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/// Regime criticism as a form of resistance

Social resistance or social support behind critics of the (Kádár) regime

=== Résumé

1989 and 1990 are considered to be historical moments due to the significance of the regime change, even if it only occurred just over three decades ago. The era before the fall of the communist state apparatus fundamentally defined the subsequent formation of power. Naturally, the way in which the regime change was implemented differed from country to country, and consequently the political transition processes were also different in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

In this study I examine the decade before the regime change in Hungary, the prevailing public mood, the developing opposition within intelligentsia and the Party, and the Party's tactics for keeping the existing regime together. Although the relevance of the topic cannot be discussed without the regime change as an event, my field of research focuses on the period preceding it. Consequently, my analyses include events until the opposition groups began founding political parties.

The minutes of the Monor and Lakitelek meetings served as the basis of the research. I studied the history of the period in books written by Zoltán Ripp and Ignác Romsics. For issues I deemed to be important, I read additional literature. As an additional source, I used periodicals that assumed decisive importance in the period and the press closely following the regime change. Reminiscences greatly contributed to my understanding of the events. After that, I summarised the results my research revealed and drew conclusions.

I will put my argument in a historical context by presenting the ruling system, with a view to examining the last decade of the Kádár era in the light of the beginning of the opposition's organisation. The structure of my study is determined by the analysis of the three main conferences of the opposition circles, based on official reports. I go through the events in chronological order where necessary and,

in separate chapters or subchapters, I describe the ideas of the party state or the events from the Party's perspective.

In the middle of my analization is the meeting at Monor and the meetings at Lakitelek. I also explore the separation of opposition paths. I analyse the reasons for the failure of the second Monor meeting impartially and the debate between the two main opposition circles. Over the years, it can be observed that former outsiders joined the 'debate' and former debaters quit. Principally, I do not examine them as political events or politicians, but I aim to present them according to what they represented before they formed a party.

The events and personalities of the opposition will be presented, firstly, in relation to the party-state system and, secondly, as they defined themselves, and draw new conclusions from the combination of the two. In light of this, I also examine them as group phenomenon.

I chose the opposition of the Kádár era as the topic of my study because, in my opinion, the fault lines formed during the debates of the era and the members of the respective groups largely determined the politicisation of the last thirty years, as after all, the era in question is historically the closest to the present one. After 1989, the intelligentsia necessarily had to place themselves on the scene of post-1989 politics, so the history of the opposition of the Kádár era can be considered as a prelude to this.

= = = Thought provoker

This study seeks to present the forms of resistance that gained ground in the second half of the 1980s, specifically manifestations that had political content different from the agenda of the MSZMP (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party, the 'Party'). I sought to find a possible answer to the question about the characteristics connecting the publications and samizdat journals that became publicly known to a specific intellectual environment, and how political fault lines were created in the spaces of dissent by the end of the decade. I have analysed the groupings linked to intellectual trends and the manifestations carrying a political message under the banner of 'social resistance' in the context of historical memory.

The political fault lines that characterized the era did not exclusively consist of the confrontation between the Party and the opposition (in retrospect, this might be the most emphatic approach). The criticism articulated by the demand for reform led to fermentation even within the ruling Party. Besides the orthodox communist line, the New March Front and the reformers led by Imre Pozsgay¹ and Rezső

¹ = Imre Pozsgay (1933–2016), politician, university professor. Minister of Culture from 1976, member of the Central Committee of the Party since 1980. In 1982, he became the Secretary General of the National Council of the Patriotic People's Front until 1988. Although Pozsgay did not hold a particularly high position in the Party (he was a Patriot at the head of the People's Front), he was given an almost free hand, thus increasing the previously insignificant the political role of the organisation. See Pozsgay, *Koronatanú és tettestárs*.

Nyers² appeared, among others. In the following, I also wish to provide a picture of how and why intelligentsia moved in from the area of culture to the political arena. The newly-formed parties in 1989 had a high proportion of intelligentsia and they formed the base of the parties enjoying the greatest support. In my view, control and influence were not necessarily wielded by the person offering the best solution to an existing social problem, but rather by the one that determined the subject of the discourse, in other words, the one able to find a phenomenon through which he/she could make an impact on a social scale in the political public sphere. Inevitably, the literature on the history of the rift between popular and democratic opposition deals with this topic. The presentation and distinction of the opposition circles require a deep knowledge of intellectual trends, which is helped by publications and literary works; however, it is important to underline that no clear categorisation is possible in the period under review. This is made more difficult by factors such as the phenomenon of permeation between groupings, friendships and matters on which they have similar or nearly identical views. Thus, the grouping of individuals may also seem arbitrary in some cases—even if they do each have their distinctive features—and therefore, while striving for completeness and credibility, their orientation cannot be correctly judged in all cases. The issue of public relations distinguished the two groupings. Whereas those attached to the popular side expressed their opinions mainly in the framework of the existing public media, i.e. mainly in rural periodicals, those belonging to the so-called democratic opposition often expressed their opinions in the samizdat publications they published. This is why I primarily rely on the journals rather than the individual accounts of the respective tendencies when distinguishing the two opposition groups. The use of words is a particularly important tool in the political system that dominated the era, and from the perspective of the central question of the study, the clarification of the terms ‘opposition’ and ‘resistance’ is indispensable. Use of the word ‘opposition’ has a different meaning under a one-party system (given the absence of political opposition) than it does nowadays, and this meaning is given political content by the leadership of the ruling regime at the time. Press and public opinion followed the Party’s wording, and thus, by voicing stigmatising terms in public, it positioned the forces critical of the regime in the political space according to its own interests. In their case, it therefore helps us to understand the form of opposition to the system. Throughout the analysis, I will use the word ‘opposition’, but I will interpret it beyond its classical meaning, in line with what has been described.

² = Rezső Nyers (1923–2018), economist, politician, university professor. He supported some employees of various research institutes and the Ministry of Finance in developing an alternative reform programme, which took shape in the 1986 document ‘Change and Reform.’ In December 1987, he was one of the initiators and a founding member of the reform forces within the Party in order to consolidate it, he launched the New March Front, for which he was reprimanded by the Party. See Nyers, *Utkeresés-reformok*.

The Kádár regime has often been labelled as ‘goulash communism’, ‘the happiest barracks’ and ‘soft dictatorship’. We can consider that it began with the repression that followed the 1956 uprising. The subsequent consolidation process sought to avoid openly violent action and to provide the framework for the regime by other means.³ The proclamation of ‘whoever is not against us is with us’ meant a ‘bargain’ between the regime and society, the maintenance of which was mainly to be achieved by the former by ensuring a gradual and slow rise in living standards. In 1968, the Party’s new draft reform integrated some elements of market economy into the planned economy: central planning was decreased and corporate autonomy in the field of production and investment was increased. However, even this did not solve the real problems of the regime. While capitalism could handle the economic crisis, it pushed the already recessionary economy of communist systems to the brink of collapse.

By 1987, János Kádár had admitted that ‘crisis phenomena can be observed’. However, he could not deal with the consequences of the new situation and could not cooperate effectively with the new political forces. The power of the Party rested on three pillars. Sustained economic growth allowed consumers to buy welfare goods and services, the framework of the regime and its adjustments were guaranteed by the Soviet Union, and the ideology underpinning the party’s omnipotence was recognised by society (this included an assessment of 1956 as a ‘counter-revolution’). The nascent political crisis shook these pillars.⁴ Since the 1980s, there had been a noticeable change on the issue of compromise with the regime, with informal concessions becoming more customary, and even dissenters finding it less worthwhile to look for cracks in the wall.⁵

= = Intellectual critique of the political system in illegal spaces

From the mid-1970s onwards, samizdats, i.e. illegal publications reproduced and distributed without permission, appeared in Hungary as well. Its authors often published under pseudonyms and, due to their limited circulation, mainly addressed intelligentsia. In October 1981, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1956 uprising, the first issue of the samizdat journal entitled *Beszélő*, edited by the inner circle of the democratic opposition, was released. The recurring themes of the texts published in *Beszélő* included economic policy, economic crisis situation, labour law, protection of the interests at the workplace, the Hungarian sub-

3 = = Szekér, ‘A diktatúra „kis körei”’, 11–12.

4 = = Ripp, *Rendszerváltás Magyarországon 1987–1990*, 2–44.

5 = = For example, backyard farming was considered such a concession, the essential element of which was that it was not officially part of the system, even so anyone could do it without consequences.

sistence minimum and social security, environmental protection, freedom of the press and the universality of human rights. They considered it necessary to elaborate an electoral reform, a party law and the enforcement of the right of assembly and association, and in the long term the implementation of a multi-party system. At the beginning, the objectives of reforming the system were based on the former 1956 claim, i.e. the implementation of a democratic system based on self-governance. They also gave a lot of thought to the issues of patriotism and internationalism. They advocated the position that the path to modernisation was to follow the Western development pattern, and not to seek some kind of independent Hungarian reform initiative. In seeking an alternative to the prevailing system, they often considered and evaluated the system of ideas of social democracy, Soviet-type Marxism and nationalism from a philosophical point of view. A novelty in comparison to previous samizdat publications was the regular publication and the fact that the authors of *Beszélő* mostly published under their own names. Apart from the members of the *Beszélő-kör*, the movement's different groups included the charitable Poor Relief Fund organisation and the Inconnu artists' group.⁶ Also, those organised around György Krassó⁷, a former 1956 convict, operated initially in the illegal space, working as contributors to the samizdat publications *Hírmondó* and *Demokrata*, and in collaboration with the Inconnu group.

The editors of the samizdat publications were regularly harassed by the police or the secret services, but Kádár avoided spectacular retaliation, as it would have damaged the Western perception of Hungary, which he had an interest in meeting in any case, because of Western loan disbursements.⁸ The leadership sought to get rid of all the remains of Stalinism, while unwilling to renounce its monopoly on power. Job and living opportunities of those who openly expressed and engaged in opposition ideas and activities were restricted in the hope that this would isolate the intelligentsia opposition being isolated in society and deprived it of the possibility to influence the masses. The activities and methods of *Beszélő-kör* were different from those of dissents operating in the legal space. Their more extreme manifestations and the risk of entering illegal territory opened up an independent alternative form of opposition to the regime versus a legal critique of

6 = = Bossányi, *Szólampróba. Beszélgetések az alternatív mozgalmakról*, 208–210.

7 = = György Krassó (1932–1991), opposition intelligentsia. After the Soviet intervention in 1956 he was arrested. From the 1970s, he took an active role in opposition movements. On 23 October 1985, he and the Inconnu group held an illegal celebration. From 1986, he worked for Radio Free Europe and the BBC. He returned home in 1989, before the reburial of Imre Nagy. As a radical anti-communist, he was critical of the opposition parties' negotiations with the Party. See more in Modor, *Célkeresztben Krassó*.

8 = = Horváth, *A tábornok vallomása. Meztelenül a Duna-gate ügyben*, 168–194.

the regime. Through illegal behaviour, they did not wish to circumvent the regulated framework of the party state, but rather to reject it in a demonstrative manner. And they wished to 'legalise' their illegal actions by means of a higher principle, namely fundamental human rights. However, we can hardly speak of truly radical steps even in the case of the so-called democratic opposition.⁹

This degree of easing was not only due to the crisis of the Party, the process was spurred on by the transformation in international politics, such as Gorbachev's reform policy, which aimed to reform the existing communist system.¹⁰ These circumstances led to the Hungarian opposition becoming more open to taking organisation to a new level. On 14–16 June 1985, a discussion of critical intelligentsia was held, hosted by Ferenc Donáth.¹¹ The event, organised at the campsite in Monor, was characterised by the diversity of the invitees, in the sense that a wider circle of representatives of different reform initiatives attended than before. The significance of Ferenc Donáth¹² lay in the personal links he held with Party leadership, the democratic opposition and the popular side. Although his orientation was that of the democratic opposition, he maintained a good relationship with the popular side thanks to his personality.¹³ As regards the structure of the discussion, it consisted of four reports and the opponents' comments reflecting on them.

The topics of the session were problem statements, which were reflected on by a number of rapporteurs and speakers. Members of the democratic opposition predominated at the meeting, some of whom included Miklós Szabó,¹⁴ János Kenedi,¹⁵

9 = = Kis, 'A demokratikus ellenzék hagyatéka', 207–229.

10 = = Ripp, *Rendszerváltás Magyarországon 1987–1990*, 42–44.

11 = = Rainer M., *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve 1985. június 14–16. A vita jegyzőkönyve*, 27.

12 = = Ferenc Donáth (1913–1986), politician, agricultural historian. In 1951, he was sentenced to 15 years and was rehabilitated in 1954. In 1956, he was among the reformers around Imre Nagy. In 1958, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison as a secondary defendant in the Imre Nagy trial. In 1980, he organised the publication of the Bibó memorial book as a samizdat. After his death in 1986, the Supreme Court acquitted him and the defendants of the Nagy Imre trial in the absence of a crime. See more in Bozóky, *Zord idők nyomában*.

13 = = Csizmadia, 'Donáth Ferenc és a demokratikus ellenzék', 304–316.

14 = = Miklós Szabó (1935–2000), historian. From September 1979, he was a regular speaker at the 'Flying University' organised by the democratic opposition. The text of the presentations could not be published, but typed copies were distributed. In the first issue of *Beszélő*, he wrote about the Bibó memorial book under his own name. He received workplace discipline twice for illegal actions. The book was banned from 1979 to 1986. See more in Köbel, *A repülő egyetem professzora*.

15 = = János Kenedi (1947), writer, critic. One of the defining figures of the democratic opposition. From the end of the 1970s, Kenedi's apartment was one of the central places of the opposition party. See Kenedi, *Kis állambiztonsági olvasókönyv I–II*.

Tamás Bauer,¹⁶ János Kis¹⁷ and Miklós Vársárhelyi.¹⁸ The form of the presentations at the meeting was resented by the popular opposition. The presentations of the popular opposition were opposed by members of the democratic opposition. They criticised the subordinate role, which was perceptible in the structure of the meeting. In his address, Ferenc Donáth expressed criticism of the Hungarian government's economic policy. István Csurka,¹⁹ representative of the popular line, highlighted the crisis of Hungarian culture in his speech, taking stock of the events of Hungarian history since 1945, praising 1956 and describing it as a major caesura. He took account of the main social problems as a negative consequence of the enumerated past events: waves of emigration, reduced willingness to have children, alcoholism, the high number of suicides, indifference to national identity. Speakers from the democratic opposition side spoke about the economic recession, 1956, and emphasised the damage to the legal consciousness and solidarity. János Kis called attention to the phenomenon that power, as a 'new control mechanism', facilitated the institutional fragmentation of the intelligentsia.²⁰ The 'result' of the meeting could be seen in the fact that the members of opposition and regime-critical groups, with

16 = = Tamás Bauer (1946–), economist. In 1966, he joined the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, but was expelled in 1974 because he protested against tightening the authorisation of induced abortions. Later, he was a leading member of the democratic opposition, publishing in *Beszélő*. In 1985, he was elected member of the national council of the Patriotic People's Front, but resigned from his position three years later. In 1988, he was one of the initiators of the New March Front.

17 = = János Kis (1943–), philosopher, theoretician of human rights liberalism, the first president of the SZDSZ. From the 1980s, he was one of the leading figures of the democratic opposition. Since the 1980s, he had been active in teaching and research both abroad and in Hungary. He was expelled from the Party in the so-called philosopher's trial, dismissed from the Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and sentenced to silence. He was the editor of the *Beszélő*. See Kis, *Szabadságra ítélve*.

18 = = Miklós Vársárhelyi (1917–2001), historian, politician. He served as the press chief of the second Imre Nagy government. In the Imre Nagy trial, he was sentenced to 5 years in prison. In 1960, he was released from prison with an amnesty. From 1972, he became a staff member of the Institute of Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 1988, he became a founding member of the New March Front and the Historical Justice Committee. See more in Kozák, *Kész a leltár–Vársárhelyi Miklós*.

19 = = István Csurka (1934–2012), writer, politician. During the 1956 revolution, he was the head of the college's national guard, so he was relocated for half a year. After graduating in 1957, he became a freelance writer, unable to get a job corresponding to his education. From 1988, he became a member of the editorial staff of the new *Hitel*. As an organiser, gave talks at the Monor and Lakitelek meetings. Founding organiser, board member, and later vice president of the Hungarian Democratic Forum.

20 = = Rainer M., *A monori tanácskozás jegyzőkönyve 1985. június 14–16. A vita jegyzőkönyve*, 85.

partly divergent approaches, confronted each other with their views on the crisis and ways of emerging from it.

= = = The potential inherent in the limitations of the system

The definition of being in opposition changed several times according to the frameworks imposed by the Party, and forms of resistance were also shaped by Party strategy. The Kádarian consolidation wished to distance itself from the Rákosi regime, but did not intend to alter its dictatorial character. One of the experiences of 1956 for the leadership was that the rejection of power, even by the class it had elevated, went so far that even the class-selected, mostly first-generation intelligentsia turned against it, and therefore it had to base itself on a new intellectual policy. They saw self-organising autonomous communities as the main source of danger, so they sought to prevent their emergence in order to avoid violent retaliatory measures.²¹

The deepening of the crisis and the threat of opposition groups joining forces justified Party leaders' putting on the agenda the issue of party policy vis-à-vis voices critical of the system. In its 1986 decision,²² the Policy Committee distinguished two main groups of opposition.

It categorised one of these groups as a civil radical²³ tendency and made the following statement about it: 'It rejects any form of existing socialism, so-called "Soviet-type societies" and the one-party system, and, as an alternative, it considers the realisation of some kind of "pluralist democracy" as a strategic goal.'

According to the 1986 position, the Party credited its own success in preventing the democratic opposition from organising itself into an autonomous political movement and from connecting with the working classes. However, the established system was adversely affected by the significant growth of 'second-public' channels and the operation of illegal publishers and distribution networks. All things considered, they concluded that it was not a threat to power, since 'the "hard core" of the civil radical group still consists of a few dozen people, and their direct influence remains limited to a few hundred people—intelligentsia in the field of

21 = = Szekér, 'A diktatúra "kis körei"', 9–32.

22 = = Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP PB üléséről, 1986. július 1. [Report on the MSZMP Policy Committee session, 1 July 1986]. MSZMP KB Tudományos, Közoktatási és Kulturális Osztálya javaslata a Politikai Bizottság részére az ellenzéki-ellenséges csoportok tevékenységével összefüggő politikai feladatokról. [The proposal of the Science, Education and Culture Department of the MSZMP Central Committee to the Policy Committee on the political tasks related to the activities of opposition-enemy groups.] 972. M-KS 288-5. MNL OL, Budapest, Hungary.

23 = = In his 1990 assessment, Ferenc Kőszeg calls their circle „the so-called democratic civil rights opposition”, which believes that the nation cannot be anything but the will of the majority respecting the rights of the minority. C.f. Kőszeg, 'Monor üzenete', 12–13.

humanities and social sciences, and a select circle of students at the major Budapest universities'.²⁴

The other group was categorised by the proposal submitted to the Policy Committee as a national radical trend described as follows: 'To them, democracy is a tool in the fight for the good of the nation. Their goal is to elaborate the life principles of an obedient citizen who does not contest issues of power, thereby not prompting it to take violent action. The social background of the trend consists of the middle classes in small towns.'²⁵ They do not totally reject the socialist ideology established in the country, but they see it as an alien system imposed on the nation from outside. Its specific image is given by the issues they keep on the agenda'

In relation to them, the Party came to the conclusion that they had not built up organisational frameworks or brought out illegal publications, and organised opposition actions only together with the democratic opposition. They spread their ideas more in rural periodicals, but they also had a strong base in the Writers' Union and the József Attila Circle of Young Writers. However, they perceived danger in the very fact that their base could easily grow as a result of increasing interest in the 'national question', given that society accused the Party of neglecting these issues anyway. Nevertheless, they stated that it was just a 'loose grouping of writers' with no political agenda.²⁶

The death of Ferenc Donáth, who enjoyed the confidence of both opposition groupings, thwarted the second opposition gathering in 1986, and preparations for a new meeting only began in early 1987.²⁷ In the spring of 1987, a study by young economists entitled *Fordulat és reform* [Change and reform] was published in the journal of social theory of Eötvös Loránd University (Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem, ELTE) and Karl Marx University of Economics (Marx Károly Közgazdaságtudományi Egyetem, MKKE), which for the first time offered a complete programme for economic reform processes.²⁸ Unlike in the past, the study was elabo-

24 == Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP PB üléséről, 1986. július 1. [Report on the MSZMP Policy Committee session, 1 July 1986]. MSZMP KB Tudományos, Közoktatási és Kulturális Osztálya javaslata a Politikai Bizottság részére az ellenzéki-ellenséges csoportok tevékenységével összefüggő politikai feladatokról. [The proposal of the Science, Education and Culture Department of the MSZMP Central Committee to the Policy Committee on the political tasks related to the activities of opposition-enemy groups.] 972. M-KS 288-5. MNL OL, Budapest, Hungary.

25 == Ibid.

26 == Ibid.

27 == Szeredi, *A nemzetépítő demokratikus ellenzék története 1987–1989*, 17.

28 == In 1986, the leadership of the Patriotic People's Front commissioned economists from various Hungarian research institutes and the Ministry of Finance a detailed economic situation analysis, which formed the basis of a draft reform. The document entitled 'Change and Reform' deals with different aspects of the situation. Researchers and theoretical specialists working at state institutions reflected its position. After the manuscript went to press, its publication was banned.

rated by economists from research institutes at the request of the leadership of the Patriotic People's Front.²⁹ The very fact that the Party was looking for alternative solutions to economic policy problems, and that it was turning to non-party professionals to do so, showed a willingness to negotiate and bargain.³⁰

The organisation of a second meeting in Monor was underway, but a paper by the democratic opposition published in June, encouraged the popular-national opposition to organise itself further in its own circles. A publication of the democratic opposition, *Társadalmi Szerződés* [Social Contract], came out as a special issue of *Beszélő*. The title of the first chapter was 'Kádár must go!'.³¹ The nationals feared that they could provide grounds for tougher action against them, and it went against the very essence of their ideas: to put social support behind criticism of the system.

In popular-opposition memory, the writing of the democratic opposition went down as inspiring them to organise themselves in their own circle. A publication critical of the regime, it included an issue proposed by the democratic opposition for the second Monor meeting programme, which the popular opposition did not accept as discussion material. Lajos Für recalled the event as follows: '[...] János Kis turned up on the terrace of one of the press rooms at Vörös Hadsereg út in Buda, and put the *Társadalmi Szerződés* programme on the table. There had been no mention of this until then. Moreover, for months we had been talking about the fact that the second Monor meeting would develop the joint programme. While we had been discussing this week after week, János Kis and his group had been secretly and quietly preparing their own programme. This took us by surprise and caused quite a shock for everyone [...]. It was the sobering cold shower that made it clear to us, that we must choose a different path.'³²

The premise of *Társadalmi Szerződés* not questioning the viability of the regime, but rather, it sought to put the Kádár system on new democratic foundations with a new type of reform it proposed. It laid the ground for the creation of a democratic legal order and a market economy. The paper also contained the programme proposed by the democratic opposition for debate at the second meeting in Monor, which the national opposition did not accept as discussion material. The publication could not be regarded as the programme of the whole democratic

29 == The Patriotic People's Front (Hazafias Népfront) was a specific political group, which, true to its historical traditions, called all classes and strata of Hungarian society to unite to realise the timely tasks facing the nation. The Patriotic People's Front was not a mass organisation, but a movement, and every Hungarian citizen who agreed with the People's Front's political goals and undertook to accomplish them could participate in its actions. It did not have a registered membership, it solved its tasks with the help of elected bodies, officials and activists.

30 == Pozsgay, *Esélyünk a reform*, 148–150.

31 == „Társadalmi Szerződés”, 4.

32 == Für, *Szabadon szeretnénk sírni*, 487–488.

opposition, but was rather the programme of *Beszélő-kör*, the samizdat publisher and other groups that had made their mark with anti-regime actions.

The focus of the popular side's strategy was to gain legitimacy, so for them this proved to be unacceptable. They wanted an own independent paper that was not controlled by the party, but neither did it qualify as samizdat. The nationals would have liked to broaden their movement and increase their political weight. They saw an opportunity to obtain the license they had long requested to launch the journal *Hitel*. The same summer, Károly Grósz³³ was elected prime minister, representing the possibility of a new reform era, which they hoped would give them better opportunities to achieve their goals.³⁴

Power seemed to have lost control of intellectual life. The broadening of the 'tolerated' category and allowing certain opposition manifestations to go unchallenged were apparent concessions that were not officially integrated into the system to prevent it from compromising its framework. These concessions did not form part of the system and did not exist legally, yet their use was widespread. These concessions on the part of the Party were a technical instrument of power, but they slowly became an integral part of the system and began to dismantle its structure.³⁵ The criteria of opposition behaviour were unclear, the boundaries between legality and illegality were becoming blurred, and the necessary political unity within the party was also lacking. The category of alternative thinking was put in place in order to nuance the forms of expression that differed from party positions. They used the rhetoric to indicate that they were willing to engage in dialogue with dissidents, that they were not seen as enemies, as they served the same purpose with the best convictions as the powers that be, but by other methods.³⁶ Although they professed to communicate this to the public, that was not the case. According to Party rhetoric, they included the intelligentsia close to the *Fordulat és reform*, the organisers of the Lakitelek meeting and environmentalists.³⁷ They

33 == Károly Grósz (1930–1996), politician. In May 1988, at the national Party conference he was elected general secretary of the Party's Central Committee, as the successor of Kádár, who had resigned. Although he initiated a dialogue with the emerging opposition movements and organisations, he was not willing to make any real concessions. Parallel to the beginning of the disintegration of the party state, his political influence also decreased. See more in Medgyesi, *Apagyilkosság—Kádár János és Grósz Károly küzdelme*.

34 == Riba, *Hatalomtechnika a pártállam végóráiban*, 75–87.

35 == *Ibid.*, 19–20.

36 == Kis, 'Kik azok a másként gondolkodók és hogyan különböztessük meg őket az ellenzékiektől?', 4–8.

37 == In Hungary, the construction of the hydroelectric power plant was a symbolic, concrete issue for the greens and the opposition in general. At protests against the dam, slogans of environmental protection were mixed with those demanding democracy. There were people in the so-called Danube movement who protested specifically on professional grounds, while others believed that the government's behaviour in relation to the dam clearly showed the flaws of the political system.

defined them in terms of their ideas being different from Party politics, but without seeking open confrontation and not wishing to go beyond the constitutional framework. The intelligentsia close to *Társadalmi Szerződés*, which advocated a multi-party system, were classed among the enemy groups.³⁸

Isolating critical thinkers from each other was an established Party policy.³⁹ More important than the division, however, was for the Party to initiate a dialogue with thinkers who seemed less radical, so that it could retain the right to make the final decision against them.

A fundamental difference was that *Társadalmi Szerződés* envisaged pluralisation as coming from the bottom, by organising broad social groups into a counter-power, while, according to *Fordulat és reform*, this could be achieved from the top, by fragmentation of power. The debate that arose between the members of *Beszélő-kör* and the authors of *Fordulat és reform* raised the question of who the representatives of power would negotiate with at a given time, in order to provide the agreement with social legitimacy.

The Party policy on intelligentsia created room for opposition; however, even the regime itself did not reckon with the two main groups as resistance. It is therefore necessary to clarify to what extent the analysed groups can be considered to be resistance. In the classical sense, resistance means defiance, non-concession, defence and self-defence against an external force. Clearly radical actors were usually sentenced by means of public law enforcement, leaving them no possibility to organise an eventual opposition. However, it can be stated that intellectual groups had tried to outsmart the framework imposed by the regime rather than become resistant. They might not have achieved their goals in the latter case.

The national opposition, even after the publication of *Társadalmi Szerződés*, insisted that it was necessary to hold another concertation meeting. The organisers of the Lakitelek meeting emerged from their circles. There were some who had experience that could be used in politics, including Zoltán Bíró⁴⁰ and István Bakos

38 = = Az MSZMP Politikai Bizottsága 1988. február 9-i ülésének jegyzőkönyve. [Reports of the meeting of the Political Committee of the MSZMP on February 9, 1988]. A KB Közigazgatási és Adminisztratív Osztályának előterjesztése, 1988. február 3. [Submission of the Public Administration and Administrative Department of the Central Committee, February 3, 1988.] 1019. M-KS 288-5. MNL OL, Budapest, Hungary.

39 = = Szekér, 'A diktatúra "kis körei"', 9–32.

40 = = Zoltán Bíró (1941–), literary historian, university professor, the first president of the MDF. In the 1970s, he was a chief official at the Department of the Ministry of Culture, and later the head of the Department of the Ministry of Culture. In 1988, he was expelled from the Party. One of the founding members of the MDF, he served as first president from 1987 to 1989. See Bihari, Bíró, Lengyel, Király, *Kizárt a párt*. Budapest: Primo, 1989.

(through their activities in the Ministry of Culture) and Mihály Bihari (by means of his political history research). An age group slightly older than them was brought into politics in the wake of 1956. The events of the time and their taking on various roles served as a lifelong lesson (Gyula Fekete, Lajos Für, István Csurka, Sándor Csoóri, etc.). The main representatives of the movement were for the most part of the intelligentsia, writers and literary historians, but there were also political scientists, sociologists and economists. The structure of the speeches delivered at the meeting was made up of reports and co-reports, unlike the Monor organisation. The opposition, operating within the limits of legality, consistently took care of the essence of its strategy, which was that it could not allow the possibility of being classified as illegal by the regime. Dispelling suspicions was an important aspect of the organisation of the Lakitelek meeting, which they tried to ensure, among other things, by inviting Imre Pozsgay, who participated in the meeting as one of the leaders of the Party, to make an introductory presentation, thus setting the organisation's limits. With his participation, in the meantime, he ensured the legality of the meeting against the action of the regime.⁴¹

In his speech, Imre Pozsgay conveyed the standpoint of Károly Grósz, according to which he was 'ready to engage in dialogue with all constructive intentions in the name of unfolding and stability'.⁴² According to Pozsgay, the reforms were most pressing in the field of property, distribution and power-political relations. To a certain extent, he criticised the Party's 1968 reform, and argued that any new reform required a new concept, which approached the management of the country's affairs in a different way than before. He believed the state was unable to maintain a relationship with society and the desired support could not be achieved by democratic means either. He continued to envision a rift in the one-party system, but considered it important that the work of the Party was public to society. He meant to re-regulate the operation of social organisations and associations, and wanted to place the function of the Parliament on a new basis based on the principle of popular sovereignty. Part of his concept was the amendment of the electoral law, as well as the introduction of referendum in a consultative (and not legislative) role. He wished to incorporate the historical values of Hungarian public law and constitutionalism into the socialist state concept.⁴³

István Csurka gave the next presentation. The theory he elaborated, the 'anti-catastrophe programme,'—according to which the Hungarian nation was threatened with extinction and must fight for its survival—formed the basis of his later politics.

41 = = Szeredi, *A nemzetépítő demokratikus ellenzék története 1987–1989*, 30–33.

42 = = Speech by Imre Pozsgay at the Lakitelek meeting.

43 = = Ibid.

The ‘vision of the national death,’ derived from Herder’s prophecy,⁴⁴ had previously prompted several Hungarian literary figures to action. According to his theory, the fate of the Hungarians beyond the border was only the beginning: Hungarians were being raised to be small-minded and the nation was on its way to population decline, or if it did not die out, it would turn into a so-called subservient ‘waiter-nation.’ According to Zoltán Bíró, the most serious reason for the crisis was that the country had been left to itself. True to the preliminary discussions, he initiated the creation of a forum that would provide the opportunity for participation, dialogue and cooperation, and would play a fact-finding and proposal-making role between the state power and society. The joint Lakitelek Declaration was not classified as a political programme, but rather, it was meant to initiate a dialogue to encourage the creation of a political alternative.⁴⁵

== = Earned legality

The editors of *Hitel* primarily belonged to the popular side and the Writers’ Union. After waiting many years for the magazine to be licensed, the first issue was published less than a year after the 1987 meeting. *Hitel* became a magazine with literary, artistic and social themes, defined by the folk-national spirit. The writings and their choice of topics conveyed a value system in which national tradition, language cultivation, national self-awareness and historiography took first place. Special attention was paid to the grievances suffered during Trianon and the 1956 uprising. The writings about their third-way ideas⁴⁶ about the Hungarian future were also decisive in terms of the spirit of the magazine. The importance of *Hitel* lay in the fact that the founders consciously waited until they received the magazine’s approval and did not want to go ‘underground’ and publish samizdat that only reached a narrow section of society. They feared that radical steps would win the support of fewer people, while they sought to appeal to the widest possible sections of so-

44 == The vision of ‘the death of the nation’, by Johann Gottfried Herder, was that in centuries to come, in the sea of Slavs, Germans, Romanians and other peoples surrounding the Hungarians, the Hungarian language would be hardly recognisable. Among the writings of the volumes entitled *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, published between 1784 and 1791, the ‘prophecy,’ which can be found only as a commentary, had a great influence on Hungarian intellectual life and was a mobilising force in the movements of the reform era.

45 == Agócs-Medvigy, *Lakitelek, 1987. A magyarság esélyei. A tanácskozás hiteles jegyzőkönyve*.

46 == In Hungary, the term appeared in the 1930s, in the use of words by some folk writers. Some of the writers associated with the popular ‘spiritual-political force field’ from his world of thought and principles, what is summarised as the ‘third way.’ The concept comes from László Németh. The essence of the idea is that Hungarians should not expect development either from the West or from the East, because this will always lead to exploitation and dependence.

ciety from the outset.⁴⁷ All of this was the result of a conscious strategy, the fact that the journal could be published legally was considered even more important than the content of the published articles.⁴⁸ At the time, in addition to supplementing Forum, the magazine considered it a duty to provide a counterpoint and an alternative to *Beszélő*.

The main difference between the popular and democratic opposition is well illustrated by the distribution of samizdat publications, specifically, the avoidance of the genre. The democratic opposition did not seek permission to publish its magazine, which was printed as a samizdat. This means that the company—even if they only went ‘illegal’ as individuals when proceedings were initiated against them—was active in an illegal area. The popular opposition’s strategy sought to avoid this very thing. Despite all this, it can be observed that they kept in touch with each other and were able to cooperate from time to time in certain matters.

The visit of the Hungarian Prime Minister Károly Grósz to Arad became one of the important topics of the second Lakitelek meeting, organised on 3 September 1988—due to appointment scheduling and the increasingly dire fate of Hungarians in Romania. The Prime Minister’s visit on 28 August 1988 had elicited a significant response, with almost the entire Hungarian society expressing its disapproval. Pursuant to the programme announced by Ceaușescu, the demolition of the former Hungarian cities in Romania began in autumn in order to resettle the Hungarian population.⁴⁹ Moreover, expropriations took place without the possibility of legal remedy, with minimal compensation. The flow of refugees also increased: almost ten thousand people tried to flee to Hungary this year.

The Forum tried to gain support for the situation of the Transylvanian minority and managed to establish a good relationship with Austrian movements, partly through the efforts of the Austrian People’s Party, which promised to officially notify the Austrian government that it would request the help of the UN in stopping the methods used against minority Hungarians in Transylvania.⁵⁰

It is important to mention the case of the Bős–Nagymaros dam, which was also discussed at the meeting. At the end of the 1980s, a mass movement against the construction of the dam was formed, which was initially of an environmental nature, but over time, demonstrations took on a strongly oppositional and directly critical nature.⁵¹ In the years before the regime change, the barrage spread in public consciousness as a symbol of the communist one-party system and unlimited power.

47 = = Csoóri, ‘A visszaszerzés reménye’, 4–6.

48 = = Csoóri, ‘Mi a magyar, ma?’, 51.

49 = = ‘Kéretlen tájékoztató’, 24–26.

50 = = Documents Nos 21–29. In: Riba-Szekér, *Dokumentumok a Magyar Demokrata Fórum korai történetéből 1987–1989*, 75–92.

51 = = Csengey, ‘A parlament előtt’, 31–33.

As the country was known to be on the brink of economic bankruptcy, it could not have afforded such an investment, but the Party pushed for it for a long time in order to demonstrate its political strength. The project was ultimately scrapped.⁵²

The founding charter of the Forum as a social organisation was adopted at the end of the Lakitelek discussion in September 1988. It was a novelty that both the domestic and international press attended and reported on the meeting. News of the social organisation of the Hungarian Democratic Forum spread extremely quickly. As a result of press—and in particular Hungarian Radio—coverage, the Forum's stance, reflecting on the most important social problems, gained immense publicity, which allowed them to gain greater and greater social support.

= = = Belated steps

According to one of the well-tried strategies of the Party, the Patriotic People's Front could have consolidated the alternative organisations and pluralism would have been accomplished at most in the form of intra-party groupings. Grósz's first goal was to get the Forum to be incorporated into the Patriotic People's Front, but this was unacceptable to them. The Party leadership wished to demonstrate that the opposition relations with Party members exceeded the limit of tolerance. In 1988, they demanded cooperating Party members to be held accountable. Pozsgay was included in the Policy Committee, which made his position within the Party more prestigious, but this also demanded greater loyalty to the Party. Due to his participation in the Lakitelek meeting, Pozsgay was disciplined. The 'supporters of Pozsgay's reform efforts,' Zoltán Bíró, László Lengyel, Zoltán Király and Mihály Bihari, all of whom were somehow connected to the Forum and its events, were expelled from the Party.⁵³ The leadership tried to create distance between Pozsgay and the opposition circles by official means, but the relations between them did not cease even after that. Pozsgay maintained good relations with several reform organisations, but worked in the closest cooperation with the Forum. In the beginning—as best as they could—Grósz and his companions tried to 'win' the Forum for themselves and make it look like the group representing the social base of the reforms. The Patriotic People's Front was managed by Pozsgay and Grósz was Pozsgay's rival, so this organisation was foreign territory to him. The relationship between the two intensified in the second half of the '80s. Pozsgay was promised a serious position before the 1988 Party conference. The thinking of Grósz and Pozsgay was similar on several issues from the start of the 1980s. In spite of that, they acted as rivals. They agreed on the multi-party system and the need to replace Kádár. However, Grósz did not consider the multi-party system essential, but rather, he believed that the renewal of the existing one-party structure could solve the problems.

52 = = Ripp, *Rendszerváltás Magyarországon 1987–1990*, 78–81.

53 = = Szeredi, *A nemzetépítő demokratikus ellenzék története 1987–1989*, 156–157.

This difference of opinion and distancing from Pozsgay, by the way greatly boosted Grósz's career. For Pozsgay, Grósz's progress could mean that both positions from which he could achieve meaningful results were occupied. Grósz, who was already aware of Kádár's intention regarding the position of general secretary, proposed the appointment of Imre Pozsgay and Rezső Nyers as state ministers. By nominating Pozsgay, he was, firstly, able to emphasise the new government's commitment to reforms, and secondly, he prepared the ground for the time when he would appointed secretary general. He informed Pozsgay of all this, making a specific promise to him for the post of prime minister. According to Pozsgay's memories, Grósz approached him with the idea of replacing Kádár, asking for his support in reaching the position of general secretary. The fate of the post of prime minister was also discussed during the conversation, but according to Pozsgay, he only asked Grósz to resign, but he did not ask for it himself. According to Grósz, he believed that Pozsgay would be involved in government work as state minister and that when the time came, the change of prime minister would be easier. However, in the end Grósz changed his opinion regarding Pozsgay's position as prime minister.⁵⁴

Polarisation could be observed within the Party as well. Those who considered a multi-party system inevitable, but only with the participation of political parties that accepted socialism, grouped around Károly Grósz. By this time, the primary goal of the reformists was to find a coalition partner for the multi-party elections, as they all realised that the Party would not be able to form a government on its own. Imre Pozsgay had a more or less organised relationship with the popular-national opposition, Rezső Nyers with the social democrats and partly with the democratic opposition, and Miklós Németh with the technocrats and expert groups.⁵⁵ Rezső Nyers initiated the New March Front with this aim in mind. In November 1988, Miklós Németh was elected as Prime Minister, and he primarily had the backing of professional organisations.

On the opposition's side, the grouping of the popular side proved to be the strongest, and although the Hungarian Democratic Forum classified itself as a social organisation, they saw the possibility of a future party. The circle of civil democrats formed the Free Initiatives Network in the spring of 1988, and then the Free Democrats Association in November, which, compared to the previous network form of the former, acted much more like a party-like initiative. At that time, it was no longer possible to impose a barrier on independent organisations, so in November the government adopted the draft law on associations and assemblies, which even made the establishment of parties possible.⁵⁶

54 = = Jónás, 'Adalékok egy reformer pályaképehez. Pozsgay Imre útja 1988-ig', 4–13.

55 = = Ibid.

56 = = Szeredi, *A nemzetépítő demokratikus ellenzék története 1987–1989*, 160.

In the spring, the Historical Justice Committee was established, the main purpose of which was to reveal the crimes, illegalities and injustices committed during Stalinism in Hungary after 1945 and to advocate for their reparation. They dealt with the issue of 1956 separately and issued statements about the necessity to analyse the events of 1956. Their tasks were divided into three categories: historical, legal and religious.⁵⁷ Hundreds of people attended the commemoration on the thirtieth anniversary of the execution of Imre Nagy and his companions. The interpretation of 1956 remained a central issue from the regime's point of view, as their conceptual framework and thus their legitimacy of power would have been called into question in case the events come under review.⁵⁸

= = = Social resistance?

It was definitely in the interest of the opposition forces to win the trust of the society, but when it came to legitimisation by the regime, they took a different attitude.

The popular side envisioned change through the reformation of power, thus, during the Kádár era, they, as the opposition, strove to assert legitimacy, hoping that the interests they represented would appear and take effect in the decisions of the power, which would also mark the end of the one-party system. The democratic opposition took a different stance, not trusting that the government would ever give up its monopolies by itself, so they envisioned the validation of the matters they considered important and the defence of their position as something to be fought out. For them, obtaining legitimacy from the Party was a less important aspect. In terms of social support, the popular side were thinking about winning over broad strata of society, while the democratic opposition could count on the support of narrower, intellectual layers.

Resistance in its classic sense and alternative ideas gaining ground in the public in an illegal or legal way are not the same thing. Aside from our knowledge of the era, we tend to idealise facts or even endow them with opposite feelings. However, the inappropriate use of certain concepts can lead to wrong recognitions, which results in a distortion of the collective historical memory.

Movements formed around the magazines, by taking on topics and authors that could not appear elsewhere, and the writers became opinion-makers who took on their ideas that differed from party propaganda in front of the public. The 'popular-national' and 'democratic' division is somewhat arbitrary, but it became quite exclusive in the era. Transition between groups was not typical especially among

57 = = Speech by Zoltán Bíró at the second Lakitelek meeting. In: Szeredi, *Lakitelek 1988. A Magyar Demokrata Fórum 1988. szeptember 3-i tanácskozásának jegyzőkönyve és sajtóvisszhangja*, 15–23.

58 = = Szekér–Riba, *A Nagy Imre-kód. Nagy Imre újratemetésének politikai dimenziói*, 22–23.

the more vehement debaters. The identity of the groups individually strengthened as they increasingly began to define themselves in relation to each other. By reading the minutes of the meetings and their writings, it was possible to determine to which opposition group the speaker—even without prior knowledge of their identity—belonged to in almost every case.⁵⁹ The reason for this is that the debate was driven by a specific use of words and the clash of certain specific guidelines and ideas.

The representatives of the various opposition circles were organised along strict fault lines, but at the same time, the linguistic system used by the disputing parties, with which they defined themselves, distinguishes them from others. They were the first to reflect on unresolved issues affecting broad sections of society. For the Party, dominating the discourse topics meant a disadvantage in relation to the opposition, and formulating its position on the current problems was only possible in hindsight, less authentically, while the popular viewpoints were assumed to have already been taken by the so-called ‘alternatives,’ ‘reformers,’ ‘enemy groups,’ i.e. mostly representatives of the popular side, the Democrats or even some representatives of the Reform Communists. It also often happened that they voiced the same idea, only phrased it differently, for which the language framework of the Party proved to be narrow and outdated. In other words, the opposition of the Kádár era had a common goal: rejecting the existing system, and the debate society itself was in fact a joint society of the popular side and the democratic opposition.

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59 == This is clearly illustrated by Éva Kovács’s concise synthesis in the 1994 issue of the journal 2000: ‘and [...] if you worry about Hungarian minorities beyond the border, you can only be a populist (and not a human rights activist), if you want an open market economy, you can only be an urbanist (and not a pro-market economist)’ In: Kovács, ‘Indulatok a népi-urbánus vitában’, 15–22.

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