

The Independent Historical Memory of the Hungarian Democratic Opposition

by

András Bozóki

(Draft paper)

“Our generation, whose interest it is to forget, would like to abolish good memory by decree. I would also be glad to remove my early poems from every library and from the memory of the people. Pathetic people revise their past. (...) If they are angry with somebody, they prove that the given person had been a criminal from the cradle. Of course, this is no longer important.”¹

Introduction

The historical memory of the democratic oppositions was independent of the official ideology of the Communist regime. This independent memory was not the consequence but the cause of the establishment and the functioning of the opposition. Obviously, the identity of the democratic opposition was rooted in ideas that were in opposition with the official ideology: without an independent memory there would have been no opposition. Despite the fact that Hungarian samizdat publications mostly dealt with current affairs rather than historical ones, these journals were inseparably linked to the desire for and the existence of an independent memory. Thus, independent historical memory was a constitutive element of the democratic opposition.

The editors² resumed the publication of the most important samizdat journal, *Beszélő*, after the Polish self-limiting revolution³ at the end of 1981. This publication had close links to the democratic opposition and in particular to SZETA (The Fund for Supporting the Poor), which saw the helping of the poor, whose existence the regime denied, as its main mission. At the end of the 1980s, the editors also had close ties to the Network of Free Initiatives,⁴ and later to the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ)⁵. In the beginning, *Beszélő* was duplicated illegally with the use of stencils (1981-89), then it became a legal weekly (1989-96) and later monthly magazine (from 1996 to the present).

The editors and authors of the opposition publications took seriously and started out from the hypocritical statements of the regime about constitutionality and the freedoms of speech and press. They were outspoken about taboo subjects and always published the names and contact details of the editors. With this, the editors did not only risk their job and their freedom but also such unpleasanties

¹ István Eörsi (1986) “Búcsú egy naiv embertől” (Farewell to A Naive Man) in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol. ?, Issue 1. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. ?.

² János Eörsi, Miklós Haraszti, Gábor F. Havas, Gábor Iványi, János Kis, Ferenc Kőszeg, Bálint Nagy, György Petri, Ottília Solt and Sándor Szilágyi.

³ On December 13, Wojciech Jaruzelski introduced a state of emergency in Poland in order to break the opposition labor union movement, Solidarity, because it endangered the Communist monopoly of power.

⁴ The Network of Free Initiatives was founded on May 1, 1988.

⁵ The Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) came into being on November 13, 1988.

as the revocation of their passport, the constant scrutiny of the secret police or the confiscation of their writings.

In 1981 the first issue of *Beszélő* defined the aim of the journal in the following way: “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.”⁶ Since *Beszélő* was primarily the forum of the democratic opposition, it did not take long until the need for a coherent political program surfaced. This program appeared in 1987 as a special section – entitled *Social Contract* – of the twentieth issue. It demanded constitutionalism, freedom of the speech, the protection of the interest of employees, social security, civil rights, but before all, the resignation of the general secretary of the Communist party, János Kádár. It called attention to such unspoken demands as the distancing of relations with the Soviet Union, the resolution of the situation of Hungarians abroad, and the restoration of the events of 1956 to the collective memory of the nation.

This also shows that *Beszélő* mostly dealt with current affairs. It focused on the changes that concerned Central and Eastern Europe and covered these events from a Hungarian point of view. The topics the journal covered can be classified into four broad categories:

1. The examination of and debate over current political and economic issues.
2. The past, characteristics, and role of the Hungarian democratic opposition.
3. Raising and examining issues that the regime treated as taboos.
4. Reviews and descriptions of books that were published either illegally or abroad and talked of political or moral questions; the introduction of legal and illegal democratic organizations, their documents and activities.

Since in the examination of all these issues aimed at serving present needs, the focus was on issues that were relevant and problematic in the 1980s, including (1) the crisis of the Hungarian economy and possible solutions to it, (2) censorship and the opposition press, (3), the situation of Hungarian minorities abroad (especially in Czechoslovakia and Romania), (4) the relationship of the churches and those in power, coercions and persecutions, (5) The military power seizure in Poland in 1981 and the illegalization of Solidarity (6) the situation of those living under the poverty line in Hungary, (7) the need for and the lack of advocacy of the interest of workers, (8) the building of the dam at Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros and arguments against it, (9) the nuclear catastrophe in Chernobyl, its concealment by the press, and (10) the reform of the electoral law.

Based on this, it appears that there is no opportunity to uncover the historical view of samizdat intellectuals. Samizdat publications hardly published articles on history. However, as they discussed current events, they often offered historical reviews or blamed problems on certain historical processes.

Thus, it can be said in general that history was not among the focal issues. The only exception was the 1956 revolution in Hungary. Not only did the opposition take it upon itself to articulate its own interpretation of the revolution on the pages of *Beszélő*, but also aimed at introducing its events through the eyes of the participants in the form of interviews, memoirs, and documents. This way they made 1956 an event open to research, which would not have been possible without the publication of information that was not open for research. However, the contributions about the 1956 revolution did not look upon this event as history, because they thought that it was an unresolved, thus living problem of the society. They believed that the silence surrounding the memory of 1956 and the retaliations after the revolution were the fundamental lies of the Kádár regime. Therefore, if the opposition could tell the truth about the revolution, then they could substantially contribute to the delegitimization of the regime.

The description of the past and present of Hungarian minorities, the situation of the churches, the political and economic periodization of the years following 1956 and the descriptions of the characteristics of these periods were frequently discussed in *Beszélő*. Furthermore, it openly talked

⁶ János Kis, “Lapunk elé” (To the First Page of Our Journal), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 1. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p 4.

about issues that the Socialist regime treated as taboos: the 1947 coming to power of the Communists and the fate of the other parties, the situation of the Jews, and Hungarian emigration after 1945. Besides questions directly concerning Hungarians, the contributors of *Beszélő* reflected on the social, political, and economic processes of the neighboring countries, Romania and Czechoslovakia, in particular. The Polish changes preceding the 1956 revolution by a few months, the Prague Spring of 1968, and the military coup in Poland in 1981 also played an important role in the analyses.

The 1956 Revolution, Retribution, and the Dilemmas of the Intellectuals

“Those who were born after 1956 do not have common memories. (...) They are also sufferers of the consequences of the defeat in 1956: the hang-dog culture of Kádárism.”⁷

The dissident intellectuals who contributed to samizdat publications belong to the part of the intelligentsia that defined itself as the democratic opposition, stood in opposition to power, and demanded political rights. Not all of the intelligentsia of the Kádár era belonged to the opposition. Nonetheless, intellectuals suffered from the same problem as all of them broke with the independent, critical and democratic tradition of intellectuals, which were so characteristic of the political thinker, István Bibó. The opposition often referred to the 'Bibó forgetting' phenomenon,⁸ which did not only mean that the opposition discarded the 1956 demands for democracy and independence, but that they broke with the liberal tradition and the sober value judgments that Bibó represented.

For the opposition, 1956 was the starting point. Miklós Haraszti expressed it in the following way: “since ideals do not, but only tanks matter, everyone seeks his or her own recipe for getting on in life. Mine could only be a private recipe: we treat spinelessness with reading forbidden literature.”⁹

In the following section of this study, I will compare the official position of the regime with the opinion of the opposition, i.e. the ideology of spinelessness with the forbidden literature. While the Communist regime referred to 1956 as a counterrevolution against people's democracy that was incited by imperialists, the opposition talked about a revolution that was the result of social unity and that demanded democratic changes and political rights.

What was the 1956 revolution in reality? Was it a revolution, national uprising, counterrevolution, war of independence, or a crushed rebellion? Or did it demand independent, self-governed, democratic socialism instead of state socialism?

Examining the issue from multiple points of view, the opposition offered several alternative interpretations. One of these claimed that the Hungarian revolution in 1956 was the first loud outcry of the people of Eastern Europe. It was a radical expression of demands that has not been repeated in any other countries of the region ever since:

“... it was the 1956 revolution that expressed the squelched will of the peoples of Eastern Europe, living under Soviet occupation and in Communist regimes for (1) national independence, (2) multi-party system, (3) representation of the workers' interest (through

⁷ István Eörsi “Búcsú egy naív embertől” (Farewell to a Naïve Man), *Beszélő* 1986, Vol. 1, in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 1. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992. pp. 135-37.

⁸ István Csurka, “Bibó-felejtés” (Bibó Forgetting), in: János Rainer M., *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve (The Minutes of the Monor Meeting)*. Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2005, pp. 75-85.

⁹ Miklós Haraszti, “Emlék és panasz 1956-ból” (Memory and Complaint about 1956), *Beszélő* 1987, Vol. 1. szám in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992. pp. 246-49

workers' councils), and (4) freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, and press.”¹⁰

According to another interpretation, 1956 was a spontaneous joining together of the workers. Thus, it was not possible to talk about 1956 as the overthrowing of the power of the people. One of the famous workers' leaders in 1956, Sándor Rác expressed this the following way:

“What I believe is the greatest shame is that the regime did not aim at increasing and deepening the self-awareness of the workers after 1948, but ruined workers' unity, on which the power of the workers should have been developed, by the institution of the informers' system. In 1956, the deceived workers clearly realized this and supported and defended the revolution as long as they could. They did so, because they understood that it was possible to build a society that was free of exploitation in Hungary. I myself find the obligation to fulfill their commitments the most important political-historical deed in the history of the Hungarian workers' movement, because it was on their own initiative without any manipulative attempts.”¹¹

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

“It is said that nothing is happening in Hungary. The people are happy that it is left alone and do not have to deal with politics, can built their houses in their free time, raise the poultry, and bungle. The intellectuals shut themselves off into the ivory tower of culture, and leave politics to politicians. The churches collaborate with the state. Old-fashioned reactionaries and civil democrats died out and the revisionists of the Communist movement could never rebound again after their defeat in 1956. Power sometimes shows its steely fist, but seeing that nobody is out of line, it quickly puts its fist back into its pocket.”¹²

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

“As for intellectuals, most of them have a positive attitude and support our socialist goals. A small minority, perhaps following fashionable trends, has a tendency for effusiveness and only see the negative side of everything.”¹³

¹⁰ István Szilágyi, “‘Legyünk az Emberi Jogok Őskeresztényei!’ Négy vélemény a forradalom örökségéről” (‘Let's Be the Pioneers of Human Rights!’ Four Views on the Heritage of the Revolution), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 19. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992. p. 696.

¹¹ “A Munkástanács mint egy pecsét hitelesítette a forradalmat. Interjú Rác Sándorral, a Nagy-Budapesti Központi Munkástanács elnökével” Workers' Council authenticated the revolution. Interview with Sándor Rác, the President of the Greater Budapest Workers' Council, in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 2. Budapest, AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 353.

¹² János Kis, “‘Lapunk elé’” (To the First Page of Our Journal), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 2. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 3.

¹³ János Kádár, *A békéért, népünk boldogulásáért. Beszédek és cikkek 1981-1985* (For Peace and the Progress of Our People. Speeches and Articles 1981-1985). Budapest: Kossuth, 1985, p. 5.

For a long while after 1956, politics was characterized by the absence of or, at the least, the silence of intellectuals. That is why it was a novelty that at the end of the 1970s the democratic opposition got organized. The writers of *Beszélő* sensed that after 1956 the relationship of the leadership and the opposition changed fundamentally and, as a result, there was no visible opposition in the 1960s.

The Communist leadership redefined alliance politics, left space for various 'progressive ideas', and wanted to preserve the monopoly of Marxism by persuasion and not by coercion.¹⁴ This was Kádár's 'Hungarian way'. The economic boom that followed the repression after 1956 made a certain kind of compromise between the regime and the intelligentsia possible. The compromise meant that in exchange for the unquestionability of its political monopoly, the Party made allowances with regard to culture, consumption habits and in everyday life. Of course, the leaders of the regime saw this as their own success.

The Kádárist compromise or capitulation – the deal – and the fear of forgetting was the fundamental point of reference for the democratic opposition. The deal, which was made after the 1956 revolution, was a symbolic agreement between Hungarian society and the leading political elite. It was interpreted differently in various samizdat publications.

The greatest fear of the opposition concerning 1956 was that the revolution would be forgotten, which contributed to the coming to existence of different interpretations of the revolution. To prevent the revolution falling to oblivion, the editors of *Beszélő* made it a policy to mention 1956 in each issue. At the Monor meeting of different opposition groups, István Csurka described the situation that was the consequence of the 'deal' in the following terms.

“Hungarian society today is the result of a bad, one-sided, opportunistic, yet also efficient and useful compromise. This forced compromise was made after the crushed revolution and war of independence. We were forced into it but the deal was not entirely useless or ineffective. The nation also gained with it. The country gained the “happiest barrack” image as a result of the compromise. For sure, life in the 1960s and 1970s became more human and bearable. (...) The happy barrack life went on above a huge barrel covered by a thick lid to hide its rotting contents. After November 4, 1956, blood, heroic death, workers' council, the beauties of the revolution, the ecstasy of one week's freedom, and self-consciousness were thrown into the barrel. Later on the thousands who were hanged, and the beatings and humiliation of the imprisoned were also thrown into the barrel only to be covered by the lid of forgetting. The main condition of the deal was to forget and be silent. 'Who is not against us is with us,' said János Kádár. But it was only possible not to be against them if one was able to forget.”¹⁵

According to the narrative of the democratic opposition about 1956, the decade after the revolution passed by the silence of the Hungarian intelligentsia. This was the consequence of the crushing of the revolution and the imprisonment of the activist intellectuals. Those who had resisted emigrated, became mute, or served those in power to secure a livelihood. In the 1980s the old Communist and revolutionary intelligentsia no longer existed. The leaders of the opposition, including fifty-sixers, leftist of 1968, social democrats, and radical democrats, moved closer to the strategic aim step by step through the chosen policy of radical reforms. More or less, they all agreed that most people were disillusioned by the regime, but some served the power elite while others tried to find a way out of the

¹⁴ See Tibor Huszár, “Az MSZMP értelmiségpolitikájának néhány időszerű kérdése” (A Few Timely Questions of the MSZMP's Policies toward Intellectuals), in: Tibor Huszár (ed.), *A magyar értelmiség a 80-as években (Hungarian Policies toward Intellectuals in the 1980s)*. Budapest: Kossuth, 1986, pp. 7-55.

¹⁵ István Csurka “Új magyar önépítés” (New Hungarian Self-Construction), in: János Rainer M. *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve (Minutes of the Monor Meeting)*, June 14-16, 1985. Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2005, p. ?.

general economic and political crisis. As György Konrád said “the vacuum that sucked in most of the official and opposition intellectuals alike in both the East and the West was block nationalism.”¹⁶

Thus, the opposition's view of the compromise of the 1960s and 1970s was fundamentally different from the official interpretation. Given the circumstances, György Petri said – and most of the opposition agreed with him – it was not possible to speak about a compromise:

“Since the social compromise no longer exists, it is time to call attention to the fact that it never existed. What we called a compromise – and many people called it so – was resignation to reality. A compromise necessitates partners of comparable standing. The post-retribution society in the 1960s was only able to acknowledge things rather than to agree to them. This is true despite the fact that the growth and the happier times in the barrack gave a rationally unreasonable *albeit* psychologically understandable euphoria and the childish belief in the limitless elasticity of the barriers. Hungarian society as a whole, including most of the intelligentsia, was susceptible to such naivety, simply because it always tended toward political infantilism since it had always been socialized that way.”¹⁷

Petri thought that opposition intellectuals took part in public life in the 1960s not because they were persuaded that Kádárism was right, but because they were willing to silence their own conscience for certain concessions. István Eörsi represented a less radical point of view. He believed that the compromise did exist, but it was based on the fear of the events of the period before 1956 rather than on the success of Kádárist politics:

“Those whose fate was to be silenced or persecuted during the Rákosi era did not fare any better. Fear was written in their bones and now they serve in silence and with resignation those whom they despise. 'It can only get worse', they say with a whisk when they meet the desire for change. The mute compromise that the Kádárist state made with its citizens is based on the memory of Rákosi, Soviet intervention, and the gallows.”¹⁸

Both opposition writers – István Eörsi and György Petri – agreed that intellectuals subsided into silence in the 1960s. Yet, Petri saw this as a result of the regime's concessions. According to Eörsi, a social compromise existed but it was based on the fear of the Rákosi regime rather than on the success of the Kádár regime.

It is important to note that while official propaganda and the democratic opposition agreed that the 1960s was characterized by the lack of open opposition, the Communist leadership differed on this point privately. János Kádár's speech at the MSZMP Politburo in 1982 testifies to this:

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

¹⁶ György Konrád, “A blokkrezsim halálos dramaturgiája” (The Deadly Script of the Bloc Regime), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 13-14. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 225.

¹⁷ György Petri, “Az unalmas válság” (The Boring Crisis) in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 3, Issue 22. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 122.

¹⁸ István Eörsi, “A Szovjet Emberről” (About the Soviet Man), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 13-14. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 207.

else.”¹⁹

According to Kádár, the opposition was not mute after 1956; it is only that the leadership did not use total retaliation against them. However, the democratic opposition found such an understanding of the post-revolutionary consolidation entirely false. Using documents available at the time, M. János Rainer M. tried to count the number of people who fell victim to the retribution and see who these people were. His findings contradict the concept of limited retribution. He claimed that retribution targeted certain types, namely:

“people in their early twenties at best, workers who fought in arms, those who were around thirty and had some respect in their local communities, and those who perhaps had lower-level leadership positions in firm-level workers' councils or were elected to firm-level revolutionary committees. Of course, retribution did not spare the intellectuals who played a leading role in the more moderate, pre-revolutionary period and were unable to accept the defeat of the revolution and continued resistance together with workers' councils. We estimate that 350-400 people were executed in Hungary between December 1956 and the end of 1961 and the vast majority – about 90% – of them was executed for their participation in the revolution. (...) Sixteen thousand people were imprisoned, several hundred executed, and tens of thousands were sanctioned in other ways after the government promised impunity for participants.”²⁰

The interpretation of retaliations was closely linked to the criminal trials of the post-revolutionary period. The opposition questioned the regime's claim that retributions were fair and only the 'traitors' of the people were called to account.

“Post-revolutionary retribution did not initiate show trials, but did not bother to stop the free interpretation and constructive classification of facts. The investigating, prosecuting, and judicial personnel hardly changed until the end of the retributions. The process of retributions was most likely started by the political leaders, because they had no other means to break social opposition. The desire for revenge of the pre-revolutionary old Party apparatus that came to power again made this process especially brutal. And perhaps it is not an unfounded presumption that the period of retributions was so long, because of the new political leadership and the old Party apparatus.”²¹

The opposition also called into question the claim of the representatives of power that even those who committed major crimes were given the opportunity for a fair trial and to defend themselves and that the people were adequately informed after trials. The opposition pointed out that this was not in harmony with facts.

“On June 17, 1958 the announcement of trials and executions after they had taken place resulted

¹⁹ “Az MSZMP PB 1982. március 30-i ülése: A PB 1980. december 9-ei – az ellenséges, ellenzéki, ellenzékieskedő csoportok tevékenységéről szóló – határozatának végrehajtása” (The March 30, 1982 Meeting of the MSZMP Politburo: The Execution of the Politburo Decision of December 9, 1980 about the Activities of Opposition Groups). Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives), KS 288.f.5/850.

²⁰ János Rainer M, “Adatok az 1956-os forradalmat követő megtorláshoz” (Statistics about the Retribution after the 1956) in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 19, Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, pp. 656 and 661.

²¹ Ferenc Kőszeg, “Huszonöt év után” (After Twenty-Five Years), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 8. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, pp. 420-421.

in general shock.²² Although it did not evoke strong emotions in the lethargic and terrified public, most people acknowledged the announcement that the former prime minister Imre Nagy was tried and executed without the people's knowledge with rage and bitterness.

“Neither did they get fair information after the events. The announcement of the Ministry of Justice and the White Book²³ that was published later said nothing about when and where Imre Nagy was arrested, when and where interrogations took place, who the prosecutor and the members of the court were. These documents did not list the names of the witnesses. The picture they gave of the proceeding, the evidence, and the defense strategy of the defendants was confusing and incomprehensible. No wonder that the rumor that Imre Nagy was executed without trial or if there was a trial it took place in the Soviet Union and not in Hungary spread quickly. Twenty-five years passed since then, yet the outlets of power have added nothing to the fragment and false information published in 1958.”²⁴

According to one of the most important self-justificatory narratives of the Kádár regime, the regime broke with the political practice of Stalinism. The editors of samizdat publications saw it differently. They thought that there was a perceivable continuity between the Stalinist orthodox dictatorship of Rákosi and the Kádár regime. They found the proof in the fact that the political prisoners of the Rákosi era were not rehabilitated as late as the 1960s:

“The present political leadership has claimed since November 4, 1956 that it broke with the sins of the past. However, it did not compensate the victims of those sins (apart from a few rehabilitations) or the cruelly punished opponents of that regime in any way. What is more, the present regime only continued punishing them, because they were tried after the revolution again and since they count as recidivists, the amnesty of 1963 did not apply to them. Several hundreds of them remained in prison until the turn of the 1960s and 1970s on the basis of the verdicts made around 1950, and they still suffer from the consequences of the long punishment.”²⁵

The other manifestation of continuity was the eagerness with which the Kádár regime used the skills and the desire of the police and judicial cadres for revenge in order to solidify its own power. What set the democratic opposition apart from the official policy makers was that they disclosed this continuity and turned against it. This characterized the contributors of the Bibó Memorial Book, who published this samizdat book on the birthday of István Bibó. As Miklós Szabó, opposition historian, said, “the authors [of the Bibó Memorial Book] represent diverging points of view, their opinions differ from one another. What is the uniting point then? What is it that their diverging thinking is still united in? I think it is that they do not accept the continuity with Stalinism and that they are committed to a future that should not incorporate this historical phenomenon.”²⁶

The opposition thought that while certain elements of the regime show direct continuity, society has changed: it became more fatigued, more resigned, and more opportunistic. It resembled its old self less and less. It was deprived of its history; things were decided without them and above their heads.

²² Prime Minister Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs were executed the day before on June 16, 1958.

²³ *Nagy Imre és bűntársai ellenforradalmi összeesküvése (The Counterrevolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and his Fellow Criminals)*. Budapest: Tájékoztatói Hivatal, 1958.

²⁴ “Ami elvárható” (What We Can Expect), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 8. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 45.

²⁵ Ferenc Kőszeg, “Huszonöt év után” (After Twenty-Five Years) in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 8. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p.410.

²⁶ Miklós Szabó, “Bibó Emlékkönyv” (Bibó Memorial Book) in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol. 1, Issue 1. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 28.

István Csurka wrote,

“Since November 4, 1956, Hungarians do not live their own history. This did not happen after defeats in previous wars. It happened in the soul of the people. (...) Neither after 1945, which represented the greatest change in history, nor after the death of the thousand-year old state at the end of World War I. when the country lost the war and won its freedom did the awareness of continuity break in the soul of the people on either the winners' or on the losers' side.”²⁷

The hope that still existed after 1945 was lost for good after 1956. The promise of and the chance for freedom disappeared. It became clear that Communism was not a straitjacket forced on the country for a short time, but a permanent system in Central Europe. This was not so, because neither superpowers were interested in changing the geographic status quo of the cold war. In 1956 the United States did not risk a third world war in order to liberate Hungary. Consequently, Soviet power were cemented in Central Europe for decades. People in the region lost their right to shape their own history.

In connection with 1956, *Beszélő* mentioned a lot of political personal who were forgotten or disapproved by the regime and the younger generation could not hear about. Obviously, Imre Nagy was one of the most important reinterpreted people, but Sándor Bali (the leading figure of the Workers' Council of Greater Budapest), Géza Losonczy, Miklós Gimes, Pál Maléter, József Szilágyi, Miklós Vásárhelyi and such political thinkers as Sándor Haraszi and István Bibó also had a place in the personal recollections of the contributors. To understand the role these people played, interviews were made with the survivors. In case of those who had died or were executed, personal recollections of others, speeches, and court reports were used to remember them. For example, they wrote about István Bibó that he “was the only remaining representative of the dissident tradition in Hungary. In the 1970s there was a Bibó renaissance: his writings were duplicated, published as samizdat literature and served as starting point for debate. The duplicates reached even those whom other critical thoughts rarely penetrated. The Memorial Book was meant to be the culmination of this renaissance. The group that accepted Bibó's intellectual heritage wanted to express their admiration to Bibó on the occasion of his 70th birthday, but, in the end, could only salute his memory.”²⁸

It had the effect of a great revelation when *Beszélő* published the 'minutes' of the three meetings of the Workers' Council of Greater Budapest (KMT). KMT was founded in November 14, 1956 and operated until December 9 when its offices were closed and their leaders arrested. No minutes were made during these meetings.²⁹ Therefore, the minutes of the meeting were put together from the notes jotted down by the participants of those meetings.

Anniversary Celebrations

Beszélő had a special column devoted to 1956. These were documents or obituaries rather than interviews or personal recollections.³⁰ As the opposition writers noted on the 25th anniversary of the revolution, there have always been people who remembered October 23 – the anniversary of the revolution. “On the first anniversary, a few college students walked through the streets that protesters took the year before. As a punishment they were denied the opportunity to study forever. Commemorations had to be held in private homes. They became intimate personal affairs. They also

²⁷ Csurka István, op. cit., p. 31.

²⁸ Szabó Miklós, “Bibó Emlékkönyv” (Bibó Memorial Book), in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 1. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 28.

²⁹ Of course, the possibility that the archives of the Ministry of Interior have copies of the minutes that were recorded secretly through informers cannot be refuted.

³⁰ János Kis, “Egy igaz emberrel kevesebb: Bali Sándor, 1923–1982” (Sándor Bali, 1923-1982: One Less Truthful Man in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol ?, Issue ?. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p.127.

testify about the fact that some dozen or thousand people did not forget the revolution, gathered with their friends and fellow prisoners, or lit a candle for their dead, the unknown Hungarian rebels and the Russian privates who died. The police was fearful of those October days. On the night of October 21-22, 1957, they arrested five hundred people as a precaution. Similar arrests were made for many years to come even if on a smaller scale.”³¹ Police action was more visible in 1981 than in the previous years. “For months, the official propaganda whispered that the Party was preparing for a more realistic evaluation of the sad events and wanted to raise the taboo concerning 1956. Then as an anticlimax there was even more intense press propaganda than before, using well-known slogans about the counterrevolution of factory-owners and landowners and the mistakes made by the Rákos-Gerő leadership. (...) Still, the twenty-fifth anniversary was different than the ones before. It was the first time that the secondary public commemorated the revolution.”³²

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

“We do not note it to blame anyone but the assembled Hungarian writers did not feel it necessary to express their concern over the fate of their Polish colleagues. They already knew what their Polish colleagues are only to learn now. They do not raise their voice and do not sacrifice the attainable for their principles. They politely clap when György Aczél tells them that he prefers those who write literature to those who write their names on petitions.”³³

The democratic opposition organized a two-day conference at a private home in Budapest on December 5-6, 1986 on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the revolution. The approximately seventy participants of the conference made the first objective attempt to recall the events of the revolution. The authors, writers, participants of the revolution, and young intellectuals tried to view events from the distance of history and treated it as a subject of scientific research. The debate was based on studies written by Ferenc Donáth,³⁴ János Kis,³⁵ Imre Mécs,³⁶ Jenő Széll,³⁷ and Miklós Vásárhelyi.³⁸ Participants also called their personal memories and experience to their aid in order to supplement their analysis of the unclear issues concerning the revolution. Later, a shortened version of the minutes of the debate was published.³⁹

³¹ Ferenc Kőszeg, “CÍM?” (FORDÍTÁS), *Beszélő*, 1982, p. ?.

³² *Ibid.*, p. ? Kőszeg referred to the 6th issue of *Magyar Figyelő*; the audience of the illegal Monday Free University, which was organized by the opposition; and the 9th-10th double issue of *Magyar Füzetek*, which was published by Hungarian emigrants in Paris.

³³ György Dalos, “Írók egymás között” (Authors Among Themselves), *Beszélő*, 3. szám, 1982.

³⁴ Ferenc Donáth, “Töredék az 1956-os magyar forradalomról” (Fragment About the 1956 Hungarian Revolution), *Magyar Füzetek*

³⁵ János Kis, “Az 1956-57-es restauráció” (The Restoration of 1956-1957), *Magyar Füzetek*

³⁶ Imre Mécs, “Alulról jövő és spontán mozgalmak a forradalomban” (Spontaneous and Bottom-up Movements of the Revolution), *Magyar Füzetek*

³⁷ Jenő Széll, “Társadalmi és politikai erők az 1956-os forradalomban” (Social and Political Forces in the 1956 Revolutions), *Magyar Füzetek*

³⁸ Miklós Vásárhelyi, “Az első meghiúsított reformkísérlet” (The First Unsuccessful Attempt at Reform), *MagyarFüzetek*

³⁹ It also appeared abroad after one copy printed in Budapest was duplicated abroad: *A forradalom előzményei, alakulása és utóélete. Tanulmányok és kronológia. Adalékok az újabkori magyar történelemhez. (The Antecedents, Events and Aftermath of the Revolution. Essays and Chronology)*. Párizs-New Jersey: Hungarian Studies, 1987.

Sometimes the participants of the debate wanted to decide questions that were difficult to judge even in the knowledge of nuanced information. How did the revolution start? How much was it spontaneous or inevitable? How much was it nativity? How much was the revolution consciously planned? These questions had serious political significance for the opposition. A spontaneous movement was both legitimization and acquittal. A pre-planned event could mean both deliberate manipulation and intellectual power, which wanted to put new social forces into action and change the regime.

1986 was a turning point in remembering 1956. Commemorative events right before transition treated the revolution as part of history. By 1988-89, the revolution cemented its place in Hungarian history. The opposition conference in 1986 was the watershed: debates still held the possibility for both the continuation of and breaking with the past. That is why the evaluation of János Kis, which appeared in the 1987 thematic issue about the revolution, is so telling:

“The anniversary of 1956-1957 is not yet history. Hungarian society could not come to terms with its total defeat. Similarly, those in power could not shake off the weight of victory. The economic and political crisis that has grown deeper and deeper in the 1980s is the crisis of the regime that has been restored thirty years ago. The restoration sent the demands of the revolution – neutrality, multi-party system, and economic self-governance – into exile. Thus, the opportunities of Hungarian society remained at the level where they were in 1947, which made it impossible to catch up with the West. We start to pay the bill for this now – after thirty years. So what if we point at these connections? No matter how much the Soviet world order has changed since 1956, the fundamental demands of the revolution cannot be made into short-term goals even today. A neutral, self-governed Hungary with a multi-party system is still a distant ideal. The crisis of the 1980s is related to the 1956-1957 in other ways, as well. It was then that the political style of the power elite took shape. János Kádár and his environment deduced life-long lessons from the political struggles before and after November 4, 1956. These were not reviewed either during the consolidation, economic reform, the retreat from reforms in the 1970s nor when reforms were continued in the 1980s. Today's crisis is not only the crisis of the regime: it is also the crisis of the means used by those in power.”⁴⁰

Approximately a year later, when the Committee on Historical Justice (TIB) was founded in June 5, 1988, the new democracy-oriented political actors went beyond mere the commemoration of events. The leaders of TIB made it clear that they found it important to objectively assess the whole post-1945 era, the revolution in particular, with the help of historical documents.⁴¹ This meant the radical acceleration of events. What appeared to be a distant ideal for the leaders of the democratic opposition at the end of 1986 and 1987 almost became reality in 1989. The roundtable negotiations between the power elite and the democratic opposition took place in 1989, a new constitution was ratified, and the republic declared. As a result of the free elections in 1990, a democratic republic, in which the people elected all representatives from the local to the national level and which had a multi-party system, came into being.

Of course, this did not mean that the problem of historical justice was forced into the background. Rather the function of this issue changed. The scientific rediscovery of the past gave way to the utilization of 1956 for political ends. The samizdat journal, *Demokrata*, paid special attention to the reports about and remembering the historical forgeries of the power elite when it published its thematic issue about the revolution in June 1988. “Numerous debates and a lot of guessing are going on,” they

⁴⁰ János Kis, “Vég és Kezdet” (End and Beginning), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol. 2, Issue 19. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 617.

⁴¹ *Demokrata*, Special Edition about 1956, 1988, p. 6.

wrote, “about the Rajk trial when the documents of this event, which already became the synonym of a show trial internationally, are protected as sensitive state secret, provided they had not disappeared for good. And the other show trials that preceded the Rajk trial are also covered by similar mist.”⁴² These include the imprisonment of Pál Demény and Aladár Weiss, the trials of the Hungarian Community, the smallholder 'conspirators', Cardinal József Mindszenty, MAORT, Standard, and the left and right wings of the Social Democratic Party.

Concerning historical reflections, it is important to ask whose reflections they were meant to be? There was a lot of noise made about 1956 in 1989 both by the democratic political elite and politically active intellectuals and many of them saw a direct link 1956 and 1989. However, this was mainly a theoretical construction. As Bill Lomax noted, “revolutions start when ordinary people enter the public arena and, thus, actively shape historical events. However, after the revolution it is the political elite and intellectuals who harness the fruits of victory. This is all the more so, because the history of revolutions is not written by the masses who started them, but by their intellectual advocates, or the political leadership, that is, those with whom revolutions are identified with in the end.”⁴³

Budapest – Prague – Warsaw

“At the entrance of the Farkasréti Cemetery candles are lit every November 1. Officially, they are said to be for those who disappeared, died far away, but the average person believes them to burn for the revolutionary dead. This year there were a surprisingly large number of young people around the small flowerbed near the cemetery gates. Did they really think of the revolution or the Polish priest, Father Popieluszko, who was murdered earlier, or their own dead? No one can tell. Be that as it may, policemen standing near the gates viewed them with unease and suspicion.”⁴⁴

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

“Between intervention in the Czech Republic in 1968 and the appearance of the democratic oppositions, the Marxist opposition figures saw 1956 as a national uprising at best. They did not think it was a social revolution and they believed that, as opposed to the Prague Spring, the Hungarian uprising did not bring a desire for more human socialism any closer. The weakening of the Marxist socialist utopia, the discovery of Bibó's ideas about a self-limiting revolution, and the spreading of the hope from Poland were all necessary for opposition thinkers – both the democratic opposition and the former Marxist reformers who joined forces – to see 1956 as a revolution and as such it differs from other red letter days in that the anniversaries were the

⁴² Ibid, p. 5.

⁴³ Bill Lomax, “Recenzió Pongrátz Gergely könyvéről” (Review of Gergely Pongrátz's Book), *Hírmondó*, April 1984, p. ?

⁴⁴ Spartacus, “Suhancok forradalma” (The Revolution of Striplings), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás* (*Beszélő Complete Edition*), Vol. 2, Issue 5. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p.

realization of an invisible process.⁴⁵

István Eörsi, who was imprisoned for years after 1956, went further and reasoned that it was only the Hungarian national uprising in 1956 that fought the Communist regime in the ideological dimension. Instead of state socialism, Hungarian revolutionaries demanded real socialism, representative democracy, workers' councils, and the making of state property into public property. He thought that the following two confrontations (Czechoslovakia 1968 and Poland 1981) were dominated by material demands rather than ideals. Communists in power promised material gains in exchange for consolidation:

“For the existing power structures only attainable or believably promised goods and allotments served as legitimization. This turn across Europe was brought not by 1956, but the beautiful and doomed 1968. It was then that it became clear that there is no Prague spring or student movements in Paris or West Berlin that could transform the 'already existing socialism' into real socialism or abolish the adversities of capitalism. In the West, student movements as well as workers' movements suffered a general defeat when workers abandoned their parties. It was this defeat that the Polish workers repeated on the Eastern part of the continent in different historical and organizational settings in December 1981, when their head was chopped off by Jaruzelski who loudly pronounced that “I am the least of two evils”⁴⁶

István Csurka, who could still legally publish as a writer but was getting closer and closer to the 'népi' opposition circles, described 1956 as a singular event, which is explained in the following way:

“The fate of Hungary still differs from the fate of other Central European peoples in one respect. It is the consequences of the revolution that makes all the difference. Until today this has been the first and largest of explosions. This explosion by nature could not be self-limiting. What followed in Czechoslovakia and Poland were already self-limiting events.”⁴⁷

Csurka's use of the word, self-limiting is interesting not only because it refers to the wording of Jadwiga Staniszkis,⁴⁸ but also because a few years later the Hungarian negotiated transition was described in the same terms, which then referred to the formal rules of the roundtable negotiations and the equality of the participants.

János Kis also called attention to the differences between the three crises in Central Europe. However, he focused on the difference in the nature of political consolidation. He said that the holders of power used different methods to rule individual countries. Thus, changes that followed revolutions had no clear pattern:

“In Hungary after November 1956 and in Czechoslovakia after August 1968 the Soviet-type political regimes were restored in their entirety. Here the party was reorganized, there the party was tamed by mass cleansing and then its power was restored at every level. The illegal bodies

⁴⁵ “Egy icipicit igazítottak a világon’ A második nyilvánosság az októberi évforduló és a decemberi hatalomátvétel között” (‘They Changed the World a Tiny Bit.’ The Secondary Public Sphere between the Anniversary in October and the Takeover in December), in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 3. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 274.

⁴⁶ István Eörsi, ‘A másság ünnepén’ (On the Occasion of Celebrating Diversity), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 18. Budapest. AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 530.

⁴⁷ István Csurka, “Az első áldozat nevében” (In the Name of the First Victim), in: Havas Fanny et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 3, Issue 21, Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

of resistance were (here the revolting groups; there the network of independent radios) were destroyed, the temporarily legal independent social organizations (workers' councils in both countries) were outlawed and crushed, the temporarily independent social organizations (artists' associations) were taken over. Of course within the framework of restoration, political developments took divergent roads. In Hungary the situation started to be consolidated between 1960 and 1963. As opposed to this, the repressive measures have not been lifted in Czechoslovakia. However, we should not forget that society in Hungary was just as unable to influence the process of consolidation as in Czechoslovakia. Half a year after the invasion, even the thought of organized social resistance was out of question.

“As its revolution, the counterrevolution in Poland also differs from earlier examples. Of course, Jaruzelski also declared emergency in order to restore the previous order. The authority of the party and government apparatus was strengthened, independent social organizations were banned, most independent artists' associations were dissolved. However, three years after December 1981, this process is far from being completed and it is unlikely that it will ever be... Because of the unfinished restoration and because not all social movements were abolished, there were several transitory institutions whose legality the government did not question, but whose activities it could not entirely control.”⁴⁹

Although Kis spoke of Polish changes as an unfinished process, contributors of *Beszélő* made it clear that they saw the 1956 revolution in similar terms. This remained so up until the very end of 1980.

Hungary, Central-Europe, Europe

The opposition was in agreement in that many social and political problems were rooted in the fact that the borders of the nation and the state were different. Beyond that, the opposition was divided over two contradictory interpretations of the situation. This disagreement was the consequence of the different social traditions that resurfaced after 1956, i.e. the 'népi' (traditionalist and popular) and urban (Western-oriented) views.

In later samizdat issues, the deepening crisis and the maturing of the democratic opposition resulted in a more clearly defined division between the 'népi' and urban groups. “The main goal of the 'népi' grouping was to achieve the appearance of popular democratic nationalism as the official policy. The 'népi' camp thought that the guarantee for the survival of Hungarian society as a political community and the protection of its independent political identity was keeping national consciousness alive and giving official rhetoric a patriotic tint. The patriotic rhetoric was a means to distance themselves from what was official and thus still acceptable. Contrary to this, the urban position held that if its representatives joined the official anti-nationalism and the rejection of patriotic rhetoric – which fitted well with the bourgeois radical and social democratic orientation -, they could perhaps carefully hid a few thoughts in their articles about the ideals of the smitten revolution. The 'népi' side did not see this possible.”⁵⁰

In *Beszélő*, the representatives of the urban view most often voiced their concern over the lack of legal rights for Hungarians outside Hungary. As opposed to this, the followers of the 'népi' position painted a dramatic picture of national extinction as a consequence of the existing situation. While the former believed that national question was primarily a political issue, the latter built their reasoning on

⁴⁹ János Kis, “Lengyel fejlemények – magyar tanulságokkal” (Polish Developments with Hungarian Lessons), in in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 11. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Miklós Szabó, “A magyar neobarokk új korszaka” (The Second Coming of Hungarian Neo-baroque), in in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 3, Issue 25. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 503.

the idea of a cultural nation. Miklós Duray, member of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia wrote about this in the following terms:

“When it comes to this question [i.e. the question of national minorities – A. B.], we Hungarians are most interested in the fate of the Hungarians who found themselves outside the borders when historical Hungary was cut to pieces. Not only because this event was unjust and illegal, but because it plays a decisive role in the relationship of the Hungarian and neighboring nations, that is, the politics of Central Europe.”⁵¹

According to the 'népi' radical, István Csurka, “there are some who gloat over this process [i.e. the decline of the Hungarian nation – A. B.], whose actions only serve this deadly process. However, to be able to continue with the process of ethnic annihilation, they hide their gloating and blame nationalism on those who dare to raise their voice about national annihilation. It is not only the weakness of the Hungarian nation, but also the moral decline and the lack of self-consciousness that encourage the repression of Hungarians, radical nationalists, and the tacticians and strategists of assimilation.

Not all contributors treated Hungarians as a homogeneous group. The philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás, who originates from Transylvania, used the derogative nickname used by Romanians for Hungarians, 'Bozgor', in order to describe his experience in Hungary:

“I thought I could be Hungarian without being a 'Bozgor'. I have had suspicions for some time that this is self-deception. At first, the only obtrusive sign was that the swag we carried over from Romania contained food for very few people. The Devil knows what is wrong with us, 'Bozgors.' Our intonation and body language are urban, yet we still count as rural in Hungary; our liberalism is Hungarian, but protestant; it is obvious from our tardiness that that we were left out of every Hungarian revolution and counterrevolution of the twentieth century. Undeniably, twentieth century modern Hungarians are fictional to us. We are all Hungarians, but we have lived under different dictatorships.”⁵²

All contributors agreed that the nation was struggling with problems that was the consequence of the new borders instituted by the Trianon peace treaty. They thought that Hungarians outside our borders – especially in Romania and Czechoslovakia – lived deprived of their legal rights. Although everyone agreed with this, there was less agreement about the causes of the current state of affairs. The representative of the 'népi' view argued that the cause behind legal deprivation was the cultural and moral decline of Hungarians in Hungary, which prevented them from successfully lobby for Hungarian minorities. The followers of the urban tradition attributed legal deprivation to the repressive nature of political regimes. State socialism did not ensure freedom of speech, which was the fundamental means of representing and furthering the cultural and legal interest of minorities. At the same time, they pointed out that dictatorships in the region that lacked legitimacy attempted to create it by using nationalist propaganda and victimizing Hungarians. the Kádárist leadership in Hungary was also held responsible for the situation, because it did not advance the interests of Hungarian minorities. Thus, while the 'népi' view saw the Hungarian issue as cultural, for the urbanists it was a political problem.

The problems concerning Hungarians and Hungarian minorities were closely linked to the issue of Central Europe, since the conflict among nations in the region affected their foreign policies. Many asked whether Central Europe existed and, if it did, where its borders were? *Beszélő*'s answer was an

⁵¹ Miklós Duray, “A magyar kisebbségek és az egyetemes magyarság közötti kapcsolatok problémái” (The Problems of the Relationship With Universal Hungarians and Hungarian Minorities), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 3, Issue 24. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 370.

⁵² Gáspár Miklós Tamás, “The 'Bozgor' Speaks Out” in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 3, Issue 23. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 221.

unequivocal yes to the existence of Central Europe as a historical formation. “Meetings and contacts are numerous in the past of Central Europe. We share a part of our history and our cultural traditions has common elements.”⁵³

However, Central Europe came to be redefined and artificially sustained as a political-military unity. It was an area ruled by Socialist regimes and the Warsaw Pact. According to the writer, György Konrád, “our life and thinking were depressively defined by the East-West schizophrenia. The ruling social-political reality of today is no longer that of the nation state but of bloc states. It is not social reality that determines political reality but on the reverse.”⁵⁴ István Eörsi articulated this in the following way: “The people of Eastern and Central Europe live in regimes labeled as “real-time socialism” – what an expression! It expresses perplexity, the beginning for forgiveness and the fact of forgiveness. East of Eden, it is called the 'socialism of we-cannot-do-better-than-this' and on the west of Eden it is called the 'socialism of “they-cannot-do-better-than-this’.”⁵⁵

For the opposition, Central Europe was also a cultural bloc. As opposition critic, Sándor Radnóti wrote, “Wolfgang Mantl is right in saying that in the Eastern bloc Central Europe stands for the desire to belong to the West and for anti-Soviet feeling. The division of Europe – if we disregard the bleeding wound of Berlin – is best signified by the differences between Vienna and Budapest or between Vienna and Prague. We cannot pretend that this difference does not exist; it would be self-deception on our part. From the West, it would be offending tact. If any virtual unity – and Central Europe is one – serves the purpose of covering over these differences in the name of a beautiful dream, then understanding negligent and will remain illusionary.”⁵⁶

In the view of the democratic opposition, Central Europe was not created in Yalta. It existed before that and is defined by common historical experience. However, socialism isolated it by forcing Socialism on it and inserted it into the bipolar world order as counterweight to the West. This definition was finally accepted by the people of Central Europe, because it corresponded to their experience. However, instead of the official propaganda about an ideal social order, they saw the region defined by the lack of freedom and the unavailability of certain products.

“It must be seen that Europe is not our home. For forty years the party leadership had done everything to ensure that it would not be our home. We only have to read the newspapers of the past, which show how consistently we were shut off and made to turn our back on anything that comes from the West.”⁵⁷

Western Europe accepted this isolation. What is more it owned it up: “what is East of the Elbe is no longer Europe even according to meteorological maps. It is only an animal farm.”⁵⁸ Thus, the division was not only the fault of Socialist regimes but also of Western Europe that accepted and internalized

⁵³ Sándor Radnóti, “Grand Café Mitteleuropa. Erhard Busek és Emil Brix: Projekt Mitteleuropa (Közép-Európa terve), Ueberreuter, Bécs 1986.” (Central European Grand Café: Erhard Busek and Emil Brix' Plan for Central Europe), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélt Összkiadás (Beszélt Complete Edition)*, Vol 3, Issue 21. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 54.

⁵⁴ György Konrád, “A blokkrezsim halálos dramaturgiája” (The Deadly Script of the Bloc Regime), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélt Összkiadás (Beszélt Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 13-14. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 223.

⁵⁵ István Eörsi, “A Szovjet Emberről” (About the Soviet Man), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélt Összkiadás (Beszélt Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 13-14. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 205.

⁵⁶ Sándor Radnóti, “Grand Café Mitteleuropa. Erhard Busek és Emil Brix: Projekt Mitteleuropa (Közép-Európa terve), Ueberreuter, Bécs 1986.” (Central European Grand Café: Erhard Busek and Emil Brix' Plan for Central Europe), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélt Összkiadás (Beszélt Complete Edition)*, Vol 3, Issue 21. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 54.

⁵⁷ István Vass, “Levél a Magyar Nemzet főszerkesztőjéhez” (Letter to the Editor in Chief of *Magyar Nemzet*), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélt Összkiadás (Beszélt Complete Edition)*, Vol 3, Issue 24. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 393.

⁵⁸ Imre Barna, “Hála bölcs Vezérünknek, pompás a víz. G. Orwell, Állati gazdaság – AB Független Kiadó, 1984” Thanks God to Our Leader, the Water is Wonderful. G. Orwell's Animal Farm. AB Független Kiadó), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélt Összkiadás (Beszélt Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 13-14. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 244.

this.

The Taboos Fall: Hungarian Minorities, Jews in Hungary and Political Emigration

Hungarians Living in Minority

Hungarians living outside the borders were an unavoidable issue for every Hungarian government after 1918. After the Communists came to power, the Rákosi regime decided to make this issue a taboo. For the regime, minorities simply did not exist. The Stalinist regime could ignore this subject for two reasons. First, Communism was an international ideology that did not think in terms of nations but social classes. This suggested that the common goals of the international proletariat was more important than the Hungarian national interest. Second, the regime was also anti-fascist, which also made it possible to ignore the minority issue. Since Communists contrasted themselves with fascism, the revisionist goals of the Horthy era, which was defined in unequivocally fascist terms, fell outside the possible courses of action in foreign affairs. Every policy that fought for the rights of Hungarian minorities or listed their grievances carried the danger of appearing similar to the foreign policy that led to the tragedy of Hungary in World War II. Thus, up until the end of the 1950s, “we cannot speak of independent Hungarian foreign policy.”⁵⁹

This only changed somewhat in the 1960s when the Kádárist leadership rediscovered the minority question. In this period, the issue was dealt with within the framework of the so-called ideology of dual attachment. That is, while national minorities have cultural ties with their mother nation, as citizens of another state. They are required to keep themselves to the legal order of that state. The principle of “non-intervention” prevented the regime from making public attempts in order to improve the situation of ethnic minorities abroad, but behind close doors negotiations were going on with the Czechoslovak and Romanian leadership concerning culture and education. Nonetheless, in order to preserve the unity of the bloc, Hungarian leaders never made public statements about the bad situation of Hungarian minorities or the discriminatory measures brought against them.

The members of the democratic opposition found this approach unacceptable. As early as the first two issues of *Beszélő* the work of Tibor Fényi about the history of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia after 1945 was published. According to Fényi’s periodization, Hungarians in Czechoslovakia were entirely deprived of their rights between 1944-1948, and Stalinist consolidation did not bring any substantial improvement in 1948: deportation, forced relocation, and the confiscation of property characterized the late 1940s. Slovak nationalists limited the activities of the Cultural Association of Hungarian Workers’ of Czechoslovakia (CSEMADOK), which came into being in 1949. Fényi describes the period after 1965 as an era characterized by the strengthening of nationalism at the expense of minorities.

György Nagy, who analyzed the situation of Hungarian intellectuals in Romania with the use of numerous statistics, painted a similarly dire picture:

“The data unequivocally prove that since 1966 the role of minority intellectuals in social and cultural life decreased both in comparison to the ratio of Hungarians within Romania and in comparison to the number of minority intellectuals in Romania. The number of people who belonged to the minorities and had a university or college degree decreased further and this

⁵⁹ Zoltán Kántor, “Nemzetpolitika a rendszerváltás előtt és után”(Politics of Nation Before and After Transition), in: György Majtényi and Csaba Szabó (eds.), *Távolodás és Közelítések. Rendszerváltás és Kádár-korszak* (Distancing and Approximation: Regime Change and the Kádár Era). Budapest: Kossuth, 2008, p. 184.

process has hit the Hungarian minority especially hard.”⁶⁰

Besides the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, the minority in Romania received the greatest publicity in the opposition press. In a radical article, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, who moved from Transylvania to Hungary, blamed the Kádár regime, because the guided and censored Hungarian public sphere was silent especially with respect to Romania. “They describe the famine there with cautious irony, they wink meaninglessly in the distance as they discuss Hungarian literature in Romania, but both poverty and the oppression of Hungarians go unmentioned. (...) The most important things – solidarity, compassion, and indignation – are not voiced at all.”⁶¹

Miklós Duray and Kálmán Janics were among the most important advocates of the interests of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and often expressed their views in *Beszélő*, which also published their autobiographic novels and an interview with Duray. In connection with this, István Eörsi bitterly noted that

“... only from these books [the autobiographical writing of Duray and Janics – A. B.] did I learn about the fact that after 1945, the Czechoslovak state and its constitution was built on racist foundations. It declared its intention to create a Slavic state and built it on the deprived rights of non-Slavic inhabitants. I am appalled that Hungarian peasants were not allowed to take part in the land reform and 97 percent of Hungarians had no voting rights, social security insurance or pension. I was even more surprised at reading that the Communist leaders were openly and proudly racist. Communist was so attractive in my adolescence, because it promised to abolish class, national, and racial antagonisms that were built on birth right. In 1983 I had to learn that there had been a Communist Party in the year when Nazism was defeated that advocated a nationalistic and racist program.”⁶²

According to the poet Sándor Csoóri, who was the accepted leader of the 'népi' movement, Trianon was the cause of the minority neurosis and the divided conscience of and the conflict between the peoples of Central Europe. Yet, Csoóri saw the post-1956 changes in Hungary in a positive light. He thought that “finally we are believed” in international politics. He believed that this was the consequence of both the revolution and the economic reforms that happened after the revolution. Therefore, he believed, it was time for Hungarian politicians and intellectuals to stand up for the rights of Hungarians outside Hungary.⁶³

Hungarian Jews

Somewhat related to the minority issue, but in a completely different way, *Beszélő* also discussed the other great taboo of the Kádár regime – the situation of the Jews in Hungary. According to Marxist ideology, capitalism is the result of harmful processes whether they are cultural, religious, or patriotic. Thus Marxists believed that the victory of Socialism would end antisemitism and the Jewish problem

⁶⁰ György Nagy, “A romániai magyar értelmiség jelenéről – jövőjéért” (About the Present and For the Future of Hungarian Intellectuals) in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 10. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 599.

⁶¹ Miklós Tamás Gáspár, “Éhség és terror Romániában” (Hunger and Terror in Romania), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 3. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 147.

⁶² István Eörsi, “Egy újságcikk és a 'realitások’” (An Article and 'Reality') in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 9. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 563.

⁶³ Sándor Csoóri, “Eltemetetlen gondok a Duna-tájon” (Unburied Problems of the Danube), in: János Rainer M., *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve (The Minutes of the Monor Meeting)*. Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2005, p. 17.

as well.⁶⁴ That is, Marxism did not break with the assimilationist paradigm of the nationalist movements of the nineteenth century.

Despite this theoretical position, in the Socialist countries of East-Central Europe neither Jews nor antisemitism disappeared, which created some tension between the theoretical principles and their realization in practice. The Kádár regime resolved this tension by denying the existence of the Jewish problem. It claimed that the “counterrevolution [of 1956] allowed for numerous expressions of antisemitism,”⁶⁵ but the consolidation that followed did away with these anti-Jewish tendencies. Although the state accepted the existence of the Israelite church and under strict limits allowed its operation, it did not acknowledge the possibility of the existence of a religious Jewish identity and unequivocally denied the presence of antisemitism in Hungary.

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

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

Former Communist and clerics – leftists and rightists – were accused side by side. As we remember them, we wish to make no difference among them – they were all martyrs of a cause whether we agree with their political views or not. We see the Communist Zoltán Schönherz as much of a martyr of anti-fascism as we do the racist Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and the Zionist Hanna Szenes, who was executed in the prison on Margit körút (even if her name is missing from the official catalog of martyrs) although we are neither Zionists nor racists.”⁶⁶

When the peace movement, SALOM, wrote an open letter to the National Representatives of the Hungarian Israelites and demanded the redefinition of the relationship between Jews and Hungarians, *Beszélő* did not only publish the letter but also the reactions to it. The critical analysis that János Kis wrote about the letter, also claimed that “since the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, along the rising consciousness of Hungarians, *albeit* partially independently of it, the number among Jewish youth who want to openly accept their Judaism, feel togetherness with the Jewish Diaspora of the world and Israel, and own the special Jewish traditions has increased. SALOM voices the claim of these young people when it breaks with the hundred-year old principle of assimilation. 'Although we acknowledge the right of the individual to assimilation, we believe that the Jews of Hungary should not assimilate, but integrate into the society of their homeland.' That is, instead of doing away with all the differences between Jews and non-Jews, the aim is that Jews preserve their tradition, become a minority and find their place in Hungarian society that way.”⁶⁷

According to Kis, this did not mean total assimilation, at least not in the way that official propaganda claimed. This was different, because “Jews almost entirely live and behave like any

⁶⁴ See Karl Max, “On the Jewish Question,” in: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975.

⁶⁵ See *Ellenforsradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben (Counterrevolutionary Forces in the October Events in Hungary)* vol 4. Budapest: Magyar Népköztársaság Tájékoztatási Hivatala, 1957.

⁶⁶ Ferenc Kőszeg, “Huszonöt év után” (After Twenty-Five Years), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 1, Issue 8. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, pp. 421-422.

⁶⁷ János Kis, “A Salom nyílt levele a magyar társadalomhoz és a magyar zsidósághoz” (The Open Letter of Salom to Hungarian Society and Hungarian Jews) in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 11. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p 58.

Hungarians, its environment still singles them out. It is a vain attempt to try to assimilate. It only leads to a compulsion to prove ourselves, minority complexes, and humiliating exposures.”⁶⁸

Hungarian Political Emigration

The existence and activities of Hungarian emigrants abroad was another sensitive issue for the system. Right after 1956, the official Communist position classified the emigrants into two groups. Those, who emigrated between 1945 and 1947, were described as “the fascist supporters of the Horthy regime” and those who left in 1956-1957 were called “counterrevolutionaries” The opposition not only disapproved the position of the regime, but identified the controversies hidden in it:

“Since 1945, a million Hungarians has left the country as a result of the violent means that characterized the historical processes and social shocks that the realization of Socialism brought with it. The vast majority of them were forced into emigration, because the Socialist regime saw them as enemies. This attitude was accentuated by death threats, prison sentences, forbidding them to practice their profession, and by strict sentences in their absence. The official opinion about the emigrants did not change until the end of the 1960s. Communist party propaganda described it as radical rightist, reactionary, fascist, and counterrevolutionary. Following *détente* in the 1970s and the Helsinki agreement, the universal condemnation of emigrants was replaced with a less extreme view, which divided emigrants into good and bad ones. The 'good' emigrants were those who were ready to cooperate with official Hungarian organizations and the 'bad' ones were those who refused to do so.”⁶⁹

Samizdat publications treated works written in emigration as an integral part of Hungarian culture. However, almost without exception, these works were all 'to be banned' according to the Communist power elite.

Economic Policy in the Kádár Era

Finally, most of the Hungarian samizdat publications attentively followed the alternatives that were worked out in the area of economic policy. The history of the 'new economic mechanism' (NEM) that was introduced in 1968, were analyzed in numerous comprehensive studies before transition.⁷⁰ The beginning of economic reforms in Hungary should be dated to 1963 when Rezső Nyers, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, created an informal economic advisory body to start the reforms. His suggestions became the basis for the comprehensive reform package. Changes were necessary because by the mid-1960s it became clear that economic growth slowed in the Socialist bloc. This

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 59.

⁶⁹ István Orosz, “Az 'idegenbe szakadt' demokratikus hagyomány' Könyvkritika Borbándi Gyula: A magyar emigráció életrajza 1945-1985 című könyvéhez” (“The Emigrated Democratic Tradition' Book Review About Gyula Borbándi's Biography of Emigration, 1945-1985) in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 17. Budapest. AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 501

⁷⁰ See Iván Berend T., *A magyar gazdasági reform útja. (The Road of Hungarian Reforms)*. Budapest: KJK, 1988.

László Lengyel. *Végkifejlet (Dénouement)*. Budapest: KJK, 1989.

Iván Pető and Sándor Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története 1945-1985. (The Four-Decades History of the Domestic Economy, 1945-1985)*. Budapest: KJK, 1985.

Ágnes Ungvárszki, *Gazdaságpolitikai ciklusok Magyarországon (1948-1988) (Economic Cycles in Hungary (1948-1988))* Budapest: KJK, 1989.

Or a book that was published after the transition: János Kornai, *A szocialista rendszer. (The Socialist Order)*. Budapest: HVG Rt, 1993.

included the inadequacy of agricultural production, technological and scientific research and development, or the imbalance of payments. These phenomena were confusing, because Socialist propaganda claimed that CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance) countries would catch up with the level of economic and industrial development of the capitalist countries. The eighth Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party in 1962 declared “that national income between 1960 and 1980 increased fourfold ... industrial production was increased five times... [and] the industrial products will be made with high-level technology. By 1980 the consumption per capital will be higher in Hungary than in capitalist countries.”⁷¹

Economic reforms were introduced in East Germany in 1963, in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in 1965 and in Hungary in 1968 as answers to the unfavorable economic tendencies that were contrary to official expectations. Hungarian reforms started in agriculture when small-scale private farms were allowed. These production units based on private ownership did not replace but temporarily supplemented Socialist production.

However, after the democratization in Prague in 1968 repressive measures were made stricter and this did not favor the survival of Hungarian reforms. Despite the fact that Kádár expressed his official commitment to reforms after the intervention, Hungarian political leaders had to make a u-turn in the early 1970s. This, however, was never accepted as official policy. The leadership talked about “corrective measures” and “temporary difficulties”, but these did not correspond to the size of the real crisis. By the early 1970s, “it became clear for Kádár that the reform policy of 1968 cannot be continued and that the leadership in Moscow demanded scapegoats.”⁷² Kádár realized the threatening nature of the situation, utilized the division in the Politburo, and in the end only Rezső Nyers and Jenő Fock had to resign, but he could stay in power. These dramatic events were did not miss the attention of the opposition, either. János Kis wrote that

“the turn abroad, that is the occupation of Czechoslovakia, made the necessity of a decision imminent. From 1969 on, the natural adversaries of reforms – the leaders of state firms who were threatened by competition; the leaders of the regional party apparatuses, sectoral ministries, and labor unions – went on the offensive after Brezhnev's rhetoric gave them encouragement. The Kádárist leadership was not ready to fight: it constantly retreated and gave way to the anti-reform coalition, which was so weak that despite the backing received from Moscow, it could not work out a clear policy and fell apart as soon as it emerged victorious between 1972 and 1974. Kádár could again solidify his position and play the balancing act between various factions.”⁷³

Economic depression was unavoidable, which called the reform generation of the 1970s into being:

“Towards the end of the 1970s, it became clear that the reserves of the Kádárist polices were exhausted. The return of newer concessions constantly decreased. As the stress was moved over to the secondary economy, it became clearer by the day that progress would sooner or later will clash with the biological limits of self-exploitation. It became obvious that for certain groups this was not the right direction: growing inequalities made their mark. The spreading of uncontrolled economic activities increased autonomy *vis-à-vis* the state, but the effects of valueless self-exploitation on life-style were frighteningly destructive. Cultural progress also achieved the limit where the organization of various views, and open debates that were free of

⁷¹ *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt VIII. Kongresszusának Jegyzőkönyve, 1962 november 20-24. (The Minutes of the Eighth Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, November 20-24, 1962)*. Budapest: Kossuth, 1963, p. 579.

⁷² Tibor Huszár (ed.), *Kádár – A hatalom évei 1956-1989* (Kádár: Years in Power). Budapest: Corvina, 2006, p. 197..

⁷³ János Kis, “Vég és Kezdet” (End and Beginning), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 19. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 617.

tutelage became essential for survival. New generations appeared for whom the consolidation was not an unexpected gift, but a natural point of departure.”⁷⁴

That is, in the face of official propaganda, which said that the country was continuously moving forward on the “Leninist road of Socialism” and that difficulties were temporary, János Kis claimed that the difficulties were rooted in the nature of the regime. The Kádár regime ensured its legitimacy by showing newer and newer results, repeatedly making political concessions, and increasing living standards. But the sources of growth – which were cheap Soviet raw material and Western credits – dwindled by the end of the 1970s. The regime could only silence the dissatisfied population with further concessions. However, this would have resulted in such a degree of democratization that would have ended in the abolishment of the regime.

The Perceptions of Normality

One of the main building blocks of the Kádár regime was the perception of normality, in which 'normal' life equaled the opportunity for an apolitical existence. The media of the time often used the “deceiving strategy of normalization”; they painted “heroic”, irrational deeds in unbelievable colors. Nationalization was described not as a process based on force and violence but one that was the result of the voluntary joining of rational individuals. How could it be otherwise? Why would a rational person work alone? Why would he want to be just a needle in a haystack?

Political Activism as a Form of Mental Illness

After 1956 and in connection with resisting intellectuals, the media often tried to prove their irrationality and used the illusion of normality. The story of Tibor Pákh's hunger strike exemplifies this well.

“We do not have to introduce Dr. Tibor Pákh to the readers of *Beszélő* (...) therefore, here we only summarize the antecedents. Dr. Tibor Pákh, the 59-year old lawyer, was imprisoned for twelve years after 1956 because he wrote political essays. His imprisonment was not longer, because he was declared to be 'mentally unfit' for good in 1971 and the rest of his sentence was abolished after he received electroshock treatment and was put into insulin-induced coma on a regular basis. Tibor Pákh went on hunger strike in prison to protest for the human rights of the imprisoned. He did the same 15 years later when he joined Polish civil rights activists in the church of Podkowa Leszna in the spring of 1981. In October 1981, he protested when his passport was illegally revoked. It was then that he was taken to the National Mental Institute. He underwent forced treatment in the hospital: he was intravenously given drugs to modify his consciousness and was fed forcefully. At this point, this could no longer be kept secret, because 57 intellectuals and many international organizations spoke up for the inhuman and dangerous 'treatment'. Finally, Tibor Pákh was released from the hospital at the end of October (but he did not get his passport back).”⁷⁵

The authorities treated Pákh's protests as mental illnesses, that is, paranoia based on false political ideals and schizophrenia which resulted in an eating disorder. It did not occur to authorities that his life

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 617.

⁷⁵ György Krassó, “Dr. Pákh Tibor elmebetegsége” (The Mental Illness of Tibor Pákh), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol. ?, Issue ?. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. ?

could be saved by providing remedy for the legal offenses that were committed against him and not only by 'treatments' that endangered his life and destroyed his health. What is more, legal offenses continued, so Tibor Pákh went on hunger strike again in October 1982. As one samizdat journal reported, "the procedure was the usual. He was taken to a mental institution by force, drugged, tied down, and fed forcefully. It must have occurred to those who knew the antecedents or signed the petition in 1981 that the psychiatrist might be right. Or as it was posed in *Beszélő*, 'Is it not too extreme to risk one's life for a passport?' Or another related question is whether it was reasonable and right to collect signatures and turn to the domestic and international public on behalf of Tibor Pákh?"⁷⁶

To answer this question, Professor Charles Durand arrived in Budapest in 1982 and talked to Tibor Pákh on several occasions for three days. He came to the conclusion that "Tibor Pákh is an example of how one can be declared mentally unfit for truthful protest. We, psychiatrists, have to fight the wrongful use of psychiatry. Tibor Pákh feels that he is being persecuted in Hungary. On the basis of my experience, I must tell that this is not a delusion but the reality. For three days, we were continuously followed by persons who, I assume, belong to the police."⁷⁷

Commemorative Acts

Acts of remembrance symbolically place the taboos back into the world of normality. Such acts lose their character as direct political protests and they become routine activities, which are often tied to anniversaries. Commemorative events that are frequently repeated lose their protesting character, become rituals and this can make unusual, forbidden or – as in Hungary – abnormal behavior acceptable.

When it comes to the acts of remembrance, the samizdat press was not united. Mostly *Demokrata* and sometimes *Hírmondó*, but *Beszélő* only occasionally reported commemorative events, which had the purpose of keeping historical events fresh in the minds of civil society.

Demokrata and *Hírmondó* found commemorative occasions in Hungary particularly important (for example Mayday in Poland had a similar function: workers demanded changes when they celebrated Labor Day.) "Remembering the commemorative events" was also a frequent phenomenon in Hungary, as several opposition reports pointed it out. Examples are the reports of *Hírmondó* about the anniversary celebrations of March 15, i.e. the 1848 revolution.⁷⁸ and those of *Beszélő* about the celebrations of the 1956 in private homes. These made a clear distinction between official and private red-letter days, The regime celebrated April 4 and November 7 while the opposition would have wished to commemorate March 15 and October 23. The national holidays of the regime were linked to the 1917 Soviet revolution and the Soviet occupation of Hungary in 1945. The opposition celebrated the beginnings of two Hungarian revolutions: the one that started on March 15, 1848 and the other, which started on October 23, 1956.

The Role of the Semi-Opposition: The Circle of 'Nepi' Writers

Besides the democratic opposition who published samizdat journals outside the official public sphere, there was a tradition and circle of 'nepi' (populist) writers. Their work however rather belonged to the 'grey zone' between government and opposition, at least garnering some official recognition. These

⁷⁶ Pákh Tibor ügye, *Beszelo Osszkiadas*, op. cit.

⁷⁷ Pákh Tibor ügye. Ibid.

⁷⁸ Cf. the issues of *Hírmondó*, 1984.

writers did not consciously make informal alliances across borders, expand samizdat, or theorize about the potential of the opposition in the same (or similar) way as the democratic opposition. Nevertheless, they represented a very influential intellectual tradition in Hungary going back to the 1920s and 1930s.

In the interwar period the peasantry was squeezed below society, and for this reason it was unable to articulate its interests itself, and to enter into political alliance. The populist writers of the time attempted to close this social gap with their activities, but they themselves proved to be of limited influence: neither the political class of the Horthy regime, nor the national middle class, that entered into a compromise with the regime, or the isolated bourgeois strata, and not even the targeted peasantry could have been mobilized by them. Thus the function of their writings remained primarily to keep social self-conscience alive.

The defeat suffered during World War II, and the communist change of 1948 fundamentally transformed the structure of Hungarian society. The gentry elite was wiped out, a large part of the bourgeois middle class was destroyed by the war. In the 1940s many people emigrated from both strata. In the 1945 land reform more than one million peasants were given land, which was subsequently forced onto kolkhozes. A larger proportion of the rural poor was absorbed by forced industrialization. The 'soft dictatorship' of the reformist politics of consolidation launched by János Kádár in the 1960s, was able to make the society digest the shock of the 1940s and 1950s. The issues raised by the populist writers (large estates, land, agrarian poverty) became obsolete.

Populist thought however, survived in a cultural form, linked to literature, and in the meantime it did good service to the opponents of reform with the criticism of Western modernization and consumer society. It played a role in the revival of national traditions from the seventies onwards and as a new element, it put on the agenda the problem of Hungarian minorities living on the other side of the border, in other countries. Thus it tried to make populist cultural heritage a nationalist one, and also to maintain the idea of "middle of the road" – which had a different meaning earlier – equally turning against Western liberal capitalism and Eastern internationalist communism. Populists found internationalism common to both, and similarly to the New Left, they condemned the economic influence of the Western multinational concerns as well as the power monopoly of the Soviet type system. They regarded both as foreign oppression.

Communist cultural policy, associated with the name of György Aczél, tried to use their reappearance to divide the opposition; appearing also in the late 1970s, suggesting, that the two kinds of – Western and populist – criticism could not have a common platform, as the "urbanists" were Jewish, and the '*népi*' (populists) were not. This whispering propaganda, which was amplified by the populists at the rime of regime change, has again made anti-Semitism a political issue. It meant a past anachronism for the younger generations that have grown up in the shadow of the Kádár-system and have heard about the populist vs. urbanist conflict only from history books.

The populist writers and their circles were not directly political in their actions, but their symbolic gestures were usually far more echoed among certain groups of public opinion makers, especially countryside teachers, churchmen, poets, writers, journal editors, literary figures (etc.) than the writings and gestures of the rather marginalized democratic opposition. Their message was coloured with cultural and historical undertones, they were concerned with the 'mental recovery' of Hungarians living under Communism, inside and outside the borders of Hungary. They developed important intellectual transborder cooperation with like-minded people of the Hungarian community in Transylvania, Vojvodina, and the Slovakian part of Czechoslovakia. They visited them, provided Hungarian books for them and saw their historic mission in keeping the Hungarian 'national spirit' alive beyond the borders of the nation-state. They operated between officialdom and the direct opposition. They were anti-communists but ready to compromise with them in order to get closer to their cultural and political goal. Sometimes they caused troubles for communist officials especially at the scandalous Writers' Congresses in 1981 and 1986. In the 1960s and 1970s, their spiritual leader was the writer Gyula Illyes who died in 1983.

By the second part of the 1980s, the cultural criticism of popular origins was replaced by the organization of political movements with the pluralization of the intelligentsia and the society, and the Hungarian Democratic Forum, which was established as a loose intellectual association in Lakitelek in September 1987, was transformed into a political organization a year later. Some of their spokesmen, as Istvan Csoori, Istvan Csurka, and Sandor Lezsak later cut their previous ties with the official cultural politics, represented by the communist Gyorgy Aczel, and moved closer to the opposition. These writers were instrumental in forming the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), first as an independent movement (in September 1987), later as a political party (in 1988-9). Not accepting “either the tag of pro-government or of opposition and the pressure of choice,”⁷⁹ initially the Forum did not function as a party, yet it was active a party that collected groups from a wide range. Populist thinking emerged from its purely cultural forms and reappeared on the political stage. It was the MDF which won the first free elections in March 1990, under the leadership of the former high school teacher and historian, Jozsef Antall, who became the first, democratically elected Prime Minister in Hungary.

In sum, the populist writers, with their democratic *and* nationalist agenda did not belong to the circles of democratic opposition or independent society. They belonged for long to a grey zone, a ‘second society’ which can be characterized as a set of informal relationships within the first, official society. Its specific characteristic was however that it did not fit into the framework of the official ideology. Since the Kadar regime paid far more attention to maintain the political monopoly of the Communist Party and to keep social stability under check than to punish ideological differences, the regime tacitly acknowledged and tolerated the marginal presence of a nationalistic semi-opposition. As mentioned above, some Communist politicians, most notably Gyorgy Aczel, sometimes even used them by playing the nationalist card out in order to keep the democratic opposition ‘counter-balanced’ and thus politically contained.

Conclusions

It is not an easy task to summarize the samizdat publications' view of history, because the analysis of historical processes was not crucial for *Beszélő* or other samizdat journals. But as they discussed current events, they often mentioned certain historical events and gave their own interpretation of these events. Thus, the independents building blocs of the historical memory of the democratic opposition can be clearly distinguished.

One of the most important characteristics of this memory was that it was almost exclusively limited to the post-1945 period. Paradoxically, the representatives of the dictatorship and the opposition agreed that history started in 1945. For example, of the twenty-seven issues of *Beszélő*, only two mentioned events before the Communist takeover in 1947-1948 and only in passim One of these was an article that reflected on the speech made by Sándor Csoóri at the Monor meeting in July 1985. The author, Pál Szalai provided information so as to analyze the behavior of Miklós Horthy in 1944 with more clarity.⁸⁰ Undeniably, he described it as more complex than the simplistic officially fascist image of Horthy, but his comments made up only two short paragraphs. The other such reference to pre-1945 period was when István Eörsi identified the post-1956 period with the oppression of the Bach-era that followed the crushed revolution and war of independence in 1848:

⁷⁹ Az MDF Alapítólevele, (The Founding Declaration of the Hungarian Democratic Forum) *Hitel*, November 1988, pp. 50-51.

⁸⁰ Szalai Pál, “Contribution”, Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol. 2, Issue 12. Budapest: AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 189.

“If we want to sincerely approach the memory of 1956, we have to start out of an independent consciousness. Official political positions help us in this, since – unlike during the reign of Francis Joseph – it cannot even attempt to make the revolution a part of its traditions. This is so, because in our times the same people and institutions performed the tasks that were divided between Haynau, Bach and Deák. Thanks God, this makes it impossible to see our age as the disillusionary stylization that represented the achievements of the realistic demands of the revolution.”⁸¹

What the opposition found the most unbearable error of the Kádár regime, that is that it erased 1956 from the nation's memory, came to their help. It reminded them that the demands of the revolution were not achieved – not even in a limited form.

Beszélő treated the Communist takeover of 1947 and the role of other parties in this in such a way that helped do away with the taboo that concerned this issue. The official Communist narrative talked of the 'voluntary' union of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party in 1948, which resulted in the creation of a united workers' party, the Party of Hungarian Workers. However, the union was preceded by the salami tactics of the Communist party and election frauds in 1947. *Beszélő* proved these and the opposition of the social democrats by publishing relevant contemporary documents. The publication of the memorandum of the social democratic Peyer group was also closely linked to the issue of emigration, since Károly Peyer left the country in 1947 and became a prominent member of the social democrats abroad. The position of the Peyer group “was timely because of the parliamentary elections called in August 1947. The Social Democratic Party that fought for fair elections for decades approved an election law that made all kind of frauds possible in 1947. This way, the Social Democratic Party diverged from its earlier principles for temporary gains and gave its approval to measures that it should have opposed on principle.”⁸²

Beszélő published the full version of the last speech of the Christian Democratic politician, István Barankovics, which he made in December of 1948 and was “the last great expression of opposition in the Hungarian parliament after 1945.”⁸³ In his speech Barankovics focused on three issues – the relationship of state and church, the issue of small and medium sized private property, and the question of human rights – to criticize the Communists. It is not difficult to notice that these issues were the ones raised by *Beszélő*. This was what made the publication of the document so timely in the 1980s. The opposition also wanted to prove that democratic opposition had a tradition in Hungary. As they said, “no one should say – least of all János Kádár in his interview to *Time Magazine* – that Hungary has no democratic tradition and, consequently, the Communists must teach democracy to the people.”⁸⁴

Beyond the examples above, there were no other references to earlier historical events or processes in *Beszélő*. What could explain this? The reason could be partially tactical: contributors thought that the facts of the distant past are not efficient enough to pressure the dictatorship for a reaction. On the other hand, samizdat publications focused on current – not past – problems, especially on those that resulted from the repressive nature of the regime. The roots of repression could in part be found in the outside, i.e. of Soviet occupation, and they could have gone back no further in time than

⁸¹ István Eörsi, ‘A másság ünnepén’ (On the Occasion of Celebrating Diversity), in: Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 18. Budapest. AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 530.

⁸² “A Peyer csoport irataiból” (From the Documents of the Peyer Group), in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 17. Budapest. AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 467.

⁸³ “Szalai Pál bevezetője Barankovics István utolsó beszédéhez” Pál Szalai's Preface to the Last Speech of István Barankovics), in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 13-14. Budapest. AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 193.

⁸⁴ György Krassó György, “Két választás Magyarországon” (Two Elections in Hungary), in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő Összkiadás (Beszélő Complete Edition)*, Vol 2, Issue 19. Budapest. AB-Kiadó, 1992, p. 700.

the Socialism of the old 19th century. Since criticism targeted the Kádár regime, it was obvious that the greatest attention should be paid to events and processes that could question the legitimacy of the regime.

From the point of view of historical memory, the 1956 revolution was the most important historical theme. There was no common point in the interpretation of 1956 between the regime and *Beszélő*. The journal already expressed protest by simply calling the 1956 a revolution as such, analyzing it, and refuting the silence that the regime forced on society, which the contributors called 'national forgetting'.

Beyond this, opposition writers renounced official propaganda. They showed that

1. In 1956, revolution erupted, which was based on broad social unity,
2. The revolution defined its goal as the democratization of the system,
3. Imre Nagy's government was not made up of traitors,
4. The retribution and trials following the revolution were not legal in any sense,
5. The new apparatus in power, which was led by János Kádár, did not entirely break with the customs of the Rákosi regime. What is more, at the beginning it used the same tactics to consolidate its power,
6. Following retributions, Hungarian intelligentsia subsided into silence in the 1960s, but this was not the consequence of accepting the social compromise. Rather, it was based on the fear of Stalinist restoration and on resignation about what could not be changed.

The assessment about the role of intellectuals relates to this last point. While the early issues of *Beszélő* described the 1960 as the era of silence, later issues partially reassessed this position and pointed out that among intellectuals the 'népi' and urban views started to appear again. In 1987, *Beszélő* openly identified these two opposition movements: the followers of the 'népi' position tried to add a patriotic flavor to their statements and the representatives of the urban position agreed to the anti-nationalism of the official policy line so that they could get their views published despite censorship. While the former viewed the problems of the nation from a cultural point of view, the latter treated it in terms of a political program.

The national question was one of the problematic issues discussed by the democratic opposition and this was the cleavage along which different opposition positions developed. The 'népi' position believed that the Hungarian nation was in a moral crisis. As opposed to this, the 'urban' position blamed the economic and political crisis on the regime and its leadership. The differences between these two positions could be most clearly seen in their treatment of Hungarian minorities abroad.

Besides reinterpreting the meaning of the revolution, the samizdat press demolished taboo issues that the regime tried to shovel under the carpet. This way *Beszélő* discussed poverty, the situation of Jews in Hungary, and Hungarian emigrants and minorities abroad. These problems existed but were hardly new. Therefore, they gave a chance to examine their causes and history. Consequently, the members of the democratic opposition pointed out that the situation of the Hungarian minorities in Romania and Czechoslovakia could not be treated as solved despite the internationalist nature of Socialist ideology. They found similar faults in the traditional treatment of the 'Jewish question', which was based on religious and assimilationist policies. For the opposition, Hungarian emigrants were not a group of 'fascists', as the official propaganda claimed, and could not be divided into good and bad types. Rather they were treated as an integral part and constituent community of the nation

Official propaganda tried to divide Hungarian emigrants into good and bad and the East-West division appeared as a similar antagonism in its worldview. The samizdat movement also accepted the existence of a division between East and West, but unlike official propaganda, questioned that this could be described along Socialist values. The division of Europe for them was characterized by lacking than by having. Freedoms were lacking in Eastern Europe and it was obvious to the opposition

that the Soviet bloc will never catch up with Western Europe economically. Although the dividing line in the Cold War resulted from World War II. and the agreement in Yalta, and became unquestionably clear with the building of the Berlin Wall, the economic differences had their roots in an earlier era and were linked to earlier historical developments.

Dissident intellectuals of *Beszélő* saw Central Europe – and not Eastern Europe – as a geographic and historical unit. They identified the turning points of the recent past in the events of 1956, 1968, and 1981. *Beszélő* regularly let Polish and Czech and Slovak intellectuals voice their views, commemorated the anniversary of the Prague spring, and followed the fate of Solidarity – the movement of independent Polish labor unions. Thus, the opposition mostly meant Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary by Central Europe, that is, Central Europe was the geographic area between Germany and the Soviet Union that had a common historical heritage, experienced both fascism and Communism and gave life to democratic opposition, critical publicity, and independent civil society.

Finally, the democratic opposition refuted the official economic self-definition of the system, which was based on the Marxist evolutionary ideal. According to the opposition, the situation after 1956 was not only characterized by improving economic trends but also by inconsequential reforms that were followed by hangs in the process of execution. In addition, from the early 1970s, the process of accelerating accumulation of national debt and lagging behind Western capitalist countries were added to these.

Based on this, I conclude that the democratic opposition did not question the historical interpretation of the Kádár regime entirely. Only the self-definition of the regime and its historical determinants were called into question.

* * *

Appendix

Table 1. The Diverging Position of the democratic opposition and the Kádár regime

Theme	The interpretation of the democratic opposition	The official position of the regime
History	Limited view of history which concentrated on the post-1945 period	The blooming of history started after 1945
	1947-48 was not a positive turning point; it meant the dissolution of the opposition	Socialisms came as a turning point in 1948.
	1956 was a revolution, democratic aspirations	1956 was a counter-revolution
Kádár regime	Did not break with the customs of the Rákosi regime	Historical compromise
	Brutal retaliations after 1956	Strict, but just reactions
	Resignation rather than social compromise	Compromise
	Economy: there is no continuous progress characterized by reforms, hangs, and crises	Linear and steady economic progress
	Unresolved issues, chronic problems (e.g. poverty, the churches, Jews, Hungarian emigration, Hungarian minorities)	Such problems do not exist
Nation	Turns against the internationalist narrative of the regime	Internationalism of the proletariat
	The Hungarian nation does not equal with the size of the country, which generates political problems	These problems are the shadows of the past, which can be solved in the spirit of internationalism
	'Népi' view: The issue of ethnic minorities is a cultural and moral problem Urbanist view: the problem of ethnic minorities is a consequence of the political regime	These problems are remnants of the past, which can be solved in the spirit of internationalism
Europe	The East-West division is not void of a value judgment, and existed before 1945	The socialist system stands above capitalism in its historical chances
Central-Europe	The defining events are those of 1956, 1968, 1980-81. The defining countries are Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland	It is the community of socialist people's democracies, its geographical location is secondary.

Bibliography

- Berend T., Iván: *A magyar gazdasági reform útja* (The Road of Hungarian Reforms). Budapest: KJK, 1988.
- Ellenforradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben* (Counterrevolutionary Forces in the October Events in Hungary), volume 4. Budapest: Magyar Népköztársaság Tájékoztatási Hivatala, 1957.
- A forradalom előzményei, alakulása és utóélete. Tanulmányok és kronológia. Adalékok az újabbkori magyar történelemhez.* (The Antecedents, Events and Aftermath of the Revolution. Essays and Chronology). Párizs-New Jersey, 1987.
- Havas, Fanny, et al. (eds). *Beszélő Összkiadás* (Beszélő Complete Edition), volumes 1-3. Budapest: AB Kiadó, 1992.
- Huszár Tibor (ed.), *Kádár – A hatalom évei 1956-1989* (Kádár: Years in Power). Budapest: Corvina, 2006.
- Tibor (ed.). *A magyar értelmiség a 80-as években* (Hungarian Intellectuals in the 1980s). Budapest: Kossuth, 1986.
- Kádár, János. *A békéért, népünk boldogulásáért. Beszédék és cikkek 1981-1985* (For Peace and the Progress of Our People. Speeches and Articles 1981-1985). Budapest: Kossuth, 1985.
- Kornai János. *A szocialista rendszer* (The Socialist System). Budapest: HVG Rt, 1993.
- Lengyel, László. *Végkifejlet* (Dénouement). Budapest: KJK, 1989.
- A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt VIII. Kongresszusának Jegyzőkönyve, 1962 november 20-24* (The Minutes of the Eighth Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, November 20-24, 1962). Budapest: Kossuth, 1963.
- Majtényi, György and Csaba Szabó (eds.), *Távolodás és Közelítések. Rendszerváltás és Kádár-korszak* (Distancing and Approximation: Regime Change and the Kádár Era). Budapest: Kossuth, 2008.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975.
- “Az MSZMP PB 1982. március 30-i ülése: A PB 1980. december 9-ei – az ellenséges, ellenzéki, ellenzékiekedő csoportok tevékenységéről szóló – határozatának végrehajtása” (The March 30, 1982 Meeting of the MSZMP Politburo: The Execution of the Politburo Decision of December 9, 1980 about the Activities of Opposition Groups). Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives), KS 288.f.5/850.
- Nagy Imre és bűntársai ellenforradalmi összeesküvése* (The Counterrevolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and his Fellow Criminals). Budapest: Tájékoztatási Hivatal, 1958.
- Pető, Iván and Sándor Szakács. *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története 1945-1985.* (Four Decades' History of the Domestic Economy, 1945-1985). Budapest: KJK, 1985.
- Rainer M., János. *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve* (The Minutes of the Monor Meeting). Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2005.
- Staniszkis, Jadwiga. *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Ungvárszki, Ágnes. *Gazdaságpolitikai ciklusok Magyarországon, 1948-1988.* (Economic Cycles in Hungary, 1948-1988) Budapest: KJK, 1989.