

===== Béla Nóvé =====

/// West meets East

The European Cultural Forum and Counter-Forum of Budapest in 1985

Ten years after the Helsinki Accords of 1975 had been signed by all the European states (except for Albania), together with the us and Canada, Budapest hosted the European Cultural Forum from mid-October to the end of November 1985. The event followed a series of conferences in Belgrade and Madrid, themselves designed to monitor compliance with the Helsinki commitments. The theme of the Budapest fete was freedom in culture and art, which formed the ‘third basket’ of the Helsinki Accords. The conference promised to be challenging, in view of the fact that open and disguised censorship were practiced in the communist countries, in contradiction with the principles of the Helsinki Accords, thus offering an easy target for the Western delegations.



Memorial coin produced for the official Cultural Forum Budapest, 1985.

== Introduction

The events and debates of the Cultural Forum and Counter-Forum of Budapest in late 1985 well reflected on the major changes which had just begun at the time in East-West relations, politics, and diplomacy, together with the challenging concept of cultural freedom as a basic part of human rights.

The time itself—the middle of the tumultuous 1980s—offers a great historical perspective for an analytical case study. After all, at half-time we can see a series of epoch-making changes from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Compared to the dynamically pros-

perous West, Central and Eastern Europe was increasingly falling apart, the economy and technology were not competitive, and the Soviet power bloc was led by dying out party general secretaries one after another (Brezhnev 1982, Andropov 1984, Chernenko 1985). The beginning of the decade is dominated by the depressing nuclear rivalry of the 'Little Cold War' across Europe, with the freezing of the SALT negotiations, the stiffened confrontation between the Soviet SS 20 and the American Pershing nuclear arsenal. Compared to this, the emergence of the new, energetic Party Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in March of 1985, warrants cautious hope from the point of view of domestic and foreign policy. Although substantive reforms: 'glasnost' (openness) and 'perestroika' (restructuring) had not yet come about, it was already a great achievement that he was ready to seriously negotiate with President Reagan at the Soviet-American summit in Geneva at the end of November 1985—actually the closing period of the Cultural Forum in Budapest!—among other things, by agreeing on Soviet-American cultural and scientific exchange. (The bipolar power confrontation later eased further with the Reagan–Gorbachev summits in Reykjavik, 1986 and in Washington, 1987.)

At the same time, in the late autumn of 1985, the vassal states of the Soviet empire were still ruled by rigid and orthodox communist leaders everywhere, including the 'happiest barracks in the East', i.e. the stagnant Hungary of the Kádár regime, which nipped all kinds of reforms and domestic political changes in the bud. In Poland, the state of emergency and the military government of General Jaruzelski were still in full swing. The GDR, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, and even the 'separate-way' communist Yugoslavia, were ruled by one-party police states, trying to hide the complete lack of freedom and prosperity with primitive propaganda and terror. At the same time, the leaders of these severely repressive puppet states were stubbornly guarding their common 'Stalin heritage', the Yalta status quo conchain, could not foresee that in another five or six years the Soviet empire itself would collapse spectacularly, the two German states would unite, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia disintegrated, as did Tito's legacy: the communist federal Yugoslavia, with a series of bloody and protracted wars.

The contemporary relations of culture, literature and the press also show far-reaching changes during the decade of the 1980s. These are partly structural and therefore bound by legal and institutional conditions, and partly formed as a result of brave individual and community initiatives, such as the censorship-rejecting samizdat press and book publishing, independent artist groups and underground countercultures, minority protection, free church or human rights movements. All of these, although suppressed from time to time, already had significant social traditions in the Soviet Union as well as in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The only thing missing was to show themselves publicly, get to know each other, and develop freely. In the autumn of 1985, the Counter Cultural Forum in Budapest provided an exceptional opportunity for this, with the wide interna-

tional press coverage that accompanied it. Mainly to the Hungarian democratic opposition movement, but also to similar Russian, Polish, Czech, Romanian and other initiatives through their advocates.

The main focus of my case study is to reveal the motives and impact of this. In other words, I am researching what the one-time actors expected or hoped for the deliberations of either the official or the alternative forum, and how did they evaluate their results and shortcomings. I wish to reconstruct authentically all of this from a variety of sources, e.g. from the news reports of the Hungarian official and independent press, as well as from the additions of the international press, memoir literature, oral history sources or from the extant minutes of the meetings of the Hungarian party leadership. In my work, in addition to the bibliography, I refer to more than sixty actors of the time, quoting their words and providing their brief biographies in footnotes. At the end of my study, I will describe in detail the three main source collections of my work: (1) the documents of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), (2) my relevant findings in Hungarian Archives of State Security (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, ÁBTL), (3) and the Hungarian Samizdat Collection of Petőfi Literary Museum (Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, PIM). (All three archives are freely researchable in Budapest.) At the end of my work, I also provide a brief overview of the history of Hungarian samizdat movement for those interested abroad.

I cannot hide the fact that I myself was present at the Counter Forum as a member of the Hungarian democratic opposition movement, and I have maintained friendly relations with many of its Hungarian and foreign participants ever since, including some leaders of the IHF. Here is but a brief footnote about my own samizdat activity.¹



Provoking sticker and flyer printed by the Art Group Inconnu, 1985.

¹ == Samizdat works by Béla Nóvé (1956–): *Az utcaseprő királysága* (The Kingdom of a Street Cleaner), Tale, 1977; *A kurtizán esküvője*, (The Wedding of a Prostitute), Play, 1978; *Kötéltánc* (Rope Danse), *Poems*, 1979; Translation, and illustrations to Hungarian edition of Orwell's *Animal farm*, entitled *Állati gazdaság*, 1984, *Kétség és remény közt—Erdélyről sokadszorra* (Hopes and Doubts: Once Again on Transylvania), A selection of studies and documents, 1989.

= = What happened—and did not happen in Budapest in autumn 1985?

For the official Forum, some 850 participants were accredited to Budapest, thus the city was home for six weeks to a legion of diplomats and experts. However, instead of the protocol-like programme of the official Forum, the real novelty which caught the attention of the world was the Western public, samizdat press, and dissidents from the East (not to mention the communist secret police and its informers, were busier than ever) was an open dispute among writers and intellectuals from both East and West that was held at the poet István Eörsi's² flat and then in film director András Jeles's³ apartment, which lasted altogether three days in Budapest. The rich and versatile collections survived contain many exciting documents which may well be interesting both for Hungarian and international researchers as well as the larger public.

Hosts and guests, official and unofficial groups had long prepared for the event, which was expected to meet with a great deal of attention in the press. Dissidents, human rights activists, agents, secret police, party bureaucrats, and journalists were all ready to do their best. Even some artists were busy preparing for the Forum, for instance those of the Inconnu Art Group, Budapest, the young and inventive talents with daring political messages. They printed a large numbers of stickers depicting Mona Lisa in a Hungarian police uniform, and these stickers were posted all over the city during the conference: on buses and trams on public telephone cabins and shop windows, suggesting a bizarre but rather realistic image of Hungary as a 'charming police state.' A samizdat poster was also printed with the same design of 'Constable Gioconda,' with the slogans: 'Culture without Police!—Art without Censorship!' Few people knew that the young artist, Péter Bokros,⁴ who had designed the image, had been forcibly conscripted to the army right before the Forum started and spent several days in 'splendid isolation' in a military jail.

2 = = István Eörsi (1931–2005) was a Hungarian poet, translator, and journalist. He took part actively in the 1956 revolution, and then was imprisoned for 4 years. He was one of the most devoted followers and the translator of György Lukács the reform-Marxist philosopher of the 'Budapest school'.

3 = = András Jeles (1945–) is a Hungarian film and theater director. His first feature *Little Valentino* (1973) became an alternative cult film. However, *Dream Brigade*, shot in 1983, was only screened publicly in 1989. His son, a film director himself, László Nemes Jeles received an Oscar Award for Best Foreign Film in 2015 for his film 'Saul's Son'.

4 = = Péter Bokros (1957–2017) was a Hungarian graphic artist and founding member of Inconnu Group, the most active underground art formation, that organised the exhibition banned 'The Fighting City' in 1986, and in 1989 made wood carved memorial columns for the graves of all executed 1956 victims. He finished his life in poverty in a small vilage.

= = The case of the 'cheetah won in the lottery' with communist cultural diplomacy

The official Hungarian preparations began in the autumn of 1983, shortly after the Madrid decision, in fact more than two years before the opening of the European Cultural Forum in Budapest. Following the decision of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP) in September 1983, the Ministerial Council established a National Preparatory Committee (Országos Előkészítő Bizottság) to chair the top-level political goals and coordinate the tasks of the host role, chaired by the Minister of Culture, Béla Köpeczi.⁵ A year later, in the autumn of 1984—the long-awaited sinister 'Orwellian Year'—experts from the 35 participating states also held a preparatory meeting in Budapest to develop the Forum's agenda and organisational framework. The top party leadership, the Hungarian 'Politburo' was informed of all this by the end of 1984, and it took a decision on further tasks of the preparation. Finally, the Politburo at its meeting on 24 September 1985, discussed the report presented by Katalin Radics⁶ on the preparations, and set out its last decision three weeks before the Forum opened. On this session, party leader János Kádár,⁷ the man of 'careful punch', and the master of 'two-front tactics', said:

'I welcome the report and propose that the Committee of Political Affairs take note of it.

I join those comrades who appreciate that our organisational staff is preparing carefully for this event. However, this report already reflects concerns in a sense, and I think we went like someone who won a cheetah or a flea circus in the lottery and didn't know what to do with it, when they took it home. I would say, comrades, that we need to get back to our basic principle, and stick to it. [...]

As for the [Western] "monitoring" groups... Let us accept the report's recommendations. So those on the blacklist cannot get a visa, and the ode to it must be taken. Others will need to be issued a visa under the normal procedure, but we have to reckon with the fact that they might prepare to do some minor actions

5 = = See Köpeczi's interview he gave in the Mass Communication Center right before the Budapest Cultural Forum opened. 'European Culture—Hungarian Heritage. Conversation with Minister of Culture Béla Köpeczi'. As a minister, he accurately reflected the wishes of the Hungarian party leadership.

6 = = Katalin Radics (1945–) was a communist politician and a member of administration. During the 1980s she worked as the Head of Department for Science, Education, and Culture, an operative body assigned to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party MSZMP.

7 = = János Kádár (1912–1989) was a Hungarian communist leader and from late 1956 General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, a position he held for 32 years. Declining health led to his retirement in 1988, and he died on 6 July 1989, the very day the Hungarian High Court declared Imre Nagy and all revolutionary martyrs innocent.

here. In the right place, even four people can do spectacular things, and there will soon be eight Western reporters who are just eager to record that. And then what would happen? Little crappy things don't have to be dealt with, but dating should be radically prevented! We can safely take on all the ode to this. After all the governance of Hungary cannot be taken over by the Cultural Forum.⁸

What concerns were falling on the foreheads of domestic party leaders and culture cadres, and what kind of prestige gains, political and lucrative benefits did they hope for by 'the cheetah won in the lottery'⁹, being asked to host the European Cultural Forum? As Kádár's comments behind the padded doors of the Politburo's Danube panoramic meeting room reflects: the Hungarian party leadership did not really know what to do with the honor that Hungary was granted the right to organise the European Cultural Forum as the first and last of the Warsaw Pact member states in the very jarring role of the host. It is typical that most of the headaches of the Hungarian forum organisers who eagerly nurtured the image of Hungary as the 'happiest barracks in the Soviet block' were caused by the issues of the third 'Helsinki basket': the free flow of information, free press, religion and culture and the more and more challenging common ground of all these: the human rights. They feared not only the Western diplomats and the Western press, but also the meetings and joint protests of active Hungarian political emigrants and the Hungarian democratic opposition. At the same time, they hoped for another prestige gain, and last but not least for more Western loans, if they successfully fulfill their hospitality role and the appearance of Hungarian 'liberal' cultural policy.

The Hungarian security forces were well aware of the preparations many months prior to the planned event. In the last moment, it therefore secretly instructed the management of Hotel Intercontinental in the downtown of the city to refuse to make the reserved banquet room available and deny all new requests for rental of similar conference spaces. Thus, the Helsinki Federation was denied the chance to hold a public meeting in Budapest. However, thanks to the Hungarian opposition, the meeting still successfully took place in the private residence of two generous artists as host. As I have mentioned, on 15 October, the participants

8 = = Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP Politikai Bizottságának 1985. szeptember 24-én megtartott üléséről. Jelentés a Budapesten megrendezésre kerülő Európai Kulturális Fórum előkészítésével és lebonyolításával kapcsolatos kérdésekről. Kádár János felszólalása. Magnetofon felvételről leírt szöveg. [Report on the meeting of the Political Committee of the MSZMP held on September 24, 1985. Report on issues related to the preparation and implementation of the European Cultural Forum to be held in Budapest. János Kádár's speech. Text written following tape recording.] 949-239. M-KS 288-5. MNL OL, Budapest, Hungary.

9 = = This somewhat bizarre saying of the First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party could either be a reference to a joke commonly known in that time—with the meaning of a 'not really wanted present'—or Kádár's own improvised metaphor for the uncomfortable situation.

gathered at poet István Eörsi's flat, and on the next two days they met at film director András Jeles's apartment. Thus, the event became a private affair, which the Hungarian secret police was unable to prevent, although it tried to monitor it by all means from the beginning till the end of the third day.

As a young writer, translator and editor at the time, I also have some memories about the unique atmosphere of this semi-conspirative, semi-public meeting in the apartment of the well-known poet and intransigent '56-er István Eörsi near the Elisabeth Bridge. After a long historical break, 'West met East' freely and with a rather keen interest in each other in this temporary asylum of a downtown flat full of fairly informally dressed local intellectuals, students, some well-known writers, human rights activists from the 'free world,' and friendly face Western diplomats, a bit more than a hundred people in total. Sitting on the floor, seated on chairs, or standing behind them, the members of the audience listened carefully to the speakers, who spoke mostly in English and sometimes in German, French, and Hungarian. The lectures touched on the question of writers' integrity, the role of writers in society, and the future of European cultural and political heritage. The most sensitive issue, however, was that of censorship, a topic hardly mentioned at the official forum.

In fact, the publicity of these free discussions among writers and intellectuals both from the East and the West was much more intensive than that of the boring protocol like events of the official Forum. The Counter-Forum was atten-



Participants of Alternative or Counter-Forum, 15 October 1985.

(Photo: IHF Archives)

ded by, among other people, Susan Sontag,¹⁰ Per Wästberg,¹¹ Danilo Kiš,¹² Hans Magnus Enzensberger,¹³ Timothy Garton Ash,¹⁴ Amos Oz,¹⁵ Pavel Kohut¹⁶ and Jiří Gruša,¹⁷ as well as by a number of Hungarian writers, including György Konrád,¹⁸

10 == Susan Sontag (1933–2004) was an American writer, philosopher, and political activist. She mostly wrote books of essays on photography, war, poverty, cancer, but also published political pamphlets, studies, and film scripts. She remained all in her life a radical minded intellectual, with a passionate search for social justice and liberty worldwide.

11 == Erik Wästberg (1933–) is a Swedish poet, novelist, and journalist. He was editor-in-chief of Sweden's largest daily, *Dagens Nyheter* 1976–1982, and has been a contributor since 1953. Throughout his long life he has campaigned extensively for human rights. He was President of the PEN International from 1979 until 1986 and founder of the Swedish section of Amnesty International (1963).

12 == Danilo Kiš (1935–1989) was born in Subotica (Szabadka) as son of a Serbian mother and a Hungarian Jewish father. He was a Yugoslav novelist, short story writer, essayist and translator. His best known works include 'Hourglass', 'Tomb for Boris Davidovich' and 'The Encyclopedia of the Dead'. In 1979, he left Belgrade for Paris, and gave lectures at Bordeaux University.

13 == Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1929–1922) was a German author, poet, translator, and editor. He was regarded as one of the literary founding figures of the Federal Republic of Germany, and wrote more than 70 books, with works translated into 40 languages. He was one of the leading authors in Group 47, and influenced the 1968 West German student movement.

14 == Timothy Garton Ash (1955–) is a British historian, author, and commentator. He has published so far a dozen of books of political writing which have charted the transformation of Europe over the last half century. He is Professor of European Studies in Oxford University. His essays appear in the *New York Review of Books*. Also writes a column on international affairs in the *Guardian*.

15 == Amos Oz (1939–2018) born in Jerusalem, was an Israeli writer, novelist, and journalist. He was also a professor of Hebrew literature at Ben-Gurion University. From 1967 onwards, he was a prominent advocate of a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. He was the author of 40 books, and still regarded as one of Israel's most prolific writers and respected intellectuals.

16 == Pavel Kohut (1924–) is a Czech and Austrian novelist, playwright, and poet. He was a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, a Prague Spring participant and dissident in the 1970s until he was not allowed to return from Austria. He was also a founding member of the Charter 77 movement.

17 == Jiří Gruša (1938–2011) was a Czech poet, novelist, translator, and diplomat. From 1969 he was banned from publishing, and later was imprisoned for his samizdat work. In 1982 he left for West Germany. From 1991 he served as an ambassador to Germany, then on to Austria. For his last years he was the Director of the Diplomatic Academia of Vienna and the President of PEN International.

18 == György Konrád (1933–2019) was a Hungarian writer—banned for long in his own country, and best known in the West. His works include both fictions (*The City Builder*, *The Loser*, *A Feast in the Garden*, *The Stone Dial*) and non-fictions (*Antipolitics*, *The Melancholy of Rebirth*, *A Guest in My Own Country: A Hungarian Life, Departure and Return*). In the 1990s he was elected President of PEN International, and of the Academy of Arts, Berlin.

Sándor Csoóri,¹⁹ György Bence,²⁰ Miklós Mészöly,²¹ and Miklós Tamás Gáspár.²² The Helsinki Federation was represented by Gerald Nagler,²³ Jeri Laber,²⁴ Aryeh Neier²⁵ and Karl von Schwarzenberg,²⁶ who had recently been elected President of the IHF. Right from the beginning, publicity given to the alternative forum by the Western press significantly exceeded the press coverage of the official forum. Three

19 == Sándor Csoóri (1930–2016) was a Hungarian poet, essayist, and screenwriter who became known as one of the finest poets of his generation. He was also considered as a leading figure of national opposition. Volumes of his poetry translated into English included *Memory of Snow*, *Barbarian Prayer*. Among his sociopolitical essays about Eastern Europe are: 'Report from the Tower', 'Preparation for the Reckoning'.

20 == György Bence (1941–2006) was a university professor, philosopher, dissident and political consultant. In 1979 he was among the first Hungarians who criticized together with Andrei Sakharov and others the Soviet crackdown on the Czech Charta 77 signatories. Later he was among the founding members of the IHF for Human Rights. He was founding editor-in-chief of the Budapest Book Review (Budapest Könyvszemle, 1989–1995).

21 == Miklós Mészöly (1921–2001) was a Hungarian prose writer and playwright, a founder and chairman of Széchenyi Academy of Hungarian Writers and Artists. From 1956 he was a freelance writer. His main works included: *Sötét Jelek* ('Dark Signs'), *Az atléta halála* ('Death of an Athlete'), *Saulus* ('Saulus'), *Film* ('Film'), *Megbocsátás* ('Forgiveness'), *Érintések* ('Touches').

22 == Miklós Tamás Gáspár (1948–2023) is a Hungarian philosopher, politician and publicist. In 1978 he settled from Romania to Hungary, and started to teach philosophy at Eötvös Lóránd University Budapest, but soon was fired due to his 'oppositional attitude'. He then went on teaching at Yale and in French universities. Returning to Budapest he soon became one of the most radical figures of the democratic opposition, until he was elected as an MP in 1989.

23 == Gerald Nagler (1929–2022) was a Swedish businessman and a human rights activist. In 1977 he went to the Soviet Union to make contact with Andrei Sakharov, Yelena Bonner, Naum Meiman, and other Russian dissidents. He then founded the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights and was its Chairman from 1992 to 2004.

24 == Jeri Laber (1931–) was one of the founders of Human Rights Watch, the largest human rights organization in the United States. She is the author and/or editor of dozens of Human Rights Watch reports and more than 100 articles on human rights issues published in *The New York Times*, *The New York Review of Books* and many other publications.

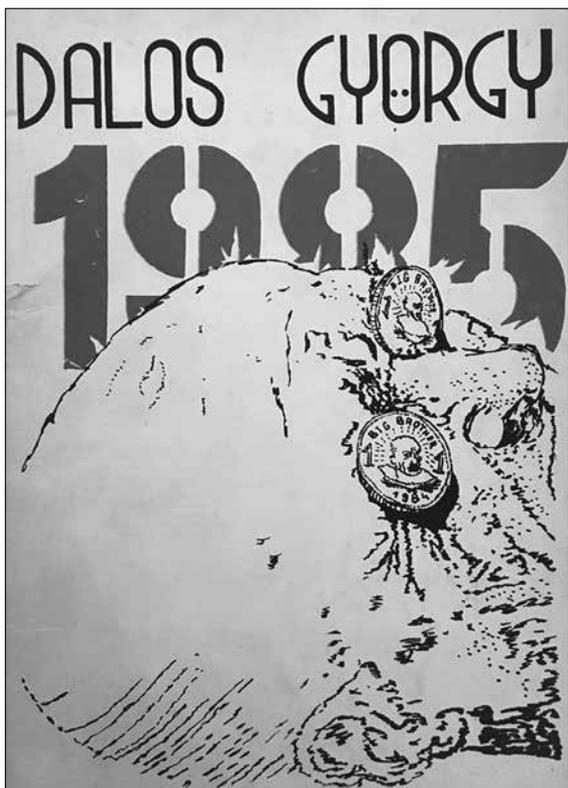
25 == Aryeh Neier (1937–) was born into a German Jewish family in Berlin, then in Nazi Germany. He then became a refugee as a child as his family fled when he was two years old in 1939. He graduated in the US from Cornell University in legal studies in 1961. Later he became a human rights activist who co-founded Human Rights Watch, served as the president of George Soros's Open Society Institute philanthropy network from 1993 to 2012.

26 == Karl von Schwarzenberg, (1937–) is a human rights activist, politician, and diplomat. In 1948 together with his family he fled from communist Czechoslovakia to Austria. He started his political career as an activist for ÖWP. He was the chairman of IHF for Human Rights between 1984 and 1991. Then on he became twice the Foreign Minister of Czech Republic (2007–2013).

television channels, several radio stations (including the BBC, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle, and Radio Free Europe), and countless correspondents from the Western media took part in the symposium, producing reports and making interviews with the participants.

The great Western dailies, weeklies and magazines, including the Austrian *Profil*, the German *Die Welt*, *Die Weltwoche* and *Die Presse*, the prestigious Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the French *Liberation*, and the Italian *La Repubblica*, published detailed coverage of the counter-forum. An essay by Danilo Kiš was published in the *New York Times Book Review*. Garton Ash sent a report to *Spectator*

and wrote a longer study for *New York Review of Books*. In the latter piece, which was entitled ‘The Hungarian lesson’, he revealed that although censorship in Hungary may have seemed liberal from a distance, in reality it was characterised by chaos and unpredictability. To give an example, in response to Soviet protests, he mentioned that copies of a Béla Kun²⁷ biography, written by an associate of the Party History Institute, had recently been removed from the bookshops and the publisher was ordered by the Politburo to keep all the copies closed from the public.²⁸ Even some of the right-wing Western press that did not represented themselves at the Counter-Forum reflected on the main topics quite clearly. *The Guardian of Liberty*, for example, published the full text of Counter-Forum’s statement, ironically adding reiterated the Kremlin’s viewpoint of the Soviet Communist Party daily, *Pravda*, on the role of television and radio, what is applied



A witty and popular samizdat novel by György Dalos—AB Independent Publisher, 1985.

27 == Béla Kun (1886–1938) was the leader of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, later he fled for the Soviet Union, where he fell a victim of Stalin’s purges. The book referred by Timothy Garton Ash was György Borsányi’s biography, see: Borsányi, *Kun Béla*.

28 == Garton Ash, ‘The Hungarian lesson’. On the media response in connection with the counter-forum, see Project files: Cultural Forum, Budapest, Press Clippings. Box 2, folder 3. 318-0-5. Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, OSA. Budapest, Hungary.

to the other media and to the arts too: ‘Our television and radio broadcasting must entirely and fully be political television and political radio broadcasting.’²⁹

György Konrád, in those years an ‘unperson’ in his own country, but possibly the best known Hungarian writer abroad, had written a lengthy essay, which was first published in samizdat,³⁰ and then was read out by the author himself as an opening speech to the participants of the Alternative Cultural Forum in Budapest. Even its title sounds rather polemic with a scent of irony: ‘A cenzúra reformja?’ [Reforming censorship?]. Konrád in fact provides a profound analysis from all aspects of the problem: historically, politically, psychologically, and often concludes in highly original statements. As he compared the Western and Eastern models of publishing practice: ‘From Voltaire to Flaubert roughly a century was enough for the French writers to get rid off censorship. However, for the Eastern half of Europe even two centuries were not enough to reach this goal. Censors and customs officers in East Europe are not at all comic figures as yet. Your smile will immediately frozen, once they pull out your personal notes from your suitcase, read them, and may confiscate them, if they feel like. These guys are armed legal rubbers with a high sense of duty.’ He emphasised the unacceptable nature of censorship, and insist that it must be wholly abolished, not just reformed.

Other speakers of the Counter-Forum expressed nevertheless characteristic—although often controversial—ideas, as was reported in those days by the *Hírmondó*, popular samizdat paper of Budapest:

‘Danilo Kiš pointed out that self-censorship was even more harmful than the real thing, official censorship, because in a schizophrenic way the former forced the author to assume the personality of another man, who may not even exist as a real person. In his comments about the written text, he referred to the writer’s dilemma: whether one should be loyal to the laws of the state or to the norms of literature. Talking about the limitations dictated by political “realities”, István Csurka³¹ also referred to censorship and self-censorship, when he declared that while politics may have to deal with realities, culture must transcend them. Literature cannot accept them, and writers must attempt even the impossible. He quoted Epictetus: “Only those deserve freedom, who are prepared to die for it.”

29 = = ‘Budapest appeal for religious freedom’. 1.

30 = = Konrád, ‘A cenzúra reformja? Az Ellen-Fórum beszédeinek külön száma’.

31 = = István Csurka (1934–2012) was a Hungarian novelist, playwright, and politician. During the Kádár era he sharply criticized the communist establishment from a national basis. During the 1980s he became one of the main leaders of the ‘national opposition’. As the editor-in-chief of Magyar Fórum, founding member of MDF (Magyar Demokrata Fórum, Hungarian Democratic Forum), he challenged MDF from inside, the first governing party, from which he was excluded in 1993, still went on marching with his extreme right, anti-liberal, and anti-semitic new party, MIÉP (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja, Party of Hungarian Justice and Life).

The other main topic of the symposium was European unity and the European idea.

According to Susan Sontag, Europe's future lays in the creation of a multicultural and multinational Europe without separate states. By contrast, Hans Magnus Enzensberger thought that the "European idea" could never be a guiding principle, nor could the European institutes and the bureaucratic organisations of political power be our ideals. He criticised the idea of the European Union, pointing out that the Germans continued to regard themselves Germans, rather than Europeans.

István Csurka painted a picture of Europe as a sick and onanistic society solely interested in money. The West can only produce goods, but not ideas. Still, Eastern Europe was looking to the West for inspiration. [...] Taking issue with Csurka, François Bondy³² pointed out in his brief and witty speech that it was by no means self-evident that new ideas were necessary. In any case, the ideas of democracy and human rights were born in the West, along with a number of new movements in art. Admittedly, Eastern Europe itself produced some new ideas, such as Communism, for example.[...]

In György Krassó's³³ words, there was no such thing as Europe at all; it was all history. There were many ways to divide Europe, but the main distinction separated it into two areas: one half was occupied by the Russians and the other half was *not* occupied by the Americans. In that context, the fact that Hungary was an occupied country of a crushed revolution would have deserved greater attention. [...]

The position and the role of writers was another topic that engaged the attention of the participants most.

Per Wastberg made the point that literature was not about drawing some final and unshakeable conclusions, it was rather a testimony for pluralism. Writers should not be expected to set various goals; they are to express dissatisfaction and desire. Alain Finkelkraut³⁴ talked about the writers' betrayal. Amos Oz also referred

32 == François Bondy (1915–2003) was a Swiss journalist and novelist. He worked for Swiss and German newspapers and was reputed for his political commentaries. In 1940, Bondy worked for *Weltwoche*; in 1950, he joined the *Congress for Cultural Freedom*, and established the monthly magazine *Preuves* Paris. From 1970, he lived in Zürich. He was one of the first Western intellectuals who promoted the work of the Polish exile writer Witold Gombrowicz.

33 == György Krassó (1932–1991) was a member of Hungarian democratic movement during the 1980s. He had taken part in the 1956 revolution as a student, and was imprisoned then for 7 years. By mid-1980s he was the busiest samizdat publisher, for that he was often harrassed by the police. With the standard name 'Hungarian October' he founded his Publishers, Press, and lately his Party. In 1985 he left Budapest for London, but kept on busy with his Press.

34 == Alain Finkelkraut (1949–) is a French philosopher and public intellectual. He has written books and essays on a wide range of topics, many on the ideas of tradition and identity nonviolence, including Jewish identity and antisemitism, French colonialism, the mission of the French education system in immigrant assimilation, and the Yugoslav Wars.

to the responsibility of writers, when he pointed out that tyranny, oppression, moral predicament and mass murder had always and everywhere started with the contamination of language. The writer's task is to name everything by its name. Every time that war was described as peace, oppression and persecution as safety, and murder as liberation, it invariably turned out that tyranny had put shackles on the language. [...]

Jiří Gruša spoke about those emigrant intellectuals from Eastern Europe, who used to be 'prophets' in their home country and now were considered ex-prophets both in the West and in the East. In fact, even back in their home country they only projected their own personality, rather than their fine ideals.³⁵

= = The 'Helsinki kitsch'—or has the 'Big red shark been hooked' by the West?

As for the official conference it proved to be far less challenging and inspirational—both politically and intellectually. The Western delegations could not be blamed entirely for the Forum's failure to use the opportunity to spark fiery debates and express fervent criticism of communism. The agenda of the conference practically smothered all hope of any debate. The Eastern Bloc delegations insisted on the extremely detailed agenda they had set. Thus, only the selected delegates could take the floor; they were allowed to speak only on the subject which they had already specified as the focus of their talks, and there were no informal discussions afterward. Although the Western delegations motioned to change the rules so as to allow time for informal discussions, their proposal needed a unanimous 'yes' from all those present. Since the communist delegates opposed it, the proposal was defeated.

Indeed, the events that took place in the field of international politics in the ten years after Helsinki gave very little cause for celebration, as was indicated by the 'lack of progress' at the Budapest Forum. Still, the Cultural Forum of Budapest became a significant stage in the Helsinki process, not so much on account of the official events, but as a consequence of the initiative launched by the International Helsinki Federation. The Federation wanted to hold a parallel event during the first three days of the official Forum, that was finally managed to be held in privat flats owing to daring and generous contributions of Hungarian artists, intellectuals and the active network of the local democratic opposition. This came to be known as the 'Alternative' or 'Counter-Forum', the only progressive novelty in the eyes of many critical minded participants and observers.

35 = = 'Az alternatív fórum'. 3-4.

In his subtly written monograph on the history of Hungarian Helsinki Committee,³⁶ historian András Mink³⁷ concludes: ‘The Alternative Forum passed no resolutions; it issued no final communiqué and presented no official position on the issues debated. But it was not meant to do, either. All things considered, the forum accomplished its mission. One of its goals was to enable the writers, artists and dissidents from both the East and the West to meet and to get to know each other. Another obvious goal was to give Western publicity to censorship and the position of dissidents inside the Communist countries. The third goal of the counter-forum was either to enforce a right acknowledged in the Helsinki Accords—the right of groups of citizens to meet—or to inform the world about the authorities’ denial of this right. The counter-forum was able to meet all these expectations.’³⁸

Even so, many dissidents in Budapest—and no doubt even more in Warsaw, Prague, Moscow and Bucharest—felt rather disappointed about the outcome of the official Helsinki Forum, since they would have expected ‘loud solidarity instead of silent diplomacy’ from the West. In an article, Miklós Haraszti³⁹ radically refused the whole policy of ‘the Helsinki kitsch’, which in his view only helped to maintain the cynical status quo policy of the ‘Yalta order’. He raised the question: ‘Did anything happen?’, and concludes as follows:

‘It cannot be ruled out that totalitarian and democratic states held a consultation in Budapest aimed at reaching a consensus on the future of culture. The way in which the consultation was conducted will also remain with us: this technique of secret diplomacy, has so far only been used for cultural purposes in communist countries. And we are left with a new conception of culture, whose homeland is, in fact, not Budapest, but Helsinki. If the young philosopher, György Lukács was right, culture is nothing more than cultivating a desire for our perfect self. In Budapest, the states have come very close to this possible perfection, simply by the fact of the Forum: to the common official culture of Yalta-Europe. I would call this new culture “Helsinki kitsch”, and I believe that, as a desire for oneself, it lives and works even if it does not yet make a joint final statement.’⁴⁰[...]

36 == Mink, *The Defendent: the State—The History of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee*.

37 == András Mink (1965) is a Hungarian historian and archivist working for Blinken-OSA Archives, Budapest. In the early 1990s he was journalist of weekly *Beszélő*, then on editor-in-chief of the monthly periodical from 2003 to 2007. He joined the Hungarian Helsinki Committee as programme director, and started to work for Blinken OSA in 1995. He received his PhD from the Central European University History Department in 2003.

38 == Mink, op. cit. 66.

39 == Miklós Haraszti (1945–) is a Hungarian writer, journalist, and politician. He studied philosophy and literature at Budapest University. In 1976 he took part in Hungarian democratic opposition, and in 1980 he became editor of the samizdat *Beszélő*. In 1989, he participated in the ‘roundtable’ negotiations on free elections. A member of the Hungarian Parliament from 1990–1994, he then moved on to lecture on media politics at numerous universities.

40 = The final resolution of the European Cultural Forum was vetoed by the Romanian delegation instructed by Nicolae Ceaușescu.

The meeting point is obvious: favoring state-level relations. Communist countries are keen to expand cultural exchanges, provided that their control over culture is not compromised. As long as they are not threatened with this, they are willing to sign standards that are contrary to their principles and practices. The other group, from the west, goes to the meeting point from the opposite direction: if cultural contacts are established between the countries, they will not mind if the eastern states ignore the restrictions that, if implemented consistently, would upset the status quo in Helsinki's first and second baskets. [...]

Whatever we have to say about the Western cultural figures in Budapest, it is a fact that only persons selected by the states could be considered as officially invited participants according to the rules. So far, only official Eastern Europe has ignored a culture independent of the state, now the whole official culture, the West as well as the East, did so when it "took note" of the official explanation given by the Hungarians why they would not allow the independent symposium to be held in public, which, for any case, would have been their duty to host.⁴¹

However, the Soviet human right activist, Sergey Kovalyev⁴² felt quite differently when said: 'The big red shark has already swallowed the hook in Helsinki. Now it is up to the West to tug on the string.'⁴³ This belief seemed to be justified by the fact, that the first Reagen-Gorbachev summit was held in Geneva in November 1985, which in light what followed later on further summits—in Reykjavik in 1986 and in Washington in 1987—soon proved to be the first decisive step to the rapid dissolution of the Soviet system. However, the average East-European citizens could hardly feel anything of this at that time. Nor did the Russian human right activists in their forced labour camp or imprisoned, those Polish Solidarity activists still interned, Václav Havel, Miklós Durayand others in Czechoslovakia, or the victims of the Securitate in Romania. On the contrary, during the next months oppression even in Hungary became harder. It seemed as if the Hungarian authorities wanted to take revenge for their previous indulgence forced upon them by the massive presence of diplomats from the West. The democratic opposition in fact was still to suffer a long series of harassments: house searches, fines, arrests, which soon concluded in the brutal police attack on peaceful demonstrators, the ill-famed 'Battle of Chain Bridge' on 15 March 1986 –national memorial day, when free press was first

41 == Haraszti, 'A Helsinki Giccs'

42 == Sergey Kovalyev (1930–2021) was a biophysicist, and a Soviet-Russian activist for protection of human rights. In 1966 he protested in an open letter against the trial of two brave Russian writers: Siniavsky and Daniel. He was soon fired from the Moscow State University, and in 1974 was sentenced for ten years prison and exile for his samizdat activities, and 'anti-soviet propaganda'. He could only return to Moscow in 1987.

43 == These words of Kovalyev were preserved by his fellow prisoners in the Goulags. No written source has been found.

achieved by some young poets and students in Pest-Buda as a glorious overture of peaceful 1848 revolution.



Memorial stamp issued for the official Cultural Forum by the Hungarian Post, 1985.

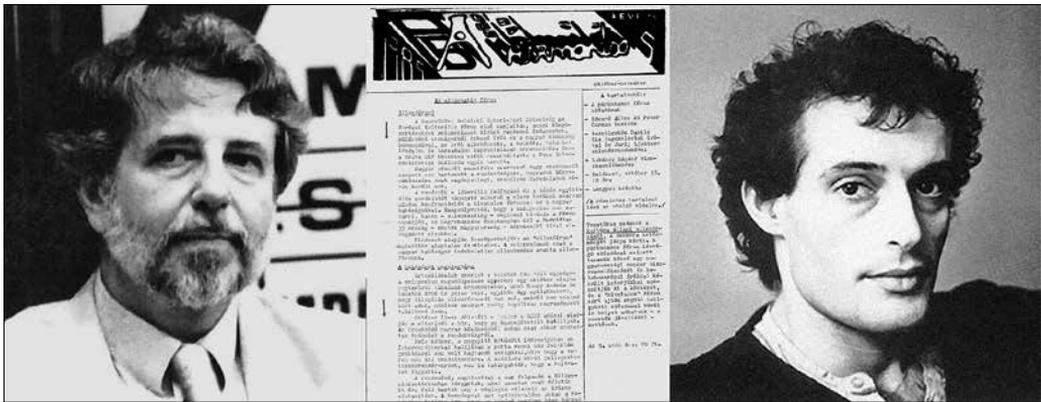
== The sources of the Budapest Forum and Counter-Forum

A rich collection of sources survived about the events and debates of the Forum and Counter-Forum consisting of the one-time publications (articles published in the Eastern and Western press, gassizdat, samizdat, and tamizdat), the records of the Hungarian diplomatic, police, and party organs (secret reports, instructions, etc.) and some private and personal recollections (in the form of memoirs, oral history interviews, etc.). The theme is of both Hungarian and international interest. The

arguments which were put forward in the formal and informal debates clearly reveal what the creators and managers of culture thought about public fora, human rights, and political freedoms and responsibilities. The people who took part were writers, journalists, artists, scientists, diplomats, and politicians from both East and West just a few years before the decline of the bipolar world order.

There are three main archival holdings of the Budapest Cultural and Counter-Cultural Forum held in late 1985: (1) the Hungarian samizdat collection of PIM, (2) the documents of the IHF, and (3) the secret files of ÁBTL. All three closely related, well-structured, and freely researchable repositories are located in downtown Budapest, quite close to one another, which makes it possible to study the materials in their holdings in parallel with relative ease.

The Hungarian samizdat collection of the PIM was completed and made accessible for research following the major changes of the political system in 1989–1990. It went on to become one of the most comprehensive Hungarian reference samizdat collections, like the ones of the National Széchényi Library (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, OSZK) and the Blinken-osa Archives (former Open Society Archives). Today, the PIM's collection includes more than 200 samizdats in book format and some three dozen non-censored periodicals, and a number of small prints published in the 1970s and 1980s. It was mainly the 1985 issues of *Beszélő* and *Hírmondó*, the two prominent Hungarian samizdat papers, which reported on the events of both the Budapest Forum and Counter-Forum, publishing fresh news, interviews, speeches, and summaries of the debates, though censorship and self-



Dissident writers Ferenc Kőszeg and Miklós Haraszti with samizdat paper *Hírmondó*.

ensorship, the main issues of the unofficial Counter-Forum organised by the IHF and Hungarian dissidents jointly, were often debated passionately both before and after 1985 by independent minded Hungarian authors and scholars, such as György Konrád, Miklós Haraszti, Ferenc Kőszeg,⁴⁴ György Bencze, István Eörsi, György Petri,⁴⁵ György Dalos,⁴⁶ Sándor Radnóti,⁴⁷ Gáspár Miklós Tamás and Sándor Szilágyi.⁴⁸

44 = Ferenc Kőszeg (1939–) is a Hungarian editor, teacher, and politician. In the 1970s, he joined the democratic opposition in the making. As a founding editor of *Beszélő* he took an active part in samizdat movement. In 1988, he was a founding member of the Alliance of Free Hungarian Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SZDSZ), and became an mp by the first free election. In 1989, he was also a founding member, and then on the first Chairman of Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

45 = György Petri (1943–2000) was a Hungarian poet, translator, and editor. After 1975, his works were banned as politically unacceptable. Until 1988 his poems appeared only in samizdat. During that period, he translated poetry and drama as a freelance job. Between 1981 and 1985, he co-edited *Beszélő* the illegal paper of the Democratic Opposition. He joined the SZETA (Fund for Aiding the Poor,) and the liberal party, SZDSZ formed in 1988.

46 = György Dalos (1943–) is a Hungarian writer and historian. In the mid-1960s, he studied history at the Lomonossov University. He then returned to Budapest and worked as a museologist. In 1968, he was accused of 'Maoist activities' and was handed 7 months prison on probation, plus publication ban. In 1977, he joined the opposition movement of Hungary. From 1987 he lived mostly as a freelance writer in Vienna, Berlin, and Budapest.

47 = Sándor Radnóti (1946–) is a Budapest based former dissident writer, editor, and critic. From 1979, he was an active member of the Hungarian democratic opposition. In 1983, he was offered a visiting fellowship at New York University by the Soros Foundation New York. Since 1993, he has been a professor of aesthetics at the Eötvös Lóránd University of Budapest. He was the founding editor of the prominent literary periodical *Holmi* for a quarter of a century.

48 = Sándor Szilágyi (1954–) is a Hungarian journalist, photographer, member of the the democratic opposition. He was one of the founding editors of *Beszélő*, the leading underground political periodical. Apart from his samizdat activities, he was the main organizer of the free courses of 'flying university' in Budapest. (1978–1984) He was also a devoted editor, who saved and published writings left behind by István Bibó, the revolutionary minister of 1956.

The IHF, as the most influential independent organization monitoring human rights, was founded in Bellagio, Italy in the Autumn of 1982. It remained active for a quarter of a century. Its overall archival documentation, which comes to some 55 meters in length, includes papers, correspondence, thematic and country reports, conference materials, archival photos, and press clippings. These materials were deposited in several installments between 1998 and 2007 in the Open Society Archives in Budapest, as the contractual care-holder of the overall IHF collection. The documents of the 1985 Budapest Cultural Forum and Counter-Forum, as a sub-fund, can be found in five archival boxes.⁴⁹ Apart from the IHF correspondence, papers, press clippings, and archival photographs, the most precious documents preserved here are the original manuscripts (both typewritten and hand-written) submitted by the main speakers of Counter-Forum, such as Danilo Kiš, Susan Sontag, Amos Oz, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, György Konrád and Timothy Garton Ash. The events and debates of both the official and the unofficial Cultural Forum were often covered all the year round by the special programmes and background reports of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

The third type of resource of the 1985 Budapest cultural fora, the Hungarian secret police records, can be found in the ÁBTL in Budapest. They provide a very different perspective, including the angle of the existing communist power structure and a number of confident records made by the Hungarian Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the central bodies of the ruling Communist Party. These documents cover a period of more than two years of events from the earliest preparations for the Budapest Cultural Forum to its final evaluation, i.e. from March 1984 until April 1986. For the most part, these documents are ‘top secret’ official plans, propositions, reports, and resolutions added by a number of secret agent reports. Some 70 of these documents were published for the twentieth anniversary of the Budapest cultural fora in 2005 by Rolf Müller, that timean archivist working himself for the ÁBTL.⁵⁰ However, this published collection probably constitutes only a small part of the official records held by the ÁBTL, and new research may well result in many more findings.



Some well-known speakers of the Counter-Forum, 16 october 1985. (Photo: IHF Archives)

49 = = Project files: Cultural Forum, Budapest, Press Clippings. Box 2, folder 3. 318-0-5. Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, OSA. Budapest, Hungary.

50 = = Müller, *Európai Kulturális Fórum és ellenfórum Budapest, 1985*.

= = Three featured items of archival sources

(1) Programme schedule for the IHF Cultural Symposium,
Budapest 15–18 October 1985

Although the plans and practical preparations for the alternative programmes of the Budapest Cultural Forum 1985 had been started more than a year earlier, it was this invitation letter and programme schedule sent to all Western participants by the IHF from its Vienna Office, an invitation signed by Chairman Karl Joachim Schwarzenberg on 1 September 1985, that proved the success of devoted efforts made by the IHF staff to organise a three-day East-West Cultural Symposium in Budapest in parallel with the official opening session of the European Conference.

The main subjects of the alternative forum were much more challenging. They included ‘Writers and their Integrity’ and ‘The Future of European Culture,’ and they offered a good opportunity for free and stimulating exchange of ideas for participants from both East and West. The list of authors invited seemed quite imposing, as it included prominent figures such as György Konrád, Susan Sontag, Per Wästberg, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Derek Walcott,⁵¹ Timothy Garton Ash, Alain Finkelkraut, Danilo Kiš, Jiří Gruša, El Doctorow⁵² and Amos Oz. This forum gave perhaps the first chance since 1945 for writers from both East and West to enter into free public debates on sensitive cultural and political issues such as exile, censorship, self-censorship, the role of national identity in literature, the rights of minorities, the right to history, or the basic question of whether European culture is separate from world culture. And is European culture really one indivisible culture? These issues represented an utterly new approach, which regarded cultural freedom as a vitally important and integral part of the overall realm of human rights.

How did the Budapest Cultural Counter-Forum manage to implement these promising plans made by the IHF? Not quite as was expected. Apart from Hungarians, no other participants from Eastern Bloc countries could attend the symposium, either because they could not get passports or because they were forced to live under police surveillance, house arrest, or had been interned or jailed, like many Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak and Romanian writers at the time. They were partly represented by some Western writers of Eastern origin, e.g. Jiří Gruša, Danilo Kiš, and Amos Oz, and Timothy Garton Ash, who came directly from Warsaw to Budapest,

51 = = Derek Walcott (1930–2017) was a Saint Lucian poet and playwright, a prominent author of modern Caribbean literature. Among his fifty volumes his best known books of poems are: *The Bounty*, *The Prodigal*, *White Egrets*—his best known plays are: *Walker and The Ghost Dance*, *Moon-Child*, *O Starry Starry Night*. In 1992, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature.

52 = = El Doctorow (1931–2015) was an American novelist, editor, best known for his works of historical fiction. He wrote twelve novels, three volumes of short fiction and a stage drama. They included the novels *Ragtime*, *Billy Bathgate*, and *The March*. A number of his novels and short stories were also adapted for the screen, including *Daniel*, *Ragtime*, and *Wakefield*.

and spoke for the Polish writers who at the time were still suffering from the harsh measures of martial law. Things were similar in the case of writers who belonged to ethnic minorities. Hungarian participants, like poet Sándor Csoóri and philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás, spoke on their behalf, as did two of the most harassed writers and samizdat makers, Géza Szócs,⁵³ who was originally from Cluj Napoca (Kolozsvár) and Miklós Duray⁵⁴ from Bratislava (Pozsony). Szócs and Duray addressed open letters to the participants in the Counter-Forum.

How many people took part in the forum? As many (120-150) as could fit in the crowded private Budapest flats provided for the event by poet István Eörsi and film director András Jele. These people were IHF representatives, writers, journalists, Western diplomats, Hungarian intellectuals and students. This constituted an unanticipated change which gave the Counter Forum a fairly informal and non-conformist feel.

The Hungarian authorities refused to allow the group to hold its gathering in any public place, and the reservation made by the IHF for a conference room in a downtown Budapest hotel was cancelled at the last moment by the Hungarian secret police. On the very first day of the six-week-long official Forum, this scandal, which was reported on by the world press and some Western delegates, all of a sudden drew attention to the Counter-Forum, highlighting the fact that cultural affairs are still sensitive political issues in the eastern part of Europe.



Secret police files at the Hungarian Historical Archives of State Security Services, Budapest.

53 = = Géza Szócs (1953–2012) was an ethnic Hungarian poet and politician from Transylvania, Romania. In 1982, he edited the Hungarian-language samizdat *Ellenpontok*. Because of this he was interrogated and abused by Securitate, the communist secret police. Then he was forced into exile to Switzerland where he worked in Geneva as a journalist. In 2010–2012 he served as Secretary of State for Culture in Hungary.

54 = = Miklós Duray (1945–2022) was an ethnic Hungarian geologist, politician, and professor in Czechoslovakia—later Slovakia. In 1978, he founded the Committee for Protection of the Rights of Hungarian Minority, and joined the civil rights movement Charta '77. In 1982, he was arrested, and held without trial for 470 days. His main crime was his book *Kutyaszorító* ('Dog Clamp') published in the US, documenting the grave violations of right against the Hungarian minority.

(2) Secret report of the Hungarian State Security Service, 16 October 1985

The state security services of communist Hungary began to follow the preparations underway for the Counter-Forum Budapest 18 months prior, i.e. as early as March 1984, by gathering regular information and agent reports on the informal meetings of IHF representatives and some Hungarian dissident intellectuals in Budapest. By the opening of the official Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Cultural Forum in mid-October 1985, the entire staff of the Hungarian secret police had been mobilised with the main task of preventing any potential conflict or open scandal before, during, and after the six-week-long prestigious East-West diplomatic conference, as a 'top secret' daily information report dated 16 October 1985 (just one day after the grand opening of the CSCE Conference) clearly proves. It seems to be a telling sign of flurry and an excess of caution (or even paranoia) that it was the second report submitted that day by the secret service on the same subject: reporting on all suspicious signs and information concerning the efforts of the IHF to find public places: restaurants, conference rooms in downtown Budapest for the use of the Counter Forum. The brief report, which contained both false and misleading information, also illustrates the incompetence of the Hungarian secret police, as they do not seem to have been aware of the latest news, according to which the Counter-Forum had been refused permission to hold its session in a public place a day before and so was hosted by two wellknown Hungarian dissident artists, who offered their private homes for the sessions.

Gyula Horn,⁵⁵ Head of Department of Foreign Affairs in the Communist Party's Central Committee and Hungarian Prime from 1994 to 1998, was responsible for conducting and ensuring the smooth operations of the CSCE Conference in Budapest. He must have known about the parallel preparations of the IHF's Counter Forum, and he might also have had a decisive role in the official refusal of the IHF demand for public space, which was issued in written form by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, years later, following 1990, when he was asked about his role by reporters, he replied with an obscure allusion to the fact that there were far too many high-ranking Soviet and Eastern Bloc delegates who expected Hungary, the host country, to adopt firm measures in order to resist 'the pressure of Western countries'.

55 = Gyula Horn (1932–2013) was a Hungarian politician. As a pragmatist cadre of the Communist Party, he was already appointed Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1983. In two years, he supervised the events of Budapest Cultural Forum in that capacity as well. He is most remembered as the last Communist Minister of Foreign Affairs who demolished the 'Iron Curtain' for East Germans in 1989. Later he served as Prime Minister from 1994 to 1998.

(3) Special issue of Hungarian samizdat bimonthly *Hírmondó* on debates of the Counter-Forum in Budapest, October–November 1985

The Hungarian samizdat periodical *Hírmondó* was launched in 1993 by Gábor Demszky,⁵⁶ who also founded AB Independent Publishing House, and just over a year later also the *Beszélő*. Soon, other samizdat papers were also launched, such as *Demokrata*, which was founded by Jenő Nagy,⁵⁷ *Máshonnan Beszélő*, an *East European Monitor* which reflected the increasing interest among the public in the uncensored press and the Hungarian samizdat press. *Hírmondó* was published as a screen-printed bymonthly; by the Autumn of 1985, it had been published in 15 issues, each of which sold fairly well. Its profile, style and character were somewhat different compared to other free press products, as it preferred to publish shorter articles and interviews. Its greatest asset was rather the fresh news blocs based on many sources.

Well over of one third of its October–November 1985 issue was dedicated to the debates which had just taken place at the Budapest Cultural Forum and the Counter-Forum. This issue included no less than 10 documents, interviews, essays, and articles, for instance conference papers by Danilo Kiš, Amos Oz, Edward Albee⁵⁸ and Peter Curman,⁵⁹ open letters by Géza Szőcs and Miklós Duray, interviews with Yuriy Lyubimov⁶⁰ and Danilo Kiš, us Congressman Alfonse Marcello

56 == Gábor Demszky (1952–) is a Hungarian politician, lawyer and sociologist. During the late period of communist regime, Demszky was a leading figure of the democratic opposition, and the samizdat activities. During this time he was surveyed by the secret services, and often harassed by the authorities. He was a founding member of the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) between 1988 and 2010, and the Mayor of Budapest for 5 terms from 1990 to 2010.

57 == Jenő Nagy (1952–) a Hungarian philosopher, dissident publicist, founding editor of AB and ABC independent publishers, and the bymonthly periodical *Demokrata*. He joined the samizdat movement right from the start, signed the declaration supporting Charta 77, and then soon lost his job. He was the samizdat editor and publisher in Hungary, who suffered the most from repeated police harassment, but stubbornly carried on anyway.

58 == Edward Albee (1928–2016) was a world-famous modern American playwright known for works such as *A Delicate Balance*, *At home at the Zoo*, *Occupant*, *Seascape*, *The American Dream*, *The Goat*, *The Play About the Baby*, *The Sandbox*, *Three Tall Women*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

59 == Peter Curman (1941–2021) was a Swedish poet, and editor. Apart from his own volumes of poetry, he initiated founding some new Swedish literary publishers, such as *Författarcentrum* (1967) and *Stockholmstidningen* (1998). Between 1983 and 1986 he was the cultural manager of the Swedish liberal daily *Aftonbladet*, and he was elected as Chairman of the Swedish Writers' Association (1988–1999).

60 == Yuriy Lyubimov (1917–2014) was a world famous Russian actor and theater director of his Taganka Theater in Moscow. In 1984, the Soviet leadership replaced him as artistic director of Taganka and then stripped him of his Soviet citizenship. The renowned director went abroad and worked in many European countries, included Hungary too. He regained his Soviet citizenship in 1989 only and returned to his homeland and to the leadership of Taganka.

D'Amato's speech, etc. Hungarian readers were also given a detailed introduction to the principles and activities of International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, which had been founded no more than three years earlier. Though the articles and comments were published with no names, the issue nonetheless seems to be the product of good teamwork among the authors, editors, translators, and interviewers. Two of the authors who published anonymously in the issue were most likely the editors Miklós Haraszti and Gábor Demszky as their witty styles and challenging statements make their writings easy to identify.

This special issue of *Hírmondó* was dedicated to the recent debates which took place at the Counter-Forum. These debates were fresh and provocative, and they evinced a clear commitment to engagement in human rights. Thus, the issue stands out from among the tired, routine news and reports which appeared in the professional press, both in the East and in the West in 1985.

**== Inside and outside
the 'Velvet Prison'**

'In Hungary there is no censorship,' declared György Aczél,⁶¹ cultural secretary of the Central Committee of the MSZMP in an interview with Paul Lendvai⁶² in 1980.⁶³ However, everyone was well aware of the fact that in a country of 'actually existing socialism' such a thing as censorship all too evidently did exist. The statement made by the most influential communist leader in charge



Man of the State and Censorship by György Konrád, Áramlat Independent Publisher, 1986.

61 == György Acél (1917–1991) was a Hungarian communist politician. He became a member of the then illegal Hungarian Communist Party in 1935, and was a founding member of the Political Committee of the MSZMP in late 1956. He was a deputy minister from 1958 to 1967, later, as one of the leaders of the Party's Central Committee the most influential figure in socialist culture politics for a quarter of century.

62 == Paul Lendvai (1929–) is a Hungarian-born Austrian journalist. He moved to Austria in 1957, and is working still as an author and journalist there. Some of his books in English: *Anti-Semitism without Jews: Communist Eastern Europe* (1971), *Bureaucracy of Truth: How Communist Governments Manage the News* (1981), *Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat* (2003).

63 == Aczél, *Szocializmus, nemzet, kultúra*, 168.

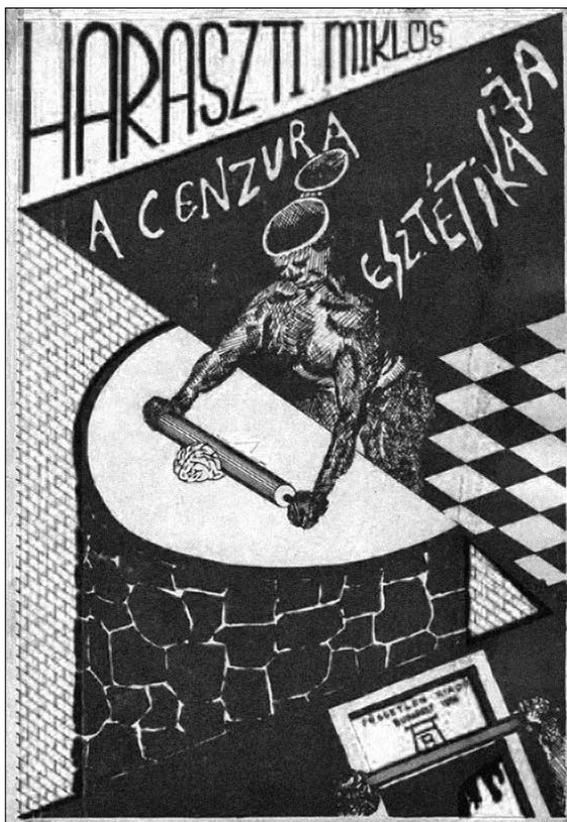
of cultural policy was nothing but a routine propaganda lie, or another sample of Orwellian ‘doublespeak’.

The state bureaucracy and the Politbureau repeatedly discussed how to treat the ‘oppositional-hostile groups’ and their ‘illegal publications’, yet principles were never declared publicly, nor was a list of banned works or writers ever published, although it was loudly demanded from time to time by the rebellious editors of periodical *Mozgó Világ*, for example, or at the assemblies of the Hungarian Writers’ Association (Magyar Írószövetség) in the 1980s. Informality in the daily practice of administration remained paramount in the later years of János Kádár’s rule.

Needless to say, the ‘Thought Police’ played a considerable role too, especially the Department III/III (Internal Reaction & Sabotage) of the Ministry of Interior. House searches, short-term arrests, heavy fines and various other forms of harassment occurred regularly from 1981 until 1988. All in all, thousands of copies of samizdat books and newspapers were destroyed, and a number of duplication machines were confiscated. During the early years of Hungarian samizdat, from

1982 to 1984, the editors of the periodicals *Beszélő* and *Hirmondó* were repeatedly harassed and fined. In spring 1983, Gábor Demszky, editor in chief of AB publishers was attacked by the police in the street and, under the pretext of ‘violence against the authorities’, given a six-month suspended sentence. Somewhat later, György Krassó, the publisher of Magyar Október Független Kiadó, together with Jenő Nagy, the publisher of ABC, Lajos Jakab that of Áramlat, Ádám Modor that of Katalizátor Iroda, and the editors of *Demokrata*, *Égtájak Között*, and *Hiány* suffered serious harassment, repeated house searches, and were forced to pay massive fines.

The first conceptual samizdat work to mount a daring attack on state censorship was the pamphlet by Miklós Haraszti originally entitled *A cenzúra esztétikája* [The Aesthetics of Censorship],⁶⁴ or its later English edition *The*



The Esthetics of Censorship (The Velvet Prison) by Miklós Haraszti, AB Independent Publisher, 1981.

64 = = Haraszti, *A cenzúra esztétikája*.

Velvet Prison.⁶⁵ Haraszi's critical view of censorial practice was formed some years earlier in the mid-1970s, when the so-called Kádárist consolidation in the wake of 1956, with its routine-like institutional control on culture, science and education was still felt strongly in Hungary. In addition, most of the artists, writers and state-employed intelligentsia seemed not merely to respect the rules of the communist regime but to willingly support them. This kind of loyalism as a general attitude led Haraszi to conclude that some two decades after 1956, those in charge of the daily practise of censorship had successfully handed on much of their function in the form of self-censorship to the artists and intellectuals themselves. As he saw it, this had become the major challenge in a new system of state control of cultural and intellectual life: in short, as he put, a 'new civilisation' was emerging.

Haraszi's book had a lively reception both in Hungary and worldwide. It was published as a cyclostyled samizdat brochure in Budapest in 1981, not long before martial law was introduced in Poland. Another Hungarian samizdat version in book form was published in 1986⁶⁶—just one year after the Budapest Cultural Forum and Counter-Forum—and French, German, and English translations came out during the 1980s,⁶⁷ as well as a clandestine Cantonese version printed recently in Hong Kong.

Haraszi's pamphlet was much influenced by the theory György Konrád and Iván Szelényi⁶⁸ offered in *Az értelmiség útja az osztályhatalomhoz* [Intellectuals on the road to class power], a book also originally published in samizdat.⁶⁹ Since communism or state socialism was officially declared to be a system based—at least in theory—on unquestionable Marxist doctrine, all its opponents felt themselves challenged to express their critical views on a structured theoretical basis.⁷⁰ As Konrad comments in his forward to the English version of Haraszi's book:

65 = = Haraszi, *The Velvet Prison. Artists Under State Socialism*.

66 = = Also by the AB Independent Publisher, Budapest. A third edition was published by Gondolat, Budapest 1991.

67 = = French edition: *L'Artiste d'État* (1983), German edition: *Die Staatskünstler* (1984). English editions: *The Velvet Prison* (New Republic Books, 1987), (I. B. Tauris, 1988), (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), (Penguin Books, 1989).

68 = = Iván Szelényi (1938–) is a noted Hungarian-American sociologist. In 1974, a transcript of a book which he wrote with his fellow author György Konrád: *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, was brought out of Hungary. The book contained critical thought about Communist-ruled society. After this move, Szelényi was arrested, later expelled from Hungary and stripped of his citizenship. Ever since he has been teaching worldwide as professor of sociology.

69 = = Konrád–Szelényi, *Az értelmiség útja az osztályhatalomhoz*.

70 = = This resulted in a huge amount of theoretical literature by the new left authors in the West, and some hereditary reform-Marxist attempts in the East, for example those of the philosopher György Lukács and his 'Budapest School'. There is no space here for a thorough analysis of this rich and rather ambivalent tradition of political theories, but one should note that one of the first Hungarian samizdat books was a selection of studies entitled *Marxizmus a negyedik évtizedben* [Marxism in the Fourth Decade], and some prominent activists of the one-time democratic opposition—János Kis, György Bence etc.—earlier used to belong to György Lukács's school. It is also well known that Haraszi himself in the late-1960s flirted for a while with Maoism, although he did not take part in the 'hostile Maoist conspiracy' of young intellectuals, some of them were sentenced for prison by a show-case trial in 1967.

‘Previously, in a book entitled *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, written with Ivan Szelényi, I tried to examine how the intelligentsia was becoming a separate class in state socialism. The theory that in state socialism censorship is an inherent part, a constitutional and constructive element of literature, gradually expropriated by the elite in power, was in fact inspired by the mood of the mid-1970s. We came to the realisation that communism is a system whose power is sustained not by the police alone.’⁷¹

Haraszti’s pamphlet also provoked critical reflections among Hungarian dissident writers and intellectuals. Two of them, poet and philosopher György Petri and historian Gábor Klaniczay,⁷² published their comments in *Beszélő*, the most influential Hungarian samizdat periodical. Petri radically rejected Haraszti’s concept and his description of a ‘new civilization’ based on mutual self-restraint on the part of both the subject and the rulers.⁷³ He categorically denied that censorship of any kind ever had any inspiring impact on culture, nor was he ready to accept that writers and intellectuals could ever benefit from or creatively contribute to such a compromise. On the contrary, he witnessed more and more promising efforts for intellectual autonomy on the basis of the re-establishment of some moral principals and professional standards of intellectual life. Meanwhile, the censorial practice of state socialism had lost any authentic ideological principals, and displayed nothing but the real repressive nature of a police state.

In his article, Klaniczay reflects on both Haraszti’s and Petri’s arguments. In the first place, ‘Haraszti and Petri did not seem to talk about the same thing’ and both tend to neglect the real nature of culture. However, he readily admits ‘the positive function of Haraszti’s satirical-pessimistic overstatements’, in as much they successfully inspire critical thinking and provoke some counter arguments. As Klaniczay also notes, Haraszti’s bad luck is that his pamphlet came out too late and much of his vision of the flourishing ‘new civilization’ of post-Stalinist consensus on self-censorship had become obsolete in the interim: ‘Today I would rather agree with Petri’s views, than Haraszti’s vision.’

However, as Klaniczay added: ‘Haraszti’s book, to my knowledge, is the first overall effort to describe the new type of constraints and their potential output on

71 = = Forward to Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison. Artists under state socialism*, xiii.

72 = = Gábor Klaniczay (1950–) is a Hungarian historian, head professor of the Department of Medieval Studies at the Central European University, titular university professor at the Department of Medieval History of the Eötvös Lóránd University History Institute, member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has also published a book about the counter-cultures of the 70s and 80s: Klaniczay, *Ellenkultúra a hetvenes-nyolcvanas években*.

73 = = Petri, ‘A legvidámabb barak mint civilizáció’.

the socialist culture *as a system*—and that deserves more than just an angry ejection. Petri should not have criticised Haraszti for the poetic overstatement of ‘a new civilization’, but rather should have pointed out that the system the author suggested is a very static one.⁷⁴

Culture in a broader sense after all, as Klaniczay argues, is the daily practice of a society that can neither be directed by cynical, counter-selective bureaucrats, nor be based only on the heroic resistance of some radical intellectuals; and that is what makes Klaniczay none too optimistic for the future.

Looking back in anger (or with a bitter taste of nostalgia?) could we really be proud of this ‘future in the past’ vision—when facing desperately with much similar social attitudes and a growing state control of both cultural and public life close to four decades after?



Two bestseller samizdats: *The Animal Farm* by Orwell, and *Dog's Heart* by Bulgakov—both with the cover design and illustration by Béla Nóvé, 1984–1987.

74 = = Klaniczay, 'Még egyszer a cenzúra esztétikájáról'.

== Appendix: A brief history of Hungarian samizdat movement

Below I have made use of the relevant parts of the historical overview published by Ferenc Kőszeg as an 'Editor's Note' in *Roundtable*.⁷⁵

'The Russian word *samizdat* (самиздат) literally means self-publishing. It is meaningless in a world without censorship. But in countries where the government retains the right to control the publication of books, periodicals and articles, anything that is published and distributed without the censor's stamp is samizdat. Censorship and samizdat depend on each other: while censorship exists, uncensored writing will always be circulated.' So wrote Ferenc Kőszeg in 1987, founding editor of *Beszélő*, the most influential Hungarian samizdat periodical launched in late-1981.

The word samizdat became familiar in the Hungarian language along with knowledge of the Russian and Polish practice of clandestine, uncensored printing, publication and distribution of banned and dissident works. It was also used to refer to the works themselves and flourished in Hungary from 1977 till the Summer of 1989.

But the phenomenon had existed in Hungary well before this, when ferocious state terror was practised against any expression of dissent from the late 1940s. The best Hungarian writers were reduced to silence, but their poems and writings circulating among friends. During this period, a considerable amount of religious material was also distributed among the followers of various denominations. After the 1956 Revolution was violently suppressed, dozens of political manifestos, statements and essays were circulated among intellectuals, workers and students. If caught by the police, their authors served years in prison. A case in point is that of István Bibó,⁷⁶ a member of the Revolutionary Government and an outstanding political thinker.

In the 1970s, samizdat editors produced some 170 publications, mostly typewritten and reproduced via carbon paper or by cyclostyle. The first, and one of the most important, was *Marxizmus a negyedik évtizedben* [Marxism in the Fourth Decade]. Another, the 800-page *Profil* edited by János Kenedi,⁷⁷ was a superb collec-

75 == Kőszeg, 'Editor's Note'.

76 == István Bibó (1911–1979) was a legal philosopher, politician, and the last minister of the revolutionary government in 1956. He was a great theoretician of democratic tradition, author of a series of analytic studies and volumes. In 1957 he was sentenced to lifelong prison, then he was released with an amnesty in 1963. His funeral in 1979 became a massive protest demonstration against the 'rule of the hangmen', i.e. the Kádár regime.

77 == János Kenedi (1947–) was a leading actor of Hungarian democratic opposition. From 1970, he was under a ban on employment and publication. Joined and collected signatures on Charter 77 civil rights petitions. Restless samizdat: editor of *Profil*, *Bibó Memorial Book*, *Máshonnan Beszélő*, *Kelet-Európai Figyelő*. He arranged papers left behind by István Bibó and Zoltán Szabó. Later he was a research consultant of 1956 Institute and expert inspector of ÁBTTL.

tion of poems, short stories, essays and studies rejected by official periodicals in the 1970s under the pretext that they did not fit the scope of the papers. The most significant early samizdat venture was the publication of the 1,000-page, three-volume *Bibó-emlékkönyv* [Bibó Memorial Book] edited by Ferenc Donáth⁷⁸ and others, in honour of István Bibó. Bibó's analysis of Hungarian society and his theories on 'principled compromises' are strikingly similar to the Polish KOR's (Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej, Committee for Self-Defence) conception of limited revolution and have strongly influenced Hungarian intellectuals.⁷⁹ Two periodicals were also published in this period. *Magyar Figyelő* concentrated on domestic affairs and on the fate of Hungarian national minorities beyond Hungary's borders. *Kelet-Európai Figyelő* mainly published translations from the samizdat and emigré press (tamizdat) of Soviet bloc countries.

In 1981, influenced by the enormous independent press in Poland at the time of Solidarity, various groups undertook the production of samizdat for wider circulation. The first mechanically duplicated publication was the fifth issue of *Kelet-Európai Figyelő*, published in August 1981, under the telling title *A lengyel nyár* [The Polish Summer].

Wojciech Jaruzelski's coup⁸⁰ deeply shocked the Hungarian opposition and many gave up active participation. Most of the dissidents, however, decided to carry on. While two of the early periodicals, *Kisúgó* and *Magyar Figyelő* ceased publication. The political quarterly *Beszélő* survived.

Together with the publication of the first samizdat reviews, book publication also began. The first and most productive independent publisher was Gábor Demszky's AB Független Kiadó, which began in 1982. Besides its series of political publications—*Supplement to the history of Eastern Europe, 1956, Poland, Gulag*—it published a growing number of works by foreign authors and Hungarian writers living at home or abroad. They published Orwell's *Animal Farm*, plays by Václav

78 == Ferenc Donáth (1913–1986) politician, journalist, agricultural expert. As a law student, he joined the illegal communist party in 1934 and sought contact with the anti-Nazi resistance. As a political prisoner, he spent years behind the bars in the Horthy-, Rákosi- and Kádár-regimes. In 1956, he strongly supported Imre Nagy. Before he died, he had hosted in 1985 the 'Monor meeting' for an open dialogue of the opposition groups.

79 == About KOR's concept see Mitrovits, *Tiltott kapcsolat—A magyar-lengyel ellenzéki együttműködés 1976–1989*.

80 == On 13 December 1981 Polish general Wojciech Jaruzelski introduced martial law by the mobilized forces of Polish Army. The free Trade Union on Solidarity was banned, thousands of its activists were arrested and interned. Jaruzelski's martial law, with some concessions, lasted until 1989, when a political compromise was made between the party-state and Solidarity, and a general election was held in the country.

Havel⁸¹ and novels by Milan Kundera.⁸² One of its most popular ventures was the publication of the autobiographical novel by György Faludy,⁸³ the prominent Hungarian émigré writer and poet. The 600-page novel of *Pokolbeli vig napjaim* [My happy days in Hell], which had previously been published in English, French, German, Swedish and Japanese, was published first also in Hungarian as one of the most popular samizdat books.

Another independent publisher, Jenő Nagy's ABC Press brought out Arthur Koestler's⁸⁴ *Darkness at Noon* and the biography of Raoul Wallen-



Otilia Solt, sociologist, editor of samizdat *Beszélő*, founder of SZETA: the Aid for Supporting the Poor, an independent social movement. (Photo: Lenke Szilágyi, 1989)

81 == Václav Havel (1936–2011) was a Czech statesman, author, poet, playwright, and former dissident. Havel served as the last president of Czechoslovakia from 1989 until the dissolution of the federal state in 1992, and then as the first president of Czech Republic from 1993 to 2003 democratically elected. As a writer, he is known for his plays, essays, and memoirs. Havel was a leading actor of several dissident initiatives, including Charta 77 and the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted.

82 == Milan Kundera (1929–) is a Czech writer who went into exile in France in 1975. His Czechoslovak citizenship was revoked in 1979, then conferred again in 2019. However, he sees himself as a French writer and insists his work should be classified as French literature. His mostly apolitical novels were banned in his native country until 1990, meanwhile were highly popular worldwide, included in Hungary in samizdat editions.

83 == György Faludy (1910–2006) was a Hungarian poet, writer and translator. In his long life, he left his native country—and returned twice. In 1938, due to his Jewish ancestry, he left for Paris, and then for the U.S. Soon after he returned in 1946, he was sent to the labor camp of Recsk. After the 1956 revolution he escaped again to the West, and lived in London and Toronto until his second return in 1988. He is best known worldwide due to his witty memoir entitled *My Happy Days in Hell*.

84 == Arthur Koestler (1905–1983) was a Hungarian-born author and journalist. He was born in Budapest and, apart from his early school years, was educated in Austria. In 1931, he joined the German Communist Party, but he resigned in 1938, disillusioned with Stalinism. He moved to Britain in 1940, and published his anti-totalitarian novel *Darkness at Noon*. Over the next 43 years, he espoused many political causes and wrote novels, memoirs, biographies, and essays.

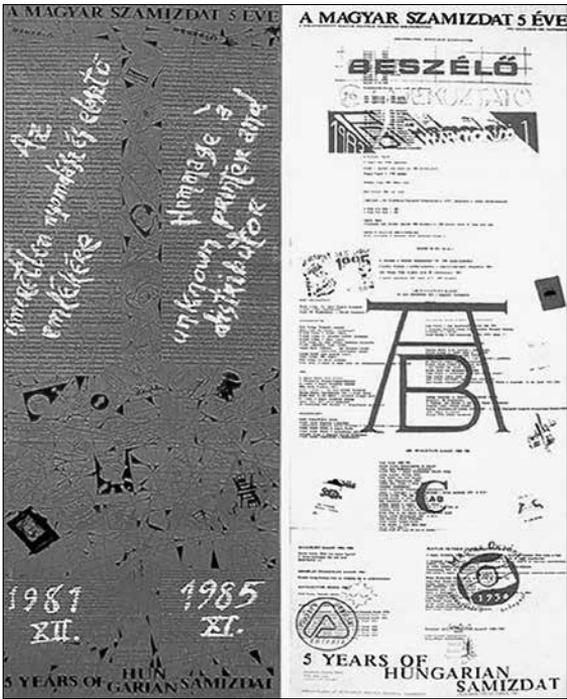
berg.⁸⁵ The publishers under the name *M.O. Független Kiadó* (*Hungarian October*) launched by the intransigent '56-er György Krassó, considered their main task to be the publication of works and documents connected to the 1956 Revolution. Among them are books such as Bibó's writings from 1956 and *Hungarian Diary* by Wiktor Woroszyński,⁸⁶ the eminent Polish poet and journalist. They also issued the striking autobiographical writing of Béla Szász,⁸⁷ a survivor of the Rajk trial⁸⁸ and George Orwell's *1984*.

85 = = Raoul Wallenberg (1912–1947?) was a young Swedish diplomat who saved the lives of many Hungarian Jews in 1944–1945. He was sent to Budapest in July 1944 to help to protect the 200,000 Jews remained in the city. For three months he tried to do his best by issuing protective documents, by securing the release of Jews from deportation trains, death march convoys, and labor service brigades—all at grate risk to himself. He was detained by Soviet agents in mid-January of 1945, and thereafter disappeared without a trace.

86 = = Wiktor Woroszyński (1927–1996) was a Polish poet, translator, and journalist. In 1956 he was sent from Warsaw, as a correspondent, to Budapest. During the 13 days of the Hungarian revolution and freedom fight he wrote his diaries with great sympathy with the revolutionaries, which later was also published as a book in English: *Diary of a Revolt, Budapest 1956, Through Polish Eyes*. It was also published in Hungarian in a samizdat edition, in late 1984.

87 = = Béla Szász (1910–1999) was a Hungarian writer, and journalist. In 1930, he received a scholarship from the Sorbonne. He worked as film director Renoir's assistant. After WW2, he returned home, and got a job in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. He was soon accused in the Rajk-trial, and sentenced to ten years in prison. In 1957, he emigrated to London, and worked for the the BBC. His book *Without Compulsion* was first published in Hungary as a samizdat.

88 = = László Rajk (1909–1949), the communist Minister for Foreign Affairs was accused of being a 'Titoist spy' and was executed in 1949. It is a bitter irony of history, that his son, László Rajk Jr. (1949–2019) who was just a seven months baby, when lost his father, became a daring activist of anti-communist activities. From 1975 he joined the democratic opposition, and was soon blacklisted. In 1981 with Gábor Demszky (later the Mayor of Budapest) he founded *AB Publishers*, and ran an illegal but public bookstore in his apartment called 'Samizdat Boutique'. In 1988 he was one of the founders of the Alliance of Free Democrats, and served six years in the freely elected Hungarian Parliament.



5 Years of Hungarian Samizdat, a poster designed by László Rajk Jr. and published for the Counter Forum Budapest 1985.

Several smaller publishers also played active part in independent publishing. These included *Áramlat*, *Katalizátor Iroda*, *Alulnézet* and *Szabadidő*. Special mention must be made of the avant-garde artistic publications and political documents used as art objects by the Inconnu Art Group.⁸⁹ Although Hungarian censorship was relatively liberal compared to other Soviet bloc countries, the works listed above would never have reached the Hungarian public without the independent publishing houses.

A few titles among the Hungarian *samizdat* periodicals are well worth mentioning, among them *Beszélő*, already mentioned, *Máshonnan Beszélő*, *AB Hírmondó*, *Demokrata*, *Égtájak Között*, *Vizjel*, *Magyar Zsidó* and *Határ/Idő/Napló—Erdélyi Figyelő*. The techniques generally used included mimeography, silk screen printing, *ramka* (from the early days of Polish samizdat and a combination of the previous two techniques), photocopying and offset printing.⁹⁰ The latter was widely used in book publishing from the mid-1980s.

By 1988, radical opposition movements had gathered momentum, the organisation of democratic proto-parties had started and it became impossible to stop the sudden boom in independent publications. In fact, it was no more than a public admission of the political reality when, in May 1989, the last Hungarian communist prime Miklós Németh⁹¹ declared that prior permission for publishing books and newspapers of any kind was no longer required. This was the official end of censorship in Hungary which had been in existence for more than four decades alongside the forcibly prolonged communist rule of the country.

All in all, in just over a decade, 1977–1989, the Hungarian samizdat movement produced some 300 books and two dozen periodicals.⁹² This crop might not seem as rich and versatile as the Soviet Russian one, in many respects falling short of the literary and bibliophile virtues of Czech samizdat, and certainly had far less ‘mobilizing power’

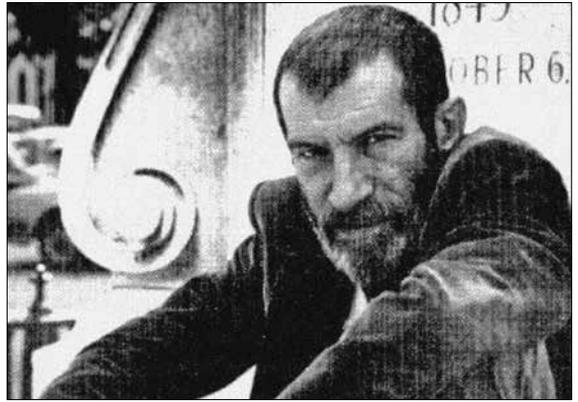
89 = = The Inconnu Art Group, formed by Péter Bokros, Tamás Molnár, Mihály Csécsei, Bánk Mészáros, and Mihály Sípos in the late 1970s was a daring and talented young team that was often harrassed by the police. For the 30th anniversary of the Hungarian revolution of 1986 they organised an international exhibition of which the art pieces were confiscated by the police, and in 1989 they carved some 300 wooden memorial colomn to mark with all the graves of the executed revolutionaries.

90 = = For the Polish technical model and transfer of samizdat multiplications see more details in Mitrovits, *Tiltott kapcsolat—A Magyar-lengyel ellenzéki együttműködés 1976–1989*.

91 = = Miklós Németh (1948–) is a retired Hungarian economist and politician who served as Prime Minister from November 1988 to May 1990. He was one of the leaders of Hungary’s Communist party, in the tumultuous years that led to the collapse of communist system in East-Central Europe. He was the last communist Prime of Hungary, and as such, a pragmatist reformist, who, among other things, abolished censorship by a decree of May 1989.

92 = = Most regrettably, a complete and critical bibliography of Hungarian samizdat publications has still not been prepared as yet. (June 2022).

than the independent Polish press had for many years by supporting the resistance of a whole society against communist rule and its military regime. Yet two of its particular merits seem still significant: its intellectual force and radical engagement with truth and justice. These can be most clearly felt in the arguments of the one-time debates on censorship both in samizdat publications and in other free forums such as the public debates of the Alternative Cultural Forum of 1985 and the Hungarian Writers' Association in the 1980s.



Poet György Petri, at the base of the statue of Polish general Jozef Bem, Budapest 1980s.

== Conclusions

Finally, the question remains: was the Budapest Cultural Forum and Counter Forum held in the autumn of 1985 a success or a failure? Which is better, based on what criteria and to what extent? As we have seen, it is not easy even today to make an authentic assessment of the series of often contradictory events of this complicated transitional period, and that time it was judged rather differently by the contemporaries themselves. According to the decision of the Hungarian Communist Party leadership in December 1985, the official forum was overall successful, it further increased the prestige of the host country, and the scandalous challenge of the Counter-Forum was largely avoided. The Soviet and Eastern European delegates could also be satisfied, since—with the exception of some disturbing, improvised Western interludes—their original scenario prevailed throughout the official conference, and thus it remained largely formal and protocol like.

On the other hand, Miklós Haraszti judged it a serious failure for the same reason, describing the East-West interstate cultural exchange and the stubborn preservation of the Yalta status quo as 'Helsinki kitsch'. In contrast, the Counter-Forum was considered a resounding success not only by the participants, the organiser International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights and members of the Hungarian democratic opposition, but also by the Western press, which reported on it in detail, and the analytical articles of the Hungarian samizdat papers. This was an important event not only because the gross abuses of communist censorship could be openly criticised and participants could freely discuss possible scenarios for the future of Europe, but also because some writers and journalists who were forced to be absent from the Budapest Counter-Forum, being persecuted, interned or imprisoned as they were, could also send their messages. (In this way, Timothy Garton Ash from Warsaw, Sándor Csoóri and Miklós Gáspár Tamás

from Slovakia and Romania transmitted the latest news and important documents.) I myself, together with some participating friends, have already regretted that the Counter Forum and its press reports did not talk more about the heroic stand of many Russian, Polish and Czechoslovak human rights activists, often in defiance of ten-year prison sentences. I missed the fact that more writers, artists, and scientists who had emigrated from East to West were not invited to the Counter Forum. All the more so, because such persons had been excluded from the delegates of the official Forum by a silent East-West consensus.

What would be worth further researching on the topic of the two Budapest forums? Many things, as there are still plenty of less researched and published sources. For instance, the available oral history interviews and memoirs of many participants, their later communications—e.g. exchange of letters—and their joint actions in some public or political matters. It would be equally important to see a more comprehensive European and overseas cultural overview in the background, in other words, what was going on in the 35 countries involved in the mid-1980s, and what thought of interactions between mainstream and underground trends prevailed? In the same way, it would be nevertheless worthwhile to see culture in a broader sense than literature and the press: the that time institutional world of film, theater, music, museums, libraries, and archives—both in the East and in the West. In the narrower context, there is a Hungarian debt to this date, as there has not been made any research and analytical summary of why so many Hungarian prominent writers, artists, film and theater people took part in the official party-state protocol events during the Cultural Forum of Budapest? Who were they and what kind of programmes did they take part? Did they know about the Counter Forum and what did they think about those writers and artists who participated—or, not without risk, even offered their apartment to the many participants of this symposium—as did poet István Eörsi and film director András Lányi?

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