

==== *Attila Novák* =====

/// The single majority

The Salom Peace Group or Jewish opposition voice at the end of the Kádár regime in Hungary

== Introduction

The Kádár era, which lasted from the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian uprising until the regime change of the late 1980s, was relatively moderate among the communist/socialist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe. Still, various degrees of repression were experienced by religions and minorities in Hungary, including Jews. This also means that the regime's policy towards religious minorities, while repressive, was nowhere near as oppressive as that of the majority of the Eastern Bloc. Nor did it engage in an anti-Zionist campaign after 1967, and the Kádár-regime did not allow for social unrest on such a matter.

Our study examines the circumstances of the emergence of Salom, a Jewish group that emerged within the decaying regime of the late Kádár era (then considered illegal), and analyses the debates that took place within the democratic opposition (considered one of the most important opposition groups of the late Kádár era) about the nature of the organisation.

In this paper, we shed light on the process by which, almost out of nowhere, an independent voice of opposition (from the dissident opposition) emerged, which sought to embrace Jewish identity while representing democratic values: Jewishness and democracy (or longing for a more democratic society) went hand in hand in this group.

Among the historical sources, the main emphasis is on archival sources that have not yet been researched. The material held in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security relating to György Gadó¹ (the 'founding father' of Salom) and György Krassó (a leading personality of the opposition) are included in

¹ = György Gadó (1930–), journalist, translator, politician. After the regime change he became a member of the Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SZDSZ) in the first freely elected parliament, then he left the party.

the daily operative reports of the Ministry of Interior, and Krassó has separate files. In the Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár), the materials relating to Salom can be found among the materials of the State Office for Church Affairs (Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal, ÁEH), which was a state organisation that supervised the Hungarian churches. The OSA Archives and the National Széchenyi Library (Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár) have the group's manifestos, statements and debates in the samizdat.

In the early 1980s, the well-established Kádár regime went into agony, which lasted for years, with temporary regressions. Taboos that had been taken for granted (such as the Socialist nature of the Hungarian state and the future of society) were being questioned (mainly by members of the opposition), and the emerging dissident 'media' (the illegal press or samizdat) gave an outlet for some social, religious and ethnic communities (or minorities), as well as to those who were members of the mainstream churches (loyal to, and controlled by, the party state), but had different, autonomous voices.²

Manifestations of Jewish identity in Hungary up to that point had been channelled exclusively through the official Jewish representation, initiated by the party-state in 1950, a Jewish umbrella organisation called National Representation of Hungarian Israelites (Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselete, MIOK). It was the Hungarian communist state that forced this unity, not Jewish religious channels. The communists simply wanted, when dealing and negotiating with the Jewry, to deal with one organisation only. The Jewry represented by the MIOK was acceptable only within the walls of synagogues: the suppression of over-expansion was not only the responsibility of the State, but also of its leadership, which included a large number of State Security agents. Any secular Jewish sense of identity (including Zionism) that went beyond the official religious-synagogue identity was not tolerated by the state, which nipped any initiative in this direction in the bud. The Hungarian state, careful to ensure that Jewish community leaders could only be appointed on the basis of prior approval, managed this situation in its own interests. The number of Jews in Hungary at this time was estimated at 100,000-150,000, but since 1949 it had not been possible to ask about religious affiliation in the census, so this figure is not entirely accurate. A much smaller proportion of this Jewish population attended synagogue and belonged—to some extent—to the official Jewish community, and in the 1970s there was even a low point, when, for example, very few children enrolled in the Jewish community's grammar school or married in a traditional Jewish ceremony.

² = = In addition to one of the most important open letters of SALOM, Otilia Solt's article on the 'Gipsy question' was published in the same issue of *AB Hírmondó* in May 1984, and even immediately after SALOM's Letter. *AB Hírmondó* (1984), 362-0-2/6. Collection of Philipp, OSA. Budapest, Hungary.

= = The emergence of Salom

Although the situation has improved over the years, the basic structure has remained the same. This state of affairs in the 1980s is well illustrated by the fact that, on 16 September 1984, when the MIOK held its plenary session, its president Imre Héber³—who painted a positive picture of the situation of the Jewry—remarked (to be highlighted on the front page of the MIOK newspaper *Új Élet*) that the main task of the organisation *was to serve the religious needs of the Hungarian Jewry*.⁴

It was in this situation that the open letter of the Salom group appeared in the Hungarian ‘second public sphere’ on 25 December 1983.⁵ This appeal ran through the channels of samizdat in the first half of 1984 and announced and also symbolised a sharp break with the old policy of the official Jewish representation, the MIOK. The appeal, signed by an ‘independent peace fighting group of Hungarian Jews’, was on several levels in opposition to the controlled and official opinion of the Hungarian Jewry, which forced into an official and sectarian existence.⁶ The text begins by suggesting that there was a great ambition to ‘stir the still water of Hungarian Jewish public opinion’. It argued that the relationship of the Jewry with the Soviet Union, progress, Hungarian society and history, Jewish tradition and anti-Semitism had to be reconsidered. At the same time, the paper raised the question of the Hungarian Jewry across the borders and its relation with Israel. The text—which was officially addressed to the MIOK Presidency and the editorial office of its official newspaper *Új Élet*—was inspired by the fact that the 15 December 1983 issue of the newspaper announced the formation of the Inter-church Committee of the National Peace Council, with Chief Rabbi László Salgó elected as vice-president and Imre Héber, the president of the MIOK, as president.⁷ This was in fact an inter-church peace committee, with the president of the National Rabbinical Council (Országos Rabbitanács) as Vice-Chairman (since its meeting on 7 December) and the presidents of the MIOK and the Budapest Israelite Community (Budapesti Izraelita Hitközség, ВИИ) as its board members. Tibor Bartha, a bishop of the Reformed church, was appointed as chairman of the committee, and Zoltán Aranyosi, a synod councillor, was appointed secretary general. They issued a joint declaration, which mixed elements of the ‘Christian’ desire for peace with current politics reflecting Soviet interests, stated that ‘We protest with

3 = Imre Héber (1923–2008), Jewish community leader, President of MIOK from 1977 to 1985.

4 = ‘A magyar zsidóság vallási igényeinek az ellátása a legfőbb feladatunk’

5 = The ‘second (i.e. the illegal literary) public sphere’ is a term which is used for describing the independent sphere of the Socialist state’s cultural-political system.

6 = A SALOM nyílt levele. [Open letter of SALOM], 25 December 1983. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-19619/9, ‘Lidi’, Operatív-dossziék, ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

7 = ‘Megalakult az Országos Béketanács egyházközi békebizottsága’.

all our strength against the world domination efforts led by the United States government.’ In its clear anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric, the Peace Declaration condemned the US-motivated arms race, which ‘is driving the governments of the Western European peoples, traditionally under Christian influence, to further accumulate nuclear weapons’. They also objected to the ‘imperialist forces’ trying to ‘deceive’ people of faith by ‘misleading’ them into believing that they were defending the faith against ‘a threat to the socialist social order.’ They also condemned the deployment of first-strike nuclear weapons in Western Europe.

The author of the Salom Declaration was justifiably outraged by the unilateral anti-American statement signed by also Jewish representatives and was sympathetic to the duplicity of the Declaration, which accused the United States exclusively of arms trafficking and the financial gain it generated. He also rightly pointed out that the Soviet Union was supplying arms to the Third World.⁸ Nor did the Salom writer fail to mention that the Arab arms against Israel came mainly from Soviet sources.

The open letter went on to raise fundamental objections against the leaders of the MIOK that were on the minds of many Hungarian Jews: where were they in 1967 and 1973 when Israel was attacked? Why did they not point out how the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) were colluding with far-right and far-left groups in Western Europe? Why were the organisers of the attack on Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics (1972) not condemned in similarly specific terms? An even stronger criticism was the historical parallel that Salom drew by equating Samu Stern (the leader of the Jewish Council after the March 1944 German occupation of Hungary) and the Jewish Council with the leaders of the MIOK, indirectly saying that the leaders of the MIOK are (as much) collaborators with a totalitarian power as the Sterns were in 1944. With pathos, Salom’s text called for Jewish solidarity on behalf of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters and the Maccabees, and at the very end reverted to a more emotionally balanced tone: ‘This lesson, this teaching, is by no means contrary to the demands of the peace movement. If we do not want to be pawns in the games of foreign powers,

8 = = ‘Between 1950 and 1975, the Third World countries received a total of 14.2 billion dollars worth of Soviet military equipment, which was 730 million, or 5.5 percent, more than the value of US arms shipments in the same period. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 6 April 1977). Between 1973 and 1979, the developing countries -the value of Soviet military supplies to the developing countries (including supplies from other Warsaw Pact countries) amounted to \$20.7 billion (to be exact) 72.6 percent of all (?) was supplied to the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 13-14 September 1980). And as far as revenues are concerned, between 1972 and 1982 the Soviet Union received about twice as much revenue from military equipment supplied to developing countries as the United States. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 4 August 1982).’. See: A SALOM nyílt levele [Open letter of SALOM], 25 December 1983. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-19619/9, ‘Lidi’, Operatív-dossziék, ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

we must, as a small nation, distance ourselves from all the aspirations of great powers. And this applies just as much to the small Hungarian people as it does to the small Jewish people, and therefore applies equally to the Hungarian Jewry. The major conflict of our time demands independent political power and civil courage from our social leaders. And if the leaders of the MIOK do not have the courage to express solidarity with Israel and the millions of Soviet and American Jews, they should at least have the courage to refrain from unilateral and prejudicial declarations.’

Salom’s open letter, which clearly signalled the loosening of the political constrictions of the Kádár era (many such pro-Soviet statements had been made by Jewish community leaders in the past, but these had not provoked any reaction from the public), fundamentally changed Hungarian Jewish reality, as the text clearly rejected the portrayal of Judaism as a mere religious group, alongside a strong claim to autonomy, pledged solidarity with the Jewish state.

One of the paradoxes of this period was that while this completely new and innovative oppositional declaration was being drafted, and while State Security continued to harass the opposition, the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP) adopted a resolution on Hungarian-Israeli relations on 20 December 1983, which included several innovations.⁹ Although the intention to establish links was explained by the desire to improve the deteriorating Hungarian economic situation (the level of debt had become enormous), compromises were made. As a sign of the slow thaw, individuals were allowed to travel to Israel (as tourists), but for Israelis group travel was compulsory. However, the last point of the resolution was precisely to warn the press not to change its tone on Israel and to avoid reporting on Hungarian-Israeli relations. As the Soviets had not yet agreed to establish (diplomatic) relations with Israel, the official Hungarian leadership was very careful not to show signs of rapprochement to the wider public.

György Gadó, who is associated with Salom—and who actually came into contact with the democratic opposition through György Krassó¹⁰—admitted early on that he too was behind the initiative. A Holocaust survivor, the journalist and translator became a communist after the war, and after the 1956 uprising he accepted the Kádár regime, so he was slow to become an oppositionist.¹¹

9 = = See Kovács, *A Kádár-rendszer és a zsidók*, 226–230.

10 = = György Krassó (1932–1991) was one of the most important figures of the Hungarian opposition movements of the Socialist period. He took part in the 1956 revolution and freedom struggle, for which he was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 1957. He was released on amnesty in 1963. During the Kádár era, he was active in a wide range of political opposition activities, for which he was constantly harassed by the police, arrested several times and not allowed to travel abroad until 1985.

11 = = ‘A Gadó’.

He left the MSZMP after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and was fired from his job in 1970 after a few years at the Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, KSH). He was temporarily employed on a part-time basis at the Institute of Popular Education, but that too changed. He was outraged by Hungary's press coverage of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. 'Long live Israel! I threw leaflets with the slogan "The press is lying!" into letterboxes, stuck them on billboards of institutions and wrote similar slogans in chalk on walls and slates at night,' he said later, in 1995.¹² He was caught, prosecuted for incitement and released from prison in early 1975 after 9 months.

= = = Opposition in opposition

Salom, however, not only came into conflict with the Hungarian state and its Israelite 'branch' (and Hungarian State Security), but its actions divided the democratic opposition early on. At the beginning of January 1984, György Krassó, one of the most prominent Hungarian oppositionists with a huge claim to autonomy, told one of the agents shadowing him from the Ministry of Interior (who called the group 'SOLON', demonstrating that the authorities had not yet 'domesticated' the name of the organisation, not knowing where to put it) that in several places (i.e. in opposition public forums), but it was blocked everywhere, so a separate newspaper would have to be set up for it.¹³ This tension—which will be discussed later –accompanied Salom throughout its existence, and ambivalence towards the group has been palpable in the opposition.¹⁴ On 18 January, Radio Free Europe broadcast Salom's call for a new group on the radio, and this launched its international career.¹⁵ Another report, referring to the Romanian-language Radio Free Europe broadcast, states that Salom's appearance on the radio is seen as a sign that for the first time Jews are appearing as members of the opposition in Hungary.

The authorities took Salom's emergence seriously. They began monitoring its domestic postal circulation. An operational report of 25 January 1984 highlighted the fact that an open letter signed by Salom had been pulled from domestic postal circulation and that it had been handed over to the III/III Directorate of

12 = = A few things have changed slightly in 2016: „Éljen Izrael!” Ezért kapott börtönt Gadó György'.

13 = = Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], BRFK-221-64/7/16 January 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

14 = = Ervin Csizmadia also refers to this: See: *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*, 285.

15 = = Another source claims that the Romanian-language Free Europe announced this. Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/II-9-19/27 January 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

the Ministry of Interior.¹⁶ According Krassó, the material had been mailed to 200 Hungarian Jewish intellectuals.¹⁷ Another operational report said that Salom had tried to send the open letter to 80 well-known Hungarian public figures.¹⁸ It also stated that 126 letters (copies of Salom) had been ‘intercepted’ and withdrawn from circulation.¹⁹

The ambivalence within the democratic opposition was constantly felt by György Krassó (György Gadó’s main opposition ally), as *Beszélő*, the main samizdat newspaper, did not actually publish the material, and the *Alulnézet Kiadó* in 1984 began to distribute duplicates of the three-page manifesto.²⁰ The publishing house had been founded in the autumn of 1983 and its declared purpose was to ‘satisfy’ the publication needs of independent Hungarian peace initiatives (of course, the staff remained anonymous).

The difference of opinion was felt in the way *Beszélő* treated Salom, since in the issue of 9 February 1984 they did not present the letter on its own, but together with two other pieces from the *Alulnézet Kiadó*. In addition, they condemned the text for being biased and pro-Israel and for blaming the arms race exclusively on those that it criticised. ‘SALOM is saying the reverse of what the leaders of the MIOK said in the wake of the peace council—but it does not go beyond the false circle that the peace movement criticises,’ they wrote.²¹

The impact of Radio Free Europe, however, proved to be lasting: according to State Security, the MIOK protested to the World Jewish Congress and Israel Singer, the organisation’s director, promised to take steps with the US president and secretary of state to ensure that the radio would not ‘interfere’ in the ‘peaceful life’ of the Israelite denomination and would not broadcast ‘defamatory’ reports.²²

The Salom Peace Group issued another important document: an open letter to Hungarian society in May 1984.²³ The target audience of the text was no longer the Jewish community and its press, but a much wider audience. Although the

16 == See Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/3-72-5-7/25 January 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

17 == Jelentés [Report], 17 February 1984. O-19619/9, ‘Lidi’, Operatív-dossziék, ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

18 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-11-20/34/20 February 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

19 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/3-72-5-12/20 February 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

20 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-11-20-24/6 February 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

21 = ‘Bemutatjuk az Alulnézet Kiadót’.

22 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-11-20/34/20 February 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

23 == ‘Nyílt levél a magyar társadalomhoz és a magyar zsidósághoz’.

letter was circulated exclusively in samizdat circles, it had an enormous impact. The text was first published in the May-June issue of *AB Hírmondó* (the newspaper of another important oppositionist personality, Gábor Demszky²⁴), but was also distributed separately.²⁵ The long essay turned the Hungarian Jewish assimilation paradigm on its head, but at the same time made Judaism intelligible on cultural, historical and ethnic grounds. The letter, written on the fortieth anniversary of the deportation of Hungarian Jews, saw Judaism as a political factor in its own right and detected major changes in two respects: it raised the responsibility of Hungarian society for the fate of the Jewish people during the Second World War (from 1920), but also articulated the responsibility of the Hungarian Jewry in relation to the Socialist/Communist era after 1949. This text, which was equally open to Hungarian society as a whole, gave a completely new dimension to the situation of the Hungarian Jewry. Instead of assimilation, it proposed integration, which simply meant that Jews should be integrated into Hungarian society by preserving and not denouncing their own values.

Public policy itself was in a constant state of flux, and despite police harassment, the meltdown was underway. The editor of the *Hírmondó* himself noted after Salom's new article that the rebuilt Jewish Museum had opened, Raoul Wallenberg's name was mentioned at the commemoration on 13 May (but not his fate),²⁶ a memorial plaque for Hanna Szenes (the Hungarian Jewish paratrooper who was taken then executed by the Hungarian authorities at the end of the WWII) was unveiled, and a book containing a study by István Bibó²⁷ on the 'Jewish question' was published.²⁸ In parallel with Salom's action, a kind of détente began:

24 == Gábor Demszky (1952–), Hungarian lawyer, sociologist, politician, former member of the democratic opposition and then the SZDSZ, mayor of Budapest for five terms between 1990 and 2010.

25 == Nyílt levél a magyar társadalomhoz és a magyar zsidósághoz [An open letter to Hungarian society and the Hungarian Jewry]. *AB Hírmondó* no. 6–7. (1984). 23–37. 362-0-2/6. Collection of Philipp, OSA. Budapest, Hungary.

26 == Raoul Wallenberg (1913–1947?) was a Swedish diplomat sent to Budapest during the summer of 1944. Wallenberg issued exemption documents for thousands of Jews and was also connected with the Hungarian resistance movements. In January of 1945 he was dragged by Soviet authorities and probably died in Moscow in 1947.

27 == István Bibó (1911–1979), lawyer, philosopher, sociologist, politician, university professor. After 1948-49, he was excluded from public life. Between 1951 and 1956 he was a staff member of the University Library in Budapest. On 31 October 1956, he was elected a member of the Executive Committee of the National Peasant Party, which was reorganised as the Petőfi Party. He was briefly Minister of State in the Imre Nagy government.

28 == They add: 'However, we believe that the most important messages of the open letter are not affected by this' Nyílt levél a magyar társadalomhoz és a magyar zsidósághoz [An open letter to Hungarian society and the Hungarian Jewry]. *AB Hírmondó* no. 6–7. (1984). 37. 362-0-2/6. Collection of Philipp, OSA. Budapest, Hungary. It is about the book Bibó, *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus*.

the party state started to give up important positions and the channels of communication opened up even more.

Salom's May letter provoked a lively reaction. One of the most important one was an article by the leading figure of the 'democratic opposition', the philosopher János Kis^{29, 30}. The 'democratic opposition' was one of the most important parts of the opposition movements of the Kádár era. They issued samizdat and were subject to numerous persecutions. Kis, while agreeing that the Hungarian Jewry represented a kind of added value and should not be assimilated but integrated, also raised serious objections to Salom's idea. He considered the call for a position in favour of the minority Jewry in Hungary to be meaningful only to those who themselves agreed with it and wanted it. Salom does not adequately explain the problem of 'Jewish belonging', he points out, that in our 'one-sidedly modernised society' there are Jewish and non-Jewish cliques: social mechanisms recreate mutual prejudices. Although Salom applies the same yardstick to non-Jewish and Jewish Hungarians (thus drawing a parallel between Hungarian responsibility for the deportations and Hungarian social responsibility after 1945), he loses the yardstick when he does not judge the parties equally in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. János Kis repeated his criticism—somewhat sterile, but honest, from today's perspective—when he bid farewell to György Gadó, who left his political career (he was a member of parliament for the Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SZDSZ) after 1990) following the change of the regime.³¹ He praised Gadó, who expected minority rights to be part of the democratic transformation of Hungarian society, but accused him of intolerance towards assimilationist Jews who did not see their own history as part of the history of world Jewry. János Kis's writing was symptomatic in that it indicated that a part of the democratic opposition of Jewish origin does not want to get involved in any Jewish politics (ethnic or minority) and sees itself as an unmarked part of Hungarian political life. The political loneliness of György Gadó—who accepted in the 1980s that the people around *Beszélő* did not want to deal with the Jewry in a specific way and to engage with world Jewry and Israel (if it goes beyond the fight against anti-Semitism and towards any particular solidarity)—was also due to this specific, multiple minority and marginalised position.

A Hungarian from Czechoslovakia under the pseudonym Sándor Balázs (his real name was László Öllős³², also expressed his thoughts on Salom's open let-

29 == János Kis (1943–), philosopher, political scientist and politician. Leader of the SZDSZ (1990–1991).

30 == Kis, 'A Salom nyílt levele a magyar társadalomhoz és a magyar zsidósághoz'.

31 == Kis, 'Gadó'.

32 == László Öllős (1957–), political scientist, philosopher, president of the Forum Minority Research Institute (Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Fórum Inštitút pre Výskum Menšín) in Slovakia.

ter.³³ He emphasised the role of the Hungarian and Central European Jewry in civilisation, modernisation and cultural mediation. On behalf of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, he expressed his support for the awakening of Hungarian Jews to self-consciousness in the face of discriminatory nationalism. It was entirely predictable that a considerable part of the Hungarian intelligentsia across the border would support any awakening of ethnic consciousness (even within Hungary)—they saw good chances and model for their own minority group's aspirations for autonomy.

= = = The influence of Salom is spreading

The existence of an independent, oppositional Hungarian Jewish organisation began to interest the foreign press. One of the agents who had been put in charge of György Krassó reported that not only had a film crew visited him, but in July 1984 he had also received two foreigners, whom he had intensively informed about the situation of the Hungarian Jewry and the Salom letter. Gábor Demszky, another leading opposition figure and founding editor of *Hírmondó*, also joined the conversation.³⁴ One of Krassó's agents, when he visited him on 10 August, said that although he agreed with much of the article, he condemned the writing of the 'Salamon' (meaning 'Salom'; 'Salamon' was Gadó's State-Security nickname) organisation. The Hungarian opposition is regarded as a 'Jewish gang' by the 'spiritually oppositional' Hungarian masses, and reading the manifesto only confirms the extreme right-wing view that Jews cannot be assimilated, says the informant.³⁵ Krassó defended Salom, explaining that he was of Jewish origin and that Judaism was not a race but a community. There was a need to arouse the sympathy of Hungarian Jews for Israel, which is the bastion of the West in the Middle East, he argued. 'The rise of anti-Soviet sentiment in Jewish circles will help to increase sympathy for the State of Israel and to develop a Jewish consciousness,' Krassó said, according to the informant. A radical oppositionist and a highly impulsive movement politician (and far from being a tactical thinker) Krassó identified with Salom's aims and methods with a natural instinct.

Krassó sold Salom's open letter, among other publications, in his apartment on Fő utca in Budapest, while the authorities triumphantly announced in August that they had again withdrawn from postal circulation 9 items of Salom material—

33 = = 'A Salom Nyílt Levele egy kisebbségi magyar szemével'.

34 = = Jelentés Krassó Györgyről és Demszky Gáborról [Report on György Krassó and Gábor Demszky], 26 July 1984. O-19619/9, 'Lidi', Operatív-dossziék, ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

35 = = Jelentés [Report], 13 August 1984. 10. O-19619/9, 'Lidi', Operatív-dossziék, ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

written to Hungarian and Swiss addresses—and photocopied pages from the *Hírmondó*.³⁶

Salom's second open letter provoked a number of reactions, the most important of which was Pál Szalai's³⁷ visceral response.³⁸ We can regard these reactions as visceral because rational perception is often interrupted by personal recollection, and the conclusions often cannot be generalised and political action cannot be inferred. Such was the case when Szalai challenged the conception of 'Jew' in Salom's statement. At the same time, he offered the position of Jewishness in a cultural-ethnic sense to Salom. He also notes that the Salom speaks of the 'Jewish' members of the democratic opposition, thus adding fuel to the fire of the 'red' and 'white' reaction, which to this day speaks of the democratic opposition in this way. However, an important integration of the supportive position on Israel is that Szalai not only recognises the founding of the state of Israel as one of the most important events in modern history, but considers the 1967 war against the 'Arab dictatorships' to be comparable in ethos and heroism to the Jewish Warsaw Uprisings of 1943 and the Polish Warsaw Uprisings of 1944; the Hungarian workers' councils' struggle of 1956; the Prague Spring of 1968; the Solidarity revolution of 1980–1981. What is more, Israel gave a boost to the democratic-socialist movements in Eastern Europe with this self-defensive struggle.³⁹ Although Szalai argues that national self-defence in Israel after 1967 had eclipsed the struggle for social justice and that Israel's war in Lebanon is against one of the democracies of the Middle East (and therefore he does not approve of it), his position is fundamentally supportive. In his assessment of the contemporary situation in Hungary, Szalai is more empathetic than Salom himself, noting tangible signs of a slow thaw, but also detecting semi-official anti-Semitism in the Hungarian public sphere.

The interest of the Hungarian authorities reached a new level when a confidential investigation was launched against Salom on 10 October 1984.⁴⁰ 'We would inform you⁴¹ that, on the basis of the permission of Comrade (Ministry of Interior)

36 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-72-5-58/15 August 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

37 == Pál Szalai (1935–2003), writer, journalist, member of the democratic opposition, who before and after 1989 was and remained an advocate of Bibó-inspired democratic Socialism.

38 == Megjegyzések a "Salom" független magyar zsidó békemozgalom második nyílt leveléhez [Comments on the second open letter of the 'Salom' independent Hungarian Jewish peace movement]. *AB Hírmondó* no. 10. (1984). 27–34. Box 3/8. OSA 355-0-1. Collection of János Kis. Budapest, Hungary.

39 == *Ibid.*, 29.

40 == See Információkérés [Request for information], 10 October 1984. O-19619/9, 'Lidi', Operatív-dossziék, ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

41 == The address was: Gyula Hanusz, Police Lieutenant Colonel, Head of Department III/III-3, Ministry of Interior.

Department III of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, we have launched a confidential investigation to identify the members of the group known as 'Salom' (the independent peace group of Hungarian Jews) and to prevent and disrupt their hostile activities. We ask you to hand over to our department any information and documents previously obtained concerning the 'Salom' group. At the same time, we ask you to assist in the detection of the members of the 'Salom' group by using your existing and deployable operational positions in the interdiction areas. According to the assessment of the primary information, further information is expected to be generated mainly in the framework of the 'Lidi' codename confidential investigation. Please continue to send information generated in this case to our department', they wrote.⁴² The III/III-4-c Subdivision (countering the 'national' opposition) was contacted with a request for information.

The author of another Salom piece caused some confusion, since the informant called 'Aspirant' thought he recognised the author, 'who, according to him, was a Rabbinical Seminary graduate, a prison inmate, and now a small-scale plastics manufacturer.'⁴³ The description, which perfectly fitted Ivan Beer, a former rabbinical student convicted of Zionism⁴⁴, was not true of Salom, since Beer had no connection with the group.⁴⁵

The authorities harassed György Krassó and György Gadó. On 18 October, a search was carried out at Krassó's apartment and various materials were confiscated.⁴⁶ Gadó's place was searched on 1 November,⁴⁷ while other sources put the so-called residence search on 12 November.⁴⁸ In the 'announced' search (the police

42 == The signatories: Lajos Forgács, Police Major Head of Division and Ernő Udvardi Police Captain, Head of Subdivision

43 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-11-20/194/15 October 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

44 == Ivan Beer was sentenced to 16 months in prison in 1970. See Joó, 'Állambiztonsági eljárás Beer Iván rabbinövendék és baráti köre ellen. Az "Exodus" fedőnevű ügy előzményei és következményei.'

45 == On other occasions, too, they were groping in the woods: in the autumn of 1984, an unknown person named Friedmann forwarded a written message to 'Kormos' asking him to send his paper to SALOM in the usual way, because it was to be published in December, together with other papers. The authorities are asking for a writing expert to reveal Friedmann's identity. See Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], BM III/III-11-20/196/17 October 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

46 == A record was also made: 23 Salom 'Open Letters' and 73 Salom envelopes were seized. Jegyzék a Krassó György lakásán megtartott nyílt házkutatásról [Note on the open perquisition of György Krassó's apartment], 18 October 1984. O-19619/9, 'Lidi', Operatív-dossziék, ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

47 == 'Újabb hatósági támadások a független sajtó ellen.'

48 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-11-20/213/12 November 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

never conducted a search on the basis of a prosecutor's warrant), where Gadó's past behaviour was also described as 'Jewish nationalist activity', many items were seized. It was concluded that he was actively involved in the editing and distribution of samizdat.⁴⁹ György Gadó was charged with a press offence, fined and the seized material was 'permanently' confiscated. The authorities launched a confidential investigation to 'further investigate and disrupt' Gadó's activities. Gadó, meanwhile, has become an important element in the Hungarian second public: the Italian news agency ANSA has already reported that he has called for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Hungary and Israel, while Gadó himself has denied any involvement with the opposition Jewish grouping.⁵⁰

In the so-called 'flying universities' (where members of the opposition and other gave lectures and research reports at private apartments), which already existed in the democratic opposition, the topic was also discussed, as on 10 December sociologist András Kovács and social psychologist Ferenc Erős gave a lecture (at the apartment of opposition writer János Kenedi⁵¹) on their major Jewish sociological-social-psychological research, in which they investigated the Jewish identity of Hungarian Jews by conducting and analysing in-depth interviews. In front of an audience of about 40 people, 'Solomon' (i.e. György Gadó) spoke and said that he considered it more important to take a political approach, for which the platform was Solomon's open letter.⁵² János Kenedi was interested in the matter and wanted to start the new season of the flying university on 4 February 1985 with a discussion of Salom's letter, but they could not find a place for it to be held for 3-4 more sessions.⁵³

The year 1985 was a turning point in many ways. György Krassó was forced to leave Hungary after a year in police custody. György Gadó was exposed as someone who also used his name in his writings as 'Győző Ravasz'.⁵⁴

As mentioned above, Salom's activities also divided the public of the opposition: at an internal meeting in late August—which may have been informed to

49 == 'Among the materials discovered and confiscated are, among other things, a draft letter and draft statutes of an organisation called the "Hungarian Democratic Rights Organisation"'. Ibid.

50 == See Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/I-67/52-1/228/ 21 November 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

51 == János Kenedi (1947–), writer and critic, former member of the democratic opposition.

52 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-11-20/236/13 December 1984. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

53 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-11-20/39/15 February 1985. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

54 == See Napi jelentés [Daily report], 5 May 1985. O-19619/12, 'Lidi', Operatív-dossziék, ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

the authorities by Tamás Mikes (aka ‘Micsinay’⁵⁵), who was present—the Jewish organisation was the subject of discussion and they said they did not want to join it because they considered it too radical.⁵⁶ In the summer of 1986, the authorities tried to intimidate the various civil Jewish ‘table companies’ (there were at least three such groups in Budapest), counting about 25 people. Allegedly the civilians informed the World Jewish Congress of the events and (also allegedly) promised to raise the matter with the Hungarian government, but we know nothing more.⁵⁷

Salom sparked further press controversy, operating in the press. The Salom peace group’s opinion on the state of the Jewish Community was published in the *Hírmondó* with Leviticus’⁵⁸ signature.⁵⁹ The text was sharply critical of the MIOK, namely in connection with the election of its new president, Dr András Losonci, a senior physician, on 15 December 1985 (at the MIOK’s elective plenary session).⁶⁰ Losonci, who for the first time in the history of the MIOK had been self-critical and had spoken of mistakes, gave the Salom letter-writer an excuse. Leviticus had just quoted the words of the president of the MIOK, who spoke of the need to eliminate anomalies and restore moral reputations. ‘The public speeches refer to the moral crisis of the denomination, but they stubbornly ignore the fact that the causes of this moral crisis are not simply material problems or abuses, but primarily the leadership’s failure to face up to the contradictions of domestic social develop-

55 == Mihály Andor wrote a book about Mikes: *Szegény Micsinay—Egy besugó élete*.

56 == See Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/II-11-162/28 August 1985. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

57 == Interview with György Gadó by the Viennese Jewish newspaper *Die Gemeinde*. In K. Pfeiffer interjúja Gadó Györggyel a Zsidó Világkongresszus végrehajtó bizottságának legutóbbi bp-i ülése alkalmából [K. Pfeiffer’s interview with György Gadó by the occasion of the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Jewish Congress held in Budapest] 3-11. A-3358, ‘Tematikus összeállítás az antiszemizmusról és a zsidóságról’ [Thematic compilation on anti-Semitism and Jewry], ÁBTL, Budapest Hungary. See also ‘Szóval azt mondja, aki zsidó, tartsa magát zsidónak? Mihancsik Zsófia interjúi Lovász Ferencsel és Rácz Andrással’.

58 == Leviticus is the third book of the Pentateuch, in the Hebrew canon it is called Vayikra.

59 == Valódi válság, hamis megújulás [Real crisis, false renewal]. *AB Hírmondó* no. 1. (1986). 46–48. The issue is available at the National Széchényi Library. Representing the ‘internal’ opposition were György Gadó, Miklós Tamás Gáspár, Tamás Molnár, Péter Bokros, Ferenc Kószeg, Gábor Demszky, Miklós Sulyok, Jenő Nagy, Róbert Pálinkás, Sándor Radnóti, Tibor Philipp, Miklós Haraszti, Olga Diószegi, József Talata (punctuated by Mikolta Bognár and Gyula Bartók).

60 == Dr Alfréd Schőner, Chief Rabbi, President of the Budapest Rabbinate, then became Deputy Chairman of the National Rabbinical Council. See: ‘Felekezetek együtt a békéért’ and ‘„Előttem csak az a cél lebeg, hogy hazámat és ezen belül a felekezet érdekeit szolgáljam”’.

ment and domestic political life. The MIOK had taken loyalty to the communist state to its very core', the article stated.⁶¹ It did so at a time when the weaknesses of that state were already apparent. Nor did the MIOK condemn the PLO for 'killing Jews' with Soviet weapons, and it was a major event when it wrote off the name of Israel. Not once in its assembly does *Új Élet* mention the ordeals of the Soviet Jewry or Israel—understandably, because they exist not because of the democratic initiative of Hungarian Jewish society, but 'at the mercy of the communist state negotiating with Arab terrorists.' Referring to an interview in a German Jewish newspaper with Gézá Seifert, Secretary-General of the MIOK, Leviticus noted that if things continue as they are, in twenty years there will be no Jews in Hungary.

= = Israeli detour: debate with a radical

This statement by the Salom Peace Group also reached the Hungarian-speaking public of Israel. On 8 May 1986, the Israeli Hungarian newspaper *Hét Tükre* published an article by Mose D. Braun, the paper's correspondent in Budapest, in which he described the article. Orthodox journalist Naftali Kraus (belonging to the Chabad movement) strongly criticised Leviticus in the 29 May issue of the Hungarian-language Israeli newspaper *A Hét Tükre*. György Gadó responded separately, and the *Hírmondó* published Kraus's article and his response side by side.⁶² This undoubtedly strong democratic gesture did not obscure the sharply polemical nature of the debate. Naftali Kraus made it clear that the Hungarian Jewry was in its final hours, and that everyone must do everything possible to prevent this from happening.⁶³ Kraus also criticised Salom because, in his view, if the 'regime in Pest' does not hinder the life of the Jews (in the areas of education, religious life, culture, spiritual life and development) and supports Jewish emigration (he cited the Romanian Jewry and its Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen as a positive example), then 'we have nothing against it'. It is the missed opportunities of the Jewish leadership in Pest that should be addressed, that could be criticised, but that is not the business of the *Hírmondó*. Kraus declared that 'we' should give the new leadership of the MIOK the opportunity and only criticize the organisation if it fails to fulfil its responsibilities. Kraus further claimed that this is none of the business of the *Hírmondó* or of various fictitious or non-fictitious opposition groups in Hungary.

61 = 'Valódi válság, hamis megújulás' [Real crisis, false renewal]. *AB Hírmondó* no. 1. (1986). 47. OSZK.

62 = Igenis van közünk egymáshoz. Válasz Naftáli Krausnak, Izraelbe. [We do have a connection. Reply to Naftali Kraus, Israel.] In *AB Hírmondó* no. 3. 1986. 45-49. OSZK.

63 = Még 'Hírmondónk' sem marad... Megjegyzések a pesti Hírmondó zsidó vonatkozású cikkéhez. [Not even our "Hírmondó" will remain... Memos to the article in the Jewish section of the Pest Hírmondó.] In: *ibid*, 46-47.

Moreover, he attacked the democratic opposition—with completely distorted optics—by claiming that they were personally descendants of those who had assisted in the deportation of the Hungarian Jewry in 1944 and who ‘now’ wanted to exploit the existing Jewish question. In his reply, György Gadó rightly pointed out⁶⁴ that Kraus did not seem to know any opposition members personally, although even the Western media had managed to find them. He vehemently rejected the idea that Jewish freedom could be imagined without freedom for Hungarian society at large. ‘The survival of the Jewry in Hungary does not depend on its cooperation with the existing regime, but on its breathing with the nation, with the broader part of the nation.’⁶⁵ He called Kraus’s refusal to help non-Jewish Hungarians an outrageous speech, and Gadó was also outraged that he called the democratic opposition, which included so many Jews, the successors of the Holocaust collaborators.

This debate—not so much because of the weight of the arguments put forward in it—was very important from the perspective of the years after the regime change, since for the first time the Hungarian (second) public was confronted with a pure ethnocentric Jewish opinion (Kraus’s), which was not only not bound by linguistic taboos and other self-limitations, but also considered it possible to express and represent a position for which democratic values do not exist in themselves and does not want to conform to any so-called external reference. This position was completely at odds with the left-wing universalism which (at least formally) was still represented in socialist Hungary and which, now endowed with the rights of man, was also considered by a large part of the democratic opposition as its own.

= = The change of regime is coming: the last years of Salom

In 1987, the Salom Peace Group was once again the focus of public attention. An opposition artist, Gábor Zrínyifalvi, had converted the garage of his family home on the outskirts of Budapest into an alternative cultural centre. The centre was opened on 8 May 1987 with a two-room exhibition paying tribute to Wallenberg, and a US embassy report discussed the events there.⁶⁶ Wallenberg, who had saved the lives of many Hungarian Jews, was arrested by the Soviets in Budapest in January 1945, then taken to the Soviet Union, where he died—under uncertain circumstances—in a prison. His deportation was considered taboo in the countries of the Soviet bloc, as his death was not caused by the German Nazis, but by the Soviets, who also had Hungary in their sphere of interest.

64 = = Ibid. 47–49.

65 = = Ibid. 49.

66 = = Kávássy, ‘A talapzatára fellépő szobor. Raoul Wallenberg személyének exponálódása a magyar belpolitikában 1987-ben’.

Three opposition members read at the opening, Miklós Tamás Gáspár⁶⁷ and Tamás Molnár⁶⁸ (a member of the Inconnu Group⁶⁹), along with György Gadó. Gadó spoke (briefly in English and at length in Hungarian) as co-editor of the *Demokrata* and on behalf of those who had set up the Salom peace group three and a half years ago. He spoke about the growing and long-standing Hungarian anti-Semitism in a context of deteriorating economic conditions. Gadó briefly described the activities of the Salom Group, the history of their ‘persecution’, and then read the ‘Salom appeal.’⁷⁰ Tamás Gáspár, who made anti-Soviet and anti-Communist statements, compared the ‘oppression’ of Hungarian Jews to the situation of Hungarian national minorities living across the border. The event was reported in detail by the State Security services. ‘The opening programme was attended by some 30 people, including the BBC, REUTER, AFP, DPA, Voice of America correspondent, Austrian journalist Karl Pfeiffer and an anonymous delegate to the World Jewish Congress.’⁷¹

Salom’s declaration was entitled ‘Against anti-Semitism, for democratic change’.⁷² The text, which was aimed at the erection of the Wallenberg statue and the meeting of the World Jewish Congress, detected a sense of disorder in Hungarian economic life and also reported the strengthening of anti-Semitism. Their problem is not with the Hungarian people, but with the exercise of power, they wrote, while also criticising Hungarian Jewish illusions, such as confidence in the Soviet Union. They also criticised the MIÖK, which ‘echoes the voice of the Party and the government as much as the Party or the trade union.’ The MIÖK does not talk about harassment of Jews, Salom claimed. The manifesto also stated that this was not the way of Jewry, while calling on the Hungarian government to act to free Raoul Wallenberg.

67 == Miklós Tamás Gáspár (1948–2023), Marxist philosopher, politician, public and journalist, university lecturer, one of the most influential and internationally recognised figures of Hungarian philosophy at the turn of the millennium.

68 == Tamás Molnár (1955–), artist, writer, publicist.

69 == Inconnu was an independent group of artists at the end of the Kádár regime, see <http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n37721> (Access on 21 June 2022)

70 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-76/7/11 May 1987. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

71 == Representing the ‘internal opposition’ (that’s how State Security called them) were György Gadó, Miklós Tamás Gáspár, Tamás Molnár, Péter Bokros, Ferenc Kőszeg, Gábor Demszky, Miklós Sulyok, Jenő Nagy, Róbert Pálinkás, Sándor Radnóti, Tibor Philipp, Miklós Haraszti, Olga Diószegi, József Talata (punctuated by Mikolta Bognár and Gyula Bartók. Ibid.

72 == The declaration is available online: https://watson.sk/NZONLINE/docs/szamizdat_116_20191022.221227.pdf (Access on 29 June 2022)

Gadó sent the Salom statement to the writer István Csurka⁷³ and asked him to sign it. This was a very important gesture towards the so-called Hungarian ‘national’ or ‘popular’ opposition of which Csurka was one of the most important figures. This kind of collaboration was very positive in the fragmented Hungarian intellectual-opposition (or semi-opposition) milieu, where the democratic opposition, considered to be urbane, and the ‘national’/‘popular’ wing (consists of writers mainly), which considered themselves the intellectual descendants of the people’s movement had a huge distrust, which deepened over time.

The State Security’s daily operative report of 7 May reported on events of fundamental importance.⁷⁴ According to the report, Csurka had consulted the writer Sándor Csoóri⁷⁵ (also a leading intellectual of this opposition) and they had come to the conclusion that its content was a ‘Jewish internal matter’, but on the other hand it described political problems in a ‘peculiar way’ with which they could not identify and therefore could not sign it. At the same time, they thought that, if only to avoid accusations of anti-Semitism, they should react to the declaration by condemning anti-Semitism, but also by denouncing the accusation of anti-Semitism. It was also suggested that, in addition to the two writers accused of anti-Semitism, ‘two of them, Ferenc Sánta⁷⁶ and Gyula Fekete⁷⁷, should also have János Kis and János Sánta sign the text, which would also be a gesture by the ‘popular’ opposition towards Kis and his friends.’⁷⁸ Although in the note behind the report they write that they do not know whether this statement is identical to the one they wanted to have read out with Sándor Radnóti⁷⁹ at the Inconnu evening on 8 May (but it was György Gadó himself who read it out), the text ‘Resolution against hatred’ was eventually signed by István Csurka, Gyula Hernádi and György Konrád⁸⁰. The text was essentially conflict-ridden, with Salom’s manifesto being described as one of the manifestos towards ‘the fulfilment of freedom, the purification of souls’. Referring throughout to Raoul Wallenberg, the text described the Salom’s declaration as a ‘sober voice’ against the national hatred and incitement of peoples to hatred and incitement to hatred that was ‘once again destroying’

73 == István Csurka (1934–2012), Hungarian writer, journalist and far-right politician.

74 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operational Information Report], III/III-75/a-7/7 May 1987. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

75 == Sándor Csoóri (1930–2016), poet, essayist, prose writer, politician.

76 == Ferenc Sánta (1927–2008), Kossuth Prize-winning Hungarian writer, his works have been published in many languages.

77 == Gyula Fekete (1951–2119), writer, sociographer, journalist.

78 == See Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-75/a-7/7 May 1987. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

79 == Sándor Radnóti (1946–), essayist, critic, philosopher, literary historian, university professor.

80 == György Konrád (1933–2019), writer, essayist, sociologist.

Central and Eastern Europe. ‘We feel it is our inevitable human duty to take this opportunity to voice the need to create a common homeland where there is finally no “anti”, where there is only “pro”, where history happens for everyone whose mother gave birth to it’—concludes the declaration.⁸¹ The joint declaration, which was obviously a compromise—and in which the ‘popular’ opposition did not want a confrontation—was drawn up almost at the last moment before the opposition (the ‘popular’ and the ‘urban’) fragmented, but realistic political considerations also prevailed, precisely in order to preserve unity, at least on the surface.

In the meantime, a very important event was taking place in Budapest, where the World Jewish Congress (WJC) Executive Committee met for the first time in a socialist country since 1967—starting on 7 May.⁸² The officials of the WJC had imposed two conditions: Israeli delegates should be allowed to travel freely to the country and that the organisation should be free to choose its own themes for the event: the Hungarian government agreed to both conditions. At the event’s dinner, US Ambassador Mark Palmer, probably in return for the Hungarian authorities’ leniency, not only mentioned the need for continued political pressure on the Soviet Union (to allow Jewish emigration to Israel), but also described the human rights situation in Romania as deplorable, with a special emphasis on the situation of the Hungarian minority.⁸³ The press also played a part in shaping the situation, as a correspondent from *Le Monde*, one of the French newspapers present at the event, was interested in the ‘Salom movement’, among other issues relating to church politics and the Hungarian economic situation (they were interested in the situation of small cooperatives and private shops).⁸⁴

György Gadó was pleased with the Salom statement, which was timed to coincide with the WJC meeting and the unveiling of the Wallenberg statue, and one operative report (by the State Security) stated that the Jewish secular aspirations it symbolised had gained ground. Gadó, moreover, wanted to develop Salom into a ‘Jewish-Christian’ reconciliation group, as it would not only be associated with his name.⁸⁵ He also wanted to start two new newspapers, *Salom* and *Szabad Polgár*,

81 = ‘Nyilatkozat’

82 = <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/07/world/a-jewish-parley-in-budapest.html> (Access on 21 June 2022.)

83 = The Waldheim case also had been raised: ‘Edgar M. Bronfman, president of the congress, opened the talks by asking for unanimous adoption of a motion of congratulations to Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d for the action of the Justice Department in barring President Kurt Waldheim of Austria from entering the United States.’ Ibid.

84 = See Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-76-7/11 May 1987. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

85 = See Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-94-7/4 June 1987. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

the first of which would deal specifically with Jewish issues.⁸⁶ The measure at the end of the report on this matter states that, once the information had been completed, a ‘operational plan’ would be drawn up to prevent the activities of ‘Solomon’.

Independently of the Salom group, György Gadó launched his newspaper *Magyar Zsidó* (3 issues) in the autumn of 1987, which was supported by the Hungarian (urban) opposition and (as usual) attracted the interest of State Security. The paper, whose staff—Gadó later admitted—consisted of fictitious persons, represented an independent and well-edited organ representing a democratic Jewish voice radically different from the МЮК *Új Élet*. In many ways, *Magyar Zsidó* was an interesting, individual voice. This is evidenced by its publication of the May 1987 statement of the three writers (quoted earlier) in connection with the May 1987 Salom manifesto. It then took a stand on the famous poem by the writer György Spiró entitled ‘They are coming’, which caused a huge storm at the time. György Spiró, predicting the emergence of the Hungarian extreme right, described the phenomenon in unsearchable terms, which led several literary figures belonging to the popular opposition to take offence and accuse the author of insulting Hungarianness. The *Magyar Zsidó* article stated that, although Spiró’s position is understandable, it is not true that the majority in Hungarian society is ‘afraid’ of the haters.⁸⁷ The paper also reported on a new exhibition in the Goldmark Hall (a festive place of МЮК), in collaboration with the Nachum Goldman Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv.⁸⁸ It criticised several aspects of the exhibition, such as the lack of presentation of modern Zionism, and said that the museum’s technology left much to be desired. The paper reported on the May meeting of the JWC Executive Committee (‘What was left out of *Új Élet*’), mainly on issues (e.g. the situation of the Soviet Jewry) that were left out of the official Jewish denominational newspaper.

The publication was of keen interest to State Security and was the subject of daily operative reports. It even attracted the attention of the leadership of the АЕИ.⁸⁹ A report on *Magyar Zsidó* was made as early as 1 November, and on 6 November the content of the publication were specifically mentioned. According to

86 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-99-7/11 June 1987. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

87 == Kik félnek és mitől? [Who are afraid and of what?], *Magyar Zsidó* no. 1. (1987). 12. Box 5. 302-0-2. OSA, Budapest, Hungary.

88 == ‘Kiállítás a magyar zsidóság történetéből’ [Exhibition on the history of the Hungarian Jewry], *ibid.*, 13–14.

89 == I rely heavily on Bence Csatóri’s unpublished work titled ‘Szemelvények a magyarországi zsidóság pártállami történetéből’ [Sections from the history of the Hungarian Jewry in the party-state], written for Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association (Magyar Zsidó Kulturális Egyesület, MAZSIKE).

this, 700 copies were distributed, and a special section was devoted to the situation of the Soviet Jewry. Béláné Mészáros, the deputy head of Department III/III-7, whose name appeared at the end of the report, saw it as her task to prevent the next issue from being published. They also tried to prevent its distribution by post, and a copy was seized in a letter sent to the Netherlands. Another report claimed that György Gadó wanted to obtain a printing press from the new Jewish Emmanuel Foundation.

Magyar Zsidó was also covered by the foreign press: the German-language daily *Kurier* in Vienna on 14 December 1987 even published a facsimile print of the paper. According to the article, the slogan of the new Hungarian Jewish paper was 'We condemn anti-Zionist propaganda campaigns, which only serve to disguise the traditional anti-Semitism of totalitarian regimes'. The report of 26 January 1988 stated that the second issue had already been published. The circulation of the Hungarian Jew had increased from 44 to 66 pages and 1,000 copies. Gadó allegedly encouraged by the American diplomats in Budapest, gone ahead: he published the third issue. Further reports told of where and when issues of the paper had turned up, including at the Sasad farmers' cooperative (Mezőgazdasági termelészövetkezet, MGT SZ)⁹⁰ and the Young Artists' Club (Fiatalközéleti Klubja, FMK) in Budapest.⁹¹ They also mentioned in a report that they had learned that Syrian intelligence was investigating the financial backing behind the newspaper.⁹² Dated 8 May 1988, the report, stated that a search had been carried out in Zamárdi (a village near Lake Balaton), during which 700 copies of the third issue of *Magyar Zsidó* were seized, along with other samizdat publications. The high-performance Rotaprint printing press in Zamárdi was reported to have been in the hands of Gábor Demszky's partners. The authorities, of course, confiscated the samizdat publications, together with large quantities of paper, ink and a stapling machine, also of high capacity, and set themselves the new target of eliminating or at least reducing the distribution of illegal newspapers. This had some effect, as the 3rd issue was published in stencil reproduction of poorer quality than the previous ones.⁹³

On 4 January 1988, Imre Miklós, the State Secretary of State and President of the ÁEH, sent a short analysis of the paper to high MSZMP functionaries including

90 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], BRFK-36/5/1 March 1988. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

91 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/II-44/3/3 March 1988. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

92 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/II-57/1/22 March 1988. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

93 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-127/3/5 July 1988. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

János Berecz⁹⁴, Ernő Lakatos⁹⁵, Gyula Horn⁹⁶, and to Károly Grósz⁹⁷ and Harangozó (probably Szilveszter⁹⁸).⁹⁹ According to György Vass, the analyst of the Office, the nature of its introduction and the whole paper tells a different story—the professed and unconfessed aims of the organ: to discredit the МГЮК and the Hungarian People’s Republic, to promote Zionism, to oppose communism and the Soviet Union, to show that the democratic opposition is the real ally of the Hungarian Jewry—these are the aims. The summary is a ‘timed provocation’, a diminution of the growing international prestige of the Hungarian People’s Republic’s church policy and its achievements in the field of human rights. It is interesting that the proposals made at the end of the text reveal a great deal of uncertainty, e.g. to take the wind out of the sail by consulting the Új Élet on a more flexible and courageous policy of journalism, ‘a more sophisticated journalistic theme could take away some of the publication’s themes.’ A short report by the АЕИ, signed by Imre Miklós and dated 3 January 1988, made similar observations.

On 1 August 1988, the АЕИ also made a proposal for the so-called illegal journal *Magyar Zsidó*, which they said had improved in quality, even though it was a one-man publication, Gadó himself writing it alone. According to the memo, ‘The general political orientation of the journal—as was to be expected—was openly, aggressively hostile, its tone had become extremely harsh. Socialism is portrayed as a dead end in world history, the Party as a rotting corpse, our country is referred to as a servant and henchman of the Soviet Union, the press management is said to be run by party satraps and barrack-room hirelings, a general national unity (including party members) is called for to overthrow the system, etc. It is likely that the official measure on the third number will be used to prove that the regime is also

94 = János Berecz (1930–2022), Hungarian politician in the Kádár regime. In the 1980s, he was a leading official, member of the MSZMP Central Committee, Secretary of the Central Committee of the State Party in charge of ideological and propaganda affairs, one of the most influential politicians of the time, and member of the Political Committee in 1987.

95 = Ernő Lakatos (1930–2018), Communist journalist, politician and diplomat. Between 1982 and 1988 he was head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the MSZMP Central Committee. In 1988 he was transferred to the foreign service and became ambassador in Berlin, the capital of the GDR. He retired after the regime change in March 1991.

96 = Gyula Horn (1932–2013), politician, economist, candidate of economics, last Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian People’s Republic, Prime Minister between 1994 and 1998.

97 = Károly Grósz (1930–1996), politician, President of the Council of Ministers, General Secretary of the MSZMP.

98 = Szilveszter Harangozó (1929–2011), held positions in internal affairs and state security before the regime change.

99 = A *Magyar Zsidó* című kiadvány tartalmi elemzése [Content analysis of the publication *Magyar Zsidó*]. S-36-8/1987. XIX-A-21-a. MNL OL, Budapest, Hungary.

anti-Semitic [...] He stated that in Hungary “Jewish culture is living under severe restrictions” and that this must be fought against. The secular, social cultural [sic!] institutions of the Jewry must be established, and an independent but legal newspaper must be founded. [...] He also praises the work of Tamás Raj and the book on the Jewish Museum.¹⁰⁰ His opinion of the MIOK was that it did not represent the Hungarian Jewry. According to György Vass, the ÁEH rapporteur, ‘the quality of the journal (paper, typesetting, typography) is strikingly good. The production of this quality cannot be covered by the revenues from its sale. It would not be uninteresting to know who could cover the costs’.¹⁰¹ The ÁEH suggests that the paper should continue to be monitored, no doubt through the Ministry of Interior’s network of informers, and that the MIOK should be alerted to the ‘slander and distortions’ they have been subjected to in the *Új Élet* columns.

In May 1988, Tamás M. (probably Molnár) presented a statement edited and distributed by György Krassó on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Israel.¹⁰²

As the turn of events approached, the practice of State Security *reporting on interviews in legitimate newspapers became increasingly bizarre*, including the interview with György Gadó in *Magyar Nemzet*.¹⁰³ They also reported on his interview in Hungary, in which Salom was described as an initiative of a ‘narrow group of intellectuals’.

The reason for this bizarre situation is that the democratising public already published Salom’s views in legal newspapers, but State Security, not knowing how to deal with this new publicity, used them as illegal sources. But now they were no longer, and slowly State Security was becoming obsolete and views of Gadó were becoming a legal part of life.

Alongside the actions against the opposition, the state has slowly started to change direction, especially in terms of foreign policy. Alongside the fight against Zionism, or ‘Zionist propaganda’, which was considered an act of persecution by State Security, Hungary and the Jewish state began to move closer together in the early 1980s.¹⁰⁴ Cornerstones of this were, for example, the establishment of contacts between the National Bank of Israel and the National bank of Hungary (Magyar Nemzeti Bank, MNB) in 1983. At the end of 1984, an official Hungarian delegation travelled to Tel Aviv for the opening of an exhibition on the Hungarian Jewry at the Bet Hatefutsoth, the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora. Most of the exhibits came from the Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum) and the

100 == Csatári, ‘Szemelvények a magyarországi zsidóság pártállami történetéből’.

101 == Ibid.

102 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-99-7/25 May 1988. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

103 == Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés [Daily Operative Information Report], III/III-237-7/12 December 1988. ÁBTL, Budapest, Hungary.

104 == Govrin, ‘Egyszerre csak egy lépés. Izraeli–magyar kapcsolatok, 1967–1989’.

Jewish Museum (Zsidó Múzeum) in Budapest. When the delegation of the World Jewish Congress visited Hungary in early 1985, it was accompanied by Moshe Gilboa, head of the Diaspora Affairs Department of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, who was the first official who met with Hungarian officials of the local foreign ministry. At the UN General Assembly—in September 1985 and 1986—Hungarian and Israeli Foreign Ministers Péter Várkonyi and Yitzhak Samir met each other, and the initial Hungarian demands—which included direct negotiations with the Palestinians and a kind of peace conference—were gradually toned down until full relations were established. This was first signalled in September 1987 by a reciprocal agreement on the establishment of diplomatic representations, and in September 1989 by the full establishment of relations.

The Hungarian government also established contacts with the American Jewry, for example, large-scale Orthodox Jewish pilgrimages to Hungary began, and in the autumn of 1988 Prime Minister Károly Grósz received the world leader of Satmar Hasidim, Rabbi Moses Teitelbaum.

This may have been the open world that György Gadó dreamed of, but the democratisation of Hungary and the Hungarian Jewish organisational world was still to come. Although a multi-party system has replaced the one-party system in the country and the MIOK became Mazsihisz (Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége, Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities) in 1991, it was still a long time before democracy was integrated into the denominational life, even though Jewish life continued outside also the walls of synagogues, without the close control of the state, in a large number of civil organisations.

== Summary

While it marked a change in the trend in the relationship between the Jewry and state power in Hungary, the Salom Peace Group was in fact the work of *one personality*, the journalist György Gadó. ‘As long as it existed, I was the “group”. There was nothing to be ashamed of, I could not find any companions’, he later said.¹⁰⁵ The same was the case with the three-issue magazine *Magyar Zsidó*, which he also wrote and edited alone and which popularised Salom’s aims.¹⁰⁶ His relationship with the so-called democratic opposition, although he was personally an integral part of it, was good, but he had to respect the fact that this opposition did not, for a number of reasons, wish to take up an oppositional and distinctly Jewish political position. Firstly, not because the majority of those of Jewish origin in the democratic opposition did not want a policy of dissimilation, and deeply agreed with the achievements of Hungarian assimilation, so that they could be expected to accept ethnic

105 == ‘A Gadó’

106 == It was around this time that Gadó, together with Jenő Nagy and Tamás Mikes, who was later identified as an agent, started the newspaper *Demokrata*.

self-awareness to the maximum. Secondly, the democratic opposition also did not want to give the so-called national opposition, who identified themselves as Jews in the eyes of the opposition, a brand that they were not interested in the fundamental problems of the wider Hungarian society and that their attachment to the Hungarian nation—as well as their commitment to dual identity—was not so firm.

In any case, it is symbolic that Salom's last public appearances were on 15 March 1989, where it was listed alongside a number of other organisations—as one of the organisers of the independent 15 March meltdowns and peaceful demonstrations in Budapest, and at the demonstration in Transylvania on 27 June 1988 and 15 November 1988, when they showed solidarity with the protesters in Brasov a year earlier.¹⁰⁷ The latter demonstration was crushed by the Hungarian police.

Salom continued its activities under very difficult circumstances, in the face of several obstacles, which really meant the drafting of a few declarations, and György Gadó even made sure that he has a separately Hungarian opposition(ist) being that was completely separate from his Jewish Salom. Yet the existence and the principles of the Salom group only showed that there was not only a great distance, but also serious tensions between the official Jewish position, as demanded by the communist state party, and the opinions and individual/political identities of some Jews in Hungary. The Salom group's work and its principles reinforced the secular Jewish identity that was able to find a form for itself after the regime change and that was already characteristic of the broad strata of the Hungarian Jewry, especially in Budapest, that survived the Holocaust.

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