mass media, and punishment of the past regime's guilty persons. The paper revealed that those of the center of the government and the MDF probably identify with views regarded earlier as too radical. Kónya emphasized that those steps had to be taken even if most Hungarians were against them. Further, he said, Western responses should not be feared as Europe had already recognized Hungary as a democratic state.

The Kónya paper was interpreted by SZDSZ leaders as a threat. The executive body of the party reached the conclusion that the only way to prevent

65 Konrád and Szelényi, "Intellectuals and Domination in Post-Communist Societies."

66 Konrád, "Egy gesztus vizsgálata."

67 Kónya, "Az igazat, csak a tiszta igazat . . ."

a shift to the right by the government coalition and authoritarian tendencies in the shift's wake was to appeal to democratic citizens by issuing an open Charter stating that democratic restructuring had not been completed. To support their proposal, Bauer and Kis, two leaders of the party analyzed authoritarian tendencies in the MDF in a lengthy article.⁶⁸ On analyzing the situation, leading politicians of MSZP joined SZDSZ leaders. However, the arguments by SZDSZ representatives included an important statement addressed directly to the critical intellectuals of 1989:

The group of liberal intellectuals, who have done so much in the press, in clubs, and other public forums to prepare the ground for restructuring during the late Kádár period, split as soon as political changes took place and have been unable to recover from the split to this very day. Some of them have been absorbed by the opposition parties. Those who stayed out turn their back on party politics with disdain. Those who are in often fail to see what is outside the Parliament, those who are out are increasingly antagonistic to Parliament and the whole new political structure.⁶⁹

In order to bridge the gap between insiders and outsiders, the authors proposed a division of labor.

Intellectuals working within the parties should realize that lacking support of independent intellectuals shaping the public view, their voices are crying in the wilderness. Nonparty member intellectuals should realize that their fate is also at stake in political struggles, and it is no use maintaining their independence by saying six of one and half a dozen of the other.⁷⁰

The proposal was still conceived in the old framework of dissidents by speaking about insiders and outsiders and not making a distinction between intellectuals and politicians. If we accept the definition of an intellectual as one who has trans-contextual knowledge and secures his given social position by that knowledge alone, politicians can no longer be considered as

68 Bauer and Kis, "A magyar demokrácia védelmében."

69 Bauer and Kis, "A magyar demokrácia védelmében."

70 Bauer and Kis, "A magyar demokrácia védelmében."

intellectuals. For a politician's social-political position is legitimized by the voters rather than by their professional knowledge.⁷¹ This is true even if 90 percent of the Hungarian MPs elected in 1990 had a professional university degree⁷² and they often behaved as political-minded intellectuals rather than politicians. Bauer and Kis however, wrote not a sociological but a political article aiming to mobilize people: "all who are freedom and against totalitarian rule by communists or else shall join forces to defend democracy."⁷³

Feeling a growing political apathy and disillusionment in the country, the authors wanted intellectuals who were increasingly distancing themselves from politics to return to the ranks of supporters of democratic politics by taking part in the proposed public demonstration. Yet the initiative carried the risk of dividing society into those who are for freedom and those who are against it. Thus, the executives of SZDSZ emphasized that their initiative was not antiparliamentarian and laid stress on the collaboration of individuals committed to the same cause rather than on party politics. Iván Pető of the SZDSZ said, "the members of the Alliance of Free Democrats would sign the Charter as individuals, but the SZDSZ would not be signatory as a party, a political organization."⁷⁴ At the same time, the Publicity Club also published a statement condemning the principles of the Kónya paper.

The document, completed two weeks later, was put together primarily by members of the former democratic opposition.⁷⁵ The title of the document was a reference to the Czech Charter '77, one of the outstanding initiatives of the struggle for freedom in Central Europe. During the debate, a difference of opinion arose between liberal and socialist-minded participants on whether social rights could be regarded as an inherent part of democracy. In the end, those rights were included for the participants wanted to publish a generally acceptable document that could signed by everybody, including those who supported the ruling parties.

The DC was issued on September 26, 1991, signed by 162 mostly liberal intellectuals. The full text was published the next day in four national dai-

71 Konrád and Szelényi, "Intellectuals and Domination."

72 Róna-Tas, "The Selected and the Elected."

73 Bauer and Kis, "A magyar demokrácia védelmében."

74 Pető, "Demokratikus Charta a jövő héten."

75 György Konrád, Mihály Kornis, and Sándor Radnóti.

lies. The document listed 17 criteria of democracy in different areas of society. The opening lines also explained the need for a Charter:

We, signatories to the Charter, Hungarian democrats, independent of our party politics, believe that the democratic process is held back in our country. Many have turned away from politics not only as a result of our declining living standards but also because this is not how they imagined democracy. We know that, as in all historical transformations, this is a decisive period in our history that brings not only hardship but benefits as well. We would like to safeguard them, and thus we deem it necessary to proclaim what sort of Hungarian Republic we want.⁸⁰

The declaration was signed by 4,000 people by early December. Although its text was not openly anti-government, Prime Minister Antall thought it was. He called it “a collection of elementary constitutional theses” that could be signed by practically anybody and was therefore politically meaningless; on the other hand, he considered it an opposition action directed against the government that coalition sympathizers could not stand for. He took the stance that *there is* democracy now and not that “*there will be*” when the conditions in its 17 points were met; and if there is democracy, whoever doubts its existence questions indirectly the democratic legitimacy of the government and existing institutions and is, in the extreme, antidemocratic.

Differences in the use of the term democracy were conspicuous. Democracy was a political concept for the prime minister and his supporters, based on institutions and representation. For the signatories of the Charter, it was a wider, social concept based on civil participation in a process that “can never be ended by nature.”⁷⁷ The existence of political democracy in Hungary was not questioned by the signatories, they themselves had fought for its birth in the 1980s. However, they felt a need to identify with the role of a critical intelligentsia and to maintain that identify by changing from being advocates of political democracy to advocates of a society’s democracy.

Political and critical intellectual motivations were inseparably mixed in the Charter from the minute it was born. Politicians supporting the DC

80 *Demokratikus Charta*.

77 Vitányi, “Egy mondat a demokráciáról.”

were probably endeavoring to widen the political base of opposition politics, while the critical intellectuals regarded it as a new public social form of a critical intellectual identity—as an opportunity for the intelligentsia to break away from partial truth and continue to be a representative of some “universal truth.” The DC was issued apropos of the Kónya paper but it did not want to be a daily political response to another daily political event. Rather, it wanted to state the basic principles of democracy, and mobilize the intellectuals. Thus, the Charter gained an independent life: it turned from a means to an end. As Imre Keszérű, a high school teacher who formerly had been in the MSZMP reform circles, put it: “For three years, I’ve been waiting for the moment to meet those people again who were friends in 1989 but have been ‘blown away’ by politics. It’s uplifting that we finally stand here again, side-by-side, knowing that we must strengthen each other again.”⁷⁸

Following Antall’s response, whether to sign the document turned into a political, moreover, a loyalty issue: therefore, the great majority of the representatives of the government coalition and their sympathizers did not sign it. The action seemed to be a highbrow intellectual initiative that was going nowhere. However, when Antall dismissed the governor of the independent National Bank of Hungary⁷⁹ because he had signed the DC, the slumbering initiative was given a new impetus. Antall regarded the central bank governor’s signing as an act of disloyalty, saying “if somebody is crying for freedom at a place where there is freedom, that person has become the victim of a misconception or is lying. Neither the governor of an independent central bank, nor any member of the government can give their name to such a document.”⁸⁰ Csurka, the leader of MDF radicals, used harsher wording: “It should be realized that the Hungarian people authorized the MDF at free elections to govern the country. Overemphasizing a need for professionalism is a dirty trick by the Bolshevik.”⁸¹ The signatories to the Charter, however, thought their earlier fears had come true. “By relieving from his position, the governor of the Hungarian National Bank for his doubts about the freedom of speech in Hungary, the Prime Minister proved there was no freedom of

78 “Society cannot be divided again.” Interview with Imre Keszérű by Attila Farkas. *Magyar Hírlap*, March 16, 1992.

79 György Surányi was removed from the position of governor of MNB on November 30, 1991.

80 Antall, “Fel kellett menteni.”

81 For Csurka’s full commentary, see *Magyar Hírlap*, December 2, 1991.

speech,” said György Konrád. Another liberal writer, Mihály Kornis added that “this is the evidence that the government ruthlessly wanted to implement antidemocratic goals.”⁸² Both parties thought they were true democrats and wanted to protect democracy against each other.

The cashiering of the central bank governor caused a scandal in domestic policy. In response, the leading bodies of the opposition parties joined the signatories of the Charter, therefore lending it party political weight. The most important was the joining of the three parliamentary opposition parties (SZDSZ, MSZP, Fidesz). Signatories protested to the government valuing economic actors by their political loyalty rather than their performance. Dailies published the 17 points of the DC again. A group of economists turned MPs warned in an open letter against the independence of the central bank being endangered by political interests.

When the signatories convened another meeting in the beginning of December 1991 to discuss their strategy, Konrád made three proposals. He said that (1) the DC should be established as an organization with spokespersons to speak out on topical issues from time to time; (2) neighboring Central European countries should start their own Charters; and (3) collaboration between such movements should be launched. By this proposal, Konrád also revived his own previous proposal about an international Democratic Charter. On the following day, a group of DC signatories issued a protest statement which condemned the way the central bank governor had been relieved, called Charter sympathizers to join, and announced a rally to clarify appropriate further actions.⁸³ They also published a full-page political advertisement, whose words, “It can be your turn tomorrow” reminded people of the symbolic importance of the removal of the bank governor.

The first rally of the supporters of DC took place at the Budapest Town Hall in December 1991 attended by 1,000 people.⁸⁴ They agreed that the Charter, which had started as a single move of protest, needed to be changed into a movement initiative. In his opening address, Konrád identified the

82 For the statement of György Konrád and Mihály Kornis, see *Magyar Hírlap*, December 2, 1991.

83 For the text of the statement, see *Magyar Hírlap*, December 4, 1991. The statement was authored mainly by journalists: Endre Babus (*HVG*), Katalin Bossányi (*Népszabadság*), Tivadar Farkasházy (*Hócipő*), Tibor Fényi (*Beszélő*), Iván Gábor (*Magyar Hírlap*), Ervin Tamás (*Népszabadság*), and Mátyás Vince (*Napi Világgazdaság*). The others were intellectuals of the liberal arts, as well as a couple of opposition politicians.

84 Interview with Katalin Bossányi, 1992.

DC, not as a party or political movement but as “a spiritual alliance of democrats,” which, he said, was a kind of “noetic shield,” an exchange of views among citizens, a “genre for self-arrangement of civil society.” In his words, the Charter “did not want to replace representative democracy, it only wants to embed the political class and, particularly, the ruling administration in a democratic social context. [. . .] [The Charter] is not a party, it has no membership, only occasional agreement in principles. Accordingly, it vests power in no one. The Democratic Charter will not have power, but it will have influence. [. . .] The Democratic Charter is an update to the ideas of social contract from the side of the governed.”⁸⁵

Several speakers reiterated that the Charter was not an opposition move but a common denominator of the principles of democracy.⁸⁶ Two speakers reminded the audience of the intellectual movements of the 1980s: Zoltán Krasznai explained that the former dissidents did not wish to be subjects again; whereas Imre Keserű from the former reform circles of MSZMP underlined the opportunity to unite the parties that had lost the elections. Two members of parliament were present who made remarks on the relationship between the Charter and the political institutions: Gáspár Miklós Tamás (SZDSZ) said that “the Charter is gaining importance as the crisis of parliamentary democracy is growing in Hungary”; and Gábor Fodor (Fidesz) reminded that “the Charter cannot replace either parliamentary opposition or any element of the political institutions.”⁸⁷

Spokespersons of the Charter were elected by open ballot for a year,⁸⁸ and participants adopted Konrád’s proposal that the Charter should have signatories and spokespersons rather than members and leaders, and all signatories were, symbolically, spokespersons. Elected spokespersons included four journalists, two sociologists, a psychologist, a chemist, a film director, a high school teacher, and a full-time politician. The process of the nomination of spokespersons was unclear, the participants of the meeting did not vote for each spokesperson but approved an already composed, final

85 Konrád, “A Charta: szellemi pajzs.”

86 See the comments of Tivadar Farkasházy, Péter György, Mihály Kornis, Zoltán Lovas, Sándor Radnóti, Tamás Ungvári, and Iván Vitányi in *Magyar Hírlap*, December 9, 1991.

87 For the full comments of Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Gábor Fodor, and others, see the December 9 issues of *Magyar Hírlap*, *Magyar Nemzet*, *Népszabadság*, and *Népszava*.

88 *Vasárnapi Hírek*, December 8, 1991.

list. It was important for those who compiled the list of spokespersons⁸⁹ to include as many journalists as possible to ensure publicity for the Charter. It was also important to choose people who were, in majority, close to the opposition parties: "The three opposition parties were trying to delegate people who were close followers. So they could not be said to belong to one or another party, while they could be influenced by a party to a certain extent."⁹⁰

Most of the nominators were intellectual politicians in their party, and therefore exercised an informal right of delegation. Most of the spokespersons were intellectuals who had stepped into the limelight at the time of the regime change but had later quickly withdrawn from politics, as well as sympathizers, but not members, of the opposition parties. No one from the first line of former dissidents acted as spokesperson. In the enthusiastic atmosphere of the rally at the Town Hall, the newly organized group of intellectuals achieved its goal. Intellectuals wavering between political and intellectual roles found in the Charter an arena for movement action and an opportunity to withdraw to shape a noetic and political alliance. And intellectuals who had withdrawn from politics could again get closer to decision making without being forced to join the rank and file of party politics.

2.4 A "GENTLE POWER": EVENTS OF THE DEMOCRATIC CHARTER

Following the rally, the influence of the Charter grew beyond the circles of intellectuals. The number of signatories rose to 7,000 in the following week.⁹¹ Spokespersons received dozens of supporting letters and declarations of intent to join every day. A then considerable sum was collected at the rally or transferred to the Charter's account.⁹² The mood was a bit like that of the revolutionary times of 1988–1989, although the government media were, naturally, unenthusiastic. Their articles usually pointed out that the Charter was an opposition movement against a democratically elected government. From the opposition parties, Fidesz openly criticized the Charter for becoming something different from what they had joined. Its parliamentary faction stated that "by signing the Charter, they did not wish to approve of the

89 Among them were Gábor Fodor, György Konrád, László Rajk, and Iván Vitányi.

90 Interview with Katalin Bossányi, 1992.

91 Horányi, *A Charta dokumentációja*.

92 Interview with Katalin Bossányi, 1992.

establishment of a political movement and do not wish to participate in it.”⁹³ On the one hand, this revealed the lines of power within Fidesz. For Gábor Fodor was an active supporter of the Charter, whereas László Kövér and Viktor Orbán were more suspicious. The other two opposition parties, the MSZP and the SZDSZ, did not mind. The general response of the Charter spokespersons to Fidesz’s position of separation was that the DC did not wish to become a branch office of any party, or a party itself, it was merely a citizens’ appeal.

The spokespersons of the DC published an open letter of self-identification addressed to the signatories, in which they defined the Charter as a citizens’ initiative. They emphasized that “the Charter is not directed against any party” and “the Charter is not backed by parties.”⁹⁴ At the same time, thousands of signatories were sent sheets to collect further signatures. The number of signatories increased at a record speed to 20,000 by February 1992. The DC Foundation was set up during the winter.⁹⁵ The spokespersons issued a report on the state of democracy which was presented at a press conference in February 1992, where various experts spoke and circulated short reports on certain phenomena in the press, the economy, and the political scene that seemed to be endangering democracy. A conservative signatory, Béla Pomogáts, caused a sensation with his report on a meeting of the World Federation of Hungarians held in December 1991 where he was publicly called a “traitor to the nation” for signing the Charter.⁹⁶

The first major demonstration of DC took place on the national holiday of March 15, 1992. For the first time supporter parties were faced with a fait accompli when the spokespersons announced a separate Charter rally and demonstration in downtown Budapest along a traditional route of former dissidents, from the Petőfi Statue to Kossuth Square. An event to be held on the day of Free Press had become especially relevant because the government was trying to exert increasing pressure on the presidents of the independent radio and television, and also wanted to use its pre-emption right to

93 For the statement of the parliamentary group of Fidesz, see *Magyar Hírlap*, December 9, 1991. The interview of the parliamentary leader of Fidesz, Viktor Orbán in *Pesti Hírlap*, December 9, 1991.

94 The open letter was published in *Magyar Hírlap*, December 21, 1991.

95 Katalin Bossányi, György Konrád, and Sándor Radnóti were named officially as founders. The creation of the Foundation was aided by Alajos Dornbach, a lawyer who had supported the democratic opposition and was an MP of SZDSZ and the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly at the time.

96 Pomogáts, “A Charta körül.”

purchase the liberal daily, *Magyar Hírlap*. The demonstration, the first occasion when the Charter brought masses to the streets, had about 15,000 participants.⁹⁷ Addressing the crowd, Iván Vitányi emphasized that it was not an opposition demonstration but represents the basic values of democrats. Gáspár Miklós Tamás wanted to strengthen the Charter's umbrella, and its "para-party" identity, saying: "We are not supposed to defend a single party, a single way of thinking or a single kind of taste alone but every taste, every party, and every thought, even the ones we find unbearable."⁹⁸

Following the demonstration, Charter spokespersons arranged meetings in an endeavor to set up an informal nationwide network. They met the most active supporters, most of whom urged that the Charter be organized into a powerful national movement. Participants included representatives of the Democratic Trade Union of Researchers (TDDSZ), the League of Citizens' Rights, and the Young Socialists.⁹⁹ At the same time, DC clubs were formed in the country, and spokespersons often visited country towns and cities on the invitation of such clubs or to mark their opening. The organization of traveling was often helped by SZDSZ and MSZP. Nevertheless, the Charter did not become a continuous social movement and on only a few occasions was its influence felt beyond the groups of intellectuals. Two spokespersons proposed an anti-fascist demonstration on May 8 to mark the European ending of World War II, but the proposal was rejected by the spokespersons on the grounds that May 8 has a different meaning in the countries of the former Soviet bloc.¹⁰⁰

A Charter-arranged event for May Day, however, was a success. Spokespersons had gotten hold of a government draft of the Social Act. As they found it unsuitable to ensure adequate social support, in collaboration with social politicians a call went out in defense of social minimums. The text referred point five of the 17 points of the Charter which said, "there will be democracy if the state guarantees all its citizens basic social welfare." Although this point had been opposed by liberals from the start¹⁰¹ it had found its way into the Charter. The Social Charter containing it was published on May Day,

97 Speeches at the demonstration were made by György Konrád, "Az ünnep visszanéz.," Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Iván Vitányi, and two spokespersons of the Charter, Ferenc Miszlivetz, and Imre Keserű.

98 See the report of *Magyar Hírlap*, March 16, 1992.

99 Interview with György Horányi, 1992.

100 Interview with Katalin Bossányi, 1992.

101 Liberals claimed that social welfare was not inevitably part of the definition of democracy.

and it was embraced by all trade union associations.¹⁰² With the Pensioners' Association and various youth organizations, this meant the representation of almost five million people. An overall support by the trade unions was sensational, as it was the first occasion in the post-communist history of the Hungarian trade union movement that all trade unions agreed on an issue. The Charter people and major trade unions agreed to collaborate. These trade unions printed Charter leaflets in their own printing houses and distributed them jointly.¹⁰³ DC spokespersons took part in May Day celebrations in Budapest parks collecting hundreds of supporting signatures.

Increasing attacks by the government coalition against the presidents of the public radio and television occasioned another Charter event. In an open letter, spokespersons protested the "government policy violating consensus."¹⁰⁴ In the cultural committee of the Parliament, only the MPs of the government coalition voted for a proposal to relieve the two presidents, who had been appointed by a consensus of coalition and opposition parties. Then, President Árpád Göncz refused to sign off on Antall's firing of these presidents; the government coalition responded by proposing the Parliament to condemn the Göncz for his "anti-constitutional" action. Göncz was caught in the crossfire of political attacks by the ruling coalition parties. As stakes had risen, the Charter issued a solidarity statement in support of the President:

The coalition parties consider the Head of State Árpád Göncz's move made in defense of democracy and the freedom of the media anti-constitutional. We protest against the unjustified series of attacks against the Head of State. A threat to constitutional order is posed by forces trying to evoke hysteria, to disturb the order of society, and to divert attention from an economic and social crisis.¹⁰⁵

The Statement also called for another rally. At the same time, intellectual sympathizers of the Charter published a full-page paid advertisement to

102. Autonomists, Confederation of Unions of Professionals, Liga, National Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions, National Federation of Workers' Councils, National Association of the Unemployed and Job Seekers (Bossányi, 1992). For the text of the call, see *Magyar Hírlap*, April 28, 1992.

103. Interview with Gyula Hegyi, 1992.

104. For the full text of the open letter, see *Magyar Hírlap*, May 19, 1992.

105. For the full text of the statement, see *Magyar Hírlap*, May 27, 1992.

support Árpád Göncz, with the caption "*The president = democracy*," starting another wave of signature collection. This time, organization of the signature campaign was promoted by the Publicity Club.¹⁰⁶

By the time Charter signatories and supporters gathered in June 1992, 12,000 people had already signed a statement to support the President of the Republic.¹⁰⁷ The speakers spoke about the disintegration of the consensus that had tacitly joined the government parties and the opposition despite their differences of opinion.¹⁰⁸ Unlike previous occasions, open criticism of the government coalition was dominant. Konrád opined that

the Prime Minister has found the time ripe to set out rules for the mass media, an attack has been launched against the presidents of the Radio and Television, who are trying to maintain their relative independence. The President of the Republic has also been attacked as he was unwilling to take part in such an attack and remained true to his oath to defend the freedom of the press, of speech, of thought, and of belief, refusing to play a subordinate role to the Prime Minister's censorial will.¹⁰⁹

Later the imminent constitutional crisis seemed to quiet down, and the draft statement condemning Árpád Göncz was not submitted to parliament by representatives of the government coalition. The MSZP and the MSZOSZ actively participated in the petition campaign.¹¹⁰ Thirty-five thousand signatures had been collected by the end of July to support the President of the Republic.¹¹¹ A debate on the Charter's future made it clear that the sympathizers wanted the Charter to become either a wider movement or an active network.

The most important event in the history of the DC took place on September 24, 1992. The summer slack season of domestic politics was ended in one stroke by a provocative political analysis by István Csurka published

106 *Magyar Hírlap*, May 27, 1992. The signatories were not organized by Charter spokespersons but a former member of the democratic opposition, János Kenedi (Publicity Club).

107 Horányi, *A Charta dokumentációja*.

108 Konrád was the leading speaker of the rally. Historian András Gerő and Iván Vitányi also addressed the participants.

109 Konrád, "Egy gesztus vizsgálata."

110 Hegyi, "A Charta színévaltozása."

111 Horányi, *A Charta dokumentációja*.

in the weekly *Magyar Fórum*. As a vice president of MDF, Csurka analyzed the failure of coalition parties at by-elections and the stalemate of the “media war” between government and opposition and drew the conclusion that the radical right of the MDF should either force the government to step down or demand that political conflicts be settled by force rather than by compromise. Csurka openly used some Nazi terms, such as *Lebensraum* and the “genetic degradation” of the population on ethnic grounds.¹¹²

The Csurka paper outraged majority of citizens, and when the issue was debated in parliament and Csurka reiterated his views on television, the public was shocked. Antall was hesitant to distance himself from the paper, stating merely that he did not identify with it. Fear was growing that the largest government party would fall into the hands of extremists, and pressure increased on the Charter to do something. The spokespersons declared that Csurka’s extremist views could not be tolerated by the democratic forces.¹¹³ Some of them urged an immediate demonstration in response, while others opined that the only worthy response can be a real mass demonstration, the organization of which requires time. Consultations with the opposition parties, trade unionist organizations, and other social groups began to organize the demonstration. The DC published an appeal, urging the government to condemn anti-constitutional views and announcing a “dignified march” in defense of democracy at an appropriate time.¹¹⁴ The spokespersons initially thought, with the agreement of the opposition parties, that speakers at the Charter demonstration should be independent of parties. Fidesz announced that their support of the demonstration was conditional on having no party speakers.¹¹⁵ In the end, however, it turned out differently. Following a pro-Csurka rally, SZDSZ leaders believed that the Charter demonstration should be given more political support. They placed pressure on the spokespersons and convinced them about the need for party speakers. Social expectations increased day by day.¹¹⁶ Following a pro-Csurka rally, SZDSZ leaders believed that the Charter demonstration should be given more political support. They placed pressure on the spokespersons and convinced them

112 Csurka, “Néhány gondolat.”

113 Statement by spokesperson Zoltán Szabó, *Magyar Hírlap*, August 31, 1992.

114 For the full text of the appeal, see *Magyar Hírlap*, 15 September, 1992.

115 From Fidesz, János Áder and András Kovács negotiated with the spokespersons of the Charter. Bossányi, “Szociális minimumok.”

116 Kószeg, “Az utcára? Az utcára!”

about the need for party speakers. Social expectations increased day by day. More and more organizations joined the demonstration, some of them providing financial support as well. Eventually, Fidesz also supported it, but it appointed no speakers. All three parties and the major trade unions helped print leaflets. The Charter made another public appeal, announcing the place and time of the demonstration and stating:

In Hungary, the extreme right have been pushing forward over the past few weeks. Racist, anti-minorities, inciting views supporting fascism were publicized at different forums. The vice president of the MDF announced a nationalistic program called *Magyar Út* [Hungarian Way], different from the coalition program and antagonistic to national endeavours to join a civilized Europe. [...] The Democratic Charter warns in time: This is not what we voted for in 1990! Let us defend the achievements of a peaceful transition, let us protect jointly the freedom and democracy we have attained in heavy struggle!¹¹⁷

The long list of organizations joining the appeal showed all the shades of political opinion. It ranged from anarchists to evangelical youth organizations, from former communists to liberal democrats, from greens to Christian sports clubs. The list of signatories was dominated by left-wing organizations. Nevertheless, the impressive list of joining NGOs was reminiscent of the movement atmosphere of 1988–1989, the romanticism of the fight between the oppressing state and the liberating civil society. The list of speakers was announced at a press conference arranged by the Charter, where each joining organizing were given time to express their position.¹¹⁸ With the cooperation of sympathizer journalists, opposition politicians, and critical intellectuals, major dailies reported daily on the event to come.

Over 80,000 people, by reliable estimates, took to the streets on September 24, 1992.¹¹⁹ It was the largest mass demonstration in Hungary since the 1989

¹¹⁷ For the full text of the appeal, see *Magyar Hírlap*, September 21, 1992.

¹¹⁸ It was decided here that theater director Imre Kerényi, who was usually associated with the national-liberal wing of MDF, would make a speech, alongside four speakers belonging to SZDSZ, Iván Darvas, György Konrád, Bálint Magyar, and Imre Mécs. Interview with Hegyi, 1992.

¹¹⁹ The organizations participating in the Charter demonstration of September 1992 were the following: Alba Circle, Anti-militarist Group, Left Alternative Union, Leftist Youth, Budapest Anarchist Group, Budapest Social Democratic Youth Movement, Workers' Democratic Alliance, Feminist Network, Fix

reburial of Imre Nagy.¹²⁰ Demonstrators marched along their traditional route in the city center. György Konrád and pastor László Donáth addressed the crowd at the Petőfi Statue, then the crowd moved to Kossuth Square with flowers and candles in hand.¹²¹ The speeches here mostly called for a joint move against an antidemocratic right and emphasized the importance of a quiet but firm response to aggression. Vitányi again suggested that it was not an opposition demonstration but a meeting of the “friends of society.” Writer Miklós Mészöly warned that on the horrible bridge of ethnic violence between Bosnia and Rostock, “Budapest may be an intellectual pillar only in a suicidal way.”¹²² Konrád reiterated: “If there is democracy, being Hungarian anywhere is not forbidden. If there is not democracy, it is difficult to be a Hungarian in the neighboring countries. Hungarians, then, have a vested interest to see democracy prevail all over the Carpathian basin.”¹²³

The demonstration had a definite anti-fascist character. Participants included pensioners who said that they had last demonstrated against fascism 50 years ago in 1942. Charter sympathizer artists also performed. Opposition politicians felt that there was indeed a demand in the people for this to happen. Major funding was provided for the demonstration by a religious community, the Faith Church (*Hit Gyülekezete*).¹²⁴ In parallel with the Budapest demonstration, Charter demonstrations took place in Miskolc and Debrecen, too, which were attended by a few thousand people. Pál Forgách, the former president of the Liga trade union made a speech at the Miskolc event. While the government press attacked the Charter for the participation of certain so-called extremist groups, the gentle demonstration was anything but extreme. A large banner with the words “*Fearless for Democracy*” was carried by spokespersons; there were few other banners.

Association, Helsinki Citizens Group, Young Socialists, Christian-Jewish Dialogue Circle, Hungarian Radical Party, Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, Hungarian Protestant Church's Mission for Youth, The Liberal Division of Hungarian Roma, Hungarian Green Party, May Day Society, Martin Luther King Association, Marxist Youth and Student Union, R-Kert Service Association, Roma Parliament, SZETA, Council for Social Interest Reconciliation, Evangelical Youth and Student Community, New March Front, Wallenberg Association, Green League, Green Women, Hungarian Alliance of Jewish Students, and other organizations.

120 On demonstrations after the transition, see the statistics published in *HVG*, May 2, 1992.

121 György Konrád, Iván Vitányi, Iván Darvas, Imre Kerényi, Bálint Magyar, Imre Mécs, Miklós Jancsó, Miklós Mészöly, and Jenő Zsigó (Romaparlament) made speeches on the Kossuth Square.

122 The full texts of the speeches were published in *Népszabadság*, September 25, 1992.

123 Konrád, “Hölgyeim és uraim.”

124 Interview with Katalin Bossányi, 1992.

The success of the demonstration pushed the Charter on to a different level of politics. Its organization was justified in retrospect by the acts of István Csurka as well. The DC was no longer the internal issue of intellectuals or an incestuous movement: it was about defending democracy against the attack of right-wing radicals. The DC and the Antall government turned out to be on the same side in this, for defending democracy meant the defense of the democratic institutional system, including the democratically elected government. This is what Imre Kerényi realized in his speech at the demonstration, calling attention to this potential identity of interests. Spokespersons of DC were divided: they condemned Csurka, but they were not sure whether Antall turned against the Charter or Csurka. They regarded Antall as way too uncertain and demanded the head of government to be more forceful when distancing himself from Csurka. However, Antall had to consider that a significant part of MDF was behind Csurka at that time, which meant that an abrupt and radical breakup with Csurka risked losing governing majority. It took Antall long maneuvering to remove Csurka from the position of vice president of MDF, and that was possible only by abolishing the position of vice president itself. The power play within MDF was decided in the spring of 1993, when Csurka was left with no other choice but to leave MDF. This outcome was largely formed by the powerful appearance of the Charter, which had a major influence on public opinion.

In September 1992, the DC which started as a loose association of intellectuals was able to mobilize crowds that had been passive for a long time. It is true that the number of signatories was increasing slowly, but their composition had changed. After issuing the social charter in May, the proportion of the unemployed and pensioners increased.¹²⁵ It is also true that the DC did not become a permanent social movement, but it functioned as a symbol of democracy that could mobilize people if need arose. On the other hand, the demonstration also meant another step toward closer cooperation between the Charter and the opposition parties.

In a conference of October 1992 Konrád reiterated his idea of setting up an international democratic charter, which was supported by an overwhelming majority. Following the conference, the *Budapest Appeal* was compiled by Konrád, Mészöly, and Vitányi, proposing to set out an international

¹²⁵ Interview with György Horányi, 1992.

democratic charter in order that “the state of affairs in the world” could be continuously judged against democratic ideals. After identifying their joint values, they suggested an international dialogue on the issue.¹²⁶ In the meantime, radical right groups including uniformed skinheads disturbed celebrations on October 23 (Republic Day and the day of the outbreak of the revolution of 1956), preventing by whistling and shouts President Göncz from delivering his ceremonial address. Since there were off-duty border guards on the scene, who had been taken there on trucks, and they did nothing to prevent the disturbance, a suspicion arose of organized forces being in the background. Suspicion grew when Prime Minister Antall gave his first statement in the evening, saying no more than he was “not pleased with” the disturbance. By the time the spokespersons of the Charter gathered to express their protest, the participants of the conference had already compiled a protest statement on behalf of them as well. The Charter next published a full-page political advertisement in protest to the appearance of neo-Nazi ideals. The advertisement featured two photos: one recalled the takeover of the Arrow Cross Party (Hungarian fascists) in 1944; the other showed a neo-Nazi youth photographed on Kossuth Square on October 23. The caption was: “*Again? No!*”¹²⁷ When President Göncz was to inaugurate a restored Hungarian national symbol at Tatabánya in November, Charter spokespersons asked supporters to attend and, if need arose, physically protect the President of the Republic. About 100 people responded. Police, however, were careful this time, and skinhead groups gathering on the scene had no chance to disturb the inaugurating ceremony.

The one-year mandate of Charter spokespersons expired in December 1992. They discussed the future of the Charter at several meetings. Horányi proposed that the Charter suspend its activity for a year because with elections coming it might be used by some parties for their own campaigns, endangering its very existence.¹²⁸ Konrád, however, proposed with some support from others that Charter do not suspend its activity; moreover, the spokespersons stay on for another year.¹²⁹ Eventually, the congress they planned

126 For the full text of the appeal, see *Magyar Hírlap*, October 26, 1992. While the appeal was signed by at least 100 participants, the press published only a shortened list on the next day.

127 The advertisement was published in the October 28, 1992 issue of *Magyar Hírlap*, *Népszabadság*, and *Kurír*.

128 Interview with György Horányi, 1992.

129 Interview with György Konrád, 1992.

never happened, the spokespersons met only with a fraction, about 50 people, of those who had elected them. Following a lengthy debate, spokespersons decided to postpone their elections but meet again.¹³⁰ A political statement was also adopted in defense of the President of the public Television who had been suspended from his position by the prime minister by means of a disciplinary procedure based on an unconstitutional regulation that had accidentally survived the regime change.¹³¹

The spokespersons and their invitees met again in January 1993. By that time, the Radio and Television presidents¹³² had resigned under pressure from the government. In the wake of an MDF National Conference right-wing radicals of the party had become increasingly outspoken, and the crowding out of media presidents was also seen as a concession to the radical wing by Antall. Apparently, forcing them out was the price Antall had to pay to the circles around Csurka for supporting his anti-Csurka campaign, which Antall carried out at the National Conference of MDF in the end of January.

Because of these tensions in domestic politics, the following DC meeting was dedicated to a debate on the relationship between the Charter and political parties, in which those supporting independence remained a minority. The dilemma ended in an open victory for political parties. Konrád argued that party politicians should be included among the spokespersons as “independent personalities.” A new, 16-member body of spokespersons was elected, which included four former spokespersons. Altogether, four people who were also members of their party’s executive body or fulfilled a party function were included in the new body of spokespersons, as well as one of the freshly resigned leaders of Liga. Beyond them, three journalists, seven well-known scholars and artists, and one high school teacher were elected.¹³³ Political statement was not issued. Those spokespersons of the Charter who believed in the preservation of a nonpartisan social movement observed with growing worries that the organization was more and more often presented in

¹³⁰ Interview with Erzsébet Szalai, 1992.

¹³¹ The statement in defense of TV-president Hankiss was published in *Magyar Hírlap*, December 14, 1992.

¹³² Political scientist Csaba Gombár and sociologist Elemér Hankiss.

¹³³ In the new body of spokespersons, Farkasházy, Forgách, Gerő, György, Jancsó, Konrád, Mészöly, Mislivetz, Veér, and Vitányi were original signatories of the Democratic Charter. Among the party-related spokespersons there was Zoltán Király, the president of the Social Democratic People’s Party; the writer György Konrád, member of the National Council of SZDSZ; medical doctor András Veér, vice president of the Republic Party; and Iván Vitányi, one of the leaders and MPs of MSZP.

public opinion as the background organization of the approaching SZDSZ and MSZP. Someone blamed the noncooperative politics of Fidesz which had not joined the Charter as a movement.¹³⁴ Another Charter meeting started late because of a bomb threat. Gábor Demszky, Mayor of Budapest was also present. The attendees elected the new body of spokespersons of the Charter,¹³⁵ followed by speeches.¹³⁶ Although a few days earlier prime minister Antall had successfully marginalized the Csurka wing at the National Conference of MDF, and Csurka had left MDF, participants of the Charter meeting were not appeased for they sensed growing Csurkist influence in the public media led by vice presidents vested with full presidential powers, particularly in Hungarian Radio. Then, Konrád defined the role of the Charter as “citizens’ self-defense association, independent initiative, a forum of public life, which aims at stopping the restoration of censorship.” Its aim is to enforce a democratic minimum, “so communism would be followed by democracy, not *democradúra*.”¹³⁷

The rejection of radical right-wing views, as well as the linking of democracy to the issue of social security was more emphatic than before.¹³⁸ About the rally of many thousands of people, one spokesperson noted that “it’s bad enough that this many people are interested in today’s event, [. . .] our goal is not to perpetuate Charter but to say we can leave, as soon as possible, because the goals of the Charter have been realized.”¹³⁹

In March 1993, the spokespersons of DC proposed the formation of Charter clubs as civil circles forming under the wings of renowned intellectuals. In their letter, they said:

If you agree that citizens interested in public life demand various points of view to be heard and confronted and their own opinion to be ex-

¹³⁴ Kornis, “A helyzet – töredékek ugyanarról.”

¹³⁵ The body of spokespersons elected here was not exactly identical to those who had been elected by smaller circle a month before. The list of names now accepted consisted of the following: musician János Bródy, writer Csaplár Vilmos, editor Tivadar Farkasházy, journalist Gyula Hegyi, trade union leader György Kerekes, teacher Imre Keserű, MP Zoltán Király, historian Géza Komoróczy, writer György Konrád, writer Miklós Mészöly, sociologist Ferenc Miszlivetz, literary historian Béla Pomogáts, psychiatrist András Veér, and MP Iván Vitányi. See *Magyar Hírlap*, February 8, 1993.

¹³⁶ Géza Komoróczy, György Konrád, Miklós Mészöly, András Veér, and Iván Vitányi delivered speeches.

¹³⁷ Konrád, “Mi a Demokratikus Charta?”

¹³⁸ The latter idea was represented by Pál Forgách and Zsuzsa Ferge.

¹³⁹ For the statement of Tivadar Farkasházy, see *Magyar Hírlap*, February 8, 1993.

pressed, then you may also agree that these demands needs to be given some kind of form or framework. Let us call this form the Charter club. As our original agreement makes you, and every single signatory, a spokesperson of this civic initiative, we ask you to discuss with your agreeing friends and acquaintances how this can be realized. Reviving the tradition of civic discussion circles and dining-clubs, any public space may be an appropriate venue, just as private homes open to neighbors. We are happy if we can help with this attempt, expert, independent thinker, renowned intellectuals gladly visit you upon invitation for an exchange of thoughts.¹⁴⁰

Charter clubs organized all around the country and occasionally they invited DC spokespersons, yet the reasons for which the movement had been created gradually lost their importance. Movement politics became the exchange of thoughts of civic discussion circles and renowned intellectuals.

The change of function of the Charter could be observed also when the DC organized a peaceful march with flowers and candles on the night before March 15, 1993. Ten thousand people participated, but the speakers protested not concrete rights infringements but wanted to stress basic principles. Gyula Hegyi spoke for the freedom of the press, whereas the forced-out former President of Television, Elemér Hankiss spoke against exclusion, hate, and scapegoating and argued for action vis-à-vis apathy.¹⁴¹ A major topic of the event was the possible role of Hungary in facilitating discussion between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In his speech, Konrád offered a new national strategy to reconcile the neighboring peoples,¹⁴² arguing that Hungary can be successful only if it undertakes the role of regional initiator. He believed that it could be mediating between cultures, he proposed dual citizenship for Hungarians abroad in the future and urged the creation of a Southeast European Roundtable to resolve conflicts.

140 The letter which was sent to Charter signatories in the first half of March 1993 was signed by writers and artists as well beyond the original circles of DC.

141 On the peaceful demonstration of the Charter, see *Magyar Hírlap*, March 16, 1993.

142 Konrád, "A megértés stratégiája."

2.5 THE DECLINE OF THE DEMOCRATIC CHARTER

After the rally in March 1993, the Charter disappeared from the streets. It went on to exist in clubs, and sometimes issues statements. One of these was a May Day appeal which stated that “without social peace there is neither peace in society nor democratic transformation.”¹⁴³ In May the peaceful rally of a new initiative, the *Act against Hate!* movement took place. By then, 150,000 people had signed the call of the movement. Answering whether there is a conflict between the two movements, an organizer of *Act against Hate!* said: no, because the two initiatives are different from each other. He emphasized that their movement was, unlike the Charter, (1) not an opposition movement, (2) not an intellectual movement, and (3) when they protest exclusion they think not only about anti-Semitism and anti-Roma sentiments but also the poor and the unemployed.¹⁴⁴ While these allegations were not exactly true—indeed, the Charter made several attempts at including people who are not regarded as opposition,¹⁴⁵ it mobilized not just intellectual masses, and finally it argued for social rights at several occasions—that characterization was *per se* symptomatic, marking the narrowing of the Charter’s playing field.

When the government announced the reburial of Miklós Horthy, the Regent of interwar Hungary in August 1993, a group of intellectuals published an open letter to the vice president of Hungarian Television, protesting against the planned televising of the event.¹⁴⁶ At that time, the bulk of the signatories were not liberals but socialists and others. On the night before the burial, Charter spokespersons and an audience of roughly a thousand people held a cultural event to bid farewell to the Horthy era, underlining that Hungarian democracy today did not regard itself as a successor of the Horthy system. Apart from the short speech of writer Miklós Mészöly, political speeches were not delivered; commissioned artists read out works of writers who lived during the Horthy era.

143 “Mit kíván a Demokratikus Charta 1993 május elsején” (What does the Democratic Charter want on May Day 1993), leaflet.

144 Iványi, “Nem csatlakoztunk egyetlen csoporthoz sem.”

145 Such as Hankiss, Kerényi, and Pomogáts.

146 “Tiltakozás a Horthy-temetés televíziós közvetítése ellen” (Protest against the televising of the Horthy reburial”), *Magyar Hírlap*, August 27, 1993.

The last two bigger events organized by the Charter took place in defense of the freedom of the press. In October 1993, the new management of Television wound up its last independent news program with reference to an allegedly biased presentation of an earlier political event—the disturbances on October 23, 1992, which prevented President Göncz from delivering his ceremonial address. On an initiative of the Chamber of Radio Employees, 15,000 people held a silent demonstration in front of the Television building on October 30. Later, the Charter organized a mass rally¹⁴⁷ in which some of the speakers spoke of the threat of a political coup following the coup in the media, while some proposed that “in the shadow of a coup that might become dangerous,” the Charter should turn to international human rights forums.¹⁴⁸ The terminally ill prime minister József Antall had already been treated in Germany at the time; the government was led by his deputy, Minister of the Interior Péter Boross. The spokespersons of the Charter believed that the expected change at the helm of the government will be beneficial to the radical right. In this atmosphere, many people were worried about the freedom and fairness of the 1994 elections.

President Árpád Göncz emphasized in a letter addressed to Prime Minister József Antall that, because of these recent events, “Hungarian Radio and Television have grown unable to meet their basic tasks,” and therefore “Hungarian voters [. . .] will be deprived of the opportunity to freely express their views.”¹⁴⁹ In his response, Antall disagreed: “A defense of the freedom of the press also means that an internal terror cannot be exercised by certain political forces and groups of journalists who discriminate, sharply attack everyone whose ideas are different.”¹⁵⁰ Indeed, both parties spoke as if they were guarding the freedom of the press, though Antall considered the termination of the news program an internal affair of media professionals. But Charter speakers emphasized, agreeing with Göncz, that the issue had outgrown the category of internal debate of intellectuals,¹⁵¹ because oppression of the freedom of the press could lead to tyranny.

147 At the event, speeches were made by Péter Balassa, Miklós Mészöly, György Konrád, Lajos Parti Nagy, as well as two journalists, András Bánó (*Esti Egyenleg*) and Iván Gábor (*Magyar Hírlap*).

148 Mészöly, “Alkotmányellenes eszméletvesztés.”

149 Göncz, “Levél Antall Józsefhez.”

150 Antall, “Levél Göncz Árpádhoz.”

151 Balassa, “Ez így nem fog menni!”

The last phase of the “media war” began in autumn 1993, marked by a severe shift to the right in news programs and political purges in the radio and television.¹⁵² Many well-known authors, poets, and musicians protested by forbidding the broadcasting of their works on Hungarian Radio and Hungarian Television. At the same time, 83 intellectuals announced in an open letter the establishment of the Association of Independent Thinkers aimed at reviewing news programs every week and publishing their findings. MSZP also joined the wave of protest, starting a signature campaign for the legal regulation of the supervision and social control of public radio and television.¹⁵³ A protest letter was published by many members of Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Arts,¹⁵⁴ and 162 actors signed an open letter to the Prime Minister protesting against a “civil war of ideals” in radio and television, which had rendered “creative work impossible.”¹⁵⁵ Some people were dismissed from radio positions because they had played an active role in the DC.¹⁵⁶ Although the Hungarian Writers’ Association, which was more loyal to the government, also agreed that the freedom of the press had been violated it did not support a boycott. Instead, it urged the government to ease the tension in radio and television.¹⁵⁷

There were less than two months to go until general elections in May 1994 when 129 reporters and program editors were sacked from Hungarian Radio. This act deepened the difference between coalition parties and politically active intellectuals into an unbridgeable gap.¹⁵⁸ Although a political motivation for the dismissals was officially denied, it was obvious, and the public found it revolting.¹⁵⁹ The procedure was legally unjustified and recalled the spirit of the 1991 Kónya paper and the 1992 Csurka pamphlet. Radio staff held a protest demonstration on March 3.¹⁶⁰ The Publicity Club

152 Farkas, “Az Antall-kormány ‘sikerágazata.’”

153 For the appeal of MSZP, see *Vasárnapi Hírek*, November 14, 1993.

154 For the protest letter of SZIMA, see *Magyar Hírlap*, November 24, 1993.

155 For the actors’ letter to the PM and the list of the 162 signatories, see *Magyar Hírlap*, November 26, 1993.

156 Tivadar Farkasházy, *Magyar Hírlap*, December 13, 1993.

157 “A Magyar Írószövetség elnökségének felhívása” (The appeal of the leadership of Hungarian Writers’ Association), *Magyar Nemzet*, November 25, 1993.

158 Cf. Ibolya Jakus: “Mit üzen a Rádió” (The message of the Radio), *HVG*, March 23, 1994, 79–81. The annex of the article lists the names of the 129 fired program editors.

159 See the poll conducted by Telemedia in *Magyar Hírlap*, March 12, 1994.

160 For a report on the event, see *Magyar Hírlap*, March 4, 1994.

also protested in a statement,¹⁶¹ whereas 54 intellectuals demanded the rehiring of the dismissed and the firing of the vice president of the Radio in an open letter. DC spokespersons also published a protest letter condemning the government more harshly than ever before: “a government that violates openly and defiantly the constitutional and moral principles of the freedom of the press cannot be regarded a democratic government anymore.”¹⁶²

Similar wording was used at a press conference held a few days later at a mass demonstration organized on the eve of the National Day on March 15, attended by 20,000 people. Konrád said, “The Democratic Charter will continue to regard the Hungarian government as limitedly democratic until access to extensive information has been ensured for the public.”¹⁶³ Some of those dismissed from the Radio spoke,¹⁶⁴ the 17 points of the Charter were read, and a spokespersons statement on the freedom of the press followed. “Our system is democratic but whether our government is such that is for you to judge!”¹⁶⁵ They demanded the withdrawal of the government from the media and the adoption of a suitable Media Act by the next Parliament immediately after the elections. The main speaker of the rally was the aesthetician Péter Balassa, who pointed out that the issue of the radio and television is the issue of freedom of the press, and “it cannot be that here authoritarianism and unidirectional public information will prevail.”¹⁶⁶ Opinion polls had already forecast that the unpopular government coalition was going to lose the elections, which was promising news for many Charter sympathizers. Upon DC’s call, many people pinned on their clothes the blue ribbon of solidarity for the radio staff even after March.¹⁶⁷ Some were looking forward to the elections in May to end a period of misery.

During the 1994 election campaign, the voice of the DC faded, its participants rarely participated in party politics. The results of the elections justified

161 “Mit lehet és kell tenni?” A Nyilvánosság Klub nyilatkozata (What can and is to be done? The statement of the Publicity Club), *Magyar Hírlap*, March 5, 1994.

162 “Márciusi üzenet” (March Message), *Népszabadság*, March 4, 1994.

163 See the press conference of Charter spokespersons, *Népszabadság*, March 11, 1994.

164 István Bölcs, Eszter Rádai, Júlia Váradi. Beside them, Tivadar Farkasházy and Miklós Mészöly gave speeches.

165 “Összefogást az ámokfutó önkénnyel szemben!” (Cooperation against tyranny run amok!), *Magyar Hírlap*, March 16, 1994.

166 Balassa, “Szolidaritás az ünneprontókkal szemben.”

167 Cf. “A Demokratikus Charta nyilatkozata” (The statement of the Democratic Charter), *Magyar Hírlap*, March 16, 1994.

the expectations for a change of government. The MDF-led coalition lost. In the first round of the elections, the parties actively supporting the Charter received the highest number of votes (MSZP, 32.98%; SZDSZ, 19.76%). The second round of the elections ended in absolute majority for the ex-communist MSZP with 54 percent, while the liberal SZDSZ received 18 percent of the votes. The MSZP could have formed a government, either with other parties or on its own. Yet it was clear immediately that they wished to form a coalition and the only serious coalition partner was the SZDSZ. Konrád¹⁶⁸ supported the coalition in an article published after the first round of the elections and argued for a prime minister to be appointed from his party, the SZDSZ. Although many people did not support the latter idea, there was a growing intellectual pressure on both parties to form a coalition. More and more newspaper articles argued for an MSZP-SZDSZ coalition. The DC, which used to launch events in defense of democracy and to call for a halt to extreme rightist trends, went further and claimed to shape party policy. Two days after the second round of the elections, DC spokespersons organized a public debate on the kind of government that should prevail in the country. Some opinions to the contrary notwithstanding, most speakers supported a coalition. Based on this, György Konrád on behalf of the DC, publicly asked the leaders of both parties to start coalition negotiations.¹⁶⁹ Not only parties wanted to influence the movement; movement intellectuals wanted to influence their parties. A civil rights movement had turned into a kingmaker.¹⁷⁰

The socialist-liberal coalition that took over in 1994 gave up “ideologizing” and refrained from a value-centered discourse. The language of the coalition returned to a peculiar mix of the neutral technocratic terminology of the late Kádár regime and a “project-oriented” bureaucratic language. In a typical way, the Horn government announced a “modernization charter” for the development of science and technical progress, the signatories of which were representatives of business as well as the academic elite.¹⁷¹ Former civil activists of the DC were not given positions in the government.¹⁷²

168 Konrád, “Május nyolcadika határozott ítélete.”

169 Konrád, “A polgárnak joga van tudni.”

170 Krokavay, “A Charta temetése.”

171 “Modernizációs Charta, 1997” (Modernization Charter, 1997); *Népszabadság*, January 31, 1997.

172 From the politicians active in the Charter, Gábor Fodor became Minister of Education and Zoltán Szabó, ex-spokesperson of the Charter, became a state secretary. Ferenc Donáth and Gyula Hegyi became MPs of MSZP, and Tamás Bauer who had contributed to writing the Charter became an MP of SZDSZ.

The Democratic Charter, which created the “spiritual prerequisites” of the creation of the socialist-liberal government coalition in 1991–1994, gradually died away and became forgotten, without its spokespersons formally announcing its termination.

3. THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEMOCRATIC CHARTER

What was the meaning of the Charter? The found identity of intellectuals or their temporary confusion of roles? The protection of democracy or a challenge to its functioning? The supporting of the opposition parties or the maintaining of civil society’s role of political control? The emergence of party intellectuals or the intellectual counterattack against “partocracy” in the name of civil society? The weakening of political democracy or the strengthening of society’s democracy? These questions have been asked by many.

In the beginning, the Democratic Charter was a simple signature-collecting movement to express that democratic control necessitates extra-parliamentary means as well. As one of the participants put it back then, “in this whole machinery nothing is ever documented, written down, [or] recorded. It’s happening on a purely informal basis until this day. But that’s why it has a kind of human charm, because it involves nothing that’s otherwise in an organization; of course, as a result, it’s not working either.”¹⁷³

About the character of the DC, three different positions developed among participants and supporters. The first one was the actionist branch which wanted the movement to constantly organize and be present in street politics. The second position held that the DC should be situational, that is, if need arose, we must go to the streets without any preplanning. Finally, those who believed in the third position—who came from the parliamentary parties—argued that extra-parliamentary politics is necessary only in special circumstances, for example in the case of a mass demonstration.

DC events were based on self-activity where spontaneity played a large role, the spokespersons of the movement exercising very weak control. Nevertheless, the ties of informality remained strong. According to film director Károly Makk “the Charter: a bridge, a point of connection. [...] One can make a movement out of it, but if it becomes very organized that will

173 Interview with Katalin Bossányi, 1992.

not serve the original goal. [. . .] Maybe it depends on one's upbringing, that one should openly endorse right issues—especially when he's asked to. Liberal philosophers, writers are my old friends; to me, public action is related to persons.”¹⁷⁴ However, as the DC had no bureaucratic organization and institutional framework it always had to turn to the opposition parties, to ask for help to organize an event, recruit supporters, print or put up posters. In everyday background work, opposition parties and the traded unions took part actively. On the level of the public sphere, however, the DC was mostly associated with SZDSZ; as if the then unpopular successor party MSZP had “given way” to the liberals, lest it hamper the expansion of the movement.

Regarding the relationship to the parties, there were again three positions competing in the Democratic Charter. The supporters of the first position wanted DC to be party neutral, meaning it would not be linked to any opposition party. The second position argued that the task of the DC was to mediate between the parties and society by enhancing the emerging democratic demands of the public sphere. According to this point, the DC “permanently calls attention to democratic values for those who are related to party or not, are somewhat apathetic or stayed out of this whole life of party politics.”¹⁷⁵ Finally, the third, less popular view held that DC should not reject the influence of parties, but it should be the movement wing of the opposition parties.

The question of relationship to the parties was a frequent topic of the meetings of DC spokespersons. In this question, the flexible standpoint of György Konrád prevailed:

If someone happens to be an MP, the other, a journalist, and the third, a scholar, there's nothing horrible with that, because they represent various segments of Hungarian intellectuals. In my eyes, Hungarian society is more fluid, and I think that if an MP participates in a Charter rally, there he participates as himself, he doesn't have to recite the standpoint of his party; if he says something smart, good, if he says something boring, his problem. [. . .] In the West, there is no such Great Wall between politicians and non-politicians. Politicians appear everywhere among intellectuals, professionals, writers, artists.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Makk, “Gazdagodásvágy és arrogancia.”

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Mária Neményi, 1992.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with György Konrád, 1992.

While MSZP and SZDSZ from the opposition parties were always behind the Charter (Fidesz gradually distanced itself), often the parties were afraid of the Charter, and wanted to influence its actions. According to a DC spokesperson, the explanation was this:

Everyone is afraid of the Charter. Either wants to absorb it or is afraid of it. I've realized that they work so poorly, they are such badly organized parties that any political force that is only a bit better organized and the people are attached to it emotionally can be a threat. For indeed, if we, Charter spokespersons, say, founded a party then many voters would vote for the Charter. I understand this fear.¹⁷⁷

The Democratic Charter stemmed from the previous culture of regime opposition, the original signatories of the DC involved former dissidents who had introduced the genre of signature campaign as a kind of action for protest or solidarity. Among the original signatories, one could also find many former anti-system journalists, and the noetic character of the movement was primarily defined by them. According to György Konrád, the protests "are significant, mainly, for the mood, that is, they express in a spectacular and, if possible, aesthetically neat form the presence and power of democratic public conscience. And they practically serve the goal of making those uncertain who think that one can do politics on the streets violently. [. . .] What needs to be displayed on the street is precisely gentleness."¹⁷⁸

However, the activists of the movement were primarily not them but such younger intellectuals who had not or much less participated in opposition acts. The DC was significant not only because it bridged the former reformist camp and the opposition, but because it gradually washed away the political importance of the differences that came from the different background of the participants. It is not a coincidence that the original signatories of the DC showed the greatest personal overlap with the signatories of the "letter of one hundred," as Table 12 demonstrates, for that letter was the first joint act of demonstration of reformers and members of the opposition.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with György Horányi, 1992.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with György Konrád, 1992.

Table 12. Overlap between the 1991 signatories of the Democratic Charter and the signatories of pre-1989 opposition events

DATE	EVENT (ALL SIGNATORIES)	ORIGINAL SIGNATORIES OF DC (162 PEOPLE)
January 1977	the first Charter signature campaign (33 people)	9
October 1979	the second Charter signature campaign (186)	15
October 1979	open letter to János Kádár (125)	3
1981	the authors of the <i>Bibó Festschrift</i> (75)	7
November 1982	protest against the harassment of the editors of <i>Ellenpontok</i> in Transylvania (71)	11
November 1984	message to Poland after the murder of Father Popiełuszko (50)	4
November 1984	protest against the police supervision of György Krassó (295)	15
April 1986	appeal to the Austrian public opinion about the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam (30)	3
October 1986	appeal on the 30 th anniversary of the revolution of 1956 (47)	5
March 1987	appeal to the participants of the Helsinki Conference (49)	5
April 1987	appeal to members of parliament against house searches (64)	7
September 1987	the “letter of one hundred” to the members of parliament (100)	18
September 1987	the Lakitelek memorandum (164)	8
March 1988	appeal for the formation of the Network of Free Initiatives (43)	10
March 1988	the formation of Fidesz (37)	2
May 1988	appeal for historical justice (27)	3

Sources: *Magyar Hírlap* (1992), *Magyar Füzetek* (1979), Csizmadia (1995), *Beszélő* (1982, 1986, 1987, 1988), *Külön-Beszélő* (1984), Mislivetz (1995), Agócs and Medvigy (1991), Bozóki (1992).

The events of the Democratic Charter made it famous in the country, many people expressed their joining with a signature. Table 13 shows the rate of growth of the number of signatories.

Table 13. Rate of growth of joining the Democratic Charter from September 1991 to December 1992

DATE	EVENT	NUMBER OF SIGNATORIES
1991		
September	publishing the text of the Democratic Charter	162
October	press conference	1,500
December	rally at the Town Hall	4,000
December	The Charter becomes a movement	7,000
1992		
January	-	18,613
February	report on the state of democracy	20,200
March	political demonstration	22,082
May	social appeal	24,191
June	protest for the independence of public radio and television	25,713
June	defending Árpád Göncz, the President of the Republic	27,040
September	Protest against the far-right views of István Csurka, vice-president of the biggest governing party	27,346
December	-	27,600

Source: Horányi, *A Charta dokumentációja*.

The number of signatories grew rapidly especially in the first months. Beyond initial excitement, another factor that contributed to this was that MSZP participated, through its organizations, in the collection of signatures. According to the data of György Horányi, out of the more than 27,000 signatures 12,000 were collected with the cooperation of MSZP. The reason for the slowing rate of growth in the later period was that, while at first signing was “the action” itself for the people, from March different forms

of activism—demonstrations, individual petition campaigns—appeared. Comparing the social distribution of the first 10,000 signatories with the sample of 2,000 collected exclusively by MSZP, one can observe a conspicuous shift in the MSZP sample toward physical workers, unemployed people, and pensioners vis-à-vis the spontaneously collected “intellectual sample” of the DC. Over a year, more than 27,000 people joined the DC. It is worth noting that after the social appeal was issued in May 1992 the share of the unemployed and physical workers quickly rose.¹⁷⁹ In 1992, the Democratic Charter was able to mobilize about 15,000 people on its March 15 rally and more than 80,000 people on the September 24 demonstration. The two rallies at the Budapest Town Hall were attended by 1,000 people each, whereas the petition in support of Árpád Göncz was signed by 35,000 people.

The establishment of the Democratic Charter and the events it organized offered a chance for many to say “yes” to democracy and “no” to antidemocratic phenomena. The reason for its success was its all-encompassing popular front nature. When people were unwilling or unable to find their way in the labyrinth of party politics, the Charter simplified topical political issues to one single alternative: here is “our” Hungary and there is “theirs.” Thus, the DC became a point of reference. Organized to restore a destabilized political consensus and in defense of a democratic minimum, the Charter elevated politics to a moral field. The all-encompassing organization and movement politics based on “yes” and “no” was possible only on moral grounds. This way, however, the Charter and its actions increased the polarization of political life and deepened society’s differences. The moralization of politics usually benefits political intellectuals, for they speak this language better than the technicians of power. In the beginning of the 1990s, this seemed to postpone the end of democratic transition, the emergence of politics as a vocation. On the other hand, the Charter also called attention to the one-sidedness of the regime change. For “regime change must mean, in the broadest sense, that the people take their fate in their own hands, that they have a say in managing their own affairs.”¹⁸⁰

In many respects the DC has been one of the most successful political movements of Hungarian intellectuals, which organized the largest anti-fas-

179 Horányi, *A Charta dokumentációja*.

180 M. Eörsi, “A politikai mórckaság, és ami a lényeg.”

cist demonstration in Hungarian history.¹⁸¹ Assessing their social effect, it was not speeches in parliament but peaceful DC demonstrations that halted an advance by the extreme right.¹⁸² At the same time, the Charter did not decrease the polarization of the political field; its political effect, besides driving back the extreme right, the emptying of the liberal centrum. Popular-front politics was the price paid for the defense of a democratic minimum, which probably contributed to the rapid return to power of the former communist party. According to Iván Vitányi, the Charter was not partisan, but it provided such a “subsoil” for “liberal and social democratic thought that somewhere, in the deep, connected them.”¹⁸³

The radical right suffered a severe loss in the 1994 elections. Csurka’s new right-wing party, the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (*Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja*, MIÉP) received only 1.59 percent of the party list votes. Still, it is not easy to tell, even in retrospect, whether the threat to democracy had indeed been as great as suggested by DC spokespersons. Election results suggest that the “threat of fascism” had been exaggerated and had actually been less powerful than the anti-fascist response it triggered; that, however, could only come to light following the Charter protest actions. The moral politics of DC was effective because it was able to resonate with and mobilize the people. Historical situations cannot be repeated, and therefore it is impossible to use the means of social science to say whether the same or significantly different election results would have been without the presence of the DC. At any rate, by keeping the issue of a threat from the extreme right on the agenda, the DC ensured a natural framework for social cooperation against such trends.

The characteristic feature of the Democratic Charter as a movement was duality in sociological terms. On the one hand, it became a club-like network of intellectual politics. On the other hand, because of its openness, it also served as a channel for powerful mass demands that would erupt in rare moments. It was a real “umbrella movement” in more than one sense. The DC covered different social groups as an “umbrella” that probably would not have communicated with each other otherwise. It was also an umbrella in the sense suggested by György Konrád: when it was needed it open and

181 Tamás, *Otherworld; Political Essays*.

182 Kis, “A polgár mint varázsló.”

183 Vitányi, “Nem a liberálisok és a szocialisták között van a törésvonal,” 47.

closed for a time when it was not. Its members did not wish to operate it permanently. Therefore, some did not consider it a real movement. But it was a kind of movement which consisted of distinct actions, though it existed in circles and the form of network communication between events.

The movement needed well-known, charismatic leaders to maintain its umbrella character, people who were able to catch and hold the attention of many. Such was the role played preeminently by Konrád, an author known all over the world, the father and mastermind of the DC, a symbolic figure, a member of the former democratic opposition who was at that time the chairman of the International Pen Club and member of the National Council of SZDSZ.¹⁸⁴ A movement intellectual characterized Konrád's role as follows: "I reported from the time to time how the thing was going, and he always gave his blessings. Without anyone saying so, everyone assumed that Konrád fulfills a kind of boss role here. He is unfit for organizing, so rather he lent the myth to the thing."¹⁸⁵ Konrád himself saw this as follows: "Actually, I think of my role as an initiator. That I was later called back as a kind of silver-tongued orator, I'd almost interpret that as hard luck, for they didn't find anyone else."¹⁸⁶

DC spokespersons often spoke up in defense of Hungary's most popular politician, the former dramatist, President Árpád Göncz, they had been in contact with him and enjoyed his support. Iván Vitányi was another important figure who had a dual role in the inner circles of the Charter—as an intellectual and as a politician holding an important position in the MSZP—and bridged the gap between younger socialist intellectuals and the socialist party.

There were also differences between the parts played by Konrád and Vitányi. Konrád was in the DC as a politically active intellectual, a "magician" of democracy. Indeed, he sat on the National Council of the SZDSZ mainly because of his fame, on a meritocratic and friendly basis: first as an intellectual and second as a politician. After 1989, Konrád became a "metapolitician": to him, opposition outside the system meant antipolitics, whereas the DC was a forum of metapolitics. The relationship between him

¹⁸⁴ Similar figures were the novelist Miklós Mészöly, the aesthetician Péter Balassa, the sociologist Elemér Hankiss, the director Imre Kerényi, and the film director Miklós Jancsó.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Karalin Bossány, 1992.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with György Konrád, 1992.

and SZDSZ leaders was similar to that between the German author Günter Grass and the German Social Democratic party of the 1970s led by Willy Brandt. Konrád's links with SZDSZ leaders were close because of the long years spent together in the democratic opposition.

Iván Vitányi's credibility and movement legitimacy had different roots. He had been appointed the director of a research institute under the dictatorship (and was not far from the cultural policy of the Kádár regime) and he used his position to offer "shelter," that is, job opportunities to members of the opposition who had been removed from their positions. In 1989, he was an active participant in changing the former state party into a socialist reform party. In 1990, he became Chairman of the MSZP Board and a member of parliament. Compared to these positions, the Democratic Charter was a kind of political hinterland for him. At the same time, it offered him an opportunity to form intellectual relations with influential members of the democratic opposition retrospectively. Although Vitányi had a party function, he was considered as an undeniable authority to a much lesser degree than Konrád was in SZDSZ. Vitányi represented a wing of his party, he did not have a balancing role. The fame of Konrád was due primarily to his authority as a writer and a former opposition member. In contrast to his politically active intellectual role, Vitányi was an intellectual politician. He was hailed as an active member of the movement by MSZP, preparing to break out from its isolation, and the Charter, in need of organizational support.

The Democratic Charter was represented by established intellectuals with professional prestige and cultural capital who (1) had history in the opposition (or at least could not be considered as supporters of the old regime); (2) had been acknowledged professionals; (3) were close to the opposition parties of the period (measured by influence rather than by membership); and (4) had a chance to appear in the media often and in an effective way. These were the sources of a Charta intellectual's charisma. When only one of the above-listed ingredients was missing, the given person's influence remained significantly smaller.

DC was a movement of the age of mass communication, where the image of a message is almost as important as the message itself. Major DC events were designed by professional directors of theatre and film, and charismatic speakers were the chief spokespersons. A speaker's image and ability to com-

municate were more important than what they politically represented. The basic lines of the message were designed by intellectuals of the critical establishment, and “movement intellectuals” created the framework of conveying the message. Earlier, this knowledge has been described in sociology as the ability of “symbolic domination over practice.”¹⁸⁷

Beyond established intellectuals with professional and social prestige, another, peculiar group of movement intellectuals¹⁸⁸ appeared. It consisted mostly of younger journalists or other intellectuals close to the party who had been selected (sometimes without being asked) by established intellectuals. These people did not belong to the democratic opposition of the 1980s; on the contrary, most of them believed for a long time that the dictatorship might be reformed. Because of this reformist attitude, they were a step behind the events when the political transition started. With their growing critical activity as journalists, they found it unfair that the politicians of the MDF-led coalition government treated them as they did the beneficiaries of the dictatorship. Most of them learned the role of the critical intellectual in 1990–1991, which made them eligible to become DC spokespersons. They were media intellectuals who were temporarily turned into movement intellectuals by the Charter. Their role as movement intellectuals was a belated compensation for what they had “missed” in the 1980s. The value of their belatedly experienced opposition behavior was enhanced because it was modeled on the members of the former democratic opposition and “endorsed” by them. In a period when people seemed to have lost their illusions about party politics, the position of a DC spokesperson enjoyed strong moral legitimacy in society. The democratic opposition of the 1980s symbolically “adopted” media intellectuals of the 1990s (or, putting it in another way, acknowledged their need for them) and continued to approach the reform intellectuals of the late MSZMP.

The Democratic Charter was a successful political cooperation of established intellectuals and movement intellectuals. As I mentioned in the beginning of my book, the literature on social movements identifies those movement actors as movement intellectuals who had been “trained” to become intellectuals by a movement.¹⁸⁹ Regarding the movement as cognitive praxis,

¹⁸⁷ Szelényi and Martin, “Beyond Cultural Capital.”

¹⁸⁸ Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements and Their Intellectuals*.

¹⁸⁹ Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements and Their Intellectuals*, 94.

they conceived intellectual activity as a process rather than a project resulting in intellectual products. In contrast, established intellectuals can operate in the context of a social movement as speakers, ideologues, movement communicators, and so forth, but they are not “created” by the movement. Their role was to contrast the “ideal patterns” of political community vis-à-vis everyday practice in a symbolic way. Such representative role was fulfilled in the Charter by György Konrád, Miklós Mészöly, or Miklós Jancsó. At the same time, participant media intellectuals could use the movement discourse of the Charter to reinterpret their intellectual existence. They were much closer to the ideal type of movement intellectual, although they were not identical to it. Their intellectual identity was not created at that time and so was not exclusively bound to the movement. To them, what mattered more was movement identity and the respective moral legitimation.

Their cooperation suggested that it would happen in Hungary as well that old-style public intellectuals give way to a new layer of more agile and communicative public intellectuals.¹⁹⁰ According to the contemporary opinion of a DC spokesperson,

There are many-many informal ties, nothing is formalized. [...] After all, a plenty of nothing, a non-existent thing became existent through that people related to it, and not only people but parties and various organizations as well. Thus, something was legitimized that was completely elusive to its creators.¹⁹¹

One of the reasons why the Democratic Charter lost force was that a government coalition took over that was emotionally closer to DC activists, who therefore could have felt that they would be able to influence its decisions more “from the inside.” However, the other reason was that their identity was not bound to the DC alone, so they did not need to hold on to it at any price. Charter spokespersons, temporarily in an intellectual position in the movement returned to the media in 1994 or became accepted as newly established intellectuals.

¹⁹⁰ Aronowitz, “On Intellectuals,” 159.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Mária Neményi, 1992.

Another conclusion can also be drawn from the history of DC: Moralizing politics gives an advantage to political intellectuals over party politicians, for the language used is more familiar to them. This kind of political discourse is their true field. The terminology, however, slowed down the professionalization of politics in the given situation, the process described by Max Weber as the creation of politics as vocation. The terminology of moralizing politics was used in reference to civil society, which was therefore degraded into a means of self-expression for political intellectuals.¹⁹² Because of this, a sociologist spokesperson of the Charter emphasized the necessity of directly democratic forms and a social acceptance of democracy. He said that self-therapy of civil society rather than the new political elite could be expected to achieve that goal.¹⁹³

The DC was one of the most characteristic manifestations of post-transition identity politics. Beyond its role as a protector of democracy, it vindicated a role of cultural representation as well, in a period when the ties between the political elite and the intellectual elite loosened and the influence of intellectuals seemed to decline. A prominent actor of the movement, for example, spoke as follows:

The new political elite, as it is well known, mostly comes from the representatives of the cultural elite: historians, economists, teachers, and writers became the members of this elite. This promised that the new political elite would be more willing to see to the prevalence of the interests and demands of culture than the old one was. This is not how it happened. [...] the new political elite usually cut its ties to the cultural elite effectively, giving up its cultural commitment and forming rather beneficial relations with economic interest groups, or was integrated into the boards of various state companies, holdings, and financial institutions. [...] Social status symbols appearing in elite circles have also changed.¹⁹⁴

Intellectuals lost the privileges they enjoyed in the state socialist system, their ability of interest representation as an independent layer declined. But

192 Coser, "The Social Role of Eastern European Intellectuals"; Lomax, "The Inegalitarian Nature of Hungary's Intellectual Political Culture."

193 Miszlivetz, "A magyar demokrácia válsága 1989 után."

194 Pomogáts, "A politikai elit és a magyar kultúra."

these debates about the political role of intellectuals were also about democracy, that is, a common cause, the maintenance and consolidation of which could be presented as social interest. Beyond social activity, the most important prerequisites for the consolidation of a new democracy might be the establishment and reliable operation of democratic institutions and the professionalization of the new political elite. Concerns about a substantive, idealized concept of democracy being a threat to the new set of institutions based on representation seemed to be well founded.¹⁹⁵ However, the intellectuals of the DC were also right to believe that a new system born out of radical political change demands not only institutional but also moral legitimacy. As democracy is a contentious system, the representation of conflicts through democratic social movements is as an integral part of democracy as political parties, interest groups, or the institutional setting. The consensual formation of the frames of the system and the redefinition of political identity happen through a series of conflicts in every democracy.¹⁹⁶ The Hungarian example was special not because of the emergence of movement-intellectual politics but that blurred and vague self-interpretation of the Charter's movement intellectuals who simultaneously aimed at having influence and credibility as ideologues in the party, spiritual leaders in the movement, and opinion-molders as independent intellectuals.

Intellectuals of the DC contributed to transcending the communist-anti-communist cleavage which had had crucial importance in 1990, and to the cooperation of three social elite groups: the reformist wing of the political class of the Kádár regime, the financial-technocratic elite, and the left-liberal intellectuals. However, the common ideological denominator of these groups was no longer the kind of liberal-social minimum the DC represented but a promise of "modernizing" professionalism, the ideology of modernization. DC often, with true pathos, protested against the spread of a politics of ideologies but it used value-centered politics because of its movement nature.

Debates around the Democratic Charter were, in part, conflicts of different interpretations of democracy. On the other hand, it was a political debate about what action would threaten or strengthen democracy in a certain political situation. Some denied the necessity of making politics in the

195 Körösfényi, "Intellectuals and Democracy."

196 Hirschman, "Social Conflicts as Pillars of Democratic Market Society."

streets in a situation, although they accepted it in general. As opposed to the supporters of the Charter, they believed that democracy was not in danger, but the consolidation of the new institutional system needed time before it can be subjected to the endurance test of movement politics.

Second, there were others—mainly politicians of the opposition parties, particularly the MSZP—who generally denied the necessity of direct participation in the operations of a democracy but in a certain situation (with reference to an exceptional threat) supported the policy of mass demonstrations. They realized that a democratic movement that was critical of the government was beneficial to the opposition.

Third, there were those who rejected movement politics both generally and under the given circumstances—primarily the politicians and supporters of MDF and the governing parties—who saw the DC's actions as both an attack on the government and democracy.

Finally, members of the fourth group agreed with movement politics on both issues: protection of democracy in the given circumstances on the one hand, and the functioning of an ideal democratic society on the other. Intellectuals sympathetic toward the DC saw it not only as a manifestation of the function of democracy protection necessitated by Csurka's appearance but also as a sign of the reviving, movement tradition of civil society. The following table summarizes these standpoints.

Table 14 summarizes the strategic options of the dominant political groups in 1992. These options were depending on their evaluation of the political situation and their expectations from democracy.

These debates were further complicated by differences in interpretation of whether the intellectual or the mass movement character of the DC was to be emphasized and of whether its dependence or independence of political parties was more desirable. With respect to the role of movement intellectual, conflict arose between the legacy of the radical movement patterns of former dissidence and the fundamentally reformist character of the Charter's aims. While the intellectuals of the 1980s were outside the system and launched movements that were against and eventually changed the regime, the declared goal of the DC remained inside the system. It was organized to facilitate the "halted democratic transformation" and "to preserve the results achieved," and therefore it could have also been accepted by those supporting the government. However, it is no accident that the DC rarely

had governmental supporters. The dilemmas of the movement were reflected well in a contemporary analysis of one of the spokespersons: The logic of confrontation and the impetus of the movement threw the Charter off of the role it had originally undertaken: first, when it declared the entire government antidemocratic, and second, when it emphasized its party ties and expressed the wish to shape the new governing coalition.

Table 14. Dominant political groups' evaluation of the notion and context of democracy

		THE INTERPRETATION OF DEMOCRACY	
		Political concept	Social concept
THE INTERPRETATION OF THE GIVEN POLITICAL SITUATION	Democracy is in danger	The movement is necessary under the given political circumstances (MSZP politicians)	The movement is not just necessary but also enriches democracy (Charter intellectuals)
	Democracy is not in danger	The movement is not just unnecessary but also harmful; it supports the opposition (MDF politicians)	Movements may be necessary in general but it is unnecessary under the given political circumstances (government intellectuals)

Major studies by Gouldner¹⁹⁷ and Konrád and Szelényi¹⁹⁸ of the expected arrival of the class power of the intellectuals made a great impact when they were published. The feverish months of the changes in 1989 seemed to confirm that feeling, for the “velvet revolution” would not have been possible without the breakthrough of the Gouldnerian culture of critical discourse. Later, Konrád and Szelényi¹⁹⁹ used the concept of “politocracy” to capture the emergence of the new intellectual elite, and even after decades several researches have opined that the cycle of intellectual mobilization of the 1980s was similar to the class formation described by them. Nevertheless,

197 Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*.

198 Konrád and Szelényi, *Road to Class Power*.

199 Konrád and Szelényi, “Intellectuals and Domination in Post-Communist Societies.”

at the end of the decade of intellectuals the idea that seemed more solid was this: “The time has come for mass democracy rather than the class power of intellectuals.”²⁰⁰ Until there was no unquestioned consensus in society about the nature of democracy, intellectuals in Central Europe had a chance to play another gig—after being the protagonists of political transition—as the liberal or other ideological “magicians” of nascent democracy.²⁰¹

The paradox of the DC was that it was a kind of pro-democracy civil rights movement whose slogans and terms were compiled by a hierarchical group of formerly privileged intellectuals who were gradually losing their political influence. In the movement, a confusion of roles by the intellectuals which could be interpreted as a counterattack by the estates of the realm against an institutionalized world of politics existed alongside an intellectual identity based on continuous critical discourse and the maintenance of civilian control over the institutions. As the rolling transition was nearing to an end, the kind of “hybrid intellectual”²⁰² who aimed at maintaining their influence by relying not only on their knowledge capital but also their social capital, that is, the media and political networks they developed became more and more typical in the democratic debates following the transition.

²⁰⁰ Fehér and Heller, *Kelet-Európa dicsőségés forradalma*, 7.

²⁰¹ On this, see Dimitrijevic, “Words and Death”; Magas, “Nationalism Captures the Serbian Intelligentsia”; Mungiu-Pippidi, “Intellectuals as Political Actors in Eastern Europe”; Tucker, *The Politics of Conviction*.

²⁰² Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*.

CHAPTER IX

Rolling Transition: Rotating Agency

(Co-author: Ágnes Simon)

This chapter will offer empirical evidence of the rolling transition thesis. It offers a comparative statistical analysis about the composition of intellectuals from different angles, who were politically active before, during, and after the transition. The political tides of the decade transformed the political roles that intellectuals played. It was the dissident intellectuals' movement that had preceded and set the stage for the regime change,¹ and it was the intellectual movement of the former dissident intellectuals that followed and brought the regime change to a close. The period of our analysis between 1977 and 1994 is customarily broken down into three categories based on the nature of the political regime: late Kádár era, regime change, and new democracy. On the closer scrutiny, however, it became clear that a five-period division, based on the activities of intellectuals, corresponds much better to the dynamics of events.

These five periods (Table 15) make up the rolling transition in which several groups transformed and rotated themselves somewhat "organically" in order to respond to the new political challenges. This era includes the periods of (1) Dissent (1977–1987), (2) Open network-building (1988), (3) Roundtable negotiations (1989), (4) Parliamentary politics (1990–1991), and (5) New pro-democracy initiatives (1991–1994). The traditional and new periodization share the recognition of the dominance of intellectuals in bring-

¹ Brzust, "Negotiated Revolution in Hungary"; Tóké, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution*.

ing about the transition. However, the new five-period approach allowed for uncovering a more nuanced story and revealed that the dominance of (dissident) intellectuals in the long decade of regime change did not mean that it was the same group or type of intellectuals that dominated in all periods.

1. PERIODS AND ACTORS

In the first decade (1977–1987), the activities of intellectuals focused on reviving and connecting various subcultures, organizing a counterculture to the regime, and initiating critical social activities and political activism challenging the ruling elite. Conceptually, these opposition strategies can be best described by the adoption of new evolutionism,² the spreading of the culture of critical discourse,³ the strengthening of the circles of freedom,⁴ the idea of a parallel polis,⁵ the provocative break with a society that had showed unreflective acceptance toward the regime,⁶ and playing the role of the mediator by telling the truth to those in power.⁷

Dissident intellectuals did not aim to become the “organic intellectuals” of any particular social class, therefore, only their strategy that focused on the civil society and on fulfilling the tasks of intellectuals fits Gramsci’s ideas.⁸ They could not act as a New Class—neither did they have such aspirations—although initially when they operated in a vacuum isolated from the rest of society, it seemed that they are moving to that direction. In a few years, however, it became clear that, rather than fighting on their own, dissident intellectuals can bring about the democratic transition in collaboration with other social groups. Therefore, Gouldner’s theory of intellectuals⁹ can only be applied as far as establishing the culture of critical public discourse and a community of shared language goes, but not the concept of the intelligentsia forming a New Class. What occurred was the opposite to the formation of a New Class in several ways: it was rolling transition. Instead of

² Michnik, “A New Evolutionism.”

³ Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*.

⁴ Bibó, *Összegyűjtött munkái; Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination*.

⁵ Benda et al., “Parallel Polis.”

⁶ Havel, “The Power of the Powerless.”

⁷ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*.

⁸ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*.

⁹ Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*.

Table 15. The five-period categorization of the era of rolling transition

	1977–1987	1988	1989	1990–1991	1991–1994
	Dissent	Open network-building	Roundtable negotiations	Parliamentary politics	New pro-democracy initiatives
<i>Context</i>	decline of the old regime	emerging political activism	negotiated revolution	installation of the new regime	new democracy
<i>Organization</i>	circles of dissidents, underground networks	networks, movements, nascent parties	political parties	democratically elected parliament	Democratic Charter
<i>Operation</i>	informal	informal	formalized	formalized	informal
<i>Political goal</i>	human rights	pluralist democracy	democratic constitution	functioning democracy	democratic control
<i>Strategy</i>	critical discourse, new evolutionism, disobedience	connecting opposition groups	elite consensus, nonviolent negotiated change	making multiparty democracy work	expanding social capital to control power holders
<i>Actors</i>	writers, philosophers, sociologists, freelancers	writers, historians, sociologists, journalists, students	economists, lawyers, sociologists, historians	lawyers, engineers, teachers, doctors, economists	artists, writers, journalists, historians
<i>Roles</i>	dissidents, mediators, truth-tellers, radical reformers	organizers, activists	elite negotiators, “founding fathers”	professional politicians	interpreters, mediators, critics
<i>Adversary</i>	ruling communist regime	communist hard-liners	communist soft-liners	government vs opposition	proponents of the interwar regime
<i>Outcome</i>	active civil society, movements, networks	political parties	new constitution, free elections	major bills	change of government
<i>Theory</i>	Gouldner, Michnik, Bibó, Havel	Gouldner, Michnik, Gramsci	Bauman, Burton and Higley, O'Donnell & Schmitter	Konrád and Szelényi, Schumpeter	Bauman, Eyerman and Jamison, Bourdieu, Medvetz

creating a closed group of vanguard intellectuals, an open stratum of intellectuals was formed. This stratum transformed itself flexibly, it included new activists periodically, and it rotated their own agents somewhat organically.

The classical period of Hungarian regime change, between 1988 and 1990, is traditionally treated as an organic whole. Existing accounts of this period are descriptive and based on qualitative data that support such a conceptualization.¹⁰ These accounts focused on the fact that the group of dissident intellectuals moved away from operating as a movement and toward a formalized, institutional *modus operandi*, which usually characterizes the organization and behavior of power holders. Intellectuals formed political parties, which elected their own leaders and negotiated with each other. At the same time, this elite-led regime change was backed by the public's support, which strengthened dissident intellectuals' belief in their own legitimacy. Those negotiating on behalf of the Opposition Roundtable were mostly lawyers and economists, although there were also many writers and social scientists among them.

Relevant theoretical accounts that informed the analyses of the Hungarian regime change also suggest that these three years belong organically together. Accordingly, the activities of dissident intellectuals between 1988 and 1990 were described by the concepts of elite settlement,¹¹ the fulfillment of the role of intellectuals as "legislators,"¹² the appearance of a mixed-character intellectual political activism—but not an intellectual social class—which accelerated the circulation of political elites,¹³ and making critical public discourse dominant. In 1989 nothing seemed impossible, which showed the strength of the new critical discourse. The newly elected parliament looked like an arena of intellectuals, in which the cabinet of historians faced the opposition of sociologists.

This book proposes the idea of rolling transition, which stems from the empirical observation that different groups of intellectuals largely replaced each other in shorter periods of time as well. Therefore, a more subtle periodization was needed for the proposed evaluation of transition. First, if these

10 Ripp, *Rendszerváltás Magyarországon*.

11 Burton and Higley, "Elite Settlements."

12 Bauman, *Legislator and Interpreters*.

13 Konrád and Szelényi, "Intellectuals and Domination"; Szelényi, "Intellectuals and the Politics of Knowledge."

years can be theoretically explained through so many approaches, there may be further nuances to be uncovered. Second, none of these approaches fit perfectly although all of them captured important aspects or characteristics of the activities of dissident intellectuals. It was because all theoretical approaches start out from a certain conceptualization of the elite, or specifically, of intellectuals. Third, the traditional periodization did not satisfactorily account for all the transformation in the activities of dissident intellectuals. Therefore, instead of looking at the Hungarian regime change through the lens of an analytical framework, we based our approach on the most important characteristics of the political environment in which dissident intellectual activities took place and on the roles that these intellectuals played. Thus, we have broken down the years of 1988–1990 into the periods of open network-building, Roundtable negotiations, and parliamentary politics, and discuss below how the conceptualization of each period.

In the fifth and final period that followed the regime change, intellectuals focused on pro-democracy initiatives again. Theories of revolutions argue that the victory of the revolution does not result in the abrupt end of activities on the part of revolutionaries; it is not possible to abandon the extraordinary situation and return to “normal” from one day to the next. It was no different in the nonrevolutionary and peaceful regime change in Hungary. Intellectuals did not abruptly leave politics and the DC served as the cooling phase of the intellectual activism. They conducted their political activities within a movement again: the Charter intended to complete the change of regime by initiating a widespread social discourse about the state of the newly established democratic system and the notion of democratic ideals. The supporters of democracy criticized the democratic regime, or rather, those who supported the normative view of democracy demonstrated against the lopsided realization of democracy. In this, artists, litterateurs, and journalists played a crucial part. The role of journalists was decisive in that the culture of critical public discourse became the dominant political culture in Hungary in the 1990s. At the time, the governing coalition objected to the opposition’s strategy, finding it unfair.

As intellectuals returned to politics within a movement in 1991, they became interpreters once again.¹⁴ They fought their political battles relying

14 Bauman, *Legislator and Interpreters*.

on their cultural and social capital.¹⁵ They had also socialized the younger generation of intellectuals into a critical perspective¹⁶ through which they not only created a receptive audience for their critical discourses but also their own successors.¹⁷ However, capitalist democracy also offered many career options for intellectuals, which led to the disintegration of the hitherto cohesive group of critical intellectuals and to the end of their political influence by 1994.

These five periods can be described with two larger categories according to the organizational forms of intellectual political activities. In the periods of dissent, open network-building and pro-democracy initiatives intellectuals operated outside the institutional framework of the regime and worked within political movements (1977–1987, 1988, 1991–1994). As opposed to this, during the Roundtable negotiation and especially in the period of parliamentary politics, intellectuals became parts of political power structures and professional politics (1989, 1990). Under these circumstances, it was particularly interesting to study of how much continuity and discontinuity were present in the activities of intellectuals, which we analyze in detail in the rest of this chapter. The five-period approach highlights the variation and adaptation in the activities of intellectuals as well, providing a richer account of the 1977–1994 era. This long decade was unique in that intellectuals exerted strong influence over both politics and the holders of political power.

2. ACTIVITIES AND PARTICIPANTS

Between 1977 and 1994, we have selected 39 events as the basis of our analysis (Table 16). These events were the units of analysis in our quantitative investigation, and they were selected to match the characteristic features of each period.

In the era of dissent (1977–1987), opposition activities were carried out outside of the political space of the ruling regime and included signing statements and petitions of protest and solidarity, forming committees, attending meetings like the democratic opposition's meetings at Monor and Lakitelek, and engaging in academic or scholarly activities like attending the meetings

¹⁵ Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."

¹⁶ Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*; Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements and Their Intellectuals*.

¹⁷ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*.

Table 16. List of dissident intellectual activities and events, 1977–1994

No.	Event/Activity	Year(s)
1.	Declaration of solidarity with Pavel Kohout, one of the imprisoned spokespersons of Czechoslovakia's Charta 77	1977
2.	Statement of protest to Chairman of the Presidium, Pál Losonczi, regarding Charta 77	1979
3.	Publication of the samizdat <i>Bibó Festschrift</i>	1979–1980
4.	Meetings of the underground Open University	1978–1985
5.	Call to Assist the Polish people	1982
6.	The democratic opposition's letter to the Minister of the Interior, István Horváth, after street persecutions in 1982	1982
7.	Protest letter against street persecutions to the Public Prosecutor, Károly Szijjártó	1982
8.	Call to support the imprisoned editors of the Transylvanian samizdat journal <i>Ellenpontok</i> (Counterpoints)	1982
9.	Opposition declaration of human rights and the cultural autonomy of national minorities	1984
10.	Statement of protest against the arrest of Charta 77 member Miklós Duray in Czechoslovakia	1984
11.	Statement by the committee established to defend opposition activist Miklós Duray	1984
12.	Message from the Hungarian opposition after the murder of Polish priest and Solidarity member Jerzy Popiełuszko	1984
13.	Letter of protest to the public prosecutor about the police supervision of György Krassó, a prominent dissident intellectual	1984
14.	Democratic opposition's meeting in Monor	1985
15.	Democratic opposition's appeal to the CSCE Cultural Forum	1985
16.	Appeal to the Presidium against the building of the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam	1986
17.	Appeal to the Austrian people regarding the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam	1986
18.	Joint call of the Central European opposition on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the 1956 revolution*	1986
19.	Letter to members of parliament regarding the growing number of house searches	1987
20.	Condemnation of the arrest of Zsolt Keszthelyi, a dissident intellectual	1987
21.	Letter of "the one hundred" to members of parliament	1987
22.	Democratic opposition's meeting in Lakitelek	1987
23.	Founding of the László Rusai Committee	1987
24.	Journalists call for the founding of the Publicity Club	1988
25.	Call for the founding of the Network of Free Initiatives	1988
26.	Statement about the founding of Fidesz	1988
27.	Welcome for the founding of Fidesz by the Hungarian Democratic Forum	1988
28.	Statement of Hungarian citizens to the citizens of Romania	1988
29.	Declaration of "Historical Justice" by the Committee of Historical Justice	1988
30.	Opposition Roundtable's participation in National Roundtable negotiations	1989
31.	Election of representatives of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) to the Hungarian national assembly	1990
32.	Election of representatives of the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) to the Hungarian national assembly	1990
33.	Election of representatives of the Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz) to the Hungarian national assembly	1990
34.	Issuing of the Democratic Charter	1991
35.	Advertisement in defense of the President of the Republic Árpád Göncz	1992
36.	Protest against the televising of Horthy's reburial	1993
37.	Forbidding of Hungarian Public Radio and Hungarian Public Television from use of their own work	1993
38.	Founding of the Association of Independent Thinkers	1993
39.	Open letter demanding the dismissal of the Vice-President of the Hungarian Public Radio	1994

* Hungarian signatories only

of the flying university or written contributions to the *Bibó Festschrift*. The last two activities revealed the opposition's intellectual roots and identity.

While the main form of dissident intellectual activities remained similar to those in the previous periods, the establishment of new political movements and organizations set the period of open network-building (1988) apart from the period of dissent. The Publicity Club, the Network of Free Initiatives, and the Committee of Historical Justice were all formed in this period similarly to the political parties of MDF, SZDSZ, and Fidesz. It was also when such mass demonstrations as the ones against the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam and the destruction of Hungarian villages in Transylvania took place. These activities became possible because the political environment changed partly due to dissident intellectuals' activism and partly to the changes in the political climate. The government was increasingly less willing to retaliate against those who publicly criticized the regime: the last such retaliation took place on June 16, 1988. For this short period, we recorded six events in the database, indicating the intensity and frequency of intellectual political activism.

In the period of Roundtable negotiations (1989), the parties of the opposition united in the EKA, and forced the ruling communist party to join them at the three-sided negotiations about the establishment of democracy. While the pace of activities remained high, it now all centered around a single event, the Roundtable negotiations. The fact that there is only one event recorded for this period in the database is misleading in that, although it was just one event, it lasted for months and required continuous presence from participants. As such, it was more demanding on participants than the six events of the previous period, demonstrating also how the nature of intellectual political activities changed.

After the completion of the institutional transformation of the Hungarian political system, the creation of a new constitution, and the first democratic elections, dissident intellectuals did not abruptly disappear from politics. They remained key actors in the period of parliamentary politics (1990–1991) as there were many (former dissident) intellectuals in the two largest parliamentary factions (MDF, SZDSZ) as well as in the smallest parliamentary party (Fidesz). After the Roundtable negotiations, the political activism of intellectuals diverged into two main directions: some of them became professional politicians as parliamentary representatives or cabinet

members. Almost all intellectuals who had participated in the Roundtable negotiations and chose to become professional politicians were automatically elected as members of the parliament at the 1990 elections. They contributed to the era of parliamentary politics (1990–1991) by establishing the practices of the new parliamentary democracy in Hungary. Similarly to the period of Roundtable negotiations, partaking in the work of the democratically elected national assembly was recorded as a single event, but required lasting and repeated efforts from participants.

Other intellectuals, after a brief lull in their political activism, established an umbrella organization, the movement of the DC, returning to the roots of intellectual political activities. The period of new pro-democracy initiatives (1991–1994) included former dissident intellectuals who concentrated their activities outside the frameworks of the political system and in a political movement again. Although some of them were present at the Roundtable negotiations, good number of intellectuals who participated in earlier periods of dissident activities became active again in 1991. The revived interest of these intellectuals can be explained by the democratic political environment: it was no longer exceptional to voice critical political opinion publicly and without retortion. Participants did not have to ponder the consequence of each of their political activities. The Charter movement was created and led by intellectuals whose aims were to protect the nascent democracy and to hold the governing coalition accountable to the principles of democracy. Events—mostly petitions—related to the activities of the DC formed the basis of analysis in this chapter. Just as in the period of open network-building, we have identified six events but as they spread out over three years, there were only two events per year, signaling lower intensity activism.

The final dataset included 37—rather than 39—events because we merged three events—the formations and working of the parliamentary factions of the three parties, MDF, SZDSZ, and Fidesz that were dominated by intellectuals. Keeping them as separate variables would have not only artificially raised the number of events in the dataset, but also distorted the data as membership in these factions were exclusionary. Even though one might have moved from one faction to another within the year, at any given moment the person was only the member of one faction.

The characteristics and concentration of intellectual activities varied across the five periods established above, which is responsible for the great

variation in the length of the periods. While the initial activities of dissident intellectual were sporadic but steady for a decade, the following years were tumultuous with a fervent pace of activities in a constantly changing political environment. Although on average, there were two events in each year, in reality the number of events in a period varied greatly (Table 17). Most of the events took place in period of dissent ($n=23$) but even in this decade the frequency of events varied. In general, however, there were two events per year in this period as well as in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives. Each of the other three periods lasted for a year and the periods Roundtable negotiations and the parliamentary politics also centered around one major and lasting event rather than a series of shorter actions. The variation in the lengths of the periods and the unequal distribution of events within them are unideal from a statistical point of view and could have been one reason why a quantitative analysis similar to this one has not been attempted yet. However, as we are going to show, analyses relying on this less-than-ideal setting yielded interesting and novel findings, contributing to a renewed understanding of the role that dissident intellectuals played between 1977 and 1994.

Table 17. The distribution of events and actions by dissident intellectuals in the five periods of the rolling transition

Period	Date	Number of years	Number of events	Yearly average number of events*
Dissent	1977–1987	11	23	2
Open network-building	1988	1	6	6
Roundtable negotiations	1989	1	1	1
Parliamentary politics	1990–1991	2	1	1
New pro-democracy initiatives	1991–1994	4	6	2
Total	1977–1994	18	37	2
* Rounded to whole number				

The unit of observation of our analysis was each individual who participated in any of the 37 events. We coded each event as a dummy vari-

able based on whether or not an individual participated in an event (1=yes; 0=no). All in all, we have identified 2,037 individuals who took part in at least one of the events.

In addition, in each period we have identified the core group of the most active individuals. In the periods of dissent, open network-building, and new pro-democracy initiatives—that is in the periods where the intellectuals pursued their activities within movements—this was straightforward: those became members of the core who took part in the most events. Since in the other two periods there was only one event, we turned to other methods to identify their core groups.

In the period of Roundtable negotiations, we measured the intensity of the activity of each participant by their involvement in the works of the Opposition Roundtable and the National Roundtable negotiations. Given our interest in the role of intellectuals, we focused on the activities of those members of the Opposition Roundtable who belonged to organizations established by intellectuals, namely, MDF, SZDSZ, Fidesz, and Liga. These organizations grew out of the dissident intellectual movements of the 1980s. The membership of the so-called historical parties was notably different: they were older people whose political career had been halted in the early 1950s and whose life and career went astray. Very few of them were intellectuals at all and, accordingly, they did not much participate in the activities of dissident intellectuals prior to 1989. Based on the nature of activities, we established three categories in this period: those who participated not only at the meetings of the Opposition Roundtable but also in either the plenary sessions or the intermediate-level political committee of the National Roundtable negotiations belonged to the core. Moderately active participants included, first, those who participated in the intermediate-level economic and social committee of the National Roundtable and attended the meetings of the Opposition Roundtable, and second, those who took part in the intermediate-level political committee of the National Roundtable but did not contribute to the work of the EKA. Everyone else was an occasional participant.¹⁸

As for the period of parliamentary politics, we have identified the core of the parliamentary factions of the MDF, SZDSZ, and Fidesz based on their

18 Cf. Bozóki et al., eds. *A rendszerváltás forгатókönyve*.

position in the hierarchy of the Hungarian National Assembly. We selected those who occupied leadership positions as speakers, deputy speakers, or notaries, in the parliament, or served as members of the Antall cabinet as the most active intellectuals of the period. Moderately active participants were those who began their parliamentary career as chairmen and deputy chairmen of parliamentary committees, secretaries, and subcommittee chairmen. We considered everyone else an occasional participant.¹⁹

We have also collected information on the gender, age, and occupation of participants. The first was rather unproblematic because Hungarian first names are gender-specifics. As opposed to this, it was only possible to identify the age of the members of the core groups of the periods, because in case of many lesser-known people there was no way to find out when they were born. We computed the age of the members of the core groups at the time of a given event from their birth year.

In most cases, it was unproblematic to identify the occupation of participants as they tended to list their occupation next to their signatures on petitions. On occasions when the occupation was not provided, we have consulted the biographies of notable people. Unfortunately, if someone had a common name and/or was not well-known, it was not possible to identify their profession. It was common for intellectuals during the Kádár regime to have been forced out of their jobs frequently due their dissident activities and try to earn a living at whatever job they could secure. Therefore, when someone listed more occupations throughout the period of analysis, we took the first one listed.

All in all, the more than 2,000 participants had about 250 different occupations listed that we put into 38 categories for analytical purposes. We did so not simply because working with so many occupations would have made it impossible to identify any patterns, but also because people with the same occupation often had differing job titles and keeping these variants would have distorted the data. Of the 38 job categories, 32 were of intellectual jobs and six were “other occupations.” Thus, not all 2,037 participants were intellectuals: 192 individuals held other jobs (127 were manual workers, 27 worked in clerical jobs, 20 were churchmen of various denominations, 11 pensioners, 4 businessmen, 2 sportsmen, and one high-school student). On

19 Kiss and Horváth, *Az 1990-ben megválasztott országgyűlés almanachja*.

the one hand, this supports very well the earlier claim in this books that intellectuals had limited connections with the working class and so intellectuals were the primary force behind the transition. On the other hand, since our analysis focused on intellectuals, we have dropped nonintellectuals from the analysis. There were also 181 participants, whose occupation could not be identified. We have assumed that they were intellectuals who either refrained from listing their occupation out of caution or were unemployed at the time and kept them in the dataset ($n=1,845$).²⁰

As noted above, this chapter is largely based on quantitative analyses that overwhelmingly rely on the methods of descriptive statistics and occasionally on crosstabulations. We augment our statistical analyses with qualitative data in order to give a more layered understanding of who exactly the influential intellectuals of a period were and how their activities looked like.

3. MODEL OF THE ROLLING TRANSITION

3.1 FROM BEGINNING TO THE END (1977–1994)

None of the 1,845 intellectuals that we identified was present at all 37 events: The most active took part in about half of all the events. One of the icons of the transition, János Kis stood out with being present at as many as 19 events. His political activism was a telling example of the type of dissident intellectuals who withdrew from politics after the initial goal of disposing of the communist regime was met. Kis criticized Marxist socialism even before the dissident intellectual movement formed, which led to his dismissal from MSZMP and from his job as a researcher at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He was most active in the period of dissent participating in as much as 70 percent of events. It was during these early years that Kis became a founder and editor-in-chief of the opposition's samizdat journal, *Beszélő*. He remained a committed critique of the ruling regime and carried on his activities into the period of network-building, including being a founding

20 Elsewhere, we conducted our analysis excluding those whose occupation was unknown, resulting in a smaller population ($n=1664$) (Bozóki and Simon 2020). In the current analysis the ratio of intellectuals among all dissidents is 91 percent while in our earlier analysis it was 82 percent. The results of the analyses based on the two differently sized populations are essentially identical when it comes to proportions. Although there are reasons for using either approach when it comes to the treatment of those whose occupation remained unclear, the decision is inconsequential for the story that we have been telling.

member of the SZDSZ. Kis was playing a key role during the Roundtable negotiations as well but from the background rather than in one of the high-profile negotiating bodies. In 1988 and 1989, he was also a visiting professor in the New School for Social Research in New York. This not only shows that foreign opportunities became both available and attainable for dissident intellectuals by then but also explains why Kis was less active in these years. Although he served as the president of SZDSZ in 1990–1991, he did not become a member of the parliament. Later, he remained active in party politics as a member of the National Council of SZDSZ, but he neither became a professional politician nor joined the Charter's activities in the early 1990s.

Similarly, many intellectuals who had been active in the early year of the dissident movement showed little to no interest in professional politics. First, it was incredibly rare that someone participated in at least one event of all periods: there were only three such persons. Second, also only three intellectuals participated in the periods where the opposition conducted its activities in the form of movements and in either period of power politics. Third, a more typical behavior was displayed by the 32 intellectuals who took part in only the activities of the three periods of opposition movements. The regularity of their activism varied greatly, too: the most active among them also belonged to the most actives of the era while the least active only participated once.

As for the occupational composition of the opposition, litterateurs/writers (13.61%), artists (14.43%), journalists (12.65%) and, to a smaller extent, economists (7.17%) were represented in the largest numbers among dissident intellectuals (Figure 1). This justifies the common perception that Hungary's democratic transition was primarily the work of social scientists and humanists as well as the crucial role that economic challenges and criticism played in dismantling the communist regime. When it comes to the gender distribution, men outnumbered women 78 percent to 22 percent.

Just as we did regarding each period, we have also identified the core of the 1997–1994 era by taking those who involved themselves in at least 1 in every 5 events. Table 18 lists these 40 most active individuals in the order of the intensity of their activism. They constituted 2 percent of all intellectuals. Their average age was 45 years although the age gap between the youngest (23) and the oldest (75) was sizeable. The core group was even more predominantly men than the full group: only 1 in 8 dissident intellectuals was female.

Figure 1. The top 15 most frequent occupations among all intellectuals compared to the distribution of occupations among the most active participants, 1977–1994

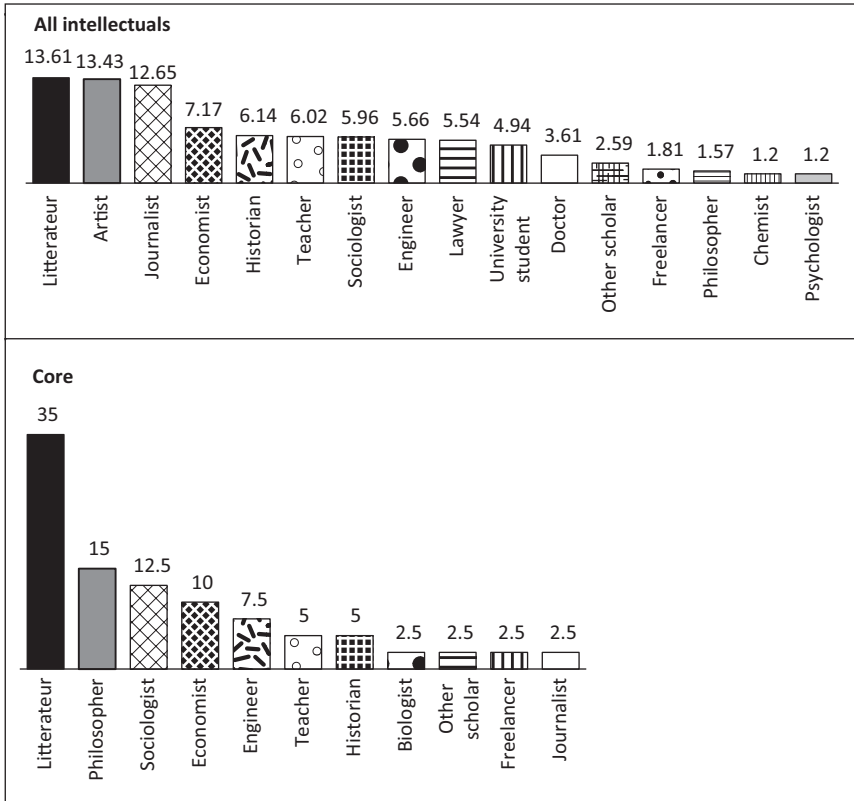


Figure 1 above reveals not only that, just as in the whole group, writers were represented most strongly but also that their pre-dominance was much more notable in the core (35%). Meanwhile, only one (1.2%) of the 210 journalists participated with such a frequency that he made the list of the most active participants. Nobody out of the 223 artists made it into the core. Instead, it was philosophers (15%) and sociologists (12.5%) that became the second and third most numerous groups in the core, overrepresenting their true numbers among all intellectuals. Economists composed the fourth most numerous group overall and in the core as well. The job distributions of the whole group and the core attested to the pivotal and widely recognized influ-

Table 18. The 40 most active dissident intellectuals of the 1977–1994 era

Name	Dissent 1977–1987	Open network-building 1988	Roundtable negotiations 1989	Parliamentary politics 1990	New pro-democracy initiatives 1991–1994	Whole era 1977–1994
All events	23	6	1	1	6	37
János Kis	16	2	1	0	0	19
János Kenedi	13	2	0	0	3	18
György Konrád	14	1	0	0	3	18
Miklós Haraszti	13	2	1	1	0	17
Sándor Radnóti	11	2	0	0	4	17
Gáspár Miklós Tamás	13	2	1	1	0	17
Gábor Demszky	12	1	1	1	1	16
György Petri	11	1	0	0	3	15
Ferenc Kőszeg	10	2	1	1	0	14
Miklós Mészöly	9	2	0	0	3	14
László Rajk	11	1	1	1	0	14
Ottília Solt	10	2	1	1	0	14
Pál Szalai	10	1	0	0	1	12
Sándor Szilágyi	11	1	0	0	0	12
Sándor Csoóri	9	2	0	0	0	11
István Eörsi	6	3	0	0	2	11
András Nagy	10	1	0	0	0	11
Miklós Vásárhelyi	5	3	0	1	2	11
Zsolt Csalog	6	0	0	0	4	10
Jenő Nagy	9	1	0	0	0	10
Miklós Szabó	5	1	1	1	1	10

György Bence	8	1	0	0	0	9
István Csurka	6	1	1	1	0	9
György Gadó	6	2	0	1	0	9
Gabriella Lengyel	9	0	0	0	0	9
György Litván	5	3	0	0	1	9
Imre Mécs	4	3	1	1	0	9
Bálint Nagy	7	0	0	0	2	9
Erzsébet Szalai	3	3	1	0	2	9
Júlia Szalai	3	3	0	0	3	9
Mihály Vajda	8	0	0	0	1	9
Iván Bába	6	2	0	0	0	8
Ferenc Donáth	8	0	0	0	0	8
Zoltán Endreffy	7	0	0	0	1	8
Alíz Halda	6	1	0	1	0	8
Pál Juhász	5	2	0	1	0	8
Csaba Könczöl	7	0	0	0	1	8
György Krassó	8	0	0	0	0	8
Bálint Magyar	3	3	1	1	0	8
János Vargha	6	2	0	0	0	8

ence of social scientists in the dissident intellectual movement. In the following sections, by analyzing intellectuals' activities period by period, we draw a more subtle and varied picture of the dissident intellectual movement.

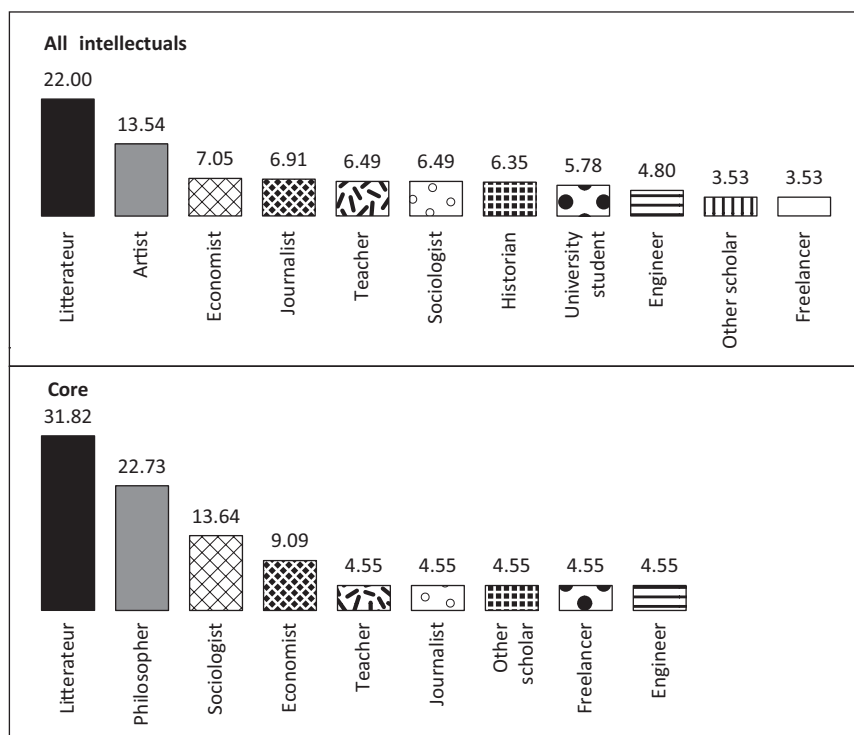
3.2 PERIOD OF DISSENT (1977–1987)

Opposing the ruling communist regime was not only politically risky but was also done in isolation from the society during the period of dissent. Dissident intellectuals constantly ran the risk that signing a petition or publishing an article or monograph “at the wrong time and the wrong place” would result in the termination of their employment, a ban from publishing for any period of time, or increased scrutiny by censors. Working for state-owned establishments further limited the opportunity to take action against regime. In addition to not wanting to seem too active and, thus, get

the attention of the regime, some may not have agreed with all the petitions, or could not sign them because they were not aware of those in the making.

Yet, there were 754 dissident intellectuals who participated in at least one of the 23 activities of this period. Dissident intellectuals were mostly men (72.94%), but the proportion of women was highest in this period (27.06%). It was not a coincidence but a consequence of the political environment that a substantial number of dissidents had their background in the liberal arts: Most were writers (22%), but there were also many artists (13.54%), sociologists (6.49%), and historians (6.35%) among them (Figure 2). The relative prominence of the otherwise small group of freelancers (3.53%) evidenced not only that opposing the regime was easier from the periphery, but also that one who opposed the regime could easily find themselves marginalized.

Figure 2. The top 10 most frequent occupations among all intellectuals compared to the distribution of occupations among the most active participants in the period of dissent 1977–1987



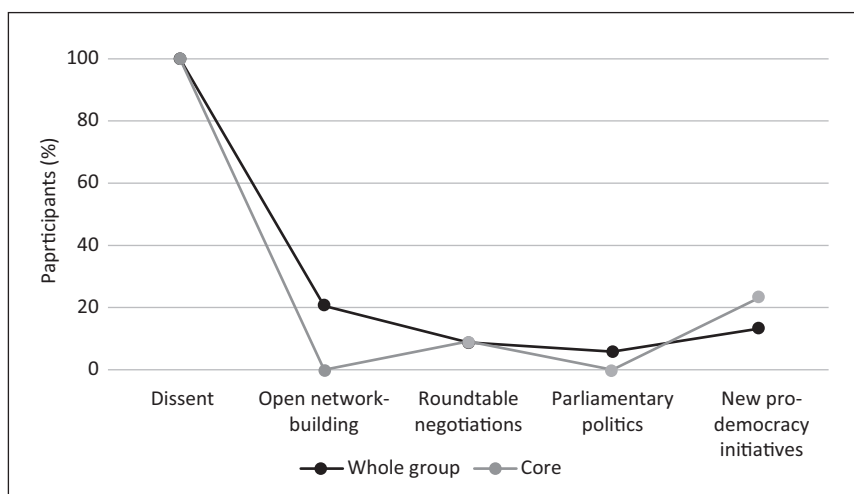
Indeed, their group was likely more numerous as intellectuals often identified themselves by their profession rather than their actual job or the lack thereof.

The frequency of participation in this period varied greatly from person to person. The overwhelming majority, that is 530 (70.29%) intellectuals were one-timers, that is, they participated in one event only. The group of casual participants numbered 202 individuals (26.79%), they took part in between 2–7 events. The core group of this period is made up of those 22 intellectuals who participated in at least one-third, that is, 8 or more of the events.

The core did not entirely reflect the composition of the full group. First, the core consisted of men mostly, now only 1 in 10 participants was female as opposed to the 1 in 4 ratio in the whole group. Similarly, writers were more prominent in the core, making up one-third of the most active intellectuals of the period. Not a single artist was among the most active, while both philosophers and sociologists were represented in much greater proportions in the core. Philosophers who were not among the top 10 most highly represented professions of all intellectuals (2.82%), became the second largest group of the core (22.73%) (Figure 2). The average age in the core group was 43 years, somewhat below the era's average.

Of this period's intellectuals 155 (20.56%) continued on to the period of open network-building. Meanwhile 66 (8.75%) intellectuals took part in the Roundtable negotiations and only 44 (5.84%) became members of the parliamentary factions of the three parties of intellectuals (MDF, SZDSZ, and Fidesz). Notably, 99 intellectual participants of the period of dissent returned to the movement in (13.13%) the period of new pro-democracy initiative, which evidenced that those who left the dissident movement after the early period(s) returned to the fold in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives in 1991. Figure 3 shows slightly different trends in the core and the full group when it comes to continue on to later periods. The major exception is that while at least 5.84% of all intellectuals of the period of dissent participated in a future period, not a single member of this period's core was present in the cores of open network-building and parliamentary politics. Several of core participants, mostly those who later joined SZDSZ, received Soros fellowships and studied at American universities for a year in 1988 and 1989. Therefore, their contribution to building social networks and founding political parties were sporadic.

Figure 3. The proportions of all intellectuals and the core of the period of dissent that participated in subsequent periods



Looking at the level of activism within the group, including comparing the less active groups with the core, sheds light on who were the most likely to remain with the movement in later periods. Table 19 shows that most frequent participants were also the ones who took part in the activities of later periods in largest proportions. Most notably, 80 percent of the core continued to remain politically active in the movement, but their activism did not reach the same high level again. Based on the differences in participation and activism within the core, we identified three career paths for early dissident intellectuals. The first group includes those six intellectuals who withdrew from public life after their initial activism.

János Kenedi (1947) was a prominent representative of those eight members of the core, who got themselves involved in the movements of the opposition but were not interested in becoming politicians themselves, and thus, withdraw from public life. As early as the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, Kenedi was a leading figure among the youth opposition of the regime. He could keep down only two jobs and only for short periods of time as an editor in a publishing house and a filing clerk of manuscripts. In the meantime, he was the tireless organizers of petition campaigns and various opposition events that we have examined in this period. Kenedi attended

the illegal Monor meeting of various groups of the democratic opposition in 1985. During the 1980s he was also the editor of the samizdat publication, *Máshonnan Beszélő* (Speaker from Elsewhere), which reported on the activities of the opposition movements in other Central European countries. He remained active in 1988, but like several other members of the core, Kenedi refrained from becoming a professional politician and returned to his intellectual interests. Although he briefly reappeared in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives, he preferred to stay a free-floating intellectual rather than being a cog-wheel in party bureaucracy or state administration. He worked as the author and editor of various literary publications as well as a historian uncovering the workings of the communist state security agency.

Table 19. The correlation between the frequency of participation in the period of dissent and participation in later periods

	Open network-building	Roundtable negotiations	Parliamentary politics	New pro-democracy initiatives
<i>One-timer</i>	58 (10.94%)	32 (6.04%)	16 (3.02%)	50 (9.45%)
<i>Casual</i>	79 (39.11%)	27 (13.13%)	22 (10.89%)	41 (20.30%)
<i>Core</i>	18 (81.82%)	7 (31.82%)	6 (27.27%)	8 (36.36%)
Total	155 (100%)	66 (100%)	44 (100%)	99 (100%)

Some dissidents, like Ottília Solt (1944–1997) would try themselves out in power politics for shorter or longer periods of time. Solt was a sociologist researching issues of poverty in a team that affiliated with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the 1970s. In 1979, she established an unofficial NGO, the Foundation in Support of the Poor (SZETA). Her academic employment was terminated by the authorities after she signed the declaration of solidarity with the Czechoslovak Charta 77, and until 1981, she worked as a teacher and librarian. She continued her dissident activities including becoming an editor of the opposition samizdat journal *Beszélő*. In 1985, Solt was also among the attendees of the democratic opposition's

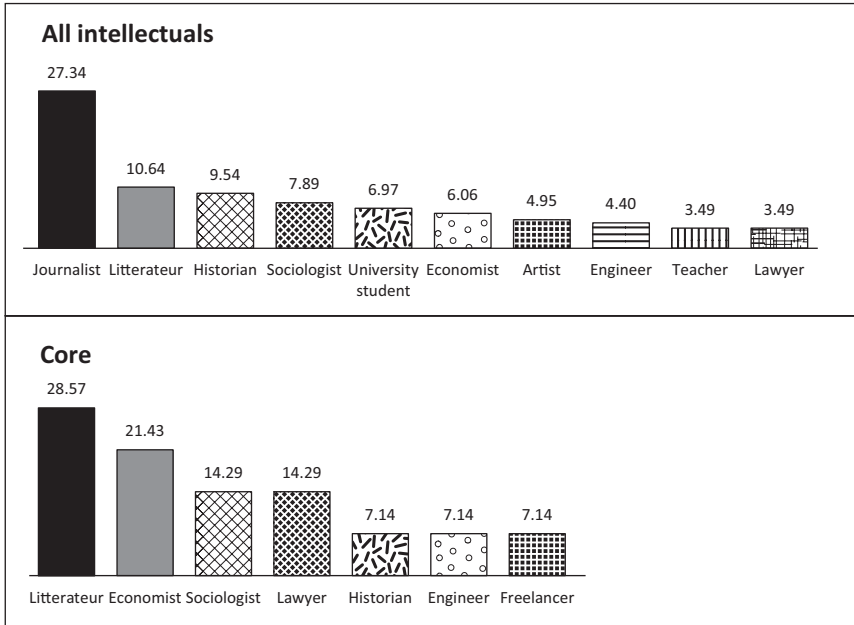
meeting at Monor. In the period of open network-building she was among the leaders of the newly established Network of Free Initiatives and a founding member of the liberal opposition party, the SZDSZ. Between 1990 and 1994 she served as the party's parliamentary representative and became the member of its cadre. Although Solt became a professional politician, in heart she remained an intellectual and activist. She continued to edit the *Beszélő*, which became a widely recognized, legitimate weekly after 1989. She also worked as a university lecturer of social work. Even though we identified these three intellectual archetypes of early dissidents within the core, many of the less active dissidents of this period followed similar paths.

3.3 *PERIOD OF OPEN NETWORK-BUILDING (1988)*

There were 580 intellectuals participating in the period of open network-building. In 1988, several movements, civic organizations, trade unions, and most of the opposition parties were founded in this period. It brought an influx of new opposition activists. Since only 155 (26.72%) of this period's participants were active previously, the newcomers proved important for the continuation of the movement, but they also transformed it. The transformation can be best illustrated by two developments. First, the proportion of women declined with nearly 5 percent since the previous period: now only 22.41 percent of the activists were women as opposed to 77.59 percent of men.

Second, there were important changes in the occupational distribution of intellectuals, signaling that the transformation of dissident intellectual activities went hand in hand with the reshaping of the movement itself. Although the presence of writers was still prominent, their proportion shrunk to 10.64 percent (Figure 4). At the same time, historians grew in numbers approaching the number of writers (9.54%). Nonetheless, it was journalists—whose proportion increased more than fourfold compared to the period of dissent—who became the most numerous group of intellectuals in this period (27.34%). This development is at least partially due to the fact that those who had been writing for or editing samizdat publications now listed themselves as journalists rather than according to their original professions as a response to the regime's softening treatment of dissidents. The increased activism of journalists both within and outside the movement played a central role in connecting the hitherto isolated dissident intellectual movement with the larger public.

Figure 4. The top 10 most frequent occupations among all intellectuals compared to the distribution of occupations among the most active participants in the period of open network-building, 1988



Yet, the growing public sympathy and support for democratic intellectuals did not lead to the expansion of the movement. The declining regime's softer treatment allowed for the hitherto largely underground movement to gain publicity and moral support among people, though it was also the year when the regime softened but did not yet stop its retaliation against dissidents, making both intellectuals and common people cautious about becoming activists. This development also preserved the intellectual nature of and provided continuing cohesions to the movement whose ideological differences came to the fore. While they were united in their opposition to the ruling communist regime, intellectuals differed in their preferences regarding the nature of the post-regime change political system. A good example of their differences was organizing themselves in a few, rather than one, political parties.

Nonetheless, the overwhelming presence of journalists did not translate into a leading role within the movement: there was not a single journalist among the most active members of the group. Their widespread partici-

pation but limited influence suggests that many were participant observers, who went to report on the activities of dissident intellectuals but ended up singing the petitions and documents out of solidarity. The core of this period included 14 intellectuals. They were all new to the core and some of them even new to the movement while others increased their activism from the earlier period. Yet, by the open network-building period the nature—but not the membership—of the core changed much less than the whole group: litterateurs maintained their strong presence (28.57%). Economists (13.64%) and lawyers (14.29%) rose in prominence, which can be related to the shift of dissident intellectual activism toward founding various organizations, including parties, in which legal and economic expertise was essential. Whereas philosophers fell completely out of the core, sociologists (14.29%) hung onto their position, contributing to the still strong position of social scientists in the core (Figure 4).

The period of open network-building is also notable for two other reasons. First, the average age of the members of the core also suggest little change in composition: although the 48 years was about five years above the average age of the previous period but it was the results of a variety of factors: the natural aging of long-time members was balanced with an influx of people from a younger generation including many who came to play pivotal roles in Hungarian politics—for example, Viktor Orbán, László Kövér—and the differences in the length of the two periods. Second, the proportions of women among all intellectuals and in the core were nearly identical, 22.41 percent and 21.43 percent, respectively. The fraction of women in the core was the largest: nearly twice as much as in any other period. It is not so much because women got more active, but because the frequency of men's activity declined sharply.

Júlia Szalai (1948) was one of the female sociologists who stepped forward to play a central role in the period of open network-building. Prior to 1988, she only joined in three activities and mostly in 1987 as a prelude to her activism in the following year. She contributed to the founding of the Network of Free Initiatives and of the Publicity Club. Szalai was also a founding member and leader of the Democratic Trade Union of Academic Workers, and in the latter role she actively worked to recruit her colleagues at universities and research institutes to join the movement. Many of them would become central figures of the regime change. In 1989, Szalai's role was instrumental

in preparing the party manifesto of SZDSZ; yet, she refrained from becoming a professional politician. She became somewhat active again only in 1991, when dissident intellectuals pursued their goals in a movement again. Instead of politics, she focused on her academic carrier as a critical sociologist and continued to teach and research. She also became a Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Szalai was not the only member of the core who withdrew from politics after 1988: another seven of her fellow intellectuals decided not to participate in professional politics.

Despite the notable changes, some consistency and continuity within the movement could also be uncovered. As before, the proportion of those who participated only once in the period was overwhelming (89.31%). There were much fewer casual participants—they took part in two events (8.28%). Those who belonged the core because they participated in 3 of the 6 events gave a tiny fraction (2.41%). The pattern that the more frequently someone participated, the more likely it was that the person remained with or returned to the movement continued (Table 20). Similarly, there was an increase in the number of those who returned in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives, but a much smaller one than previously.

Table 20. The correlation between the frequency of participation in the period of open network-building and participation in later periods

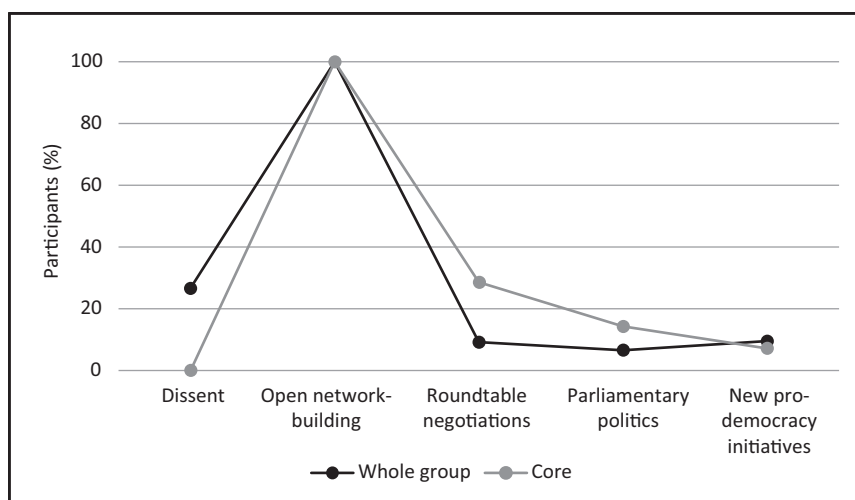
	Roundtable negotiations	Parliamentary politics	New pro- democracy initiatives
<i>One-time</i>	30 (5.79%)	19 (3.76%)	36 (6.95%)
<i>Casual</i>	17 (35.42)	13 (27.08%)	13 (27.08%)
<i>Core</i>	6 (42.86%)	6 (42.86%)	6 (42.86%)
Total	53 (100%)	38 (100%)	55 (100%)

However, it is notable that a larger proportion of the core of this period continued on to become professional politicians than it was the case in the period of dissent. One of them was Árpád Göncz (1922–2015), who started

out as a young politician of the Smallholders' Party in the late 1940s and soon found himself in the opposition of the communist regime. During the 1956 revolution, he became an advisor to István Bibó, a minister of state in the cabinet of Prime Minister Imre Nagy. In 1958, Göncz was sentenced for life for his activities during the revolution. While in prison, he learned English and translated literary works into Hungarian. After he received amnesty in 1963, he worked as an author and translator. Initially Göncz was cautious in joining the dissident movement and participated in their events very rarely. He became very active only in 1988, first by founding the Network of Free Initiatives and then by becoming a founding member of SZDSZ. In 1989–1990, he was the president of the Hungarian Writers' Union. After briefly serving as the speaker of the freely elected Hungarian National Assembly, he was elected by that body to become the President of the Republic in 1990. He was reelected for a second term in 1995 to serve until 2000.

Overall, the proportion of those intellectuals who continued on to the next period halved (9.18%), showing a distinction between politics in movements and professional politics. The patterns of participation of this period's intellectuals in the prior and subsequent periods were similar in the whole group and the core (Figure 5).

Figure 5. The proportions of all open network-building intellectuals and their core participating in previous and subsequent periods



3.4 PERIOD OF ROUNDTABLE NEGOTIATIONS (1989)

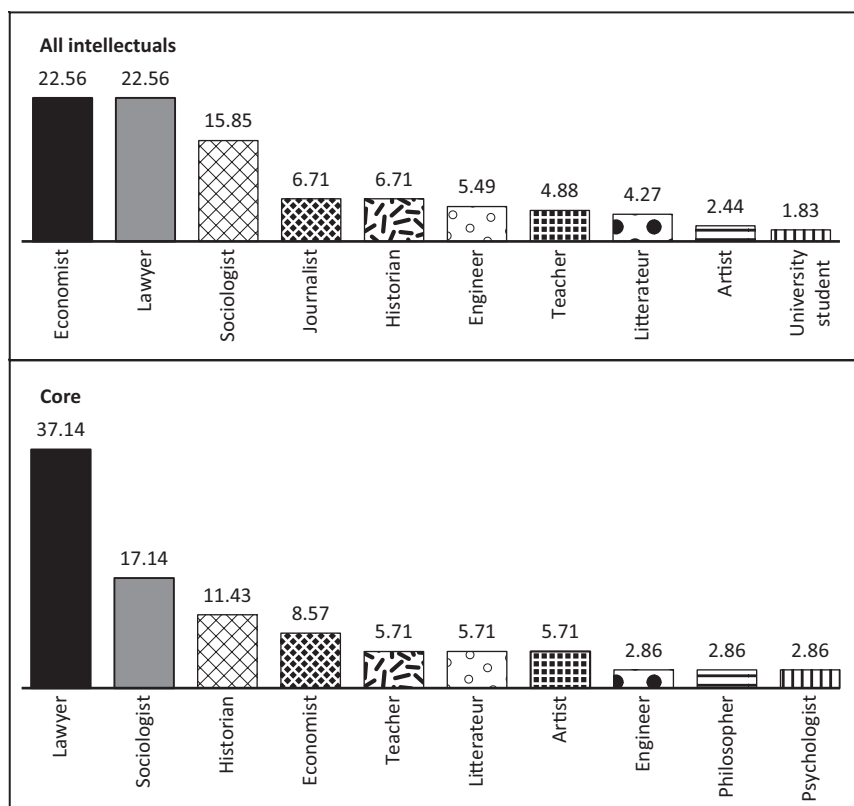
In March 1989, the nascent political parties established the Opposition Roundtable, which was a turning point in the history of the regime change. Member organizations of EKA declared that they would negotiate with the ruling MSZMP about the political conditions leading to free elections as one body, rather than one-on-one. The structure of EKA required that its constituting parties possessed professional expertise and policy knowledge to be able to debate each other competently. This had profound effects on the movement itself.

First, the number of active dissident intellectuals declined: only 280 intellectuals belonged to the movement in the period of Roundtable negotiations. Unlike in previous periods, there were so many places that the four organizations—MDF, SZDSZ, Fidesz, Liga—rooted in the dissident intellectual movement needed to fill at the negotiating tables of the Opposition Roundtable and the National Roundtable negotiations. On the other hand, many intellectuals—especially writers, artists, but also journalists—were either less interested or lacked the necessary expertise to transform the country's political system.

Second and relatedly, in the vacuum created by those withdrawing from the movement, intellectual parties had a sudden inflow of experts, who were often immediately called upon as delegates to the National Roundtable talks. More than two-thirds (70.01%) of dissident intellectuals of the period were newcomers. As a result, the characteristics of the movement transformed greatly again. Figure 6 illustrates that journalists had no longer formed the most numerous group (6.71%) and the weight of writers were reduced even further (4.27%). The ratio of economists more than tripled since the previous period (22.56%) while the proportion of lawyers increased sevenfold and now they were on par with economists (22.56%). The percentage of sociologists also increased (15.85%). The transformation of the movement was also evident in the gender distribution: the imbalance between men and women increased sharply as the proportion of female participants declined to 10.71%.

Katalin Kutrucz (1948) was one of the relatively small number of female experts who joined the movement in this period. She was a lawyer teaching criminal law at Eötvös Loránd University. She had not participated in

Figure 6. The top 10 most frequent occupations among all intellectuals compared to the distribution of occupations among the most active participants in the period of Roundtable negotiations, 1989



the dissident movement earlier but served as co-editor of a Catholic journal, *Vigilia*. She got involved in politics through her husband, Imre Kónya, who was a lawyer, too, a founder of the Independent Lawyer's Forum. As a member of MDF, Kutrucz played an active role at the Roundtable talks in defining the principles of the new Criminal Code. Afterward, she was a parliamentary representative for MDF (1990–1996) and later for its splinter party, Hungarian Democratic People's Party (*Magyar Demokrata Néppárt*, MDNP) (1996–1998). As a professional politician, Kutrucz continued to pursue her academic career as well. Later, she worked as the deputy director of the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security.

In this period, the core was also transformed greatly despite the fact that 6 of its 37 (16.22%) members had belonged to the core of either of the two previous periods. Lawyers were predominant (37.14%), although they came to exert much greater influence than their size in the whole group would suggest. The path of economists was just the opposite: they were needed in large numbers in the movement, but their actual influence was much smaller as illustrated by their representation in the core (8.57%). During the Roundtable negotiations economic issues took a backseat behind political issues mostly because the government continued to form economic policies. In addition, dissident economists felt uneasy about making lasting decisions on economic matters given the government's monopoly over information about the economy, which the intellectuals did not trust. As a result, many economic issues were settled only after the Roundtable talks. Sociologists' presence in the core (17.14%) corresponded to their number in the whole group propelling them to the role of the second most active group. They were followed by historians, who came to fill a more important role in the core (11.43%) than what their numerical presence in the entire movement would imply (6.71%). Lacking western-type political scientists, it was sociologists and historians who acted as the primary gatekeepers of knowledge about political history and social processes.

The career of Elemér Hankiss demonstrates this well (1928–2015). Although Hankiss started out as a literary scholar, his interests later shifted toward the social sciences. In 1975, he started working as a sociologist at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Several of his studies in the early 1980s turned heads by their critical take on social issues. Yet, he came late to the dissident intellectual movement when in August 1988, he signed the Declaration of Historical Justice. He became very active the next year and, as a member of the Liga independent trade union, represented the Opposition Roundtable at the National Roundtable talks. During the negotiations, his focus was on establishing and safeguarding the freedom of press. Following the Roundtable negotiations, he withdrew from politics. In 1990, he was appointed as the president of the state-owned Hungarian Television. Following a tumultuous three years in that position, he resigned and returned to his job as a sociologist. In the mid-1990s, Hankiss launched

“Let’s invent Hungary!,” an attempt at encouraging debates about the future path of Hungary.

The core changed in other ways, too. First, it underwent a rejuvenation: on average, members of the core were 41 years old. Partly, it was due to a younger generation’s activism—the youngest member was now 23 years old—and partly, to the leaving of older dissidents evidenced by the fact that the oldest member was now 65 years old compared to the periods of dissent’s 73 and the period of open network-building’s 71 years. Second, the core became even more masculine in its makeup: it was 94.59 percent male and 5.41 percent female. There were not only half as many women in the period’s core than in the whole group, but women’s representation in the core shrank to one-fourth what it used to be.

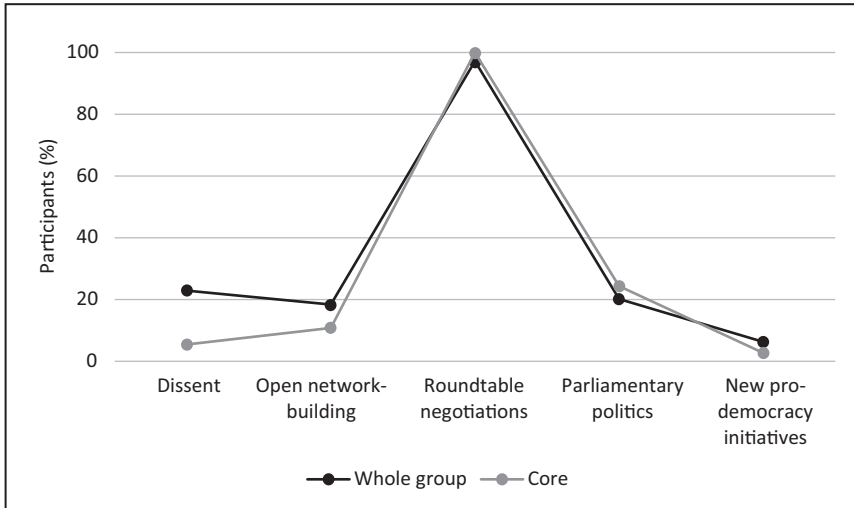
There were also new developments in this period. There was no longer a clear negative relationship between the intensity of participation and the size of groups based on that intensity (Table 21). The least active, that is, occasional participants, gave 68.97 percent of all intellectuals ($n=100$). The pool of moderate participants was rather small ($n=8$, 5.52%) especially compared to the 37-member core (25.52%). The data on what proportion of occasional, moderate, and core participants stayed with the movement suggests that this development is related to the meager connections between the Roundtable negotiations and new pro-democracy initiatives. On the one hand, 58 of the 280 (20.71%) dissident intellectuals of the current period continued on to the next—the largest proportion in the entire era, affirming that high profile participants of the Roundtable negotiations stood a good chance to get elected to the parliament. Core participants had proportionally higher chances to become MPs than moderates and even higher than occasional participants. On the other hand, only 15 (5.36%) of all intellectuals of the Roundtable negotiations participated in the movement between 1991 and 1994, further attesting to the disconnect between politics in movements and professional politics. In addition, it was not occasional participants but those of moderate intensity who were the least likely to join the Democratic Charter movement.

The similarities between the core and the whole group of this period are also evident when looking at how many of these intellectuals were present in the earlier and next periods as shown in Figure 7.

Table 21. The correlation between the frequency of participation in the period of Roundtable negotiations and subsequent periods

	Parliamentary politics	New pro-democracy initiatives
<i>Occasional</i>	33 (33.00%)	8 (8.00%)
<i>Moderate</i>	3 (37.50%)	0 (0.00%)
<i>Core</i>	22 (59.46%)	7 (19.92)
Total	58 (100%)	15 (10.35%)

Figure 7. The proportions of all and the most active members of the four intellectual organizations (Fidesz, Liga, MDF, SZDSZ) of the Opposition Roundtable that were active in the periods before and after the Roundtable negotiations



3.5 PERIOD OF PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS (1990–1991)

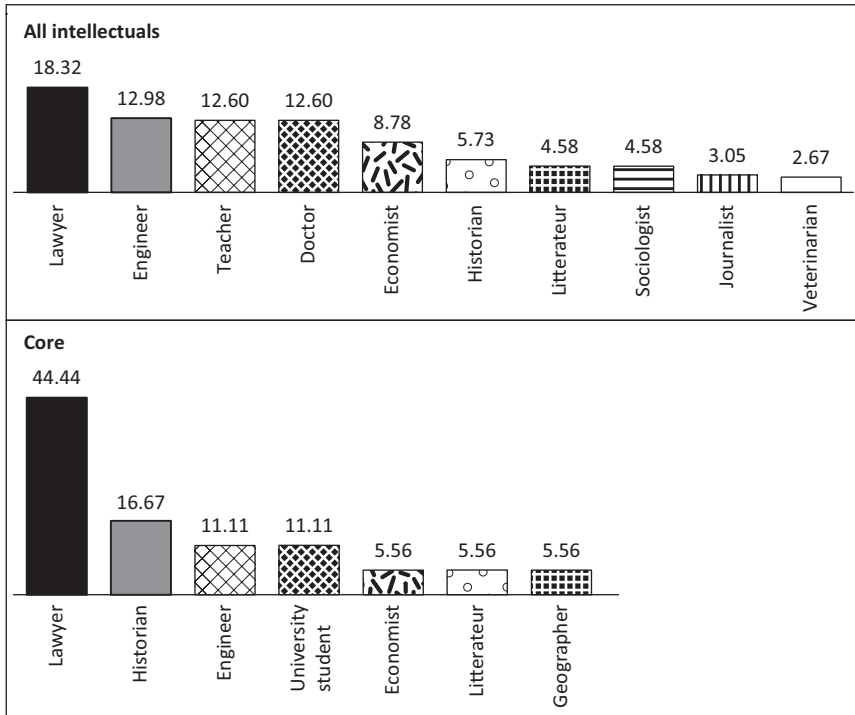
Based on the electoral system created during the Roundtable negotiations, the first free elections were held in the Spring of 1990. A great num-

ber of the participants of the Roundtable negotiations were elected to the parliament: 58 of 267 (20.71%) intellectuals of parliamentary politics had already been present at the negotiating tables. However, about four-fifth of the members of the freely elected parliament had different backgrounds. A small group were old dissident intellectuals who stayed away from the Roundtable negotiations: 11 (4.12 %) of them participated in only the period of dissent, 5 (4.50%) in the period of open network-building, and 7 (2.62%) were present in both of those periods. Although the continuity with the two early periods was somewhat higher if we consider those who were also there at the Roundtable negotiations as well—18 (6.74%) intellectuals from the period of dissent 12 (4.5%) from the period of open network-building and 26 (9.74%) from both periods—it was still small, signaling that a new type of intellectuals came to the center of the movement.

More than two-thirds of the intellectuals of parliamentary politics were newcomers. The election compelled former opposition parties to expand their ranks and establish a nationwide presence. They created local member organizations in each precinct. In the second half of 1989, dissident intellectuals had to go beyond their strong orientation toward and support in Budapest. They identified well-known and respected opinion leaders in local communities whom they then selected to contest the general election under the party's banner. Since intellectual parties were highly motivated to win the election, they selected candidates who had personal daily contacts with constituents.

This was how the renowned political career of Ibolya Dávid (1954) began. She had worked as a lawyer in a town in southern Hungary and had been inactive during the first three periods of the long transition. Even though she joined MDF as early as January 1989, she was not a widely known figure within the party. In 1990, Dávid was chosen as MDF's candidate in the electoral district that centered around her hometown and was elected to the parliament. She soon became a highly successful politician. Dávid was not only a parliamentary representative for 20 years, but she also served as the president of MDF (1998–2009) and the minister of justice in the first Orbán cabinet (1998–2002). After the millennium, she was one those first few politicians of the center right, who realized and tried to resist Orbán's emerging authoritarianism.

Figure 8. The top 10 most frequent occupations among all intellectuals compared to the distribution of occupations among the most active participants in the period of parliamentary politics negotiations, 1990–1991



In the period of parliamentary politics, Ibolya Dávid’s fellow lawyers benefitted from both the prestige of being present at the Roundtable negotiators and having daily contacts with people. As a result, theirs was the most numerous group of professionals (18.32%) in the period. As shown in Figure 8, they were followed by engineers and teachers (12.60% each) as well as doctors (12.60%), who could only build on their status in the local population. These four professions gave as much as 56.50 percent of all intellectual members of parliament. The representatives of the occupations who appeared in the largest numbers in either of the three previous periods were still present, but in much fewer numbers: economists made up 8.78 percent, historians 5.73 percent, writers and sociologists both 4.58 percent, and journalists 3.05 percent of all intellectuals. While they could still capitalize on their previ-

ous roles, they were now overshadowed by local notables. On the other hand, free lancers disappeared not only from the top 10 most frequent occupations among intellectuals but altogether. As we noted above, freelancers used to be forced out of their jobs due to their dissident activities, but by 1990 they could freely return to their original professions. Moreover, those who had political ambitions often had to realize that their flexible lifestyles appealed for neither the party leadership who selected the candidates nor the voters.

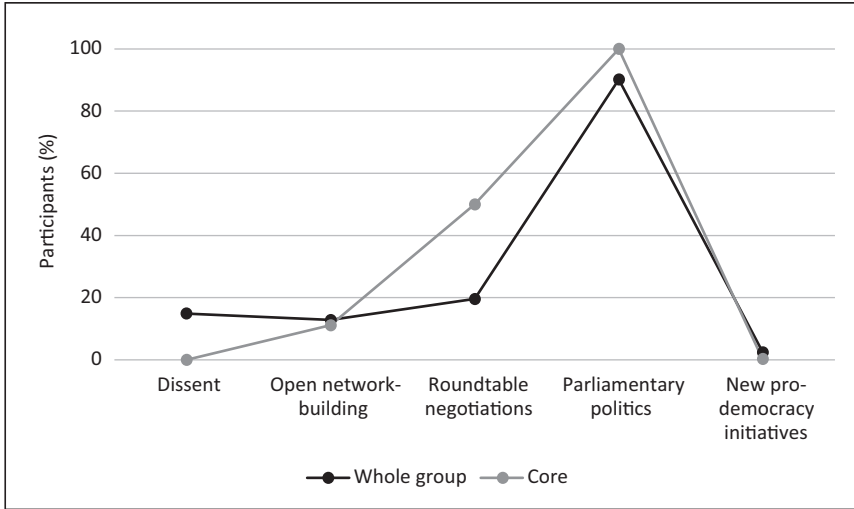
Ibolya Dávid was also one of the increasingly few women among professionals in the period of parliamentary politics: only 7.49 percent of intellectuals were women and 92.51 percent were men. Women were similarly underrepresented in the core of this period with the presence of a single woman (5.56%).

The most active members of the period were also lawyers (44%)—their influence in the core far outweighed their overall proportion. One of those lawyers who came to play an influential role in the national assembly was Alajos Dornbach (1936–2021). Although he did not participate in the events of earlier periods, Dornbach was closely connected with the dissident movement as its legal advisor. In 1988, he became a founding member of SZDSZ and in 1991 contested the party's presidential election unsuccessfully. He was elected to the parliament in 1990 and remained an MP until 2002. Dornbach was by no means a charismatic politician but did a remarkable job in crafting compromises among political forces. It was his position as the deputy chairman of the national assembly that allowed him to play a key role in his party and among intellectuals.

In the core group of parliamentary politics, engineers and university students gave the third largest groups (11–11%). Historians were the second most active group (16.67%), but only them and writers (5.56%) of liberal arts background were represented anymore in the core. The core changed in other ways, too. Its members were about five years older than in the previous period, suggesting that more experienced people with an established career were the best candidates for being elected to the national assembly. All in all, the transformation of the whole group was accompanied by a notable change in the makeup of the core.

Half of the 18-member core came from the core of the previous period, evidencing a smaller turnover in memberships than any time before and a strong connection among the leadership roles of two periods. Continuity with the

Figure 9. The proportions of all and the most active members of the three intellectual parties (Fidesz, MDF, SZDSZ) of the period of parliamentary politics that were present in previous and subsequent periods



core groups of other earlier periods was nearly nonexistent: there were 2 persons from the period of open network-building and none from the period of dissent. Figure 9 illustrates the fractions of both the core and whole group of intellectuals of parliamentary politics came from earlier or later periods.

The core gave 6.74 percent of all intellectuals in this period. Only 15.73% of the intellectuals were moderately active and the overwhelming majority, as previously, were low-intensity participants (77.53%). In this period, only a small number ($n=7$, 2.62%) of intellectuals continued on to the fifth and last period. Although it is unusual, it is understandable: many of them were members of the strongest governing party, MDF, and most likely did not much object to the activities of the government and even if they disagreed, they turned to other from means to express their dissatisfaction. Members of the SZDSZ and Fidesz were in opposition, but they had sufficient forums—in the national assembly, the media, or through their parties—to voice any objections. It was not necessary for them to create or join a movement in order to reach the public.

Lastly, the pattern of continuing from this to the next period also changed (Table 22). As we would expect on the basis of earlier trends, higher propor-

tion of moderate-intensity than low-intensity participants went on to the next period. But because not a single member of the core joined the Charter movement, there was no straightforward relationship between the intensity of participation and the proportion that stayed with the movement in the future.

Table 22. The correlation between the frequency of participation in the period of parliamentary politics and participation in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives

	New pro-democracy initiatives
<i>Low-intensity</i>	5 (2.42%)
<i>Moderate</i>	2 (4.76%)
<i>Core</i>	0 (0.00%)
Total	7 (100%)

3.6 PERIOD OF NEW PRO-DEMOCRACY INITIATIVES (1991–1994)

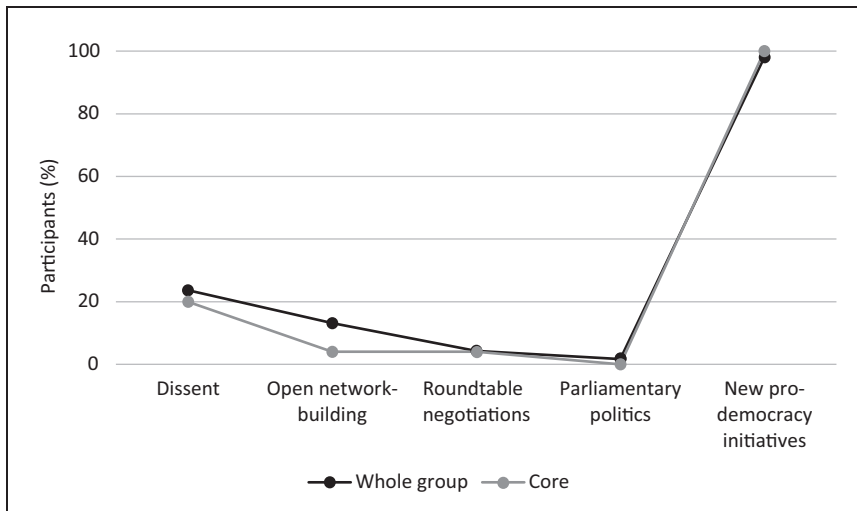
By 1991, protest against government policies did not constitute an existential threat, and thus, many who had refrained from openly expressing their opinion in the 1980s joined in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives. Writer and dramatist Mihály Kornis (1949) was a typical example of this group. He worked for the state-owned Hungarian Radio in the 1970s but was sacked in 1978 because he distributed copies of the early samizdat publication, *Napló* (Diary) to a closed circuit of readership, and thus, bypassed censorship. His entire life and work took place in dissident literary circles, yet he refrained from political activism in the 1980s and he only began to protest actively in 1991. Kornis became an important organizer, speaker, and active member of the Democratic Charter. He gave several interviews about the rise of the far right and its potential danger to democracy to radio stations and weekly magazines between 1991 and 1994. During and after his political activism he worked in theaters as a play-reader and artistic consultant. Like Kornis, 283 (68.68%) intellectuals of this period were newcomers.

We have discussed above the weak ties between this and the previous period. As depicted in Figure 10, connections with the earlier period of professional politics was marginally stronger as 13 intellectuals of the period of Roundtable

negotiations returned the movement in 1991. However, the fact that strategy of opposition intellectuals returned to the strategies of dissident intellectuals of the first two periods resulted in the return the old guard, who stayed away from the periods of Roundtable negotiations and parliamentary politics. Sixty-two of them participated during the period of dissent and 20 in the period of open network-building only, while another 26 were active in both. Together they formed 26.28 percent of the activists of the Democratic Charter.

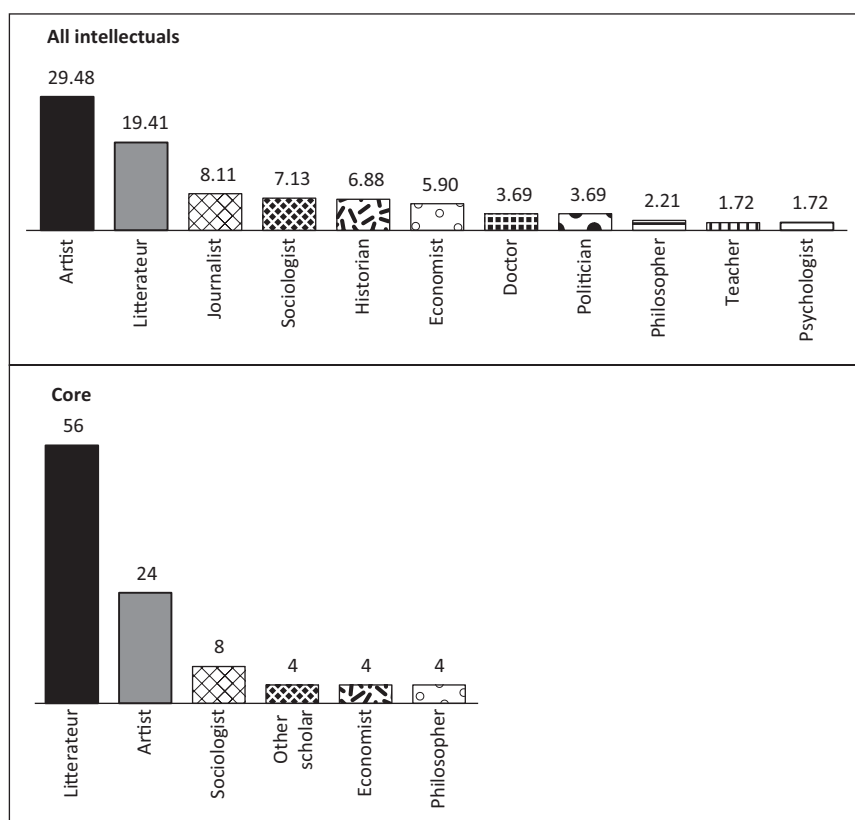
The essayist, critic, and literary historian Péter Balassa (1947–2003) represented the group of movement intellectuals who were moderately active in the periods of dissent and of open network-building, and who later stayed away from professional politics, but reactivated themselves in the DC movement. As charismatic university professor, Balassa was well known among the artistic and literary circles of Budapest. He had a loose relationship with members of the democratic opposition in the 1980s. Some of his former students belonged to the left-liberal wing of the early Fidesz in the first part of the 1990s. In the period of new pro-democracy initiatives, Balassa became very active in writing newspaper articles and giving interviews and public speeches against the rise of the radical right. Both Kornis and Balassa emerged as highly visible defenders of the nascent democracy in public life.

Figure 10. The proportion of all and the most active intellectuals of the period of the new pro-democracy initiatives that participated in earlier periods



The connections between the period of new pro-democracy initiatives and the early periods of dissident intellectual movements were also clear in job and gender distributions. Artists (29.48%), writers (19.41%), journalists (8.11%), sociologists (7.13%), historians (6.88%), and economists (5.90%) were represented in the largest numbers similarly to the early periods of the movement (Figure 11). The difference was that artists appeared in the greatest proportion in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives for the first time. Meanwhile, doctors (3.69%), teachers and psychologists (1.72% each), who were sought after in the period of parliamentary politics, were pushed to the

Figure 11. The top 10 most frequent occupations among all intellectuals compared to the distribution of occupations among the most active participants in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives, 1991–1994



background. Even though the presence of women did not reach the levels of the first two periods, it increased to comparable heights: 18.98 percent of the intellectuals were women and 81.02 percent were men.

At the same time a new flock of intellectuals, politicians (3.69%) appeared. They were exclusively from the ranks of the opposition parties. Those members of the governing coalition who left the dissident intellectual movement before the periods of professional politics and/or who did not fully agree with the party's leadership stayed away from politics altogether rather than to join forces with the opposition.

Regarding the core, as before, one-time activists formed the largest group ($n=332$, 80.78%), while there were 54 (13.14%) casual participants, who took part in two events. The period's core included 6.08 percent of intellectuals. They participated in either three or four of the six new pro-democracy initiatives. In the core, for the first time since the period of open network-building, writers (56%) were predominant while artists became the second most influential (24%). The core included artists and academics exclusively. The fraction of women (12%) also resembled more closely the periods of dissent and open network-building (9.09% and 21.43%, respectively). The members of the core were the oldest of all periods with an average age of 52, which can also be explained by the fact that many older intellectuals from the early decade of the movement returned. Indeed, the youngest member of the core was 37 years old, that is, 12 years older than the youngest member in any other periods.

At the same, only 7 of the 25 core activists belonged to the core in an earlier period (Figure 10). Close to half of the core ($n=11$, 44%) participated with lower intensity in one or more periods previously. In addition, seven of the most active were newcomers not only to the core but to the movement itself.

4. CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

The mutual affinity between transition theory and elite theory was established by Dankwart Rustow's path-breaking article.²¹ Here Rustow argued that transition is not a result of some indirect structural factors, but it is an outcome of political choices. For him transition to democracy is more about agency than structure. Reinterpreting Rustow, we can say that agency matters, but beyond

21 Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy."

that, the rotation and transformation of actors can be the secret of success. To put it simply: while the vanguard party of intellectuals leads to coup d'état or revolution, flexibly rotating agency leads to rolling transition. The conditions of consolidation might be different from this situation, in which the role predominance of agency is much less obvious vis-à-vis the impact of former structural conditions which shape the pattern of path-dependent development.

4.1 CIRCULATION OF ELITES AND CONTINUITY

Pareto's theory about the circulation of elites²² has been identified as a form of elite recruitment. Szelényi and Szelényi contrasted two ways of elite recruitment: the reproduction of elites and the circulation of elites. Elite reproduction claimed "that revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe did not affect the social composition of elites. This is because the old nomenclature elite has managed to survive at the top of the class structure and is now becoming the new propertied bourgeoisie."²³ As opposed to this, the theory of elite circulation argued "that the transition to post-communism resulted in a structural change at the top of the class hierarchy: new people are recruited for command positions on the basis of new principles."²⁴ Although in an earlier work on "interrupted embourgeoisement," Szelényi predicted the attainment of elite circulation,²⁵ he was only right about the radical transformation of political elites. Whereas circulation was the defining feature of the transformation of political elites, it was elite reproduction that characterized the transformation of cultural and economic elites.²⁶ Nonetheless, the idea of contrasting theories of elite circulation and elite reproduction brought new perspectives into the study of elites during the regime change. Fast circulation leads to revolution while pure reproduction maintains the status quo. Between these two extremes, transitions offer both: a significant proportion of circulation makes sure that the change would be fundamental, while partial reproduction of elites makes the change smooth and paves the way for rolling transition.

22 Pareto, *The Mind and Society*.

23 Szelényi and Szelényi, "Circulation or Reproduction of Elites," 916.

24 Szelényi and Szelényi, "Circulation or Reproduction of Elites."

25 Szelényi, *Socialist Entrepreneurs*.

26 Kolosi and Sági, "Rendszerváltás – elitváltás"; Kolosi, *A terhes babapiskóta*.

Among the elite theorists, Field and Higley's work²⁷ contributed to the understanding of the relationship between the circulation of political elites and the operating of the new political system. Their theory of elite differentiation and unity argued that there was consensus among the widely differentiated elite groups regarding the acceptance and following of the rules of the game of democratic politics.

Higley and Lengyel see this kind of elite unity as the cornerstone of making democracy work and an establishing effective market economy.²⁸ According to their approach, as Table 23 shows, in consolidated democracies, the unity of elite is based on consensus and not homogeneity. The unity of the elite is established at the same time when wide differences between elite groups come to the fore. In other words, unity is rooted in the mutual acceptance of democratic producers and not in common ideology and mentality. Totalitarian regimes are characterized by ideocratic elites because the strong unity of the elite is coupled with narrow differentiation or, in other words, homogenization. On the other hand, elites that are widely differentiated and weakly unified, which results in highly fragmented and disintegrating elites, might be typical of unconsolidated democracies. Finally, we mostly find elites that are weakly united and narrowly differentiated in authoritarian regimes.

Table 23. The type of elites and associated regime types

		Elite unity	
		Strong	Weak
Elite differentiation	Wide	Consensual elite (consolidated democracy)	Fragmented elite (unconsolidated democracy)
	Narrow	Ideocratic elite (totalitarian or post- totalitarian regime)	Divided elite (authoritarian regime)
<i>Source:</i> Higley and Lengyel ²⁹			

However, not all scholars agree to relate the type of elites and the type of regimes to each other in such a straightforward fashion. Some authors

²⁷ Field and Higley, *Elitism*.

²⁸ Higley and Lengyel, *Elites after State Socialism*.

²⁹ Higley and Lengyel, *Elites after State Socialism*, 3.

rather emphasize the role of democratic protests³⁰ and broad social mobilization³¹ in strengthening democracy, while others focus on the issue of equality and inequality among social strata in the post-communist regimes.³² Haggard and Kaufman underline the class character of redistribution conflicts, just as the elite and mass behavior³³ among the factors of democratic stability. Unexpected, mass-driven, breakthrough changes raise further questions concerning the viability of consolidation.³⁴ Beissinger argues that quickly convened negative coalitions against the rulers of the authoritarian regime can be a source of post-revolutionary instability which might hinder democratic consolidation.³⁵ Indeed, as Schmitter already observed in the 1990s, successful transitions and consolidations follow different logics and some of the results of the transitions need to be undone for the success of consolidation.³⁶

In Hungary, the relatively smooth transition of 1989 could give the false illusion that the consensual elite, characteristic of consolidated democracies, developed quickly. In the 1990s, however, it became clear the elite remained as highly divided as it was when it opposed the communist regime (e.g., populists vs. urbanists). The vision of a disunited elite so typical of authoritarian regimes troubled the opposition already between 1985 and 1987 and it became a reality after the regime change. It took different forms in the 1990s: see the cleavage between Antall-government and DC movement, or the social-liberal government versus the radical, populist opposition. Therefore, the first decade of the regime change left it unsettled whether the nature of the Hungarian political elite was consensual or fragmented despite the rather quick institutional consolidation of liberal democracy. In the 1990s, institutional consolidation was mostly accompanied by a consensual elite behavior, as far as the major issues are concerned, but in the following decade, the tension between the institution arrangements of the political system and political practice kept increasing. By the millennium, the behavior

30 Brancati, *Democracy Protests*.

31 Della Porta, *Mobilizing for Democracy*.

32 Bernhard and Jung, "Civil Society and Income Inequality in Post-Communist Eurasia."

33 Haggard and Kaufman, *Dictators and Democrats*.

34 Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Post-Communist Countries*.

35 Beissinger, "The Semblance of Democratic Revolution."

36 Schmitter, "The Consolidation of Democracy."

of a divided elite undermined the political institutions that had been built through consensus.

Higley and Lengyel also differentiated between the variants of elite circulation so that their theory matched better the dynamics of political change.³⁷ Instead of following the above model developed by Szelényi and Szelényi,³⁸ which named elite circulation and elite reproduction as the forms of elite recruitment, Higley and Lengyel understood elite circulation as elite recruitment. Building on Pareto's theory, they argued that circulation was continuous and therefore, it could only be augmented with adjectives, such as "classic," "reproduction," "replacement," or "quasi-replacement," to differentiate between its patterns. For them, reproduction was an adjective describing the nature of circulation, whereas they borrowed the term, "replacement" from Huntington.³⁹ Table 24 summarizes their approach.

Table 24. The patterns of elite circulation

		Scope of elite circulation	
		Wide and deep	Narrow and shallow
Mode of elite circulation	Gradual and peaceful	Classic circulation	Reproduction circulation
	Sudden and enforced	Replacement circulation	Quasi-replacement circulation
<i>Source:</i> Higley and Lengyel ⁴⁰			

The above theoretical approaches allowed us to examine the extent of connections in Hungarian parliamentary elites. Our analysis makes clear, that the circulation of the elite did take place, but it was not as "wide and deep" as it seemed in 1989. In the parties that grew out of the dissident intellectual movement of the 1970s and 1980s, elite circulation was "gradual and peaceful." But in other parties, especially in the historical parties and the newly formed MSZP, circulation was "sudden and enforced." Moreover, elite circulation was "narrow and shallow," rather than "wide and deep," in the

³⁷ Higley and Lengyel, *Elites after State Socialism*.

³⁸ Szelényi and Szelényi, "Circulation or Reproduction of Elites."

³⁹ Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

⁴⁰ Higley and Lengyel, *Elites after State Socialism*, 5.

lower strata of the political hierarchy. Therefore, the theory of elite circulation led to differing conclusions about the depth and gradualism of elite circulation at different levels of the political system.

Since this book focuses on the transformation of dissident intellectuals, and not on the larger issue of elite circulation, we only focus on the conclusions regarding the composition and overlaps between the pre-regime change and freely elected national assemblies as well as the Opposition Roundtable. It helped to understand continuity and discontinuity, both within the dissident intellectual movement and in the larger context of the national assembly, and also the extent to which the members of the last authoritarian parliament were reelected to the first democratic parliament and how this compared to the proportion of the participants of the Roundtable negotiations that were elected to the democratic parliament.

4.2 CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY WITHIN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

There was clear, albeit small, continuity between the elites in the pre- and post-regime change national assemblies. Only 24 members of the pre-regime change parliamentary assembly were reelected. One could easily consider this as the survival of the old communist guard into the new regime. However, this was not the case at all.

First, prior to the 1985 election, the Election Law was modified allowing for two candidates in a precinct. These elections were not free yet; it was expected that each candidate would accept the election program of the Patriotic People's Front. Yet, the fact that more than one candidate could run gave an opportunity for communist reformers and dissidents to challenge the ruling party's mainstream. A few dissident intellectuals immediately tested the system by trying to contest the election, but these early attempts were thwarted. A few younger party reformers did get elected. Some of them—like the well-known television personality, Zoltán Király, who was even expelled from MSZMP in 1988—radicalized further as a result of their parliamentary experience. This was why the seven MPs elected to the parliament in 1985 later became members of the new parliament under the banner of MDF. The more restrained strategy of MDF could be reconciled with

a graduated cadre politics. There had been also one unaffiliated parliamentary representative who later gained reelection as a member of SZDSZ.

Second, due to the ongoing political changes in which they had key roles, opposition forces exploited legal opportunities and through a collection of signatures initiated the recall of several communist MPs. The empty seats were filled through byelections in 1989 and 1990, when it became possible for the opposition to contest and win these elections. On four occasions in the summer of 1989, the newly elected representatives of the old parliament were members of the MDF, while one SZDSZ politician became member of the parliament at beginning of 1990. Although they served, briefly, in the last communist national assembly, no one considered them part of the old guard. Rather, they were seen as foreshadowers of the imminent political transformation.

Third, representatives of the reformist wing of the MSZMP could also win their reelection bid in 1990. The MSZMP, that represented the government at the Roundtable negotiations, was dissolved and it was its successor party, the MSZP that contested the democratic elections. Only seven representatives of the MSZMP were (re)elected into the new parliament as members of the MSZP due to their reformist attitude. Considering its status as the successor party of the former ruling communist party, the MSZP did well by becoming the fourth largest faction. It joined the ranks of the opposition.

Finally, four independent candidates were elected to the parliament in 1990. They had initially started as representatives of the MSZMP in the previous national assembly, including Prime Minister Miklós Németh. During their years as MPs, they were able to build an independent profile. Their elections in single member districts without the support of a party attested to the strength of their personal charisma. For example, Németh, who led the cabinet since the end of 1988, was not seen as the representative of an old, fallen regime but as a young politician who held a high political office while he was capable of distancing himself from the MSZMP and successfully managed the democratic transition.

Thus, the 24 individuals who were members of both the last pre- and first post-regime change parliaments did not represent the old guard. They gained acceptance and reelection through their reformist or dissident backgrounds or through their political work and achievements.

4.3 CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN THE ROUNDTABLE TALKS, AND THE DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The newly elected members of the first post-communist parliament met for the first time on May 2, 1990. The 389 MPs came from six parties. Five of these parties, MDF, SZDSZ, FKGP, Fidesz, and KDNP were members of the Opposition Roundtable. Not all organizations of the Opposition Roundtable were elected to the national assembly. The Hungarian People's Party and the Hungarian Social Democratic Party did not pass the parliamentary threshold, while the BZSBT and Liga did not even contest the elections. However, a few of their members, respectively, were elected to the national assembly under the banners of other opposition parties.

Participants of the EKA played a key role in the emerging new political elite. Fifty-eight intellectual members of the EKA were elected members of parliament, representing the three parties whose roots are in the dissident intellectual movements. They gave 14.91 percent of the members of the freely elected national assembly. Most of them became leaders of the new political elite. Thus, leaders and the most influential members of the parliamentary factions already knew each other closely. As one of the MPs, a then-leader of his parliamentary faction put it, "The present political leaders were creations of the Opposition Roundtable. Almost everyone who lives and breathes politics today and can be considered a leader came from the Opposition Roundtable."⁴¹ However, this was only true for elites of the new representatives. However, it was not only the members of the three intellectual parties which had grown out of dissent that came to play a dominant role in the new political elite.

Three times as many participants of the Roundtable negotiations were elected in 1990 than members of the old parliamentary assembly. Considering all members, including historical and intellectual parties, of the EKA, 73 out of 280, roughly one-fourth, would be elected MPs. This is presented in Table 25. These 73 individuals, who negotiated out the new constitutional and political systems of the country, became the key figures of the new political elite. Quite a few of them had become influential figures of the Roundtable negotiations because they had already been prominent members

41 Interview with Viktor Orbán, 1990.

of their parties. However, as we have shown above, they had not played a notable or any role during the periods of dissent and open network-building but rose to prominence during the negotiations. They transformed into politicians in the EKA and their performance at the National Roundtable negotiations got them elected to the parliament.

Table 25. Overlaps between the members of Opposition Roundtable and the members of the newly elected national assembly

Organizations in the Opposition Roundtable	Members of the Opposition Roundtable	Members of parliament, 1990–1994	
Fidesz	34	15	(44.18%)
Liga	36	2	(5.56%)*
MDF	39	19	(48.72%)
SZDSZ	33	19	(57.58%)
Total, dissident intellectual organizations	142	55	(38.73%)
All other (historical) organizations	138	18	(13.04%)**
Opposition Roundtable	280	73	(26.07%)
* One as a member of MDF and another as a member of SZDSZ			
** Two MPs were elected representing MDF and one SZDSZ			

Although the former members of the EKA only made up 18.77 percent of the new parliament, their personal connections were so strong in the first year, that they operated as an invisible network behind the formal multiparty structure of the assembly. With time, these ties eroded in the new political space and the parties' position in this new space—that is, whether they belonged to the government or the opposition—took precedent. Partly, this was business as usual as the new elite cleavages solidified. This process was also sped up by the fact that the majority of MPs did not take part in the Roundtable negotiations. They became members when the parties expanded their ranks after the Roundtable negotiations and before the democratic elections. They defined themselves by their party affiliations from the beginning and did not feel any sense of community with members of the former opposition parties. This mentality caught on within the parties overall and, when later MPs switched or left

their parties, EKA members were not immune to this behavior. The relationships built during the Roundtable negotiations were transcended.

4.4 CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN THE WAVES OF ACTIVISM

When we analyzed each of the five periods of dissident intellectual activities above, we have already touched upon continuity and discontinuity among all participants and the core, including participation, occupation, gender, and age. However, the emphasis was on uncovering the defining features of each period and noting connections or disconnections between periods were primarily used to that end. In this section, we focus on continuity and discontinuity in a larger context and, based on the changes from one period to another, identify patterns characteristics of the era of dissident intellectuals' political activities from 1977 to 1994.

Patterns of participation among all intellectuals and in the core are both telling. At first glance, it seems that the movement of intellectuals was more numerous than the 1,845 dissident intellectuals we have identified (Table 26). It is, however, exactly because of the continuity between the periods.

Table 26. Summary of the most active and other activists of each period

Period	Core	Other activists	All intellectuals
Dissent	22 (3.01%)	732 (96.99%)	754 (100%)
Open network-building	14 (2.42%)	566 (97.58%)	580 (100%)
Roundtable negotiations	37 (13.21%)	243 (86.79%)	280 (100%)
Parliamentary politics	18 (6.74%)	249 (93.26%)	267 (100%)
New pro-democracy initiatives	25 (6.08%)	386 (93.92%)	411 (100%)
Total*	78 (4.23%)	1,767 (95.77%)	1,845 (100%)
* Because of the overlap in participation across periods, the total sum is smaller than it would be if the numbers in the columns were summed			

Figure 12. Continuity in the participation of all dissident intellectuals between consecutive and nonconsecutive periods of regime change, 1977–1994

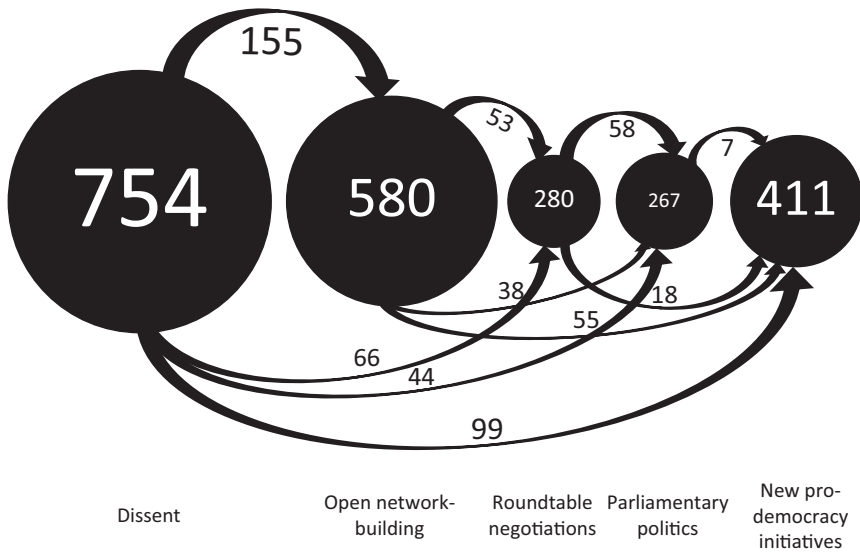


Figure 12's top arrows, linking the five periods illustrated by the circles, show the number of the dissident intellectuals who went from one consecutive session to the next. Continuity varied greatly. It was the smallest between the periods of parliamentary democracy and new pro-democracy initiatives with only 2.67 percent of intellectuals continued. About the same proportion went on from the period of dissent to the period of open network-building (20.56%) and from the Roundtable negotiations to the parliament (20.71%), while 9.14 percent of open network-building activists earned a place at the Roundtable negotiations. There was strong continuity between the two initial periods, when dissident intellectuals work as a movement, and also the periods of Roundtable negotiations and parliamentary politics, when intellectuals participated in power politics. When a transition occurred from politics in movements to power politics, or vice versa, there was an increased disconnect.

However, continuity through the 17 years of intellectual activism was higher when we consider activists who rejoined the movement after period(s) of inactivity. The bottom arrows on Figure 12 show the number of continu-

ing of activists between nonconsecutive periods, regardless of their involvement in other periods. When, including consecutive and nonconsecutive periods but controlling for participation in earlier period(s), the proportion of those activist who were present in earlier period(s) is remarkably stable: 26.72 percent of open network-building, 24.64 percent of the Roundtable negotiations, 27.11 percent of parliamentarians, and 23.11 percent of new pro-democracy initiative activists returned from earlier periods.

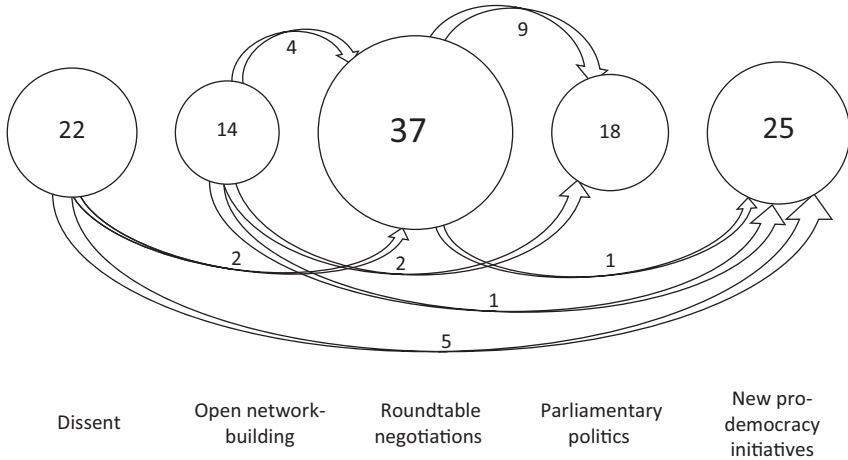
To sum up, in Hungary, as a rule three-fourth of the participants were replaced by newcomers in each period of transition, while one-fourth of them went through to the next stage. This has been the formula of rolling transition in the Hungarian case. The proportion of this “organic” rotation of opposition activists was rather high. During the regime change, representatives of the second generation of communist party elite faced a heterogeneous and flexible opposition which effectively rotated itself.

We have shown earlier that in general, members of the core of a given period were more likely to remain active or reactivate themselves than less active participants, even if this pattern was less evident in connections with 1991–1994. Looking at overlaps between the core groups of the periods, we also made it clear that this willingness to stay in the movement did not translate into staying among the most active members. In fact, the cores showed less continuity but greater variation than the whole groups. First, it is clear from Table 26, that the size of the cores relative the whole groups varied between 2.42 percent and 13.21 percent.

Second, there was no continuity at all between the cores of either the periods dissent and open network-building or the periods of parliamentary politics and new pro-democracy initiatives (Figure 13). Where continuity exists, the proportion of the core that joined the next core is rather similar: 28.57 percent from the open network-building’s core went on to the Roundtable negotiation’s core, from where another 24.32 percent remained in the core of the following period.

Third, compared to the whole group, connections between the cores of nonconsecutive periods marked by the bottom arrows in Figure 13, also reveal somewhat higher levels of continuity but much less consistency. Looking at the percentage that joined the core of a specific period from the cores of all previous periods and counting those who belonged to more than one of the previous cores only once, we found that 16.22 percent of the most

Figure 13. Continuity in the participation of the most active dissident intellectuals between consecutive and nonconsecutive periods of regime change, 1977–1994



active members of the Roundtable negotiations, 55.56 percent of parliamentary politics, and 28 percent of the period of new pro-democracy initiatives used to belong to the core in earlier period(s).

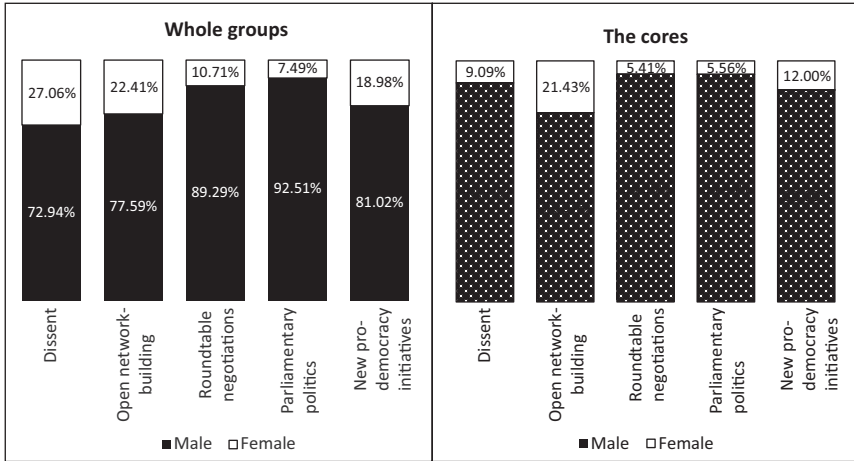
Variations in occupation showed a somewhat similar pattern. Despite the smaller and less stable continuity within the core, its occupational composition was somewhat more stable than that of the whole group. It is best demonstrated by the fact that while the most active occupational groups only included the representative of two professions—litterateurs (writers) and lawyers—in the cores, there was a new predominant group in nearly each period when it came to the whole group: litterateurs in the period of dissent, journalists in the period of open network-building, economist and lawyers at the Roundtable negotiations, lawyers in the parliament, and artists in the period of new pro-democracy initiatives. Since in all three periods where intellectuals pursued their activities in movements, writers were present in the largest numbers in the cores, whereas lawyers were predominant in the two periods of professional politics, it was easier to identify a pattern in the core and establish a difference between the two types of politics. However, when we looked at more than just the single most numerous occupational

groups of the periods among all intellectuals, a similar pattern emerged: representatives of the liberal art tradition predominated movements as opposed to professional politics, where representatives of more practice-oriented professions held the majority.

A similar pattern could be established based on gender composition both among all intellectuals and within the cores of the five periods. While men consistently outnumbered women in every period, the balance of the two genders varied greatly (Figure 14). In general, the cores included smaller proportions of women than the whole group. In the period of open network-building this gap was negligible: 22.41 percent of the whole group and 21.43 percent of the core consisted of women. In two periods, however, the differences between the whole group and core was sizable: there were three times as many women in the whole group than in the core of the period of dissent, and twice as many in the period of parliamentary politics. While it was not possible to speak about equality among men and women in any period, inequality increased greatly when intellectuals became professional politicians. In general, women's proportion was always greater in the periods where intellectuals pursued politics in movements—about one-fourth of the movements were women—and smaller when intellectuals were embedded in traditional power structures—about one-tenth of the participants were women. Thus, women's role in establishing and operating the rules of the new regime was disproportionately modest: only 30 female intellectuals participated in the Roundtable negotiations and only 20 were elected to the national assembly. This corresponded with tendencies in the pre- and post-regime change elites: the closer politics got to the top, the fewer the number of female politicians were.

The average ages of the most active participants in the five periods of regime change were much less revealing. Unlike in case of participation, occupation and gender, based on age, we could not delineate the periods of movements from those of power politics. Yet, even our limited data that focused on the average age of the most active participants showed changes in the composition of dissident intellectuals. At the least, had the group of dissident intellectuals remained the same group of people or similar in character, we would have expected a steady rise in age over the periods. This was not the case: there was notable dip in age—nearly seven years—from the period of open network-building to the Roundtable negotiations, attesting to the

Figure 14. Continuity in the gender distribution among all dissident intellectuals and their most active subgroups in the five periods of regime change, 1977–1994



fact the influx of new participants did not only change the occupational and gender makeup of the core but also rejuvenated it (Table 27). The role that the young and agile members of Fidesz played at the Roundtable negotiations could have been a key factor in that.

Table 27. The average age of the most active individuals in the five periods of regime change

Period	Size of core	Average age	Standard deviation	Minimum age	Maximum age
Dissent	22	42.56	10.16	25	73
Open network-building	14	47.93	14.92	25	71
Roundtable negotiations	37	40.74	10.74	23	65
Parliamentary politics	18	45.94	13.09	23	68
New pro-democracy initiatives	25	52.06	10.88	37	75
Total	90*	45.03	12.17	23	75
* Because of the overlap in participation across periods, the total sum is smaller than the sum of the numbers in the column above					

There was also a larger, six-year gap in the average ages of the periods of parliamentary politics and new pro-democracy initiatives. This time, it was an increase in age, which corresponded well with the pattern of returning early activists that we established above. However, it was more than that. Even the newcomers of this period were older: this period had the highest minimum age (37 years) for participants. While these could be people who had a newly found interest in defending democratic values, we found it more likely that these individuals were long-term sympathizers with the activities of dissident intellectuals but had not been in the position to join the movement due, for example, to existential reasons at the beginning or lacking the required skills when professional politics came to the fore.

5. THE END OF TRANSITION

The patterns identified above provided important evidence for the model of the rolling transition. First, it was not a strong, cohesive vanguard that carried out the regime change, but somewhat overlapping core groups replaced each other. In other words, the most active participants of the regime change did not sit and row toward the finish line in the same boat throughout the long decade of regime. Rather, they were participants in a relay race during which they passed the torch on from one period to the next to cross the finish line and achieve the common goal of creating a new political regime.

However, the metaphor of the relay race is only applicable if one thinks about intellectuals as groups and subgroups of activists. When considering the career of the individual leaders of the three intellectual parties (Fidesz, MDF, and SZDSZ) between 1989 and 2010, it became clear that the key political figures were all there at the cradle of Hungary's new democratic system. Three of the four presidents of Fidesz played important roles in the period of open network-building already, while the fourth started out his career at the negotiations of the Opposition Roundtable. As for the six presidents of the MDF, the first one was expelled from the Communist party hardly a year before his election as MDF's president, while another president was already active in the period of dissent, one joined during the open network-building phase and two became active during the Roundtable negotiations. Only one of the MDF presidents began his career in the post-regime change national assembly in 1990. Regarding the SZDSZ, three of its nine

presidents were already active in the period of dissent, two joined during the period of open network-building and one become active at the Roundtable negotiations. In addition, one president joined the period of parliamentary politics as a professional politician, while two became party members only after the end of the long decade of regime change. All four presidents of Fidesz, five of the six presidents of MDF, and six of the nine presidents of SZDSZ came from the first three periods—dissent, open network-building and Roundtable negotiations—and, thus, was among the founding fathers of the Third Republic in Hungary.

Fifteen of all 19 presidents of the three intellectual parties of the regime change were influential individuals within their parties even before the democratic elections of 1990. Early involvement with the opposition of the communist regime strongly defined the careers of political leaders for the next 20 years, when only those were elected leaders of their party who actively contributed to the regime change. Thus, the impact of 1989 was much more important for the individual careers of party leaders than in the history of their parties.

When concentrating solely on the party leadership, the notion that a dissident intellectual vanguard carried out the regime change in Hungary seemed justified. However, as this book showed, it was not the same group of intellectuals that played the central role in each period. Intellectual members of the opposition of the communist regime were heterogenous in more than one way and opposition intellectuals were divided and often distrustful of each other's intentions. They certainly never felt that they belonged to the same group, let alone a vanguard. In the meantime, the relationship of the communist regime and its dissident opposition alternated between cooptation and cooperation, which also made room for newer actors to emerge.

Nonetheless, this brief reflection on the careers of party leaders demonstrated that while individual career paths could be useful in understanding certain aspects of the era, an individual level analysis cannot reveal all the larger processes at play. By looking at the wider group of all intellectual activists, it became clear that it was newer and newer groups—and individuals—who played key roles in the progression of the regime change even though some of the actors were present at several phases although in different capacities.

Second, the facts that only 25 percent of any given period were participants that had been present in earlier periods of the movement and that about 75 percent of each period's participants were newcomers to intellectual activism, became a strength rather than a weakness. Incoming activists brought skills, character, and expertise that made the intellectual movement able to adjust to the new challenges of each period successfully. Thus, adaptation to the changing political context in the 17 years of the long decade of regime change was crucial in the survival and success of dissident intellectuals.

Third, a clear difference emerged between periods of professional politics—the Roundtable negotiations and parliamentary politics—where intellectuals became entangled in power politics and the periods of movement—dissent, open network-building and new pro-democracy initiatives—where intellectualized organized themselves and pursued their goals in movements. Different type of politics required different type of activists as the analysis of the occupation, gender, and, to a smaller extent, age of intellectuals revealed. Had we focused on the traditionally studied years of the regime change or its customary three-period division, we could not have been able to identify these processes. Instead, we delineated five periods and showed how the characteristics of the intellectual movement changed from one period to another.

Jacek Wasilewski's model of "three elites" differentiated three periods in the social transitions of Central Europe: political and economic transitions, and consolidation.⁴² He argued that these three periods required three different kinds of elites. By political transition, he meant the brief period of strategic decision making between the old and the new regime, when the rules of a new political system were laid down. The practical implementation of these strategic decisions took place in the period of economic transition, when, for example, the legal frameworks and the practical workings of the market economy and the democratic political system were established. According to Wasilewski, economic and social transitions became much more deeply embedded in the structure of the society than the elite-driven political transition, because the former two required the basic reorganization of resources. The third period, the period of consolidation, concerned

42. Wasilewski, "Three Elites of the East Central European Democratization."

the new order and its stable functioning, when the newly established rules and behavior became customary.

Each of these periods had its own prominent actors. The elite of the political transition was characterized by visions of the future and missionary mindsets and beliefs. The elite of the economic transition consisted of experts of their own fields, who implemented the visions. The elite of the period of consolidation played an intermediary, integrating and stimulating role so as to make the new order widely accepted and followed.⁴³ In other words, the symbolic politics of the regime change was first followed by the politics of economic reforms and then by redistributive policies.

In Hungary, the institutional transformation of the political system, and thus regime change itself, ended in 1990, however, the activism of intellectuals ended four years later. Just as activities progressed, the number sympathizers and outside supporters of the movement had grown incrementally during the intellectual movement, it dissipated also gradually after the regime change. In 1994, at the second democratic elections, a social-liberal coalition acceded to power although socialists could have governed alone as they held an absolute majority in the national assembly. The government started to speak of “ideology free,” “modernized” experts. Europeanization, managing the macroeconomic crisis, and a monetarist market-economy with modest state intervention were the key elements of their discourse. The coalition of socialists and liberals, the latter of whom followed the ideals of dissident intellectuals, relied on the dichotomy of traditional and modern. As I discussed earlier, this approach had been successful in delegitimizing the Kádár regime on pragmatic reformist or technocratic grounds but was insufficient for establishing the identity of the new democracy.

The discourse of transition was replaced by a discourse of consolidation that looked as much into the past as into the future. After 1994, communist party reformers and technocrats of the previous regime now came to speak the language of modernization. Ideological debates were replaced by the pragmatic and materialist politics of consolidation. This was augmented with an interpretation of Hungarian history that described the forces of modernization as fighting the ghosts of the pre-state socialist period even during the regime change. By the mid-1990s, it became obvious that the 1980s did not

43 Wasilewski, “Three Elites of the East Central European Democratization,” 135.

only bring the revival of classical political ideologies, but that these coexisted with modernization, the technocratic ideology of reform intellectuals.⁴⁴

The socialist-dominated coalition used the discourse of modernization for political reasons. Through the flexible concept of modernization, they could send messages to both the reformers of the 1980s and the middle class that was socialized in the Kádár regime. Former reformers understood that the coalition needed their expertise, while the middle class could trust that there would be no more radical changes and the politics of regime-changing intellectuals ended. The discourse of modernization was a substitute for ideologies in the era of privatization, when socialists did not engage in the traditional leftist policy of redistribution.⁴⁵ It soon became the ideology of a “competition state.”⁴⁶ The trade unionist wing of the MSZP watched capitalist developments with suspicion. The discourse of modernization distracted these leftists from the problems of capitalism and, at the same time, reassured the technocratic elite that they could increase their profit through the benefits of privatization.

The ideology of modernization bridged the gap between the socialist party elites, who were clear winners of the transition, and the socialist voting base, who mostly belonged to the losers of the regime change.⁴⁷ Because it focused on the future instead of the past, it remedied the grievances of communists and anti-communists alike. This post-intellectual, pragmatic approach to policymaking sent the message that there were no alternatives to privatization, and thus, the only thing worth thinking about was the future of modernization. Instead of the fair redistribution of social capitals, the discourse focused on the country’s progress, the success of which was vested in the elite of modernization. The “romantic” ideologies of the transition were, thus, replaced by the politics of consolidation that were interlinked with the anti-theses of politics. Modernization and expert knowledge served the depoliticization of politics.

Different periods of the transition required different political experience, knowledge and skills, elites and leaders. The groups of elites had to replace one another or had to adapt to the new tasks. As Putnam presented his find-

44 Böröcz, “Reaction as Progress.”

45 Sebők, *Paradigmák fogságában*.

46 Scheiring, *Retreat of Liberal Democracy*.

47 Bozóki, “Rhetoric of Action.”

ings much earlier, post-revolutionary elites differed from revolutionary elites in a significant way.⁴⁸ Clearly, democratic consolidation required different attitudes and different actors than the transition. The political dynamics in Central Europe covers a longer era of democratization. The model of rolling transition showed that even the social and political transformation contained several periods in which intellectuals faced largely different challenges. No wonder that they were forced to rotate themselves to respond to those challenges differently. The peaceful and gradual Hungarian transition was “rolling” in nature because the rotation of activists was the typical pattern of activists and not their long-lasting vanguard role. It was also not revolutionary, because the periods of movements and power politics alternated, which necessitated that movement activists and professional politicians emerged from the heterogeneous groups of intellectuals.

48 Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*.

Conclusion

The aim of this book was to explore the ideas, strategies, activity, and social background of the most influential actors of the Hungarian democratic transition, the intellectuals. I was interested in who carried out the transition, where they came from, and what kind of ideas they were driven by. As opposed to Poland where the intellectuals formed an alliance with workers and employees, creating an enormous mass movement, the starting and negotiating of the Hungarian regime change as well as the organization of movements and the formation of parties were mainly done by the intellectuals. They formed an alliance with some active groups of the older generations but most importantly with technocrats of the late Kádár era. Most of the society had been in a state of political passivity up until 1988.

The democratic opposition of the 1980s mainly consisted of dissident intellectuals who had been fired from their employment, “free-floating” intellectuals of the humanities and social sciences, and students. The group of dissidents can mainly be interpreted as a human rights movement. In the beginning, the dissidents strove to mediate between power and society, that is, they preferred the tactics of persuasion and considering progression over the revolutionary tactics. Their aim was to strengthen civil society in which self-conscious citizens, relying on their moral autonomy, take the fight against the dictatorship on the basis of the ideas of human rights. However, the concept of civil society paradoxically had both an inclusive and an exclusive meaning. It was inclusive because there were no ethnic, religious, age, gender, or class restrictions. Anyone could join the movement. Yet it was exclusive in the sense that the Hungarian meaning of the term civil society referred not to a class alliance but, out of necessity, it remained within the

boundaries of a middle class political organization. As it turned out, intellectuals had a privileged position in the concept of civil society.

On the other hand, this book was only in part about the dissidents. For its aim was to understand the character of the Hungarian transition with respect to the dynamics of transformation. Therefore, I devoted separate sections to the late-1980s period of networking and party formation, to the main actors of the Roundtable talks (including the organizations of EKA in particular), and to the composition of the party groups with a rather intellectual character in the first freely elected legislature. Afterward, a separate chapter discussed the role of the activists of a new movement for the protection of democracy, the Democratic Charter.

Which were the factors in the Hungary of the 1980s which helped a group of intellectuals organize and gradually become, from a relatively closed countercultural community, the flag-bearer of a political change of historical importance? Returning to the Jerome Karabel's criteria outlined in the beginning of the book,¹ we can derive the following conclusions.

According to Karabel, the first criterion of the revolt of intellectuals is that the intellectuals exist as a well-organized, politically radical yet subordinate social group or they are connected to such a group. That the Kádár regime detached intellectuals from the broader social groups of workers and employees did strengthen the identity of this group, but most of the intellectuals turned away from politics. Therefore, they were successfully put at the regime's service. Intellectuals were in a relatively privileged and isolated position at the same time, but from the mid-1970s they were forced into a subordinate position in a political sense. Their isolation did not mean that they were either radical or politically organized. Reform intellectuals—most of whom were party members—existed as a subordinate faction of cadre bureaucracy, and they used their knowledge and proposals to push the party apparatus toward the direction of reforms.

Dissidents, on the other hand, took part in this only minimally. While their group was not particularly radical in international comparison, they ended cooperation with the system. In the beginning, the dissidents undertook the role of a mediator, trying to mediate between the state and society. Back then they did not even think that they would be able to give voice

1 Karabel, "Toward a Theory of Intellectuals and Politics."

to the oppressed society. Beyond the “new evolutionist” strategy of radical reformism,² the position they could consider was that of the truth-teller,³ which was exercised by the groups of the democratic opposition via the limited publicity of samizdat journals. They were legitimized by their outsider stance which became important when the change took place. By then political discourse had changed and—because of the democratic opposition, the reform intellectuals, and also in part the more open media intellectuals—the Gouldnerian culture of critical discourse had gained ground.⁴ Political radicalism and opposition organization started to develop only in the second half of the 1980s.

The regime change did not end democratic social movements at one stroke. Indeed, new groups joined the political sphere. Politically active intellectuals organized into a movement in an attempt to defy the right-leaning government that sometimes seemed to revise the principles of 1989. The Democratic Charter was supported not only by the liberal and socialist parties: a cooperation of artists, journalists, and movement intellectuals who enjoyed the newly experienced freedom of the press was forged. This could happen in such way because the new political elite itself was still amateur and divided.

The other structural criterion of the revolt of intellectuals, according to Karabel, is the lack of a strong bourgeoisie. This obviously refers to capitalist societies. This criterion cannot be interpreted for the state socialist period of Hungary for there was no bourgeoisie out of the very nature of the system, albeit certain signs of petty embourgeoisement had appeared by the 1980s due to the strengthening of the second economy.⁵ However, this typically had happened out of necessity, by overwork and self-exploitation, in an ambivalent form in a gray zone at the periphery of the public sphere. In general, the effect of petty embourgeoisement through forced entrepreneurship did not affect the activity of the dissidents. However, the lack of strong bourgeoisie could be interpreted after the regime change when the movement of opinion-molder intellectuals, the DC gained significant political influence.

2 Michnik, “A New Evolutionism.”

3 Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*.

4 Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*.

5 Szelényi, *Socialist Entrepreneurs*.

Later, after 1994 we can find no examples for such a *par excellence* intellectual movement.

According to Karabel's third criterion, if "free-floating" intellectuals in the great organizations exist in relatively high numbers compared to applied professional intellectuals, the chances of revolt may increase. As professional intellectuals lose their critical potential due to organizational indoctrination, opposition intellectuals can count on them only if the inevitability of change becomes widely acknowledged. In Hungary, this criterion was more or less fulfilled, one could find a number of freelance intellectuals among the dissidents. Intellectuals could exist in universities, research institutes, and certain hidden jobs in the system, which therefore allowed their status to approach Mannheim's concept of "socially unattached" intellectuals.⁶ The movements of this layer—while it was relatively isolated from society—were not always restricted, which meant that some of their representatives could visit country universities, community centers, writer camps, and other non-official events. Some reform intellectuals were considered reliable fit into this circle, too, and they could even visit factories or plants as well. However, this was conditional upon maintaining at least formal loyalty to the party (i.e., party membership). Yet organizational indoctrination was not particularly strong. Pro-regime, communist indoctrination had specifically emptied by the 1980s. The economic decay and political stagnation of the system rapidly impaired its indoctrinating effect, opening the way for intellectuals calling for modernization and the rule of law.

All this could be observed even more clearly in the years immediately after 1989. Transnational corporations had not arrived in Hungary yet, journalism was completely reformed, the role of independent media grew. This meant that, in the years after the regime change, intellectuals had not been caught in the corporative ethos of capitalist corporations yet, and therefore a relatively high number of unsettled, "free-floating" intellectuals trying various roles could appear among their ranks.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth criteria of Karabel are closely related. According to the fourth criterion of the activation of intellectuals, if the regime is moderately repressive (i.e., it has no intention or opportunity of full oppression) that opens room for maneuver for dissidents. This was also

6 Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*.

described in other words by O'Donnell and Schmitter:⁷ they regarded moderation of the system as an antecedent, not simply to intellectual activism but also to democratic transition. The softening and disintegration of the Kádár regime, the politics of opening and liberalization, the state of political vacuum of the transition years, and the rapid social changes of the years preceding the regime change created the way for the joint activism of intellectuals. However, they were also joined by other layers at this point. The paradox of intellectual protest in the Hungary of the 1980s was this: when they could not act, they were alone, but when they could finally act, they were no longer alone. This was another reason why no one could realistically anticipate the change of 1989 leading to the class power of intellectuals.

These circumstances are related to the fifth criterion, the weakness or dividedness of the political elite. In the 1980s, the oppressive nature of the Kádár regime diminished because the economic decay of the country forced it to borrow Western loans to maintain living standards. In exchange, the creditors urged further reforms, or the moderation of the treatment of the opposition. This, in turn, contributed to the dividedness of the regime's leadership: it became more and more visible that, behind the old leaders growing detached from reality, reformer and hard-liner successor candidates were battling. This enlarged the room for maneuver for the regime opposition. The weakness of the political elite could also be observed in the period of the democratic transition when rapid changes in the highest echelons of politics took place. The political elite of post-communist democracy was characterized by inexperience, dividedness, and mutual distrust, which created favorable circumstances for a new movement politics for the protection of democracy and constitutionalism. The DC lost its intellectual-movement character when it openly endorsed one political side before the 1994 elections. Then, politicians took the initiative and used the movement as a tool, leading to the insignificance of the Charter.

The sixth criterion holds that intellectual may lead the opposition if the state is unable to protect its citizens from the growing economic, political, or military influence of other states which put significant groups of the nation into a disadvantaged position on the international stage. From this, Hungary experienced economic decay which led to growing indebtedness, new depen-

7 O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*.

dency and, eventually, to the severance of old dependency by 1989. The years after 1990 were characterized by two-digit unemployment and inflation above 30 percent, which created popular disillusionment toward the government, the political class, and party politics in general. This increased the prestige of intellectuals as a “last resort” and the unusually strong trust toward intellectuals.

The seventh criterion of the emergence of intellectual activism is that the borders isolating social groups are sociologically so strong that prevent their effective joint activity. This is when the intellectuals undertake the role of representing other social groups. As I suggested above, dissidents as well as the greatest portion of intellectuals of liberal arts were successfully isolated from other groups of society by the Kádár regime. Thus, intellectuals had been unable to build a broad social coalition against the dictatorial regime up until 1988. After 1990, the intellectual movement organized already in the environment of freedom of speech, press, and association, but the DC still remained—in the first period of its existence—an intellectual movement relying on a broader base. Nonintellectual actors started flowing into the movement only from 1993.

Finally, as an eighth factor, Karabel mentioned the possibility that the society might have historically developed cultural patterns of resistance to power which can be conjured up as symbolically imprinted messages in times of crises. Such patterns existed in Hungary, although they were mainly related to the tradition of violent revolutions, including the so-called “Kossuth song” of 1848 or the national flag with a hole from 1956. The role of the intellectuals was to translate the cultural patterns of revolution in such a way, according to the requirements of nonviolent transition, that they would not lose sight of the goal of the lawful revolution. Because of this, the early references to the revolution of 1956 later gave way to references to peaceful historical new beginnings. In 1989, participants of the transition often referred to the revolution of 1956, but in fact 1989 signaled a break with the revolutionary tradition of 1956.

What all this shows is that the status of the Hungarian dissident intellectuals in the 1980s mostly met the points Karabel mentioned as the antecedents of the revolt of the intellectuals. However, it did not meet the criterion that the ratio of free-floating intellectuals was high within their ranks. In the first decade, the movement of the dissidents was small, isolated, and

essentially limited to certain segments of the middle-class layer of Budapest. Thus, intellectual “New Class formation” was never on the agenda of the dissidents. Rather, they always focused on mediation, dialogue, broadening the group, changing the frames of the public, and forming alliances with other critical groupings. Moreover, when in the exceptional year of 1988 mass demonstration took place and the movements of politics unequivocally turned toward democracy, intellectual movements became more open as well. When the time for mass politics arrived, opposition politics lost its exclusive intellectual character. This is summarized by Table 28 below.

Karabel’s criteria appeared even more eminently in the years after the regime change when, after the “constitution-maker” role of the intellectuals, their movement role temporarily came to the fore again. The public in these years saw the intensifying conflicts between humanistic intellectuals who could mold opinion with great erudition on the one hand, and democratically elected politicians referring to that legitimacy on the other hand.

In Hungary, rapid political pluralization preceded the first free elections. Thus, no great umbrella organization covering all the opposition groups appeared like Solidarity in Poland, or Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia. Competition among parties developed already before the challenge of democracy, thus the communist–anticommunist cleavage became just one among many. The two most important new political parties grew out of intellectual circles (the company of historians, sociologists, writers, philosophers, and others), and therefore the political scene was occupied by these cultural “tribes.”⁸ In the first few years after the elections, the various topics and interpretations of symbolic politics were the main issues on the public agenda.

I made several statements throughout the book with respect to the role of intellectuals and the regime change in Hungary. I showed that intellectuals can be conceptualized in various ways, but I did not accept either particular definition as an exclusive one. My reason for this was, first, that during the long decade of Hungarian intellectual politics I have encountered numerous ideal types of politically active intellectuals. In this period, intellectual groups described by the classical definitions of Benda, Gramsci, Mannheim,⁹

8 Tamás, “The Legacy of Dissent.”

9 Benda, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*; Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*; Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*; *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*.

Table 28. The possibility of intellectual protests: Theoretical criteria and practical realizations

THEORETICAL CRITERIA	THE POLITICAL CONTEXT IN HUNGARY (1980s)
Intellectuals are a well-organized, but subordinate group	Dissident intellectuals are a minority group among intellectuals
The lack of strong bourgeoisie	The lack of bourgeoisie
The share of free-floating intellectuals is relatively large <i>vis-à-vis</i> applied intellectuals living under organization indoctrination	Marginalized dissident intellectuals and the relatively less indoctrinated reform intellectuals interact
Moderately oppressive regime	Declining dictatorship
Dividedness of the political leadership	The gradually growing dividedness of political leadership
Weak state	Gradually weakening party state
Isolation of the social layers from each other	Isolation of the social layers from each other and the lack of solidarity
Historically developed cultural patterns of resistance exist	Historically developed cultural patterns of resistance exist

and others existed at the same time and almost in parallel, each group representing certain typical traits of intellectualism. But actors were present also from the New Class theories and the subsequent and different approaches related to the names of Foucault, Bauman, and Bourdieu.¹⁰ In these theoretical frameworks the intellectuals were observed as participants within the discursive communities, cultural communities, and specific knowledge communities, each bound together by the practice of reference to culture, cultural capital, or specific professional knowledge. Finally, intellectual movements and negotiations of the Hungarian opposition also created situations which were in the focus of Karabel's above-described approach, while the dynamics of the regime change allowed for such effective "interventions" as Eyal and Buchholz describe,¹¹ which elevated certain actors into the category

¹⁰ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*; "The Subject and Power"; Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital"; *Distinction*.

¹¹ Eyal and Buchholz, "From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions."

of intellectual celebrity in a short time. But regardless the different types of activists, the big picture framed the dynamics of a rolling transition in which actors tended to replace and rotate themselves in the given structures.

As the revolving stage of the rolling transition featured every type of intellectuals or public-intellectual behavior, it would have been a mistake to narrow the subject of the book right at the beginning by an early chosen definition about the intellectual. Some people opted for one or another type of political activity as intellectuals, while others defined the intellectuals by their participation in the public life. I did not define intellectuals by the power they hold, because I did not regard it self-evident that intellectuals strive for power or define themselves in the dimension of power. The model of rolling transition does not reinforce this automatism, quite the contrary: even when intellectuals dominated the stage, they never considered themselves united by their status group or social position. It is not evident that the intellectuals' thinking is defined by their power aspirations or, even if they are influenced by such aspirations, that such aspirations are more definitive than in the case of nonintellectuals. However, this resulted in instructive situations after 1989, when academia, politics, media, and business were equally open to intellectuals and this variety of gravitational attractions gave rise to a new layer of hybrid intellectuals.¹²

The 1989 regime change in Hungary was preceded by an extensive, decade-long work of preparation. Alongside the state, a "second society," the circle of dissidents, and later the movement of the democratic opposition came into being. But it was also related to Hungarian peculiarities—particularly the nature of the Kádár regime—that there was no such strong dividing line between state and society as the one in Poland. There was regular communication between outsider dissidents and insider, often party member reformers, which was reinforced by the mutual openness of these groups toward each other. It was easier for the dissidents to find their way to the reformist party intellectuals than the (politically passive) layers of workers. While dissidents lived in the "second society," workers, employees, and agricultural laborers lived (also) in the "second economy." However, this did not imply connection between them as the concepts of second economy and second society indeed referred to two very different social segments.

12. Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*.

The dialogue of opposition intellectuals and the reform intellectuals related to the party slowly resulted in a new community of expression, the culture of critical discourse. This was used by the two regime-critical groups to successfully overshadow the traditional communist elite, while they could also distinguish themselves from the society. Besides the rhetoric of civil society, the issues of human rights, equal human dignity, as well as the surviving constitutional rights, overlain by socialist legalism, were the fundamentals of the politics of emancipation. These ideas stemmed from the thoughts of István Bibó's Anglo-Saxon liberal philosophy, as well as the paradigm change of US foreign policy which made the idea of human rights a political issue. The nascent Hungarian democratic opposition was equally influenced by the nonviolent initiative of Charta '77 in Czechoslovakia and the self-organizing and self-limiting nature of the Solidarity movement in Poland.

Nevertheless, the language of human rights, civil society, radical reform, and market economy did not prove to be robust enough in a social sense, for the broader masses of people. Dissidents and reformers communicated in a different way from the people, which caused problems with respect to developing social relations. They tried to overcome this disadvantage by country tours, discussions and forums in university clubs, community centers, and other circles of informal institutions—that is, by doing tough work. They did not preach revolutionary tenets but the ideas of radical reformism. Although they could not foresee the regime change either, they tried to raise awareness that the country was in a crisis and only choosing radical reforms provide a nonviolent way out. Waking up and mobilizing society had come to fruition by 1988, but this could not fundamentally change the elitist nature of the regime change.

In the long decade of transition, there were 2,037 people who openly embraced the opposition form of protest to the regime or protested the defects of democracy. As I presented, 91 percent of them (1,845 people) were intellectuals, including those young people who became intellectuals in these years.¹³ Such dense participation of this social group did not characterize the democratic transformation of other Central European countries. In Hungary, a transformation not revolutionary in kind brought about revolu-

¹³ The number of participants obviously depends on the selected events. However, the proportion is roughly the same with some more or less events.

tionary results. Here, the Bastille was not demolished by a single storm but by the coordinated, yet not always conscious, cooperation of various groups. Exploring this, I isolated five phases to be able to identify the actors of each period more closely, as well as the character of their activity. I called these phases as dissident, open network-builder, negotiating, parliamentary, and new pro-democracy movement periods.

The Roundtable talks of 1989 ended up as a special form of elite settlement¹⁴ of the emerging counter-elite and the representatives of the decaying party elite and its satellite organizations. The parties reformed, not only their own relationship but the political institutional system as well. The crowning moment of this was the adoption of a new constitution in terms of content. To describe this process, I needed to examine elite theories as well as theories of intellectuals. The elite settlement happened without the direct, continuous participation of society but not against their will: The people of the streets expressed its volition time and again and demonstrated in mass protests that they supported the regime-changing forces.¹⁵ The adoption of the new constitution was accompanied by a referendum in the issues that were left unresolved by the Roundtable talks, thereby lending democratic reinforcement to the regime change's result. This was followed by the free elections, both national and local. The turnover in these elections was not high compared to other countries in the region, but it was enough so that the voters, closing a nonrevolutionary process, expressed their consent.

Elite groups standing out of opposition intellectuals were able to cooperate at the Opposition Roundtable, but this did not mean that the general distrust between them disappeared or even faded. Distrust is a natural element of every politics, but an excessive deficit of trust may manifest even in such institutional changes that later turn out to have a boomerang effect. In Hungary, such was the unreasonably high number of laws requiring two-thirds majority, which remained too numerous even after the pact between MDF and SZDSZ in 1990. Laws that require two-thirds majority do not allow the government to govern, that is, to use the mandate it was given by the voters. At the same time, such laws give unjustifiable "governmental" responsibilities to the opposition. Thus, laws requiring two-thirds majority

¹⁴ Burton and Higley, "Elite Settlements."

¹⁵ Renwick, "The Role of Non-Elite Forces."

blur the responsibility of the government and the opposition and hamper the realization of governmental politics just as the opportunity of the opposition to develop an alternative. Maybe it is not unfounded to suppose that mutual reservations would have had a much smaller effect on politics if the opposition parties had not been dominated by the representatives of a single social group.

One of the greatest revived cleavages, the well-known populist-urban divide, ensured the survival of the two constructions of Hungary's history and future. The populists believed themselves to be the faithful representatives of the popular will. At first, they did not even want to establish a party because they wanted to represent the nation as a whole. They held that Hungary must follow its own way and a specific "Hungarian ideology," as opposed to importing foreign patterns. When legality hindered justice, they regarded the latter's value as higher. Liberals wanted to rebuild the country following Western models, and they emphasized the importance of "return to Europe." In contrast, the populists and the conservatives opined that Hungary had always belonged to Europe and therefore its "Europeanization" is needless. While the populists spoke the language of "tradition," the liberals spoke the language of "progress." While the populists wanted to accelerate the process of the regime change, the latter believed that it would have been a mistake to "revolutionize" the transition *ex post*, and they focused on the democratization of the new constitutional system instead. The populists accused the Antall government of lacking a deeper commitment to the Hungarians and selling out the country as the victim of a conspiracy of foreign capitalists. The most influential representative of this position was the writer-politician, István Csurka.¹⁶

But the government was attacked, not only by the more and more radical populists but also by the liberal protectors of democracy. The starting point of the left-wing and liberal intellectual movement, the DC was that Hungary was not sufficiently democratic yet and the people were not involved in politics to an adequate degree. In the name of an interpretation of democracy that embraced the various forms of political participation, the signatories of the Charter opposed the existing elite democracy that was based on a prin-

16 Csurka, "Néhány gondolat."

ciple of representation which restricted pluralism to the multiparty system.¹⁷ Although this was partially a newer version of an old debate (namely that of emphasizing the priority of representative or participatory democracy), the spokespersons of DC claimed that they were “more democratic” than others. They mobilized tens of thousands of people for demonstrations against the growing radical right. As a result, they kept the issue of the quality of democracy on the agenda and contributed to the fall of the conservative government on the 1994 elections. By this time, however, it had already become clear that the voters were less interested in symbolic politics: after freedom, they desired security. The people understood that a new hierarchy of social inequalities was forming in these critical, unformed years, and they also knew that their actions might affect their entire life. The voters wanted to hear more, not about freedom but equality and the opportunities of dignified life. Therefore, they voted for the party which promised that its coming to power meant that “expertise comes to power.” The regime-changing, ideology-driven parties and their intellectual elite were more and more rejected.

The rhetorical battles of the years after the transition were mainly about the possession of historical memory and the realization of one of the competing visions of the future. Identity politics was, in a significant part, a symbolic fight for the possession of the “only true” memory of history. The ideas about the future of the country entailed similar battles, albeit the EU was attractive enough so that every parliamentary party supported Hungary’s joining to the Union. The debate around historical memory and vision was the last great battle of the opinion-molder intellectuals, who could use the credibility they had accumulated before and during the regime change to influence the identity of the new democracy.

The case discussed in this book, supports the argument for the model of rolling transition. To sum up, by rolling transition, I mean an incremental, nonviolent, elite driven political transformation which is based on the rotation of agency and it results in a new regime. This is led mainly by different groups of intellectuals—from bohemian, artistic, academic, free-floating types to different professionals and organizational intellectuals—who do not construct a vanguard movement or a New Class organization but create an open-network which might transform itself, if necessary, into dif-

17 *Demokratikus Charta.*

ferent political parties. The rolling transition gives the impression that the opposition is weak and fragmented, but it turns out that weak ties could be more powerful in shaping the political dynamics and achieving success.¹⁸ Outsiders are more willing to join nonviolent campaigns than violent ones because the threshold of participation is lower¹⁹ and trust-based solidarity-networks can be enlarged more effectively. Newcomers can easier have a voice. The intellectuals participating in the rolling transition were forced by the conditions to become more inclusive and to perform better than it was originally expected. Under pressure these intellectual groups were able to find a common denominator in political action, just as in making and remaking political strategy. They could therefore make themselves attractive for broader social strata. Despite their spontaneity and relatively slow tempo, these features make the rolling transitions viable alternatives to violent revolutions, coup d'états, elite settlements, or technocratic-managerial reforms.

When the rolling transition ended the political positions of the new powerholders became strong again. The halo of regime-changing action had lost the moral driving force it once had, and governance took on a routine-like, "post-revolutionary" image. The intellectuals of the humanities and social sciences, who had played significant, active roles in the political battles of the regime change, retired relatively quickly. They were named as "politocracy"²⁰ or "hybrid intellectuals"²¹ referring to those intellectuals who were able to influence political processes substantially, often appeared in the media, and were politically active at the same time. They were replaced by the managers of the regime's operation. In the years before the appearance and dominance of capitalists, in the period of "post-communist managerialism"²² the ideology of modernization veiled traditional cleavages and tried to project the vision of a secure, ideology-free, democratic capitalism.

The democratic regime born out of the chaotic situation after the transition required new adaptation: the atomized society had to rebuild the network of its interest relations. The "post-intellectual" wild capitalist era was equally defined by the cult of individualism and the reconstruction of inter-

18 Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties."

19 Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*.

20 Konrád and Szelényi, "Intellectuals and Domination in Post-Communist Societies."

21 Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*.

22 Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, "The Theory of Post-Communist Managerialism."

est groups. Social actors were led by the vision of an imaginary capitalism from which they expected to prosper. In the next years, various “-cracies”—technocracy, meritocracy, plutocracy, partocracy, kleptocracy—took the place of such concepts of the 1980s opposition as human rights, civil society, and political community. The new concepts competed in a game characterized by “now or never” changeable rules. But a description of consolidation, as well as the analysis of the predominant ideas and actors of post-transition settings, belongs to another discussion.

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Interviews with some participants of the transition

Name	Organization	Date
Áder, János	Fidesz	July 7, 1997
Antal, László	MSZMP	May 5, 1997
Auth, Henrik	MSZMP	May 18, 1997
Bácskai, Sándor	MSZDP	March 11, 1997
Balás, István	MDF	June 12, 1997
Balázs, Ágnes	MSZMP	May 15, 1997
Bálint, Tibor	MSZMP	April 15, 1997
Balogh, Gábor	KDNP	May 13, 1997
Balsai, István	MDF	June 10, 1997
Bánfalvi, István	MSZMP	April 29, 1997
Baranyai, Tibor	MSZDP	February 23, 1997
Bártfay, Pál	Liga	July 31, 1997
Bauer, Tamás	SZDSZ	April 26, 1997
Bejcz, Sándor	FKGP	April 10, 1997
Bencsik, Gábor	Liga	February 10, 1997
Benyó, Pál	MSZDP	February 19, 1997
Bercsényi, Botond	MSZMP	April 28, 1997
Bogdán, Tibor	MSZMP	March 18, 1997
Borbély, Endre	MSZDP	March 13, 1997
Boross, Imre	FKGP	June 25, 1997
Bossányi, Katalin	DC	September 28, 1992

Interviews with some participants of the transition

Name	Organization	Date
Botos, Katalin	MDF	June 28, 1997
Bruszt, László	Liga	May 11, 1997
Budzsákli, Mátyás	MSZMP	May 27, 1997
Chikán, Csaba	MSZMP	April 24, 1997
Czirják, Sándor	MSZMP	March 28, 1997
Csaba, Iván	Fidesz	May 13, 1997
Csillag, István	Liga	June 24, 1997
Dávid, János	Liga	May 10, 1997.
Dékány, András	MSZMP	May 26, 1997
Demszky, Gábor	SZDSZ	June 25, 1997
Deutsch, Tamás	Fidesz	July 9, 1997
Diczházi, Bertalan	Fidesz	June 10, 1997
Dobos, László	MSZDP	April 5, 1997
Dobozy, Dániel	MDF	May 18, 1997
Doleschall, Pál	Liga	February 26, 1997
Domonkos, István	BZSBT	March 5, 1997
Dragon, Pál	FKGP	April 22, 1997
Draviczky, Tamás	MSZMP	April 7, 1997
Echter, István	BZSBT	March 14, 1997
Eörsi, Mátyás	SZDSZ	June 22, 1997
Fábián, Gyula	MNP	March 7, 1997
Fazekas, Károly	Liga	April 15, 1997
Fehér, József	MSZMP	April 15, 1997
Fejti, György	MSZMP	April 19, 1997
Fekete, Gyula, Jr.	MDF	July 12, 1997
Fenyő, György	MSZMP	May 7, 1997
Fertő, Imre	Fidesz	June 2, 1997
Fischer, György	MSZDP	February 17, 1997
Fluck Papácsy, Edit	MSZMP	May 10, 1997
Fodor, Gábor	Fidesz	May 22, 1997
Fonyódi, Ilona	Liga	July 9, 1997
Forgács, Ádám	MSZMP	June 23, 1997

Name	Organization	Date
Fölsz, Attila	Fidesz	June 9, 1997
Freisinger, Jenő	FKGP	April 10, 1997
Furmann, Imre	MDF	June 24, 1997
Füzessy, Tibor	KDNP	May 13, 1997
Gaál, Gyula	Liga	April 17, 1997
Gács, János	Liga	July 6, 1997
Gál, Zoltán	MSZMP	May 3, 1997
Gaskó, István	MSZDP	March 1, 1997
Gáspár, Miklós	KDNP	April 29, 1997
Gegesy, Ferenc	SZDSZ	April 23, 1997
Gergely, András	MDF	June 14, 1997
Grad, János	MSZDP	March 3, 1997
György, István	MSZMP	May 5, 1997
Győri, Péter	SZDSZ	June 23, 1997
Gyulavári, Antal	Fidesz	June 4, 1997
Hack, Péter	SZDSZ	June 12, 1997
Hankiss, Elemér	Liga	July 22, 1997
Hann, Endre	Liga	April 16, 1997
Hardi, Péter	FKGP	July 7, 1997
Harmati, István	Fidesz	June 24, 1997
Hegedűs, István	Fidesz	May 7, 1997
Herczeg, Attila	MSZMP	June 3, 1997
Hegy, Imre	MNP	April 9, 1997
Holló, András	MSZMP	March 21, 1997
Horn, Gábor	Liga	March 5, 1997
Horváth, Balázs	MDF	June 20, 1997
Haraszti, Ákos	BZSBT	July 4, 1997
Haraszti, Miklós	SZDSZ	May 29, 1997
Hegy, Gyula	DC	October 4, 1992
Horányi, György	DC	December 2, 1992
Jaczkó, Dezső	MSZDP	July 21, 1997
Jakucs, Tamás	MSZMP	May 4, 1997

Name	Organization	Date
Jancsó, Miklós	Liga	March 4, 1997
Jávor, András	MSZMP	June 19, 1997
Jójárt, László	MSZMP	July 3, 1997
Jutasi, György	MSZMP	May 28, 1997
Kajdi, József	MSZMP	April 30, 1997
Kakuk, György András	Fidesz	June 11, 1997
Karcsay, Sándor	KDNP	June 4, 1997
Kardos, Péter	MSZMP	May 20, 1997
Kaszás, Iván	MSZDP	April 7, 1997
Kelényi, István	KDNP	May 5, 1997
Kerényi, Imre	Liga	September 21, 1997
Keresztes, Sándor	KDNP	May 23, 1997
Kilényi, Géza	MSZMP	June 16, 1997
Kis, János	SZDSZ	July 8, 1997
Kiss, Gy. Csaba	MDF	July 15, 1997
Koblencz, József	MNP	February 18, 1997
Koltai, Jenő	SZDSZ	June 9, 1997
Konrád, György	DC	November 23, 1992
Kónya, Imre	Liga	February 20, 1997
Kónya, László	MNP	March 20, 1997
Kovács, Flórián László	MSZMP	June 10, 1997
Kováts, Ferenc	BZSBT	April 1, 1997
Köllő, János	Liga	September 15, 1997
Körösenyi, András	Fidesz	July 19, 1997
Kőszeg, Ferenc	SZDSZ	June 26, 1997
Kövér, László	Fidesz	June 13, 1997
Krasznai, Zoltán	BZSBT	April 4, 1997
Kunos, Péter	MSZMP	May 13, 1997
Kupa, Mihály	MSZMP	June 24, 1997
Kurucz, János	SZDSZ	June 6, 1997
Kutrucz, Katalin	MDF	June 30, 1997
Laki, Mihály	SZDSZ	July 11, 1997

Name	Organization	Date
Lányi, Zsolt	FKGP	July 19, 1997
Légrády, Tibor	BZSBT	April 11, 1997
Márton, János	MNP	March 7, 1997
Matúz, György	MNP	June 15, 1997
Mécs, Imre	SZDSZ	September 29, 1997
Mendrey, László	Liga	March 3, 1997
Molnár, Péter	Fidesz	June 5, 1997
Nagy, Ferenc	FKGP	July 10, 1997
Nagy, Márta	MSZMP	June 11, 1997
Naszvadi, György	MSZMP	June 15, 1997
Neményi, Mária	DC	October 5, 1992
Palánkay, Tiborné	MSZMP	May 18, 1997
Orbán, Viktor	Fidesz	October 14, 1990
Óry, Csaba	Liga	May 19, 1997
Pálffy, Dezső	BZSBT	April 19, 1997
Pallós, László	KDNP	May 12, 1997
Papp, Gabriella	MSZMP	May 29, 1997
Pelle, Andrea	Fidesz	June 4, 1997
Pető, Iván	SZDSZ	February 24, 1997
Petrik, Béla	MNP	March 5, 1997
Pokorni, Zoltán	Liga	February 24, 1997
Pongor, Zoltán	FKGP	July 15, 1997
Pozsgay, Imre	MSZMP	June 25, 1997
Prepeliczay, István	FKGP	July 3, 1997
Radnai, György	MSZMP	June 20, 1997
Raisz, Gusztáv	MSZMP	July 8, 1997
Rákosi, Ferenc	MSZMP	June 10, 1997
Rockenbauer, Zoltán	Fidesz	May 27, 1997
Rozgonyi, Ernő	KDNP	June 3, 1997
S. Hegedűs, László	MNP	March 7, 1997
Ság, László	MSZDP	April 9, 1997
Salamon, Konrád	MNP	February 6, 1997

Interviews with some participants of the transition

Name	Organization	Date
Salamon, László	MDF	June 15, 1997
Sándorfi, György	Liga	July 24, 1997
Sánta, Áron	MSZMP	July 9, 1997
Sík, János	MSZDP	February 19, 1997
Simó, Zoltán	FKGP	July 2, 1997
Sinkó, Eszter	MSZMP	June 19, 1997
Sivák, József	MSZMP	July 16, 1997
Somogyvári, István	MSZMP	May 27, 1997
Soós, Károly Attila	SZDSZ	May 7, 1997
Such, György	Fidesz	May 8, 1997
Szabad, György	MDF	August 14, 1997
Szabó, Miklós	SZDSZ	July 2, 1997
Szakolczai, György	KDNP	May 6, 1997
Szabó, Sándorné	MSZMP	April 30, 1997
Szalai, Erzsébet	DC	December 21, 1992
Szalay, Péter	MSZMP	April 9, 1997
Szántai, János	MNP	February 11, 1997
Szántó, Anikó	MSZMP	April 23, 1997
Szent-Iványi, István	SZDSZ	March 18, 1997
Szentgyörgyi, András	MSZMP	April 16, 1997
Szerdahelyi, Péter	MSZMP	April 28, 1997
Szilvásy, György	MSZMP	April 19, 1997
Szmicsek, Sándor	MSZMP	June 2, 1997
Szöllősi, Erzsébet	SZDSZ	July 4, 1997
Tamás, Gáspár Miklós	SZDSZ	July 3, 1997
Teleki, János	KDNP	April 9, 1997
Tirts, Tamás	Fidesz	July 3, 1997
Tóth, András	MSZMP	April 17, 1997
Tóth, István György	Fidesz	June 4, 1997
Tóth, Zoltán	MSZMP	April 26, 1997
Tölgyessy, Péter	SZDSZ	May 6, 1997
Tömpe, István	MSZMP	May 8, 1997

Interviews with some participants of the transition

Name	Organization	Date
Törzsök, Erika	KDNP	April, 24, 1997
Tórtösy, Istvánné	BZSBT	March 20, 1997
Türei, Sándor	KDNP	March 25, 1997
Tütös, Sándor	MSZMP	July 4, 1997
Ungár, Klára	Fidesz	June 13, 1997
Urbán, László	Fidesz	August 4, 1997
Vágvölgyi, B. András	Fidesz	July 10, 1997
Varga, Csaba	MNP	February 14, 1997
Varga-Sabján, László	MSZMP	May 9, 1997
Vértés, András	MSZMP	April 13, 1997
Vígh, Károly	BZSBT	March 7, 1997
Vissi, Ferenc	MSZMP	April 28, 1997
Voszka, Éva	SZDSZ	June 11, 1997
Vörös, István	MSZMP	June 23, 1997
Winkler, Tamás	Fidesz	June 11, 1997
Zala, Simon Tibor	MNP	March 10, 1997
Zám, Mária	MNP	June 2, 1997

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