

The Hungarian Democratic Opposition: Self-reflection, Identity, and Political Discourse

by

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(Draft paper)

This paper examines the self-reflection, identity, strategic concepts and discourse of different groups of the democratic opposition in Hungary. Although in some distant ways the democratic opposition was born out of the 1956 revolution and the reformist ideas of 1968, it only appeared an independent group and subcultures at the end of the 1970s. The golden age of the democratic opposition was in the period of 1980-1988. This is the time frame of analysis in this paper. It was in this period that the dissidents who directed sporadic and isolated acts of criticism against the Socialist regime started to define themselves as a tightly knit and more and more well-organized democratic opposition.¹

In the 1980s, the various groups of the democratic opposition increasingly sought the opportunity for dialogue with different circles of Hungarian intelligentsia through the means of samizdat journals. 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 first part of this paper I shortly describe these journals and their dissident contributors. After that, I turn to examining their strategic goals, their relationship to power and society, their declared policies with regard to national and regional issues, and their views on religion, peace, environmental protection, and various cultural initiatives.

1. Samizdat Journals and Opposition Groups

The *Beszélő*

The most important samizdat journal, *Beszélő*, published 27 issues in between 1981 and 1989. The editorial team was made up by the leading figures of the democratic opposition: Miklós Haraszti, János Kis, Ferenc Kőszeg, Bálint Nagy, György Petri, Ottília Solt and Sándor Szilágyi. The journal combined theoretical, strategic, practical and investigative articles and reports. A great number of leading opposition figures published in it, including György Konrád, János Kenedi, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Miklós Szabó, Erzsébet Szalai, Pál Szalai, Bálint Magyar, Iván Pető, Gábor Iványi, and Mihály Vajda.²

In the introduction of the first issue the informal editor, János Kis, described their plans as being more ambitious than simply publishing an “Opposition Newsreel.” “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 other.”³

¹ I wish to thank Kinga Györffy and Anna Menyhért for their research assistance.

² Those who worked at universities or research institutes were only ready to publish under pen-names.

³ János, Kis (1981), “Beköszöntő” (Introduction), *Beszélő*, No. 1. p.1.

In the first couple of issues the majority of the articles reflected this desire. They 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 (“unanimously, under a pseudonym or by their own names⁴) and what they had to say. 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. Indirectly, all this shaped the identity of the editors and groups with close ties to *Beszélő*.

Kis’s introduction did not define a clear political program. It only aimed at sounding the alarm. Instead of offering a political program, *Beszélő* 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 and who wanted rumors to be replaced by facts. In reality *Beszélő* did nothing else than fulfill the classical function of the press by disseminating reliable information without advancing any political program. The journal reported on those social groups who disobeyed the rules, thus bringing practical examples – not theoretical ones – 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 working for the same purpose at other areas. In the long run, the editors believed, the feeling of isolation would have replaced by a growing opposition that had increased potentials and effectiveness.

After regime change of 1989, János Kis described the purpose of the journal in a three-volume publication of all *Beszélő* issues in the following way: “Today, starting a newspaper is a financial enterprise. *Beszélő* was called into existence on moral grounds. We wanted to exercise our human rights to express and disseminate our ideas even though the contemporary laws called such rights into question. [...] It was liberating to speak up from behind the protective bastions of human rights even if morals were our only defense. We chose the name of the journal – *Beszélő* (i.e. the visiting area in prisons) – to reflect our situation: we were behind bars. We were prisoners who in the visiting area could still freely speak to their beloved ones. [...] We were neither reformers nor revolutionaries. We were aware that in contemporary Hungary ours is not a revolutionary grouping. Neither were we reformers at least not in the sense ‘reformism’ was understood at the time. The reformers of the 1980s accepted the rules promulgated from above and tried to push the power elite toward reforms. [...] We believed that progress was no longer possible under the existing conditions where the allowance made by power elite could be revoked any time. Progress necessitated the birth of social autonomy protected by rights. We also believed that rights behavior could not be given from above but should be won from below by fighting for them. Only legally minded behavior can guarantee legal protection. This was the most important message of the democratic opposition besides the communication of the fact that no longer could the regime close the flood gates of opposition entirely as it did in the previous decades and stop public protest conscious of legal matters. In other words, there was a political motivation behind us taking up the provocative exercise of our rights. We reckoned with retaliation by the police in the form of house searches, confiscations, and arrests. But we also counted with the effect if we prevail. It could help others expand the permitted boundaries of disobedience.

“In the first half of 1980s the public did not believe that there existed a third way between politically empty revolutionary rhetoric and joining in reforms directed from above. *Beszélő* called attention both to the existence of this third alternative and to the heavy price the country would pay if this chance were missed. In the face of the popular view we

⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

advanced the idea that the military putsch in Warsaw on December 13, 1981 was not the end of a revolutionary period in the region as November 4, 1956 and August 21, 1968 were. Rather, we believed, it gave rise to a comprehensive crisis of the Soviet order. For us the most vital question was how Hungary would prepare for the culmination of the crisis.”⁵

Judging by its content and its political prestige *Beszélő* was the most important political journal of the opposition. It published the best quality strategic analyses written by dissidents who would later become the leading figures of the transition elite.

1.2 The *Hírmondó*

The *Hírmondó* first appeared in November 1983. Twenty-six subsequent issues followed until 1988.⁶ It was the successor of *Tájékoztató*, which only appeared three times in the spring of 1983. *Hírmondó* was edited by Gábor Demszky and Róza Hodosán. In the early period András Nagy and Ottília Solt were also part of the editorial team.⁷ András Nagy as well as György Gadó helped editing the journal in 1985-1986.⁸ The most often published authors were Gábor Demszky, András Nagy, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Pál Szalai, Mihály Vajda, György Konrád, György Krassó, and György Gadó.

In the introductory issue, its goals were defined in the following way: *Hírmondó* “wishes to focus on the Eastern European efforts at the democratic renewal of the countries of the region.”⁹ This promise was kept to the end. After examining all issues of *Hírmondó*, it can be said that half of the articles in each issue were devoted to topics about East-Central Europe.¹⁰ They published articles that had appeared in the underground media of region (especially Poland). Articles from emigrant publications, the West-German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the Austrian *Die Presse* and *Gegenstimmen* also found their way in the issues.¹¹ These reported on the situation in Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The two most published non-Hungarian free thinkers were Adam Michnik and Václav Havel.

Realizing the omission,¹² the editors also incorporated articles on democratic and progressive developments in Yugoslavia.¹³ 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.¹⁴

⁵ János Kis (1992), “Előszó” (Preface) in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.). *Beszélő. Összkiadás 1981–1989. (Beszélő. Collection 1981-1989)*. Vol. 1. Budapest: AB-Beszélő Kiadó, pp. 5-6.

⁶ From 1984 on *Hírmondó* (together with *Beszélő*) was printed on László and Erzsébet Somogyi’s farm, which was located at the area of the Kiskunsági National Park. The Somogyis acted as the printers of *Hírmondó* and *Beszélő* until the end of 1987.

⁷ The introductory article speaks about the anonymity of the editors. See “Beköszöntő” (Introduction) (1983), *Hírmondó* (November), p. 1.

⁸ György Gadó and Győző Ravasz published under pseudonyms. Gadó also edited *Demokrata*.

⁹ “Beköszöntő” (Introduction) (1983), *Hírmondó* (November), p. 1.

¹⁰ “...a kelet-európai, aki persze közép-európai...” (...the Eastern European who is, of course, Central European) (1986), in Miklós Haraszti “Jogvédő rögeszmetár” (Obsessed with legal protection), *Hírmondó*, Vol. 4. No. 20, p. 17.

¹¹ For instance, they published the comments made by English historians in *Gegenstimmen*.

¹² They thought that there had been very few attempts to introduce Yugoslav democratic and progressive endeavors despite the fact that the Southern border was one of the most open borders in linguistic, cultural and political sense.

¹³ For example, they published the writings of Danilo Kis.

¹⁴ They published the Hungarian translation of transcripts of Russian language radio interviews.

1.3. The *Demokrata*

The *Demokrata* published 41 issues between 1986 and 1989. It was edited under the direction of Jenő Nagy and published articles regardless whether the author was ready to publish under his own 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.”¹⁵ Most of the articles were penned by the editors who, except Jenő Nagy, preferred to remain unidentified. György Gadó,¹⁶ Béla F. Reymund, Szilárd Stark, Róbert Sasváry, Dr. Serföző, Imre Kármentő and Csaba Öskü.

In the first issue they committed themselves to political pluralism. “*Demokrata* greets its entire democratic readership [...] whether they be advocates of bourgeois, Christian, social or popular democracy.”¹⁷

They desired to be practical and a supplement to already existing Samizdat publications. “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 (*Beszélő, Hírmondó, Vakond, Égtájak Között, Máshonnan Beszélő*) of the samizdat movement. Rather, we intend to supplement their theoretical content and message. We aspire to be both activist and up-to-date.”¹⁸ It was because of its practical, shorter and easy-to-understand content that Radio Free Europe described *Demokrata* as the “tabloid of the opposition.”¹⁹

Unlike *Hírmondó*, which concentrated on explicating the intellectual heritage of East-Central Europe, writings in *Demokrata* concentrated on uncovering the workings and lies of the power elite in Hungary. Hence, 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, compromise-seeking attitude of *Hírmondó*’s circle of intellectuals.

1.3. The *Égtájak között*

Égtájak között was originally the outlet of the Vox Humana Circle of one of the universities in Budapest. It first appeared at the Faculty of Arts of Eötvös Lóránd University in November 1984 as a Central European social science journal. It published six issues and a literary special issue legally. However censorship forced them to type later use stencils to duplicate their independent issues. Thirteen Samizdat issues were published. It was edited by Ervin János Lázár,²⁰ Zsolt Keszthelyi,²¹ Olga Diószegi, Gyula Bartók, László Rusai, József Talata and Mikolta Bognár.

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

¹⁵ *Demokrata* (1986), *Demokrata* No. 1-2, p. 1.

¹⁶ He left in 1986 and founded *Magyar Zsidó* in 1987.

¹⁷ *Demokrata* (1986), *Demokrata* No. 1-2, p. 1.

¹⁸ Op. cit.

¹⁹ “In its show ‘Gondolatforgató’ (Rotation of thoughts) Radio Free Europe introduced our journal. It was then that the statement that *Demokrata* was the tabloid of the opposition was made. [...] We think that this reflects neither reality nor our purpose. We want to put a more easy-to-read, popular and fresh journal in the hands of our readers than the admired other samizdat publications but *Demokrata* is not a tabloid. “Szerkesztői reflexió” (Editorial reflection) (1986), *Demokrata* No. 6, p. 10.

²⁰ Ervin János Lázár emigrated to Denmark in 1986.

²¹ Zsolt Keszthelyi parted with the journal in the fall of 1986, but remained a member of the Vox Humana Circle. He was imprisoned for refusing to serve in the armed forces.

conventional journal. Instead, it was devoted to “be documenting human fates.”²² “Most of the contents of the journal,” the article went on to say, “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.”²³

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 Hungarians”. 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 in Hungary that regularly published fiction, poetry,²⁴ and graphics. It was surrounded by the youngest of the young opposition figures who rejected mainstream political orientation and enriched the opposition discourse by giving voice to alternative ideas. Instead of a party-centered democracy, they advocated the idea of a 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.²⁵

2. Hungarian Dissidents between State and Society

2.1 Attitudes to Communist Power: Isolation, Mediation or Opposition?

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, in particular, the 1956 revolution, which they described as a national democratic revolution and viewed as an absolute ideological and moral capital.²⁶ This was the emotional and intellectual pillar that they relied on in the course of their regime criticism.

Intellectuals saw their role in the public sphere to be mediators between the power holders and the society. “We, the writers of the secondary public sphere, cannot undo the boycott of the Olympics, but still can shout at the Hungarian Olympic Committee to express society’s indignation, ‘that won’t do!’”²⁷ “Intellectuals in a democracy should not be concerned with their own preferences but with the means by which they can help the expression of the will of the public.”²⁸

Beyond the expression and the transmission of public will and public opinion, those publishing in *Hírmondó* also saw their role in shaping public opinion. “The semi-Orwellian man, the schooled peasant, is very useful for those in power. For us, who long for a better life, progress, and membership in a new European society of self-aware individuals, this lop-sided creature stands in the way. We should do something so that the ambition for professional and

²² László Rusai (1988), “Színek – *Égtájak között* 1984-?” (Colors– *Égtájak között* 1984-), *Demokrata* No. 3 (March), p. 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁴ They also translated, for instance, Hrabal short stories and Herbert poems.

²⁵ József Talata (1986), “Feladataink” (Our tasks), *Égtájak között* (July), pp. 12-18.

²⁶ Cf. Béla F. Reymund (1986), “Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat” (Let’s keep ourselves to the rules of the game), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 21.

²⁷ They wrote this with regard to the Soviet bloc’s boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics. Editors (1984), “Gyeplő és kurázi” (Reins and Courage), *Hírmondó* No. 6-7 (May-June), p. 3.

²⁸ “Tamás Gáspár Miklós nyílt levele Mihai Korne-hoz” (The open letter of G. M. Tamás to Mihai Korne) (1984), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), p. 27.

human productivity goes hand in hand with the desire to be free and emancipated citizens who are equal before the law.”²⁹

Ironically, it was often the writers who talked about the necessity of mediation, and the expression³⁰ and the shaping of public will that most often questioned the possibility that they could, indeed, do something meaningful to this end. As they recognized, “The intellectual is isolated from the common man.”³¹ This isolation 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 intellectual superiority and “rationalism”³². They saw it as a “privilege” to be able to voice their views.³³ Many intellectuals often treated the society, the people and the public will as an abstract and homogenized constructions. Rarely did they refer to social stratification, that is, the fact that society consisted of many groups with different interests, dreams, will, and relationship to power.

The authors of *Hírmondó* described themselves in terms 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 particular 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.”³⁴

When discussing their stubbornness in fighting power, they primarily highlighted the emotional and moral aspects. “You – together with many famous and unknown colleagues – do your job and work for the freedom of the press. Seeing that you do not question the sense of doing this, your skeptical friends only smile at you. It may be doubted that we do the right thing. But if we find something morally good, it is not right to laugh at it.”³⁵ “Can we be so disheartened that we give up doing our job [...]?”³⁶

²⁹ András Nagy (1984), “A 229-es csapdája. Utóirat a Demszky-perhez” (Catch 229. Postscript to the Demszky trial), *Hírmondó* No. 6-7 (May-June), p. 62.

³⁰ What is more, they often talked about bearing the burden for the people. Intellectuals, “in a not very democratic but rather old-fashioned way, volunteer to bear the burden for the people again.” Gáspár M. Tamás (1983), “Zsiga, te destruktív vagy! (kultúrpolitikai harcok és farce-ok)” (Zsiga, you are destructive! (Fights and Farce of Cultural Politics)), *Hírmondó* No. 2 (December), p. 39.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³² This does not mean that they sought truth in the name of abstract reason. “We must not search for general truths and solutions in the name of abstract reason. Every society – of course, in harmony with other societies, as it may be impossible otherwise – have to find solutions according to its own customs.” Mihály Vajda (1986), “Megcsalt nembeliség vagy megvalósult orosz történelem” (Deceived gendering or the materialization of Russian history), *Hírmondó* (August-September), p. 54.

On their relationship to society see *Ibid.* pp. 40-41.

³³ Gáspár M. Tamás (1983), “Zsiga, te destruktív vagy! (kultúrpolitikai harcok és farce-ok)” (Zsiga, you are destructive! (Fights and Farce of Cultural Politics)), *Hírmondó* No. 2 (December), p. 39.

About their privileges he wrote at another place: “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 this rights to others.” Gáspár M. Tamás (1984), “Van a Bajza utca sarkán egy kis palota” (There is a little palace on the corner of Bajza street), *Hírmondó* No. 4. p. 26.

³⁴ György Konrád (1985), “A cenzúra reformja?” (The reform of censorship?), *Hírmondó*, (August-September), p. 8. In addition, he wrote that “...it would be a natural step forward in the progress of modest rationalization if the state did not look at those who publish outside the official public sphere as if they were criminals. The criminalization of the opposition requires numerous rude propaganda effects, a smear campaign, and diminution, which in the end blur the vision of the government rather than anyone else.” *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁵ Gáspár M. Tamás (1984), “Egy pohár törköly Demszky Gábornak” (A glass of marc to Gábor Demszky), *Hírmondó* No. 5 (April), p. 43.

“Our responsibility,” he wrote elsewhere, “is to think about ideas that are beyond the dictatorship in which we live, but are on this side of utopia. We must ask ourselves what we should suggest to an honest democrat in case

In the face of the truth of power, they viewed themselves as the holders of moral truth. They thought that power could not touch the moral truth. “Regardless of the softening of power, it is absolutely unimaginable that an opposition figure is right and the police is wrong. [...] Gábor Demszky³⁷ was not simply arrested by the police but they also tried to cuff his hands. Demszky protested against this vehemently and finally he prevailed. Those who like symbols may even find one in this story.”³⁸

The intellectuals of *Hírmondó* regularly reported and analyzed the atrocities committed by Communist power elite i.e. keeping people in custody illegally, political and 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.”³⁹ At the same time, however, they did not discard dialogue with power, either.

As opposed to this those with close ties to *Demokrata* did not think that such self-limitation was possible in the long run. Thus, their ultimate aim was their own advancement to power.⁴⁰ This group with mostly plebeian attitudes identified the nation with the people of which they were a constitutive part.⁴¹ Their goal was not to mediate between power holders and the society but to give voice to the people by expressing their alleged demands. While *Hírmondó* stressed the importance of the political and geographical concept of East-Central Europe, in *Demokrata* concerns about the relationship with the power elite was dominant.⁴² They defined themselves in opposition to power, i.e. the *status quo*.

There were several defining features to their opposition to power. First, they saw themselves less as excluded from power and more as robbed and suppressed⁴³ by it.⁴⁴ “The opposition is robbed of the chance to organize.”⁴⁵ One of them described himself in terms of “being in the way.”⁴⁶

There were decidedly more accounts of police atrocities, house searches, and interrogation in *Demokrata* than in *Hírmondó*. Those publishing in *Demokrata* saw their situation to be much more dramatic.⁴⁷ This might have been the consequence of their refusal

the people of East-Central Europe do not wish to live together.” See “Tamás Gáspár Miklós nyílt levele Mihai Korne-hoz” (The open letter of Gáspár M. Tamás to Mihai Korne) (1984), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), p. 27.

³⁶ Gáspár M. Tamás (1984), “Egy pohár törköly Demszky Gábornak” (A glass of marc to Gábor Demszky), *Hírmondó* No. 5 (April), p. 43.

³⁷ Gábor Demszky was a leading figure of the Democratic Opposition. Since 1990 he is the Mayor of Budapest.

³⁸ András Nagy (1984), “A 229-es csapdája. Utóirat a Demszky-perhez” (Catch 229. Postscript to the Demszky trial), *Hírmondó* No. 6-7 (May-June), pp. 60-61.

³⁹ Gáspár M. Tamás (1987), “Üdvözlét, óvás és kacaj” (Greeting, caution, and laughter), *Hírmondó* Vol. 5 No. 24. (March-July), p. 4.

⁴⁰ “How could political movements that are robbed of the chance to expand – or if they expand they can never gain decisive political power (not even as the balancer) - not disintegrate...” See Róbert Sasváry (1986), “Ellenzék a hódoltságban” (Opposition in oppression), *Hírmondó* No. 7-8, p. 18.)

⁴¹ For their relation to society see *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴² I purposefully spoke about identity and not counter-identity creation with regard to *Hírmondó*’s circle.

⁴³ From this point of view the titles of articles and columns were also telling. For example *Az elnyomás krónikája* (The chronicle of oppression), *Ellenzék a hódoltságban* (Opposition in oppression), *Az elnyomás csöndje* (The silence of oppression).

⁴⁴ The opportunities for actions were obviously limited for those robbed or oppressed. If possible, their options were even more limited than the options of the those who saw themselves as excluded. It appears that *Demokrata*’s circle judged their situation (or made others see their situation) to be more serious than *Hírmondó*’s opposition circle.

⁴⁵ Béla F. Reymund (1986), “Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat” (Let’s keep ourselves to the rules of the game), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 22.

It was also written that “No one has to be impaled, it is enough if one is not allowed to breathe.” See György Gadó (1986), “Nem húznak karóba” (We will not be impaled), *Demokrata* No. 6, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Virágkedvelő (1987), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 2.

⁴⁷ On the difference between the robbed and the excluded, see *ibid.*, p. 16.

to cooperate with the regime, which resulted in their being subjected to police atrocities more often.⁴⁸ 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 these every issues was defined as crucial for deciding the nation's fate. Unlike them, those writing for *Hírmondó* preferred to talk about questions that were crucial "to decide the fate of this generation."⁴⁹ The context of their discussion was more general and less particular.

Finding role models and the preferred pattern of behavior was an important matter in the self-definition of the identities of these groups. More generally, it is important to see if they needed role models at all. As it becomes clear from the following quotation from *Hírmondó*, they turned to role models from the region, because they found no role models within the country. They expressed dissatisfaction that was directed both at themselves and at the opposition as a whole.

"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 are not awed by the alleged generosity of the Jaruzelski-regime but by the steadfastness of its prisoners who prefer the prison to any rational argument and oblique attempts of the regime that intends to corrupt them. We do not attach any value to the so-called humanism of the police state. Instead we admire the fact that despite the oppression of the last two and a half years there are about five hundred illegal newspapers and magazines in Poland. Note that we did not write five but five hundred. [...] 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."⁵⁰

Hírmondó only used pathos in articles that they penned about others.⁵¹ They never went so far as to talk about their own achievements in this fashion. As opposed to this, *Demokrata* often described Hungarian politics and their own oppressed situation in dramatic terms. They felt the latter to be so serious that they could not remain silent: "Even animals whine when they sense trouble. Men usually shout, 'Fire!' And today we do not face a small flame but an enormous fire."⁵²

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,⁵³ soft dictatorship, socialist democracy,⁵⁴ and enlightened absolutism.⁵⁵ "If

⁴⁸ *Hírmondó* followed the rules of conspiracy. There was a division between the groups of editors, distributors, agents, and printers. They always took care that the printers were well hidden from the police. As opposed to this Jenő Nagy and his colleagues did not use such rules and, consequently, they became the constant targets of the police.

⁴⁹ Cf. Mihály Vajda (1986), "Megcsalt nembeliség vagy megvalósult orosz történelem" (Deceived gendering or the materialization of Russian history), *Hírmondó* (August-September), p. 54.

⁵⁰ R- ő (1984), "Emberi arcú rendőrállam?" (Police state with a human face?), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), pp. 1-2.

⁵¹ Pathos was expressed by repetition, comparison, and cumulation. Predicates that expressed strong feelings (e.g. to be awed, to be amazed, and to be spellbound) were also used in great numbers.

⁵² *Demokrata* (1987), "Megnyugtattak: most más időket élünk" (We were reassured: we live in different times), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 66.

⁵³ "Mintha-ország" (As-if country) and "Széljegyzet a válsághoz" (Side note to the crisis), (1987), *Demokrata* No. 12, p. 2.

⁵⁴ "If the government [...] really wanted to broaden democracy as they say, they could safely trust the fate of associations to the members and elected leaders of the associations. [...] But, of course, this would be too

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.’⁵⁶ “We must make this clear,” they wrote in another article, “that the economic achievements of the Kádár regime are also relative. In comparison to true democracies, these achievements appear limited and backward,”⁵⁷ “because this is a tug of war.”⁵⁸

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. They understood compromise as settling for less and giving up their identities. “Would an honest political movement accept an eternal compromise? Compromise is an integral part of politics but it is only acceptable and honest if it is not made forever and, thus, does not result in one’s denial of one’s identity. [...] 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.”⁵⁹ The opposition categorically refused the idea of an eternal compromise. “No. This regime – this government – 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.”⁶⁰

The ultimate and often-voiced goal of *Demokrata* intellectuals⁶¹ was to bring down the regime: “What is the value of an opposition that cannot bring down either the government or the regime?”⁶² Democracy can only be victorious when party dictatorship is abolished.”⁶³

Assessing their relationship to power, those with close ties to *Demokrata* mentioned their fear regularly. The confession of being afraid, however, almost always went hand-in-hand with making it clear that they were not intimidated.⁶⁴ “I am no longer suspicious. I am only afraid. But not so much as to remain silent.”⁶⁵ As often as they mentioned their own fear, they also expressed their belief in their ability to raise fear in the power elite: “how dangerous

simple. Then it would be democracy not just social democracy, which is an absurdity anyhow.” “Milyen fa a legjobb vaskarika készítéséhez?” (What is the best way to fabricate nonsense?) (1986), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 43.

⁵⁵ “...the logic of the system remains unchanged despite all its ‘liberalism’. Enlightened absolutism is still absolutism. Its ‘enlightened attitude’ is haphazard. Its defining feature is still its absolutism.” L. Serfőző, Dr. (1987), “A lényeg nem lehet kikerülni” (The essence of it cannot be avoided), *Demokrata* No. 1, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Brávó (1987), “Reszketsetek demokraták!” (Democrats, you’d rather tremble!), *Demokrata* No. 9, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Szilárd, Stark (1986), “Aki magyar, velünk tart?” (Hungarians keep with us?), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 28/c.

In addition see: “For a certain strata – the beneficiaries of Goulash communism – Kádár became Uncle Joe, but certainly not for us.” Imre Kármentő (1986), “Az elnyomás csöndje” (The silence of oppression), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Pál Szalai (1987), “Sztálinizmus. Kiállítás és előadás az ACC-ben” (Stalinism: exhibition and lecture in ACC), *Demokrata* No. 6 (June), p. 28.

⁵⁹ Róbert Sasváry (1986), “Ellenzék a hódoltságban” (Opposition in Oppression), *Demokrata* No. 8, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁰ Béla F. Reymund (1986), “Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat” (Let’s keep ourselves to the rules of the game), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 23.

Another example: “With all respects to the intellectual legacy of István Bibó, the failure of Bibó’s suggestions signal that compromise is not among the political means in this region.” Editors (1987), “Két program – a hallgatás és halogatás vége?” (Two programs – the end of silence and procrastination?), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 23.

⁶¹ Hereafter I will refer to the circle of intellectuals close to *Hírmondó* as *Hírmondó* intellectuals and to the circle of those close to *Demokrata* as *Demokrata* intellectuals.

⁶² Róbert Sasváry (1986), “Ellenzék a hódoltságban” (Opposition in Oppression), *Demokrata* No. 8, p. 18.

⁶³ L. Serfőző, Dr. (1987), “A lényeg nem lehet kikerülni” (The essence of it cannot be avoided), *Demokrata* No. 1, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Those *intimidated* lose their *élan*, withdraw, and become silent. Those who are (only) *afraid* would not necessarily do any of these.

⁶⁵ *Demokrata* (1987), “Megnyugtattak: most más időket élünk” (We were reassured: we live in different times), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 66.

it is for power to be afraid of us all the time!”⁶⁶ 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.”⁶⁷ Besides, this fact “makes it even more pronounced that Goliath’s power is a morally fallen one.”⁶⁸

2.2. Attitudes to the Society: Voice or Exit?

The relationship of the opposition to society was not free of contradictions. Occasionally they expressed their dissatisfaction with the “silence of society.”⁶⁹ They wanted to speak up or even to mobilize against the atomization, pacification and neutralization strategies of the Kádár regime. They were afraid that society would not identify with their goals and that it would not even understand them. 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 scapheaps.”⁷⁰ *Demokrata* returned to the metaphor of light frequently.⁷¹

They saw themselves as role models. “If we allow the disintegration of our grouping – community if you may – that is ready to express and shape opinions and on occasion engage in demonstrations, then we not only dishonor our own goals but deprive others of our example and a chance...”⁷²

They believed that it was their responsibility to talk about the suppressed past.⁷³ “The situation does not favor those who remember 1956. In this situation our best chance is not in visible and organized mass demonstrations but in remembering and making others remember [the past] as often and in as many places as possible. We must prefer the multitude of quick, secret and inventive action to public demonstrations that necessitate long preparation.”⁷⁴ These people 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.⁷⁵ The question of individual

⁶⁶ A somewhat frightened democrat (1987), “A valóság másik arca avagy: ki mivel játszik” (The other face of reality or who plays what?), *Demokrata* No. 9, p. 29. See in addition: “this deafening propaganda, which can hardly tolerate dissent even when it comes with the ‘loudness’ of a mouse! Imre Kármentő (1986), “Az elnyomás csöndje” (The silence of oppression), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 14.

⁶⁷ The opposition often pictured themselves and the power holders as well as the political situation in metaphors. For example, “‘the strawberry tree keeps nodding in the dark’ – we remember this line of a well-known poem and not because of the darkness but because of nodding. Strawberry trees should be organized into clubs – they would only nod and the socialist order and our international alliances would not be questioned.” Gergő deák (1986), “Az Eperfa jó káder” (The strawberry tree is a good cadre), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 30.

⁶⁸ Béla F. Reymund (1986), “Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat” (Let’s keep ourselves to the rules of the game), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 22.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁰ Róbert Sasváry (1986), “Ellenzék a hódoltságban” (Opposition in Oppression), *Demokrata* No. 8, p. 19.

⁷¹ The reformer economists with close ties to power also used the metaphor of light, who later talked about themselves as light in the darkness.

⁷² *Demokrata* (1987), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 1.

⁷³ The historical past meant the squelched 1956 revolution first and foremost. The 1956 revolution was the most obvious means to question the legitimacy of the Kádár regime.

⁷⁴ Anonymous (1986), “Bátran, öntevékenyen” (Courageously and Actively), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 43. To facilitate speed, they even gave practical advice, for instance, about how to make rubber stamps, stencils, and fliers. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷⁵ The conflict between the so-called elite and the radical-plebeian opposition became especially intense in 1988-1989. 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.

responsibility appeared in the most pronounced way on the pages of *Hírmondó*, but even *Hírmondó* avoided the discussion of the role the families of dissidents played. The authors placed themselves in the public and not the private sphere. The broad and open – that is, broad and open in their minds – East-Central European space were rarely reduced to the innermost spaces of the private sphere. At best, it was reduced to the den.⁷⁶ The risk that the families of opposition activists had to take was left unmentioned. To sum up, dissident intellectuals in Hungary wanted to give voice to demands for freedom, and also to those who had no chance to present themselves in the public sphere.

The second option was emigration. Once they cannot change, cannot shake up society, they should think of the exit option. In the journal *Hírmondó*, emigration was not a characteristic subject of the opposition's discourse. The only exception was the column, *Lapzárta után* (After deadline), which, for example, brought up the issue with regard to opposition philosopher, Gáspár Miklós Tamás who had immigrated to Hungary from Transylvania.⁷⁷ This particular case was selected for discussion on purpose, because of Tamás's view of emigration. He did not see it as one's free choice, but as something one pressured into by the power elite. In his case, the representatives of the power elite told him that, "You are not going to get a passport but you may emigrate if you wish, which indeed would be desirable."⁷⁸ The opposition categorically refused to back such a solution. "We think it otherwise. [...] To the hell with such offers! The power elite may live with this method again in ten years⁷⁹ 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.'"⁸⁰

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. "'No, I am disgusted so I'll leave.' This is what this couple said. I think I do not need a lot of empathy to understand their decision at least."⁸¹

It deserves attention that as much as they stressed the morality of the attitude to stay in the country, they stressed the same with regard to emigration. This group of intellectuals did not judge emigration negatively from the point of view of a collective responsibility for the fate of the nation. As they wrote, "this couple," who were medical doctors, "did not go to Sweden because there was a shortage of doctors there. They went to face a very progressive system of taxation. If in any country, then it is in Sweden that they are not going to earn millions by practicing medicine. Earning millions was not their purpose, anyway. They simply wanted to be and remain honest individuals."⁸²

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

⁷⁶ "So what should these people do if the police comes and feels like reading our letters?" András Nagy (1984), "A 229-es csapdája. Utóirat a Demszky-perhez" (Catch 229. Postscript to the Demszky trial), *Hírmondó* No. 6-7 (May-June), p. 61.

⁷⁷ Gáspár Miklós Tamás was offered an emigration passport. Gábor Demszky (1984), "Menjenek el talán ők" (Perhaps they should leave), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), p. 24.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷⁹ The sociologist Iván Szelényi was 'removed' from Hungary by this methods in 1975.

⁸⁰ Gábor Demszky (1984), "Menjenek el talán ők" (Perhaps they should leave), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), p. 24.

⁸¹ Anonymous (1986), *Demokrata* No. 1-2, p. 25.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

would enrich us with new ideas and reasoning and help them preserve their ties with the country and think like Hungarians even when abroad.”⁸³

The democratic opposition in Hungary saw the political power of the emigrant intelligentsia larger than their own. They often overestimated it: “Those of them coming home for a visit should not [...] be ashamed of seeing the opposition and should explicate the power elite’s disregard for the law in Western forums. [...] They should not keep away from demanding the same rights that Hungarian emigrants who are ready to cooperate with the elite enjoy for those living in Hungary.”⁸⁴

As writings in *Demokrata* reveal many felt losing ground at the end of 1987.⁸⁵ In this period, the number of self-analytical articles drastically increased. They did not question their desire for change and its purpose, but they chastised themselves for pushing too hard for it. “I can do one thing: I can list my sins: We erred that we did not think through what we got ourselves into. We did not count with the demands of the movement. [...] We have had more power than we had dreamed of, only we could not handle it.”⁸⁶

They also missed self-irony rightfully, since their self-reflections lacked it entirely. “Cold ruthless irony was missing in us. [...] I would never have said aloud what disgusted me during the electoral campaign: not one of us could speak in an exciting, interesting and attractive manner. Instead, I was only criticizing the rude manipulations and interventions of the police.”⁸⁷

Those publishing in *Égtájak között* dealt most intensively with the extreme hardship that fell upon the imprisoned. For example they called attention to the victims of “psycho-prisons” and forced psychiatric treatments. Besides putting pressure on the authorities,⁸⁸ they found it important to keep in touch with the imprisoned. “It was important to inform him [László Rusai of the Vox Humana Circle] continuously that the outside world did pay attention to his plight.”⁸⁹

3. Strategic Concepts of the Dissidents

3.1 Between Reform and Revolution: The Debate of the *Beszélő* Circle on Political Strategy

⁸³ *Demokrata* (1986), *Demokrata* No. 6, p. 19.

See also “We do not see those [...] who are Hungarians, who are Hungarian citizens and write for a New York paper or give an interview to Radio Free Europe as our enemies. They cannot be adversaries, since the mentioned paper and radio station are not our enemies, either...” Szilárd Stark (1986), “Ki az ellenség” (Who is the enemy), *Demokrata* No. 8, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Szilárd Stark (1986), “Valódi párbeszéd vagy manipuláció?” (Real dialogue or manipulation), *Demokrata* No. 9, p. 8.

“In our judgment,” it was written in 1988, “in the current critical situation of the country, informing the public openly and in large numbers through the Hungarian media abroad. Their objective work can help democratic mentality, which must be the part of the developing political culture of the country. See Hungarian Democratic Opposition (1988), *Demokrata* No. 4, p. 27.

⁸⁵ Editors (1987), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 1.

See also, “It is an even bigger question – and I am afraid we are going to pay the price for it whether we want it or not – is why we want to let events get to the periphery of our vision?” Gondolkodó Másféleképpen Beszélő (1987), “Széljegyzet a válsághoz” (Side note to the crisis), *Demokrata*, No. 11, p. 12.

⁸⁶ Editors (1987), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Speaking about László Rusai of the Vox Humana Circle, who had been imprisoned, they wrote, “If we do not save him now, he will be the first victim of the 30th anniversary [of the revolution]” “A Vox Humana Kör a pszichobörtönbe zárt Rusai Lászlóról” (The Vox Humana Circle about the imprisoned László Rusai) (1986), *Égtájak között* (Hóhatár, November), p. 28.

⁸⁹ Vox Humana Circle (1986), *Égtájak között* (Hóhatár, November), p. 36.

A leading figure of the incipient opposition, János Kis published an essay *Gondolatok a közeljövőről* (Thoughts On The Near Future)⁹⁰ in *Beszélő* in 1982,⁹¹ and this article resulted in a great debate within the opposition about the opposition's strategy and, thus, played a vital role in their decision of taking up the role of political opposition. Here, shall discuss the main points of the debate.

According to Kis, the situation in the 1980s demanded an action program from the opposition. The debate that followed dealt with the issues of whether the opposition was part of the Kádárist consensus and whether it needed a political program or it should remain cultural opposition or in Mihály Vajda's words, "a critical public".⁹² As for the former, there was no consensus and, thus, the opposition had no unified identity when it came to defining who and what was the subject of their criticism and who were their allies. Many thought that they should work together with those of the power elite who were willing to cooperate in order to further reforms. Others advanced the idea that the opposition was not outside the Kádárist consensus and it should never be. They were equally divided over the necessity of a political program: some found it necessary, others believed that concrete policy-making was not the task of the opposition thinkers.

Although the first issue of *Beszélő* appeared in November 1981 – 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 a another long 'ice age' of restoration.

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 be consolidated."⁹³ Kis supported this audacious statement by pointing out that the economic decline in the region was caused not only by temporary reasons. Polish Solidarity broke the legitimacy of socialist systems for good. The word 'reform' was again mentioned in Hungary (although it was not articulated in official circles for a long time), but 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, Ágnes Heller, because it was based on the arguments of material rationality. When one accepts the dimension of material rationality, one excludes the dogma of infallibility at the same time, and, Heller thought and was quoted to this effect by Ambrus Oltványi in the debate, this inevitably leads to pluralism in the long run.⁹⁴

The democratic attempt in Poland did not only come out in support of certain principles – as its predecessors in 1956 and 1968 did – but also for the guarantee of survival. The working-class movement came up against the "the state of the proletariat." Based on this fact, Kis said, the beginning of the eighties was not only the time of restoration and reaction in Eastern Europe, but was also the era of the growing economic and political crises. These crises, according to him, would not spare the Soviet Union, either. "The Soviet leadership at present wants to do only one thing in Eastern Europe: to keep up the order by all means. However, its successors will have to decide what they wish to do with the bankrupt heritage

⁹⁰ János Kis (1982), "Gondolatok a közeljövőről" (Thoughts on the near future), *Beszélő* No. 3, pp. 115-122.

Kis replied to reactions to his article two years later. See. János Kis (1984), "Másfél év után, ugyanarról" (On the same issue one and a half years later), *Beszélő* No. 9 (February), pp. 541-558.

⁹¹ János Kis (1982), "Gondolatok a közeljövőről" (Thoughts on the near future), *Beszélő* No. 3, pp. 115-122.

⁹² Mihály Vajda (1983), "Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság?" (Opposition or Critical Public Sphere) *Beszélő*, No. 8. pp. 456-459.

⁹³ János Kis (1982), op. cit. pp. 115-122.

⁹⁴ Ambrus Oltványi (1982), "A közel és távolabbi jövőről, avagy a demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon" (About the near and far future, or the prospects of democracy in Hungary), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. pp. 273-283.

they get. Their decision will surely reflect the means by which they find a way out of the domestic crisis and the unstable position of the Soviet Union as a world power.”⁹⁵

In early 1985, as soon as the gerontocratic party leadership of Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernienko ended, a reformer, Mikhail Gorbachev, came into power. The ascendance to power of a reformist politician was not foreseen. In 1982 nobody could really imagine a political change with such an outcome. But it is possible that the above-mentioned economically and politically bankrupt heritage 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 oppositions? The Hungarian opposition – following the Polish opposition leaders, Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik – set out of 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, called as the ‘new evolutionism’ by Michnik, which did not concentrate on the transformation of the system but on the strengthening of social autonomies.⁹⁶ The oppositional strategy in Poland was different from that in Hungary. Here, the strategy was rather a legalist one, which took the fiction of the right to freedom, which was declared in the constitution, for granted. It also some ‘anti-political’ characteristics. The fact that throughout the debate neither Kis nor the majority of the 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.

The party leadership considered oppositional journals as a sign of the opposition’s weakness. However, 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.”⁹⁷

As Kis thought, the political initiative could only come from the circle of the opposition, because this was the only group outside the Kádárist ‘consensus.’ The author concluded that this group could start on the road of political opposition only if it had an ideology. The pillars of this ideology should be human rights, liberal democracy, national independence, national autonomy, and the useful elements of the socialist tradition. Whereas his starting point for the ideological debate was not fully developed, it had 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. 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, methods and possibilities of the opposition were answered.

Except for the plebeian radical István Orosz, the rest of the contributors agreed with Kis’s evaluation of the current situation. Orosz was different from the others in that he thought that the democratic opposition did not stand outside of the consensus, but was on the margin of it.⁹⁸ “The main goal of *Beszélő*,” he believed, “is to increase the size of the reform-minded dissident intelligentsia.” He argued that not only the Kádárist ‘consensus’ made after

⁹⁵ János Kis (1982), “Gondolatok a közeljövőről” (Thoughts on the near future), *Beszélő* No. 3, pp. 115-122.

⁹⁶ Cf. Adam Michnik (1987 [1976]), “A New Evolutionism” in A. Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essay*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 135-148.

⁹⁷ János Kis (1982), op. cit.

⁹⁸ István Orosz (1982), “Hivatal védte ellenzékiiség” (Officially endorsed opposition behavior), *Beszélő* No. 4, pp. 185-189.

1956 should be disregarded, but also “the one made by the radical thinkers after 1973, i.e. the behavior of the bureau-protected opposition.”⁹⁹ But Orosz remained alone with his radical opinion in the *Beszélő* debate.

The idea of consensus appealed to almost all the participants of the debate. As it appeared in the program of *Beszélő*,¹⁰⁰ everybody wanted to create a consensus with regard to the crisis management and economic reform. This could be based on such principles as the open public sphere, the reform of the system of interest representation, and constitutionality. 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 official public sphere later on.

The fact that the neutrality of the country – or finlandization – advocated in the 1956 revolution appeared an unreachable dream showed the intolerable atmosphere of the era. When Tamás Bauer, an economist, offered to follow the Yugoslavian model, he suggested a sort of ‘illirization’ of Hungary.¹⁰¹ In Yugoslavia under Tito, the one party system was untouched, 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, illirization 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.”¹⁰² 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 system was rather its sloppiness; it functioned as the secret net of informal, class like, mutual assertion of interests. It is interesting to note that the Communist party’s Institute for Social Science undertook a research project on this area. In this enterprise many researchers studied the Western models of pluralism, based on the representation of interests. Probably Mihály Vajda, an opposition philosopher, was referring to this 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 elite.”¹⁰³

As these quotes show, there was no opposition consensus over goals. Many of the contributors to the debate outlined a leftist program. András Lányi was talking about the socialization of the state.¹⁰⁴ József Székely wanted an alternative socialism that was based on workers’ democracy.¹⁰⁵ Philosopher 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.”¹⁰⁶

Political theorist, Pál Szalai leaned toward the idea of a multi-party system based on democratic socialism, in which the workers’ collectives owned the means of production. His view of pluralism applied to politics: according to him 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

⁹⁹ István Orosz (1982) op. cit. p.188.

¹⁰⁰ “Hogyan keressünk kiutat a válságból? A *Beszélő* javaslatai” (How to find a way-out of the crisis? The proposals of *Beszélő*) (1982), *Beszélő* Nos..5-6. pp.233-238.

¹⁰¹ Tamás Bauer (1982), “Az optimista alternatíva körvonalai: Magyarország illírizálása” (Sketches of an optimistic alternative: The illirization of Hungary), *Beszélő* Nos..5-6. pp. 260-266.

¹⁰² Ibid., 264-265.

¹⁰³ Mihály Vajda (1983), “Ellenzék vagy kritikai nyilvánosság?” (Opposition or critical public sphere), *Beszélő* No. 8. p.458.

¹⁰⁴ András Lányi (1982), “A magyar ellenzék programja” (The program of the Hungarian opposition), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. pp. 269-272.

¹⁰⁵ József Székely (1982), “Reform és ellenzék” (Reform and the opposition), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. pp. 267-268.

¹⁰⁶ Gáspár M. Tamás (1983), “Amiért mégis” (Why we still), *Beszélő* No. 8. pp. 462-470.

tug of war between the central and the company bureaucracy” if it did not go hand in hand with the strengthening the workers’ councils.”¹⁰⁷

The sociologist Erzsébet Szalai took a similar view. She wrote about “the possibility for the multiple economic entities to live side by side,” which would have happened if economic and political institutions had been split.¹⁰⁸ In such a system “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 mean a guarantee that new *albeit* historically well known exploiting relationships could not emerge from the existence of all sorts of production relations.”¹⁰⁹ 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.

The writer and poet, István Eörsi did again something similar when he quoted the ‘manager-socialist’ apprehensions of the economist Márton Tardos.¹¹⁰ It shows that, in case of the Hungarian soft dictatorship, it was not only the second public sphere that influenced the official discourse, but sometimes the first public sphere influenced the second one.

The national problem appeared emphatically first in the contribution of Zoltán Krasznai¹¹¹ and András Vízi,¹¹² but in relation to the Soviet-Hungarian relationship almost all the speakers referred to it. For example, György Konrád named the self-determination of the society as a goal.¹¹³ Mainly with regard to Polish-Hungarian comparisons and the condition of change, Bálint Magyar emphasized the development of the *citoyen*.¹¹⁴

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 much longer 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.”¹¹⁵ Unlike many other contributors then, he did not believe in the coming of democratic socialism. Referring to 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.”¹¹⁶

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, which is 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

¹⁰⁷ Pál Szalai (1982), “Remény – remény nélkül” (Hope – without hope), *Beszélő* No.4. p. 194.

¹⁰⁸ Erzsébet Szalai (1983), “A liberális alternatíva társadalmi feltételeiről” (On the social conditions of the liberal alternative), *Beszélő* No. 7. p. 366.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

¹¹⁰ István Eörsi (1982), “Csto gyélaty?” (What shall we do?), *Beszélő* No. 4. pp. 181-184.

¹¹¹ Zoltán Krasznai (1983), “Jelszavaink legyenek: haza és haladás” (Our slogans shall be homeland and progress), *Beszélő* No. 7. pp. 369-376.

¹¹² András Vízi (1983), “Kommunisták és ellenzékiek” (Communists and oppositionists), *Beszélő* No. 8. pp.461-462.

¹¹³ György Konrád (1983), “Adottságainkból kell kiindulnunk” (Our starting point should be our capabilities), *Beszélő* No. 8. p. 455.

¹¹⁴ Bálint Magyar (1982), “Polgárokká válni” (To become citizens), *Beszélő*, No. 4. pp. 189-191.

¹¹⁵ Ambrus Oltványi (1982), “A közel és távolabbi jövőről, avagy a demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon” (About the near and far future, or the prospects of democracy in Hungary), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. pp. 273-283.

¹¹⁶ Oltványi (1982), *op. cit.* p.280.

‘reform committees’ behind closed doors, ‘prompted’ mostly to the men in power, the opposition tried to ‘prompt’ to the society as well.

There was only one contributor, István Orosz, who disagreed with the more-than-reformist-but-less-than-revolutionary strategy proposed by János Kis. What Orosz suggested was a strictly revolutionary approach. “We need to step away from the margin and bear the consequences.” He thought that there was no middle ground and so the opposition had to decide whether it wanted to pursue “a popular front policy with the reformer intelligentsia or with the working class.”¹¹⁷ In his answer, Kis criticized this when he pointed out that 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. At the same time, 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 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.¹¹⁸ Csaba Könczöl called attention to the fact that this insider-outside division was expedient for tactical reasons as well, because instead of attracting the fellow travelers on the inside, it excluded them from opposition activities.¹¹⁹ 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. The ‘forcing the power elite to deal’ strategy avoided compromise since it saw the reform-process that would remove obstacle as its goal.¹²⁰

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 Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSZMP), to deal with the situation through the roundtable negotiations testifies to this. Following the ‘civic tactics’ suggested by Bálint Magyar, the opposition set such an example that could be successfully used by others, for example the members of the Független Jogász Fórum (Independent Lawyer’s Forum, FJF) who initiated the roundtable negotiations. The opinion of József Székely had a lower profile than the one of Bálint Magyar, because he thought that there was a need for a ‘positive opposition.’ Assuming the openness of those in power, he meant the development of reforms and some cooperation with the communists by ‘positive opposition.’¹²¹

According to Pál Szalai the oppositional group should define its strategy on the basis of its policies not on the inside-outside division. He did not think it was advisable to start cooperation with the leftist wing of MSZMP or the anti-liberal, middle-class heirs of noble nationalism. At the same time, he suggested, “attention should be given to the democratic trends within MSZMP” and “to the revival within Hungarian Catholicism.”¹²² Through these comments, Pál Szalai elaborated on some topics, which would become important in the future. For example he stressed that the opposition needed more than one ideology. He called

¹¹⁷ István Orosz (1982), “Hivatal védte ellenzékiesség” (Officially endorsed opposition behavior), *Beszélő*, No.4. pp. 188-189.

¹¹⁸ István Eörsi (1982), “Csto gyélaty?” (What shall we do?), *Beszélő*, No.4. pp. 181-184.

¹¹⁹ Csaba Könczöl (1982), “Levél Kis Jánoshoz” (A letter to János Kis), *Beszélő*, No. 4. pp. 191-192.

¹²⁰ Bálint Magyar (1982), “Polgárokka válni” (To become citizens), *Beszélő*, No. 4. pp. 189-191.

¹²¹ József Székely (1982), “Reform és ellenzék” (Reform and the opposition), *Beszélő*, Nos. 5-6. pp. 267-268.

¹²² Pál Szalai (1982), “Remény – remény nélkül” (Hope – without hope”), *Beszélő*, No.4. pp. 193-194.

attention to some of the anti-democratic traditions of the aristocratic middle class and pointed out the dangers of cooperating with certain groups within these circles.¹²³

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 represented the moderate approach. He 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.”¹²⁴ 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.”¹²⁵

Ambrus Oltványi agreed that the first and second public sphere should be more traversable, but 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 the importance of the example of Spanish transition for Hungary: “although only four decades after the dictatorship came into power, such a *transition* proved to be realizable in post-Franco Spain.”¹²⁶ To support his statement, Oltványi quoted Adam Michnik directly: “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 dictatorship to democracy.”¹²⁷

However unbelievable it is, Michnik wrote these lines as early as the mid-1970s. Or, 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-freeing by self-limiting’ strategy Michnik elaborated on. The fact that the Solidarity in Poland did not see the opportunities of a Spanish-like transition was not their fault. It was due to the fact that their leaders were not backed by the Soviet Union of Gorbachev. Instead it was Leonid Brezhnev that stood behind the Polish communist leaders, Gierek, Kania, Jaruzelski and their comrades.

But who should agree with whom in a country where the power was in the hands of an aging clik, and where the word ‘reform’ could be mentioned only in particular 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 number of social groups that could have been the potential allies of the opposition. The first on her list was the intelligentsia that worked in official social science institutions and thus was on the periphery of the official institutions. These people worked mainly at the Institute for Historical Science and other academic institutions. Some, including Szalai, worked at the Institute of Financial Research. Szalai singled out young skilled workers, university students, artists, technicians,

¹²³ Pál Szalai (1982), op. cit. pp. 193-194.

¹²⁴ Tamás Bauer (1982), “az optimista alternatíva körvonalai” (Sketches of an optimistic alternative), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. pp. 260-266.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-266.

¹²⁶ Ambrus Oltványi (1982), “A közel és távolabbi jövőről, avagy a demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon” (About the near and far future, or the prospects of democracy in Hungary), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. p. 279.

¹²⁷ Oltványi (1982) on p. 279. quotes Adam Michnik. Cf. A. Michnik (1987 [1976]), “A New Evolutionism” in A. Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 135-148.

health workers, and small entrepreneurs, who had already had minor clashes with the regime. She imagined some kind of a net-like cooperation with them.¹²⁸

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. 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 with the help of their training and efficiency. Thus they will not have to cling to the dictatorial means of power at any price.”¹²⁹

Most of those who contributed to the debate at the time found it important to preserve diversity within the opposition. They pointed out that those who want pluralism in the society could not endeavor to suppress it within their own circles. They insisted on pluralism as a precondition of democracy and not just as an outcome of it.

On looking back, analysts tend to simplify and regard the decade of the 1980s as the triumphal procession of the ideology of *civil society*. Several observers 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 people – György Konrád, Ambrus Oltványi, and Mihály Vajda – used the idea of civil society. In the Enlightenment traditions the idea of civil society was called to life as an antidote to the state. Its task was to “free itself from the guardianship of the state.”¹³⁰ “Civil society and political state are by nature struggling with each other,” stated Vajda.¹³¹ 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.¹³²

The historian Miklós Szabó was on exactly the opposite opinion. He thought that the role of civil courage was to help coming out from passive informality and not to keep these passive, informal structures so characteristic in the Kadar regime. “We must be careful not to increase the number of informal organizations” but “to claim strong autonomies.”¹³³

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 anti-political Konrád, the opposition “is democratic not when it is a political but when it is a social opposition.”¹³⁴ Meanwhile, Vajda said 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.¹³⁵ As Vajda Mihály said, “the new democratic political community should not be in opposition but it has to use the means of critical publicity so as to call to life an opposition within the power elite. It should force those members of the power elite who thought that things were going the wrong way to clearly state this fact and present their alternative ideas coherently so that they can be debated in public. The aim of this is to force their opponents to do the same. Only

¹²⁸ Erzsébet Szalai (1983), “A liberális alternatíva társadalmi feltételeiről” (On the social conditions of the liberal alternative), *Beszélő* No. 7. pp. 365-369.

¹²⁹ Ambrus Oltványi (1982), “A közel és távolabbi jövőről, avagy a demokrácia kilátásai Magyarországon” (About the near and far future, or the prospects of democracy in Hungary), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. p. 275.

¹³⁰ Mihály Vajda (1983), p. 458.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² György Konrád (1983), “Adottságainkból kell kiindulnunk” (Our starting point should be our capabilities), *Beszélő* No. 8. p. 455.

¹³³ Miklós Szabó (1983), “Szubkultúra vagy politikai ellenzék?” *Beszélő*, No. 7. p. 363.

¹³⁴ György Konrád (1983), “Adottságainkból kell kiindulnunk” (Our starting point should be our capabilities), *Beszélő* No. 8. p. 455.

¹³⁵ Mihály Vajda (1983), op. cit. 459.

critical publicity can transform the personal fights within the political elite into a debate over different political alternatives.”¹³⁶

The idea of Bálint Magyar was very much alike, as he said that he saw the call of the opposition in “the establishment of duty-free ports of thoughts” and not in the forming of an institutional political community.¹³⁷ It is important to stress that the opposition was not anti-power per se. It only disapproved the communist power holders. Most dissidents did not think in terms of powerlessness, but, following István Bibó, in terms of power balance, new consensus, and new social contract.

Konrád thought that striving for power was a heritage of communism and he rejected it on that ground. For him, political opposition seemed inherently anti-democratic. “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.”¹³⁸ And Vajda said, as if he had foreseen the structural problems that would plague the liberal party – Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats, SZDSZ) – that grew out of the democratic system-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’. 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.”¹³⁹

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 freedom.”¹⁴⁰ Roads split at this point – at the question of political or non-political opposition. It was obviously not by accident that neither Vajda nor Konrád became professional politicians. Others, such as Bálint Magyar, Tamás Bauer, Gábor Demszky, modified their views and pursued political career in the 1990s.

Most of the contributors, including András Lányi, Miklós Szabó, Zoltán Krasznai, and Gáspár M. Tamás, agreed with the proposition of János Kis’ 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.¹⁴¹ Within the borders of political opposition, many considered different aspects of the strategy to be highlighted. Orosz wanted confrontation, Lányi social pressure, Szabó two-sided negotiations, and Tamás, besides demanding political reforms, emphasized the need for ‘ethical renewal’.¹⁴²

Krasznai’s views on this matter were as follows: “since the future can take many directions, the opposition has to prepare for many possibilities”.¹⁴³ 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.”¹⁴⁴ Such a compromise would come about in the village of Lakitelek in 1987. But it occurred not between the leadership and the democratic opposition but between Imre Pozsgay, who was at the periphery of the party

¹³⁶ Mihály Vajda (1983), op. cit. p. 458.

¹³⁷ Bálint Magyar (1982), op. cit. p. 191.

¹³⁸ György Konrád (1983), op. cit. p. 453.

¹³⁹ Mihály Vajda (1983), op. cit. p. 457.

¹⁴⁰ György Konrád (1983), op. cit. p. 454.

¹⁴¹ András Lányi (1982), op. cit. p. 269.

¹⁴² Gáspár M. Tamás (1983), op. cit. p. 468.

¹⁴³ Zoltán Krasznai (1983), op. cit. p. 374-375.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 374.

leadership, and 'népi' writers, who worked themselves out of the democratic opposition, seeing themselves belonging neither to the opposition nor the pro-government forces.

The debate came to an end in the 8th issue of *Beszélő*. After this the quest for identity did not play a central role as if there has been a consensus to follow the strategy János Kis expressed in his article, "*Hogyan keressünk kiutat a válságból?*" (How to Find A Way Out of the Crisis?). In addition, they should make specific suggestions about specific issues or analyze issues in order to influence the public. Articles were increasingly devoted to political action and public demonstrations.

After the debate the strategy of becoming a political opposition became decisive. A policy was formed, which first led to the parley of 1985, to the conference on 1956 in 1986, and to lectures at universities and clubs. It also contributed to the birth of the *Társadalmi Szerződés* (Social Contract) program in 1987.¹⁴⁵ Finally, after the breakthrough in *Lakitelek* in the autumn of 1987¹⁴⁶ it also had a role in the organization of the *Szabad Kezdeményezések Hálózata* (Network of Free Initiatives, SZKH) in the spring of 1988. Without this strategy the democratic opposition of the 1980s could have easily become unsubstantial in the period of the regime change.

3.2. Human Rights, Autonomy and Morality: The Elements of Oppositional Strategy in Smaller Samizdat Journals and Circles

In the search for identity, the opposition circle close to *Hírmondó* relied heavily on the ideal and heritage of East-Central Europe: "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."¹⁴⁷

Similarly to the opposition circle of *Demokrata* and *Égtájak között*, *Hírmondó* was committed to non-violence and the protection of human rights: "*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."¹⁴⁸ [...] "Individual and collective human rights must be demanded for everyone, including national minorities."¹⁴⁹ "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."¹⁵⁰

They believed in the strength and power of the written word: "We will not give any ground without being forced to do so and we must not accept the loss of our freedom in silence."¹⁵¹ "Our books are read because the readers are interested in them. This is where our power lies."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ Miklós Haraszti et. al. (1987), *Társadalmi szerződés* (Social contract), *Beszélő* special issue.

¹⁴⁶ The Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) was formed as an independent political movement, in *Lakitelek*, in September 1987.

¹⁴⁷ Pál Szalai (1984), "Amivel nem tudok egyetérteni" (What I cannot agree with), *Hírmondó* (July), p. 55.

¹⁴⁸ "Beköszöntő" (Introduction) (1983), *Hírmondó* No. 1 (November), p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ "Tamás Gáspár Miklós nyílt levele Mihai Korne-hoz" (The open letter of G. M. Tamás to Mihai Korne) (1984), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), p. 27.

¹⁵⁰ György Konrád (1985), "A cenzúra reformja?" (The reform of censorship?), *Hírmondó* (August-September), p. 5.

¹⁵¹ Editors (1984), "Gyeplő és kurázszi" (Reins and Courage), *Hírmondó* No. 6-7 (May-June), p. 3.

¹⁵² György Konrád (1985), "A cenzúra reformja?" (The reform of censorship?), *Hírmondó* (August-September), pp. 4-5.

They defined themselves as members of the civil society, that is, they saw themselves as people who do not delegate power,¹⁵³ but “accept its responsibilities.”¹⁵⁴ They did not rule out dialogue with the power elite as long as it could bring an optimal compromise. “If Hungarians in Hungary are threatened by catastrophe or the existence of the nation is in question (we, however, are not inclined to use such extreme words: we would rather speak about stagnation, value loss, and missed opportunities), the causes should first and foremost be sought [...] in the sub-optimal compromise with power.”¹⁵⁵

As I have noted above, the writings of the circle belonging to *Demokrata* had a moral tone in their self-references.¹⁵⁶ However, were there any historical events or moments that they kept referring to because of the positive morality of these events? The only but very important such point of reference was the 1956 revolution. “In the current standing of the economy, political matters and 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.”¹⁵⁷ The obliging historical moment was not questionable for them: it was the 1956 revolution. “In the face of multiplying troubles, it is more and more obvious that the rights and property we still own is due to the anger, determination and sacrifice of 1956.”¹⁵⁸

It was their task, they believed, to declare the need for national independence: “In this strategic situation, the democratic opposition must aim at shaping public thinking, and raising awareness to the need for democratic progress and national independence.”¹⁵⁹ [...] “Power today is based on the continuous presence of the Soviet army. It would be foolish not to speak about it. [...] A large army means constant threat to all of us. [...] Therefore the draft of the *Társadalmi Szerződés* (Social Contract) should be supplemented by a chapter in which the contracting parties declare the withdrawal of the occupying forces as their goal [...]. Only the speed of the withdrawal may be subject to discussion.”¹⁶⁰

They stressed the pluralistic nature of democracy, welcoming the reader in the first issue of *Demokrata* by the following words: “On these pages, we wish to represent and

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 5. Konrád adds that “the good writer is proto-civilian and anti-soldier in his attitudes.” Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Hírmondó staff member (1984), “Válasz egy olvasói levélre” (Reply to a reader), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), p. 33.

¹⁵⁶ They define themselves in opposition to a morally bankrupt power elite. “... We see this government a failure both in moral and political terms. The loss of its credibility is quite obvious.” Béla F. Reymund (1986), “Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat” (Let’s keep ourselves to the rules of the game), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 21.

Or elsewhere: “We have not done what we have done out of vanity [...]. We knew we were right and we also knew how much this was worth in this country where the reaction to truth is most often boredom...” See Editors of *Demokrata* (1988), “A magyar demokrata fórumhoz” (To the Hungarian Democratic Forum), *Demokrata* No. 1, p. 17.

It was not simply about the moral superiority *vis-à-vis* the power elite. Morality was an important personality trait of these people.

¹⁵⁷ Béla F. Reymund (1986), “Tartsuk be a játékszabályokat” (Let’s keep ourselves to the rules of the game), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 21. They continuously raised their voice about the creation of falsehoods about fifty-six. “The party, in the words of János Berecz, ‘closed the books’ with the memorial series of this anniversary: it put fifty-six ‘to its place. We are certain that free and honest historians in Hungary will open those books again, but until then we have put our fingers in between the pages so that the book cannot be closed entirely...”

“Gondolattörések egy magyar televízió 1956-os dokumentum-sorozatából” (Thought fragments about the documentary of the Hungarian television about 1956), (1986), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 22.

¹⁵⁸ Anonymous (1986), “Bátran, öntevékenyen” (Courageously and Actively), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 43.

¹⁵⁹ Róbert Sasváry (1986), “Ellenzék a hódoltságban” (Opposition in Oppression), *Demokrata* No. 6, p. 18.

¹⁶⁰ Egy Virágkedvelő (1987), “Társadalmi szerződés? Hozzászólás a *Beszélő* program-javaslatához” (Social contract? Remarks on the program ideas of *Beszélő*), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 24.

propagate the pluralism of democracy that we desire to see in political life and that we wish to work for.”¹⁶¹

In the identity-making discourse of the authors of *Égtájak között* autonomy, which they felt to be the “precondition to make everyday life livable and bearable,” had a defining role.¹⁶² They distanced themselves from those who are not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of an independent existence and “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.”¹⁶³

The “practice of one party – one opposition”¹⁶⁴ did not fit their quest for autonomy, either. The different opposition groups of *Égtájak között* positioned themselves outside the “monolithic opposition”¹⁶⁵ and voiced their criticism from that position. The criticism consisted in disapproval of intolerance and the assimilation of independent groups, which the monolithic opposition used in order to “strengthen itself.”¹⁶⁶ “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.”¹⁶⁷

They advocated the diversification of the “centralized, monopolized and centrally planned”¹⁶⁸ public education. According to them, public education should ensure the availability of diverse but equal cultural and educational opportunities so that people had a real choice.¹⁶⁹ “It could lead to competition,” they wrote. “It would be great if we decided to start our own school and we could do it this week. And if it did not work, we could confess to it.”¹⁷⁰

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 know the suppressed national past and culture can serve as points of orientation. We must keep banging our fists on the table.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶¹ *Demokrata* (1986), *Demokrata* No. 1-2, p. 1. In 1988 they declared their support for the Hungarian Democratic Forum. “In the future, we will do nothing else than continue the fight for democratic values and institutions [...]. Yet, there is an important difference now: we know our comrades whom we have seen in work...” Editors (1988), “A magyar demokrata fórumhoz” (To the Hungarian Democratic Forum), *Demokrata* No. 1, p. 17.

¹⁶² József Talata (1988), “Levegőt! – Alternatív közművelődési koncepciók; Interjú Talata Józseffel és Bognár Mikoltával” (Fresh air! – Alternative concepts of public education; Interview with József Talata and Mikolta Bognár), *Égtájak között* (Körhinta, February), p. 16.

The concept of autonomy defined how they referred to their own journal. “I usually avoid the word samizdat and use independent instead...” And, “Of the independent journal, our journal’s situation is special. This is the only one whose existence is autonomous – it exists without capital and financial support.” Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶⁵ Independent groups exist mostly in practice. The opposition is as monolithic as the power elite. Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶⁶ “...it has a strong will to integrate these independent groups.” Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁷¹ Olga Diószegi (1986), “Diószegi Olga 56- ról (Olga Diószegi about 1956)” *Égtájak Között* (Hóhatár, November), p. 3.

These opposition authors very often referred to themselves as the participants of an (endless and) heroic effort: “We have written these articles with our blood. The drops of blood are on the pages and if somebody reads these articles, they may even see the blood.” “We have to get through the hurdles to publish our journal the way Sisyphus had to roll a boulder up the hill. And then we have to do it again and again. If we add the lack of financing to this, I think it is quite a miracle that we can publish new issues.” József Talata (1988), “Levegőt! – Alternatív közművelődési koncepciók; Interjú Talata Józseffel és Bognár Mikoltával” (Fresh air! – Alternative

4. Multiple Identities: Central Europe, National Identity and the Question of Minorities

4.1 The National Minorities in Context

The problem of Hungarians living outside the borders of Hungary was an important part of the discourse¹⁷² on Europe for the *Hírmondó* intellectuals. Nevertheless, problems concerning minorities living in Hungary (e.g. the Roma and the Jews) were equally important for *Hírmondó*.¹⁷³ The former is especially important to stress because, according to some, the modern and urban democratic opposition differed from the ‘népi’ writers, who criticized the Communist power elite because of the disregard for national identity. The democratic opposition was described as only having interest in domestic minorities whereas the ‘népi’ writers were said to focus on Hungarian minorities abroad.¹⁷⁴ As far as the democratic opposition was concerned, this was not the case: they were concerned about the fate of minorities both at home and abroad. *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 minorities at home.

In this respect *Hírmondó* intellectuals did not only differ from ‘népi’ writers but also from *Demokrata* intellectuals. 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 and civil rights,¹⁷⁵ which was also a often-mentioned theme in *Hírmondó*. The most defining element in the discourse of the opposition circle of *Hírmondó* was their identity as Central Europeans. They approached, propagated or rejected other issues and ideas from this point of view.

The introduction of *Hírmondó*, which can be seen as a complex 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.”¹⁷⁶ It is important to note that the introduction stressed this issue but did not place it above all other concerns: “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...”¹⁷⁷ Throughout its existence, *Hírmondó* adhered to the view

concepts of public education; Interview with József Talata and Mikolta Bognár), *Égtájak között* (Körhinta, February), p. 18.

¹⁷² They disapproved provincialism and often called themselves cosmopolitan, believing in the “brotherhood of people.” Pál Szalai (1986) “Levél az *Élet és irodalomnak*” (Letter To *Élet és Irodalom*), *Hírmondó* Vol. 4 No. 20, p. 46.

¹⁷³ Cf. Ervin Csizmadia (1995), *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék (1968-1988)* (*The Democratic Opposition in Hungary*), Budapest: T-Twins, pp. 284-285.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 284-285.

¹⁷⁵ The solutions they proposed were also different. Cf. Csizmadia (1995), pp. 8-9. and 15.

It must be mentioned that openness of the attitude of intellectuals with close ties to *Hírmondó* can also be demonstrated by the fact that they paid attention to those Hungarians outside Hungary who had been ignored. “The fewest connections existed with Hungarians in the Ukraine – the Soviet Union has carefully kept Eastern European tourism at arm’s length. Hungarians there cannot be mentioned because that would directly bring up the issue of Soviet oppression.” See Péter Kende (1984), “A kisebbségek és a magyar sérelemérzet” (Minorities and Grievances of Hungarians), *Hírmondó* (July), p. 50.

¹⁷⁶ “Beköszöntő” (Introduction) (1983), *Hírmondó* No. 1 (November), p. 2.

“The editors of *Hírmondó* do not make a secret of their worries that the Hungarian horizon is imprisoned by the solidarity toward Hungarians abroad and behind the Carpathian mountains Prague, Warsaw, and Bucharest are lost in the fog.” Editorial team (1983), *Hírmondó* No. 2 (December) p. 3.

¹⁷⁷ “Beköszöntő” (Introduction) (1983), *Hírmondó* No. 1 (November), p. 2.

that minority issue was one of many interrelated concerns: “when we raise our voice against the atrocities plaguing Hungarians in Romania, we must do the same with respect to atrocities against Romanians.”¹⁷⁸ The attitude of *Hírmondó* differed from that of *Demokrata* inasmuch as the latter gave primacy to the national question over regional problems.

The propagated solutions also formed an important element of the identity of various opposition groups. The intellectual circle of *Hírmondó* put their trust into the democratic movement of the region: “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, which rise above the power elites that oppress nations and play them out against each other.”¹⁷⁹ “I will not bother to demand from the Hungarian government to act in the interest of the Hungarians in Romania. I would rather turn to the (certainly small number of) Romanian democrats in order to ‘solve our common problems.’”¹⁸⁰

Hírmondó intellectuals represented an open view of the question of borders and Hungarians living outside the Hungarian border: they did not get submerged in reviving the past and rejected even the theoretical possibility of border revisions. Instead, they advocated more open borders, i.e. more freedom for individuals.¹⁸¹ “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. To mention an issue that troubles us much: if Hungarians in Slovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Ukraine could more easily work in, move to or attend schools in Hungary, all the concerned nations would be happier and the nationalistic hatred would decrease in the Carpathian Basin.”¹⁸² Instead of states, they were thinking in terms of peoples: “The proposal for open borders finds the rapprochement and the joining of forces of the people – and not the states – of Eastern Europe desirable.”¹⁸³

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*. “[M]any 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.”¹⁸⁴ “How insincere was the calculation through which the beneficiaries of 1956 hushed up the soul and ambitions of the nation.”¹⁸⁵ “Oh,

¹⁷⁸ Pál Szalai (1984), “Amivel nem tudok egyetérteni” (What I cannot agree with), *Hírmondó* (July), p. 52.

¹⁷⁹ “Beköszöntő” (Introduction) (1983), *Hírmondó* No. 1 (November), p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Pál Szalai (1984), “Amivel nem tudok egyetérteni” (What I cannot agree with), *Hírmondó* (July), p. 53.

See also: “In Romania Hungarians can never have the rights that they should if the Romanian public does not help and support them. In this matter the Romanian democrats at home and in exile could play a historic role [...] I suggest that that you and the Romanian public should start a dialogue.” “Tamás Gáspár Miklós nyílt levele Mihai Korne-hoz” (The open letter of Gáspár M. Tamás to Mihai Korne) (1984), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), p. 27.

¹⁸¹ Views contrary to this were usually not articulated in *Hírmondó*. The following opinion is one of the few exceptions “It is [...] very easy to refer to individual freedoms and this happens quite often here. It is the easiest argument to make, because it is a cause blessed with permanent reasons – it is almost part of everyday life. [...] if the opposition wants to explain everything within the framework of political freedoms, then it will not be able to touch upon the majority of the problems. [...] I see the coming of the time when the opposition grows up to this problem and can exert national political rationales and universal political vehemence for them. Of course, the precondition of this is that [...] abstract demand of liberty be understood as a necessity for the survival of the country.” Remarks by a reader (1984), “Korlátainkról” (On our limitations), *Hírmondó* (February- March), pp. 22-23.

¹⁸² Editors (1983), “Határainkról” (On our limitations), *Hírmondó* No. 2 (December), p. 1.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁴ Imre Kármentő (1986), “Az elnyomás csöndje” (The silence of oppression), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 13.

¹⁸⁵ A somewhat frightened democrat (1987), “A valóság másik arca avagy: ki mivel játszik” (The other face of reality or who plays what?), *Demokrata* No. 7-8, p. 29.

when will October 23, the persistent light – the eternal spring – in the national autumn, finally be a red-letter day?”¹⁸⁶

The fact that the opposition was committed to the national question did not mean that they propagated one single solution. “Progress in Hungary,” they wrote, “must be void of ‘integral nationalism’. The belief in ‘the absoluteness of one’s own nation’ is chauvinism. It is our old acquaintance and enemy.”¹⁸⁷

As we have noted above, the circle around *Hírmondó* believed that the solution to the problems of Hungarian minorities would come from the democratic movements of the region. As opposed to this, the circle around *Demokrata* expected the solution from the Hungarian government, which was closely connected to the fact that they defined themselves primarily through their relationship to the power elite: “No sane person believes that a word from the government and the party in Budapest would solve everything in Transylvania. The problem is not such a misconception of the reality or the maliciousness of the opposition. The problem is rooted in the fact that the government in Budapest does not lift a finger in the defense of 2.5 million Hungarians at international forums or within the framework of the Warsaw Treaty.”¹⁸⁸ Characteristically, they demanded toughness from the government: toughness was an important part in the identity of the opposition. “As much as the statement that the Hungarian government has no legal opportunities for the protection of Hungarian minorities is without foundation, so is the reasoning that any intervention by Budapest would only further aggravate the plight of the Hungarian minority in Romania. In the long run only the unequivocal uncovering of the truth and tough resistance works in the face of oppression. Our softness only encourages the oppressors.”¹⁸⁹

Their expression of support for Hungarian minorities went hand in hand with the criticism of the Communist power-holders in Hungary. “The Kádár regime cannot meaningfully criticize Bucharest’s policies without expressing self-criticism at the same time. Despite the many differences between the two countries, an analysis of the structure of oppression in Romania would reveal a lot of similarities with the Kádár regime’s structure of oppression. Consequently, the regime cannot allow any initiatives and their development even when they concern standing up for the Hungarians in Romania or giving the Hungarians in Transylvania or the Csángó of Moldavia practical help.”¹⁹⁰

The young intellectuals in the circle of *Égtájak között* paid very intense attention to extreme situations and conflicts. They purposefully raised their voice for the Csángó in Moldavia. “The more serious the situation there, the more important for us to know about it. Uncle Pál Péter Domokos, who is 85 years old, is a one-man institution. His concerns should be the concern of all in this country. If we participate in a run for Nicaragua, we should do so for Moldavia and for our loneliest and smallest group of brethren there. If we can give some assistance to them, we have not lived in vain.”¹⁹¹

4.2 Positions with regard to the Roma and Jewish communities

Hungarian dissident intellectuals were committed to the protection of human rights: “Let us accept the right of those living today – whether they belonged to the majority or the minority

¹⁸⁶ Csaba Öskü (1986), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 34.

¹⁸⁷ “A *Demokrata* megjegyzése” (A note by *Demokrata*) (1986), *Demokrata* No. 6, p. 19.

¹⁸⁸ Róbert Sasváry (1986), “Miért olyan szégyenlősek?” (Why are they so shy?), *Demokrata* No. 9, p. 15.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁹¹ Mikolta Bognár (1986), “Ősszel Moldvában” (Autumn in Moldavia), *Égtájak között* (Hóhatár, November), p. 52.

– to a free life. The political and the world situation oblige us to this much.”¹⁹² As part of their human rights oriented strategy, they took a decisive stand by the Roma population, which was most affected by discrimination: “I believe that today the Roma need the protection of the democrats especially.”¹⁹³ “I would again 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.”¹⁹⁴ Discussing prejudices and anti-Semitism, they stressed the complexity of the so-called “Jewish issue.” “Thus, Hungarian society should react to this issue in two ways. On the one hand it should assimilate those who wish to be assimilated, which is still not without problems today. [...] on the other hand it has to take a different stand with regard to Jews with a strong Jewish identity.”¹⁹⁵

Besides advocating solidarity with regard to the Roma, the need for reciprocity in solidarity was also stressed: “We must find or create the opportunity for the democratic movements of the Hungarian society and the endangered Roma to hold each other’s hands in order to help themselves and each other survive and move on. I believe that the soul-searching and the quest for a democratic society where the Roma will be treated as human beings is still not hopeless today.”¹⁹⁶

Judaism as an identity and minority issue came into the foreground after the open letter of Shalom,¹⁹⁷ a group of Jewish intellectuals, to the Hungarian society was published. In *Beszélő* János Kis reflected on the letter. It was welcome news, he wrote, that the fate of the Hungarian minorities abroad made the public sensitive to the situation of minorities at home and that Roma intellectuals have already spoken up for the rights of the Roma minority. Kis thought that after Salom’s open letter, the problems of the Hungarian Jews cannot be discussed in the same terms as they were discussed in the past, because the open letter spoke in the names of the Jewish youth who openly accepted their Jewish heritage. “We acknowledge the right of the individual to assimilation, but with regard to the Jewish community we believe that that they should not assimilate but integrate into this society.”¹⁹⁸ That is, instead of doing away with all the existing differences between Jews and non-Jews, the Jewish minority should cultivate their own customs and find their place within Hungarian society that way.¹⁹⁹

Kis expressed some criticism with respect to the letter, because it only allowed for two kinds of behavior: proudly accept their common Jewish identity or remain in hiding. However, he pointed out, people can choose from among many more approaches to live their life in a way that would allow Jews and non-Jews to live together in mutually respect. That is, there were many possible positions between absolute segregation and total assimilation.

¹⁹² Anonymous (1986), “Sorsközösség” (Commons fate), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 1.

¹⁹³ Ottília Solt (1985), “A korlátoltság vagy a faji uszítás rabja?” (The captive of narrow-mindedness or racial instigation?), *Hírmondó* (May-June), p. 54.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

They also rejected the comparative-demographic reasons. “From our point of view, the contrast between the incredibly high birthrate among the Roma and the low level of reproductivity of Hungarians makes no sense.” A *Hírmondó* staff member (1984), “Válasz egy olvasói levélre” (Reply to a reader), *Hírmondó* No. 9 (August), p. 33.

¹⁹⁵ Miklós Szabó (1984), “Interjú Szabó Miklóssal” (Interview with Miklós Szabó), *Hírmondó* No. 5 (April), p. 41.

¹⁹⁶ Zsolt Csalog (1988), “A cigánység a magyar társadalomban – tegnap és ma” (The Roma and the Hungarian society yesterday and today), *Demokrata* No. 6, p. 43.

¹⁹⁷ Salom (1987), “Az antiszemitizmus ellen, a demokratikus megújulásért” (Against anti-Semitism and for democratic renewal), *Beszélő* No. 21, pp. 71-73.

¹⁹⁸ János Kis (1984), “A Salom nyílt levele a Magyar társadalomhoz és a magyar zsidósághoz” (Open letter of Shalom to the Hungarian society and the Hungarian Jewish community) *Beszélő*, No. 11. pp. 58-65.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

In his reflection, László Öllős, a Hungarian author in Slovakia, stated that it is only in the interest of the oppressing state to play minorities out against each other. “It is especially advantageous for the state if the discord between Hungarians and Jews consumes the energy of the intellectuals. The state has to do nothing. It is enough if it forbids everything. It knows that in the absence of democratic minority – and of course majority – organizations and opportunities for cultural expression the discord cannot be done away with.”²⁰⁰

Öllős forecasted the strengthening of a national identity that was intolerant and discriminating, because it is not built on diversity but on an atomized society. This, he believed, was the recipe for a totalitarian state. “After Communist takeover in the region, numerous traditional interest-representing organizations and voluntary community organizations disintegrated. The church became weaker, labor unions protecting employees, voluntary economic cooperatives, many clubs and political parties disappeared. The family is in a state of crisis. This way the importance of national identity increases for many. Because, this gives a sense of belonging to the more and more atomized individual to a community. The national identity of an individual who is less and less able to accept diversity in his private relationships easily becomes discriminating. [...] Once discriminating nationalism becomes part of public consciousness, institutions become free to discriminate openly against people and this further aggravates the antagonism already present in our everyday relationships. The view that the disagreement can only be abolished by beating one’s adversary – through assimilation, genocide, forced relocation or at the least legal subjugation – may become a conviction. In the end minorities see no other option than autonomy or immigration. [...] For Hungarian Jews, there is a lot to fear from. They can fear the beneficiaries of the bureaucratic system or those who have to enforce bureaucratic interests and discriminate against them. Responding to this with counter-discrimination especially when it is closely tied to financial interests only aggravates the situation. [...] In case of social dissatisfaction a faction of the Communist party can play out the Jewish card. If the protection of certain strata becomes more important than the already weakening ties of a less and less competitive economy to the West, the party may utilize anti-Semitism. [...] This danger would be smaller if democratically organized groups came into existence. Such groups first define their own interests and then, on this basis recognize the rightfulness of the interest of other groups. As a result, they would aim at democratic cooperation and reasonable compromise with these other groups. [...] In Hungary, some Jews aspire to assimilate and want to forget and make others forget their origin. Others openly accept their heritage. Some think of themselves as Hungarians even though they preserve their Jewish heritage. Others see themselves as members of the Jewish nation who happen to live in Hungary. I would be happy if Jews in Hungary would think of Hungary as their homeland and Hungarian culture as their cultural habitat. I wish they could freely call themselves either Hungarians or Jewish origin or Jews abiding in Hungary. It would hurt me and I would regret if they should renounce their Hungarian identity. As a Hungarian I would even regret it more if they had to make excuses for, hide, or give up their Jewish identity.”²⁰¹

After the open letter of Shalom in 1987, three Hungarian authors assured Shalom of their support. Those were István Csurka, Gyula Hernádi, and György Konrád. Their ways became politically very diverging after the regime change. The twenty second issue of *Beszélő* brought news the first issue of a Jewish samizdat publication, *Magyar Zsidó*

²⁰⁰ László Öllős (1984), “A Salom nyílt levele – egy kisebbségi magyar szemével” (The open letter of Shalom – in the eye of a Hungarian living in minority abroad) *Beszélő* No. 16. p. 411.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 412-413.

(Hungarian Jew), in October 1987: This is the first samizdat publication that wished to speak in the name of a well-identified group.”²⁰²

5. Discourse on Religion, Peace, and Environmentalism

5.1 Issues in Church and Religion

In the first of *Beszélő*'s existence Christian communities, national identity and the problems concerning Hungarian minorities abroad were not among the issues that formed integral parts of the identity of the circle of individuals around *Beszélő*. When they appeared, they were viewed with the eyes of an outsider and they surfaced in reports that focused on other issues. In other words, these issues 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 Catholic dissidents²⁰³ and the Adventist church²⁰⁴ are worth mentioning. The article concerning the former 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. The juniors in seminary schools speaks about the clerical profession, but in reality mean a ‘prophetic mission’ by it. The clerical leadership uses the same words to mean “loyalty to the church” by identifying with its institutions. The junior seminarist soon becomes a senior without noticing that the clerical profession he was taught so much about is no longer his profession. Everything from the daily schedule through the ready-made ideology to atomization of spiritual life works in this direction. The seminarists do not control the development of their profession and get lost in the maze of ideologies and theories that have nothing to do with real life. This way they become unconsciously alienated from their profession. They do not even notice that they represent the interest of the ruling class. They think there is freedom only manipulation exists. [...] The church exercises total control over the churches and directs their lives indirectly. No longer do we have a chance to protect ourselves legally. The priest can turn to his bishop less and less, or the seminarist to his superior, and the discriminated church member to his parson. In reality, every existing institution and forum that was to prove the independence of the church works against the powerless. It suppresses individual initiatives, denies the hopes of the community and the chance for a collective identity. All this endangers the fundamentals of the Catholic Church as well. Many are haunted by the thought of stepping out of this vicious circle.

“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-minded 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 concessions they serve the state, which has not given up on silencing dissidents. Their mantra is ‘compromises’ and ‘realism’. [...] What do they find real? The beautiful rhetoric about the freedom of the church, the words of the leading bureaucrats of the Ministry of Interior who thinks that “we must know everything, please understand, we even

²⁰² Ferenc Kőszeg (1987), “Új és újjáéledt samizdatlapok” (New and Resurrected Samizdats), *Beszélő* No. 22, pp. 208-209.

²⁰³ János Wildmann (1981) “A magyar katolikus máskéntgondolkodókhoz” (To Hungarian Catholic dissidents), *Beszélő* No.1, pp. 21-24. and “Beszélgetés egy katolikus pappal” (Conversation with a Catholic priest), *Beszélő* No. 1, pp. 24-25.

²⁰⁴ Gábor Iványi (1982), “Kitaszított adventisták” (Adventist outcasts), *Beszélő* No. 4. pp. 194-197.

have to know when you attend church, because everything depends on us and everything is in our control.’

“The more dangerous way of leaving this vicious circle is to become a secret agent of the state. Some are held in check and forced to give information to the State Office of Church Matters because of a moral slip committed in the past. Others are ready to provide information, because they cannot tolerate the maddening tension. For the church, priests giving out information on it are the most dangerous. They are also the ones to be pitied most. They degrade themselves and their profession. They cannot leave the circle at all. Rather the circle closes in around them. They remain strangers among their ‘new friends’, since they do respect them, either. This is the way of tragic disunity and moral decay and not of breaking free.

“The number of those vegetating is not small either. They are priests who lost their goals and who do not find their way in unfamiliar surroundings, either. Their profession is turned into secondary activities: bee-keeping, pig farming, injection moulding. [...] This is not a special strata, because the behavior of ‘loyal’ believer. They are also realists: even though they cannot be forced to cringe, but they do nothing that would make their trustworthiness questionable. Konrád said of them at the 1977 Venice Biennale: “The twentieth century had the pattern of absolute evil in the form of camps. Those who have made these camps are not mad criminals, only loyal – too loyal – citizens of the state. The emblem of the totalitarian state is not the executioner but the pedant bureaucrat who is more loyal to his superiors than to his friends.”

“Most priests – especially the younger ones – do not choose this distorted escapism but dive into work with pure enthusiasm. They walk with open eyes, visit the sick, help the needy, look for new opportunities to tend to their flock of believers and gather groups around themselves. Their work is effective, but this has its pitfalls. In return for doing their job without outside intervention, these priests may give up another important part of their profession: the conscious creation of a unified personality through their work. In their belief that they are doing their job well, it does not even occur to them that their solidarity has been bought and that their obligations to the church have been replaced by obligation to subordinate the more powerful.”²⁰⁵

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 trial the Catholic church has been in the deadly embrace of power. It – or at least its leadership – has clung to power in order to protect their positions in this world. We see the recreation of church figures who desperately cling to power. We do not expect any progress from above.”²⁰⁶ 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’.²⁰⁷

What opposition figures close to *Demokrata* thought about Judaism as a religion was condensed in the way they welcomed their “sister publication,” a *Magyar Zsidó*, in 1987.²⁰⁸ Many did not understand the need for such a journal. Nonetheless, *Demokrata* intellectuals expressed their opinion in the framework of democratic ideals. According to them, “in the orchestra of growing democratic public thought, there is not only room for a new instrument,

²⁰⁵ János Wildmann (1981), “A magyar katolikus máskéntgondolkodókhöz” (To Hungarian Catholic dissidents), *Beszélő* No. 1. pp. 21-24.

²⁰⁶ Ákos Györi (1987), “Halálos ölelés” (Deadly Embrace), *Demokrata* No. 4. p.15.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ *Demokrata* (1987), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 22.

but it must also have an important role.”²⁰⁹ 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.”²¹⁰

The opposition figures with close ties to *Demokrata* supported religious Jews in their desire to openly accept their religiousness: “The customary cautiousness is not the right kind of behavior, because as a result of loyalty, fear, or perhaps hysteria, it always results in silence and in an attempt to escape one’s own identity and the questions posed by reality. The creation of this journal expresses moral strength and real desire for freedom. Its presence strengthens and not weakens the opposition, giving evidence that God only spits at the indifferent.”²¹¹

5.2. Peace Movements and Young Men’s Refusal to Serve in the Army

Beszélő devoted regular attention to peace movements and those who denied military service. An entire article was devoted to peace movements within the Catholic Church.²¹²

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”²¹³ and their reasoning often referred back to 1956. “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...”²¹⁴

They also spoke up against superpower ambitions and armament from time to time: “It is still senseless to die for such a silly question as who should rule the world – Russia or America? Neither should rule. It is the right or the destiny of neither of these states to lead the world...”²¹⁵

The contributors of the *Demokrata* found superpower competition senseless and regularly raised their voice against it: “The West that has pursued an immoral policy until recently had and still have to bear the everyday humiliation of common sense, the sophisticated nature of the Soviet’s given word, the untrue twisting of words, because the monster with a green tin hat blackmail the world with death by the atomic bomb as long as the Lilliputian legion of microchips beats the ruthless and senseless sheer force and common sense wins. Let it be.”²¹⁶

The opposition often returned to the weakness of the Hungarian army. It was important from the point of view of their identity to describe the modern Hungarian army they advocated as an army not to be used for intervention. “Hungarian leaders know it well that the Hungarian army would not be able to retreat in a conflict, because even retreat necessitates organized behavior. In case we want a real, national army that represents the national interest,

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 22.

²¹² Miklós Haraszti (1982), “Nem ütni és nem visszaütni. Pacifista mozgalom a magyar katolikus egyházban” (Not to hit and not to hit back: the pacifist movement within the Hungarian Catholic church), *Beszélő* No. 2. pp. 65-72.

²¹³ György Konrád (1986), “Antipolitika” (Anti-politics), *Égtájak között* (Más. A, February), pp. 28, 34.

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 28, 34.

²¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 29, 35.

“Neither the success of the Russians nor the Americans would mean victory for us. Therefore it is worthless to risk an atomic war for the victory of either of them.” Ibid. p. 37.

²¹⁶ Csaba Öskü (1986), *Demokrata* No. 11, p. 34. This prophetic style was characteristic of *Demokrata*.

then its size must be scaled down immediately. We need a professional army of about 120,000-130,000 soldiers with modern weaponry. A flexible and efficient air force with an appropriate locator system would be able to patrol the Hungarian airspace and represent an effective deterrent force in a conflict.”²¹⁷

Demokrata paid special attention to those who refused to serve their time in the armed forces.²¹⁸ 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...”²¹⁹ “A few members of the Hungarian democratic opposition has committed itself in a public announcement to follow the case of Zsolt Keszthelyi and his fellow sufferers.”²²⁰ They also suggested policy change that would allow these young people to complete their military service in the form of civilian service.²²¹

5.3 Eco-politics and the Politics of the Opposition

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 on, the in Chernobyl in 1986. Environmental protection quickly got on the agenda of the democratic opposition.²²² Besides supporting articles, soon environmental circles, groups and movements also appeared.

Their appearance was made possible by the fact that 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 multi-party system. They only wanted clean air and water. Their regime criticism was not motivated by any classic 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-political action, advocacy by the Duna Kör (Danube Circle) and the collection of signature in demand of a referendum.²²³ These helped do away with the society’s fear of the system step by step.

The meeting of the opposition at Monor, in June 1985, which was organized in a conspiratorial fashion and attended by forty-five Hungarian intellectuals, did not have any direct impact despite its intellectual and political significance. István Csurka, Sándor Csoóri,

²¹⁷ Béla Igaz (1986), “Elit vagy tömeghadsereg” (Elite or mass army), *Égtájak között* (Hóhatár, November), p. 26.

²¹⁸ 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. “Keszthelyi Zsolt börtönbüntetése” (Zsolt Keszthelyi’s imprisonment), (1987), *Demokrata* No. 6, p. 1.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²²¹ “Compulsory military service and drafting must be abolished in Hungary. Until this happens, privates must be allowed to serve in a civilian capacity. There is a greater need for caretakers in hospitals and old people’s homes than for long service in an over expanded and outdated army. As long as the necessary legal guarantees are made, an amnesty should be declared so as to free those who denied military service for reasons of conscience and, thus, were imprisoned.” *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²²² Zoltán Endreffy (1986), “Csernobil és az atomprogram” (Chernobyl and the nuclear energy program) *Beszélő*, No. 17. pp. 463-465.

²²³ Miklós Haraszti (1986), “Duna-dosszié” (The Danube Files), *Beszélő* No. 16, pp. 367-375.

Tamás Bauer and János Kis all spoke up.²²⁴ The date was also significant. By this time the opposition could act more freely and its activities were more momentous. In the second half of the decade the accelerating political activities became the forerunners of the political parties that came to be formed at regime transition.

Hírmondó's articles on environmental issues were significant. The problem appeared with greater frequency from its fourth volume on. Environmental protection became part of *Hírmondó's* identity when in the twenty-first issue of the fourth volume a new column was established on environmentalism. The opposition was divided over the subject of environmentalism. One group called itself 'the environmentalists'; they stood up against political, economic, and technological concentration of power. The other group, even though felt strongly about the environment, was critical of the environmental movement. They called attention to the dangers of a hypothetical "Green dictatorship".

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 protest 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."²²⁵ This environmental discourse was characterized by strong moral value judgment: "Austria builds itself a dam at Nagymaros. What is this if not the selling of the country?"²²⁶

Among others, it was the moral implacability of the environmentalists to the criticism of the other opposition group. "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 alternative terror over necessities – a hypothetical green dictatorship – is also a negative utopia."²²⁷

The *Demokrata* dissidents' attitude toward the environment was similar to *Hírmondó's*. They identified with environmental problems but criticized the environmental movement. Their criticism mostly concerned their amateurism: "The demonstration of the Duna Kör (Danube Circle) against the suicidal dam at Nagymaros took place recently. The demonstration was finally cancelled or, rather an unsuccessful abortive attempt was the result. [...] Even a successful demonstration would only have been a lesson for the democratic opposition, which although inconvenient might have at least brought dividends because of the things learned. But what happened was not even a good exercise at learning. It was disappointing and only showed how little we know about our opportunities and how to organize. We must learn to do it, because it is not a shame to lose but to be a patsy?"²²⁸

The opposition agreed with the goals of the environmental movements, but did not agree with their means, which they also found lacking." Publicity is no longer adequate, it would now be necessary to do something and not only speak. They should do what they did not have the courage to do so far: start an openly political movement, use demonstrations in order to prove the severity of environmental problems, and fight for and demonstrate the support of society. Although the Duna Kör is aware of the ecological issues, it does not know

²²⁴ János Kis (1986), "A monori tanácskozás" (The Monor meeting), *Beszélő* No. 16, pp. 403-404.

²²⁵ Zoltán Endreffy (1986) "Atomenergia, demokrácia, decentralizáció" (Atomic energy, democracy, decentralization), *Hírmondó* No. 4 (April-June), pp. 25-27.

²²⁶ The Blues (1986), "Eladó a magyar táj!" (The Hungarian landscape is up for grabs!), *Hírmondó* No. 4 (August-September), p. 27.

²²⁷ Gábor Denszky (1986), "Csernobil" (Chernobyl), *Hírmondó* No. 4 (April-June), p. 7.

²²⁸ Demokrata (1986), "Egy elmaradt tüntetés után; Kell-e tüntetni és ha nem, akkor hogyan?" (After a cancelled demonstration; do we need protest and if not, then how?), *Demokrata* No. 1-2, p. 14.

what to do with social problems. It has not analyzed the strategy of its opponents [...] and put its trust into something else than its own strength. We support the struggle against the monstrous dam with all our hearts, but we wish the Duna Circle had more self-esteem and self-confidence.”²²⁹

6. Censorship, Arts, and Sub-cultural Activities

6.1 Cultural Patterns of Protest

The rebirth of the culturally articulating critical behavior was marked first by the different sub-cultures, organized around the young and music. These sub-cultures were connected to punks and to the ‘new wave’. The peak of ‘new wave’ was in 1980-83. The magical effect of the representative bands was increased by the heightened preparation, and that their songs were not broadcasted on the radio and their records were not allowed to be put on the market for a long time. The top-class representative bands – like URH, Kontroll Csoport (Control Group), Bizottság (Committee) and the Európa Kiadó (Europe Publishers) – had a wide range of ideas they represented in their lyrics. Besides songs that could be understood as politically oppositional, there were also lyrics about the global questions of the human race as it is, of the meaning of culture and of the chances of survival.²³⁰

The different literary-artistic groups and their halos could also be found in this informally organizing cultural space. One can list here the wider circle of the journal *Mozgó Világ*, some literary societies which were connected to the “bum culture,” the Attila József Circle of Young Writers (JAK) and the readers of the JAK-booklets started by them, the István Örley Circle, the very much diffuse and avant-garde groups of Studio K, Lajos Vajda Studio, Műcsarnok Art Kino, and the Young Artists’ Club. These circles many times intermingled, there was live communication among them, and many times the same people came to their programs.

It is as hard to separate or decompose the members of these circles, as it is difficult to make any sort of generalization. But there was one obvious tendency: there used to be a sort of zeal in people to finally see the truth, and a dumping of sociographies and different genres of documentaries appeared. After that other demands – like the need for ‘clear’ aesthetic quality and self-centered art – seemed to recruit and appear in avant-gardism, post-modernism, and sometimes in anti-socialist tendencies. The revealing sociographies – besides wanting to raise social indignation – basically still moved within the framework of old reformist illusions. Its makers still trusted that by contrasting the principles with reality they could somehow convince the assigned political agents – the ‘authorized ones’ – about the need for reform and change coming from above. But here one can see somewhat different tendencies. In literature, beside Péter Hajnóczy (who died young in 1979) came Péter Esterházy and others, in cinematic art beside the pieces of Gyula Gazdag, Béla Tarr, István Dárdai, Gyöngyi Szalai and the Gulyás-brothers came the experimental works of Gábor Bódy and András Jeles. A cult had risen around the *homo aestheticus* in general.²³¹ The effect of the revealing ‘socio’-genres – according to this approach – was only partial because it had stayed

²²⁹ Virágkedvelő (1988), “Beszámoló” (Report), *Demokrata* No. 4. p. 32.

²³⁰ For more details see András Bozóki (1982), “A zene nem zene, a szöveg nem szöveg: töredék a hazai új hullámról” (The music is not music, the lyric is not lyric: fragments about the Hungarian New Wave), in János Sebők, ed., *Rock Évkönyv 1981* (Rock yearbook 1981). Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, pp. 151-164; András Bozóki (1983), “Ez már nem esztétika: rock és társadalom, tegnap és ma” (This is no longer aesthetics: rock and society, yesterday and today), *Iffjúsági Szemle* Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 71-81.

²³¹ Especially around such literary figures as Béla Hamvas, Dezső Kosztolányi, Géza Ottlik, Ágnes Nemes Nagy and the former *Újhold*-circle.

on the level of individual cases, while art was degraded into applied art and literature was degraded into applied literature. The need to get out of this trap led towards abstract aesthetic quality, sarcastic humor, and new experiments. The critical elements of this behavior can be found precisely in the turning away from the social reformer intentions, which were considered illusions. Literature that became authentic “was made in the spirit of precise, loose neutrality” – as one of the young writers of the age, István Kemény wrote.²³²

In this context one can mention the alternative lifestyle movement as well: psychoclubs, sects rooted in the Eastern cultures, yoga movement, and the spread of religious base communities. The common feature of these movements was that they all strengthened the escapist ideologies: personality-idealism, need for the transcendent, a blurry and indirect critical behavior alloyed in them. Inconnu Group – a group of political content, which turned towards the critical-oppositional art – and the literary-artistic group, called Underpress, were representatives of a transitional phenomenon that approached politics from a cultural point of view.

6.2. Censorship and the Need for the Freedom of Culture

In its first issue *Beszélő* already reported about the Bibó-memorial book,²³³ which was the first joint and comprehensive intellectual effort in Hungary ever since the existence of the Petőfi Circle in 1956. In this memorial book dozens of authors praised and analyzed the views of the social philosopher, István Bibó, who had been imprisoned and then neglected by the Kádár regime. Bibó appeared to have the potential to be such a reference point for various opposition groups as Jan Patočka was for the Czech and Karol Wojtyła was for the Poles.

Beszélő also discussed the 1981 University-College Days, the movements of university students,²³⁴ which was inspired by the self-limiting revolution of Solidarity and protest against censorship, early on. One of the editors, Ferenc Kőszeg, devoted a long article to book censorship practices.²³⁵ He stressed the point that despite the official propaganda, censorship did exist in Hungary. Another well-known figure, Miklós Haraszti analyzed in detail the judicial proceeding against a punk band in Szeged that displayed a critical attitude to the regime.²³⁶ 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 as participants of a music event that was problematic for the authorities or as subject of judicial proceedings because there was a Radio Free Europe news item among the songs of tapes that were confiscated by the authorities.²³⁷

As much as it could, the democratic opposition followed the problems that the editors of literary magazines faced. These were the attempts of certain general editors and magazines (*Mozgó Világ*, *Tiszatáj*) at uniformity. *Beszélő* dealt with the problems concerning the monthly, *Mozgó Világ*, already in its second issue.²³⁸

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

²³² “Egy konzervatív fiatal. Interjú Kemény Istvánnal” (A young conservative. Interview with István Kemény), (1987) *Kritika* No. 2, p. ?

²³³ Miklós Szabó (1981), “A Bibó-émlékkönyv” (The Bibó memorial book), *Beszélő* No. 1. pp. 48-49.

²³⁴ Sándor Szilágyi (1981), “Tétova zendülők” (Hesitant rebels), *Beszélő* No. 1, pp. 15-20.

²³⁵ Ferenc Kőszeg (1982), “A könyvkiadói cenzúra Magyarországon” (Book censorship in Hungary), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. pp. 239-248.

²³⁶ Miklós Haraszti (1982), “A szegedi punkháború” (The punk war in Szeged), *Beszélő* Nos. 5-6. pp. 287-289.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 287-289.

²³⁸ Sándor Szilágyi (1983), “Zabolátlan szerkesztők. A *Mozgó Világ* mozgalmas éve” (Rampageous editors. The hectic year of *Mozgó Világ*), *Beszélő* No. 2. pp. 72-79.

in the monolithic regime. At the 1981 Congress of the Writers' Association, the well-known opposition writer, István Eörsi, suggested with irony to the representative of power who were present 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, i.e. self-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.

Beszélő also paid attention to the conflicts involving the József Attila Circle, a group of young writers, disseminated information about the publications of the secondary public sphere and the samizdat boutiques that sold opposition publications, and kept publishing documents relating to the 1956 revolution. It brought news about the appearance and content of *Magyar Füzetek*, *Magyar Figyelő*, and *Szféra* – all published in Paris –, the Monday Free University organized by the opposition and the cultural programs of the Fund for Supporting the Poor (SZETA), which was another opposition initiative.²³⁹ The questions concerning the identity of the opposition surfaced in certain book reviews, which were published from 1984 on. For instance, the aesthete and literary critic Sándor Radnóti described oppositional behavior as a kind of literary attitude and discussed how such Hungarian authors as György Spiró and Péter Esterházy integrated the “unbearable world of bearing with everything” into their texts.²⁴⁰

The thinking and discussion of the opposition can be best described as one in which the situation of women and feminism did not appear even at the cultural level. Women as a social group was first mentioned only in 1988 when the Madzsar Alice Group of Fialat Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Young Democrats, Fidesz) organized an all female demonstration against the building of the dam at Nagymaros. In an interview, one of the main organizers, Zsuzsa Szelényi, defensively distanced herself from feminism which was understood at the time as a synonym of being hostile to men: “Of course, if one hears that this was an all female demonstration, one immediately thinks that this was an anti-male, feminist thing. As opposed to this, the stress is on the point that we, women, can *also* do something. Women have more judgments about biologically based social roles such as the family or the protection of one's health”²⁴¹ In general feminism had a negative connotation in Hungary and the opposition groups were no exception to such a view. Only among the younger generation of the opposition did this become an intellectual factor *albeit* not a decisive one.

Beszélő and *Hírmondó* did not much discuss subcultures. One critical writer scolded these journals precisely because of this lack: “I admire the editors of *Beszélő* and *Hírmondó*, but I do not feel that they know the marginalized bands of today...”²⁴² Subcultures did have their own problems even if *Hírmondó* did not write about them. “There are a lot of bands that cannot get anywhere because of the state's cultural policies and I do not only have punk bands in mind. It would be timely to put the underground music anthology of the 1980s

²³⁹ Miklós Haraszti (1983), “Állóképek a második nyilvánosságról” (Stills about the secondary public sphere), *Beszélő* No. 1. pp. 50-54.

²⁴⁰ Sándor Radnóti (1982), “Valami az első samizdat-verseskötetről” (Something on the first samizdat poetry book), *Beszélő* Nos. 5–6. pp. 290-293.

²⁴¹ Sándor Szilágyi (1988), “Lássák csak, hogy nincs igazuk! Interjú Szelényi Zsuzsa pszichológus egyetemi hallgatóval, a szeptember 17-i nagymarosi nőtüntetés egyik szervezőjével” (Let them see they are wrong! Interview with psychology major and one of the organizers of the September 17 women's protest in Nagymaros Zsuzsa Szelényi), *Beszélő* No. 25, p. 583.

²⁴² Róbert Pálincás Szűts (1985), “Nyílt levél egy kortársamhoz” (Open letter to a contemporary), *Demokrata* (May-June), p. 58.

together...²⁴³ In *Beszélő* social issues (which do not belong to the topics of this paper) forced cultural issues in the background.

In *Demokrata* there were no debates about the role of underground music and artistic groups, either. Soccer, as a subculture, appeared several times and the opposition criticized the lack of freedom of choice in this field as well.²⁴⁴ *Demokrata* brought up the effect of spreading Western popular culture, but this was almost always turned into the criticism of the regime. The creation of an alternative identity went in a consistent fashion: “The ninja made its appearance in Budapest. [...] The ninja movies are made for immature and uneducated people of bad taste. This is not the only product of the entertainment industry of the West that is capable of reducing the quality of public demand. [...] The ninja movies and similar products should not be banned but boycotted. [...] The question is why the directors of Hungarian cultural politics satisfied the thirst of those who wish to see such movies? Perhaps because the multiplying signs of crisis make the motto *panem et circenses* timelier than ever. The idea is to add entertainment to bread when the meat that goes with the bread is smaller and smaller.”²⁴⁵

Those close to *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 materials have no practice. This is so, because under great pressure the political counter-opinion is at loggerheads with political counter-practice, leaving no room for the arts.”²⁴⁶

They published the works of such artists that were marginalized or silence by the official “canonizers”. Gizella Hervay’s self-interview²⁴⁷ gives testimony to their attitude, “We could fend off the responsibility. We were all accomplices. This self-interview is both an indictment and a cry for help.”²⁴⁸

Epilogue

In the first part of the 1980s, the democratic opposition created its own ideology in the course of the debate that was carried out on the pages of samizdat journals, primarily, those of *Beszélő*. In the center of their ideology stood Western-type liberal democracy, human rights, social market economy, solidarity with the Hungarians outside Hungary and other social and cultural minorities.

After the debate in *Beszélő* the balance shifted toward the creation of an action program. The program-making article, “*Hogyan keressünk kiutat a válságból?*” (How to find a way out of the crisis?) appeared in the middle of the debate over identity in 1982.²⁴⁹ 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. “The state will

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁴⁴ The narrowly understood sub-cultures also take on a (more) general scope.

²⁴⁵ Gergő diák (1987), “Betiltani?” (To ban it?), *Demokrata* No. 1, p. 46.

²⁴⁶ Mikolta Bognár (1988), “Levegőt! – Alternatív közművelődési koncepciók; Interjú Talata Józseffel és Bognár Mikoltával” (Fresh air! – Alternative concepts of public education; Interview with József Talata and Mikolta Bognár), *Égtájak között* (Körhinta, February), p. 19.

²⁴⁷ Gizella Heltay (1988) “Beszélgetés önmagammal” (Conversations with myself), *Égtájak között* February, p.6.

²⁴⁸ Editors (1986), *Égtájak között* (Más. A, February), p. 2.

Gizella Heltay committed suicide in 1982. Contemporary literary anthologies that appeared in 1986 did not carry her poems.

²⁴⁹ János Kis (1982), “Hogyan keressünk kiutat a válságból? A Beszélő javaslatai” (How to find a way out of the crisis? Suggestions by *Beszélő*), *Beszélő* No. 5–6 (December), pp. 233-238.

only act when public opinion keeps them under moral and intellectual pressure.”²⁵⁰ 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 oppositional identity and its problems were best summarized by Ferenc Kőszeg in the 19th issue of *Beszélő*. “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. It cannot even provide a form of communication for those (e.g. the young people) who demand it. Its members would, thanks God, 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 that is destined to lead the fight. The few dozen intellectuals could not call itself a mass party, either.”²⁵¹

Kőszeg analyzed some obvious signs of disintegration of the political system. “The democratic opposition in its present form is an opinion and behavior shaping group. [...] It is more important to spread the behavioral attitude of the opposition than exert intellectual influence through publications. Today the issue is not only that independent groups publish samizdat journals and collect signatures the way the opposition had been doing it for eight years, but that prestigious social groups – almost entire research institutes – also experiment with legal resistance or step over the rules of the game that were arbitrarily defined by the power elite. The general assembly of the Writers’ Association, which voted out the representatives of power of the association by fair voting procedures and thus forces the power elite to break its own rules, exemplifies the first; the facts that prestigious writers publish in samizdat journals and that all the employees of research institutes participate at meetings that are held in private apartments and could easily be called illegal exemplifies the latter. Once disobedience happens too often, the dividing line between the behavior of the opposition and others is blurred and the retribution of power should smite so many people that the means that were used to punish them in the past become inadequate. Hungarian society starts to rediscover the means of expressing its political will. Political debates are no longer the exclusive right of the functionaries of the nomenclatura.”²⁵²

For Kőszeg, the emerging social and political problems in Hungary determined the tasks of the democratic opposition. He believed that, despite the obvious weaknesses of the opposition, its moral authority would give enough strength for achieving its goals. “Hungary entered the era of political debate again. Party leaders fighting for succession, company leaders, entrepreneurs, writers, the popular front, labor unions, and even the parliament on occasion take part in the in politics. As the economic situation continues to worsen, the workers worried about their jobs and the farmers who will not be able to sell their products at good price will engage in politics, too. [...] In this increasingly politicized world the opposition, whose gestures and genesis make it a political grouping, must engage in politics as well. Not because we should expect that the government sooner or later wants to negotiate with us. To be honest, we do not desire that situation. But we can be – we should be – in a constantly debating relationship with those groups that are in a potentially or almost real negotiating position. In order to debate, we must clearly state our own views on radical economic reforms, the political demands related to such reforms, unemployment, Hungarians living outside of Hungary, the great degree of immigration to the mother country, worsening living conditions – in other words on issues that concern the politically-minded part of the

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 247.

²⁵¹ Ferenc Kőszeg (1987), “Ne csak építkezz... Politizájlj!” (Do not only build... Make politics!) *Beszélő*, No. 19. pp. 701-705.

²⁵² Ibid. pp. 701-705.

society. And we have to make our voice heard beyond the independent press – in clubs, public gatherings and on such organized meetings as the Monor meeting was. Not that we believe that we own the sorcerer’s stone just because our opposition status. But it is only the opposition that has criticized the actions of the government publicly and without concealment for seven years. This 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.”²⁵³

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. It was written by Miklós Haraszti, János Kis, Ferenc Kőszeg and Ottília Solt. The document made it clear that the consensus of the Kádár years was over and “Kádár must go”.²⁵⁴ The authors said that a radical political turn was necessary, but without a social contract the nation will not rise. It is not enough to be grumble: new policies must be sought. The power elite will only engage in dialogue if it understands that it has to negotiate with more than just the intelligentsia. The document also stressed the necessity of an economic stability package, which builds on political change. The goals of the 1956 revolution – multi-party system, self-government at the workplace and at settlements, national self-determination, neutrality in foreign policy – were still valid.

The program elaborated on the following demands: 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, fair social policies, and civil rights. Its chapter entitled *Tágabb összefüggések* (The broader context) dealt with the relationship of Hungary and the Soviet Union, the problems of Hungarians living outside the borders, and the heritage of 1956 in Hungarian politics.

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The activities of *Beszélő* and the democratic opposition, analyzed in this paper, ended in 1988-9.²⁵⁵ Between 1987 and 1989 the real issue was not their identity but the active role they played in the regime change. Besides the disagreement between the ‘népi’ intellectuals of Lakitelek and the democratic opposition, these years were characterized by the appearance of two distinct groups along the division between the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the SZDSZ. The former dissidents became part of pluralistic politics. The twenty-fourth issue of *Beszélő* informed its readers about two public meetings held by Fidesz.²⁵⁶ The next issue published the news of the November 13, 1988 founding of the SZDSZ.²⁵⁷

The changing political situation resulted in a change in the balance of power, which was best expressed by the publication of the *Nyilatkozat* (Declaration) against police brutalities, which was signed by 300 intellectuals – and not only by a small minority of it. The *Nyilatkozat* (Declaration) gave voice to decisive protest against brutal police proceedings. “There is a disquieting and appalling contradiction in that leading politician stress their aspirations toward democracy and their willingness to engage in dialogue, but in the meantime organizations under their direction and certainly by their orders openly display

²⁵³ Ibid. pp. 701-705.

²⁵⁴ Miklós Haraszti et al. (1987), *Társadalmi Szerződés: A politikai kibontakozás feltételei* (Social Contract: The conditions of political progress) *Beszélő* special issue

²⁵⁵ Although the samizdat *Beszélő* existed until mid-1989, its functions changed rapidly. It became one of the voices of the emerging political pluralism. From late 1989, *Beszélő* changed its form, editorial board and frequency of publication. It became a political weekly to respond to speedy political changes more adequately.

²⁵⁶ “Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége” (The Alliance of Young Democrats) (1988), *Beszélő* No. 24, pp. 403-404.

²⁵⁷ “Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége” (The Alliance of Free Democrats) (1988), *Beszélő* No. 25, pp. 654-655.

violence. We believe that after thirty years time has come for the Hungarian state to take the expression of the views of its citizens with civilized self-control. We demand that responsible political leadership prohibit police atrocities.”²⁵⁸

Finally, János Kis’ article, published in 1989, titled as “Mit képvisel a *Beszélő*?” (What does *Beszélő* represent?),²⁵⁹ summarized *Beszélő*’s history and talked about the tasks awaiting the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ). “In 1987 the program of 1983 is outdated. Today the democratic opposition is not alone in demanding unequivocal, codified and institutionally protected rights. The views of the public are well beyond the compromise the opposition suggested four years ago. In the meantime it also became clear that instead of initiating reforms, the Kádár regime reacted with stubborn inflexibility to pressure. As a result, the *Társadalmi Szerződés* (Social contract) went beyond its sketchy predecessor. The initial steps described in this text can be quite easily supplemented so as to lead to multi-party democracy. On the one hand, legal limitations on the power of the party, on the other hand freedom of assembly, the press and the creation of parliamentary fractions could lead to party pluralism. This was the basic idea behind the *Társadalmi Szerződés* (Social contract) for the near future. At least equal significance was attributed to its first two paragraphs where we made it clear that “Kádár must go”. It had a much deeper message than just saying that the time of the party secretary expired. Kádár personified the restoration of 1956-1957. His inevitable fall symbolized the end of an era.”²⁶⁰

The dissident circles first came to form a critical public sphere and, later on, the political opposition. As soon as the possibility of free elections materialized, the democratic opposition stepped out of its role as critics of the regimes and became part of the new, democratic regime. From then on, its history can be followed in the daily press and the electronic media.

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²⁵⁸ “Tiltakozás” (Protest) (1988), *Beszélő* No. 24. p. 449.

²⁵⁹ János Kis (1989), “Mit képvisel a *Beszélő*?” (What does *Beszélő* represent?), *Beszélő* No. 26, pp. 691-695.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 691-695.

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