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Regime Stability and Foreign Policy Change

Interaction between Domestic and Foreign Policy in Hungary 1956-1994

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REGIME STABILITY AND FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE

Interaction between
Domestic and Foreign Policy
in Hungary 1956-1994

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*To Kasper and Felix, for the insights they have provided
into work-life balance – and rat races...*

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Acknowledgements

This study is the result of a rather protracted research process. It all started in what now feels like a distant past when the WTO was used to refer to the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, American Presidents did not yet have to be qualified by ‘Sr’ and ‘Jr’, and carbohydrates were still generally considered to be an essential part of a healthy diet. The project was based on two implicit hypotheses: (1) writing a dissertation in political science would not take more than five years, and (2) changing the political systems of Eastern Europe would. Both of these have been firmly falsified through, and during, my research.

Throughout these years, and even before, many people have contributed to this study and I owe them much gratitude. My mother and late father did not consciously encourage me to engage in this project but continuously encouraged me once I had. Örjan Sturesjö, a leading expert on Eastern Europe and the Balkans at ‘the other place’, helped me to discover the fascinating world of Central and Eastern Europe, even North of the Balkans, and considerably broadened my conception of research strategies. In 1991-92 Ágnes Mélypataki struggled hard during one year – *egy év alatt* – to teach me slightly more Hungarian than I have had the time to forget during the past fourteen years while Ferenc Miszlivetz and Jody Jensen were willing to share the crazy academic world of post-Socialist Hungary with me.

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Moving between Lund, Budapest, Stockholm and Brussels and the distinct worlds of academia, security policy analysis, and European policy making in the fields of education and training and development cooperation can, at best, help you to develop a broad perspective on a range of issues. At worst, it is a pretty foolproof recipe for a confused mind. I would like to thank a number of friends and colleagues who helped me adapt to, and recover from, such experiences and who made this extended period of more and less active research so pleasant. Even a far from non-exhaustive Swedish list would have to include Trevor & Helen Kydd, Sweet Pan Steelband, Mats Sandberg, Martin Bengtsson, Karin Olofsdotter, Angelina Madunic and Jens Stihof Sørensen. A selective 'Brussels & Paris list' includes Yves Bertoncini and Gianfranco Bochicchio – *camarades* on the, not quite successful, 1999 Montblanc expedition – Susanne Roslund, Magnus Bergström, Gordon Clark, Jens Björnåvold, Nicolas Gibert-Morin, Simon Jones, Cesare Onestini, Anna Thompson, Gregory Wurzburg, Johan Stierna, Juan Garay, and Ingemar & Malin Strandvik. The 'London list' is short but exclusive: Rolla Khadduri helped me to rediscover how much fun it can be writing together, in an exercise that put most of my, and possibly our, previous experiences of 'impossible deadlines' in a new perspective.

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For errors, mistakes and omissions I obviously assume full responsibility.

Some years ago I would have argued vehemently that a spouse in her right mind should feel offended by having a dissertation dedicated to her. I am no longer so sure but would not yet dare to take the risk. I therefore restrict myself to assuring Agneta that, as from now on, there will be more time, and shelfspace...

Brussels, 15 March 2006

List of Acronyms

AFD	Alliance of Free Democrats, Cf. SzDSz
ÁVH	State Protection Authority (<i>Államvédelmi Hatóság</i>)
ÁVO	State Protection Office (<i>Államvédelmi Osztály</i>)
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
CC	Central Committee
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CEI	Central European Initiative
CFE	Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (= COMECON)
CoCom	Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls
COMECON	Cf. CMEA
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Cf. OSCE
DISZ	Association of Working Youth (<i>Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége</i>)
EC	European Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EKA	Opposition Round Table (<i>Ellenzéki Kerekasztal</i>)
EU	European Union
FIDESZ	Alliance of Young Democrats (<i>Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége</i>)
FKgP	Independent Smallholders' Party (<i>Független Kisgazdapárt</i>)
FPC	Foreign Policy Change
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
GNP	Gross National Product

HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities (appointed in the framework of the CSCE)
HDF	Cf. MDF
HSWP	Cf. MSzMP
HUF	Hungarian Forint (currency unit in Hungary)
IC	Influence Capability
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INF	Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KDNP	Christian Democratic People's Party (<i>Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt</i>)
KGB	Soviet Security Service (<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i>)
KPSS	Soviet Communist Party (<i>Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza</i>)
MDF	Hungarian Democratic Forum (<i>Magyar Demokrata Fórum</i>)
MDP	Hungarian Workers' Party (<i>Magyar Dolgozók Pártja</i>)
MNP	Hungarian People's Party (<i>Magyar Néppárt</i>)
MP	Member of Parliament
MSzDP	Hungarian Social Democratic Party (<i>Magyar Szociáldemokrata Párt</i>)
MSzMP	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (<i>Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt</i>)
MSzP	Hungarian Socialist Party (<i>Magyar Szocialista Párt</i>)
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEM	New Economic Mechanism (<i>Új Gazdasági Mechanizmus</i>)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMRI	Open Media Research Institute
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Cf. CSCE

PCC	Political Consultative Committee (of the Warsaw Pact)
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PHARE	Poland and Hungary: Assistance for the Restructuring of the Economy
PPF	Patriotic People's Front
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SALT (II)	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (II)
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
SS	Stress Sensitivity
SzDSz	Alliance of Free Democrats (<i>Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége</i>)
SZETA	The foundation for assistance to the poor (<i>Szegényeket Támogató Alap</i>)
UN	United Nations
WEU	Western European Union

Party Congresses of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSzMP) 1959-89

7 th Party Congress	November-December 1959
8 th Party Congress	November 1962
9 th Party Congress	November-December 1966
10 th Party Congress	November 1970
11 th Party Congress	March 1975
12 th Party Congress	March 1980
13 th Party Congress	March 1985
14 th Party Congress	October 1989

Prime Ministers 1953-98

Imre Nagy	1953-55
András Hegedűs	1955-56
Imre Nagy	1956-56 (24 October-4 November)

János Kádár	1956-58
Ferenc Münnich	1958-61
János Kádár	1961-65
Gyula Kállai	1965-67
Jenő Fock	1967-75
György Lázár	1975-87
Károly Grósz	1987-November 1988
Miklós Németh	November 1988-May 1990

József Antall	May 1990-December 1993
Péter Boross	December 1993-July 1994
Gyula Horn	July 1994-July 1998

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

‘An average day, they say in Budapest, is worse than yesterday
but better than tomorrow.’¹

In early October 1991 I arrived in Budapest, invited by Ferenc Miszlivetz and thanks to a generous grant from the Swedish Institute, to spend one academic year at the newly established Center for East European Studies. My original idea was to examine influences from abroad on the domestic democratisation process, by collecting material and discussing with people who had lived the changes in Hungarian politics – as outsiders or insiders. I soon discovered that people were less interested than I had expected in discussing the(ir) past.

My interpretation at the time was that people were eager to ‘get on with their lives’ and focus on the future rather than on dissecting what lay behind them. Although this interpretation was not necessarily incorrect, there may have been a second reason why people were relatively unwilling to discuss the past: What I as a naive outsider with an extremely short historical perspective considered to be the past was for most people still part of the present. Choices made and words spoken or unspoken under the reign of János Kádár still had a direct impact on life in post-Communist Hungary. As Garton Ash argues – ‘You cannot begin to understand the personal alignments of today unless you know *who did what to whom* over the last forty years’.² Today, more than 15 years have elapsed since the fall of the Kádár regime. Nevertheless, some of its legacies may still be alive

1 Zoltan Barany, ‘Hungary’ in Barany & Volgyes (eds), 1995 (a), 193

2 Timothy Garton Ash, *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches and Despatches from Europe in the 1990s*, Penguin London, 2000, 32

in Hungarian politics, including through the presence of senior civil servants and politicians who held high posts during the Kádár regime. Awareness of this necessarily had an impact on my choices when it came to the research methodology and sources that I could, or could not, use.

Why this study?

In this study, I will analyse key aspects of the political development of Hungary during roughly 40 years. The period 1956-94 is a fascinating time in Hungarian modern history. It began with the popular uprising in 1956 and was followed by the Kádár regime (1956-88), and a brief post-Kádár Socialist interregnum, before democracy was re-established through multi-party Parliamentary elections in 1990.

The overall purpose of the thesis is to explore links between domestic policy and foreign policy change by applying different theories that will help us to shed further light on such links. The study also intends to deepen our understanding of some key issues in political science concerning what keeps a Government or a political regime in power (questions about political stability), and what promotes or hinders foreign policy change. It is a study of stability and disruption, or continuity and change, in the domestic and external arena, and it highlights the role of central decision-makers in what has been referred to as the 'two-level game'. Each of these subjects – political stability, foreign policy change, and the two-level game – are areas where I would argue that further research was, and is, called for.

Political stability is a key concept and a fundamental problem in political science. Understanding stability is, I would argue, a prerequisite for understanding change which, admittedly, has probably attracted greater interest, e.g. in the study of regime transitions. A study of the stabilisation strategies used by the Kádár regime can help us understand, both how this regime managed to stay in power for so long and some of the reasons why it ultimately fell. We will find that what initially may look like three decades of political stability in fact conceals distinct strategies used by the regime to stay in power. These strategies also carried the seed of the fall of the Socialist regime.

Foreign policy change (FPC) is another phenomenon that is of major interest to political scientists as well as to practitioners in international relations. When FPC occurs, it often has a strong impact on external actors. Holsti has shown that many cases of foreign policy restructuring 'have generated serious international

conflicts and crises. [--] In particular, where a hegemon has been challenged by a dependant, violent responses are likely to follow'. States, he argues, tend to play well-defined roles in the international system and others are likely to object to unilateral attempts to change these roles: 'Role reversal and reorientation [...] are likely to exacerbate international tensions and to result in a variety of coercive, punitive and violent responses by former hegemons'. In some cases, however, prospects for change may be better; a peripheral state that lacks strategic significance, and the foreign policy restructuring of which does not threaten the security interests of major powers, has better chances to succeed in foreign policy restructuring.³

Hermann has argued that attempts at fundamental foreign policy change are of special interest, both because of their domestic and their external consequences: 'Wars may begin or end. Economic well-being may significantly improve or decline. Alliances may be reconfigured. Sometimes the entire international system is affected'.⁴ I tend to agree that FPC also has a potential impact on domestic political and economic processes. For example, when studying a country undergoing democratisation, foreign policy changes 'are of special interest because of the demands their adoption poses on the initiating government and its domestic constituents and because of their potentially powerful consequences for other countries'.⁵

During the Cold War, there was relatively little research on FPC. The focus was on major foreign policy change, which rarely occurred. I would argue that less radical FPC is also worth studying, not least since it can help us understand the more dramatic forms of FPC, when they appear. It is, in fact, quite conceivable that radical FPC is *not* a phenomenon completely different from ordinary, less dramatic, forms of FPC. The risk associated with treating dramatic change as deviant cases has been pointed out by Volgy & Schwarz, who claim that in doing so 'one ignores the underlying commonalties which may cause their occurrence'.⁶ Another aspect, as pointed out by Hagan & Rosati, is that studying FPC 'highlights the limits of neorealist views of international system dynamics by demonstrating the importance of either strong domestic resistance to, or domestic

3 K J Holsti, *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Postwar World*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1982, 215-218

4 Charles F Hermann, 'Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy' in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1990, 4

5 *ibid.* Jerel A Rosati, Joe D Hagan & Martin W Sampson III, 'Preface' in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, ix. Thomas J Volgy & John E Schwarz, 'Foreign Policy Restructuring and the Myriad Webs of Restraint' in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 24

6 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 23

pressure for, change in foreign policy independent of change in the international environment'.⁷ This study will cover both less radical FPC (under Kádár) and major FPC (post-1989).

The *interaction between domestic and foreign policy* is often regarded as a one-way link, where one of the two domains is thought to influence action in the other. Domestic factors may impact on foreign policy interests, and events beyond the geographic borders of a state may influence developments in the domestic arena. The perspective I propose is to see the domestic and the external arenas as influencing one another. More specifically, I regard such interaction as taking place in the heads and minds of political leaders trying to play the two-level game and later reflected in their actions. Although I think such links exist and that they are important, the research literature still seems to be largely dominated by separate studies of domestic politics, on the one hand, and foreign policy, on the other. Covering a reasonably long time period, which includes authoritarian and democratic rule as well as significant shifts in regional and global structures, broadens our basis for understanding the links between domestic and foreign policy. It would, however, be unwise to make strong generalisations from the study of just one country.

A better understanding of the two-level game is useful for political scientists, for the practitioners and for those of us who are, most of the time, pawns in the game. I would also expect globalisation to make such interaction increasingly common, while bringing in new players. Some might argue, however, that the two levels now have become so intricately linked that we can no longer speak of a two-level game.

To conclude, this study should help us expand our knowledge about political stability, foreign policy change, and the two-level game in Hungary 1956-94. Some of the conclusions, it is hoped, can feed into further development of theory on these subjects to help us analyse and understand similar phenomena when they occur elsewhere.

Perspective and aims of the study

This study is based on the assumption that national political leaders often have to address domestic and external policy matters simultaneously and that there are, in many cases, links between the two. Such links can be analysed in terms of *'causal*

7 Joe D Hagan & Jerel A Rosati, 'Emerging Issues in Research on Foreign Policy Restructuring' in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 276

relations' between factors and events in the domestic and the external arenas. Another way to understand links is to focus on *the intentions and motives of decision-makers trying to act and have an impact in both arenas simultaneously.* In this study, I opt for the second perspective. I will also demonstrate, however, that links between the domestic and external arenas lie beyond the exclusive control of decision-makers and sometimes put their own marks on history.

My perspective on the relationship between domestic and foreign policy emphasises mutual interaction where each presents opportunities as well as constraints for the other. In other words, neither domestic policy, nor foreign policy, is a purely dependent variable. In this study, I will (1) describe, analyse and assess the different and evolving *strategies used* by the Communist regime in Hungary (1956-90) and the first democratic Government (1990-94) *to establish and maintain political stability*; and (2) describe, analyse and explain *foreign policy change (FPC)* under the Kádár regime, as well as during the first years of democratic Government, when FPC was more spectacular and radical.

This brings us to the third and overarching objective, which is (3) to explore and analyse *links between stabilisation strategies and foreign policy change.* I would argue that studying domestic and foreign policy simultaneously may help us to understand crucial aspects of these two policy arenas that we would be likely to ignore if we were to focus exclusively on one or the other. As part of this, I will discuss domestic consequences of the failure of the Kádár regime to maintain political stability. These together with Hungary's opening to the West, which was a major aspect of FPC under Kádár, contributed to the fall of the Socialist regime and the democratisation process from 1989.

My choice of case and methodology

Beyond my personal interest in and fascination with Hungary – where I have almost always felt at home since my first visit in 1981 – there are other reasons why I have chosen to study this country. In Hungary, foreign policy has been, and still is, closely intertwined with the quest for political stability at home. Such links may be particularly strong for a small state that is highly dependent on its environment. Thus, its domestic as well as foreign policy is often and to a large extent influenced by its environment and by its interaction with this environment. One could also argue that these links are potentially stronger in authoritarian systems dominated by a strong leader. Continuing the study beyond the fall of the Socialist regime to discuss the development under the first

years of democracy will give us a better understanding of some of the structural constraints and opportunities that any Hungarian leader is likely to face, regardless of the character of the domestic political system or the power relations within the international system. I believe that studying this country 1956-94 is particularly interesting due to:

- the semi-independence of the state during the Soviet era, which also had implications for domestic politics under János Kádár;
- the changes that occurred both in domestic and foreign policy and which culminated in a rapid democratisation process from 1989; and
- the opportunities for comparisons between the situation under one-party rule and democracy, and in different climates of superpower relations.

It would be easy to categorise this study as a single-case study. Single-case studies, as an approach, have been criticised for being unscientific in the sense that they do not lend themselves easily to general conclusions. Some researchers have countered this argument by claiming that generalisation is not necessarily the (sole) objective of social science. Others have seen certain advantages in using the single-case approach. These include the usefulness of qualitative single-case studies (1) for understanding complex processes, where contextual factors are important to prevent oversimplified generalisations, and (2) when the purpose is exploration – to ‘discover variables which otherwise would probably not have been discovered’ or ‘stimulate our imagination to think about alternative relationships, generate new ideas and force the researcher to think differently’.⁸ I would argue that both justifications are applicable to my case; the process I study is complex and I make an explicit attempt to link policy arenas that are often analysed separately.

You could also argue, however, that this study is a multiple-case study where a comparison is made between foreign policy changes across different time periods and different foreign policy areas, as well as between stabilisation strategies under Socialism and democracy. This has been described by Yin as ‘embedded case studies [...] involving more than one unit of analysis’.⁹

A third way of describing the study, which is the one I prefer, would be to see it as a multiple-case study but in a different sense of the word, meaning that it

8 Lars-Göran Stenelo, *The International Critic: The Impact of Swedish Criticism of the U.S. Involvement in Vietnam*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 1984, 21, 24. Anders Uhlin, *Democracy and Diffusion: Transnational Lesson-Drawing among Indonesian Pro-Democracy Actors*, Lund Political Studies, No. 87, Lund, 1995, 53. Caroline Boussard, *Crafting Democracy: Civil Society in Post-Transition Honduras*, Lund Political Studies, No. 127, Lund, 2003, 12

9 Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, SAGE, London, 1984, 44

is a study that applies different theories to the same material. The same historic period ('Hungary 1956-94') can be regarded as a case of several different things¹⁰ – change in the use of stabilisation strategies, foreign policy change, or a case illustrating the links between domestic and external policy (or, more specifically, between the search for domestic stability and foreign policy change). It is perhaps not so much 'the case as such' but rather my analysis of the same period in the light of different theories, and how I link these, that makes the study interesting.

I draw on existing theory to develop a conceptual framework, for both political stability and foreign policy change, which in itself can be seen as a contribution to generalisation.¹¹ I also use theory to structure the empirical parts of my study,¹² to explain foreign policy change and to explore links between domestic and foreign policy. However, I do not test theory in the form of precise hypotheses, nor do I develop explicit hypotheses to be further tested. I prefer to see my study as a potential 'eye-opener' for other cases. The study can thus be described as heuristic i.e. 'not testing but getting some preliminary indication of the usefulness of new theoretical ideas'.¹³

Source material and concepts

Both the domestic legitimisation strategies and official Hungarian foreign policy and foreign policy change during this period have been described and analysed by other researchers.¹⁴ I build on their work and primarily use secondary sources for the empirical parts of this study. For the period before 1989, I have used academic articles and books written by leading experts on Hungary, Hungarians and non-Hungarians alike. The use of such sources has helped me to get a broad perspective on Hungary during this period and, it is hoped, the main facts right. It has also helped me to generate tentative ideas for some of my conclusions. In virtually all cases, the authors I have relied on have focused predominantly on

10 Svein S Andersen, *Case-studier og generalisering: Forskningsstrategi og design*, Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2003 (2nd edition), 69

11 Andersen, 2003, 79

12 *ibid.*, 69

13 Jakob Gustavsson, *The Politics of Foreign Policy Change: Explaining the Swedish Reorientation on EC Membership*, Lund University Press, Lund, 1998, 8

14 For an excellent one-volume analysis of the rise and fall of the Kádár regime, focusing on domestic policy, see Rudolf L Tóké, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change and Political Succession*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996. Gerner studied the balancing act of the Kádár regime between domestic and Soviet pressure, but did not focus on Hungarian foreign policy vis-à-vis the West – Kristian Gerner, *The Soviet Union and Central Europe in the Post-War Era: A Study in Precarious Security*, Lund Studies in International History 21, Esselte Studium, Lund, 1984. For a good overview of the dramatic foreign policy change in Hungary following democratisations, see Andrew Felkay, *Out of Russian Orbit: Hungary Gravitates to the West*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1997

domestic *or* foreign policy whereas linking the two has been one of my main objectives. For the period after 1989, I have continued to use academic literature while also relying more heavily on press material, articles from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), the Open Media Research Institute (OMRI), and official sources.

It is doubtful whether the use of official documents or archives, for the pre-1989 period, would have added much. Neither unofficial legitimization strategies nor 'opening up towards the West' in foreign policy are likely to be well-documented in official sources. Interviews, with people who still remember and are willing to talk about it, could possibly have helped me assessing whether the links I claim to have found between domestic and foreign policy were also seen and acted upon by decision-makers during this period. This, however, is not a key assumption in my study, and it is unlikely that the added value of interviews would outweigh the significant cost in terms of time and other resources. I could perhaps also seek some comfort in the fact that several of the authors I have quoted have relied quite heavily on interviews, some of them with a very large group of Hungarian decision-makers.

I would argue that my conclusions are interesting both if they help us understand how decision-makers were thinking when playing the two-level game and if they help us see things that the leaders failed to see at the time. Nevertheless, we may find it difficult completely to ignore the question that, crudely put, could be formulated as follows: Did the Hungarian leaders see what we have seen? I will briefly come back to this in chapter nine.

The authors I refer to mainly comprise political scientists, experts on international relations, sociologists, economists and historians. I would hope that my analysis and my conclusions gain something from this meeting between disciplines in the empirical part of the study. I would suppose that this way of using analyses, and to some extent concepts, from different disciplines would make Dogan and Pahre classify me as a 'hybrid scholar', by which they mean someone whose 'research takes place at the periphery of two or more formal disciplines' and who 'borrows from his neighbours'.¹⁵ Whether they would qualify my research as an example of 'creative marginality' or discard it as an example of marginal creativity remains uncertain.

15 Matteri Dogan & Robert Pahre, *Creative Marginality: Innovation at the Intersections of Social Sciences*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1990

The key concepts used in this study – in particular ‘stability’, ‘legitimacy’, ‘foreign policy’ and ‘foreign policy change’ – will be thoroughly discussed and defined in the following two chapters. Here, I will just make one remark: If and when I mention ‘Eastern Europe’ I use the term to refer to what was during four decades a political reality. I do, however, consider that Hungary historically and culturally is part of Central Europe and that, from a geographical perspective it is probably best characterised as situated in East Central Europe.

Delimitations

Despite the broad approach applied and the rather extended time period covered in this study, this is by no means a comprehensive description or analysis of Hungarian politics 1956-94. It is an attempt to highlight important elements of change in domestic stabilisation strategies and foreign policy and to discuss links between the two. However, the choice of events is ‘biased’ in the sense that my focus lies on change and new elements rather than on those aspects that did not change. In addition, important and interesting issues such as Hungary’s bilateral relations with the United States or the Holy See are largely left outside the study. Under Kádár, the key relationship with the Soviet Union is regarded more or less as a background against which the drama of Hungarian foreign policy change was played out.

When I refer to ‘Kádár’ or ‘the Kádár regime’, I do not assume that the regime could always be seen as a ‘unitary actor’. Important decisions were taken by a core group of people inside the Party apparatus, with Kádár himself playing a key role in identifying issues, proposing solutions and, ultimately, having the final word. According to Tőkés, the ‘regime’s centralized decision-making structure left the final say on thousands of issues in the hands of fewer than fifty top policy managers of the party center’.¹⁶ It is likely that the decision-making power was even more concentrated in the hands of Kádár when it comes to foreign policy decisions. It is clear that there was sometimes disagreement and diverging views within the core group of people, and the composition of this group varied over time. Except for a few cases, however, when I do discuss Kádár’s attempts to secure his position vis-à-vis different groups within the Party, I have not developed this perspective further.

16 Tőkés, 1996, 255

I would also like to add a word of caution, starting by a quotation:

‘The actors who matter to the realist, the people the realist thinks it is worth watching and listening to, are only that handful of people – usually male, usually members of the dominant ethnic group – with enough power to steer a state. *They* are the causal factors. Everyone else is a mere consequence, or coincidence.’¹⁷

This highly critical account of the focus on key decision-makers in realist theory could be read as a slightly ironic remark about the main focus of this study, which is on the Kádár regime and its strategies. Other stories about this period in Hungarian politics have been told, will be told and merit being told.

The extent to which leaders are in control, including in authoritarian systems, is an important question. If there were a need to defend my restricted focus, I would say that it is hard to deny that the leaders in an authoritarian system have a relatively high degree of autonomy. This argument has also been made with respect to Hungary under Kádár, by, among others, Schöpflin (1986) and Tőkés (1996).¹⁸ It has also been argued that leaders, or social ‘actors’ in general, have relatively wide powers in situations of change such as a democratisation process. I would not, however, maintain that the Hungarian decision-makers had the power to do whatever they wanted to. As we will see, there were also strong domestic and external pressures and restrictions that set certain limits to the action they were likely to undertake. There were perhaps times when they themselves, not least Kádár, had a rather exaggerated perception of their power but, as it later turned out, regarding ‘everyone else as a mere consequence, or coincidence’, as Zalewski and Enloe called it, was hardly a strategy that paid off in the long term. We will come back to this in the conclusions. Suffice it to say here that it may be worth distinguishing between *formal authority*, which allows a leader to make a decision, and his or her *freedom of manoeuvre*, with regard to the number of options that can realistically be considered. I would also argue that there is a difference between the degree of control, both perceived and real, between the domestic and the external area. In many cases, it may therefore be more appropriate to talk about ‘strategies’ when we discuss the domestic arena.

Finally, I would like to advise firmly against reading this study as an expression of admiration for János Kádár, his regime or the stabilisation strategies applied during his almost 32 years in power. The Kádár regime was an authoritarian

17 Marysia Zalewski & Cynthia Enloe, ‘Questions about Identity in International Relations’ in Booth & Smith (eds), *International Relations Theory Today*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, 295

18 George Schöpflin, ‘Hungary’ in McCauley & Carter (eds), 1986, 108-109 and Tőkés, 1996, 455

regime brought to power by the use of external military force. It stayed in power due to a combination of factors, including Soviet support and military presence and the actual or potential use of violence against its opponents. I think we can learn something from studying the strategies developed and choices made by this regime. But to understand, as somebody once said, is not to forgive; it is simply better than the alternative, which is not to understand.

Structure of the study

In chapter *two* I discuss and define the key concept of political stability and various strategies a regime can use to achieve and maintain stability. I also define 'foreign policy', which is another central concept in this study, and discuss possible links between domestic and foreign policy. In chapter *three* I discuss how we should understand foreign policy change (FPC) and I construct a conceptual framework for analysing FPC.

In chapter *four* I describe and analyse the strategies used by the Kádár regime in its search for stability, referring to the discussion on theory in chapter two. In chapter *five* I describe and analyse Hungarian FPC during the period 1956-88, based on the conceptual framework developed in chapter three. In chapter *six* I analyse the fall of the Socialist regime in the period 1988-90. Democratisation will be explained as a process that resulted from the failure of the stabilisation strategies used by the Socialist regime but which was also influenced by the opening up towards the West, which was a major aspect of FPC under Kádár. In chapter *seven* I analyse the stability strategies used by the new democratic Government (1990-94). In chapter *eight* I cover the same period but focus on the major restructuring of foreign policy during these years.

In chapter *nine*, finally, I draw overall conclusions from my study based on a comparison between the Socialist and the democratic period.

The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Regime Stability and Foreign Policy – a ‘Two-Level Game’

‘Most of us like to think that all good things somehow go together. Thus we want to believe that a more just world-order – in the Western democratic sense – is also a more stable order.’¹

Regime stability – legitimacy, performance and coercion

In this chapter I will introduce and analyse the concept of *‘political stability’* or *‘regime stability’*. Achieving and maintaining stability is generally a key aspiration of any political regime. Gerner defines the key concept as ‘a state when the rulers are not openly challenged by their subjects and when there is not any gross or rapid turnover of the former’.² In a democratic political system, a Government may be openly challenged by its citizens (e.g. through elections), which may indeed lead to a rapid turnover of ministers. However, in my understanding, this would not indicate that the system or the regime as such are unstable, but simply that the Government has lost popular support. In a democracy, with its established procedures for handling such situations, the political system can survive such ‘rapid turnover’ of the ‘rulers’. In authoritarian political systems, on the other hand, challenges to the decision-makers are often perceived, and rightly so, as threats to the political system as such.

1 Geir Lundestad, ‘Forholdet mellom rettferdighet og stabilitet i Øst-Europa’ in *Internasjonal Politikk*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 1990, 213 (My translation)

2 Gerner, 1984, 5

Stability is attained by securing the position of the regime *domestically* (i.e. vis-à-vis domestic society) and *externally* (i.e. vis-à-vis the environment of the state). In chapter four, I will analyse how the domestic strategies developed under the Kádár regime, whereas in chapter seven I will analyse the new domestic strategies during the first years of democratic rule.

Three sources of political stability

On the domestic scene, political stability depends on the consent or acceptance of the regime by key groups. Such acceptance can have three sources: belief in the regime's *right* to govern (usually referred to as '*legitimacy*'); appreciation of what the regime provides e.g. prosperity or protection from threats (referred to as '*performance*' or '*effectiveness*'); or fear, rational or not, of the costs involved in challenging the system (due to '*coercion*'). According to Lipset, the stability of a *democratic* system depends

'not only on the system's efficiency in modernization, but also upon the *effectiveness* and *legitimacy* of the political system' where effectiveness is defined as 'the actual performance of a political system, the extent to which it satisfies the basic functions of government as defined by the expectations of most members of a society, and the expectations of powerful groups within it which might threaten the system, such as the armed forces'.³

In the case of *non-democratic* regimes we may add another potential source of regime stability, namely, coercion. In this regard, the distinction between democratic and non-democratic systems is not absolute. However, although all 'governments depend on some combination of coercion and consent for survival', democracies are more dependent 'on the consent of the majority of those governed'.⁴ To conclude, the *stability* of any political regime may be a result of *legitimacy*, *performance* (e.g. modernisation capacity or effectiveness) and/or *coercion*. In a situation where a political regime is performing well, it may be difficult to assess to what extent political stability is due to acceptance based on performance or to acceptance based on legitimacy. However, if stability is maintained in a situation where performance is diminishing – while coercion is

³ Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy' in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, 1959, 86

⁴ Larry Diamond & Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Legitimacy' in Lipset (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Democracy*, Routledge, London, 1995, Vol. 3, 747

not being used – then we have a clear indication that the regime is considered legitimate.⁵

Pre-modern and modern legitimacy

When using the concepts ‘legitimacy’ and ‘legitimation’, we need to also distinguish between pre-modern and modern types of legitimation.⁶ In contrast to pre-modern conceptions of legitimacy, the ‘modern type of legitimation is based on the assumption that sovereignty is located in the people, in *civil society*. It is this latter that has to delegate its authority to the institutions of the state, remaining at the same time an *alternative source of power* and maintaining its relative autonomy’ – popular sovereignty as opposed to state sovereignty.⁷ As Held observes

‘It was only when claims to “divine right” or “state right” were challenged and eroded that it became possible for human beings as “individuals” and as “peoples” to win a place as “active citizens” in the political order. The loyalty of citizens became something that had to be *won* by modern states: invariably this involved a claim by the state to be legitimate because it reflected and/or represented the views and interests of its citizens.’⁸

According to modern liberal democratic theory, elections, rather than the rather abstract idea of a social contract, serve as the mechanism whereby citizens confer ‘authority on government to enact laws and regulate economic and social life.’⁹ As pointed out by Lipset, while ‘effectiveness is primarily an instrumental dimension, legitimacy is more affective and evaluative’.¹⁰ For a political order to be considered legitimate, people’s recognition of the rulers’ right to govern must be granted without the regime using ‘any coercive means to ensure its submission’.¹¹ In my study I will mainly focus on legitimacy in this modern meaning.

5 In his thorough discussion about various ‘modes of legitimation’ (seven domestic and three external), Holmes seems to regard what I refer to as ‘performance’ as just another source of legitimacy. Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997, 44

6 Cf. Steiner’s distinction between legitimacy as an absolute or a relative concept –Kristian Steiner, *Strategies for International Legitimacy: A Comparative Study of Elite Behavior in Ethnic Conflicts*, Lund, Lund University Press, 1996, 23-28

7 Maria Markus, ‘Overt and Covert Modes of Legitimation in East European Societies’ in Rigby & Fehér (eds), 1982, 83. Cf. David Held, ‘Democracy, the Nation-State and the Global System’ in Held (ed.), 1991, 227-228

8 David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, 49

9 Held, 1991, 203

10 Lipset, 1959, 86

11 Steiner, 1996, 24

Grounds for legitimacy

The belief in, and recognition of, a regime's right to rule may rest on various grounds – *rational/legal*, *traditional* or *charismatic* corresponding to the three 'pure types' of legitimacy identified by Weber.¹² According to Weber, every political regime needs some degree of charismatic legitimacy. Relying too heavily on charismatic leadership, however, is rather risky since a system that is so 'dependent on the actions of one person, is extremely unstable. The source of authority is not distinct from the actions and agencies of authority, so particular dissatisfaction can easily become generalized disaffection'.¹³ For an authoritarian regime, the dependence on charismatic legitimacy may create additional difficulties since a succession crisis within such a regime often leads to a 'routinization' of charisma, which gives rise to a loss of legitimacy.¹⁴

In addition to Weber's pure types we could mention '*goal rationality*', which may be relevant in the Hungarian case. Thus, according to Lewis, Communist systems are characterised, not by 'the formal-legal rationality of the capitalist bureaucracy but [by] a goal rationality appropriate to the teleological nature of official communist society and it is in terms of the pursuit of its goals that legitimation is achieved'.¹⁵ This, however, is more a matter of self-legitimation (see below), which is not necessarily shared by the people.

Overt and covert modes of legitimation

Before leaving the concept of legitimacy we need to make one further distinction, namely between the official and the unofficial basis of legitimacy, or *overt and covert modes of legitimation* – the latter being referred to only half-secretly. In the case of the Socialist regime in Hungary, it overtly claimed to be legitimate, based on Marxist-Leninist ideology. Like many other Communist regimes of Eastern and Central Europe, in their ideologically based claims on power, it reverted to what – to 'non-believers' – would equate to a pre-modern conception of legitimacy.¹⁶ However, they were not entirely satisfied with this form of legitimation.¹⁷ The

12 T H Rigby, 'Introduction: Political Legitimacy, Weber and Communist Mono-organisational Systems' in Rigby & Fehér (eds), 1982, 5. Dolf Sternberger, 'Legitimacy' in Sills (ed.), 1968, 247. Dahl, 1984 (4th edition), 64-65

13 Diamond & Lipset, 1995, 749

14 Øyvind Østerud, *Statsvitenskap: Innføring i politisk analyse*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1996 (2nd edition), 135-136

15 Paul G Lewis, 'Legitimation and Political Crises: East European Developments in the Post-Stalin Period' in Lewis (ed.), 1984, 5

16 Giuseppe Di Palma, 'Legitimation from the Top to Civil Society: Politico-Cultural Change in Eastern Europe' in *World Politics*, Vol. 44, 1991, 55

17 Gerner, 1984, 7-8

Kádár regime relied mainly on coercion and performance to acquire some kind of acceptance. This will be analysed in detail in chapter four.

Providers of stability

I mentioned above that acceptance is provided by 'key groups' but who are these groups? Often when legitimacy is discussed a general reference is made to 'the people'. However, 'the people' is often far too vague a concept to use in political analysis. Instead, we should focus on e.g. interest groups, political parties, organisations, classes or elites when it comes to granting acceptance. Bialer, for example, draws a line 'between elite legitimacy and mass legitimacy, between the extent to which a regime is considered legitimate by members of its social and political elite groups, and the extent to which its legitimacy is accepted by the wider social strata of the public at large'. He claims that 'the elite dimension of legitimation is more important for the stability of political regimes than the mass dimension'.¹⁸ Lewis agrees and argues that '[t]he importance of elites in Communist systems and their centralised power structures suggest that the establishment of legitimacy may be of special importance within the elite itself'.¹⁹ Legitimacy can also be a central element in the relationship between the regime and the bureaucracy. Weber noted 'that even in cases where the system of rule is so assured of dominance that its claim to legitimacy plays little or no part in the relationship between rulers and subjects, the mode of legitimation retains its significance as the basis for the relation of authority between rulers and administrative staff and for the structure of rule'.²⁰

Furthermore, if we focus exclusively on 'the people' as an all-encompassing category we thereby fail to capture an important phenomenon known as 'self-legitimacy'. In fact, beyond the recognition by a majority of the citizens of the regime's right to govern, many definitions of legitimacy include a second element, namely, the regime's own belief in such a right.²¹ Self-legitimacy is important for the regime. A failure to achieve, or to maintain, self-legitimacy may indeed be

18 Bill Lomax, 'Hungary – the Quest for Legitimacy' in Lewis (ed.), 1984, 70-71

19 Lewis, 1984, 4

20 Rigby, 1982, 15-16

21 'Legitimacy is the foundation of such governmental power as is exercised both with a consciousness on the government's part that it has a right to govern and with some recognition by the governed of that right.' Sternberger, 1968, 244. Cf. Lipset, 1959, 86-87. Juan J Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes – Crisis, Breakdown, & Reequilibration*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1978, 17. Rigby, 1982, 1. Gerner, 1984, 5. Robert A Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1984 (4th edition), 53-54. Cf. 'Legitimacy [...] refers to a popular belief in or acceptance of an authority's right to rule'. Barry Schutz, 'The Heritage of Revolution and the Struggle for Governmental Legitimacy in Mozambique' in Zartman (ed.), 1995, 110

detrimental to a political regime since 'it introduces an uncertainty and hesitancy in the exercise of power that may serve to encourage potential or actual opposition'.²² Lewis argues that self-legitimacy may have a strong external component: '[T]he leaders might still believe in their own right to rule because of direct or indirect external support, even though they are aware of their unpopularity and lack of authority among their own population.'²³

These arguments and distinctions, I believe, remain valid not only when discussing legitimacy but also when broadening the focus to discuss performance- and coercion based acceptance. To conclude, I would propose making a distinction between *four main providers of acceptance or consent – the people at large, social, economic and/or political elites, the bureaucracy and, finally, the regime itself.*

How effective are the three bases for stability?

What about the effectiveness of the three bases for stability discussed – legitimacy, performance and coercion – in terms of their contribution to regime stability? Legitimacy, as noted by Przeworski, seems to be a sufficient condition for stability. Performance (referred to by Lewis as 'eudaemonic legitimacy') is a more complex issue but it sometimes functions as a substitute for legitimacy in contributing to political stability.²⁴ To add to the complexity, the distinction between performance and legitimacy is not always easy to maintain since the former may lead to the latter:

'Historically, the longer and more successfully a regime has provided what its citizens (especially the elites) want, the greater and more deeply rooted its legitimacy becomes. A long record of achievement tends to build a large reservoir of legitimacy, enabling the system better to endure crises and challenges.'²⁵

This can affect a young democratic Government that succeeds an authoritarian regime in two different ways. On the one hand, democratic Governments that take over after a repressive authoritarian regime 'can count upon special reserves of political support and trust'.²⁶ On the other hand, however, '[n]ew democratic

22 Lewis, 1984, 15. Saxonberg introduces an alternative terminology by referring to 'ideological legitimacy', which he says includes 'the monopoly of Truth and legitimacy based on meeting economic goals'. Steven Saxonberg, *The Fall: Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland in a Comparative Perspective*, Uppsala University, Uppsala, 1997, 146-147

23 Holmes, 1997, 45

24 *ibid.*, 44

25 Diamond & Lipset, 1995, 749

26 Karen L Remmer, 'New Wine or Old Bottlenecks? The Study of Latin American Democracy' in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23, 1991, 490

regimes are particularly dependent on current achievements for legitimacy'.²⁷ The relative importance of *legitimacy* and *regime performance* for maintaining a stable political system is often complex. As noted by Diamond, Linz and Lipset, '[r]egimes that lack deep legitimacy depend more precariously on current performance and are vulnerable to collapse in periods of economic and social distress'.²⁸ However, at the same time and seen from a short-run perspective, Lipset claims that 'a highly effective but illegitimate system [...] is more unstable than regimes which are relatively low in effectiveness and high in legitimacy'.²⁹ We can argue, however, that generally performance tends to be less secure than legitimacy as a basis for stability.

In the mid-1980s, there was a debate about the prospect for survival of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Some argued that these regimes were largely dependent on performance and that, 'lacking the formal or procedural legitimacy conferred upon their western counterparts by competitive elections and other generally-accepted mechanisms for the formation of a government, may be placed in an increasingly difficult position by the apparent erosion of their ability to provide a satisfactory alternative in terms of their socio-economic performance'. Some concluded from this that these regimes 'can at best be temporarily and precariously legitimated by their socio-economic performance; in the long run "there is no alternative to legitimacy based on institutional procedures"'.³⁰ Others, including White, argued that this was not necessarily the case. Among potential alternatives to the introduction of a multi-party system and fair and free elections, he identified 'mechanisms of adaptation' that could be used to strengthen the political bases of legitimacy of these regimes. These included electoral linkage, political incorporation through membership of the ruling Party, and the use of associational groups, such as trade unions.³¹

Coercion, finally, is an even less reliable base for building stability. The use of coercion by the regime probably reflects weak support, or consent, by the people. This would indicate that regime stability is maintained against the will of the people.³² I conclude that a legitimate regime is inherently more stable than a regime that is based on performance. The least stable regime is one that builds

27 Diamond & Lipset, 1995, 749

28 Larry Diamond, Juan J Linz & Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Introduction: Comparing Experiences with Democracy' in Diamond, Linz & Lipset (eds), 1990 (a), 10

29 Lipset, 1959, 91

30 Stephen White, 'Regime and Citizen in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China' in McCauley & Carter (eds), 1986, 219-220

31 *ibid.*, 1986, 220-227

32 Lomax, 1984, 69

its power solely on coercion. Under a coercive regime, citizens may wish to bring about a change in the political order although they estimate the risks or the costs to be too high. By contrast, in the case of a legitimate, and sometimes in the case of a high-performing, regime, most citizens do not wish to change the status quo because they consider the regime as legitimate or are reasonably happy with what it delivers.

The importance of alternatives

The 'providers of acceptance' do not provide acceptance in a vacuum – they compare the regime with *alternatives*. In other words legitimacy, performance and coercion are compared with what other regimes would offer. Acceptance is, therefore, a relative, rather than an absolute, concept. Przeworski argues that

'while legitimacy may be a sufficient condition of regime stability, it is not a necessary condition. [...] The explanation for the political stability of unpopular regimes is that stability is often less a function of legitimacy than of the perceived lack of availability of preferable alternatives. Put somewhat differently, legitimacy itself may be less an *absolute* than a *relative* concept conditioned by the array of feasible alternatives present'.³³

There are three common references when considering alternatives to the current regimes: (1) *Potential future regimes* (political forces, movements or parties other than the regime), (2) *Previous regimes*, and (3) *Regimes abroad* (e.g. in neighbouring countries). The perceptions of these alternatives among the providers of acceptance discussed above therefore matter. The alternatives are normally assessed both in terms of their legitimacy, performance and use of coercion, and in terms of whether it is foreseeable that an alternative regime based on other political forces and/or similar to previous regimes or regimes abroad could come to power.

Strategies used by the regime

In order to achieve and maintain acceptance among 'providers of acceptance', regimes consciously apply various strategies, mirroring the sources of consent. Since alternatives matter, a complementary approach consists in trying to affect the (perceptions of) alternatives. Hence, a regime trying to secure, build or maintain domestic stability can use three main types of strategies.

³³ Adam Przeworski, 'Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy' in O'Donnell, Schmitter & Whitehead (eds), 1986, 51-52 referred to in Russell Bova, 'Political Dynamics of Post-Communist Transition: A Comparative Perspective' in *World Politics*, Vol. 44, 1991, 122-123

A *first* category includes strategies to make the regime more accepted by raising its legitimacy or by changing people's perceptions of, or its actual, performance. A *second* category includes strategies using coercion to raise the cost of political change. This can be achieved by *reducing information* about the alternatives (through censorship, rewriting of history or strict border control), *reducing the capacity of opponents to form a credible political alternative* (e.g. through judicial restrictions on the right to form organisations or political parties, negative propaganda against political opponents, or through persecution of dissidents) or by *threatening to use force* to prevent political change. A *third* strategy consciously used, although sometimes implicitly, consists in presenting the providers of acceptance with non-attractive alternatives ('*negative legitimation*').

The key concepts discussed above, which I will use in chapters four, six and seven when analysing political stability, are summarised in the box below.

Box 2.1. – A conceptual framework for analysing stabilisation strategies

PROVIDERS OF ACCEPTANCE

1. The population at large
2. Social, economic and/or political elites
3. The bureaucracy
4. The regime

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED TO THE CURRENT REGIME

1. Potential future regimes (credible political forces, movements or parties other than the regime)
2. Previous regimes
3. Regimes abroad (e.g. in neighbouring countries)

STRATEGIES USED BY A REGIME TO ACHIEVE POLITICAL STABILITY

1. Raising acceptance
 - a) increasing legitimacy
 - b) improving performance
2. Raising the costs of political change (through coercion)
 - a) reducing information about political alternatives
 - b) reducing capacity to form political alternatives
 - c) threatening to use force to prevent political change
3. Raising acceptance by presenting worse alternatives (negative legitimation)

Defining and analysing foreign policy

In addition to pursuing domestic objectives, political regimes have to formulate and implement foreign policy. The purpose of foreign policy is often understood as an attempt to influence events outside the country's control.³⁴ Foreign policy can also be used by a regime to attain domestic goals e.g. to maintain political stability or to enhance the prestige of, or help to consolidate, the regime. This could be done e.g. through 'the creation of, or attention directed to, a purported external threat in order to divert the populace from internal problems that might threaten the regime's solidarity'.³⁵ In this study I will focus on the Hungarian regime in the making and changing of foreign policy. The regime serves as a crucial mechanism linking domestic society and the environment of the state and hence also domestic and foreign policy.

Before continuing, it is worth spending some time discussing the concept of foreign policy. In the academic fields of political science and international relations, more effort seems to have been put into exploring various aspects of the foreign policy decision-making process, and its outcomes, than explicitly defining the core concept itself. In the late 1970s, Hermann claimed that this neglect 'has been one of the most serious obstacles to providing more adequate and comprehensive explanations of foreign policy'.³⁶ One source of confusion is that 'foreign policy' often refers not only to the object of study but also to the whole sub-discipline of political science or international relations devoted to studying this particular form of relations between international actors. When treating 'foreign policy' as a research object, however, we ought preferably to apply a more precise definition. We should also be aware that the end of the Cold War has generated new perspectives on foreign policy (analysis) and a more in-depth discussion on the concept itself:

'There has been a broadening of those who participate in influencing foreign policy making, a shift in the range and intensity of issues on the foreign policy agenda, and increasing ambiguities surrounding the notion of a national interest to guide foreign policy.'³⁷

34 Cf. Ian Manners & Richard G Whitman, 'Introduction' in Manners & Whitman (eds), 2000, 2

35 Barbara G Salmore & Stephen A Salmore, 'Political Regimes and Foreign Policy' in East, Salmore & Hermann (eds), 1978, 116-117

36 Charles F Hermann, 'Foreign Policy Behavior: That Which Is to Be Explained' in East, Salmore & Hermann (eds), 1978, 25

37 Mark Webber & Michael Smith, *Foreign Policy in a Transformed World*, Prentice Hall, Harlow, 2002,

326. For a good introduction and overview – see Webber & Smith, 2002 and Christopher Hill, *The Changing*

In what remains of this chapter I will, *firstly*, define what I mean by ‘foreign’ and ‘policy’ as I use the terms in this study. *Secondly*, I will discuss who makes foreign policy and, linked to this, how I see this study in relation to the ontological debate on the relative importance of ‘actors’ and ‘structures’ in international relations. *Thirdly*, I will define where to position my analysis with regard to ‘explaining’ or ‘understanding’. *Finally*, I will discuss the links that can be made between different policy arenas, domestic and external, and how these can be used when analysing foreign policy.

What is foreign policy?

To define foreign policy, we need to address both what we mean by a policy and how to differentiate between ‘foreign’ and other forms of policy. Goldmann suggests a basic distinction ‘between defining the policy of an actor as his programme, his behaviour or both’.³⁸ Papadakis & Starr differentiate between process, output (i.e. a decision) and behaviour (i.e. implementation of a decision).³⁹ In the last case, I believe, we can also draw a line between ‘implementation’ (as a process) and ‘behaviour’ (i.e. the result of the implementation of a decision). Rose also adds the possibility of including the consequences of actions in a definition of foreign policy.⁴⁰ Among these six elements – *programme, process, decision, implementation, behaviour* and *consequences* – I find it useful to keep both ‘process’ and ‘consequences’ outside my definition. In so doing, we leave the way open both to discussion of how foreign policy is influenced by the decision-making process and to analysis of the consequences of a particular foreign policy.⁴¹ I will also keep ‘implementation’ outside my definition, since it may sometimes be interesting to analyse this part of the chain separately and assess how implementation impacts on foreign policy (which may differ between issue areas).⁴²

Before coming to conclusions, it is worthwhile discussing the relation between *intentions, behaviour* and *actions*. Carlsnaes draws a line between ‘action’ and

Politics of Foreign Policy, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2003

38 Kjell Goldmann, ‘“Democracy is incompatible with international politics”: reconsideration of a hypothesis’ in Goldmann, Berglund & Sjöstedt, 1986, 25

39 Maria Papadakis & Harvey Starr, ‘Opportunity, Willingness, and Small States: The Relationship Between Environment and Foreign Policy’ in Hermann, Kegley Jr & Rosenau (eds), 1987, 413. Walter Carlsnaes, *Ideology and Foreign Policy: Problems of Comparative Conceptualization*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987, 55-56

40 Richard Rose, ‘Comparing Public Policy – An Overview’ in *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 1, 1973, 73 quoted in Carlsnaes, 1987, 55

41 Cf. Carlsnaes, 1987, 56

42 Cf. Kjell Goldmann, *Change and Stability in Foreign Policy: The Problems and Possibilities of Détente*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1988, 56. The question as to when the implementation process is likely to affect foreign policy significantly has also been discussed in Hermann, 1990, 19

'behaviour' suggesting that 'a central element of the meaning of action in the philosophy of the social sciences is precisely its manifest nature as against the wider meaning of the concept of behaviour'. Hence, he claims that 'we should consider only outcomes which are manifest in the sense that they are both *intended* and *recognized* as policies'.⁴³ 'Intentional behaviour', then, would constitute action. If we were to follow his reasoning we should distinguish between 'foreign action', on the one hand, and 'foreign behaviour' which is *either* unintended⁴⁴ *or* not officially recognised as policy, on the other. Foreign policy, according to Carlsnaes, consists of the sum of foreign policy actions of the state.⁴⁵

I agree, in principle, that an important part of social action is the meaning we as actors attribute to our behaviour; I also accept that it is difficult to ascribe to an actor motives that (s)he does not publicly acknowledge.⁴⁶ However, in the Hungarian case, following this approach would present us with serious problems. For example, we cannot expect foreign policy decision-makers, in particular not before 1989, to have been free to embark on frank discussion or justification of their choice of foreign policy. More likely, change in behaviour was often more pronounced than change in doctrine. Hence, I have decided to refer to foreign policy action regardless of whether or not it was officially recognised as policy by foreign policy officials. My decision is in line with a logic proposed by Cohen referring to an 'implicit assumption of intentionality'.⁴⁷ Just as they do on the domestic scene, I assume that decision-makers act in the foreign arena with an intention to solve problems or reach specific objectives. In this study I try to (re)construct their strategies based on observable action, rather than on declared policies. At the same time, decision-makers generally have less control over the external arena. It is, therefore, often more difficult for them to foresee the impact and consequences of their actions, not to mention the behaviour of other key actors. Hence, they are more likely to be taken by surprise.

Defining the 'foreign' component of foreign policy is a separate issue. 'Foreign policy' is different from 'domestic policy' but, at the same time, more specific than 'international politics'. Goldmann proposes that we distinguish between 'domestic' and 'foreign' in administrative or substantive terms. If we follow an

43 Carlsnaes, 1987, 60-61

44 *Nota bene*, we do not refer to unintended *consequences* of foreign policy but rather to unintended behaviour.

45 Cf. Hermann, 1978, 34. Carlsnaes, 1987, 27

46 Hermann, 1978, 32

47 Raymond Cohen, *Theatre of Power: The Art of Diplomatic Signalling*, Longman, London/New York, 1987 referred to in Christer Jönsson & Martin Hall, *Communication: An Essential Aspect of Diplomacy*, Paper prepared for the 43rd Annual ISA Convention, New Orleans, LA, 23-27 March 2002

administrative definition 'foreign policy comprises that part of public policy which is managed by the foreign ministry'.⁴⁸ If, instead, we define 'foreign' in substantive terms it can be defined either in terms of issues or in terms of 'recipients' of the policy, in this case actors outside the authoritative control of the state e.g. other states, but also non-state actors, such as IGOs, INGOs or foreign NGOs.⁴⁹

White proposes a third way of separating the two areas. He refers to the possibility of 'identifying a specifically "foreign" area of governmental activity [by assuming] that this area denotes not only the direction but also a particular type of policy which is concerned with the vital security interests of the state'. This approach fits well into a traditional framework in which foreign policy was conceived of as an area of highly important decisions, or 'high politics'. Today, however, this distinction is less relevant. It mirrors a time when cross-border contacts largely remained the prerogative of the state and when such contacts were comparatively rare. Today, many decisions falling within the area of foreign policy are neither high politics nor crucial for the state itself:

'Foreign policy becomes less to do with ensuring the survival of the state, and more to do with managing an environment composed of newly politicized areas and a variety of actors. This results in an international system where there is no obvious hierarchy, no dominant issue, and a shifting set of relevant actors.'⁵⁰

Furthermore, many decisions taken mainly for domestic reasons are interpreted and reacted upon abroad. Hence, a clear distinction between 'foreign' and 'domestic' becomes rather difficult to maintain; in real political life, the line between the two policy arenas tends to become less clear when a grey zone is evolving.⁵¹ To sum up, foreign policy has become broader in its scope while losing

48 Goldman, 1986, 25-26

49 Cf. Hermann, 1990, 5. Bernard C Cohen & Scott A Harris, 'Foreign Policy' in Greenstein & Polsby (eds), *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol. 6, *Policies and Policy Making*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, 1975, 383 quoted in Jan Hallenberg, *Foreign Policy Change: United States Foreign Policy Toward the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China 1961-1980*, Stockholm Studies in Politics, No. 25, Stockholm, 1984, 18

50 Martin Hollis & Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, 38-39. Cf. Peter Söderholm, *Global Governance of AIDS: Partnerships with Civil Society*, Lund University Press, Lund, 1997, 27. Papadakis & Starr, 1987, 421

51 Brian White, 'Analysing Foreign Policy: Problems and Approaches' in Clarke & White (eds), 1989, 5-6. Goldman has made an attempt to modify the clear-cut distinction between domestic and foreign issues: 'The most basic distinction is the one between domestic and international matters; this, in our terminology, depends on whether the making of policy includes interaction with outsiders. International issues may be pursued for national or internationalist reasons. The national interest may be one of security or of economic welfare; in the latter case the common term "foreign economic policy" may be used. Security questions, in turn, may be concerned with diplomatic or military matters. This fivefold typology is meant to replace the foreign/domestic dichotomy implied in the incompatibility hypothesis. The typology is not exhaustive'. Goldman, 1986, 28

some of its former exclusiveness. At the same time, the boundary between foreign and domestic policy is not always clear.

In the empirical parts of the study, I will analyse foreign policy as going beyond high politics. I will use a substantial definition according to which foreign policy is a policy that mainly has a 'foreign' recipient. I regard foreign policy as a sub-category of the inter- and transnational relations of which that state is a part, its essence being a decision made by an authoritative representative of the state.⁵² Therefore, 'foreign policy' will be defined in substantive terms as 'programs, decisions and action (inferred from observable behaviour) decided upon by the authoritative representatives of a state directed against actors outside the authoritative control of the state'.⁵³ From the analysis, it is likely that a more or less distinct pattern can be constructed. In chapters five and eight I will focus on this pattern rather than on individual decisions or behaviour.⁵⁴

Who 'makes' foreign policy?

Discussing who makes foreign policy is difficult without first touching on the debate between actor and structure oriented research. In his typology of various perspectives in the study of foreign policy, Carlsnaes makes an ontological distinction between holism or individualism, or structure vs. agent/actor. This is a fundamental distinction in social science theory.⁵⁵ Carlsnaes, quoting Wendt, captures the basic difference between the two perspectives by stating that individualism holds that 'social scientific explanations should be reducible to the properties of interactions of independently existing individuals' whereas holism is based on the view that 'the effects of social structures cannot be reduced to independently existing agents and their interactions'.⁵⁶ For the purpose of empirical analysis of foreign policy, rather than tackling deep meta-theoretical issues,

52 Cf. Goldmann, 1986, 26. Cf. Manners & Whitman: 'Definitions of foreign policy vary from the very narrow "relations between states", through the broader "governmental activity" to the very broad notion of "external relations".' Manners & Whitman, 2000, 2

53 Cf. '[F]oreign policies consist of those actions which, expressed in the form of explicitly stated goals, commitments and/or directives, and pursued by governmental representatives acting on behalf of their sovereign communities, are directed toward objectives, conditions and actors – both governmental and non-governmental – which they want to affect and which lie beyond their territorial legitimacy.' Walter Carlsnaes, 'Foreign Policy' in Carlsnaes, Risse & Simmons (eds), 2002, 335

54 Instead of a pattern, Christopher Hill speaks about 'the sum of official external relations' Hill, 2003, 3

55 Cf. Alexander E Wendt, 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory' in *International Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 1987. Walter Carlsnaes, 'The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis' in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, September 1992, 245-270. Walter Carlsnaes, 'On Analysing the Dynamics of Foreign Policy Change: A Critique and Reconceptualization' in *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1993, Hill, 2003, 25-30

56 Walter Carlsnaes, 2002, 335 with reference to Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999

Carlsnaes proposes an analytic framework based on a triple approach consisting of an *intentional*, a *dispositional* and a *structural* dimension of explanation:

‘[A] teleological explanation in terms solely of the intentional dimension is fully feasible, based either on strict rationality assumptions or on more traditional modes of intentional analysis. [...H]owever [...] one can choose to “deepen” the analysis by providing a causal determination of policy – as opposed to an explanation wholly in terms of given goals and preferences – in which the factors characterizing the intentional dimension are themselves explained in terms of underlying psychological-cognitive factors which have disposed a given actor to have this and not that preference or intention. [---] Finally, the third layer is based on the assumption that in so far as intentional behaviour is never pursued outside the crucible of structural determination, factors of the latter kind must always be able to figure causally in our accounts of the former. As conceived here, this link between structure and agency can be conceived as both of a constraining and of an enabling kind.’

Carlsnaes goes on to say that foreign policy actions ‘can in turn affect – either by intention or unintentionally in the form of outcomes – both the structural and dispositional dimensions, providing for the dynamic interaction over time between agential and structural factors, thus invoking the agency-structure issue’.⁵⁷ We will come back to this discussion towards the end of chapter nine.

If we focus on an intentional dimension of explanation, I believe a crucial role in shaping foreign policy is played by the ‘authoritative representative’ i.e. the political regime.⁵⁸ Salmore & Salmore argue that not only does the regime have a strong influence on foreign policy. Its influence is even stronger in this field than on domestic policy issues, they argue, since the ‘instruments of foreign policy are probably concentrated more exclusively in the hands of the executive than are those of any other policy domain’. Therefore,

‘in the arena of foreign policy as opposed to domestic policy executive decision makers act more freely, respond less to other political institutions and mass publics, and suffer fewer consequences as a result of unsuccessful or “wrong” decisions’.

This concentration of foreign policy resources may be even stronger in non-democratic societies.⁵⁹

57 *ibid.*, 342-343

58 ‘Access to the policy-making process is restricted, but it is not completely impossible to achieve. The notion is one of hierarchy, with inner and outer circles of influence.’ Cf. Webber & Smith, 2002, 39-41

59 Salmore & Salmore, 1978, 103-106

When analysing Hungarian foreign policy, I will consider domestic as well as external factors. This, in Carlsnaes's words, means that I place myself not exclusively in the tradition of *Realpolitik* (which gives 'the major explanatory weight [...] to material systematic-level factors in one form or another') but more in the tradition of *Innenpolitik* (which allows domestic factors to play a role in explaining foreign policy).⁶⁰ As noted by Ole R Holsti, '[t]he notion that political, economic, and other internal institutions determine the nature of foreign policy is an old one, extending back to Kant and earlier'.⁶¹ Salmore & Salmore claim 'that the internal political structure of a country is a major determinant of its foreign policy'.⁶² We should be aware, however, that 'in using domestic structure as a variable in explaining foreign policy, we must explore the extent to which that structure itself derives from the exigencies of the international system'.⁶³ In this study I will focus particularly on how domestic stabilisation strategies were taken into account by the regime when defining and implementing foreign policy, but also on how foreign policy came to impact on political stability at home.

A second fundamental distinction can be drawn between approaches that see foreign policy as the result of goal-oriented (and often future-oriented) action and approaches that regard foreign policy as a response to the external environment.⁶⁴ These categories have been branded differently by various researchers – 'an explicit plan' or 'habitual responses to events occurring in the international environment', 'plan' and 'practice', foreign policy seen from 'the perspective of International Relations' and foreign policy seen from a 'Political Science perspective',⁶⁵ 'system' or 'state' oriented approaches⁶⁶ or 'rational actor assumptions/state-centric realism' or 'decision-making approach'.⁶⁷

Holsti, who refers to these perspectives as 'power maximizing' and 'goal-achievement', presents a *third* one, which 'takes the perspective of *problem-solving*

60 Carlsnaes, 2002, 334

61 Ole R Holsti, 'Foreign Policy Decision Makers Viewed Psychologically: "Cognitive Process" Approaches' in G Matthew Bonham & Michael J Shapiro (eds), *Thought and Action in Foreign Policy*, Basel, 1977, 22f. quoted in Carlsnaes, 1987, 5

62 Salmore & Salmore, 1978, 103

63 Peter Gourevitch, 'The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics' in *International Organization*, Vol. 32, 1978, 882 quoted in Geoffrey Pridham, 'International influences and democratic transition: problems of theory and practice in linkage politics' in Pridham (ed.), 1991 (a), 18

64 J S Coleman, *The Mathematics of Collective Action*, Aldine, Chicago, 1973, 1 quoted in Hermann, 1978, 29

65 White, 1989, 6-8

66 David Allen, 'The Context of Foreign Policy Systems: The Contemporary International Environment' in Clarke & White (eds), 1989, 62

67 White, 1989, 10-11

as its base, and adds to it elements of the goal-oriented model'.⁶⁸ He identifies a number of problem clusters faced by all Governments: '(1) autonomy; (2) welfare; (3) security; and (4) regime maintenance. For many developing countries, a fifth category is state creation, including ethnic unity'.⁶⁹ Although it may be debatable whether or not Holsti's approach really constitutes a separate category, I find his ideas useful for my research purposes. Hence, I will apply a slightly modified version of his approach and will analyse Hungarian foreign policy as *programme, decisions and action (inferred from observable behaviour) related to the following five problem clusters*, or foreign policy areas:

- Regime stability
- Security
- Trade and economic policy
- National identity, and
- Autonomy

Analysing, explaining or understanding foreign policy?

Having defined foreign policy, which is one of my key concepts, I must decide how to use it for analytical purposes. According to White, foreign policy analysis provides 'a necessary framework for posing general "what", "why" and "how" questions'.⁷⁰ Another way of distinguishing between various forms of analysis is to say that foreign policy analysis 'can be descriptive', try to explain 'why certain decision and actions are taken' or evaluate 'the consequences of foreign policy actions and assess [...] whether the [...] goals of the action were desirable and achieved'.⁷¹ Here, I will be concerned mainly with describing in a structured way, analysing and explaining foreign policy. As mentioned above, I will also explore the interaction between foreign policy and domestic stabilisation strategies, including the consequences of foreign policy for political stability.

68 Cf. Jerel A Rosati who, in an attempt to combine the two approaches, claims that foreign policy is formulated in order 'to respond abroad to the present and future environment' – Jerel A Rosati, 'Cycles in Foreign Policy Restructuring: The Politics of Continuity and Change in U.S. Foreign Policy' in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 225

69 K J Holsti, 'The Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policy: Some Notes on the Pitfalls and Paths to Theory' in K J Holsti, *Change in the International System: Essays on the Theory and Practice of International Relations*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1991, 195-196

70 White, 1989, 4

71 Deborah J Gerner, 'Foreign Policy Analysis: Exhilarating Eclecticism, Intriguing Enigmas' in *International Studies Notes of the International Studies Association*, Vol. 16, No. 3-Vol. 17, No. 1, 1991-92, 4

Another distinction often made is the one between ‘explaining’ and ‘understanding’ – based on

‘the epistemological issue of whether social agency is to be viewed through an “objectivistic” or an “interpretative” lens. Using a different metaphor, two choices are available here: to focus on human agents and their actions either from the “outside” or from the “inside”, corresponding to the classical Weberian distinction between *Erklären* (explaining) and *Verstehen* understanding.’⁷²

This study clearly applies an ‘outside’ perspective. In other words, I find it sufficiently interesting to construct a possible logic behind how policy developed and changed, regardless of whether or not this logic was actually understood, recognised and acted upon by the decision-makers at the time. In chapter nine I will come back to the question whether the regime may have seen things in a perspective similar to that which I develop in this thesis. By focusing on the regime as an actor and analysing foreign policy from the outside I place my study in what Carlsnaes calls individualism, with respect to ontology, and objectivism, with respect to epistemology.⁷³

Links between domestic and foreign policy

At the very beginning of this chapter, I stated that a political regime generally tends to strive for political stability. Simultaneously, in the foreign policy field, it needs to address the five problem clusters discussed above. These tasks tend to be rendered even more complex and difficult by the fact that the two types of strategies, or ‘games’, cannot be kept strictly separate. Instead, the regime’s use of various strategies to achieve or maintain domestic stability may influence its ability to conduct (a certain type of) foreign policy. Likewise, the Government’s foreign policy can impact on domestic politics including, in certain cases, regime stability. A key perspective in this study is the links between domestic and foreign policy. Based on that, I will analyse changes in domestic legitimation strategies and foreign policy, as well as links between the two, in Hungary from 1956 to 1994.

72 Carlsnaes, 2002, 335

73 *ibid.*, 335-6. For a more elaborate discussion on ‘explaining’ vs. ‘understanding’ – see Hollis & Smith, 1992. Hill does not accept that we have to make a choice between explaining and understanding: ‘Good history or traditional political science “explains” in the sense of highlighting key factors and the nature of their interplay on the basis of analysis and evidence that most critical but reasonable readers find convincing [...] Furthermore, “understanding” is not just a matter of reconstructing the world-view of actors themselves.’ Hill, 2003, 29-30

An often-quoted article by Putnam, presents some ideas on how such links can be addressed in a meaningful way.⁷⁴ Putnam's argument, which draws on theories and studies of international negotiations, is that such negotiations 'can usefully be conceived as a *two-level game*':

'At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign.'⁷⁵

Since neither of the two levels takes precedence over the other, states(wo)men must do two things at the same time 'that is, they seek to manipulate domestic and international politics simultaneously. Diplomatic strategies and tactics are constrained both by what other states will accept and by what domestic constituencies will ratify'.⁷⁶

Having to deal with issues at two levels simultaneously is clearly more challenging than handling issues in one arena at the time (cf. two-dimensional vs. three-dimensional chess). However, in certain situations, skilful politicians might be able to use links between the two levels strategically. As noted by Moravcsik, the 'two-level quality of linkage is particularly striking when the statesman attempts to gain approval for an important domestic measure by linking it to an attractive international agreement, or vice versa – a tactic Putnam refers to as "synergistic issue linkage".⁷⁷ The two-level game approach is useful for analysing in what situations decision-makers, or negotiators, can gain 'bargaining advantages by employing strategies that are "double-edged", exploiting domestic and international politics simultaneously'.⁷⁸ Opportunities for linking the two levels may suddenly change e.g. in cases of domestic regime change or when the regional or international system undergoes fundamental change. This, in Evans's words 'implies the construction of a "new game", with new odds for the

74 Robert D Putnam, 'Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games' in *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Summer 1988

75 Putnam, 1988, 434

76 Andrew Moravcsik, 'Introduction: Integrating International and Domestic Theories of International Bargaining' in Evans, Jacobson & Putnam (eds), 1993, 15

77 Moravcsik, 1993, 24-25

78 *ibid.*, 1993, 33

ratifiability of a range of specific policies. By the same token, of course, the time and resources required to overcome the inertia of an established social and political structure may make even the most crafty efforts at restructuring quixotic'.⁷⁹

Although my focus does not lie on formal international negotiations this conceptual framework has provided inspiration and useful ideas for analysing my case. However, we need to think of 'ratification' (which, in Putnam's discussion constrains international negotiators) less in terms of a formal voting procedure in Parliament and more in terms of securing support among key interest groups, which remains important even in an authoritarian system.⁸⁰ It is obviously more difficult to apply the model in cases where there is no formal ratification process. However, the more general idea that foreign policy is constrained by domestic concerns and that the strength in the position of a decision-maker affects his/her ability to strike a deal probably remains valid.

A second approach that focuses on linking domestic and foreign policy, and which has also inspired my analysis, is proposed by Petersen.⁸¹ He develops a typology (essentially applied to EU integration) for classifying various approaches used by national decision-makers when they face an 'integration dilemma' (which 'highlights the difficult trade-offs nation-states have to make in integration projects').⁸² Although the relative power of the states involved as well as the democratic decision-making legitimising the integration project clearly differ between the European Union and the Soviet dominated Eastern Europe before 1989, I think some of the principles discussed by Petersen may be relevant also for my case.⁸³

Petersen suggests that decision-makers will opt for strategies that 'allow their nation to enjoy the collective goods of integration (welfare, security, community) and which will increase the influence, respect and reputation of their country [...while] they will [also] endeavour to control the diminution of sovereignty, protect national priorities, avoid the loss of national identity, and reduce the risks of marginalization and exclusion'.

79 Peter B Evans, 'Building an Integrative Approach to International and Domestic Politics: Reflections and Projections' in Evans, Jacobson & Putnam (eds), 1993, 417

80 'Authoritarian leaders do not have to win public elections, but they do need to maintain the support of key élites and figures in a society to remain in office.' Peter Gourevitch, 'Domestic Politics and International Relations' in Carlsnaes, Risse & Simmons (eds), 2002, 318

81 Nikolaj Petersen, 'National Strategies in the Integration Dilemma: An Adaptation Approach' in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 36. No. 1, 1998

82 *ibid.*, 1998, 35

83 For a systematic empirical study of the way in which EU member states adapt their foreign policies – see Manners & Whitman (eds), 2000

'*Adaptation*', which is the central concept in Petersen's approach, can take one of four different forms depending on the degree of control a country has over its external environment (defined by Petersen as 'influence capability' (IC)) and on the degree of sensitivity it has to the outside world (defined by Petersen as its 'stress sensitivity' (SS)). Petersen refers to these combinations as 'policy of dominance' (characterised by high IC and low SS), 'policy of balance' (characterised by high IC and high SS), 'autonomy priority' (characterised by low IC and low SS) and policy of acquiescence (characterised by low IC and high SS). He points out that '[i]n the short to medium term, strategies are likely to evolve on the basis of decision-makers', possibly erroneous, perceptions of their country's position in the IC-SS space, but in the longer run the "objective" position is likely to be decisive'.⁸⁴

Finally, there is a third approach that I have found useful for my case. Mastanduno, Lake and Ikenberry have developed a framework for analysing '*the two faces of state action*'. They emphasise the central role played by the regime 'situated between domestic and international arenas' (although they talk about the 'state' – defined as 'politicians and administrators in the executive branch of government' – rather than the 'regime').⁸⁵ They also develop a series of hypotheses about 'state' behaviour, based on a distinction in terms of domestic structure (soft or hard) and the position (weak or powerful) of the country in the international structure.⁸⁶

From these approaches, I have deduced the following key assumptions, which I have found useful when exploring links between regime stability and foreign policy change in the Hungarian case:

- Political leaders hold a central position to the extent that they have to think and act at the two levels simultaneously.
- Domestic and international policy outcomes are mutually affected by what happens at the two levels, and neither of the two levels takes precedence over the other.⁸⁷

84 Petersen, 1998, 37-43

85 Michael Mastanduno, David A Lake & G John Ikenberry, 'Toward a Realist Theory of State Action' in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 33, December 1989

86 *ibid.*, 469. This reminds me of a distinction previously made by Barry Buzan (weak and strong states and weak and strong powers). Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1991 (2nd edition), 96-107

87 This places my study in line with what Gourevitch calls 'exploring interactions of levels' (rather than 'system-level theorising' or 'holding the system relatively constant and looking at the aspect of domestic politics which shape how a country responds to its environment'. This third approach, according to Gourevitch, 'is the least well developed, and the place that particularly requires further analysis'. Gourevitch, 2002, 309-310

- When facing pressure for adaptation, leaders will want to maximise their benefits while maintaining a maximum degree of autonomy.
- Strategies of political leaders will be based on (their perceptions of) the international position of the state as well as its domestic strength and cohesion.
- In certain situations, political leaders can use 'synergistic issue linkage' to ensure better outcomes than would have been possible by addressing only one level.

CHAPTER THREE

Foreign Policy Change

‘It is the same and at the same time it is not the same.
It is different and it is not different’ – Zen saying

Foreign policy change (FPC) is not a new feature, either in the history or the theory of international relations. To mention but one early historic example, a reference to a phenomenon today known as ‘shifting alliances’ is already to be found in Thucydides’ first book on the Peloponnesian war. Taking an example from international relations theory, balance of power theory states that ‘governments must be willing to establish new commitments’ when the distribution of capabilities is threatened.¹ Nevertheless, during the main part of the Cold War period, until the early 1980s, FPC remained an almost neglected object of study within the discipline(s) of international politics and international relations.²

Rosenau, Gilpin, Holsti and others, trying to account for this limited interest in FPC, argue that theory was narrowly focused on stability. This was due both to normative reasons (the ‘stability bias’ of the Cold War) and because of a Western preponderance within the young discipline of international relations, which had not yet learnt how to deal with change. Owing to a preference for grand theory, the task of explaining or predicting FPC was generally believed to be futile. Theory about FPC also remained narrowly focused on major foreign policy change, whereas cases of limited change were regarded as uninteresting.

1 K J Holsti, ‘Restructuring Foreign Policy: A Neglected Phenomenon in Foreign Policy Theory’ in Holsti, 1982, 3

2 Cf. Jerel A Rosati, Martin W Sampson III & Joe D Hagan, ‘The Study of Change in Foreign Policy’ in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 5

Meanwhile, major foreign policy change rarely occurred.³ It still remains hard to understand, however, why such a major example of FPC as the new policy of the United States towards the People's Republic of China in the early 1970s failed to generate a more pronounced interest in developing theory on this subject.⁴ During the 1970s and the 1980s, 'change' began to attract the attention of more researchers. However, in many cases their focus was not so much foreign policy *per se* – at the state level – but rather change in the international system or change in perceptions of international relations.⁵

In the post-bipolar period that followed the end of the Cold War, *FPC became more frequent*. We witnessed fundamental and rapid changes in superpower relations, international (as well as domestic) politics in Eastern and Central Europe,⁶ and drastic changes in international relations within traditional regions of conflict, such as the Middle East or Southern Africa.⁷ To this list, one could add examples of radical, although less dramatic, foreign policy reorientation e.g. the change in Swedish foreign policy analysed in a study by Gustavsson.⁸ These developments have highlighted our lack of, and need for, theoretical tools for describing, analysing, explaining and, possibly, understanding such change. As pointed out by Carlsnaes, existing theories, models and approaches were not very useful for explaining the radical changes generated by the end of the Cold War and there is still no consensus on how best to come to grips with these changes.⁹ Indeed, the radical changes in foreign policy in the last fifteen years may call for further developed analytical frameworks better adapted to capturing fundamental elements of our transformed world.¹⁰

In the *first* section of this chapter, I will define FPC and reflect on some important dimensions for analysing FPC. In the *second* section, two key concepts

3 Holsti, 1982, ix & 8. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981, 4-6 as summarised in Rosati, Sampson III & Hagan, 1994, 5-7. James N Rosenau, 'Comparative Foreign Policy: Fad, Fantasy, or Field?' in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 12, 1968, 324 quoted in Rosati, Sampson III & Hagan, 1994, 7. Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 23-24

4 One exception to the rule is Hallenberg, 1984

5 Rosati, Sampson III & Hagan, 1994, 7. Some interesting examples of studies of FPC in the 1980s are Gilpin, 1981; James Rosenau, *The Study of Political Adaptation*, Frances Pinter, London, 1981; Holsti, 1982; and Goldmann, 1988. Since the end of the Cold War, Hermann, 1990; Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994; and Walter Carlsnaes, 'On Analysing the Dynamics of Foreign Policy Change: A Critique and Reconceptualization' in *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1993 may be added to the list.

6 Joe D Hagan, 'Domestic Political Regime Change and Foreign Policy Restructuring: A Framework for Comparative Analysis' in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 139

7 Hermann, 1990, 3

8 Gustavsson, 1998

9 Carlsnaes, 2002, 343

10 A good attempt at adapting foreign policy theory to the post-Cold War period, as well as a collection of interesting case studies, is found in Webber & Smith, 2002

for explaining FPC – ‘promoters of change’ and ‘foreign policy stabilisers’ – will be introduced. In the *final* section I will discuss the scope of my framework regarding FPC.

Analysing foreign policy change

Change, and resistance to change, in foreign policy

Change is a fundamental concept in the social sciences. Even more fundamentally, as argued by Lundquist, change is the natural state of modern society, and we cannot understand society unless we acknowledge this fact.¹¹ Capturing change requires an understanding of time. This means, that we cannot understand social phenomena fully unless we analyse them as part of a historic current. Situations or ‘cases’ that look identical, when analysed in a static framework, may indeed be completely different when seen in a dynamic perspective.¹² To give a trivial example, bilateral trade flows of a given value, at two different points in time, may be part of completely different stories; the figures, and the interactions they summarise, acquire different meanings depending on in which direction the trade trends are developing. To take an even more trivial example, although we may still debate where to focus our attention on the proverbial wineglass, bringing time into the analysis will help us determine whether the glass has just been half-filled or half-emptied.

When it comes to foreign policy, we can assume that there is – in all countries and at all times – a dynamic between continuity and change ‘in response to internal developments and external circumstances’.¹³ Whereas, ‘[a]t the highest level, a state may either resist or adjust to international change’,¹⁴ I would agree with the statement that most states ‘are continuously in the process of adjusting to changes in international and domestic systems’.¹⁵ At any given time, and depending on our focus, either continuity or change tends to dominate the picture. During most of the Cold War period, in Europe and elsewhere, continuity remained the norm, while change was an exception. Since the late 1980s, as we have seen, FPC has become less rare and more dramatic.

11 Lennart Lundquist, *Den tudelade humanvetenskapen*, 2006 (forthcoming)

12 *ibid.*

13 Rosenau, 1981, 1

14 David Skidmore, ‘Explaining State Responses to International Change: The Structural Sources of Foreign Policy Rigidity and Change’ in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 44

15 G John Ikenberry, ‘The State and Strategies of International Adjustment’ in *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 1986, 54

Although we may assume that swift and dramatic FPC occurs rarely, beyond this general observation theoretical perspectives and opinions diverge. A reasonable interpretation of the realist school of international politics e.g. would be to see gradual FPC, or foreign policy adjustment, as a fairly frequent phenomenon. Researchers focusing more on domestic factors, such as bureaucratic politics, governmental decision-making or the role of institutions, would probably take a different position and emphasise continuity.¹⁶ Whereas both perspectives acknowledge that change and pressure for FPC sometimes occur in the external environment of the state they diverge in their perceptions as to whether and how the state is likely to react to such challenges. To capture this debate, Skidmore refers to two models of policy response where the first one, based on 'realist theory, predicts policy adjustment' whereas the second, based on institutionalism, 'predicts resistance or, at a minimum, considerable lags in adjustment'.¹⁷

My study of Hungary covers a relatively long time-span, including periods dominated by continuity and others characterised by change. I will discuss such change as a phenomenon closely linked to the regime's search for domestic political stability but also as a response to external factors.

Aspects of foreign policy change

As I have argued, the Cold War focus on large-scale, dramatic change e.g. shifting alliances, led to a widespread view that FPC is rare. The use of a broader definition capturing less radical forms of FPC would most likely have led to different conclusions. In an attempt to shed some light on these different ways of thinking, I will now consider some key aspects of FPC.

Holsti defines 'foreign policy restructuring' as 'the dramatic, wholesale alteration of a nation's pattern of external relations'.¹⁸ When compared to 'normal' foreign policy change, foreign policy restructuring 'usually takes place more quickly, expresses an intent for fundamental change, is non-incremental and usually involves the conscious linking of different sectors'. Furthermore,

16 Jerel A Rosati, 'Cycles in Foreign Policy Restructuring: The Politics of Continuity and Change in U.S. Foreign Policy' in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 229

17 Skidmore, 1994, 44 & Rosati, 1994, 229. William Dixon and Stephen Gaarder have a different view on the logical implications of realism and claim that realism, too, points 'to the existence of formidable constraints on decision-makers, constraints which make change unlikely'. William J Dixon & Stephen M Gaarder, 'Explaining Foreign Policy Continuity and Change: U.S. Dyadic Relations with the Soviet Union, 1948-1988' in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 190-191

18 Holsti, 1982, ix

such changes ‘usually occur both in the pattern of partnerships [...] and in the type of activity’.¹⁹ Holsti defines his dependent variable as ‘significant changes in the patterns of externally directed diplomatic, cultural, commercial and military relations’, ‘identification of new policies with regard to foreign “agents” within the country’ and ‘the policy-makers’ *intent* to restructure foreign policy, that is, foreign policy reorientation’.²⁰

Using this definition as a point of reference, we can identify three dimensions of FPC – the *degree* (more or less radical), the *time-frame* (gradual or swift) and the *scope* (one or several policy areas) *of change*.²¹

Degree of foreign policy change

We can distinguish between different degrees of FPC – from small-scale adjustment to foreign policy restructuring – by answering questions such as ‘How radically does the new policy differ from the one discarded?’ or ‘Is it the goals or rather the means to achieve those goals that have changed?’ Hermann makes a distinction between adjustment changes and major foreign policy redirection. The latter comprises programme changes, problem/goal changes and international orientation changes.²² ‘International reorientation’ – the most radical form of change – ‘involves the redirection of the actor’s entire orientation toward world affairs’. Furthermore, it ‘involves dramatic changes in both words and deeds in multiple issue areas with respect to the actor’s relationship with external entities. Typically, reorientation involves shifts in alignment with other nations or major changes of role within an alignment’.²³

Rosati distinguishes between four possible outcomes of a period of transition in foreign policy – intensification (little or no change), refinement (minor changes), reform (moderate changes) and restructuring (major changes) in the scope, goals and strategy of foreign policy.²⁴ The terms I will use in my conceptual framework are *adjustment* (referring to no or minor change), *reform* (indicating moderate

19 *ibid.*, 2 & 13. Cf. Thomas Volgy & John Schwarz who define ‘foreign policy restructuring’ as ‘a major, comprehensive change in the foreign policy orientation of a nation, over a relatively short period of time, as manifested through behavioral changes in a nation’s interactions with other actors in international politics’. Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 25

20 Holsti, 1982, 12

21 Hagan & Rosati refer to the level of change (more or less dramatic), the scope of change (partial or wholesale) and the time-frame of change (sharp break with the past or not). I prefer to talk about ‘degree’ rather than ‘level’ of change – in order not to evoke wrong associations to ‘level of analysis’. Hagan & Rosati, 1994, 266-269

22 Hermann, 1990, 5

23 *ibid.*, 5-6

24 Rosati, 1994, 235-237

change) and *restructuring* (indicating major changes in *programme, goals, strategy and/or international orientation*).

Time-frame for change

The second dimension of FPC covers the time-frame of change i.e. whether change happens gradually or rapidly. In Holsti's cases of foreign policy restructuring, 'fundamental change was attempted or occurred in less than five years',²⁵ although this is not an explicit element of his definition.

Rapid change is interesting – for the country, its neighbours and sometimes even the international system at large. From a domestic perspective, swift change probably indicates a crisis within the political system or in its relations with the external environment. To be successful, such change often requires a multitude of political resources. For external actors, sudden change in the foreign policy of a neighbouring state may require them to react by adapting their policies. In extreme cases, rapid change can alter the balance of power within, or even the structure of, the international system at large. According to Volgy & Schwarz, the time needed for fundamental FPC is likely to vary. Generally speaking, change can be brought about more quickly by 'nations with extensive resources and the ability to mobilize those resources'.²⁶ This could probably be read as an argument against the likelihood of rapid FPC in a small state, due to its lack of external resources. I will not use a more elaborate terminology but simply distinguish between *gradual* (changes occurring over a number of years with no specific point at which a fundamental decision was taken to change) and *rapid* (changes happening more quickly where one or a number of key decisions to change can be clearly identified).

The scope of change

We should keep in mind that

'the aggregation of behavior [...] obscures important variations within specific areas [...] and] that aggregate measures [...] do not reflect the contradictory patterns of continuity and change that are likely to coexist'.²⁷

Change may be more or less comprehensive in that it does or does not cover change in several policy fields. Hence, we need to distinguish between change

25 Holsti, 1982, 17

26 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 26

27 Hagan & Rosati, 1994, 269

in the five policy areas or problem clusters (regime stability, security, trade and economic policy, national identity, and autonomy) discussed in chapter two. The scope of change can also differ, with respect to the actors who are directly affected by the change. According to Hagan, a country's foreign policy vis-à-vis another state may change with respect to *accommodation/confrontation* (the regime's use of diplomacy vs. confrontational strategies), *independence/interdependence of action* (the regime's degree of autonomy in foreign policy) and *level of commitment* (to what extent the regime is bound by previous action – through resource allocations or expectations generated among other actors).²⁸

These various aspects of FPC, as summarised in Box 3.1, form a conceptual framework, which I will use in chapters five and eight when analysing FPC in Hungary in, respectively, 1956-88 and 1990-94.

Box 3.1. – Aspects of foreign policy change

DEGREE OF CHANGE

Adjustment (no or minor change)

Reform (moderate changes)

Restructuring (major changes in programme, goals, strategy and/or international orientation)

TIME-FRAME FOR CHANGE

Gradual change

Rapid change

SCOPE OF CHANGE

Change in the five problem areas (regime stability, security, trade and economic policy, national identity, and autonomy)

Targets for change (countries or other actors directly affected) with respect to *accommodation/confrontation*, *independence/interdependence of action*, *level of commitment*

Stages of foreign policy change

To facilitate analysis of processes of major FPC (such as Holsti's 'foreign policy restructuring' or Hermann's 'international reorientation'), I will also introduce a distinction between four analytical *stages* in the process. These are *reorientation*, which refers to the policy-makers' intent to restructure foreign policy,

²⁸ Hagan, 1994, 157-159

disengagement, which refers to the destruction of existing patterns in foreign policy, and *restructuring*, which is the process whereby a new set of relationships is established. Restructuring involves both 'significant changes in the patterns of externally directed diplomatic, cultural, commercial and military relations, and [...] identification of new policies with regard to foreign 'agents' within the country'.²⁹ *Stabilisation* is a final phase that Goldmann characterises as less dramatic and more time consuming.³⁰ I will refer to these stages when analysing the more radical change in foreign policy that occurred beginning in 1989.

Explaining foreign policy change

As an aid to analysis of the continuous shift between periods of major change and periods of continuity, adaptation or minor change, in foreign policy, I have integrated some useful elements of theory into my own framework rather than using a ready-made theory or model. I have done so because none of the theories, models or frameworks entirely 'fits my case'; either they tend to overlook significant factors or they are based on a perspective on FPC that differs significantly from mine.

My perspective on FPC is essentially quite simple. It is based on two main categories of explanatory factors – *promoters of foreign policy change* (or just 'promoters', for short) and *stabilisers of foreign policy* (or just 'stabilisers'). This line of thinking has been inspired by Holsti, Hermann and others – who sought background factors stimulating or generating change (what I call 'promoters') – and by Goldmann (among others), who takes 'environmental change, negative feedback, and shifts in leadership' as something given while instead focusing on 'the factors accounting for their varying impact'.³¹ Foreign policy is affected by *domestic* as well as *external* factors.³² I see foreign policy change, as well as continuity, as the outcome of a dynamic interaction between domestic and external factors. I will also add a third category, *cognitive and policy-related* factors, to cover promoters and stabilisers that are neither domestic nor external but more directly linked to the ideas on which a policy is based, to the decision-maker's understanding of these ideas or to his/her attitudes towards other countries.

29 Holsti, 1982, 7-12

30 Goldmann, 1988, 78. Cf. Steven F Greffenius, 'Foreign Policy Stabilization and the Camp David Accords: Opportunities and Obstacles to the institutionalization of Peace' in Rosati, Hagan & Sampson III (eds), 1994, 205-207

31 *ibid.*, 4

32 Rosenau, 1981, 2-3

Promoters of foreign policy change

It is no simple matter to devise a meaningful definition of ‘promoters of change’. On this, I must agree with Goldmann that it is more difficult to generalise about these than about ‘stabilisers’ – ‘whereas pressures for change can come from a wide variety of sources, the factors determining their impact appear to be more amenable to generalization’.³³ My definition of a promoter of change (in relation to policy P of agent A) is very extensive, and encompasses – *any factor within or outside agent A that, while stabilisers are held constant, increases the likelihood that A will abandon, or considerably modify, policy P.*³⁴

Based on this definition, I have searched the literature for examples of promoters of FPC to include in my conceptual framework. The result is largely a selection from Holsti’s ‘independent variables’ that are likely to contribute to foreign policy restructuring, Goldmann’s three ‘disturbances’ or ‘sources of foreign policy change’ and Hermann’s ‘primary change agents’.³⁵ This list is not meant to be exhaustive but to include key factors, adapted to my case, that previous research has found important.

Among the *domestic factors*, Holsti mentions *internal threats, economic conditions* and *political factionalisation*. Goldmann mentions ‘*residual factors*’ when examples of ‘policy change are neither adaptation nor learning’ but could be e.g. a shift in Government.³⁶ According to Hermann, foreign policy change may be *leader driven*, in which case it ‘results from the determined efforts of an authoritative policy-maker, frequently the head of government, who imposes his own vision of the basic redirection necessary in foreign policy’. He terms a second case *bureaucratic advocacy* i.e. when it is not the entire Government ‘but rather [...] a group within the government [which] becomes an advocate of redirection’. Finally, Hermann mentions *domestic restructuring*, referring to a case ‘when elites with power to legitimate the government either change their views or themselves alter in composition – perhaps with the regime itself’. Similarly, Hagan & Rosati highlight the impact of *domestic political realignments* defined as ‘a fundamental (more or less permanent) shift in the basic distribution of power and influence among contending political groups [...] which] bring *new sets of beliefs and/or*

33 Goldmann, 1988, 29

34 In Goldmann’s terminology, a ‘promoter of change’ is not equivalent to a ‘de-stabiliser’. Whereas a de-stabiliser weakens or hinders the trend towards stabilization of a policy (Goldmann, 1988, 76) a promoter of change counteracts the trend completely by turning the process away from stabilisation.

35 Holsti, 1982, x, 7, 14 and 199. Goldmann, 1988, 6 & 62. Hermann, 1990, 11-12

36 Goldmann, 1988, 6 & 62

interests into the foreign policymaking process'.³⁷ To conclude and simplify, I will refer to four types of domestic promoters of change – *domestic realignment or restructuring* (possibly caused by political factionalisation), *leader driven change*, *bureaucratic advocacy*, and *economic conditions* (or similar internal threats).

Holsti divides the *external factors* into *military threats*, *non-military threats* and the *structure of previous relationship* (vulnerabilities, penetration, etc.). Goldmann speaks about '*conditions*' when 'a change in policy is brought about by a change in the environmental circumstances called "conditions." This is what may be called a process of adaptation'. According to Hermann, an *external shock* (a major international event, visible and with immediate impact) may trigger major FPC.³⁸ Volgy & Schwarz note that *regional integration* sometimes operates as a promoter of change. They refer to the discussions and change in foreign policy in the Nordic countries, Austria and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s in the face of deepening EU integration and claim that

'[i]t may be plausible to argue that when integration attempts reach some level of "critical mass," nations outside of the integration process become more willing to fundamentally change their foreign policy orientations in order to gain benefit from these integration efforts'.³⁹

Finally, summarising the main results in *Foreign Policy Restructuring*, Hagan & Rosati find that '*change in global structures and the state's international position*' can trigger change. Among external promoters, I will include *change in regional structures* (e.g. regional integration), *change in global structures* (and the international position of the state) and *external threats* (military and non-military) and *shocks* (dramatic events not necessarily linked to an explicit threat).

In the category *cognitive or policy-related promoters*, I will include what Goldmann refers to as the effect of *negative feedback*. Policies may be 'their own sources of change in the sense that they may change in response to negative feedback. This will be called learning'.⁴⁰ Hermann goes even further and claims that '[a]ll the material examined explicitly or implicitly seems to assume that change is driven by failure'.⁴¹ Another example of a promoter linked to evaluation and learning

37 Hagan & Rosati, 1994, 270

38 Hermann, 1990, 11-12

39 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 35-36

40 Goldmann, 1988, 6

41 Hermann, 1990, 12-13. Another good reason to change foreign policy may be that the policy has been successful in the sense that the objective of the policy has been fulfilled. This is most likely in cases where the policy has a clearly defined scope and the goal is such that it can be reached once and for all. Once the goal has been achieved, a new foreign policy has to be formulated. To conclude, 'success' may be equally important

is *policy success*. What I have in mind here is successful policy formulation and implementation that lead to desired consequences – typically well-defined results linked to a particular event, such as a negotiation outcome or the resolution of a conflict. In this case, change is driven not by failure but by success. I will also add a promoter that Holsti refers to as *attitudes toward foreigners*. This refers to attitudes towards another country, or its population, based on historical and cultural factors. I will call this *attitudes towards other states*. Under this heading, I will also include ‘the previous relationship between states’ (e.g. vulnerabilities or penetration or, in Holsti’s terminology *colonial experience*) discussed above. I summarise the promoters I will focus on in the box below.

Box 3.2. – Promoters of foreign policy change

DOMESTIC PROMOTERS OF CHANGE

Domestic realignment or restructuring

Leader driven change

Bureaucratic advocacy

Economic conditions (or similar internal threats)

EXTERNAL PROMOTERS OF CHANGE

Change in regional structures (e.g. regional integration)

Change in global structures (and the international position of the state)

External threats or shocks

COGNITIVE AND POLICY-RELATED PROMOTERS OF CHANGE

Attitudes towards other states (which may be based on previous relationships e.g. vulnerabilities, penetration, colonial experience)

Policy failure (that generates learning through negative feedback) or policy success (policy that has achieved its objective)

As stated above, I find it more difficult to generalise about promoters of change than about stabilisers of foreign policy. According to Holsti, foreign policy restructuring is often a reaction against too much interdependence, or dependence on a hegemon:

as ‘failure’ as a promoter of foreign policy change.

'[M]any cases of dramatic foreign policy change are a manifestation of nationalism in a world popularly characterized as "beyond nationalism", where growing "interconnectedness" between societies is supposedly on the verge of creating a global community'.⁴²

These motives behind FPC have one thing in common; they are all examples where the state strives to increase its control and to liberate itself from external dominance – whether the latter is caused by colonialism, great power hegemony or perhaps, in today's discourse, globalisation.

Stabilisers of foreign policy

Promoters of change do not always lead to FPC. Their impact can be modified by stabilisers, which determine whether, when and to what extent, a promoter of change will be translated into FPC. According to Goldmann, stabilisers 'determine how sensitive the policymaking system is to its environment, the extent to which alternatives are available, and how costly the alternatives are'.⁴³

In line with the definition above I will use Goldmann's definition of a stabiliser. *A stabiliser 'of policy P of agent A' is defined as 'any attribute of P, of the ideas on which P is based, of A, or of A's relations with the environment that reduces the effects on P of changes in conditions for P, of negative feedback from P, and of residual factors'*.⁴⁴ I will use the same categorisation as I used for promoters of change – domestic, external, and cognitive and policy-related stabilisers.

In addition to using Goldmann's list I have searched for other examples of stabilisers in the theoretical literature on FPC for my conceptual framework. Volgy & Schwarz speak of bureaucratic, regime, resource, global and regional '*webs of restraint*', which 'decision-makers must confront [...] to effectuate fundamental changes in the direction of their foreign policies'.⁴⁵ Skidmore, referring to Krasner, presents three main 'sources of rigidity' that explain why it may be difficult to bring about FPC – '*analytical models*', '*organizational routines*' and '*domestic interests*'.⁴⁶ Goldmann's perspective is that of the political system, whereas Volgy & Schwarz, as well as Krasner, put the decision-maker in focus.

42 Holsti, 1982, x, 7, 14 and 199

43 Goldmann, 1988, 26

44 *ibid.*, 15

45 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 27

46 Skidmore, 1994, 47

Among the *domestic stabilisers*, we may distinguish between three main types – stabilisers linked to the type of regime and the decision-maker(s), stabilisers linked to the bureaucracy, resources and the way in which foreign policy is being implemented and stabilisers linked to interest groups in society and the way in which they influence foreign policy decision-making and implementation. The strength of a particular foreign policy is likely to vary depending on the *type of regime* in power. One conclusion that is of interest in our case is that, according to Volgy & Schwarz, restructuring ‘should be easier to achieve in nations where foreign policies are formulated without the trappings of complex bureaucracies, such as in states controlled by a single leader or a small, ruling coalition’.⁴⁷

The administration may also serve as a stabiliser of foreign policy – by blocking or resisting initiatives, due to their own established interests in current policy.⁴⁸ In this context, Goldstein & Keohane note that ideas may become institutionalised and thus constrain policy. Ideas may even affect the way in which the policy institutions are set up and the incentives of those who benefit from them: ‘In general, when institutions intervene, the impact of ideas may be prolonged for decades or even generations. In this sense, ideas can have an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them as principled or causal statements’.⁴⁹

The administration can also stabilise policy through organisational routine. Goldmann talks about four administrative stabilisers out of which I find three particularly useful – fragmentation, the response repertory and the decision structure. *Fragmentation* is defined as the ‘extent to which the administration of P is compartmentalized’. A highly compartmentalised organisation may be less likely to see the need for, or adapt to, change. The *response repertory* is defined as ‘[policy] P and those alternatives to P that have been identified and planned for by the administrative apparatus’.⁵⁰ According to Skidmore, ‘past choices may become so embedded in bureaucratic organizations, vested interest groups, as well as intellectual outlooks and understandings that they place severe constraints on the choices realistically available to present policymakers’.⁵¹ The *decision structure* refers to the process whereby decisions on foreign policy change will be made. According to Volgy & Schwarz, certain processes ‘either perpetuate previous

47 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 28-29

48 Hagan & Rosati, 1994, 271

49 Judith Goldstein & Robert O Keohane, ‘Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework’ in Goldstein & Keohane (eds), 1993, 12-13 & 20

50 Goldmann, 1988, 67

51 Skidmore, 1994, 62

decisions or, at most, create incremental departures from previous decisions'.⁵² They also note, however, that such resistance to change can be undermined in cases of domestic regime change, which may 'weaken the bureaucracy or foster ambiguity in the roles assigned to key actors in the decisional group [...] and thus provide greater opportunities for fundamental changes in policy'.⁵³

The availability or not of resources for foreign policy implementation may also act as a stabiliser of foreign policy. Volgy & Schwarz refer to this as the 'resource web'. It is clear that a lack of resources may limit the ability of a state to change foreign policy thus effectively acting as a stabiliser of existing policy. However, one could also argue that resources available may have an even deeper impact on foreign policy to the extent that resource allocations (e.g. spending on military armament) may favour certain objectives of foreign policy. In such cases, we could argue that the instruments help to define the objectives, rather than the other way around.

Beyond the regime and the administration, interest groups within the wider society may also act as a stabiliser of foreign policy. As Skidmore notes, '[c]hange is [...] rendered difficult because policies become enmeshed in domestic interests which have a stake in their perpetuation'.⁵⁴ This is developed in greater detail by Goldmann (referring to 'political stabilisers') who says that '[a]t one extreme' a foreign policy has developed into a national dogma [...]. At the other extreme, a policy has just been adopted over major opposition'. He distinguishes further between institutionalisation (expectations that the policy will continue to be pursued), support for the policy, and salience, which is defined as the 'extent to which the pattern of coalitions and cleavages in the actor's polity would be affected by the actor's changing his position on the issue with which P is concerned'. Goldmann reminds us that 'issues may be debated without being salient; more important, issues may be salient without being debated'.⁵⁵ To conclude, I will include the following domestic stabilisers in my framework: *regime type*; *administrative resistance*, *organisational routine* (fragmentation, response repertory, and decision structure), *resources for foreign policy implementation*; and *domestic interests at stake* (institutionalisation, support, and salience).

External factors may also stabilise foreign policy. Policies create expectations among other actors in the system and help to establish patterns of interaction.

52 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 27

53 *ibid.*, 29

54 Skidmore, 1994, 47

55 Goldmann, 1988, 53

This means that a change in policy may be costly, owing to other actors' reactions to changes in what they perceived as an established pattern but also because actor A has invested in this pattern. In this group, Goldmann mentions international norms, dependence and third parties. *International norms* create expectations, as discussed above, and more or less specific costs or sanctions for breaking these norms, as regulated through international law, treaties or custom. *Dependence* does not have to be formally established through international norms. It is rather expressed in a pattern of interaction, a 'regular relationship' with the environment, which could not be altered free of charge. Finally, Goldmann defines '*Third parties*' as the 'degree to which there is structural balance in the triads formed by the actor, the object of P, and third parties'.⁵⁶ I will use this concept to refer to the extent to which a change in policy vis-à-vis one external actor is perceived as being costly with regard to another actor ('the third party').

We have argued that the regional surrounding of the state may act as a promoter of change. *Regional structures* (e.g. 'the degree of regional integration, the intensity of regional conflict, the existence of a dominant hegemon in the region, and the degree of competition between hegemons in the region') may likewise be stabilisers of foreign policy. For example, in regions where there is one dominant power, foreign policy change is likely to be rather difficult and costly for other actors. However, in regions where there is no dominant hegemon, or where the interests of a hegemon are weak or declining, the prospect for foreign policy change improves.⁵⁷

The *global structure* and the place of the state in that structure may also act as a stabiliser of foreign policy. The extent to which the international system is stable, the structure of the international system and the relations (level of tension) between dominant powers in that system are all likely to impact on the prospects for foreign policy change. Thus, when international systems are undergoing change, there are better opportunities for foreign policy change. In other words, stabilisers become weaker. Likewise, a bipolar system, as opposed to a multi-polar system, makes foreign policy change more risky or costly. Finally, periods of low conflict between the key players in the international system, such as periods of détente during the Cold War, are likely to be more 'permissive' when it comes to foreign policy change.⁵⁸ To summarise, I will include *bilateral relations* (e.g. dependence on an external actor or relations with a third party), *regional*

56 *ibid.*, 30 & 64

57 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 35-36

58 *ibid.*, 32-35

structures (number of dominant powers, interest of dominant powers), and *global structures* (system stability, system structure, relations between dominant powers) in my list of external foreign policy stabilisers.

Goldmann distinguished between three kinds of *cognitive (and policy-related) stabilisers* – consistency, centrality and testability. Consistency is defined as the ‘extent to which the actor believes that P is not counter-productive and that it lacks negative side-effects’. Centrality has to do with the extent to which the actor thinks a particular policy is essential for success in other policies. Concerning testability, Goldmann claims that policies that predict ‘definite, observable, short-run consequences’ are the most vulnerable and, thus, the ones most likely to change. Having given this some thought, I find it more logical to consider ‘untestability’, rather than ‘testability’, a stabiliser. In Goldmann’s own words, ‘[u]ntestable beliefs are stable because they do not run the risk of being challenged by discrepant information’.⁵⁹ According to Skidmore, policy change is costly since it requires ‘the creation of new analytic models and organizational routines corresponding to altered realities. The intellectual and organizational costs which go into the creation of new policies mitigate against future change’.⁶⁰ Or, as noted by Allison reflecting on the end of the Cold War, ‘Perhaps the most difficult of all, we will have to think again, to stretch our minds beyond the familiar concepts and policies of containment’.⁶¹ To summarise, I will discuss cognitive and policy-related stabilisers in terms of *qualities of the policy* (consistency, centrality and untestability) and *concepts and analytical models*. The stabilisers described in this section are summarised in the following box.

59 Goldmann, 1988, 36-38 & 65

60 Skidmore, 1994, 47

61 Hermann, 1990, 4

Box 3.3. – Stabilisers of foreign policy

DOMESTIC STABILISERS

Regime type (democracy or small number of decision-makers with high autonomy)

Administrative resistance, including organisational routine (fragmentation, response repertory, decision structure) and resources available for implementing foreign policy

Domestic interests at stake (institutionalisation, support, salience)

EXTERNAL STABILISERS

Bilateral relations (e.g. dependence on an external actor or relations with a third party)

Regional structures (number of dominant powers, interest of dominant powers, norms)

Global structures (system stability, system structure, relations between dominant powers, norms)

COGNITIVE AND POLICY-RELATED STABILISERS

Qualities of the policy (consistency, centrality or untestability)

Concepts and analytical models

Before concluding this section, I would like to make two remarks with regard to the concepts used – promoters and stabilisers. *Firstly*, the distinction between domestic, external and cognitive/policy-related factors is sometimes more of an analytical construction than an accurate description of reality. To give but one example: to which category does ‘a change in decision-makers’ perceptions of the environment’ belong? Are they ‘caused’ by external, domestic or cognitive events? In a sense, if we think of new perceptions of the environment as originating within the domestic system no external cause of FPC necessarily exists since, when seen from this perspective, all external impulses are mediated through the minds of domestic decision-makers. Furthermore, even if such a line could be drawn in a static model, domestic and external factors often interact and affect each other in ways that make the distinction even more difficult to maintain when we study a dynamic process.⁶² Rosati claims that ‘changes throughout the state, society, and environment not only lead to changes in foreign policy, but changes in foreign policy also affect the state, society, and environment – it is a complex interactive process’.⁶³ This problem is probably mainly a question of

62 Hagan & Rosati, 1994, 275-277

63 Rosati, 1994, 227

how far we want to go in searching for explanations. How we resolve it is likely to reflect our basic understanding of foreign policy and which explanatory factors we see as most relevant. Nevertheless, I find the distinctions potentially useful for analytical purposes as long as we are aware of these caveats.

Secondly, in some cases a clear-cut distinction between promoters of change and stabilisers is hard to make. To illustrate this point, should one see domestic regime change preceding FPC as an example of a promoter of change or more as a weakening of previous foreign policy stabilisers, such as established interests and organisational routines? Goldmann has also noted this difficulty and comments that ‘in a study of a particular foreign policy it may not be clear [...] whether to regard a change in domestic politics as a source of a change in this policy or as the weakening of one of its stabilizers’.⁶⁴ I do not claim to have a fully satisfactory solution that once and for all settles the issue. I simply suggest that, in our analysis of FPC, we should be aware of the problem.

The scope and use of my framework

The conceptual framework above specifies two types of factors – promoters and stabilisers – which are useful when we seek to structure an analysis of foreign policy change once it has taken place. The basic idea is that there is continuous interaction between pressure for, and resistance to, change. Although promoters of change sometimes predispose a Government to try to bring about changes in foreign policy the presence of such factors is not sufficient to explain FPC. The outcome is dependent on the relative strength of the promoters and the stabilisers. As we discussed above, the presence and strength of stabilisers can help us explain whether or not promoters of change excite a reaction and, if so, what.⁶⁵

Depending on the origin of these forces – external, domestic or cognitive/policy related – the effects may be filtered through external and domestic structures, including the foreign policy bureaucracy. This process will alter the relative strength of these factors. In the end, however, I see leading foreign

⁶⁴ Goldmann, 1988, 28-29

⁶⁵ This way of approaching foreign policy change has much in common with a similar framework developed by Yvonne Kleistra and Igor Mayer which they applied on foreign policy and organisational change in the Netherlands. They use the terms carriers and barriers and go further than I do in the sense that they analyse carriers and barriers as two sides of the same coin. Their model is elegant, but not entirely applicable on my case. Firstly, it focuses on organisational change in addition to policy change. Secondly, it deals with specific policies rather than trying to analyse foreign policy across the board. Hence, the concepts and hypotheses may be too refined for my purpose. Finally, I am not fully convinced that promoters of change and stabilisers can always be analysed as different values of the same indicator. Yvonne Kleistra, & Igor Mayer, ‘Stability and Flux in Foreign Affairs: Modelling Policy and Organizational Change’ in *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2001

policy decision-makers having a pivotal role in acting on such pressure and also in reconciling and prioritising among domestic and foreign policy objectives. Therefore, we should bear in mind that the distinction between various types of promoters and stabilisers does not imply that my basic understanding of the foreign policy-making process varies depending on what type of promoter or stabiliser we discuss. For example, if we find that in a particular case promoters of change are mainly, or exclusively, external, we still recognise that the domestic system (including leading decision-makers) as well as cognitive factors are involved in translating this external pressure into a foreign policy response. We may also find that promoters and stabilisers from different categories interact to bring about, or hinder, foreign policy change.

Using this framework should allow us to answer the question why foreign policy did, or did not, change in a specific case. I have thus set myself a more ambitious objective than Holsti who declared that ‘we regrettably cannot explain why some states restructure their foreign policies while others, facing similar domestic and external problems, do not’.⁶⁶

A different question is to what extent the framework is useful for predicting foreign policy change. Here, I think our ambitions will have to be much more modest. The framework can help us to identify situations, characterised by strong promoters and weak stabilisers, when it is *likely* that FPC will happen. However, this does not mean that FPC *will* occur.

Although we can identify a number of strong promoters of change, the list is hardly likely to be exhaustive. Furthermore, we do not know very much about the reasons why such promoters of change sometimes occur while, at other times, they do not. To quote Goldmann, ‘stress can rarely be ruled out’.⁶⁷ Likewise, although we may be able to identify a number of foreign policy stabilisers and roughly understand why they tend to block FPC we do not know enough about why such stabilisers sometimes become weak, in which case they may be ‘defeated’ by promoters of change. Hence, my framework is rather static, and Goldmann has come to a similar conclusion with regard to his framework:

66 Holsti, 1982, 198-199

67 Goldmann, 1988, 62

‘The way in which the various stabilizers may develop over time and affect one another has been touched on only in passing. The theoretical sketch is static. It indicated only how the presence of a number of phenomena may affect policy stability [but not why those phenomena are, or are not, present].’⁶⁸

To conclude, trying to find general causes behind FPC is an extremely difficult exercise. Explaining events, *ex post facto*, by identifying key factors involved is, in relative terms, a less complex exercise than predicting FPC in a specific case based on the presence of such factors.⁶⁹ Prediction is even more difficult if we leave, as I do in my framework, some scope for actor autonomy. I would argue that FPC can, in some cases, be brought about based primarily on independent thinking, learning and action of key decision-makers, although the scope for such autonomy is often narrow, in particular in cases of ‘well-defined global and domestic constraints’.⁷⁰

Finally, this framework is intended to be used when analysing why FPC happens. It will not be very useful for analysing the outcomes of such change in terms of new policy, which is certainly even more difficult to generalise about. In this regard, Rosati concludes that

‘[a] period of political instability and transition may produce [foreign policy change] but the outcome is not preordained, for the scope, intensity, and direction of change in society, government, and foreign policy do not follow predictable patterns’.⁷¹

I will use the conceptual framework developed in this chapter in my analysis of Hungarian FPC. In chapter five, I will analyse FPC during the Kádár regime (1956-88) and in chapter eight the dramatic changes during the first year of democracy (1990-94) with reference to the aspects of FPC discussed here.

68 *ibid.*, 69

69 Holsti, 1982, 198

70 Hagan & Rosati, 1994, 276-277

71 Rosati, 1994, 235

The Kádár Years

CHAPTER FOUR

Kádár's Quest for Stability

'I think it was a tank. That's my first historical memory. It's also my last. Because nothing else has happened since then. Only Kádár, that's all. And the lies, as long as I can remember. With a crooked smile, she quickly adds, "It can stay that way, for all I care. World history and me we can get along without each other."¹

The analytical focus of this chapter lies on the strategies developed by the Hungarian regime under János Kádár (1956-88) to acquire stability. Here, I will focus mainly on how the regime tried to secure its position domestically, whereas, in chapter five, I will analyse foreign policy change (FPC). In chapter nine, I will explore links between these strategies and FPC.

1956 – A background to the Kádár regime

'Hungarian women of Budapest have lost their elegance. There are almost no good looking women any more. This shocked me very greatly of course[...].'
– Simon Bourgin, Budapest, May 1956²

This quotation should not necessarily be dismissed as just another sexist remark by a foreign journalist. Based in Vienna, Simon Bourgin had been covering Hungarian affairs since the end of the Second World War. Rather than just male frustration, I think what he tries to capture here is his perception of the impact

¹ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Europe, Europe: Forays into a Continent*, Hutchinson Radius, London, 1989, 132

² Simon Bourgin, 'The Well of Discontent: A Senior American correspondent's Briefings on Budapest, 1956' in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 142, 1996, 6

on Hungary and the mood among people in the Hungarian capital of seven years of rule by Rákosi – ‘Stalin’s best pupil’, as he proudly referred to himself.

After the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (February 1956) and Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’, the Soviet leadership no longer accepted the policy or position of Mátyás Rákosi, the leader of the Hungarian Workers’ Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja* (MDP)). Criticism was also raised against him within Hungary, voiced not the least through the so-called Petőfi Circle, which had been formed by reform-minded students within DISZ (the ‘Association of Working Youth’) in March 1955, during the Imre Nagy Government. The Petőfi Circle organised public debates with growing audiences during the spring and summer of 1956.³ Rákosi was prepared to fight back, but the Russians intervened. In July they imposed Ernő Gerő, another Muscovite Stalinist, as Party leader.⁴ Gerő brought János Kádár and other victims of previous purges back into the leadership. However, the appointment of Gerő did not lead to popular legitimacy, since most Hungarians did not see any major difference between him and Rákosi.⁵

On 6 October László Rajk – a former Interior Minister who had been betrayed by his friend and comrade János Kádár and executed following a Stalinist show trial organised by Rákosi – was posthumously rehabilitated. Together with others, he was given a proper burial, which developed into a large popular demonstration, with tens of thousands of people participating.⁶ From then on, events accelerated in a way that would turn 1956 into a very special year in Hungarian history.

Gerő proved unable to control the rising demands for change. In April the year before, the quite popular Nagy (also a Muscovite, although not one of the exile leaders) had been forced to resign from his post as Prime Minister; in November 1955 he had been expelled from the Party. On 13 October 1956 Gerő was finally forced to accept Nagy’s re-admission into the Party.⁷

On 23 October demonstrations organised by student movements and the Petőfi Circle, with up to 200,000 participants, were met by violence from the ÁVH (the

3 Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, Corvina Osiris, Budapest, 1999, 299. Romsics, 1999, 297, 299 & 482. Bourgin, 1996, 16 & 21

4 Hans-Georg Heinrich, *Hungary: Politics, Economics and Society*, Frances Pinter, London, 1986, 33-34. Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1986 (a), 38. Held, 1992, 220. Rákosi moved to the Soviet Union where he lived the rest of his life. For a discussion on the differences in background and attitudes between Muscovites and Home Communists, see George Schöpflin, ‘Hungary after the Second World War’ in Litván (ed.), 1996, 5-6

5 Lomax, 1984, 75

6 Held, 1992, 221. Antonín Snejdárek & Casimira Mazurowa-Château, *La nouvelle Europe centrale*, Notre Siècle, Paris, 1986, 233. Romsics, 1999, 299-300

7 Snejdárek & Mazurowa-Château, 1986, 232. Gati, 1986 (a), 37. Held, 1992, 219, Lomax, 1984, 73. Romsics, 1999, 295

‘State Protection Authority’⁸ and escalated into a revolutionary process. Fighting continued, and the following day Soviet troops stationed in Hungary intervened on a limited scale. On 25 October people gathered in front of the Parliament building and called on Imre Nagy to address them. Instead, ÁVH troops opened fire and killed hundreds and wounded even more.⁹ The very same day, in the presence of two Russian emissaries, Nagy was re-appointed Prime Minister while Kádár, who was surprisingly enough *not* a Muscovite, replaced Gerő as Party leader.¹⁰

Despite this move, the demands for change, including new elections, reform of the political system, economic reforms and independence were getting louder and more radical. On 27 October Nagy, who until then was still calling the protesters ‘counter-revolutionaries’, finally decided to accept the demands of the students and others. He announced a new Government that included former leaders of the Smallholders Party and began to refer to the events as a national democratic movement.¹¹ On 30 October the Soviet leadership declared itself ready to start discussing the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary, which could be seen as indicating a willingness to reconsider Hungary’s status within the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (or, the ‘Warsaw Pact’). The following day, more Soviet troops entered Hungary. At the same time, the MDP Presidium dissolved the Party and reformed itself as the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt* (MSzMP)). Meanwhile, however, the Soviet leadership was playing a double game. Nagy realised this after he had failed to reach an agreement with the Soviet Ambassador to Hungary, Yuri Andropov. There were also worrying reports about Soviet troop movements. On 1 November Nagy announced in a radio broadcast that Hungary was withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact and from now on considered itself a neutral state.¹² He also requested help from the United Nations, which Hungary had joined the year before.¹³

Kádár, who had secretly left Budapest in Soviet vehicles a few days earlier, ‘[f]aced with the dilemma of becoming a rational traitor or an irrational hero [...] opted for the former’, changed sides, and formed a new Government. On 7 November he entered Budapest together with Soviet troops.¹⁴ Narkiewicz

8 The ÁVH had succeeded the former ÁVO (the ‘State Protection Office’)

9 Held, 1992, 221

10 For a short background to János Kádár’s political career before 1956, see Tőkés, 1996, 17

11 Romsics, 1999, 307-308

12 *ibid.*, 309-310, 482

13 Held, 1992, 221-222

14 Heinrich, 1986, 34-37. Held, 1992, 221-222. Andrew Felkay, *Hungary and the USSR, 1956-1988: Kádár’s Political Leadership*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1989, 131-132. Romsics, 1999, 483

suggests that personal ambition may well have been an important motive behind Kádár's line of action since 'he had always been considered less able and less talented than Nagy'.¹⁵ Kádár later admitted that he was responsible for asking the Soviet Union to send more troops 'in order that the forces of reaction might be crushed'. More than thirty years later, in an interview made shortly after he had been forced to resign in May 1988, Kádár said that he 'had no regrets about any of his actions, including the request for Soviet troops to intervene in 1956'.¹⁶

The 'Hungarian Revolution' had been crushed. Accounts in terms of deaths and casualties vary widely. Official figures speak of 2,500 deaths and around 20,000 casualties. According to some unofficial estimates, as many as 25,000 people were killed, 150,000 were injured and 200,000 fled the country as refugees.¹⁷ As noted by Romsics, the main impact of this fourth wave of Hungarian emigrants in the 20th century was a sharp decline in numbers among the intelligentsia, which drastically reduced 'the country's ability to replenish its pool of better-educated citizens'.¹⁸

As to the age and social stratum of the victims, the picture is relatively clear. Almost 80 per cent of the 2,500 official deaths occurred in Budapest. More than 40 per cent of these were under 25 years old while roughly 60 per cent were manual workers.¹⁹ Neither the United States, nor any other Western power, made any attempt to intervene and, most likely, never had any intention to do so. This was not only due to their simultaneous involvement in the Suez crisis, which has sometimes been put forward as an explanation for the non-intervention.²⁰ There has been much discussion about the causes of the events in 1956. Some have tended to see it as a loss of mass/popular legitimacy whereas others have seen it as the result of a loss of legitimacy among elites. Lomax regards this as an essentially false dichotomy and analyses the crisis in terms of elite legitimacy e.g. among writers, as essentially a result or an expression of the lack of popular legitimacy.²¹

15 Olga A Narkiewicz, *Petrification and Progress: Communist Leaders in Eastern Europe, 1956-1988*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hertfordshire, 1990, 91. See also Gati, 1986 (a), 172

16 Narkiewicz, 1990, 90-100

17 Heinrich, 1986, 37. Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, 204. Susanne Klausen, 'Den anden revolution: Ungarns vej fra dobbeltsamfund til pluralisme' in *Vandkunsten*, No. 2, 1990, 143

18 Romsics, 1999, 320

19 *ibid.*, 311

20 In a note handed over to the Soviet leaders on 30 October 1956, 'State Secretary John Foster Dulles made it clear that the United States did not regard the states of Eastern Europe, Hungary included, as potential military allies; in other words, it would not intervene'. Romsics, 1999, 309-310

21 Lomax, 1984, 74

The 'October revolution', the 'popular uprising' of 1956 (or the 'counter-revolution' or the 'tragic events' as they were officially called) came to put its mark on Hungarian domestic and foreign policy for more than thirty years.²² As already noted, Kádár's position within the country – as well as Hungary's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the world at large – were strongly affected by what happened during those weeks. 1956 remained a national trauma until, and even after, the fall of the Kádár regime in 1988.

The Party leadership and the people drew different conclusions from these events, and these lessons were later reinterpreted during the decades that followed. For some years, there was a lingering fear among the Hungarian population of a return to Stalinist repression *à la Rákosi* or yet another Soviet intervention – supported or not by the direct use of military means. This, together with a harsh policy implemented by the new leaders, made people cautious or quiet in their criticism of the Kádár regime. Even after coercion was relaxed, 1956 continued to be an obstacle to change. The reason then was not so much that people feared the possible consequences of a new revolt but, more importantly, that what we may call a new 'social contract' that demanded, and largely led to, political passivity had been implicitly agreed.²³

1956 continued to haunt people who had fought on both sides – not the least Kádár himself. Sometime in 1987 or 1988, when asked to resign, Kádár is quoted as having said: 'You know what will happen then. They'll rehabilitate Imre Nagy'.²⁴ Other members of the Party leadership saw 1956 not only as an obstacle to change but also as a warning not to ignore completely the demands of the people and as a hint that the Party would be wise to make use of the intelligentsia even if the latter were unwilling to support the Party actively. Many Communists were also keen not to provoke a new collapse of the Party similar to the one that followed 1956. Schöpflin notes that, seen in this light, 1956 set limits, albeit not very precisely defined, within which both sides had to operate to 'ensure the survival of the Hungarian political community – this last being the essential shared interest between the two'.²⁵

22 For a more detailed account of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and its consequences I recommend two edited volumes: Bill Lomax (ed.), *Eyewitness in Hungary: The Soviet Invasion of 1956*, Spokesman University Paperback, 34, Nottingham, 1980 gives a personal record of the events whereas György Litván (ed.), *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression 1953-1963*, Longman, London & New York, 1996 gives a more analytical account of the events leading up to 1956 and its aftermath.

23 Klausen, 1990, 143

24 Keith Sword (ed.), *The Times Guide to Eastern Europe*, Times Books, London, 1990, 104

25 George Schöpflin, 'Hungary Between Prosperity and Crisis' in *Conflict Studies*, 136, 1981, 3

Coercion, performance or legitimacy?

A basic assumption underlying my analysis of the domestic strategies used by the Kádár regime to create and maintain political stability is that most Hungarians did *not* consider the Kádár regime legitimate at the time it came to power. I see two main reasons for this. *First*, the regime had been installed through Soviet military and political intervention. Soviet backing had, indeed, been a necessary condition of survival for any post-war regime in Hungary, possibly with the partial exception of the short-lived Nagy regime.²⁶ Hence, during the late 1940s and the early 1950s, the Hungarian regimes had to rely partly on Soviet support, and partly on coercion and repression, in order to maintain political stability

The *second* reason why the Kádár regime was not seen as legitimate was that most Hungarians did not believe in the Marxist-Leninist ideology on which the regime formally based its claims to legitimacy. Although ideological claims were being put forward to legitimise officially the rule of the Communist Party, such claims failed to generate legitimacy among wider strata of the population. After the death of Stalin in March 1953, and Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation campaign in 1956, terror had been abandoned as the primary instrument to ensure popular obedience and a new system had to be developed. Following the defeat of the revolution in 1956, the Hungarian people were even less inclined than previously to accept Communist ideology as a basis for political legitimacy.

One conclusion the regime could draw from what had happened was that repression could not be used indiscriminately to prevent change. Even if the Hungarians had 'gone too far' in 1956 'there was no talk of returning to the dehumanization policy of Stalin'.²⁷ The Kádár regime, therefore, eventually had to realise that, vis-à-vis the Hungarian people, it would have to rely on something other than, or more than, Marxist ideology combined with coercion if it was to stay in power. Seen from this perspective, Kádár's take-over in 1956 did not signal a return to the Rákosi years.

One option for the new regime would have been to try to become legitimate. But did it strive for legitimacy, or did it rely more on coercion or performance oriented strategies? Before trying to answer this question, a distinction should be made between the official and the unofficial basis of legitimacy – or overt and

²⁶ Until the end of October, even Nagy was directly dependent on Soviet approval. Charles Gati, 'Imre Nagy & Moscow, 1953-56' in *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1986 (b), 32

²⁷ Gerner, 1984, 23, 160 & 171

covert modes of legitimation (the latter being referred to only half-secretly). In this connection, Markus observes that there is often a ‘discrepancy between the pattern of legitimating values in terms of which power is claimed and exercised and those in terms of which compliance is in fact granted’. Officially, the Kádár regime certainly claimed to be legitimate, based on Marxist-Leninist ideology. This ideology, according to its believers,

‘transforms the principle of the sovereignty of the people into the sovereignty of the proletariat (on the basis of its historical mission), and then, in a second step, the latter is transformed into the sovereignty of the party (on the basis of its specific knowledge, which confers on it the role of “vanguard”). In this way, a “sovereign prince” is created though the “modern” principles of legitimation are *ideologically* preserved’.²⁸

The regime, thus, would not have to base its power on ‘bourgeois’ democratic procedures, such as multi-party elections, or even on consent. The Party would instead be able to rest its right to rule solely on ideological superiority, or even ideological ‘truth’.²⁹ This way of using ideology reminds me of Dahl’s claim that

‘[a] highly developed reigning ideology usually contains [...] an idealized description of the way in which the system actually works, a version that narrows the gap between reality and the goal prescribed by the ideology’.³⁰

I would assume, however, that privately the Kádár regime never aspired to become legitimate, in the sense of winning popular belief in its *right* to govern. Similar assumptions have been made by, among others, Heller, Schöpflin and Adam.³¹ Nevertheless, two forms of legitimacy may still have been important, namely ‘self-legitimacy’ and ‘legitimacy in the eyes of the bureaucracy’.

In their ideologically based claims to power, many Communist regimes of Eastern and Central Europe reverted to what ‘non-believers’ would equate with a pre-modern conception of legitimacy, as discussed in chapter two.³² However, they were not entirely satisfied with this form of legitimation.³³ The Kádár regime relied mainly on coercion and performance and eventually tried to acquire some

28 Markus, 1982, 84 & 86

29 Di Palma, 1991, 50

30 Dahl, 1984 (4th edition), 55

31 Ágnes Heller, ‘Phases of Legitimation in Soviet-type Societies’ in Rigby & Fehér (eds), 1982, 51. Schöpflin, George, ‘The end of communism in Eastern Europe’ in *International Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 1990, 5-6. Jan Adam, *Why did the Socialist System Collapse in Central and Eastern Europe? The Case of Poland, the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary*, Macmillans, Basingstoke, 1995, 112

32 Di Palma, 1991, 55

33 Gerner, 1984, 7-8

kind of acceptance by the people through the use of the 'Alliance policy' and economic reforms, which will be discussed later.

These tactics never amounted to any attempt to give people a real choice between different parties or regimes. Rather, people were 'free to choose' between accepting and rejecting the regime, although rejection would have direct consequences for the people rather than for the regime. According to Markus, one of the most characteristic features of East European societies was precisely the presence of a well-developed system of covert legitimation.³⁴ Apart from the official way of legitimising and self-legitimising the Communist regime, there was a need for other strategies, or 'legitimation procedures', defined as 'the methods used to convert the normatively postulated legitimacy into real legitimacy'.³⁵ Since legitimacy, in the true sense of the word, was hardly an option and since the regime strove to maintain political stability, while resorting less to active use of coercion, it had to rely more on performance as a means to achieving political stability.³⁶ I do not believe that the Kádár regime tried to achieve legitimacy. Rather, it opted for acceptance by the people based partly on coercion but also, and increasingly so, on performance. In this chapter, we will trace a development over time in the regime's choice of stabilising strategy.

Rather than focusing on *legitimacy* I will, therefore, concentrate on *stability* and discuss the two main strategies used – coercion and performance, with demobilisation and co-option, economic reforms and, minor, political reforms as the key components. To some extent, we can associate these strategies with more or less distinct time periods. However, we should also be aware that, at any given time, the regime was relying on a combination of the two strategies in order to achieve stability, although their relative importance varied.

Each strategy will be briefly described and then discussed from two aspects – the reasons behind the regime's choice of the strategy and the extent to which each strategy contributed to political stability. I will also discuss why the Kádár regime did not use nationalism in order to improve its perceived performance – until it was too late – and, finally, the implicit use of negative legitimation as a means of maintaining stability.

³⁴ Markus, 1982, 88

³⁵ Georg Brunner, 'Legitimacy Doctrines and Legitimation Procedures in East European Systems' in Rigby & Fehér (eds), 1982, 27-28

³⁶ Gerner, 1984, 8

Coercion

Kádár was in a weak position when he assumed power. He was hated in Hungary as well as abroad. On 1 November 1956 he had become leader of the newly established MSzMP – and, thus, of Hungary. However, he had no clear idea how to deal with the situation, as can be seen from the many self-contradictory statements during his first month in power. Perhaps owing to this uncertainty, Kádár initially appears to have been ‘genuinely seeking a reconciliation with the people, and aspiring to establish his regime not through violent repression of the revolution, but through a consolidation to be achieved by incorporating many of its aims, organisations and even leaders’. He tried to reach a compromise with Imre Nagy, with other political parties and with leaders of the workers’ councils. He failed, however, not only due to a lack of response from his various opponents, but also because many leading Hungarian, not to mention Soviet, Communists did not approve of the goals of the revolution.³⁷ Hence, Kádár had to change both his goals and his means.

The following years were, therefore, marked by Kádár’s attempts and wish to eliminate the ‘counter-revolutionary threat’. Between November 1956 and December 1959, more than 30,000 people were imprisoned or interned without trial. Many thousands were deported to the Soviet Union, while as many as 2,000 people may have been executed.³⁸

Three main battles had to be fought. *First*, Kádár had to establish effective control over the country by sub-ordinating three groups of people – the *workers*, organised in workers’ councils, the *intellectuals*, who had, as so many times before in the history of Hungary, played their part in bringing about the revolution and, finally, the *farmers* who were not disposed to cooperate with a regime that wanted to re-collectivise the land that had been de-collectivised and re-privatised in the autumn of 1956.³⁹ In early December there was a wave of arrests of people who were active in the workers’ councils, and on 9 December the central workers’ council was banned and its leaders arrested. The workers responded by declaring a 48-hour general strike and the Government, in response, declared martial law.⁴⁰ In February 1957 Kádár succeeded in breaking the power of the independent Workers’ councils set up in 1956 by breaking up the workers’ guard units and

37 Lomax, 1984, 78. Romsics, 1999, 318

38 Schöpflin, 1981, 2. Heinrich, 1986, 39. There is still disagreement about how many people were executed. According to Elemér Hankiss the number is smaller – around 400. Elemér Hankiss, *East European Alternatives*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990 (a), 276. Romsics, 1999, 320

39 To this list we may add the Catholic priesthood. Romsics, 1999, 326-327

40 Lomax, 1984, 80-81

setting up a workers' militia led by former ÁVO officers.⁴¹ The farmers had to wait two years 'for their turn', while Kádár was busy silencing critical voices of intellectuals and writers. In December 1958, however, the Central Committee (CC) decided to increase the collectivisation of land, and in 1962 further efforts in this direction resulted in over 90 per cent of the arable land being collectivised.⁴² Kádár also made use of economic incentives to gain support, including pay rises (18 per cent on average) for workers, miners and teachers and other incentives directed towards the farmers.⁴³

Kádár's *second* struggle was a matter of reconstructing the Party while establishing his power within it. This involved recruiting new and reliable members since so many had left the Party in 1956. Of the previous 900,000 MDP members, less than 40,000 remained in December 1956.⁴⁴ From then on, membership figures rose rapidly; at the 7th Party Congress held in November-December 1959 the MSzMP counted more than 400,000 members.⁴⁵ Khrushchev visited the Congress and declared his support for Kádár and his centrist approach while singling out Rákosi's leadership as a major reason behind the uprising in 1956. Three years later, the Party had over 500,000 members of whom about 38 per cent had joined after 1956.⁴⁶ The trend continued for new people, rather than pre-1956 members, to join the Party. Of the 662,000 members in 1970 more than 50 per cent had joined after 1956 and among the 800,000 members in the 1980s this proportion had increased even further.⁴⁷

Kádár also had to establish control within the Party leadership while avoiding the excesses of both old (Stalinist) Rákosi supporters and the supporters of Nagy – the latter being too keen on political reform. A delicate balance thus had to be struck, and purges were carried out against both groups.⁴⁸ At a meeting in December 1956, the Provisional CC of the Communist Party had decided to target 'deviationists both of the left (so-called "dogmatists") and right ("revisionists") within the Party itself'. This was the first clear formulation of the war on two fronts which was to become a characteristic feature of the Kádár regime.⁴⁹

41 Heinrich, 1986, 39

42 Lomax, 1984, 83-84

43 Romsics, 1999, 321

44 Judy Batt, *Economic Reform and Political Change in Eastern Europe: A Comparison of the Czechoslovak and Hungarian Experiences*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988, 110

45 Felkay, 1989, 128-132

46 Batt, 1988, 112-113. Snejdárek & Mazurowa-Château, 1986, 236

47 Romsics, 1999, 323

48 Heinrich, 1986, 39, 45-46

49 Romsics, 1999, 319

In addition to these purges, Kádár was using both the Stalinists and the reformists and playing them off against each other. It is probably in this context that we should see the treatment of Imre Nagy. After the second Soviet invasion, Nagy had found refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest. Kádár personally gave him a *carte blanche* allowing him to leave the Embassy and go into exile abroad. However, when leaving the Embassy on 22 November 1956, Nagy was arrested by Russian security personnel and flown to Romania, where he was imprisoned.⁵⁰ In April 1957 he was brought back to Hungary. After a secret trial, starting in February 1958, he was executed on 16 June 1958 together with his Defence Minister from 1956 Pál Maléter and Miklós Gimes, a journalist and close ally of Imre Nagy who edited the *Oktober Huszonharmadika* during the uprising. At this point in time, József Szilágyi, who had been the head of Nagy's secretariat during the uprising, had already been executed.⁵¹ Finally, a *third* struggle concerned the need to earn international recognition, which the regime initially lacked.⁵² This will be further discussed in the next section as well as in chapter five. Schöpflin, describing the means used and assessing what effect Kádár's first years in power had on political stability, concludes:

'Kádár's tactics were to use every possible lie and all forms of coercion to destroy the opposition to his rule. By the early 1960's, Hungarian society was thoroughly cowed.'⁵³

Coercion thus contributed to political stability, although there was a widespread tendency for people to begin, or to continue, to keep a distance from the regime and its official propaganda while being disillusioned by politics at large. These years made most people accept that their hopes and goals of 1956 had been defeated. They realised that 'demands for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and the dismantling of the one-party state, were now [...] unattainable within the existing balance of political and military forces in Europe'. Thus, despite Kádár's success in pacifying the country, re-establishing Party control and consolidating governmental power, he had not succeeded in winning consent – either from the elite or from the people at large.⁵⁴

50 Heinrich, 1986, 39. Narkiewicz, 1990, 91. Thomas Schreiber, *Hongrie: La transition pacifique*, Le Monde-Éditions, Paris, 1991, 19. Lomax, 1984, 79

51 Romsics, 1999, 483. Litván (ed.), 1996, 199, 204 and (210). László Kontler, *A History of Hungary: Millennium in Central Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2002, 433

52 Romsics, 1999, 326-327

53 George Schöpflin, 'Conservatism and Hungary's Transition' in *Problems of Communism*, January-April 1991, 60

54 Lomax, 1984, 84-86

The 'Alliance policy' – demobilisation, co-optation and paternalism

'Co-opt those we can, neutralize those we cannot co-opt, and isolate those we cannot neutralize.'⁵⁵ – A description of the cultural policies under György Aczél who was responsible for this policy area for several decades⁵⁶

From the early to mid-1960s, the regime became increasingly discriminating in its use of coercion, although coercion was never completely disbanded under Kádár – a point to which I will return later. Lomax summarises this development as a kind of barter trade through which '[i]n return for the population's acquiescence in Communist rule, and Hungary's continued membership of the Eastern bloc, the regime was prepared to make a whole range of concessions to society that would go far beyond anything tolerated elsewhere in Soviet Eastern Europe'.⁵⁷ I see five main reasons for this change in emphasis:

Firstly, as we have already touched upon, Kádár personally seems, as early as 1956, to have advocated some caution in the use of repression and coercion.

Secondly, during the years of coercion, Kádár had succeeded in establishing effective control both over the Party and the country at large. Thereafter, the nature of the task changed from *establishing* to *maintaining* political stability. Performance is likely to have been regarded as a more efficient means for reaching this objective.

Thirdly, there was a demand for an improved cadre policy where competence and knowledge would be allowed to play a more prominent role at the expense of ideological rigour and Party membership. Therefore, changes were needed in order for Kádár to be able to recruit qualified 'non-believers'. The social background and the political reliability of a person were no longer the only criteria. Slowly, the importance of expertise and skills began to be recognised. This could be seen, not so much in Parliament where Party members always accounted for at least 70 per cent of the MPs, but in enterprises and even in public institutions where non-Party members were less rare even in relatively senior positions.⁵⁸

55 Ivan Volgyes, *Hungary: A Nation of Contradictions*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1982, 89

56 Aczél was deputy Minister of Culture (1957-67) and head of cultural policy within the Party (1967-74). He was a close ally of Kádár's and 'in charge of the "intelligentsia policy" of the Party'. Miklós Szabó, 'Kádár's Pied Piper' in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 147, 1997

57 Lomax, 1984, 85-86

58 Romsics, 1999, 335-336

Fourthly, a new wave of de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union allowed Kádár to get rid of some, or most, of the old Stalinists in the Party leadership.⁵⁹ These people had initially been useful servants, and a counter-weight to the reformists. Now, Kádár no longer needed them.⁶⁰ Reflecting this, the CC adopted a resolution condemning the personality cult and the show trials before 1956. Rákosi, Gerő and seventeen others were expelled from the Party while Party member (no others) victims of previous purges were rehabilitated.⁶¹

Finally, for reasons mostly linked to economics and trade, Kádár tried to improve Hungary's relations with the West. In this context, a less repressive policy may have been seen as a useful tool to convey an image abroad of a less oppressive regime. The regime decided to respect the citizens' need for a certain degree of privacy and security from the state, improved living standards and some measure of private ownership.

Kádár's first step was an attempt to dissociate himself from the past. Between 1960 and 1963, several authors who had been imprisoned in the aftermath of 1956 were released. On 22 March 1963 a final amnesty was proclaimed for political crimes committed in the autumn of 1956. However, 'significant categories of prisoners were excluded from its terms'.⁶² These steps were taken in parallel to, and partly as a result of, an opening to the West. In September 1960 Kádár visited New York together with Khrushchev and gave a speech at the UN General Assembly on 3 October. He spoke about the amnesty that had been proclaimed previously that year and stated that Hungary wanted to comply with the UN Charter of human rights. Despite protests from a number of delegations, this was a turning point for Kádár in terms of foreign relations with the West. Two years later the US delegation to the UN proposed that the 'Hungarian issue' should be regarded as closed, which the General Assembly accepted. In 1963 Belgium, France and the UK, followed in 1964 by Canada, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland, upgraded their diplomatic missions in Hungary to ambassadorial level.⁶³

A second major step was an attempt by the regime to reach an agreement with society on a new 'social contract'. As early as September 1961 Kádár tried to reach out to the Hungarian people.⁶⁴ To this end, he twisted around an old

59 Schöpflin, 1986, 105

60 Lomax, 1984, 86

61 Romsics, 1999, 332

62 Lomax, 1984, 86. Heinrich, 1986, 40. Narkiewicz, 1990, 93. Schreiber, 1991, 25. A first partial amnesty for political prisoners had been declared on 3 April 1959 and a second one on 1 April 1960. Romsics, 1999, 484

63 Romsics, 1999, 332

64 Schreiber, 1991, 22-23. Lomax locates this declaration to a meeting in December with the People's

Leninist saying, frequently quoted by Rákosi. He now proclaimed that ‘he who is not against us is with us’. This was later referred to as the essence of ‘the Alliance policy’.⁶⁵ Echoing Kádár’s new slogan, ideology was no longer expected to play as prominent a role as before. From now on, Socialist slogans and class struggle terminology were used less frequently.

In this regard, the 8th Party Congress held on 20–24 November 1962 signalled a turning point. A majority of the leading people in the Party were now loyal to the new course, and the ‘silent funeral of class struggle terminology was an important symbolic victory for the new line’.⁶⁶ In Kádár’s own words, ‘every rational person must understand that a whole nation cannot be suspect’.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the regime no longer, to the same extent as before, expected people to support the Party and the regime actively. From now on, silent acquiescence was, in most cases, considered sufficient. Gati noted that the regime was not really looking for enthusiastic or active support but was satisfied with people’s passive tolerance: ‘Mindful of the tragic experiences of 1956, it tries to shape but it does not attempt to change a defeated people’.⁶⁸

Kádár’s new line was also reflected in a milder cultural climate. This opened the way to the publication of previously unacceptable literary works.⁶⁹ No longer were the intellectuals required to defend the system at all costs. They could now openly say that the system was far from perfect, provided that they recognised that there was no feasible alternative.⁷⁰ The two main taboos still in place concerned the political system itself and Hungary’s subordinate relationship with the Soviet Union.⁷¹ Thus, although the system could not be criticised as such, its effects could. The negative impact of this, from a democratic point of view, was that intellectuals were thoroughly demotivated and that state censorship was replaced by self-censorship.⁷²

It is interesting to see how well Kádár’s new motto was received by many Hungarians. Intellectuals, as well as people at large, ‘exhausted by the upheavals

Patriotic Front (PPF). Lomax, 1984, 85

65 Narkiewicz, 1990, 93. Cf. Schöpflin, 1981, 3. As an irony of fate, it may even have been Imre Nagy who originally coined this slogan (Held, 1992, 223).

66 Heinrich, 1986, 47. Batt, 1988, 114. Romsics, 1999, 333

67 Kádár, János in *Népszabadság*, 21 March 1964 quoted in Gati, 1986 (a), 161

68 Gati, 1986 (a), 160

69 Robert Manchin, & Iván Szelényi, ‘Eastern Europe in the “Crisis of Transition”: The Polish and Hungarian Cases’ in Bronislaw Misztal (ed.), *Poland after Solidarity: Social Movements versus the State*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, 1985, 93

70 Schöpflin, 1992, 97

71 George Schöpflin (ed.), *Censorship and Political Communication in Eastern Europe: A Collection of Documents*, Frances Pinter, London, 1983, 142

72 Schöpflin, 1992, 97. Lomax, 1984, 88

of revolution, repression, and the enervating posture of silent “inner emigration”, responded positively since they wanted to return to some kind of normality, ‘even at the price of self-censorship’.⁷³

As already noted, a major reason behind Kádár’s new policy was the need to recruit new people for work in the administration. Intellectuals were needed within the state apparatus to support the system and to improve the quality of the administration. Kádár’s Alliance policy was, therefore, designed to allow the technical intelligentsia to assume a more prominent role in industrial management and administration. In order to secure at least passive support from that potentially critical stratum of society, the MSzMP also tried to co-opt a sufficient number of intellectuals.⁷⁴ Before its 8th Congress, the Party launched an invitation to ‘those sectors of society which previously did not sympathise with and even opposed its objectives, to join in helping to build socialism’.⁷⁵ The strategy was generally based more on co-option than on coercion,⁷⁶ and its essence is expressed in Kádár’s statement:

‘What a convinced person is able to do for a good cause cannot be done by command, by briefing and least of all by threats. For the implementation of our policy we must continue to rely on persuading people.’⁷⁷

Besides opposition, which was not a very attractive option for the individual in terms of the likely consequences, a well-qualified Hungarian now faced two options: making a career, although not all the way to the top, without joining the Party, or applying for Party membership – a step that no longer necessarily meant that you had to regard the system, or the regime, as legitimate. Joining the Party ‘became increasingly a mere formality, the consequence partly of mild pressure and partly of calculation’.⁷⁸ During the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, the MSzMP continued to grow. At its 13th Congress, held in March 1985, it counted 871,000 members, or 8 per cent of the population.

Owing to less strict requirements concerning ideological conviction or ‘proletarian background’, Kádár managed to recruit many skilful technocrats to

73 Rothschild, 1989, 204

74 Manchin & Szelényi, 1985, 93. András Bozóki, ‘Intellectuals and Democratization’ in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 132, 1993, 93. Schöpflin, 1986, 107

75 Lomax, 1984, 87

76 Schöpflin, 1986, 107. Cf. Hankiss, 1990 (a), 113

77 János Kádár, *Selected Speeches and Interviews*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1985, 450–451 quoted in Gati, 1986 (a), 162

78 Heller, 1982, 60–61

key posts.⁷⁹ As noted by Schöpflin, the Alliance policy provided the technical intelligentsia with a certain amount of power, status, and privileges whereas the Party got access to (economic) expertise and ‘by engaging the loyalties of the intelligentsia in a relatively low-key fashion the system had stumbled upon a very effective means of legitimation’. In exchange, the intellectuals had to accept certain fundamentals of the system e.g. the leading role of the MSzMP, but with that exception the limits on criticism were fairly relaxed.⁸⁰ Thus, although on the one hand, it was no longer necessary to become a Party member, on the other hand, more and more people decided to become members. One explanation for this virtual paradox is that the top positions were still open almost exclusively to Party members. In addition, many Hungarians’ revulsion against joining became less strong as the ideological fervour of the MSzMP declined.

From the mid-1960s, the Kádár regime could no longer be characterised as a totalitarian regime. By East European standards, the regime was relatively soft and the censorship was fairly lax; there were few political prisoners, particularly if conscientious objectors are excluded from this category. The regime was certainly not democratic, but nor was it totalitarian – a more accurate term would be ‘authoritarian’. Most people did not believe in Marxist ideology but nevertheless had to refrain from open opposition; the new strategy was essentially an attempt to depoliticise society.⁸¹ The political essence of this new ‘social contract’ has been well captured by Ignatus who claims that it meant ‘*le renoncement aux principales revendications de 1956; le renoncement [...] à la liberté, pour avoir en échange quelques libertés*’.⁸²

However, ‘access to tolerance’ varied significantly between different social groups or classes. Miklós Haraszti described this as a form of limited tolerance spreading downward from the top – reaching the elite and the middle class but not the masses.⁸³ In 1984 Lomax observed that although hardly one writer, artist or scholar had been put in prison since the failed trial against Haraszti in 1975, every year hundreds of workers and farmers were still brought to trial

79 Judy Batt, ‘Political Reform in Hungary’ in *Parliamentary Affairs*, No. 4, 1990, 467

80 Schöpflin, 1981, 4. What Schöpflin refers to as ‘legitimation’ I would rather call ‘stabilisation’.

81 George Schöpflin, ‘From Communism to Democracy in Hungary’ in Bozóki, Körösnéyi & Schöpflin (eds), 1992, 97

82 François Fejtő, *La fin des démocraties populaires: Les chemins du post-communisme*, Seuil, Paris, 1992, 176. Cf. Kontler, 2002, 434

83 Miklós Haraszti, *Kései bevezetés a kádárizmusba* (A Belated Introduction to Kádárism), AB Független Kiadó, Budapest, 1982, 20 quoted in Lomax, 1984, 96

‘charged with political incitement often after making casual remarks at work or in a bar against the regime. Similarly, workers imprisoned after 1956 for their part in the revolution are still discriminated against and subject to police surveillance and persecution in a way that would be unthinkable in the cases of released and rehabilitated intellectuals’.⁸⁴

Initially, Kádár’s Alliance policy seems to have contributed significantly to political stability and was probably as close to success as an authoritarian Communist regime may ever get. Furthermore, the Party managed to recruit many competent people. One reason why these tactics initially succeeded, beside the benefits offered, is probably that people now had much lower expectations and, as a result of coercion, were prepared to accept much less than in 1956, opting for survival and passive resistance rather than a new revolution. The Party had also learnt its lesson and realised that it could not allow itself to push people or society too far.⁸⁵

In the short run, the Alliance policy strengthened the regime, which kept a wide discretion in terms of exercising power since there were few fixed criteria. As a consequence, ‘each and every concession remained a concession and could not be transformed into a right’.⁸⁶ Through the Alliance policy and the de-ideologisation of politics, a framework for professionalism and the recruitment of skilled bureaucrats was created. In the long run, this contributed to the birth of a new middle class with its own interests and demands. More and more people became dependent on, but not always loyal to, the Party. Thanks to their competence, they also gradually came to constitute a pressure group vis-à-vis the Party.

Since the regime no longer attached the same importance to ideology, while it still had to stick to it officially, genuine political conviction was substituted by empty rituals and by what critical voices began to refer to as ‘paternalistic rhetoric’. Gradually, the language of the official ideology more or less disappeared from the private sphere and increasingly this also happened in contacts with authorities. Hence, the links between official ideology or philosophy and common-sense philosophy were gradually dissolving.⁸⁷ In the early 1980s, Fehér noted that the Kádár regime was correctly seen as the most liberal of the East European regimes, which he describes as a result of ‘conscious paternalistic concessions

84 Lomax, 1984, 98

85 Schöpflin, 1981, 3

86 Schöpflin, 1992, 97

87 Markus, 1982, 87-88

to the population on the part of a leadership which is at least intelligent in its oppressive policy'.⁸⁸

From the early or mid-1980s, in connection with the economic decline, the situation began to change and the Alliance policy backfired. The people whom the Kádár regime had succeeded in recruiting were driven to act by an interest in individual, economic compensation. This had given them a stake in the system but only as long as it could deliver. When the regime started to base its legitimation on prospects of material performance, rather than on more abstract ideological long-term goals, it became easier for people to check whether the regime had met its objectives.⁸⁹ The comparatively less restricted debate opened up for discussion and even dissent. In the longer run, a basis was thus created for the emergence of a political opposition. The intelligentsia, not least through the experience it developed under Kádár, was one important factor behind the erosion of the power base of the regime towards the end of the 1980s.

Economic reforms

'A therapy for the sclerosis of the planned economy; a light drug to overcome embitterment; a stimulant that mobilizes new forces; a substitute, a hope, a palliative – economic reform is all of these, strangely mixed together. Tolerated, encouraged, slowed down, it has become a giant fact of life affecting every part of the society.'⁹⁰

As already stated, Kádár was unable to base political stability on either ideology or coercion exclusively. Building on the foundation laid by the Alliance policy, he began to rely mainly on economic performance. The financial support and cheap energy provided by the Soviet Union was insufficient to secure an efficient and prosperous economy. Hence, from the mid-1960s, experiments with economic reforms were introduced.⁹¹ Batt sees these reforms as an attempt to stabilise the regime, whose power was essentially based on coercion and loyalty to the Soviet Union, and to build legitimacy of the system based on 'the party's efficacy as the agent of economic and social modernization and provider of levels of personal consumption and social welfare comparable to those of the West'.⁹²

88 Ferenc Fehér, 'Paternalism as a Mode of Legitimation in Soviet-type Societies' in Rigby & Fehér (eds), 1982, 69

89 Di Palma, 1991, 61

90 Enzensberger, 1989, 119

91 For a detailed account of the economic reforms under Kádár, see Ivan T Berend, *The Hungarian Economic Reforms 1953-1988*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990

92 Judy Batt, 'The End of Communist Rule in East-Central Europe: A Four-Country Comparison' in *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1991, 369

I will not focus exclusively on the economic reasons behind the eventual failure of these reforms. Instead, I will analyse how the reforms were used as part of a strategy to improve performance, thereby possibly creating stability, and to what extent this strategy was successful.

Economic reforms had been debated as early as 1953 and even more intensely in 1956 but the debate had come to a halt following the revolution.⁹³ In December 1963 Rezső Nyers, who had been appointed Finance Minister the year before,⁹⁴ was assigned to draw up an economic reform programme. Nyers's report was presented in November 1965; in May 1966, his proposals for new principles of economic steering – the *New Economic Mechanism (NEM)* or *Új Gazdasági Mechanizmus* – were approved by the CC. The reforms were to be introduced on 1 January 1968, although they were modified significantly during the 18 months that preceded their introduction.⁹⁵

The reforms reflected an insight that a shift was needed in the economy, from extensive growth based on heavy industry to light industry and the production of consumer goods.⁹⁶ The Hungarian Government nourished hopes that the reforms would free productive resources by reducing the scope of centralised management, thus creating incentives for more market-oriented behaviour at enterprise level.⁹⁷ The reforms were radical, by East European standards, and included the abolition of quantitative planning targets and central resource allocation.⁹⁸

Despite these important steps, central intervention continued and Hungary's highly concentrated industrial structure did not change fundamentally. Little emphasis was put on competition or entrepreneurship; the Party preserved its influence at enterprise level and in society at large. Most importantly, there was no intention to reform the political system.⁹⁹ Instead of the former central plan, each enterprise now had to reach an agreement with the branch ministry, which decided on issues such as supplies, subsidies and market shares. However, enterprises were given no incentives to raise their productivity or to improve the quality of their products. Therefore, the policy contributed to preserving the

93 Gerner, 1984, 92. Guy Sorman, *Sortir du socialisme*, Fayard, 1990, 272. Stephen R Burant (ed.), *Hungary: A Country Study*, Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, Washington D C, 1990 (2nd edition), 55. Lomax, 1984, 89

94 Batt, 1988, 126

95 Heinrich, 1986, 41, 47. Margit Nielsen, 'Den ungarske reformproces (siden 1956)' in Egon Jensen & Margit Nielsen, *Ungarn: Et reformland*, Geografforlaget, Brenderup, 1990 (a), 26

96 Lomax, 1984, 89

97 Rudolf L Tőkés, 'Hungarian Reform Imperatives' in *Problems of Communism*, September-October 1984, 1-2

98 Nigel Swain, 'Hungary' in White, Batt & Lewis (eds), 1993, 67

99 C M Hann, 'Introduction' in Hann (ed.), 1990 (a), 4

conservative and bureaucratic politics although, on the surface, an element of market economy had been introduced.¹⁰⁰

However, the first three years of reform recorded important progress in some fields. The foreign trade balance turned positive while the production of agricultural and consumer goods began to satisfy consumers' needs better than before. Soon, however, the reforms led to excessive import of technology and consumer products from the West, while there were more and more uncompleted investments. Significant changes also occurred in the structure and distribution of income.¹⁰¹ Partly but not only reflecting this, not all key members of the Party were in favour of the economic reforms. Later on, this would lead to a power struggle between different groups within the leading circles of the Party.¹⁰²

Reforms brought to a halt

The reforms also met with resistance from the trade unions and managers in some of the large enterprises in coalition with bureaucrats in ministries who saw the reforms as a threat to their power.¹⁰³ Enterprise managers were disturbed by the new competition for materials and labour from smaller companies, some of which were linked to the farm cooperatives that had emerged with the reform.¹⁰⁴ Many of the Party secretaries were dependent on the support from heavy industry and may have felt forced to put political concerns ahead of economic rationality.¹⁰⁵ Reflecting this, and the fact that Kádár did not have full control over the Party, the reforms were brought to a halt. From the end of 1972, a coalition of anti-reform groups within the CC managed to dominate economic policy and succeeded in removing a number of key people closely associated with the economic reforms.¹⁰⁶ In November 1972 the CC took decisions to the effect that fifty large enterprises, responsible for about half the total industrial output and export production, were brought back under direct ministerial control. It also decided to raise wages and return to more centrally set prices.¹⁰⁷ The years from 1972 to 1979 have, therefore, been described as a period of 'Recentralisation'.¹⁰⁸ Despite these measures, which clearly indicated a halt to the reforms, 'the language and external façade of the

100 Sword (ed.), 1990, 99

101 Heinrich, 1986, 41

102 László Bruszt, '1989: The Negotiated Revolution of Hungary' in Szoboszlai (ed.), 1991, 224

103 Heinrich, 1986, 48. Felkay, 1989, 232

104 Batt, 1988, 271

105 Sword (ed.), 1990, 99

106 Batt, 1990, 465

107 Batt, 1988, 267. Felkay, 1989, 231

108 Rothschild, 1989, 205. Heinrich, 1986, 29. Schöpflin, 1986, 109. Gati, 1986 (a), 165

reform were never disowned and the reformists were only partially purged'.¹⁰⁹ Lomax explains that although those who opposed the reform were referred to as the 'workers' opposition', since they were criticising the growing inequalities and consumerism, they were, in fact, representing large state enterprises and Party cadres whose positions were threatened by the removal of state subsidies and protection of these enterprises.¹¹⁰

We should also mention that the Soviet leaders were not always in favour of Kádár's economic experiments. Although both Khrushchev and Brezhnev had accepted Kádár's experimenting with economic reform Moscow's attitude remained ambiguous.¹¹¹ Hence, additional reasons behind the slowing down of the reforms in the mid-1970s were the suspicion and resistance among Brezhnev and other leading Soviet decision-makers.¹¹² During a visit to Moscow in early 1972, Kádár was strongly criticised for 'the hold that petty-bourgeois notions had gained in Hungary, the return of small-capitalist conditions to agriculture, lack of concern for social justice, and general lack of vigilance'.¹¹³

The slowing down, or even reversal, of the economic reforms was also reflected in a harsher cultural and ideological climate.¹¹⁴ In November 1973 Rezső Nyers and György Aczél, the latter being responsible for cultural policy, were removed from the CC Secretariat. In March 1974 the CC degraded Nyers and appointed him head of the Economic Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Science. In 1975, at the 11th Party Congress, Nyers had to leave the Politburo. At the same Congress, Prime Minister Jenő Fock delivered a self-critical speech, and in May he was replaced by György Lázár. In 1973 and 1974 several intellectuals were also beset by an ideological clampdown.¹¹⁵ This included members of the so-called Budapest school (including Ágnes Heller and János Kis), György Konrád and Iván Szelényi, who were arrested after the police had found copies of their manuscript *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, and Miklós Haraszti, the latter being charged with 'incitement to subversion' for distributing his book *A Worker in a Worker's State*, which was based on his experiences working in a Budapest factory.¹¹⁶

109 Schöpflin, 1981, 5

110 Lomax, 1984, 91

111 Gati, 1986 (a), 174

112 Hankiss, 1990 (a), 276. Tőkés, 1984, 2. Felkay, 1989, 232

113 Romsics, 1999, 354

114 Batt, 1990, 465

115 *ibid.*, 465. Batt, 1988, 269. Lomax, 1984, 92-93. Romsics, 1999, 354

116 Batt, 1988, 269. Lomax, 1984, 91-92. Felkay, 1989, 236. Romsics, 1999, 393

A second wave of reforms

In 1978 new plans were being drawn up for implementing the economic reforms. This followed the dismissal from the CC Secretariat of Béla Biszku, a reform opponent and hardliner who was also possibly a rival to Kádár.¹¹⁷ The recentralisation of the economy was now brought to a halt since ‘finally Hungarians recognised that even they could not repeal the law of supply and demand with impunity and concluded that a return to world prices was inevitable’.¹¹⁸ Hence, the period from 1979 to 1981 has been described as a period of ‘NEM Reinvigoration’.¹¹⁹

It was now officially admitted that the NEM had really been frustrated during the previous years, and a new attempt was made to reduce the centralisation of industry and bring about a more determined price reform.¹²⁰ These decisions were taken towards the end of 1978, and the Hungarian economic decision-makers had to adapt to changes in the world economy, including ‘stagflation’, high interest rates, and shrinking demand for Hungarian hard-currency exports. Measures were needed to restore Hungary’s competitiveness abroad without reducing living standards unacceptably.¹²¹ A major reason behind the reinvigoration of the NEM was probably the dramatic growth in Hungary’s foreign debt. Between 1973 and 1978, the debt increased from US\$2.3 to 7.6 billion.¹²² Other reasons behind the policy changes were ‘higher raw material costs, shrinking export earnings and stagnating productivity’.¹²³ The 12th Party Congress, which was held in March 1980, supported the reform measures and gave the highest priority to an austerity programme intended to improve the balance of payments.¹²⁴

Despite these new efforts, the Hungarian economy did not grow and even stagnated in 1980 and 1981 while real wages fell or stagnated 1979-81.¹²⁵ The five-year plan for 1981-85 indicated only a one per cent yearly increase in consumption and low growth generally.¹²⁶ GDP and industrial production continued to fall during the first half of the 1980s while consumer prices went up and real wages fell (Cf. Table 4.1). At this point in time, the more pronounced support for the

117 Lomax, 1984, 94

118 Schöpflin, 1981, 6

119 Cf. Heinrich, 1986, 29

120 Hann, 1990 (a), 6

121 Tökés, 1984, 2

122 Klausen, 1990, 144

123 Tökés, 1984, 2

124 Heinrich, 1986, 48

125 Schöpflin, 1981, 12

126 *ibid.*, 6

reforms from the KGB chief Yuri Andropov, who replaced Brezhnev in 1982, did not really help in economic terms.¹²⁷

Table 4.1. – Annual growth rates (per cent) in Hungary¹²⁸

	1971-75	1976-80	1981-85	1986-89
GDP	6.3	3.2	1.8	1.1
Industrial production	6.3	3.4	1.1	1.3
Consumer prices	2.8	6.3	6.7	11.6
Real wages	3.3	0.8	-0.8	-0.6

In addition to the continuing decline in growth and industrial production, rising consumer prices (inflation) and falling real wages, foreign debt (and the interest burden) continued to rise. By 1989, Hungary had the highest per capita debt among the Socialist countries.¹²⁹ The consequences of the growing debt have been summarised as follows:

‘Kádár’s greatest mistake was that he did not insist on using the loans for the modernization of Hungary’s industry. Instead, the loans were used for subsidizing products that otherwise could not be sold, especially for products delivered to the Soviet Union. Therefore Hungary’s loans were actually helping the Brezhnev leadership postpone *their* economic reform program.’¹³⁰

In 1988 the grave economic problems led the Hungarian regime even to introduce income and value-added taxes while raising prices drastically and introducing other austerity measures.¹³¹

127 Romsics, 1999, 357

128 Adam, 1995, 140. Cf. Romsics, 1999, 353

129 Romsics, 1999, 358

130 Joseph Held, ‘Hungary: 1945 to the Present’ in Held (ed.), 1992, 224

131 Barany, 1995 (a), 186-187

**Table 4.2. – Gross convertible
currency debt (US\$ billion)¹³²**

1971	1.51
1974	3.11
1977	5.23
1980	9.09
1983	8.25
1984	8.84
1985	11.76
1986	15.09
1987	17.74
1988	17.35
1989	20.31
1990	21

There are several reasons why this second round of economic reforms failed to provide a cure for Hungary's economic problems. *Firstly*, Hungary is a small country, poor in raw material and energy sources and highly dependent on imports. Hence, the results of the NEM were always heavily dependent on Hungary's foreign economic relations and international economic trends. The initial positive results of the reforms had been strongly influenced by the international economic situation, while the deterioration in the latter part of the 1970s to a large extent had its roots in the oil crisis. Economic growth was maintained only at the cost of increasing indebtedness to the West.¹³³ In the early 1980s, however, the domestic economic situation was much less favourable than it had been in 1968. The 'second oil crisis' at the end of the 1970s, which also resulted in price increases for Soviet oil, followed a 20 per cent deterioration in Hungary's terms of trade between 1973 and 1980 (comparable to a 10 per cent loss in national income).¹³⁴ Hungarian products had also become less competitive in the West, which led to a further growing trade deficit.¹³⁵

132 Nigel Swain, 'Hungary's Socialist Project in Crisis' in *New Left Review*, No. 176, 1989, 15. Adam, 1995, 154. Romsics, 1999, 358. Sword (ed.), 1990, 99

133 Hann, 1990 (a), 6. Schöpflin, 1981, 6

134 Gerner, 1984, 93

135 Barany, 1995 (a), 186-187

Secondly, the reforms introduced to allow enterprises to trade directly with their counterparts abroad did indeed facilitate trade with the West. At the same time, however, they made trade with their CMEA counterparts, which continued to be important not only for political reasons, increasingly difficult.¹³⁶

Thirdly, although this was not different from the situation in 1968, enterprises hardly had any incentives to produce goods that could compete on the world market in terms of quality and technology. Failing to generate export-earnings made it impossible to keep up the Socialist-inspired welfare system. Even the fathers of these reforms began to think they had initially been too optimistic, or even naive.¹³⁷

Fourthly, perhaps *the* major problem in connection with the NEM was the inconsistency with which the reforms were being implemented. Even if the enterprises had become less dependent on direct state control, supervisory state and Party institutions were left intact 'so that they had merely withdrawn from their previous functions of close running of firms'.¹³⁸ This meant, in essence, that the previous bargaining over plans was replaced by bargaining over credits and subsidies.¹³⁹ A kind of schizophrenia was built into the economic system whereby the economy became, on the one hand, market oriented and private while, on the other, still being very much centrally controlled.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, there was no real control or constraints when it came to budgetary and investment decisions.¹⁴¹

The new rounds of reforms failed to bring economic prosperity to the country and this gradually eroded the support for the Kádár regime. Batt concludes:

'Thus at the end of a decade of modernizing and reformist rhetoric, Hungary [...] faced the 1980s with massive, unmanageable hard currency debts, inefficient and outdated production structures, budget deficits and open inflation. It is from this time that we can date the beginning of the breakdown of the political system'.¹⁴²

In the 1980s, the situation deteriorated even further when the economic mechanism was radically modified. From 1985 the model was pushed in the direction of the Yugoslav self-managed market socialism.¹⁴³

136 Karen Dawisha, *Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and Reform: The Great Challenge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990 (2nd edition) (a) 176

137 Nigel Swain, *Hungary: The Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism*, Verso, London, 1992, 2

138 Schöpflin, 1981, 13

139 Heinrich, 1986, 145

140 Iván Völgyes, 'Ungarn: Steht eine Krise bevor?' in *Osteuropa*, Vol. 37, No. 5, 1987, 333

141 György Szoboszlai, 'Political Transition and Constitutional Changes' in Szoboszlai (ed.), 1991, 198

142 Batt, 1991, 371

143 Swain, 1993, 67

Impact of the reforms on society

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, following the economic reforms, Hungary witnessed the emergence of a second, or parallel, economy. People got involved in economic activities in the semi-private, more dynamic sector, while maintaining their positions within the state-run economy. In this parallel sector or, more accurately, in this 'aspect of economic activity', more entrepreneurship was displayed than in the state sector.¹⁴⁴ In the early 1980s, half the population was involved in the secondary economy and roughly three out of four families received at least part of their income from the second economy. According to another estimate, the second economy accounted for around one-fifth of the national income and one-sixth of the total consumption.¹⁴⁵ It comprised small-scale agricultural production as well as, eventually, private enterprises, which gradually were allowed to employ more people.¹⁴⁶ The second economy was not independent of the first economy. Rather, it all gradually evolved into a matter of mutual dependence. As stability in the cities became partly dependent on the availability of farm products from the private plot, the private producer gained a certain degree of political leverage.¹⁴⁷

The NEM also had social consequences. As a side effect, the second economy gave birth to what has been called the 'second society'. In trying to explain this concept, Hankiss distinguishes between 'first', 'second' and 'alternative' society. In his analysis, whereas first society is characterised by 'vertical organization, downward flow of power, state ownership, centralization, political dominance, legitimacy, etc.' and an alternative society 'would be characterized by fully developed oppositional characteristics (horizontal organization, upward flow of power, the autonomy of social and economic actors, etc.)' second society is defined as 'an intermediate sphere "somewhere between the two"'.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, the relationship between first and second society was characterised by interdependence, just like the official economy depended on the existence of the second economy. Most people, according to Hankiss, took part in both societies which led to a split social existence.¹⁴⁹ Rather than being made up of two different groups of people, first and second society have been described as 'two

144 Fejtő, 1992, 178

145 Schöpflin, 1981, 17-18. C M Hann, 'Second Economy and Civil Society' in Hann (ed.), 1990 (b), 22

146 Nielsen, 1990 (a), 32-33

147 Schöpflin, 1981, 18

148 Ferenc Mészlivetz, 'Emerging Grassroots Movements in Eastern Europe: Toward a Civil Society?' in Gáthy (ed.), 1989 (a), 102-103

149 Klausen, 1990, 145

“dimensions of social existence” of a given society, “regulated by two different sets of organisational principles”.¹⁵⁰ Vajda, in a similar vein, makes a distinction between ‘second society’ and ‘independent society’ claiming that second society is not independent from ‘first society’ or ‘totalitarian society’ but ‘at best [...] an informal relationship inside the first society, which contributed to the functioning of the system. An independent society [...] did not exist in Hungary’.¹⁵¹ Such analyses have also been the target of critical voices. Swain e.g. claims that Hankiss’s models of the first and second society are over-simplistic, although he recognises that the idea of a second society ‘struck a chord with everyday social experience’.¹⁵² Klausen expresses similar reservations while she argues that the material and conscious platform outside the state sector dominated by the Party became the prerequisite for a greater heterogeneity within the Hungarian population opening up for growing political pluralism.¹⁵³

The NEM, together with the Alliance policy, also contributed strongly to the emergence of a new middle class. More space was created for individual economic activities, which counterbalanced bureaucratic structures.¹⁵⁴ Those in favour of economic reforms had argued that such reforms would reward hard-working, well-qualified and ambitious people.¹⁵⁵ Interpretations of the impact of this development diverge widely. Tőkés e.g. sees these reforms as an essential factor behind the birth of the ‘new post-totalitarian Hungarian middle class’.¹⁵⁶

However, the emergence of a second economy, although probably a necessary component in the Kádár regime’s strategy to achieve or maintain consumerist-based legitimacy, also had a number of negative consequences. *Firstly*, people involved in this sector became overworked, which made people less productive in their state-sector activities. For the people who took part in the second economy it is estimated that the number of weekly working hours rose from 28 to over 70 – something which, of course, also had a negative impact on family life. A large proportion of the population were also taking some kind of tranquilizer. *Secondly*, the second economy stimulated a growing materialism at the expense

150 H Gordon Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1989. 160-161. Di Palma, 1991, 66

151 Skilling, 1989, 232

152 Swain, 1992, 13

153 Klausen, 1990, 145-146

154 Szoboszlai, 1991, 198. Fejtő, 1992, 177-178

155 Batt, 1991, 369

156 Rudolf L Tőkés, ‘Hungary’s New Political Elites: Adaptation and Change, 1989-1990’ in Szoboszlai (ed.), 1991, 237

of other values.¹⁵⁷ *Thirdly*, the fact that the second economy was introduced may have delayed economic reform in the first economy as well as political reform. *Fourthly*, a large part (perhaps one third) of the population – mainly from the working class – could not profit directly from the second economy so long as it was bedevilled by inflation.¹⁵⁸ Hence, in the 1970s and even more so in the 1980s, Hungary was facing a problem of growing poverty. As the income gap began to widen after the introduction of the NEM, about 10 per cent of the population was ‘poor’, while 20 per cent could be regarded as ‘very poor’. The situation was particularly difficult for such groups as pensioners, unskilled manual workers in industry and agriculture and the Roma population.¹⁵⁹ More generally, women were over-represented among the poor. According to one estimate in 1986, the proportion of the population whose incomes could not keep pace with inflation in the first part of the 1980s and who, therefore, had to live from incomes under the official poverty line of HUF4,000 per capita, was almost 40 per cent. By then, the official monthly per capita income was HUF5,600.¹⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, the growing income gap, followed by huge differences in living conditions as well as rising inflation, was accompanied by more palpable social tension.¹⁶¹

Finally, while strictly speaking not only a result of the NEM but also reflecting Hungarian pre-war ‘traditions’,¹⁶² suicide and alcoholism became more widespread phenomena. The number of suicides/100,000 people rose from 20 per year around 1950 and 35 per year in 1970 to 45 per year in 1980. Between 1950 and 1984, the annual consumption of alcohol rose from 4.9 to 11.7 litres/capita. Some of the effects can be seen in the number of deaths from liver disease, which increased from 5 (per 100 thousand inhabitants) in 1950 to 13 in 1970 to 44 in 1988. Reflecting these and other trends pointing in the same direction, the average life span of Hungarian men fell from 66.8 years to 65.6 years in the last ten years of the Kádár regime.¹⁶³ The family problems and the growing consumption of alcohol also partly reflected the fact that hundreds of thousands of workers (close to 300,000 during the 1980s) commuted to large cities on a weekly basis while leaving their families behind in the countryside. This caused a

157 Völgyes, 1987, 335

158 Manchin & Szelényi, 1985, 94-95

159 Schöpflin, 1981, 21. Cf. Fejtő, 1992, 178

160 Völgyes, 1987, 334-335

161 Nielsen, 1990 (a), 33. Tőkés, 1984, 6

162 Barany, 1995 (a), 190

163 Elemér Hankiss, ‘What the Hungarians saw first’ in Prins (ed.), 1990 (b), 20. Barany, 1995 (a), 190-193. The number of suicides went down under the first Nagy Government from 25 per 100,000 in 1952 to 21 in 1953 and 18 in 1954. Romsics, 1999, 296 & 386

significant degree of suffering and hardship for many people as traditional family and social structures and ways of life were destroyed.¹⁶⁴

Impact of the reforms on regime stability

To what extent, then, did the economic reforms contribute to political stability? Overall, there was a strong growth in real per capita income, which more than doubled between 1960 and 1980. In the latter half of the 1960s, average annual growth was 6.5 per cent, but it slowed down from the end of the 1970s before stagnating towards the end of the 1980s.¹⁶⁵

Chiefly thanks to the consumer boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the economic reforms contributed to strengthening the regime and helping it to preserve stability. This, however, did not mean that people became more committed to the Socialist ideology on which the Kádár regime officially based its power. It rather 'reflected a shift in the basis of the regime's own claim to legitimacy'.¹⁶⁶ This strengthened the system, as long as it could deliver, however small the stake 'an apartment, a car, a villa, a vacation house, or a German stereo set'.¹⁶⁷ Thus, in the short run, the system could survive, not least because a substantial part of the population had a stake in the system in the sense that they had something to lose if it were to break up.¹⁶⁸ In the long run, however, partial and inconsequent economic reforms could not cure, only partly alleviate, the economic problems caused by the plan economy *à la Russe*. In Kaldor's words,

[w]ithout a central shift in the goals of the plan, which was impossible without political change, the reforms could do little else than marginally increase the efficiency with which the plans were fulfilled. And any serious attempt at political reform was liable to be crushed'.¹⁶⁹

In 1984 Lewis noted that people's belief in their leaders and the political order was largely based on the system's ability to ensure material satisfaction. This, he concluded, 'has provided a very provisional and precarious basis of authority'.¹⁷⁰ Lewis was even then already sceptical about the regime's chances of securing

164 Barany, 1995 (a), 191. Romsics, 1999, 376

165 Romsics, 1999, 376

166 Lomax, 1984, 89

167 Volgyes, 1982, 57

168 András Bozóki, 'The Hungarian Transition in a Comparative Perspective' in Bozóki, Körösenyi & Schöpflin (eds), 1992 (b), 164

169 Mary Kaldor, 'After the Cold War' in *New Left Review*, 1/180, March-April 1990, 29

170 Paul G Lewis, 'Legitimation and Political Crises: East European Developments in the Post-Stalin Period' in Lewis (ed.), 1984, 35

legitimation – mainly due to what he saw as economic problems ‘which are only partly associated with the international recession’.¹⁷¹

Despite mounting criticism, and growing demands for reform, Kádár failed to respond. In 1983 he declared that there would be ‘no reform of the reform’.¹⁷² The trend observed by Lewis, therefore, continued. The economic crisis deepened during the 1980s, and any attempt to reform the economy sooner or later ran into the – domestic or external – obstacles posed by ideological considerations. Hence, the NEM gradually lost its function as a guarantor of political stability. Gerner (1984) was later proven right when he speculated that ‘[i]t is not improbable that a serious setback in the economy and a failure of the “economic compensation” mechanism would entail increased self-organisation of society from below’.¹⁷³

As a result of the ‘first oil crisis’, beginning in 1973-74, the Hungarian economy ran into trouble; economic reforms were temporarily brought to a halt in an attempt to come to grips with the economic difficulties. The political situation was not yet ripe for the alternative cure i.e. to improve the quality of products and stimulate export to the West.¹⁷⁴ As the oil import became more expensive, the Government had little choice but to let consumer prices rise as well. Paradoxically, as pointed out by Kontler, there was some delay in Western recognition of Kádár’s reform efforts. Hence, ‘in the post-1974 years when “reform” became increasingly confined to rhetoric [...] foreign recognition [...] rose to prominence among the factors that comprised the domestic legitimacy of the regime’.¹⁷⁵

The leaders had nourished hopes that it would be possible, at least in the long run, to pay for the growing import of consumer goods through increased export of Hungarian products. As it turned out, this export strategy largely failed. This was partly due to the economic recession in the West together with high West European tariffs, or low import quotas, in sectors where Hungarian products were competitive. Other, just as important, reasons were the low quality of many Hungarian products and the continued existence of ‘traditionally autarchic (CMEA-oriented) development policies and institutions’.¹⁷⁶

171 Lewis, 1984, 1-2

172 Sword (ed.), 1990, 100

173 Gerner, 1984, 125

174 Klausen, 1990, 144

175 Kontler, 2002, 452

176 András Köves, *Central and East European Economies in Transition: The International Dimension*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, 5-6

The Hungarian Government could not go back on its previous commitments to the people. To overcome the gap between growing imports and stagnating exports, the only available solution was to rely on credits from the West. Such a strategy seemed to make economic sense in the mid-1970s, given the low interest rates and the availability of international, in particular Arab, capital. In a relatively short period, Hungary became the country in Central Europe that had accumulated the highest official foreign debt per capita. As in many other countries at this time, a significant part of the credits was not used effectively. Instead, the Government spent the money on boosting consumption, on covering deficits in the state budget or on projects that were unsustainable in the long run.¹⁷⁷

Table 4.3. – Interest on Hungary’s foreign debt /export earnings (per cent)¹⁷⁸

1973	27.0
1980	41.4
1986	75.1

The new wave of reforms from 1979 was partly a response to the growing debt; this was a setback for the anti-reformists within the MSzMP.¹⁷⁹ The regime realised that it would have to accept, or even promote, a higher degree of openness in its economic contacts with Western Europe. This was necessary in order for the Government to be able to deliver the goods it had promised. Ever since the end of the 1940s, when the United States initiated its strategic export control Hungary had been negatively affected by Western restrictions on export. In 1950 the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom), which comprised all the NATO states, except Iceland, as well as Japan was founded. To overcome such difficulties, and in an effort to attract foreign investments, the Hungarian Government now invited foreign companies to engage in joint ventures.¹⁸⁰

The close connection between domestic economic reforms and a growing openness towards the West was hardly a coincidence. Since Hungary is such a small country and strongly dependent on the international economy, the various

177 Adam, 1995, 209

178 *ibid.*, 154

179 Schöpflin, 1981, 11. Klausen, 1990, 144

180 Mary Dau, *Som man spørger... – En vesteuropæisk østpolitik?*, Det sikkerheds- og nedrustningspolitiske udvalg, Copenhagen, 1989, 45-49

periods of progress and setbacks in the reform process cannot be fully understood without referring to the international economy and Hungary's commercial contacts abroad. In fact, whereas the initial success of the NEM was largely the result of a favourable international economic situation, soaring energy prices in the latter part of the 1970s were one major reason behind the falling growth rate in the economy.¹⁸¹ The growing openness towards the West also reflected the improved climate in superpower relations. In Moscow, peaceful coexistence and détente were seen as a means to maintaining political control – without carrying out reforms – while at the same time raising people's living standards through imports from the West, referred to by Brezhnev as the 'foreign reserve'.¹⁸²

The economic reforms did help the Kádár regime to stay in power since they offered an instrument more efficient than Marxist ideology for acquiring popular acceptance. However, following the economic decline from around 1980, not even a new round of reforms could solve the problems. The economic decline could be easily diagnosed through symptoms, such as falling production, rising inflation, and growing foreign debt. This was not only a result of external factors, such as the two oil crises that led to a recession in the West with ensuing reduced demand for Hungarian export products, as well as to higher prices for Soviet oil and deteriorating terms of trade. It also pointed to the inconsistency with which the reforms had been designed and implemented and the fact that the capital borrowed abroad had often been used to keep unprofitable enterprises alive and to maintain living standards.¹⁸³

The economic crisis generated growing demand for more radical reforms and an insight that political reforms were a prerequisite for such reforms. As this insight collided with the stubborn passivity of the Kádár regime, the economic crisis spilled over into a political one. This may well illustrate, what Brzezinski claims is a more general dilemma built into the Communist systems that could not be resolved, namely that 'economic success can only be purchased at the cost of political stability, while political stability can only be sustained at the cost of economic failure'.¹⁸⁴

The social consequences of the economic reforms as discussed above – the emergence of a new middle class with diversified interests, second society with

181 Hann, 1990 (a), 6

182 Kaldor, 1990, 30

183 Romsics, 1999, 355

184 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1989 quoted in Adam, 1995, 7

more room for individual and collective initiatives, and the spread of poverty, alcoholism and family problems – led to growing disappointment with the regime. In the long run, this contributed to the fall of the Kádár regime.

Political reforms – changes in the electoral system

The Alliance policy together with economic reforms were the main strategies used for securing political stability. However, as early as the mid-1960s we also find attempts at modest political reform. In February 1963 the electoral law was changed to allow candidates other than the one proposed by the Party dominated Patriotic People's Front (PPF) to be nominated at local level.¹⁸⁵ In 1966 single-member constituencies were introduced as well as a provision for a multiplicity of candidates in elections.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the PPF retained many opportunities to determine the order of candidates on the ballot paper, and open voting was still a common practice.¹⁸⁷ In 1970 changes similar to those already introduced for local elections were introduced at national level, allowing multiple candidates in the Parliamentary elections. From now on, every citizen had the right to be nominated and the final decision as to which names would figure on the list of candidates was no longer taken exclusively by the PPF but by a public assembly. However, within most constituencies there was no contest for votes and there were few places where multiple candidacies emerged. This was probably as much the result of apathy and scepticism among citizens at large as of continued manipulation by the PPF.¹⁸⁸

Further changes in the electoral law were not introduced until 1983. The new law, based on a constitutional amendment, stipulated that dual or multiple candidacies were now mandatory in each single-member constituency. Candidates should be nominated one month before the general elections in local meetings.¹⁸⁹ The PPF nominated the candidates for Parliament but it was also possible to make spontaneous nominations at two public pre-election meetings.¹⁹⁰ In the elections, voters now had to mark their candidates on the ballot, and unmarked ballots did not count.

185 Schreiber, 1991, 24-25

186 However, in only 9 out of 349 Parliamentary districts, more than one candidate was nominated. Felkay, 1989, 185-186. Romsics, 1999, 334

187 Batt, 1988, 238. Brunner, 1982, 39

188 Schreiber, 1991, 30. Romsics, 1999, 334. Felkay, 1989, 227, Batt, 1988, 238

189 Andrew C Janos, 'Hungary' in Lipset (ed.), 1995 (a), 582. Heinrich, 1986, 65. Nielsen, 1990 (a), 37

190 Felkay, 1989, 257

The legal changes were first put to the test in Parliamentary elections in June 1985. In the 165 electoral districts, 280 candidates were nominated spontaneously. In the event, not one single candidate was elected unanimously, and several candidates failed, or only just managed, to reach the 50 per cent threshold, which meant that a second round had to be held.¹⁹¹ In the 1985 elections, about 10 per cent of the MPs elected had been nominated by the citizens while most of the winning candidates were elected from among senior- or middle-level managers and members of the regional nomenklatura elites – members as well as non-members of the Party.¹⁹²

Different interpretations have been made concerning the motives behind the changes in the electoral law. One motive was probably that the regime needed to get better information about people's real preferences. This, it was thought, would help the regime preserve political stability.¹⁹³ A *second* interpretation is that the change was a response to the economic stagnation and the regime's wish to share responsibility for the economic failure.¹⁹⁴ A *third* interpretation is to see the change as an effort by the Party to carry out its own regeneration. Tőkés e.g. claims that the MSzMP 'deliberately disposed of many scores of conservative apparatchiki by having them run against and be soundly defeated by younger and better qualified sons of several communities'.¹⁹⁵

In any case, even though these changes restored single-member districts and encouraged multiple candidacies they did not in any fundamental way alter the one-party character of the political system.¹⁹⁶ The basic function of Hungarian elections remained basically unchanged. They were not so much a real choice between candidates behind different policies but more of 'a coerced ritual of legitimating intent but little legitimating force'.¹⁹⁷ Hence, it seems unlikely that these changes contributed to stabilising the Kádár regime to any significant extent.

191 Schreiber, 1991, 39. Cf. Völgyes, 1987, 330

192 Swain, 1989, 16. Hankiss, 1990 (b), 21. Tőkés, 1991, 250-251. Géza Andreas von Geyr, *Amerika, Ungarn und das Ende des Kalten Krieges: Die amerikanische Osteuropapolitik 1983-1990, am Beispiel der amerikanisch-ungarischen Beziehungen auf dem Weg Ungarns von einer Volksrepublik zur Demokratie*, tuduv-Verlagsgesellschaft, München, 1993, 24

193 Batt, 1988, 239

194 Janos, 1995 (a), 582

195 Tőkés, 1991, 260

196 Andrew C Janos, 'Europe, East Central' in Lipset (ed.), 1995 (b), 448

197 T H Rigby, 'Introduction: Political Legitimacy, Weber and Communist Mono-organisational Systems' in Rigby & Fehér (eds), 1982, 11

Protecting the Hungarian nation

Beyond the strategies discussed so far, there is one strategy, which, if systematically applied by Kádár, might have helped him generate domestic support and build and maintain political stability. What I have in mind is the use of nationalism and the image of the regime as a protector of – and a guarantor of the survival of – the Hungarian nation. We could argue that the Kádár regime successfully, albeit with great caution, pursued this strategy with reference to the Soviet Union. Gerner, comparing this strategy with the one adopted by Transylvanian princes in the 17th and early 18th centuries and with the ‘*Ausgleich*’ strategy of 1867 (i.e. the compromise between Budapest and Vienna following the crushing of the Hungarian revolution of 1848), claims that the Kádár regime managed to give people the impression that both the rulers and the people ‘are in the same predicament and that it is necessary to take up the old Hungarian ways of survival under foreign rule’.¹⁹⁸

However, this strategy was used even more cautiously when it came to protecting the Hungarian minorities beyond the borders, notably in Slovakia and Romania. The number of ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia, at the end of the 1980s, was around 600,000 (or 11 per cent of Slovakia’s population) spread over one third of Slovakia’s districts.¹⁹⁹ In Romania, there was a Hungarian population of between 1.7 million (according to Romanian sources) and over 2 million (according to Hungarian sources) people. Most of the ethnic Hungarians were living in Transylvania in areas not immediately adjacent to the Hungarian-Romanian border.²⁰⁰ Hungarian speakers have been living in this area since the 10th century. In 1867 Transylvania was absorbed into the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Romania entered the First World War with the objective of incorporating Transylvania and this was achieved. While the northern part of Transylvania was returned to Hungary in August 1940, it became Romanian again through the Paris Peace Treaties after the Second World War.²⁰¹ During the post-Second World War period, there was a continuous conflict between Hungarian

198 Gerner, 1984, 94

199 Hyde-Price, 1996, 93-94. On some of the difficulties associated with counting minority populations in Eastern Europe, see Andre Liebich, ‘Minorities in Eastern Europe: Obstacles to a Reliable Count’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, 20, 1992

200 Felkay, 1989, 124. Jan Zielonka, *Security in Central Europe: Sources of instability in Hungary, Poland and the Czech and Slovak republics with recommendations for Western policy*, Adelphi Papers, No. 272, 1992, 17

201 Ewan Anderson, *An Atlas of World Political Flashpoints: A Sourcebook of Geopolitical Crisis*, Pinter Reference, London, 1993, 215. Bugajski, 1993, 158

and Romanian historians about the historic presence of the two populations in Transylvania.²⁰²

Toward the late 1960s, the president of the Writers' Association, Imre Dobozy, made some statements warning against confounding a feeling of responsibility for Hungarians living abroad with nationalism while arguing that these minorities had 'an indisputable right to preserve their own language and national culture'.²⁰³ In 1967 the Maros-Hungarian Autonomous Region was dissolved and Nicolae Ceaușescu began to exploit nationalism as a means of acquiring domestic support. The Hungarian minority was discriminated against and was also the victim of plans to eliminate thousands of villages and move people to new agro-industrial centres.²⁰⁴

Somewhat later, there are signs that Kádár began to show a more pronounced interest in the fate of Hungarian minorities across the border. Thus, in 1968, a committee was set up to look into the situation of Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries. In the main, however, these were cautious moves. The critical voices heard vis-à-vis Romania at this juncture should probably also be seen as a way for the Kádár regime to express its loyalty towards Moscow in the wake of Romania's increasingly independent foreign policy course.²⁰⁵

There were two main reasons why nationalism was used with such discretion vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and hardly at all in relation to Romania or Czechoslovakia. In the first case, Hungarian nationalism might have taken on an anti-Russian character, which could have jeopardised Hungarian-Soviet relations. This would have made Kádár's position doubly insecure. According to Heller, nationalism could not be used successfully anywhere in Eastern Europe as a way of 'auxiliary legitimisation' and where such attempts have been made they have been 'rejected with contempt by the population of the occupied countries'.²⁰⁶

Keeping a low profile vis-à-vis the other two countries was not only a question of maintaining good neighbourly relations. This approach also reflected Hungary's position as a member of the Socialist bloc. Criticism directed against Socialist neighbours, according to the intra-bloc logic, would have been interpreted as an anti-bloc policy, weakening the cohesiveness of the Socialist bloc. Faithful

202 Dominique Moïsi & Jacques Rupnik, *Le nouveau continent: Plaidoyer pour une Europe renaissance*, Calmann-Lévy, 1991, 103

203 Romsics, 1999, 405

204 Gerner, 1984, 112. Zielonka, 1992, 16-17

205 Romsics, 1999, 406-408. Romsics claims that there are clear signs that Kádár was paying attention to the Hungarian minorities fairly early. However, I find the evidence he presents to support his case rather weak.

206 Heller, 1982, 61

to that logic during more than 20 years, Kádár kept a low profile with hardly any public debate on Hungarian minorities in neighbouring states. Potential differences with, in particular, Romania and Czechoslovakia on this issue were toned down.²⁰⁷ Logically, therefore, it would have been difficult for the Hungarian regime to demonstrate that it was acting efficiently in its role as a protector of the Hungarian nation.²⁰⁸

The regime's incapacity to use nationalism as a stabilising force had severe implications for political stability. Thus, in the early 1980s – following a rapid deterioration in the living conditions of Hungarians in Romania – Kádár's passivity, in this respect, contributed to undermining support or acceptance of his regime and, later, to eroding political stability. In particular when looking at the situation in Romania, most Hungarians had the (probably well-founded) impression that things had deteriorated since the late 1960s. In 1967 a decision was taken to dissolve the Maros-Hungarian Autonomous Region in Romania; around the same time Ceauşescu began to search for legitimacy on the basis of Romanian nationalism, which led to discrimination against the Hungarian and German minorities.²⁰⁹

From the early 1980s, as Romanian nationalism was growing and was followed by repression of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, Kádár's silence on this issue began to cause popular concern in Hungary.²¹⁰ The international economic recession had a strong impact on Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and on their Hungarian minorities. Kádár began to fear that this growing discontent, not least among the working class, could provide the Hungarian opposition with the social base it had previously lacked. In response, the Kádár regime began using harsh methods against the opposition.²¹¹ It was also around this time that Gyula Illyés, the Dean of Hungarian writers, began 'to express the deep concern and alarm of his compatriots for the fate of the brethren in Romania'.²¹² Very early, Volgyes came to the conclusion that the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania 'is now an issue on which the acceptance of the Hungarian leadership by the entire Magyar population is dependent'.²¹³ The passivity of the

207 Joseph C Kun, *Hungarian Foreign Policy: The Experience of a New Democracy*, The Washington Papers, Praeger, Westport, 1993, 29

208 Cf. Gerner, 1984, 134

209 Gerner, 1984, 112

210 Kun, 1993, 29

211 Lomax, 1984, 100-101

212 Gerner, 1984, 113

213 Ivan Volgyes, 'Legitimacy and Modernization: Nationality and Nationalism in Hungary and Transylvania' in G Klein & M J Reban (eds), *The Politics of Ethnicity in Eastern Europe*, Boulder, East

Kádár regime concerning this issue most probably contributed to the weakening support for the regime among the population, not the least among intellectuals, in the early 1980s.

A few years later, the regime began to modify its policy slightly by showing more concern for, and even voice some criticism against, the way in which Hungarians were being treated in Romania, and partly also in Slovakia.²¹⁴ There are several explanations behind this changing attitude. *Firstly*, in Romania the general situation was deteriorating and even more so for the Hungarian minority. The official Romanian policy against the ethnic Hungarians became harsher as Ceaușescu tried to use nationalism in an effort to alleviate the effects of the economic crisis. In 1988 Ceaușescu presented a plan that would raze 6,000 of Romania's 13,000 villages, which would have a strong impact on the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and their traditional way of life.²¹⁵

Secondly, this difficult situation eventually led tens of thousands of Hungarians in Transylvania to try to flee Romania and seek asylum in Hungary or to use Hungary as a transit point towards Western Europe.²¹⁶ *Thirdly*, the development in Romania and, not least, the flow of refugees arriving in Hungary, led to growing frustration and to opposition to Romanian policy. The Kádár regime now had to respond in order not to grant the emerging opposition a chance to use the general concern for Hungarians abroad as an issue for rallying support.

In 1984 Hungarian media began to criticise Romania. Some Hungarian leaders and officials also expressed their views on this matter. The deputy Prime Minister, Lajos Faluvégi, criticised Romania's treatment of its minorities. In 1985 the 13th Party Congress also addressed this problem and Kádár finally spoke out about 'the need to respect the rights, language, and culture of national minorities and to allow them freedom of movement and contacts with their mother country'.

In October 1986 an even more important step was taken when Hungary raised this problem in the context of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The following month, a leading official in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Márton Klein, 'condemned the oppression of 3 million Hungarians in neighboring countries [... and] called for guarantees of the minorities' civil rights and for granting them specific collective rights to use their language to enable

European Monographs, No. 43, Columbia Press, 1981, 144 quoted in Gerner, 1984, 113

214 Gerner, 1984, 113

215 Romsics, 1999, 408

216 *ibid.*, 408

them to preserve and enhance their cultural traditions'.²¹⁷ Meanwhile, however, the situation was deteriorating in Romania. In the summer of 1986, the first waves of refugees arrived from Romania. Some of them stayed in Hungary, which was illegal, and some were allowed 'quietly to leave across the Austrian border'.²¹⁸ This continued throughout the late 1980s. Felkay observed that the minority issue had by then reached a critical point and could no longer be avoided. The forced return of some refugees to Romania generated immediate protests both within and outside Hungary, since these refugees 'were to be provided for and the Hungarian Government was expected to advocate for all the Hungarian minorities in Rumania'.²¹⁹

Growing concern over the situation of the Hungarian ethnic minority abroad was reflected in Hungary's changing position in international fora. Following the early remarks at the CSCE review conference in Vienna, in March 1987 the Hungarian delegation spoke in favour of proposals (submitted by Canada and Yugoslavia) for the protection of minority rights. For the first time at a CSCE review conference a member of the Warsaw Pact supported a proposal made by a Western country. Considerable pressure was put on Hungary by its allies as a consequence of this decision.²²⁰

The regime tried, belatedly, to react and express its concern to the Romanian authorities in order to reduce criticism from the emerging opposition. It also adopted a more tolerant attitude towards discussions on the subject. During its last years in power, the Hungarian question could be discussed in media and in books while some demonstrations were tolerated.²²¹ There were still exceptions to this generally softer line, however. On 15 November 1987 demonstrations staged in Budapest against Ceaușescu were violently broken up by the police.²²²

Throughout 1988, relations between the two countries continued to deteriorate as thousands of people fled from Romania to Hungary. The Hungarian Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Romania's plan to destroy thousands of villages as a violation of human rights. In July a demonstration was held outside the Romanian Embassy with tens of thousands of Hungarians protesting against the destruction of the villages. Ceaușescu responded to the growing and more

217 Burant (ed.), 1990, 211-213

218 Nigel Hawkes (ed.), *Tearing Down the Curtain: The People's Revolution in Eastern Europe*, The Observer, 1990, 39

219 Felkay, 1989, 282

220 Burant (ed.), 1990, 211-213

221 Miklós Molnár, *La démocratie se lève à l'est: Société civile et communisme en Europe de l'est: Pologne et Hongrie*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990 (a), 309-310

222 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 47

outspoken criticism by threatening to close the Embassy, closed the Hungarian consulate in Cluj-Napoca and criticised Hungary over the deterioration in bilateral relations.²²³

To summarise, until the mid-1980s when there was modest change in policy, the Kádár regime almost completely refrained from using nationalism as a stabilising strategy. The new policy, from the mid-1980s, contained four components: a more open debate on the issue in the media was tolerated; discussions of the issue took place within the Party and some official declarations were even made; the issue was raised in bilateral and multilateral fora and some public demonstrations were tolerated. Despite these efforts, it turned out that Kádár was reacting too slowly and too late. Hence, the regime had to pay a high price for keeping silent for so long on the question of Hungarian minorities abroad. Although the argument that the regime's failure to act in this regard was 'the ultimate cause of its lack of legitimacy' may be somewhat exaggerated, the passive attitude of the regime certainly did not earn it any goodwill capital that could have contributed to political stability.²²⁴ In addition to the economic stagnation, this was a major reason why people started dissociating themselves from, and even protesting against, the Kádár regime.

Negative legitimation

In addition to its reliance on performance, together with elements of coercion, the Kádár regime in the late 1960s and the 1970s often seems to have made implicit use of 'negative legitimation' as a means of securing political stability. The essence of this concept is linked to what I discussed in chapter two, namely that people tend to compare a given regime with alternatives. Hence, the stability of a regime is partly dependent on whether, or what, political alternatives are perceived to exist. In situations where there are no alternatives, or when these alternatives are perceived as (even) less attractive than the current rule, a regime that is disliked may still be accepted by the people.

During the 'Golden days' of the Kádár regime, Kádár tried to present three implicit alternatives as relevant for people trying to evaluate his regime: (1) the repressive Rákosi regime of the early 1950s,²²⁵ (2) direct Soviet military rule, or a new regime installed by Soviet military force, and (3) the regimes of neighbouring countries in the Eastern bloc e.g. the Romanian regime led by Ceauşescu. The

223 Burant (ed.), 1990, 211-213

224 Gerner, 1984, 145

225 Heller, 1982, 57-62

image of the Soviet Union as a continuous threat was alluded to by the Kádár regime when it wanted to warn the Hungarians not to rock the boat. This image was also used in an effort to generate support when the regime tried to portray itself as the least bad alternative and to convince the Hungarian population that ‘We are all in the same boat and we do our best. Do not ruin our chances of securing the best we can for Hungary. We must accept our fate and await better times.’

During the late 1960s and 1970s, such forms of negative legitimation contributed to the stability of the Kádár regime. Gerner, quoting Toma & Volgyes, concludes that the population at large had begun to accept Kádár’s rule and to believe that ‘without Kádár’s leadership the situation would very likely be much worse’, which can be seen as an example of negative legitimation.²²⁶

Volgyes claims that ‘Kádár and his regime maintain their legitimacy, based on economic well-being, not just because the regime has been good to a large number of Hungarians, but also because the people see no other option.’²²⁷ Gradually, however, this strategy lost whatever credibility or attractiveness it might have had as two new alternatives began to emerge in public perceptions. *Firstly*, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Western Europe was becoming a ‘reference society’ for many Hungarians. Germany and, even more so, Austria, were now seen as more relevant comparisons for Hungary than Romania or Czechoslovakia. A growing openness towards the West changed not only the image of Western Europe, but also Hungary’s self-image.²²⁸

In opinion polls carried out throughout the 1980s we can follow how the Kádár regime became less accepted and life in Hungary was seen as less attractive than Western Europe.²²⁹ The following table shows an extract from these polls made in 1981, 1986 and 1988 in response to the question – ‘What is better in Hungary when compared with the West?’

226 Gerner, 1984, 123

227 Volgyes, 1982, 42

228 This development will be discussed further in chapter six.

229 However data from such polls should be interpreted with a certain amount of caution. The result of opinion polls carried out in an authoritarian system may be less accurate in reflecting what people really think (rather than what they think they can get away with saying). Hence, it is possible that the change in perceptions which we think we find reflected in this data to a certain extent reflects more of a change in what people think they are allowed to say, due to their perception of a growing openness or tolerance within the system.

Table 4.4. – Crisis of legitimacy 1981-88
(percentage of respondents giving a positive answer)²³⁰

	1981	1986	1988
Possibility of bringing up children satisfactorily	98	87	42
Protection of workers' interests	93	89	46
Level of health supply	90	66	47
Balanced family life	86	73	36
Civil human relationships	82	78	44
Money keeps its value	66	41	6
Amount of free time	58	46	27
Material affluence	46	29	10

Secondly, in the latter part of the 1980s alternative movements and political parties, some of which appeared to be much more attractive political forces than the ageing Kádár regime, began to emerge in Hungary.

Meanwhile, as these alternative references became more credible, the relevance of the three alternatives implicitly suggested by Kádár declined. This was owing to several factors. *Firstly*, people's recollections of the Rákosi regime were fading; the younger generation had no memories of the early 1950s and the likelihood of a new Stalinist regime coming to power in Hungary, as an alternative to Kádár, seemed very slight.

Secondly, a new Soviet military intervention also seemed increasingly unlikely in the 1980s. Reasons for this were, on the one hand, the events in Poland²³¹ at the beginning of the decade and the way these were being dealt with by the Soviet leaders and, on the other, the new political climate under Secretary General Gorbachev. Jasiewicz highlights this phenomenon, which was not unique to Hungary, arguing that, by the late 1980s, the 'legitimation through the Soviet tanks' factor had exhausted its potential.²³²

Thirdly, the fact that other Central and East European regimes were more repressive than the Kádár regime in no way guaranteed that the Hungarians would

230 Romsics, 1999, 413 quoting data from Géza Lajos Nagy, 'A kettészakadt társadalom' (*The divided society*) in *Jel-Kép*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 55. These data are also quoted in Swain, 1992, 14

231 For an analysis of how the Hungarian leadership reacted to the events in Poland in the early 1980s see János Tischler, 'Kádár and the Polish Crisis 1980-1981' in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 151, 1998

232 Krzysztof Jasiewicz, 'Structures of Representation' in White, Batt & Lewis (eds), 1993, 124

accept their leader. This became increasingly obvious as a result of the economic crisis, and given the fact that the regime proved unable – or even unwilling – to do anything about the plight of the Hungarian minority in Romania.

Much like the Alliance policy and the economic reforms, Kádár's use of negative legitimization appears to have contributed to political stability up to a point. However, as the three 'official references' (or implicit threats) became increasingly less credible in the 1980s while, at the same time, West European political systems and the domestic opposition increasingly were seen as appropriate alternative references, this strategy failed. From the mid-1980s, this strategy therefore failed to generate, or maintain, a sufficient level of political stability.

Conclusions – Did the Kádár regime acquire stability?

'The moment the regime, however hesitantly, embarked in the late 1960's and early 1970's on the path of economic reforms, the party unwittingly compromised the integrity of its ideology, upon which its political power rested. A new kind of legitimacy was needed, but this legitimacy could not be accommodated within the confines of the regime's Marxist-Leninist institutional structure.'²³³

As we have seen, after the turbulence of 1956 Kádár employed harsh repression during approximately his first seven years in power in order to achieve regime stability. When stability had been achieved, however, he changed strategy and, henceforth, put more emphasis on performance as the means to maintain stability. This change of strategy can be interpreted in two different ways. A 'semi-official' interpretation would be that the Kádár regime in 1963 stepped down from stability based on legitimacy to stability based on performance. An 'unofficial' interpretation, closer to reality, would be that the regime moved away from coercion (although never completely) towards performance, i.e. from a less to a more secure basis for stability.

Regime stability was maintained partly due to the Soviet factor and partly due to performance, based on the Alliance policy and the economic reforms. In the late 1960s, a compromise of sorts was thus reached between the people and the regime and this compromise (i.e. people's acceptance of the regime) lasted until the beginning of the 1980s.²³⁴ According to Haraszi (1982) 'it is no longer so

²³³ Tőkés, 1990, 47

²³⁴ Narkiewicz, 1990, 96. See also Schöpflin, 1986, 107. Hankiss, 1990 (a), 276. Schöpflin, 1990, 5-6. Markus, 1982, 91-92

much fear as conformism that sustains the regime'.²³⁵ This compromise promoted regime stability but did not provide legitimacy.²³⁶

At the same time, coercion never completely ceased and there was always a risk that the regime would revert to it. Fehér & Heller even claim that 'Kádárism is not a regime based on less repression, but one based on the more rational and effective employment of repression'. Coercion continued to play a role owing to three factors: *Firstly*, the regime retained its capacity to use coercion; *secondly*, there were no legal guarantees against the use of coercion since because of 'the failure to turn concessions granted from on high into rights established in law' and since 'economic reforms have not been followed up by political ones';²³⁷ *thirdly*, many people still remembered what coercion was like and, wishing to avoid it, seemed to accept the regime as the least bad of feasible alternatives. Lomax gives a striking illustration of the mechanism behind this combination of performance and passive coercion, when he compares the Kádár regime with the Sicilian mafia whose legitimacy is 'based on the combination of present threats and the memory of the past terror'.²³⁸ Lovas & Anderson, on the other hand, speak of a transition from active to passive terror, based on 'the memory, the threat, and the institutionally preserved potential for a return to terror in its active phase'.²³⁹ Therefore, it would be more accurate to speak of a passive phase, rather than a disbanding, of coercion. The risk that the Kádár regime would revert to more active coercion was not merely an empty threat, as shown in the early 1980s. What happened in those years should probably be seen partly in relation to the deterioration in superpower relations which engendered a fear that 'the Soviet Union [would be] less prepared to tolerate diversity within its own camp'.²⁴⁰

Political reform, as discussed above was not much used as a strategy towards stabilisation; nor was nationalism until it was too late. A final point worth observing is that coercion was used more frequently when the regime perceived itself to be under pressure i.e. during its first years in power and during the early 1980s but not, however, so much towards the very end of the Kádár regime.

235 Lomax, 1984, 96 referring to Miklós Haraszti, *Kései bevezetés a kádárizmusba* (A Belated Introduction to Kádárism), AB Függedlen Kiadó, Budapest, 1982, 3-4

236 Heller, 1982, 51. Schöpflin, 1990, 5-6. Gerner, 1984, 121-122. Lendvai, 1986, 99. Józsa, 1994, 16. Adam, 1995, 112. Gabriel A Almond, 'Communism and Political Culture Theory' in *Comparative Politics*, January 1983, 137. Markus, 1982, 91-92

237 Lomax, 1984, 98-99 referring to Ferenc Fehér & Agnes Heller, *Hungary 1956 Revisited*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1983

238 Lomax, 1984, 96

239 *ibid.*, 69 & 99 referring to Istvan Lovas & Ken Anderson, 'State Terrorism in Hungary: The Case of Friendly Repression' in *Telos*, No. 54, Winter 1982-83

240 Lomax, 1984, 100-101

We should now assess the impact of Kádár's strategies aimed to achieve stability. I set out with an assumption that the Kádár regime did not 'really' strive for legitimacy. The regime continued to use ideology as the official basis for its claims to legitimacy and never tried to become legitimate in any other sense. As pointed out by Gerner

'[t]he legitimization devices [...] "economic compensation" and "protector of national culture" [...] cannot, if they fail, remove the legitimacy of the Party in its own terms. If the devices succeed it is good for the Party, as this diminishes the need for rule by terror, which is rather impractical in a modern industrial state, but it does not mean, in the Party's understanding of itself, that the Party *acquires* legitimacy – it is just a visible proof that it is legitimate.'²⁴¹

In line with the conceptual framework I have developed, I would maintain my initial assumption and conclude that the regime never became legitimate in the eyes of the people – 'firmly consolidated but *not* legitimised'.²⁴²

Let us now move on from legitimacy to stability and the strategies discussed above – coercion, the Alliance policy, economic reforms, political reforms, nationalism and negative legitimization. As regards political reforms and nationalism, it is quite obvious that the limited action in both areas – in addition to the late awakening in the case of the latter – did not significantly contribute to political stability. What remains, therefore, is to see how efficient coercion, the Alliance policy, the economic reforms and negative legitimization were in terms of promoting stability. A short and simple answer would be that the combination of coercion and performance (the latter a product of the Alliance policy and the economic reforms) was fairly successful in bringing about stability until the early 1980s. In the longer run, however, owing not only to the economic decline and Kádár's late awakening concerning Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries – but also to the lack of political reforms – popular perceptions of the regime's performance changed. What the regime had left at its disposal, apart from more radical reforms, was external support from the Soviet Union and, possibly, a return to coercion and repression. A return to open coercion does not seem to have been considered a serious option. Therefore, the changing image of the regime's performance eventually generated a political crisis.

241 Gerner, 1984, 179

242 Fehér & Heller, 1983, ix & 148 quoted in Lomax, 1984, 69, 102-103

Was this development a ‘necessary’ outcome, given the economic crisis? My answer would tend to be ‘yes’. As discussed in chapter two, a regime that is legitimate, or a regime that has performed well for a number of years, is likely to be fairly stable; it builds a reservoir of confidence or support that it can use in hard times. The Kádár regime, however, started off as an illegitimate regime and with a large debt to the Hungarian people. During ‘the good years’ it may have succeeded in reducing this debt even though it did not become legitimate. However, the regime never succeeded in building any reservoirs of support. From the mid-1980s, regime stability was based, more or less exclusively, on external support. Once this was being withdrawn too, under Gorbachev in the latter part of the 1980s, the regime was bound to dissolve in one way or the other.

Final points for discussion concern whether or not the Soviet Union wanted the Kádár regime to be legitimate and, secondly, to what extent Kádár was dependent on Soviet support in order to maintain regime stability. In reply to the first question, there is one official and, at least, one unofficial answer. The official answer is ‘yes’ and that the Kádár regime was legitimate since it was based on Marxist-Leninist ideology as interpreted by the MSzMP. Unofficially, however, the Soviet regime probably did not want the regime to be legitimate since a lack of legitimacy would make the Kádár regime more dependent on the Soviet Union and more willing to follow ‘friendly advice’ from Moscow. This reasoning is in line with Jones (to whom Gerner refers without sharing his conclusions) who sees ‘legitimacy and “support from the center”, i.e., Moscow, as alternative bases of political power’.²⁴³

However, even if we accept Jones’s point of view, it seems likely that the leaders in Moscow would prefer the Hungarian regime to enjoy at least a certain degree of acceptance by the Hungarian people since, without such acceptance, the regime would be too unstable and too dependent on ‘fraternal assistance’:

‘[a] regime which is not viewed as legitimate by its own subjects has not got any inherent stability. It may enforce its will or the wishes of Moscow with the help of force, or it may try to compensate for the lack of legitimacy in the economic or the national cultural realm’.²⁴⁴

Moscow’s preferences, as pointed out by Gerner and others, constituted a permanent dilemma. In order to be accepted by the people, the Kádár regime had

243 Gerner, 1984, 132

244 *ibid.*, 131

to display a certain degree of independence from the Soviet Union. I tend to agree with Gati that ‘however much each East European regime depends on Moscow for survival, its domestic authority and hence its ability to govern is a function of its ability to put distance between itself and the Kremlin’.²⁴⁵ This point is also taken up by Lomax who, while referring to the Kádár regime’s dependency on Moscow as its Achilles’ heel, goes on to claim that

‘[t]he secret of the Kádár regime [...] has been its ability [...] to turn this dependence to its own advantage, and while its power has continued to be based ultimately on Soviet force, it has claimed its legitimacy from the extent to which it has been able to appear to act as though it were holding that force at bay, and minimising its impact on Hungarian society and everyday life. [...] While the system has in no way attained legitimacy, the regime has, but only to the extent to which it is seen as protecting its citizens from the worst effects of the system itself’.²⁴⁶

Seen from Moscow, too much independence would jeopardise Soviet influence over Hungary. If, on the other hand, the Kádár regime were to pay too much attention to Soviet interests, then the Hungarian people would not accept the regime and this would entail a risk of political instability. This, according to Gerner, created a dilemma for the regime ‘of having to try to placate both the Soviet leaders and their own subjects, the former ones demanding absolute loyalty, the latter ones demanding a decent life’.²⁴⁷ Both Soviet and Hungarian decision-makers were thus constantly facing a dilemma, in this regard.

Kádár’s reliance on Moscow for regime stability is a complex issue, to which I will return in the next chapter. Here, I will make three observations: *First*, in addition to the domestic strategies already discussed, the Kádár regime was always partly dependent on external support in its effort to establish or maintain political stability.²⁴⁸ Józsa argues that:

‘Das System war in den Augen der meisten Ungarn von Anfang bis Ende ausschließlich durch die Präsenz der Roten Armee “legitimiert”, nicht aber durch seine “Modernisierungsleistung” oder durch einen stillschweigenden “contrat social” zwischen der Bevölkerung und der Parteiführung, wie es zahlreiche westliche Beobachter beschrieben.’²⁴⁹

245 Gati, 1986 (a), 3

246 Lomax, 1984, 101-102

247 Gerner, 1984, 133

248 Lendvai, 1986, 99

249 Józsa, 1994, 16

Józsa points to an important fact, namely that the Soviet Union always was among the primary factors behind the Kádár regime. However, his argument is probably over-simplified. It is quite conceivable that the Kádár regime, given the presence of the Soviet troops, was accepted partly thanks to the economic reforms and the 'social contract'. Second, as we have seen, although the Soviet leaders may not have been particularly keen on having legitimate regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, it is quite conceivable that the regimes themselves tried to secure as much consent or acceptance as possible from the people, given the external and domestic constraints. Third, in the long run the Hungarian regime was unable to remain in power, and preserve political stability, relying solely on external support.

In chapter six, we will discuss, in some detail, the fall of the Kádár regime and the transition to democracy. I will then come back to several issues introduced in this chapter. These include, the consequences of recruiting 'non-believing' members of the intelligentsia, the effects of the NEM and the deepening economic crisis, Western Europe's development into a 'reference society', the emergence of alternative civil movements in the 1980s, and the changing pattern of external support for the Kádár regime.

Hungarian Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Change 1956-88

[P]olitical Utopias are usually portrayed without the troublesome limitations imposed by foreign relations, which are eliminated by either ignoring them entirely or solving them according to some simple plan.' – Robert Dahl¹

The five problems in foreign policy

As I indicated in chapter two, foreign policy can generally be discussed under five headings, each of which relates to a particular problem complex – (1) regime stability, (2) security, (3) trade and economic policy, (4) national identity and (5) autonomy. I will use this structure for analysing Hungarian foreign policy under Kádár. Given the specific nature of the one-party system, however – and the Kádár regime's strong dependence on the Soviet Union – I have found it useful to discuss 'regime stability' and 'state autonomy' together. This approach helps us to see the potential, and in the Hungarian case very real, conflict between regime stability and state autonomy or, in other words, between regime interests and interests of the state.

The most common and simple image emerging of foreign policy under Kádár is one according to which the Hungarian regime demonstrated strong loyalty to the Soviet Union in its management of international affairs. Gati e.g. notes that 'until about 1980 or so, Kádár had supported Soviet foreign policy without fail; on no significant international issue had Hungary departed from Soviet positions'.²

1 Dahl, 1984 (4th edition), 58

2 Gati, 1986 (a), 172

While this picture is not altogether wrong it is over-simplified. If we distinguish between various periods, and between different areas of foreign policy, we can paint a picture that is richer in nuances. In the following section, I will present the main characteristics of Hungarian foreign policy during Kádár's first years in power. This will serve as a point of reference for the FPC that followed.

In the next four sections, I will discuss FPC during four time periods – 1963-74, 1975-79, 1980-84 and 1985-88. For each of these, I will focus my analysis on those problem complexes where we can observe change. I will, therefore, not necessarily discuss all problem complexes for each period. The chapter will therefore not give a comprehensive coverage of Hungarian *foreign policy* during the Kádár period. It should, however, provide a fairly complete picture of the main aspects of *foreign policy change*. At the end of the chapter, I will use the conceptual framework developed in chapter three to analyse and explain these changes.

Foreign policy during the years of coercion – 1956-62

Regime stability vs. state autonomy

Foreign policy under Kádár, as I have come to understand it, was intimately connected with the MSzMP's search for political stability domestically. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Kádár regime tried to achieve political stability through various domestic strategies. It also attempted to stabilise its position through external, primarily Soviet, recognition and support. During the period of coercion, roughly corresponding to the period 1956-62, Kádár gave priority to stabilising his own regime and to domestic affairs. In terms of foreign relations, he concentrated on developing relations with his Socialist neighbouring states as well as with pro-Soviet or non-aligned developing countries.³

A major constraint on foreign policy under Kádár was the interdependence between the Hungarian and the Soviet leadership as expressed in inter-party relations between the two Communist Parties. Just like in other East and Central European countries, the Soviet Union used inter-Party relations to ensure bloc consensus in support of Soviet interests. These relations were based on the

3 Romsics, 1999, 402-403

acceptance by the East European Parties of three key principles, largely defined by the Soviet Union – ‘Socialist internationalism’, ‘democratic centralism’ and the ‘leading role of the Communist Party’.⁴

Relations between the Kádár regime and Moscow were clearly characterised by asymmetric interdependence. On the one hand, Kádár had great need of Soviet support in his quest for political stability. This was not a completely new situation as every Hungarian leader in power since the end of the Second World War had been dependent on the Soviet Union. Kádár was certainly no exception to the rule having himself been brought to power through Soviet military force and political will. The efforts to achieve stability, however, put certain limitations on the type of foreign policy the Hungarian regime could formulate. On the other hand, the links between the MSzMP and the Soviet Communist Party provided one of the most important control mechanisms used by the Soviet leaders vis-à-vis the Hungarian leaders, also to ensure Soviet security in Central Europe. Gerner interpreted this as a key element of the Soviet strategy, namely not to be satisfied just with ideological influence but also to control a number of key persons – ‘when Nagy got out of hand, there was a Kádár available’.⁵

The Hungarian regime had little freedom to define its own foreign policy interests owing to its structural links with the Soviet Union. During these years, practically no independent foreign policy initiative or position was taken. The experience of 1956 had shown that the Soviet Union would not accept any major deviation from Moscow’s policy line in Central Europe. Furthermore, after 1956, the Soviet Union strengthened its control over Hungarian foreign policy through inter-Party contacts, diplomatic representatives, the Soviet military and the security police.⁶ This meant, according to Tőkés, that

‘the regime’s policies, the political incumbents’ ideologies and Hungary’s institutional arrangements were hostage to the political, ideological, economic and military preferences of the Soviet Union’.⁷

As far as foreign policy is concerned, the Foreign Ministry was controlled by the International Relations Department of the CC of the MSzMP and staffed with intelligence people from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the

4 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 85-89

5 Gerner, 1984, 153-154

6 Ferenc A Váli, ‘The Foreign Policy of Hungary’ in Kuhlman (ed.), 1978, 112-113

7 Tőkés, 1991, 228

Interior.⁸ Thus, the Foreign Service was subordinated to the MSzMP and the MSzMP was subordinated to Moscow. Even in third countries, Hungarian diplomats were expected to be loyal to and follow the lead of Soviet diplomats in the host country. This subordination in foreign policy was later (1978) described by Váli as ‘the Achilles-heel of the regime’ despite some positive changes during the previous ten years.⁹ Even as late as 1984, Gerner concludes that the Soviet leaders had not had much to complain about when it comes to Hungarian foreign policy and that ‘Hungary has proved herself to be an impeccably loyal ally’.¹⁰

To understand this situation, we should recall some factors that contributed to maintaining Soviet dominance over Hungary, and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to the MSzMP’s dependence on the Soviet Communist Party in order to legitimise its power in the eyes of the outside world, there were two other organisational links – *firstly*, the Soviet military threat embodied in Hungary’s membership of the Warsaw Pact and the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary and, *secondly*, Hungary’s economic dependency on the Soviet Union through bilateral and quasi-multilateral links.¹¹ These ties created ‘perceptions of structural constraint on state behaviour’ within the member states of the Warsaw Pact.¹²

Whereas official relations between the Soviet and the Hungarian regime were extremely close during these years, Hungary’s relations with the West remained at an all-time low; Kádár was strongly criticised by most Western powers, in particular the United States and West Germany. In addition to tense diplomatic relations with most Western countries following the events in 1956, Hungary was also facing problems in its bilateral relations with the United Nations and the Holy See. True, part of the disappointment, bitterness and moral indignation in the West was a reaction to the seizure of power in 1956. However, the coercive methods used by the newly institutionalised regime and, not least, the execution of Imre Nagy and his followers in 1958, were additional major causes of strain in Hungary’s external relations with countries and organisations outside the Soviet bloc. During these years, there were also other reasons for the coolness in East-West relations, including the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. The

8 Alfred A Reisch, ‘Hungarian Foreign Ministry Completes Reorganization’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, 13, 1992 (a), 34

9 Váli, 1978, 113

10 Gerner, 1984, 124

11 Karen Dawisha, ‘Soviet Political and Ideological Perceptions and Policies Toward Eastern Europe’ in Braun (ed.), 1990 (b), 20

12 Olav F Knudsen, ‘Context and Action in the Collapse of the Cold War European System: an Exploratory Application of the Agency-Structure Perspective’ in Carlsnaes & Smith (eds), 1994, 210-211

Cold War climate, however, cannot serve as the only explanation for Hungary's strained relations with the West. Rather, it seems reasonable to argue that Kádár's use of coercion contributed to a negative image and the partial isolation of Hungary and his regime from the West for a number of years.

Security – Soviet troops and membership of the Warsaw Pact

When analysing security policy under Kádár, we need to understand the tension between regime and state interests and, in this case, between regime security and the security of the country. Under Kádár, the security situation was rather paradoxical in the sense that the direct external source of military security and insecurity was the same – Soviet military power.

On the one hand, Soviet military power, and troop presence, was one of the foundations of regime stability in Hungary, although military support was only seen as a last resort, should the regime's position become seriously jeopardised. On the other hand, Hungary's political and military autonomy was tightly circumscribed by the stationing of Soviet troops and by Hungary's membership of the Warsaw Pact. From a Soviet perspective, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland were strategically more significant, and 'Moscow was more concerned about signs of instability or ideological heresy in these countries than it was in Hungary, Romania or Bulgaria'.¹³ However, from Budapest's horizon, it was obvious which country constituted the most significant military threat.

According to the Soviet-Hungarian Peace Treaty of 1948, as well as the Four-Power Agreement on Austria signed on 15 May 1955, the Soviet Union was supposed to withdraw its troops from Hungary. A main reason why the withdrawal never materialised is the fact that the Warsaw Treaty was signed on 16 May 1956. Soon afterwards, Soviet troops intervened against the Hungarian revolutionaries. After November 1956, neither the Soviet leadership, nor the newly installed Hungarian regime, saw any reason to demand, or even consider, a Soviet withdrawal. However, there was no legal ground for the Soviet troop presence until an agreement about the 'Temporary Stationing of Troops' was signed in the spring of 1957.¹⁴ As a justification for the presence of Soviet troops, this agreement referred to the need to defend the country against NATO aggression and (West) German rearmament. At least the official text of the agreement was

¹³ Adrian Hyde-Price, *The International Politics of East Central Europe*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996, 144

¹⁴ Váli, 1978, 110-113. Margit Nielsen, 'Ungarn og den sovjetiske model (1945-1956)' in Jensen & Nielsen, 1990 (b), 19

not very detailed in terms of specifying such issues as the number of troops or their deployment. It did mention, however, that 'the Soviet troops were to be stationed "indefinitely" and that the compact could be changed only by mutual consent'.¹⁵ In 1958 the Hungarian armed forces were purged and Soviet advisers were assigned as far down as company level. Following this, the number of Soviet troops stationed in Hungary was substantially reduced, to a total number of roughly 80,000 and it remained at this level until the 1980s. Shortly before the withdrawal in 1989, their number had shrunk to about 65,000.¹⁶

The Soviet troop presence was intended not primarily to protect Hungary from an invasion by NATO but rather to preserve Communist control and to satisfy Soviet security interests. The Soviet leaders did not trust the Hungarians, and Kádár apparently did not fully trust his own army, despite the fact that the Hungarian military had been completely reorganised following 1956.¹⁷ Like other East European leaders, in the last resort Kádár secured his rule through 'the Soviet tanks factor'. This was essentially used to try to convince his people that Moscow would not accept a non-Communist regime and that the alternative to Kádár's rule with its limited sovereignty would be direct Soviet occupation.¹⁸

As noted by Volgyes, the MSzMP, like other East European ruling parties, in the end depended on the support of the army and, if that failed, support by the armies of the other Warsaw Pact countries.¹⁹ In Váli's analysis this was partly counter-productive for the regime. Although the Soviet troop presence was probably necessary to keep the regime in power, that very same presence also showed that Hungary was not a fully independent country.²⁰ This illustrates the inherent tension between regime and state interests during this period.

From the Soviet point of view, it was imperative to keep troops in Eastern Europe. The Romanian example, where Soviet troops had been withdrawn completely in 1958, had paved the way for attempts to assert a limited independence from 1964.²¹ Soviet troops stationed in Eastern Europe could be mobilised and deployed within Hungary and the other Warsaw Pact members without the prior approval of host Governments. Another restriction on the military capability of

15 Burant (ed.), 1990, 238

16 Jörg K Hoensch, *A History of Modern Hungary 1867-1986*, Longman, London, 1988, 224. Heinrich, 1986, 172. Nielsen, 1990 (b), 19

17 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 100

18 Jasiewicz, 1993, 125

19 Ivan Volgyes, 'The Lesser Allies' View' in Braun (ed.), 1990, 108

20 Váli, 1978, 124. Paul Latawski, 'Central Europe and European Security' in Park & Wyn Rees (eds), 1998, 84-85

21 Gati, 1990, 141

the East and Central Europeans was the lack of debate or even development within military academies or institutions of an independent military doctrine. To secure Soviet control over the East European satellites, monitoring facilities along the border operated by Soviet staff could receive, control and interdict communications within the countries concerned. Should Moscow decide to intervene in a crisis situation the East Europeans would, therefore, have to count on the possibility that the Soviet Union would listen to and, if needed, jam high-level communications within and between these countries.²²

The Warsaw Pact had been founded partly in response to West Germany's membership of NATO. Hungary had little choice but to join the alliance. A combined military command was established, which, in practice, was controlled from Moscow. As early as 1949, however, a bilateral treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance had already been signed between Hungary and the Soviet Union.²³ In many respects, the signing of the Warsaw Pact added little of substance and merely formalised structures and relations already established.²⁴ Originally, the Treaty was valid for 20 years, but with a clause that allowed it to be automatically extended by ten years. This was done in 1975 and, finally, in April 1985, without any changes.²⁵

In many respects, the Warsaw Pact remained almost completely dominated by the Soviet Union. Only Soviet officers served as Chiefs of Staff of the 'Joint Command', and only Soviet Marshals served as Commanders-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact. Even in peacetime, there was an almost complete subordination to Soviet command.²⁶ A major problem for the Soviet Union was ensuring that the Warsaw Pact presented a credible military threat to NATO without giving the East European countries the military means needed to challenge the Soviet Union.²⁷ This made Eastern Europe, as a whole, very dependent on Soviet military equipment, but none of these countries, not even East Germany, was given access to the most modern types of Soviet weapons.²⁸

22 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 101-106

23 Renée de Nevers, *The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: The End of an Era*, Adelphi Papers, 249, 1990, 9

24 Peter Calvocoressi, *World Politics since 1945*, Longman, London, 1992 (6th edition), 241

25 de Nevers, 1990, 8-9. Calvocoressi, 1992, 240. Fejtő, 1992, 413

26 Gati, 1990, 148. Cf. Volgyes, 1990, 105. Cf. Dawisha, 1990 (b), 20 – 'According to Kuklinski, in 1979, the Soviets gained East European acceptance (except Romania) of a document entitled "Statute of the Joint Armed Forces and Their Organization in Wartime." The document in effect provides for the complete subordination of East European military to the Soviet High Command during wartime. In essence [...] the Soviets now are able to bypass national commanders in times of crisis and exert direct control over East European forces.'

27 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 100

28 Gati, 1990, 148. Dawisha, 1990 (a), 104-105. Cf. Volgyes, 1990, 106

Trade and economic policy – CMEA membership and dependence on Soviet energy

Following its military occupation of Hungary towards the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union established a strong economic hold on Hungary. Initially, the size of the Hungarian reparations was not fixed, which meant that the Soviet leaders could raise their demands when they so wished. A series of trade agreements was concluded and joint enterprises established in the early years after the war. This meant that the Soviet Union ensured effective economic control over Hungary long before it managed to establish political control.²⁹ During a six-year period, Hungary had to pay US\$200 million to the Soviet Union (and an additional US\$70 million to Yugoslavia and US\$30 million to Czechoslovakia). Furthermore, all German property in Hungary was transferred to the Soviet Union through the Potsdam agreement.³⁰

In addition to these bilateral ties, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), or COMECON as it came to be referred to in the West, was established in January 1949 in response to the Marshall Plan offering aid to Europe. The Soviet Union also intended to use this organisation as a tool for enforcing the economic blockade against Yugoslavia after Stalin had broken with Tito in 1948.³¹

However, since the Soviet Union continued to base its economic relations with Eastern and Central Europe mainly on bilateral links, the CMEA did not play any significant role during the first years of its existence and did not even have a charter until 1960. Despite its formally multilateral structure the CMEA was, in essence, a system of bilateral relations with the Soviet Union. Even after 1960, relations between Moscow and each individual member country continued to be more important than the multilateral ones; the CMEA never became an effective organisation in terms of multilateral trade coordination within Eastern Europe.³² The main purpose of the CMEA was never to develop Eastern Europe economically but rather to link these countries more closely to the Soviet Union.³³ Political reasoning was more important than economic rationality when deciding on trade relations within the organisation.³⁴

29 Joseph Held, 'Hungary: 1945 to the Present' in Held (ed.), 1992, 205-206

30 Swain, 1992, 35

31 Gabriel Partos, *The World that Came in from the Cold*, Royal Institute of International Affairs & BBC, London, 1993, 94

32 Carl H McMillan, 'Soviet Efforts to Restructure the CMEA: The Case of Regional Energy Relations' in Braun (ed.), 1990, 26. de Nevers, 1990, 8

33 Calvoceossi, 1992, 239-240

34 Ben Slay, 'Economic Disintegration and Reintegration in Eastern Europe: An Overview of Selected Issues' in Lampe, Nelson & Schönfeld (eds), 1993, 81

Moscow's exploitation of the other countries continued until Khrushchev tried to redefine the relations following his attempts at de-Stalinisation. Relations then changed. In fact, one could argue that the Soviet Union, which was a main exporter of fuel and raw materials, was now exploited by the other members. Khrushchev also tried to integrate the various CMEA economies, based on Socialist 'division of labour', which was a failure.³⁵

After 1956, the Soviet Union provided financial assistance and increased its export to Hungary to support political stabilisation.³⁶ Hungary was granted an extended period to repay outstanding debts and received a 750 million rouble long-term loan and substantial deliveries of raw material and goods worth 1.1 billion roubles.³⁷ At this time, the Soviet Union was economically strong and could provide Hungary with affordable oil and other energy sources as well as raw material. In return, Hungary delivered manufactured and agricultural products to the Soviet and the rest of the CMEA market. In the long run, however, this made Hungary dependent on cheap energy from the Soviet Union as well as on Soviet export markets, since Hungarian industrial products were almost always inferior to Western standards. Towards the end of the 1950s, two-thirds of Hungary's foreign trade was with other CMEA countries. More than a third of Hungarian exports went to the Soviet Union. In return Hungary imported 95 per cent of its raw iron, '68 per cent of its oil, 51 per cent of its rolled steel, 78 per cent of its wood and 56 per cent of its paper' from the Soviet Union.³⁸ This linked Hungary closely to the Soviet Union in the area of trade and economic policy and left the Hungarian regime little freedom to formulate its own policy or priorities. This dependence continued to grow over the following decades. In 1960 Hungary's dependence on the Soviet Union for energy was roughly 25 per cent, whereas 20 years later it had grown to 50 per cent.³⁹

National identity – no criticism of the treatment of Hungarian minorities abroad

As I discussed in chapter four, the Kádár regime was facing a difficult problem with respect to the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries. Concern over the possibility of arousing anti-Russian emotions – or of provoking 'Socialist

35 Gerner, 1984, 35-36

36 Köves, 1992, 6-7

37 Hoensch, 1988, 224

38 *ibid.*, 226

39 Romsics, 1999, 341

neighbours' – initially led the Kádár regime to follow a low-key policy. When the rights of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania were abolished or restricted from the end of the 1950s and Hungarian children in Romania were deprived of their previous right to attend minority schools, as Romanian nationalism intensified under Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceauşescu, there was a cooling off in relations between the two capitals. However, neither the regime nor the Hungarian press exploited this politically.⁴⁰ This passive attitude of the Kádár regime, despite clearly assimilationist policies in Romania, frustrated many Hungarians.⁴¹ I will come back to this issue in the following chapters. In the course of official visits to Czechoslovakia and Romania in 1958, the Hungarian leaders assured their hosts that they had no territorial demands on these countries and also that the host countries' policies towards national minorities were appropriate and, in any case, the internal affair of the Czechoslovak and Romanian Governments.⁴²

Foreign policy change 1963-74

When observed against the background outlined in the previous section, Hungarian foreign policy under Kádár underwent significant changes, in different policy areas and over various periods, in response to both domestic and external developments. In this section, I will discuss FPC from 1963 to 1974, when change occurred mainly in foreign trade and economic policy. The background to these changes was, to a large extent, domestic and they can be seen as a logical consequence of Kádár's altering strategy for preserving political stability. Furthermore, Khrushchev's fall from power affected the relationship, not so much between Hungary and the Soviet Union as between Kádár and the Soviet leaders. This also opened up for some modest change in Hungarian foreign policy as Kádár no longer had to follow Moscow's instructions out of personal loyalty. In a large majority of cases, however, Hungary still followed the Soviet line very closely e.g. in terms of voting in the UN and in its relations with North Vietnam and China.⁴³

40 Hoensch, 1988, 238

41 Mette Skak, *From Empire to Anarchy: Postcommunist Foreign Policy and International Relations*, Hurst & Company, London, 1996, 227

42 Romsics, 1999, 403

43 Hoensch, 1988, 235

Trade and economic policy

‘Our politics is economics and our economics is foreign trade.’ – János Kádár⁴⁴

From the mid-1960s, while the Soviet leadership still needed the MSzMP to keep the political situation in Hungary under control, Kádár gradually became relatively less dependent on Soviet support for his political survival. After he had declared his Alliance policy, and with the introduction of the NEM in 1968, a significant part of the Hungarian population began to re-evaluate Kádár and his regime. Although most Hungarians did not like their leaders they were accepted – or at least tolerated – by many. In his analysis of this period, Hoensch notes that despite many Hungarians’ vivid and bitter memories of the Rákosi period and of the events in 1956 ‘more and more Hungarians managed to identify with Kádár’s cautious pragmatism and relative liberalism’.⁴⁵ In the ‘happiest barracks in the camp’, the domestic guards were less disliked than before and, thus, possibly less dependent on Soviet support than they had initially been.

Whereas Hungary’s position on international Communist affairs or its relations with developing countries rarely differed from that of the Soviet Union,⁴⁶ Kádár needed more openness towards the West in order to be able to keep his promises in the new implicit social contract. During the first half of the 1960s, the Hungarian regime sought already to increase its trade as much with the West as with other CMEA members, which was an exception to current practice inside the organisation.⁴⁷ Kádár’s Alliance policy, therefore, coincided with a conscious effort made by the Hungarian regime to improve its relations with a number of Western countries, notably Austria, West Germany and the United States. This effort turned out to be partly successful, especially concerning trade relations. Hungary was characterised by an open and active foreign policy vis-à-vis Austria and Western Europe.⁴⁸ As early as 1964 Hungary tried to improve its relations with Austria and to use Austria’s status as a permanently neutral country to establish a bridge to the West.⁴⁹

With the introduction of the NEM, Hungary stepped up its efforts to change its trade balance by expanding trade with Western countries. Foreign policy towards the West became increasingly independent, not least in order to ensure

44 Tökés, 1984, 1

45 *ibid.*, 231-232

46 Schöpflin, 1981, 23. Váli, 1978, 122-123

47 Batt, 1988, 96

48 Mette Skak, ‘Centraleuropas nye udenrigspolitik’ in *Politica*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1991 (a), 282

49 Burant (ed.), 1990, 215

access to technology necessary for modernisation of the Hungarian economy.⁵⁰ Hungary tried to exploit the dynamism of the world market through credits from the West, an expansion of trade, and joint ventures involving Western capital. This led to growing competition between enterprises and a stronger focus on profitability.⁵¹ According to Kiss, the openness of the economic structure as well as the great sensitivity of the Hungarian external economy meant that Hungarian security and foreign policy was dominated by 'external economic substance'.⁵²

Following improved relations with Austria, Hungary also opened up for closer links with West Germany, which was historically Hungary's most important trade partner in the region.⁵³ Alongside Austria, West Germany soon became Hungary's most important partner in the West, although this relationship was more sensitive – both for historic reasons and because of West Germany's NATO membership. Initially, these contacts were, therefore, more confined – not least because of the absence of normal diplomatic relations between the two countries. During the latter 1960s, Hungary followed the Soviet line and did not respond positively when West Germany suggested that they should establish full diplomatic relations. The Soviet-German Treaty of 12 August 1970, however, opened up for a normalisation. Following the replacement of Foreign Minister János Péter by his former State-Secretary, Frigyes Puja, full diplomatic relations were established with West Germany on 20 December 1973.⁵⁴ Towards the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, Hungary also became a member of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and began to establish contacts and to conclude some agreements with the European Communities concerning cooperation between Hungarian and Western companies and the regulation of foreign trade.⁵⁵

Relations with the United States remained more tense. In 1956 normal diplomatic relations had been suspended; for more than ten years, the United States was represented in Budapest only by a Chargé d'Affaires.⁵⁶ Unresolved issues included Cardinal Mindszenty, who had taken refuge at the American Embassy in Budapest in 1956,⁵⁷ and St. Stephen's Crown. The Crown was supposed to

50 Romsics, 1999, 408

51 Volgyes, 1982, 55. Pierre Lemaitre, 'Ungarn: Sikkerhedspolitik, sikkerhedspolitisk tænkning og socialismemodell' in Jensen (ed.), 1988, 138

52 László J Kiss, 'Europäische Sicherheit: Interpretationen, Perzeptionen und Außenpolitik Ungarns' in *Europa-Archiv*, No. 4, 1988, 100

53 Burant (ed.), 1990, 215

54 Hoensch, 1988, 237 & 245. Váli, 1978, 115-117

55 Gabriella Izik-Hedri, 'Ungarn im Wandel: Voraussetzungen und Perspektiven' in *Osteuropa*, Vol. 40, No. 5, 1990, 454

56 Felkay, 1989, 125

57 'Working together, Mindszenty and the Holy See by January 1957 had removed from office all clerics

have been worn by Hungary's first Christian King in 996 and was an important symbol of Hungary itself and of legitimate rule and historic continuity. During the Second World War, the Crown fell into the hands of the US Army, and in 1951 it was placed in safety at Fort Knox. Hungarians in exile, opposed to Communist rule in Hungary, did not want the US administration to return the Crown to Hungary.⁵⁸

In 1968 Hungary, for the first time since 1956, followed an active foreign policy with the objective of protecting the experiment in Czechoslovakia to build 'Socialism with a human face'. Apparently, Kádár tried to reduce the scope of the reforms in Czechoslovakia to prevent a Soviet intervention and, at the same time, legitimise his own economic reforms. Once the decision was taken to invade the country, Hungary participated but Kádár 'allowed only a token Hungarian contingent to take part in the invasion and [...] remained silent for several weeks before finally voicing his reluctant and very grudging approval of the action taken by the Kremlin'.⁵⁹ The Hungarian leaders were afraid not only of a possible Russian intervention but also of a spill-over into Hungary that could put the consolidation of power at risk. Despite this, however, the Hungarian Foreign Minister 'completely rejected Brezhnev's doctrine of the "limited sovereignty" of Socialist Bloc members and announced that it would always be "an ever controversial issue", whether intervention was necessary "in the interests of peace" or whether it should be avoided if at all possible "in the interests of Socialist integration"'.⁶⁰ Hungary's policy of opening up towards the West was based on national interests rather than on the collective interests of the Socialist states or those of the Soviet Union.

The changes in trade and economic policy also had some impact on Kádár's domestic stabilisation policy. Schöpflin described this strategy as involving less coercion than before, meaning e.g. that dissidents 'are not actively persecuted but subtly manipulated on to the margins'.⁶¹ This included less strict control over literature and the media while allowing some controversial subjects such as sociology in certain universities. The opening up in the economic area

who had played any part as parish priests or bureau heads in the Hungarian peace movement since it began in 1951; they were later to threaten excommunication for all Catholic priests who accepted any sort of political role in the new régime, including taking a seat as representative to the national assembly.' Cardinal József Mindszenty remained in the US Legation in Budapest until 1972. Romsics, 1999, 317

58 Gerner, 1984, 103. Váli, 1978, 117-118. Kun, 1993, 27

59 Gati, 1986 (a), 173-174

60 Hoensch, 1988, 238-239. For a more detailed account on Kádár's handling of this issue, see Miklós Kun, 'Kádár and the Prague Spring' in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 152, 1998.

61 Schöpflin, 1981, 22-23

facilitated the establishment of closer links to the West also in other areas. The regime encouraged tourism from the West, which brought much needed foreign currency, to pay for growing imports. There was also an opening towards Western popular culture, including films, music and television programmes, a halt to the jamming of radio broadcasting from the West and improved opportunities for academic and cultural exchanges.⁶²

This period was also characterised by increased tolerance vis-à-vis such activities as listening to foreign radio broadcasts or (with the exception of Party members) attendance at church. It also became possible for many Hungarians to travel abroad (to Czechoslovakia and Poland and, later, Bulgaria, East Germany and Romania). After 1966, one could even apply for permission to visit the West once every three years for tourism, in addition to organised tourist trips. The number of people travelling abroad rose from 300,000 in 1960 to 1 million in 1970 and 5.2 million in 1980. Most of these were visits to the Socialist neighbouring countries but travel to the West also increased from 28,000 in 1958 to 120,000 in 1963 and over 700,000 in 1986 despite the imposition of strict limitations regarding hard currency.⁶³ One result of the increase in travel was that people began to compare living conditions in Hungary with what they saw in the West. Such mental comparisons 'gnawed away at the very foundations of the system [... and in] that respect, cultural permissiveness and relative freedom of travel had a destabilising as well as stabilising impact'.⁶⁴

By decentralising economic decision-making, Hungarian economists wanted to connect Hungary more intimately to the world, or Western, market. This, it was hoped, would make it easier for the regime to stick to its side of the social contract by offering people relative material wealth.⁶⁵ Hungary certainly needed economic support from the West to be able to raise living standards, and this support also included an element of political support.⁶⁶ It was thought that economic growth could be stimulated by growing imports of Western production technology but this strategy largely failed. The technology that was imported proved to be less productive in Hungary than it was when used in the West. In addition, the Hungarians gradually discovered that opting for Western technology was costly, not just in terms of the investment in machinery, but also since this

62 Lomax, 1984, 88

63 Romsics, 1999, 335

64 *ibid.*, 402

65 Klausen, 1990, 143-144

66 Burant (ed.), 1990, 215

technology in many cases required imports of raw materials from the West if it was to be used efficiently.⁶⁷

Addressing Hungary's economic problems was not only a matter of making 'rational' market-oriented decisions. One eye always had to be kept open to watch how economic decisions and reform attempts were interpreted in Moscow. Although the Soviet leaders did not openly criticise their Hungarian comrades, there were several occasions between 1968 and 1970 when informal warnings (eliciting replies intended to calm Soviet fears) were transmitted without any clear outcome.⁶⁸ In 1972 Jenő Fock, the Hungarian Prime Minister, acknowledged that there were 'both minor and major difficulties' in Soviet-Hungarian economic relations. Moscow had shown itself unwilling to enter into long-term agreements with Hungary about deliveries of Soviet raw materials, in particular energy. This had been used by leftist opposition elements within the MSzMP leadership who tried to put an end to the reforms, which they eventually managed to do. In 1975, as we saw in the previous chapter, the reformist Jenő Fock resigned from his position as Prime Minister while Kádár had to defend himself against the criticism.⁶⁹

Foreign policy change 1975-79

Trade and economic policy

Not even the NEM turned out to be the magic formula that could once and for all solve Hungary's economic problems. A major concern was that Hungary's export did not grow at a sufficient pace to pay for growing imports of Western goods. Instead, the imported goods were mainly paid for with credits from the West. When the first international oil crisis hit the Western world, with drastic increases in oil prices, Hungary was also severely affected. Initially, this crisis was seen as 'part of an international crisis of capitalism which would have no effect on Hungary'.⁷⁰ That analysis had to change, however, especially as from early 1975, when Hungary, which until then had benefited from favourable prices for Soviet energy, concluded a new Trade Agreement with the Soviet Union that led to a further deterioration in terms of trade.⁷¹ The price-setting mechanism for Soviet

67 Jan Vanous, 'East European Economic Slowdown' in *Problems of Communism*, July-August 1982, 3-4

68 Hoensch, 1988, 240-241

69 Gati, 1986 (a), 173

70 Swain, 1989, 13

71 Heinrich, 1986, 41

oil was now changed; oil prices were to be adjusted on an annual basis, rather than every five years based on a rolling average.⁷² Hungary's efforts to increase its exports to the West were largely undermined by the economic recession that reduced demand in the West, for both primary and manufactured goods from Eastern Europe.⁷³ That, combined with rising energy costs and higher prices for imported goods, led to a deterioration in Hungarian terms of trade of 20-30 per cent.⁷⁴

On the domestic scene, price increases for Soviet oil, together with the recession in the West and a revaluation of the dollar, initially provided the anti-reformers with arguments for halting the reforms. The alternative – improving the quality of products combined with an export drive to the West – was, for political reasons, not an option.⁷⁵ Eventually, however, the leadership realised that the growing foreign debt, together with deteriorating terms of trade, made it necessary to create growth in Hungarian exports in order for the country to be able to repay its debt and to continue importing Western goods. Failure to do so would jeopardise Hungarian living standards, which could undermine the social contract – ‘the main plank of the regime's legitimacy and the assurance of internal stability’.⁷⁶ An insight was born concerning Hungary's dependence on the outside, non-Socialist world for trade and other economic relations. Rising foreign debt was making Hungary more and more dependent on the West, while its autonomy was shrinking. This lack of autonomy was also a result of Hungary's dependence on trade (in both directions) with the West, rising energy prices and interest trends on international credits.

Certain effects of Hungary's growing interest in, and later dependence on, the West are easy to observe. In December 1976 Kádár visited Vienna, on what was his first official trip to the West for more than 15 years. He did not like travelling but nevertheless visited Bonn (in 1977 and 1982), Rome (in 1977) and Paris (in 1978). In 1978 the improvement in Hungarian-American relations meant that Hungary was accorded most-favoured-nation status and received extended credits from the US. This was an important step in what could be described as ‘Kádár's new strategy of “going international” to protect the regime's domestic achievements’.⁷⁷ The American decision clearly reflected American satisfaction

72 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 111

73 Vanous, 1982, 3-4

74 Swain, 1989, 13

75 Batt, 1988, 268. Klausen, 1990, 144. Heinrich, 1986, 143

76 Lomax, 1984, 93-94

77 Tőkés, 1984, 19. Felkay, 1989, 248-251. Kun, 1993, 34. Hoensch, 1988, 256

with Hungary's improvements in terms of human rights policies and contributed to strengthening Hungary's economic relations with the West.⁷⁸ At the end of the 1970s, non-Socialist countries were responsible for almost 50 per cent of Hungary's foreign trade, and its largest trading partner in the West was Germany, as it had been before the Second World War.⁷⁹

As I have mentioned, Soviet support for the economic reforms could never be taken for granted; Hungarian politicians, Kádár in particular, constantly had to demonstrate to his Soviet comrades that economic reforms and socialism could be combined. Beside the ideological, or *realpolitische*, considerations among Soviet leaders, the Hungarian economy was also heavily dependent on changes in terms of trade. A major blow to Hungarian economic prosperity was the dramatic deterioration in terms of trade with the Soviet Union from 1975.⁸⁰ In the latter part of the 1970s, however, international developments such as the Soviet ratification of the Helsinki agreement, President Carter's focus on human rights and the détente between the superpowers 'probably played a role in convincing the Soviets of their need to maintain a "liberal" regime in Hungary and to support Kádár against his rivals'.⁸¹ Throughout this period

'Kádár skilfully employed a dual approach in dealing with Brezhnev as he had done with Khrushchev. First he assured him of his loyalty to the Soviet Union, but then he asserted Hungary's sovereignty and stressed that friendship between the two countries was based on "mutual respect, equality and non-interference into each other's internal affairs."⁸²

Security

In the early 1970s, Soviet economic growth rates, which had been extremely high ever since the end of the Second World War, began to decline. This became clear despite the creative use of official statistics to divert the attention of the political and economic leaders from this fact. Partly as a response to these emerging problems, Moscow allowed East-West trade to expand. The strategy was fairly simple. The Soviet leaders hoped that, by importing cheap consumer goods from the West, they would be able to keep their citizens under firmer control while encouraging

78 Kun, 1993, 27

79 Volgyes, 1982, 55

80 Vanous, 1982, 3-4

81 Lomax, 1984, 94

82 Felkay, 1989, 191

the latter to refrain from openly criticising the political and economic system. This was one reason underlying the *détente* period in superpower relations. Peaceful coexistence became a popular feature of political rhetoric, even though Western and Eastern leaders had very different notions about what the concept was supposed to mean.

The CSCE (or Helsinki) process can be seen as a fruit of this *détente* process, and partly also as a result of the West German *Ostpolitik*, although the original initiative was Soviet. As far back as 1954, Foreign Minister Molotov had proposed – first to the Four Power Conference of Foreign Ministers and later in a call to all European Governments – a Pan-European agreement on ‘collective security’.⁸³ Behind this was a strong wish by Moscow to obtain Western acceptance of the *status quo* and the Soviet dominance over Eastern and Central Europe. Another Soviet objective may have been to try to split NATO by separating Western Europe from the United States. Fifteen years later, when Finland issued invitations to a Pan-European meeting of states in May 1969, the Soviet interest in a security conference was raised again. This took place after a period of weaker interest in the wake of the invasion of Czechoslovakia the year before. The Soviet leaders became even more interested after concluding a bilateral treaty with West Germany; they now wished to continue and secure not only bilateral but even multilateral recognition of the *status quo*.⁸⁴

West European Governments responded during the following years by trying to broaden the agenda to include, not only security-related questions but also a broad range of political, humanitarian and cultural issues.⁸⁵ Following preliminary negotiations in 1972, talks were held in Helsinki in July 1973 between representatives of all European countries, except Albania, as well as representatives of Canada and the United States.⁸⁶ The initial Soviet plans to exclude the Americans thus failed; during the Geneva negotiations (1973-75), and the Helsinki Summit in the summer of 1975 the United States participated and played a prominent role.

The Helsinki meeting was, in essence, a compromise between the interests of the superpowers and a number of individual states. The Soviet Union, as already mentioned, had an interest in securing Western acceptance of its *de facto* dominance

83 Peter van Ham, *The EC, Eastern Europe and European Unity: Discord, Collaboration and Integration since 1947*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1993, 109

84 Karl E Birnbaum & Ingo Peters, ‘The CSCE: a reassessment of its role in the 1980s’ in *Review of International Studies*, 16, 1990, 307

85 van Ham, 1993, 110

86 Sword (ed.), 1990, 248

over Eastern Europe. Some West European countries, on the other hand, wished to improve official relations with East European Governments while simultaneously supporting human rights activists and dissidents. West Germany, in particular, was eager to continue its *Ostpolitik*. The two superpowers had a principal interest in keeping their respective blocs of allied partners together. Industrialists in the West, and some political leaders in the East, wanted to promote the diffusion of technological know-how from the West and stimulate investments and trade. A number of Western NGOs wished to support independent opposition movements in the East, while West European peace movements were interested in initiating a dialogue with their counterparts in Eastern and Central Europe.

From the beginning, France and Italy pressed hard to put human rights on the agenda,⁸⁷ as was finally accepted. The various topics of the conference were divided into three 'baskets': security issues in the first basket, economic questions in the second and human rights in the third.⁸⁸ For Hungary, more specifically, the Helsinki Summit was important since it was the first time that János Kádár officially brought up the Trianon Treaty and its consequences for Hungary.⁸⁹

The final outcome, 'the Helsinki Final Act' adopted at the Helsinki meeting in August 1975, was a most ambiguous document. It did not have the legal status of a treaty and required unanimity when deciding on future activities in the CSCE framework.⁹⁰ Its non-binding legal status was considered a major weakness by its critics although the Soviet Union 'adopted the principles of the Final Act into its 1976 Constitution'.⁹¹ Another point of criticism raised was that the Final Act might serve as a future obstacle to changing the status quo i.e. Soviet dominance over Eastern Europe. This was not necessarily true, but what the document did say was that frontiers should not be altered by force.⁹² The Final Act attracted much criticism from Western political analysts and politicians as it was considered to reflect a naive confidence in the sincerity of the decision-makers in the Soviet Union and its allied states.

It is an irony of history, or perhaps merely a reflection of the shortsightedness of many political and diplomatic analysts, that the CSCE process came to have an influence on the European development quite different from what had been

87 Bennett Kovrig, 'Creating Coherence: Collective Contributions to the Political Integration of Central and Eastern Europe' in Lampe, Nelson & Schönfeld (eds), 1993, 162

88 Sword (ed.), 1990, 248

89 Schreiber, 1991, 32

90 Kovrig, 1993, 163

91 Sword (ed.), 1990, 248

92 Calvocoressi, 1992, 63

predicted in 1975. More intense contacts between the countries and citizens of Western and Eastern Europe, which became possible through the adoption of this document, were, with the benefit of hindsight, a fundamental prerequisite for the rapid transformation of East and Central European politics towards the end of the 1980s. Furthermore, even though the basic principles agreed in Helsinki were not legally binding, they raised the moral price to be paid by states that systematically violated them.

The Helsinki Final Act, and the various monitoring groups known as Helsinki Watch Groups that soon mushroomed all over Central and Eastern Europe, attracted the attention of Western media and political elites to what was happening in those countries. It gradually became less easy for Western opinion or decision-makers to neglect or tolerate human rights violations, especially since the CSCE process coincided with, and stimulated, growing official, as well as private, interest and activism on human rights.⁹³ This Western concern about the human rights' situation in the East was eventually shared by actors politically as far apart as President Reagan and West European peace movements. The latter established contacts with opposition groups in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland during the 1980s. Such contacts with, and a more genuine interest from, the West probably contributed to increasing the personal security of, at least, the best-known East European dissidents.⁹⁴

In addition to the effects the CSCE process had on the Hungarian domestic scene, the *détente* process made it easier for Hungary to continue its policy of closer trade and other relations with Western countries. The link established between trade relations and security policy soon made the preservation of a climate of good superpower relations one of Hungary's main foreign policy objectives. Partly thanks to the CSCE process, Hungary was able to improve its relations further with Western countries, including the United States, and President Carter decided to return St. Stephen's Crown and other royal regalia to Budapest. In January 1978 they were brought to Budapest by Cyrus Vance, the US Secretary of State, where they were received by political, cultural and religious leaders:

'The return of the crown of St. Stephen was a confirmation of the fact that the Kádár regime was legitimate in the eyes of the West. The symbolic message was not lost

93 Kovrig, 1993, 163

94 Chris Corrin, 'People and Politics' in White, Batt & Lewis (eds), 1993, 189. David S Meyer, 'Below, Beyond, Beside the State: Peace and Human Rights Movements and the End of the Cold War' in Skidmore & Hudson (eds), 1993, 291-292

on the Hungarian rulers, who used the regalia to demonstrate Hungarian unity and traditions.⁹⁵

However, even if Hungary profited from the détente process in the 1970s, détente did not automatically lead to economic cooperation, nor were there any guarantees that the improvement in superpower relations would last. Hence, one objective of Hungarian foreign policy became to regulate the relations between the CMEA and the EC within the CSCE process in order to make these relations less sensitive to any kind of short-term fluctuation in superpower relations.⁹⁶

Foreign policy change 1980-84

Trade and economic policy

‘The main purpose of all strategies of foreign economic policy is to make domestic policies compatible with the international political economy.’⁹⁷

As we have seen, the domestic stability strategy formulated by the Kádár regime in the mid-1960s gave priority to the promotion of economic progress and rising living standards through economic reforms. To reach these goals, the regime decided to open up towards the West.⁹⁸ Furthermore, being a small state with limited natural resources, Hungary was highly dependent on external trade and sensitive to international economic trends. Foreign and domestic policy were thus closely intertwined. In the early 1980s, according to Lemaitre, Hungary’s form of socialism led to a change in foreign policy thinking.⁹⁹ Hungary was developing closer relations with countries in the West, as well as with non-aligned countries. Meanwhile, its domestic political reforms opened up for economic assistance from some Western countries, in particular the US:

‘Domestic economic reform therefore provided the impetus for Hungary’s willingness to emancipate itself, if only to a small degree, from both the Soviet political model and Soviet foreign policy tutelage.’¹⁰⁰

95 Gerner, 1984, 103. Váli, 1978, 117-118

96 Kiss, 1988, 100

97 Peter J Katzenstein (ed.), *Between Power and Plenty: Foreign Economic Policies of Advanced Industrial States*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1978, 4 quoted in Putnam, 1988, 431

98 Burant (ed.), 1990, 205

99 Lemaitre, 1988, 134-135. Tökés, 1984, 18

100 Burant (ed.), 1990, 220

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Hungary's exports to Western Europe continued to grow, notably those to West Germany and Austria. By 1984 West Germany had become Hungary's second most important trading partner.¹⁰¹ In 1988 Austria, too, had passed East Germany and had become Hungary's third biggest trading partner in terms of both exports and imports.¹⁰² However, growing exports to Western countries were still insufficient to pay for the imports and to service the debt that Hungary had accumulated. Furthermore, owing to yet another recession in the West in the early 1980s, and the dramatic rise in international interest rates, Hungary was facing declining demand in the West while its foreign debt continued to grow.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, it was officially recognised that there was no substitute for Hungary's relations with the West, and a further opening to the West was seen as the only alternative.¹⁰⁴ The huge foreign debt 'combined with the regime's desire to satisfy Hungarian consumers, demanded that economic relations with the West continue at an ever higher level'.¹⁰⁵ Thus, notwithstanding the deterioration in East-West relations in the early 1980s, Hungary continued its policy of close cooperation with the West and tried further to strengthen its ties with West Germany.¹⁰⁶

Hungary's openness and closer relations with Western Europe began to be reflected by Hungarian political leaders who stated that Hungary was also part of Europe. Volgyes commented in 1982 that

'sometimes it is more wishful thinking than reality, but the purpose of Hungary's foreign policy for the last decade has been to become a part of the mainstream of European progress and excellence. Even if they could not become a part of the West politically, Hungary's leaders would settle for no less than second best: to make Hungary a part of the technologically and intellectually advanced European system'.¹⁰⁷

The opening towards the West, and the improvement in Hungary's relations with those countries even during the period of the 'Second Cold War', reinforced Hungary's dependence on the West. This also contributed to reducing the credibility of the official (defence) image of an aggressive Western Europe, not

101 Heinrich, 1986, 178

102 Margit Nielsen, 'Udenrigsøkonomien' in Jensen & Nielsen, 1990 (c), 95. Kun, 1993, 34-36

103 McMillan, 1990, 29. Dawisha, 1990 (a), 118

104 Géza Kótai, 'Ungarn in der sich wandelnden Welt der achtziger Jahre' in *Europa-Archiv*, Vol. 42, No. 11, 1987, 316, 320. Heinrich, 1986, 177. Gati, 1986 (a), 208

105 Kun, 1993, 32

106 Izik-Hedri, 1990, 455

107 Volgyes, 1982, 100

least due to the expansion of tourism and other forms of human ‘cross-curtain’ contacts. As Lemaitre observed, the form of socialism chosen by the Hungarian regime affected the range of security policy options.¹⁰⁸

A major problem with the NEM-reforms was Hungary’s dependence on imports from the West, to enable the regime to keep its promises in the social contract. Hungary’s foreign debt, reflecting the country’s largely failed export strategy, therefore grew rapidly in the 1970s and early 1980s. Although part of the problem was that a large proportion of these credits was wasted on unproductive investments or went to consumption the fundamental problem was really ‘the half-hearted nature of the reforms’.¹⁰⁹ By the end of 1978, as discussed in the previous chapter, the foreign debt to the West had grown so drastically that the regime decided to try to stop its further growth, but the foreign debt continued to grow, notwithstanding. This was partly a result of the deterioration in East-West relations following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979, which reduced Hungary’s possibilities to export to the West. By the end of 1981, Hungary found itself in an acute debt crisis.¹¹⁰

In response, Hungary joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in 1982, thereby demonstrating the country’s clear intentions to promote closer economic relations with the West. Hungary had already wanted to join in 1968, but, at the time, this had not been acceptable to Moscow.¹¹¹ Joining the IMF forced Hungary to accept an IMF austerity programme that included a reduction of imports, rising domestic prices and a cutback in new investments.¹¹² This did not radically improve the economic situation. However, IMF membership raised Hungary’s credit rating with banks and contributed further to the Kádár regime’s respectability in the West.¹¹³ Although Hungary’s net foreign debt remained stable during the first half of the 1980s, it doubled again between 1985 and 1987. Hungary’s debt ratio per capita became the highest in the region.¹¹⁴ Membership of the IMF and the World Bank reduced the Kádár regime’s power of independent action on economic issues during its last years in power, which ‘was the harbinger of the inevitable collapse of the

108 ‘[D]en valgte socialismemodel har haft konsekvenser for den sikkerhedspolitik, det er muligt at føre’. Lemaitre, 1988, 137

109 Pierre Lemaitre, ‘A Hungarian Concept of Security’ in Wæver, Lemaitre & Tromer (eds), 1989, 163

110 Nielsen, 1990 (a), 31

111 Heinrich, 1986, 178. Swain, 1993, 67. Romsics, 1999, 356

112 Tőkés, 1984, 2

113 Kun, 1993, 36

114 Swain, 1993, 68

old regime'.¹¹⁵ These institutions, as well as foreign Governments and creditors, had a moderating influence on the regime and, on many occasions, gave direct policy advice to the Hungarian leaders.¹¹⁶ According to a thought-provoking, although perhaps not entirely plausible, theory 'the indebtedness was a result of a deliberate process carried out by economic reformers in order to make the political reform'.¹¹⁷

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was still an important trading partner for Hungary, in particular as a source of oil and as an export market for the low-quality goods that could not be sold to the West.¹¹⁸ After the second oil shock, however, Soviet exports of oil and raw materials within the CMEA ceased to grow and even decreased. This fundamentally altered the established division of labour between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. From the beginning of the 1980s, Soviet subsidies declined steadily while Eastern Europe's terms of trade with the Soviet Union deteriorated sharply.¹¹⁹

In the early 1980s, Hungary like other East European countries again tried to increase its exports to the Soviet Union but this strategy did not meet with success. Terms of trade had deteriorated and Moscow was no longer interested in buying inferior products in exchange for raw material that could be exported to the West.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, in 1981 the Soviet Union was still the destination of almost 20 per cent of Hungarian exports, while the other East European countries accounted for almost 25 per cent. In terms of imports, in 1984 Hungary was still importing over 90 per cent of its natural gas, oil and iron ore and more than 75 per cent of its fertilisers from the Soviet Union.¹²¹

It is difficult to draw up an accurate overall balance sheet of who profited, or lost, most from the trade within the CMEA. It seems as if the Stalinist period, when the Soviet Union drained Eastern Europe of resources, was followed by two decades with a mixed record. In the 1970s, the Soviet Union was paying back, through economic subsidies, while 'during the first half of the 1980s, the positive and negative aspects of trade fell much more evenly on the two sides, although the size of the Soviet economy and Soviet predominance in determining pricing mechanisms and other CMEA structures worked to the advantage of

115 Szoboszlai, 1991, 202

116 László Bruszt & David Stark, 'Remaking the Political Field in Hungary: From the Politics of Confrontation to the Politics of Competition' in Banac (ed.), 1992, 28

117 Szoboszlai, 1991, 202

118 Lemaitre, 1989, 163

119 Gati, 1986 (a), 197-198. Köves, 1992, 7

120 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 118

121 Hoensch, 1988, 255. Heinrich, 1986, 177

Moscow'.¹²² Hence, during the 1980s, membership of the CMEA became less and less advantageous for Hungary. Enterprises were trapped with one foot in a reformed economy and were, therefore, reluctant to enter into long-term trade agreements with other CMEA member states. At the same time, for political reasons they retained one foot in the, still predominant, CMEA world. Hence, insufficient hard-currency earnings meant that Hungary could neither repay its debt, nor modernise its production facilities:¹²³

*'Die Anforderungen gleichzeitiger Anpassung an den RGW [CMEA], die Weltwirtschaft und sogar der spezifische Rahmen interner Bedingungen setzten Prioritäten und Ziele, die sich oft gegenseitig ausschlossen, zumindest aber unterschiedlicher Natur waren.'*¹²⁴

Security

On the eve of 1980, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. This was followed by the refusal of the US Congress to ratify the SALT II agreement and overall cooler relations between the alliance leaders. This change was further reflected in NATO's 'dual-track Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) decision' of December 1979 i.e. to negotiate with the Soviet Union while deploying new medium-range (Pershing II) and cruise missiles in Western Europe. This strategy was adopted to counter a Soviet decision to deploy new SS-20 missiles in Czechoslovakia and East Germany to replace the old SS-4 and SS-5 missiles.¹²⁵ Another decision that probably had greater impact was President Reagan's 'Strategic Defense Initiative' (SDI), which was revealed in March 1983, soon to be dubbed 'Star Wars'. In the autumn of 1983, NATO began to deploy Pershing II and cruise missiles in Western Europe 'an area which had seemed to be the weakest link in the encirclement of the Soviet Union'.¹²⁶

Seen from Budapest's horizon, this was a threatening development, because of the negative impact it was likely to have on 'the economic, political, technological and scientific ties between East and West'.¹²⁷ It went in direct opposition to the views on security that Hungary had developed; it was, therefore, important for Hungary to make it clear abroad that it held a distinct view on East-West relations

122 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 112

123 Gati, 1990, 130. Tökés, 1984, 20

124 László J Kiss, 'Europäische Sicherheit: Interpretationen, Perzeptionen und Außenpolitik Ungarns' in *Europa-Archiv*, 4, 1988, 97

125 Stephen White, *Gorbachev in Power*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, 163

126 David Holloway, 'Gorbachev's New Thinking' in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 68, No.1, 1989, 69

127 Lemaitre, 1989, 159-160

and intended to continue to pursue good relations with both Eastern and Western Europe. These signals involved inviting Western Heads of State to visit Hungary, supporting the GDR and Poland against Czechoslovakia and introducing a new concept of security.¹²⁸

An important reason underlying the Kádár regime's efforts to stand up for its own policy line was the belief that 'any return to economic isolation from the West would endanger policies designed to modernize the economy and to promote political liberalization' – both of which were intended to ensure support for the regime and, thus, political stability.¹²⁹

Hungary was not alone among the CMEA member states to argue in favour of continued dialogue between East and West. Romania and East Germany had their own reasons for preferring détente to conflict. In Gati's words, these regimes were trying to 'move toward the West without appearing to move away from the East'. The Soviet Foreign Minister, Gromyko, and the Defence Minister, Ustinov, as well as members of the Czechoslovak leadership criticised their Hungarian colleagues for expressing an independent view on these matters. Budapest was also criticised in *Pravda* editorials in 1985 and 1986 for its open policy towards the West.¹³⁰ In the early 1980s, relations between Hungary and the Soviet Union became cooler as the Kádár regime began to emphasise the 'special role of "small- and medium-size European countries" in maintaining cordial relations even at a time of "superpower" discord'.¹³¹

As the détente and the general improvement in superpower relations of the 1970s gave way to a new Cold War it became even more important for the Hungarian leadership to be able to justify, in the face of Moscow, its continued interest in close contacts and trade relations with the West. Hungary, therefore, stressed the existence of *common European interests* as well as *common small state interests*. To create a normative ground for its endeavours, Hungary also continued to give high priority to *the CSCE process* even when this was not considered opportune in Moscow.

References to a common European background, as noticed by Lemaitre, could be used to bridge barriers between the two blocs. Such references could also, however, carry an anti-American or anti-Soviet undertone if Europe was conceived of as Europe excluding the superpowers. From the end of the 1970s, a growing

128 *ibid.*, 165

129 Burant (ed.), 1990, 206-207

130 Hoensch, 1988, 280-281. Gati, 1986 (a), 175 & 195-196. Burant (ed.), 1990, 206-207

131 Gati, 1986 (a), 175

number of publications emerged in Hungary on the concept of Europe and the importance of Europe as one of the foundations for Hungary's development. To 'stay European' gradually acquired the meaning of 'not to stay behind' as Hungary had been forced to do in the 16th century, when the country was occupied and divided. While Hungary's development in the 1940s had been merely a carbon-copy of the Soviet development model, which required a de-nationalisation, from the early 1960s it was dominated more by a step-by-step return to a policy based on national specificities (*Besonderheiten*). The emphasis on a 'European identity' in the early 1980s was meant to reflect the common threat which nuclear weapons posed to the whole of Europe but also that it would be wise to continue an active coexistence policy between East and West. Culture, as an expression of common European interests, was also used, because of its perceived relative autonomy from politics, to maintain continuity in East-West relations.¹³²

A second element put forward by the Hungarian leaders to legitimise their relative independence in foreign affairs was the idea that small states may have interests different from those of the superpowers and, therefore, a different role to play on the international arena. This was not a completely new idea in Hungarian foreign policy. Even in the early 1970s, Foreign Minister János Péter 'often tried to establish greater cooperation between smaller countries regardless of their social system'.¹³³

As we can see, in the early 1980s relations between small and medium-size states in Eastern and Western Europe did not always reflect the relations between the two superpowers.¹³⁴ Hungary attributed a special role to small- and medium-sized states in maintaining good relations between member countries of the two military blocs. Their role was described as including the preservation of friendly relations between the two blocs and the development of compromises – even at times when the relations between the superpowers are tense. In advocating such a role, Hungary was supported by the GDR and Poland, both of which were also severely affected by the deterioration in East-West relations during the Second Cold War.¹³⁵ During these years, Hungary also 'openly promoted the state as co-equal to the class in both international and intrabloc relations'.¹³⁶

132 Kiss, 1988, 95-98

133 Hoensch, 1988, 245

134 Kiss, 1988, 96

135 Lemaitre, 1988, 142-143. Burant (ed.), 1990, 206. Fülöp, 1994, 116

136 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 202. Burant (ed.), 1990, 208

Hungary's 'small state doctrine' has been summarised by Kiss under seven headings – (1) active coexistence between East and West, (2) special responsibility among small states for international cooperation and security, (3) national interests of small states independent of superpower relations, (4) Europeanisation of foreign policy, (5) support for the CSCE process, (6) CSCE supports small states and cultures as well as minorities, and economic relations between the East and the West and (7) CSCE giving support for small states and cultures as well as minorities, and economic relations between the West and the East.¹³⁷ This doctrine made Moscow react, not the least in connection with the INF dispute in 1983. The Soviet Union insisted on a common bloc position whereas Hungary, together with the GDR, had argued that small states 'could play a positive role in the international arena'.¹³⁸

As a consequence of Hungary's growing contacts with the West, a new generation of foreign policy specialists began to emerge in Budapest. Among them were Mátyás Szűrös, who was the CC secretary responsible for foreign relations between 1978 and 1989 (and Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1978 to 1982), and Gyula Horn, who became State Secretary for foreign affairs in 1985 after he had been head of the CC's Foreign Relations Department. Horn had joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1959 and worked in the foreign policy section of the Party for 16 years. He had held several diplomatic posts abroad before this appointment.¹³⁹

Reflecting these changes within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a conflict, or at least some tension, is likely to have emerged in the late 1980s between those within the Party who were responsible for domestic affairs and those responsible for foreign policy, as well as between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior. In 1983 Andropov asked Kádár to take measures against Mátyás Szűrös who, according to confidential reports, had been too outspoken in a conversation with foreign correspondents. However, Kádár defended Szűrös

137 Kiss, 1988, 102-103

138 de Nevers, 1990, 14-15. Recently, it has been found that elements of a small-state doctrine were discussed within the Party leadership as early as 1967 when Foreign Minister János Péter proposed that Hungary should play an important role in promoting détente through intense contacts with other small European countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway, in addition to contacts with more important countries like Austria, France and the UK. Csaba Békés, *Hungary and the Warsaw Pact 1954-1989: Documents on the Impact of a Small State within the Eastern Bloc*. Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact, October 2003 at http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/documents/collection_13/texts/intro.htm, 16 with reference to a Memorandum by the Foreign Minister

139 Kun, 1993, 31-33. In 1989 Horn was appointed Foreign Minister under President Miklós Németh and joined the reform Communists to establish the Hungarian Socialist Party. Edith Oltay, 'The Return of the Former Communists' in *Transition*, January 1995, 37

and even criticised Andropov for having used KGB agents to collect information about Hungarian leaders.¹⁴⁰ As previously mentioned, Andropov seemed to approve of Kádár's economic reforms, and Kádár was warmly received in Moscow in July 1983. The nomination of Konstantin Chernenko as new Soviet leader in February 1984 was not met with great enthusiasm in Budapest. However, Hungary continued its foreign policy 'independence within interdependence'.¹⁴¹

In 1984 Szűrös defended the existence of 'national interests' (*nemzeti érdek*) and the right of Hungary to remain flexible in foreign affairs regardless of the country's obligations as a member of the Warsaw Pact. In an article published in the official Party monthly *Társadalmi Szemle*, he denied that the national interests of East European states had to be given a lower priority than common interests and objectives. He also claimed that relations between individual countries in East and West could prosper even in a period of general deterioration in East-West relations.¹⁴² In addition, he said that

'the small- and medium-sized states in each alliance system, through dialogue and constructive relations, could improve the international atmosphere and thereby create possibilities for the improvement of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union'.¹⁴³

In the face of Hungary's attempt to pursue its own policy line, the Soviet leaders criticised Hungary's position both directly and indirectly and 'warned the Hungarians not to allow the "imperialist forces" to use economic levers to interfere in the affairs of a socialist state'.¹⁴⁴ Hungary's positions were also criticised by Czechoslovak media (*Rudé Právo*), unofficially on behalf of the Soviet Union, and in Soviet press (*Novoye Vremya*). In response, Szűrös wrote that each Party had a number of specific characteristics, despite the fact that the social system was identical, and that each country had direct objectives to defend. He also gave an interview for *Neues Deutschland* expressing similar views. Meanwhile, Budapest encouraged East Germany's policy towards the West, and praised 'Honecker's meetings with the leaders of Sweden, Greece, and Italy'.¹⁴⁵ Szűrös's original article, according to Gati, had four main messages and target groups. It was intended

140 Fejtő, 1992, 179

141 Schreiber, 1991, 38

142 Tőkés, 1984, 21. Szűrös in the January 1984 issue of *Társadalmi Szemle*. Gati, 1986 (a), 203-204

143 Burant (ed.), 1990, 207-208

144 Kun, 1993, 32

145 *Népszabadság*, 26 February 1983 quoted in Schreiber, 1991, 37. Burant (ed.), 1990, 207-208. Gati, 1986 (a), 203-204

to send a signal at home that domestic economic reforms should be backed up by a foreign policy that better reflected Hungary's national interests; it should inform the Soviet Union that Hungary intended to remain loyal but that it also had to 'look West both for economic reasons and for the purpose of satisfying the public's urge to belong to "Europe"'. It was also intended to send a signal to the West that Hungary remained committed, despite superpower tensions, to continue its openness towards the West (in particular West Germany and Austria) and, finally, 'to signal to some of the more orthodox Warsaw Pact states, especially neighboring Czechoslovakia, Hungary's pride in its achievements and its growing impatience with innuendoes questioning the validity of its socialist path'.¹⁴⁶

In April 1984 the small state doctrine was criticised in an article by Rakhmanin (first deputy Head of the Soviet Communist Party's CC Department for Liaison with Communist and Workers' Parties, under the pseudonym Borisov) in *Voprosy Istorii KPSS*:

'Just as groundless are attempts to define the roles of great and small countries outside the context of class struggle and of the fundamental contradiction between socialism and imperialism, that is, outside the main characteristics of the contemporary era ... in this way, an artificial watershed line is drawn between large and small states, and the latter – irrespective of their class affinity – are attributed only positive functions in the development of international relations, those of overcoming contradictions, working out sensible compromises, and promoting East-West dialogue.'¹⁴⁷

Despite the pressure from some of the other Warsaw Pact members, Hungary continued its own foreign policy course.¹⁴⁸ In 1985 and 1986, Szürös wrote that there was not a political centre of the Communist movement that could 'enforce prescriptions for behavior' and called for 'the "proper adaptation" of the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism to specific national circumstances'. According to Burant, this was intended to justify 'renovations in domestic policy, in turn leading to innovations in foreign policy, including Hungary's opening to the West'.¹⁴⁹ In October 1986 Szürös also gave a lecture in which he 'drew a direct relationship between Hungary's economic policies at home and its primary foreign policy goals. In his view, the first priority of Hungarian foreign policy was to ensure the most favourable external conditions for the country's economic activity by

146 Gati, 1986 (a), 204-205

147 Tőkés, 1984, 22-23

148 Kun, 1993, 32-33

149 Burant (ed.), 1990, 208

using “its peculiar means, contacts, possibilities and influence to help us fulfill our economic objectives and to assist us in our efforts to ensure the prosperity of our country”¹⁵⁰

In addition, although partly connected with Hungary’s emphasis on European and small-state interests, the CSCE continued to play a prominent role in Hungarian foreign policy since this process could lead to the establishment of frameworks and institutions for East-West cooperation that would be less dependent on the climate of superpower relations.¹⁵¹ Since Kádár considered détente to be a security factor for Hungary that would eventually replace military security, détente was actively promoted by Hungary during the Second Cold War. This was reflected in an article by Gyula Horn saying that ‘one must join the antiwar side, whatever one’s ideological and political commitment’.¹⁵²

Changes could also be seen in how security was defined. Even before Gorbachev succeeded Chernenko in March 1985, Hungary acknowledged that it was pointless to try to achieve absolute military security. Instead, common security was to be promoted. Hungary also took a negative stance on the use of military force, not only in Europe but also in developing countries e.g. Nicaragua or Afghanistan. This shift is important since the use of military force in Afghanistan, in Western eyes, was one important factor in the breakdown of détente and the outbreak of the Second Cold War. Another point worth noting is that not only the Warsaw Pact but NATO as well was described as having a peace-keeping function. The previous emphasis on military security also gave way to a broader security agenda that included non-military aspects of security and advocated cooperation with the West: ‘The starting point is military balance, but thereafter the priority is on non-military aspects of security. The capitalist states are accorded an important role in the promotion of peace.’¹⁵³ It was obviously easier for Hungary to adopt an independent policy on non-military aspects of security, since the Warsaw Pact had less to say on these matters than on military doctrines and strategy.¹⁵⁴

Hungary succeeded quite well in withstanding the deterioration in relations between the two superpower blocs. Thus, by the mid-1980s, ‘the theory that Hungary had won some freedom of action in the domestic sphere by remaining loyal to the Soviet Union in foreign policy lost much of its validity’.¹⁵⁵ Despite

150 Kun, 1993, 33-34

151 Kiss, 1988, 97-98

152 *MTI Weekly Bulletin*, 15 August 1984 quoted in Heinrich, 1986, 176

153 Lemaitre, 1988, 143-144. Lemaitre, 1989, 154-162

154 Kiss, 1988, 95

155 Burant (ed.), 1990, 206-207

Hungarian efforts to follow an independent foreign policy course, however, East-West relations continued to influence Hungary's room for manoeuvre. As noted by Kótai:

*'Die Handlungsmöglichkeiten der ungarischen Außenpolitik werden – wenn auch nicht ausschließlich – so doch fundamental dadurch bestimmt, wie sich die Ost-West-Beziehungen und in diesem Rahmen das sowjetisch-amerikanische Verhältnis gestalten.'*¹⁵⁶

Foreign policy change 1985-88

Trade and economic policy

*'Il ne peut y avoir de coexistence, à long terme, entre une politique intérieure et une politique extérieure qui signoreraient et prendraient des voies totalement divergentes. Les tentatives répétées de réformes initiées par les acteurs de la politique intérieure hongroise aboutirent à une certaine ouverture de l'économie hongroise, qui dut se conformer de plus en plus aux normes des échanges internationaux et devint, de ce fait, plus sensible aux soubresauts de l'économie mondiale.'*¹⁵⁷

In the latter part of the 1980s, as Hungary's economic problems grew more serious, relations with Western Europe became even closer. In 1984 the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited Hungary after which

'the Hungarian press stressed the special place of West Germany in Hungary's foreign policy and West Germany's efforts to reduce tension between east and west. *Népszabadság* called Kohl "the patron of East-West relations"'.¹⁵⁸

West Germany was still Hungary's most important trading partner in the West and Bonn expressed its appreciation of Hungary's treatment of its German minority and the policy of letting ethnic Germans who wished to do so move to West Germany.¹⁵⁸

During this period, Hungary also tried to improve its relations with the United Kingdom and the United States as well as with the European Communities.¹⁵⁹ An offer from the EEC in 1974 to establish bilateral agreements with East and

156 Kótai, 1987, 314

157 Mihály Fülöp, 'La politique étrangère hongroise dans le contexte de l'Europe centrale' in *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 1994, 116

158 Burant (ed.), 1990, 216

159 *ibid.*, 205

Central European countries had been rejected by all CMEA members except Romania. Until the mid-1980s, Hungary had in the main been loyal to the official CMEA policy of not recognising the EC as an independent entity but had nonetheless concluded agreements with several member countries on trade and also, via membership of the GATT, obtained access to EC markets.

However, CMEA policy began to change under the leadership of Gorbachev. During the first half of 1988, when Germany held the EC Presidency, negotiations were conducted between Hungary and the EEC, and in June 1988 a joint declaration was signed, which established official relations between the EEC and the CMEA. In September Hungary signed a ten-year Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement, which entered into force on 1 December. Hungary profited from a 'relatively broad negotiating approach by the EC' which, in its policies towards Eastern Europe, clearly differentiated between these countries.¹⁶⁰

It was not only Hungary's relations with the EC that evolved. Changes were also taking place within the CMEA. In June 1984 the CMEA Council had convened for the first time in thirteen years. The main purpose of the meeting in Moscow was to allow the Soviet leader, Chernenko, to remind the other member states of their economic obligations vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and of their dependence on Soviet energy. However, the Council also adopted 'Basic Guidelines', which to some extent made (largely verbal) concessions that responded to Hungary's concern to encourage direct trade between enterprises within the CMEA framework.¹⁶¹

At the first CMEA Summit under Gorbachev, held in December 1985, the Secretary General wanted to strengthen cooperation and coordination within the organisation in order to increase economic integration, and a 'Programme for Scientific and Technical Progress until 2000' was adopted. Gorbachev indicated that he wanted to change the pricing structure for Soviet raw materials, thereby increasing Soviet revenues. He also stated that the East European member states had an obligation to supply the Soviet Union with high quality products instead

160 Werner Ungerer, 'The Development of the EC and Its Relationship to Central and Eastern Europe' in *Aussenpolitik* (English edition), Vol. 41, No. 3, 1990, 228-229. Hyde-Price, 1996, 197. Adrian G V Hyde-Price, 'Democratization in Eastern Europe: The External Dimension' in Pridham & Vanhanen (eds), 1994, 228-229. Niclas Sundström, 'Den ekonomiska utmaningen' in Magnus Andersson, Stefan Gullgren & Niclas Sundström, *Efter murens fall: om västs reaktioner på sammanbrottet i öst*, Nerenius & Santérus förlag, Stockholm, 1993, 233. Aurel Braun, 'On Reform, Perceptions, Misperceptions, Trends, and Tendencies' in Braun (ed.), 1990 (a), 185

161 McMillan, 1990, 30. Charles Gati, *The Bloc that Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1990, 127. Tökés, 1984, 23. According to Gati, the meeting was held in Sofia.

of saving them for hard-currency based export to the West. Taken together, those two measures would reduce Soviet subsidies to the other member states.¹⁶²

In October 1987, during a CMEA session in Moscow, Prime Minister Károly Grósz explained that the Hungarians 'were impatient with the slow pace of CMEA reform'.¹⁶³ The official communiqué from that meeting also mentioned the need for reform and put emphasis on 'the necessity of a *perestroika* of the mechanism of collaboration and socialist economic integration'.¹⁶⁴

Security

'Creating unhampered economic contacts helps to break the bounds of geo-strategic confrontation.'¹⁶⁵

Towards the end of the 1970s Western Europe had already become relatively less interested in the CSCE process. This reflected both the slow progress that had been made and the set-back in the détente process, which eventually led to the outbreak of the Second Cold War. Meanwhile, however, the United States began to show a more pronounced interest in the CSCE 'since it had come to realize that the Third Basket provided a useful mechanism for criticizing the Communist record on human rights'. Moreover, since the Madrid conference (1980-83), the issue of so-called confidence building measures became more important – pushed more by NATO than by the EC.¹⁶⁶ As far back as the Helsinki conference, there had been hopes that the CSCE would be continued through regular follow-up meetings although, in the beginning, these were not expected to be very important.¹⁶⁷ Initially, these low expectations proved justified, as the conferences held in Belgrade (1977-78) and Madrid failed to achieve much.¹⁶⁸

However, at the third follow-up meeting of the CSCE, which began in Vienna in November 1986, substantial progress was made in the field of human rights. Reflecting this, the 'Vienna Concluding Document' adopted in January 1989 'removed many of the previous ambiguities regarding individual civil liberties, and agreed on a joint position which reflected the West's concern with protecting

162 de Nevers, 1990, 15. Adam, 1995, 80

163 Dawisha, 1990 (b), 21-22

164 McMillan, 1990, 41

165 Gyula Horn, 'Détente and Confrontation in East-West Relations' in *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 102, 1986, 38 quoted in Lemaitre, 1989, 159

166 van Ham, 1993, 113-114

167 Dau, 1989, 59

168 Kovrig, 1993, 163

the rights of individual citizens against any infringement by the state'.¹⁶⁹ Against this background, Hungarian foreign policy, generally speaking, took on a more independent character in the 1980s – described by Tőkés as 'semi-sovereign' from 1985¹⁷⁰ – and was also more or less openly used as a means of finding solutions to the country's internal crisis. As noted by Kótai in 1987

*'Ungarn will alles tun, um seine stagnierende innere Entwicklung und seine in mancher Hinsicht eingeengten wirtschaftlichen Möglichkeiten durch gesteigerte Aktivität und Initiativbereitschaft der Außenpolitik zu kompensieren.'*¹⁷¹

Hungarian efforts in this field were greatly facilitated by the nomination of Mikhail Gorbachev as the new Secretary General of the Soviet Communist Party. This would, eventually, 'put an end to the attempts of Soviet hard-liners to interfere with the Hungarian experiment'.¹⁷² Of greater significance for Hungary than Gorbachev's domestic *perestroika* were the changes in Soviet foreign policy – new thinking or *novoye myshleniye* – which eventually began to be announced piece-meal.

Concerning the Soviet reforms, there was clearly a link between domestic reforms and Gorbachev's re-thinking of foreign policy. Improving Soviet-US relations was considered necessary and the whole Soviet bloc had to strive for closer relations with the West. Gorbachev hoped that the West would be able to provide financial capital and technological skills and refrain from exploiting Soviet weakness during the reform period.¹⁷³ From a Hungarian perspective, these were not new ideas but the 'new thinking' conveyed a message that the new foreign policy line already adopted by Hungary was now accepted and indeed even endorsed, in Moscow.¹⁷⁴ In 1987 a leading foreign policy advisor within the Hungarian Party claimed that under Gorbachev the positive role of Hungary's small state and CSCE policy had been acknowledged as necessary, also by the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁵

169 Hyde-Price, 1994, 237

170 Tőkés, 1991, 229

171 Kótai, 1987, 317

172 Kun, 1993, 33

173 Ernst Kux, 'Revolution in Eastern Europe – Revolution in the West?' in *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1991, 4. Michael Cox, 'Whatever happened to the "Second" Cold War? Soviet-American relations: 1980-1988' in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 16, 1990, 165

174 Gyula Józsa, *Die Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik Ungarns nach dem Systemwechsel: Ausgangslage*, Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, 66, 1994, 18

175 Kótai, 1987, 314-315. Géza Kótai was member of the Central Committee, Head of the Department for Foreign Policy and International Relations within the Central Committee of the MSzMP and a foreign policy advisor to Kádár.

One of Gorbachev's main objectives in foreign affairs was to improve relations with the United States and the West in order to create favourable conditions for a new détente period. In the autumn of 1985, he met the Presidents of the United States and France, but did not yet put forward any major initiative.¹⁷⁶ In February 1986, at the 27th Party Congress, Gorbachev presented the most important aspects of his 'new thinking'. Among other themes, he 'downplayed the destructive and conflict-generating nature of capitalism and [...] also referred to a growing interdependence among nations leading to an integral world (*tselostnyi mir*)'.¹⁷⁷

In Gorbachev's mind, this interdependence ought to stimulate the superpowers to search for 'mutual security' rather than 'absolute security'. Security should be regarded as a political rather than a military issue. A reasonable interpretation of this development would be to see it as a kind of 'de-ideologisation of Soviet international relations'.¹⁷⁸ In December 1988, in a speech at the United Nations, Gorbachev even claimed that international relations should be 'freed from ideology'.¹⁷⁹ Generally speaking, the 'new thinking' implied a more flexible and less dogmatic Soviet approach to foreign affairs.

The main reasoning behind this change appears to have been the need among the Soviet leadership to focus on domestic problems and on modernising the Soviet Union with assistance from the West. Hence, great efforts were made to reduce the resources spent on military defence.¹⁸⁰ With this in mind, Gorbachev took several important initiatives. In November 1985 he and President Reagan held their first Summit in Geneva. Although no concrete results emerged, the meeting did initiate a process of trust and confidence building between the two leaders that would later on contribute to the détente and disarmament process.¹⁸¹

Shortly afterwards, in January 1986, Gorbachev put forward a proposal to destroy all nuclear weapons by the end of the century and also accepted on-site verification measures within the INF.¹⁸² In October Gorbachev and Reagan met again, this time in Reykjavik. Gorbachev suddenly proposed the elimination of all strategic weapons during the next ten years in response to an American proposal to remove all ballistic missiles. Significant progress was made, which

176 de Nevers, 1990, 14

177 Alfred B Evans Jr, 'Rethinking Soviet Socialism' in White, Pravda & Gitelman (eds), 1990, 41-42

178 Alex Pravda, 'The Politics of Foreign and Security Policy' in White, Pravda & Gitelman (eds), 1990, 215. Partos, 1993, 233-234

179 de Nevers, 1990, 19

180 Pravda, 1990, 214

181 Partos, 1993, 231

182 de Nevers, 1990, 15

laid the groundwork for the INF Treaty. However, although some NATO allies saw Reagan as having been too flexible, he did not accept that the SDI should be confined to laboratory research, which had been one of Gorbachev's main objectives, and the Summit was initially perceived by many as a failure.¹⁸³

In the first months of 1987, agreement was almost reached on an INF treaty,¹⁸⁴ which was finally signed during Gorbachev's visit to the United States in December. According to the treaty, which was to enter into force in June 1988, all INF weapons were to be destroyed by 1991.¹⁸⁵ The INF treaty was welcomed in Central Europe, since it meant that the Soviet Union would have to remove its missiles from Czechoslovakia and East Germany – where they had first been deployed in 1983 'to the open chagrin of both the local oligarchies and populations at large'.¹⁸⁶

In May-June 1988 the two superpower leaders met again at a Summit in Moscow. At the 19th Party Conference in June 1988, Gorbachev stated that 'the danger of war [has] been pushed back'. Such views were very much shared by both the Hungarian leaders and the Hungarian people. Gorbachev also continued to emphasise the political dimension of security.¹⁸⁷ An agreement was reached in Geneva on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan by 15 February 1989.¹⁸⁸ This further stimulated the détente process with the West and probably also, indirectly, paved the way for a weakening of the Soviet military threat to Central Europe while signalling a change in Soviet attitude. Finally, in his speech to the UN General Assembly in December 1988, Gorbachev announced a unilateral reduction in the Soviet armed forces by 500,000 troops including 5,000 tanks and 50,000 men from Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁹ In December the following year – the dramatic 1989 – the two Presidents met again, this time at Malta, where they agreed on a gradual and orderly transition of the European order.¹⁹⁰

The prospects for an improvement in East-West relations at superpower level and the progress in disarmament negotiations between the two superpower leaders were warmly welcomed in Hungary, as well as in some of the other states

183 Calvocoressi, 1992, 55. Partos, 1993, 232-233

184 de Nevers, 1990, 17

185 Calvocoressi, 1992, 56

186 Andrzej Korbonski, 'East European Political and Ideological Perceptions and Concerns' in Braun (ed.), 1990, 77. Although some grumbling could still be heard about, once again, not having been consulted by the Soviet authorities in advance but rather informed afterwards. Volgyes, 1990, 110-111

187 Braun, 1990 (a), 194

188 Peter Zwick, 'New Thinking and New Foreign Policy under Gorbachev' in *Political Science & Politics*, 2, 1989, 219

189 de Nevers, 1990, 19

190 Fejtő, 1992, 418

in Central Europe, including East Germany and Poland. Hungary officially welcomed the positive development in Soviet-American relations from around 1987, since the improvement in that relationship had *'den Aktionsradius der ungarischen Außenpolitik eher erweitert denn eingeengt'*.¹⁹¹

In the 1980s, as we have seen, these states had been more interested than Moscow in détente with the West, which made Hungary distance itself from the Soviet Union in foreign affairs. Although 'the Soviet leadership pressed these states to support Soviet policies in 1984, both Hungary and the GDR maintained independent views on their foreign-policy roles. This argument was still under way when Gorbachev came to power'.¹⁹² With this in mind, Gorbachev's new approach to East-West relations was well received, not the least since it would open up for closer collaboration between the CMEA and the EC, bringing economic benefits and change in the relations between the smaller East European states and the Soviet Union.¹⁹³

Gorbachev's attempts to reduce the tension between the two superpowers were also reflected in developments within the Warsaw Pact. At the Warsaw Pact meeting in June 1986, Gorbachev issued 'the Budapest Appeal' calling for a reduction by 25 per cent of military forces in Europe.¹⁹⁴ In May the following year, a statement on military doctrine was adopted by the Warsaw Pact, which 'called for the reduction of armed forces on the Continent to a level "at which neither side, in guaranteeing its own defense, would have the means for a surprise attack on the other, for mounting offensive operations in general"'.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, however, between 1985 and 1988 the Soviet troops in Eastern Europe were possibly even more important than before, in light of the new détente and Gorbachev's reforms, in order to make the East Europeans understand the limits of Soviet tolerance, since the troop presence 'served as a powerful deterrent, making a politically costly military intervention in the future less likely'.¹⁹⁶ During the same period, some criticism began to be heard in Hungary. In 1988 Iván Berend, then President of the Academy of Sciences and a member of the CC, complained that his country was spending 'as much on the military as it did

191 Kótai, 1987, 316

192 de Nevers, 1990, 13. Korbonski, 1990, 71-72, 77. Birnbaum & Peters, 1990, 306-307

193 Hankiss, 1990 (a), 131. Korbonski, 1990, 78

194 de Nevers, 1990, 16

195 Holloway, 1989, 73-74

196 Gati, 1990, 142

on health, education, and research together, and he called for a review to see if the military budget could be reduced'.¹⁹⁷

National identity

As already discussed, the situation of Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries, notably Romania, constituted a delicate problem for the Kádár regime throughout its period in power. Generally speaking, the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania deteriorated during the greater part of the Kádár period. In the 1950s, the Romanian regime increasingly began to use nationalism as a means to staying in power. Policy toward the Hungarian minority became more repressive; in 1967, the Hungarian Autonomous Region, which had been established in Eastern Transylvania in 1952, was finally dissolved. All key posts in the administration of this region were given to Romanians, and a large number of Romanians were also resettled in this area.¹⁹⁸ Under Ceaușescu, from the mid-1960s, there was a drive to assimilate the minorities.¹⁹⁹ Despite this and other signs of growing problems for the Hungarian population, the Kádár regime was remarkably patient and quiet on this issue, perhaps 'out of a sense of Socialist solidarity and in the hope of being able to do more for its conationals in the Rumania of the post-Ceaușescu era'.²⁰⁰

The CSCE process with its follow-up conferences in Madrid, Stockholm and Vienna, together with a growing interest in human rights from the mid-1970s, made it more difficult for the Hungarian regime to stay quiet, and 'after Helsinki the regime could not continue to ignore the issue under the rubric of socialist internationalism'.²⁰¹ The Western powers' interest in the fate of Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring states of Hungary helped to put pressure on the Romanian and Czechoslovak Governments on issues where the Kádár regime could not speak out clearly.²⁰² This may also have contributed to strengthening Hungary's orientation towards the West.

The Kádár regime's strong interest in the CSCE process should be seen in this light. According to Lemaitre, Hungary was probably the Socialist country that most actively supported the CSCE process. This support included a strong

197 *ibid.*, 150

198 Janusz Bugajski, *Nations in Turmoil: Conflict & Cooperation in Eastern Europe*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1993, 158-159. Hoensch, 1988, 277

199 Bugajski, 1993, 158-159

200 Hoensch, 1988, 277

201 Kun, 1993, 37-38

202 Lemaitre, 1989, 164

emphasis on human rights, partly in order to find a legal basis for the protection of the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries. The ‘human rights clause, which included the rights of minorities, [...] came in handy in support of Hungary’s arguments’.²⁰³ From the mid-1970s, the Kádár regime slowly began to show a deeper interest in the fate of the ethnic Hungarians in the neighbouring countries; the issue of minority rights gradually became part of Hungarian foreign policy. There are even occasional examples of Kádár speaking out on this subject. At the 12th Party Congress in 1980, Kádár said: ‘Here with us, in Hungary, people of different ethnicity [...] live with us as all other citizens do [...] under the protection of our laws and our constitution. We wish the same for Hungarians outside of our borders.’²⁰⁴ This policy change was not only a response to the CSCE. It also reflected a gradual change in Central and Eastern Europe’s relations with the Soviet Union as well as an attempt by the Government to handle its economic performance problems.²⁰⁵

Efforts to solve the problems between Hungary and Romania bilaterally resulted in a number of high-level meetings between representatives of the two countries. These efforts included a meeting between Kádár and Ceaușescu in 1977, a visit by the Hungarian Prime Minister to Bucharest in July 1982, talks in Bucharest in November-December 1982 between the Secretaries of the Central Committees, Aczél and Bárkonyi, and the Romanian Foreign Minister’s visit to Budapest in the beginning of 1983. They were not very productive in terms of substantial outcomes except for an agreement on the establishment of Consultates-General in Cluj (Kolozsvár) and Debrecen.²⁰⁶ Gerner quotes Volgyes who stated that ‘the fate of the Hungarians (Magyars) in Romania “is now an issue on which the acceptance of the Hungarian leadership by the entire Magyar population is dependent”’.²⁰⁷ The dilemma of the regime has been well captured by Hoensch:

‘Officially, its hands are tied against doing more for the Hungarian minority in Hungary’s neighbouring countries. On the other hand, it cannot allow the problem to be exploited solely by the dissidents and nationalists, since a groundswell of nationalism could jeopardise its programme of reforms [...] and thus undermine the domestic stability so far achieved.’²⁰⁸

203 Kun, 1993, 28-29. Lemaitre, 1988, 141

204 Ignác Romsics, ‘Nation and State in Modern Hungarian History’ in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 164, 2001

205 Tőkés, 1984, 20-21. Kun, 1993, 37

206 Kun, 1993, 38. Hoensch, 1988, 277

207 Gerner, 1984, 113

208 Hoensch, 1988, 279-280

In April 1984, reflecting the deterioration both within Romania and in diplomatic relations, the Hungarian Ambassador to Romania spoke on Radio Bucharest and ‘highlighted the problems of the Hungarian minority and criticised its discrimination, contrasting the Rumanian government’s conduct with his own government’s much more tolerant nationalities policy’.²⁰⁹ The following year, the Romanian authorities unilaterally closed the Consulate-General in Debrecen – ‘a move that the Hungarians represented as the first step toward the closing of their representation in Cluj’.²¹⁰

The same year, at the MSzMP’s 13th Party Congress, Romania was implicitly criticised. Later during the summer, when ‘the Rumanian border formalities were so slow in being carried out that Hungarians had to put up with delays of eight hours on average, the Hungarian press had no hesitation in accusing Rumania of “openly violating bilateral agreements” and demanded “retaliation” for this “harassment”’.²¹¹ To summarise, from the mid-1980s the Hungarian regime was pushed by domestic and international events towards showing a higher profile in defending the rights of Hungarian abroad. This implied a change in foreign policy, so much so that Kótai in 1987 explained that protection of Hungarians living abroad was part of a quite specific field of activity in Hungarian foreign policy.²¹² Békés argues that the Hungarian diplomats were ‘tacitly relying on political support from Western countries against Romania’, when raising such issues.²¹³

As previously mentioned, Ceaușescu’s campaign from 1988 to destroy villages in Transylvania was seen as a means to ‘annihilate the Hungarian minority’. This led to a large demonstration in Budapest outside the Romanian Embassy, which was the first example of such a demonstration, not organised by the regime, against another Eastern European state. Relations deteriorated even further after the Romanian Government decided to close down the Consulate-General in Cluj as a response.²¹⁴

Autonomy

As we have seen, the issue of Hungarian minorities abroad presented a permanent dilemma for the Kádár regime. In a similar way, the issue of Hungarian autonomy

209 *ibid.*, 278

210 Kun, 1993, 38

211 Hoensch, 1988, 278-279

212 Kótai, 1987, 321

213 Békés, 2003, 23

214 Kun, 1993, 39

was problematic, to say the least, owing to the inherent contradictions between the Kádár regime's wish to stay in power and the interest of the Hungarian people in making autonomous political choices. Here, too, the new Soviet policy under Gorbachev made a great impact. It would be incorrect to say that the Soviet reforms under Gorbachev *caused* the changes in Hungary, but in the political, economic and historic context they certainly helped to accelerate current trends.²¹⁵ During these years, the previous link between regime survival and the absence of state autonomy began to dissolve.

In addition to improved relations with the West and a changing conceptualisation of security, changes also occurred in Moscow's relations with its East and Central European satellites. Under Gorbachev, the Soviet foreign policy administration was partly reorganised. In July 1985 Andrei Gromyko, who had been serving as Foreign Minister since 1957 (!), was replaced and 'promoted' to become President of the Soviet Union – a post without much real power. He was replaced as Foreign Minister by the leader of the Georgian Communist Party, Eduard Shevardnadze.²¹⁶ Some of the key figures responsible for the policy vis-à-vis Eastern Europe were also replaced, and organisational changes were implemented inside the Soviet foreign policy administration that strengthened the link between Soviet policy towards Eastern Europe and Soviet foreign policy in other fields.

Gradually, Gorbachev seems to have come to the conclusion that the Soviet Union could not become more European unless Eastern Europe was allowed to become less Soviet.²¹⁷ A more open debate than before emerged on foreign policy issues, even though some discussions had started already after the 26th Party Congress in 1981. Among those active in this debate were people who had recently been given new positions in the foreign policy apparatus.²¹⁸ During 1988 some of them expressed their growing sympathy with the Hungarian and Polish reforms, and some reform economists even declared their interest in the experience of economic reforms in those countries.²¹⁹ Both the changes in personnel and the relatively open discussion climate, by Soviet standards, indicated that changes in Soviet-East European relations were to be expected.

215 Bozóki, 1992 (b), 165

216 Mary Dau, *Sovjetunionen under Gorbatjov: Glasnost, perestrojka, demokratisatsija*, Det sikkerheds- og nedrustningspolitiske udvalg, Copenhagen, 1988, 60

217 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 198-200. Mette Skak, 'The Changing Soviet-East European Relationship' in Kanet, Nutter Miner & Resler (eds), 1992, 37. Gati, 1990, 164-165. See also Fred Oldenburg, *et al.*, 'Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe' in The Federal Institute for Soviet and International Studies, Cologne (ed.), *The Soviet Union 1987-1989 – Perestroika in Crisis?*, Longman, London, 1990, 242

218 Dau, 1988, 61. Dawisha, 1990 (a), 202-206. Holloway, 1989, 78

219 Fejtő, 1992, 415-416

Crucial questions for the Hungarian and other leaders of Warsaw Pact countries following Gorbachev's rise to power were whether or not he would renounce the Brezhnev doctrine, or the principle of 'Socialist internationalism' launched to legitimise the Soviet-led intervention by Warsaw Pact forces in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and whether or not he expected his East and Central European colleagues to initiate reforms in their own countries. Before the 27th Party Congress in February 1986, there were no signs of change in these two fields. Quite on the contrary, at the CMEA Summit in December 1985, Gorbachev repeated his demands for unity among the member states.²²⁰ Overall, Gorbachev was too occupied with Soviet domestic problems during his first year in power to present any major initiative regarding Eastern Europe.²²¹ A number of meetings were arranged with Gorbachev's East European colleagues 'and the overall impression was that he was ready to adopt a tougher stance toward the East Europeans than his predecessors'. Not even in his address at the 27th Congress, according to Korbonski, did Gorbachev make any major statement concerning Eastern Europe 'except for emphasizing the need for closer economic integration under the aegis of CMEA.'²²² Dawisha, however, claims that his speech marked a dramatic shift 'supported as much by what Gorbachev did not say as by what he did say about Eastern Europe and the socialist commonwealth',²²³ and Zwick, too, notes that Gorbachev 'did not use the terms "socialist internationalism" or "proletarian internationalism", the synonyms for Soviet-imposed unity'.²²⁴

However, it was only after the Reykjavik Summit and even more clearly in 1987, once Gorbachev had consolidated his domestic power base more firmly, that one could observe a more assertive change in Soviet policy vis-à-vis Eastern Europe. This was reflected in Soviet acceptance of the Stockholm agreement, which was signed in September 1986. The signatories of this document committed themselves to abstaining from using, or threatening to use, force in international relations, regardless of whether or not the states concerned were members of the same alliance.²²⁵ Also, on his visit to Hungary in April 1987, Politburo secretary Yegor Ligachev said that 'every country looks for solutions independently, not as in the past. [---] Every nation has a right to its own way'.²²⁶

220 de Nevers, 1990, 15

221 *ibid.*, 23. Fejtő, 1992, 413

222 Korbonski, 1990, 74-75

223 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 207

224 Zwick, 1989, 218

225 Fejtő, 1992, 413-414

226 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 99

In *Perestroika*, which was published by Gorbachev in 1987 to explain his reforms and new thinking to a wider audience in the West, he wrote that ‘the independence of each [Communist] Party, its sovereign right to decide the issues facing its country and its responsibility to its nation are unquestionable principles’,²²⁷ but although he no longer subscribed to the Brezhnev doctrine ‘he did not have a “Gorbachev Doctrine” to replace it’.²²⁸

Again, in his main address of 2 November 1987 in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Gorbachev stressed the independence of every Communist Party. To counter scepticism emanating from the fact that Khrushchev had long ago spoken in similar terms, he continued: ‘We talked about this as far back as the 20th Congress. True, we did not free ourselves of old habits at once. However, now this is an immutable reality’.²²⁹ At the same time, however, he also referred to ‘Socialist internationalism’ and ‘may have done so to caution his allies against using re-evaluations of the past as a springboard to question present-day Soviet control in Eastern Europe’.²³⁰ In the declarations of Prague (April 1987), Belgrade (March 1988) and Warsaw (July 1988), Gorbachev stressed the right of each Party to be “sovereign” in the solution of “questions pertaining to the development” of the country governed by it’.²³¹ The Belgrade Declaration ‘affirmed the principles of the independence and sovereignty of every state, the “inalienable right” of all parties “to make decisions on the choice of paths of social development” and the “impermissibility of interference in internal affairs under any pretext whatsoever”’.²³² Still, however, he expected the East European Parties ‘to accept a joint responsibility for the fate of socialism’.²³³

During the first half of 1988, leading Soviet specialists began to discuss the role of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe since the war. They blamed “the hegemonic aspirations of the Soviet leadership” for “the deep political crises” in Hungary 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and in Poland in 1956, 1970 and 1980-81’.²³⁴ These comments did not come from Gorbachev personally, who seemed to be more reluctant to accept blame for earlier actions. Commenting on

227 Quoted in Charles Gati, ‘Eastern Europe on Its Own’ in *Foreign Affairs*, 1, 1989, 104

228 Zwick, 1989, 218-219

229 Quoted in Thomas M Cynkin, ‘Glasnost, perestroika and Eastern Europe’ in *Survey*, July/August 1988, 311

230 de Nevers, 1990, 18

231 Oldenburg, 1990, 242

232 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 88

233 Oldenburg, 1990, 242

234 Gati, 1989, 103, quoting a paper written by the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, later published in *Problems of Communism*, May-August, 1988, 60-67. See also Gati, 1990, 161-165

the events of 1956 and 1968 to a reporter from *the Washington Post*, Gorbachev said:

‘When you speak about interference, I understand what you have in mind. But when I recall those situations, I had something else in mind. I have in mind that before what you are talking about happened, another kind of interference had occurred.’²³⁵

At the 19th Party Conference in June 1988, Gorbachev underlined that ‘the imposition from outside by any means – not to mention military means – of a social system, way of life, or policy constituted the dangerous armor of past years’; in September, two of his foremost advisors explained that ‘[w]e’ve given up the Brezhnev principle of limited sovereignty’.²³⁶

In Hungary and Poland, demands for change were much more radical than in the other Warsaw Pact countries. In both countries, people were aware that incomplete economic reforms were not enough and had ‘reached the conclusion that their system cannot be reformed’.²³⁷ What mattered to them was not the idea of reform coming from Moscow but rather the signals that Soviet leaders accepted, or even supported, reform.

Under Gorbachev, Hungary continued to underline its independent foreign policy line. This had been expressed as early as March 1985 by István Roska, deputy Foreign Minister for Soviet-bloc relations, who wrote that ‘the member states are independent and sovereign countries that, without exception, respect the principle of non-interference in each other’s internal affairs [and that] anyone in touch with reality will be cognizant of these differences and not see them as an “aberration”’.²³⁸ Kádár continued to be a close ally of Gorbachev²³⁹ and the Hungarians officially supported Soviet attempts at social and economic reform noting their compatibility with the thinking within the MSzMP.²⁴⁰

At the Warsaw Pact meeting in Berlin in May 1987, there were signs that Moscow might ‘be willing to adopt a more open-minded approach to foreign-policy co-ordination in the socialist community’.²⁴¹ In the ‘Social Contract’, which was published in Hungary in the same year, the authors wrote:

235 Gati, 1989, 104

236 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 88. Cf. Mark Kramer, ‘Beyond the Brezhnev Doctrine: a new era in Soviet-East European relations?’ in *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1990

237 Gati, 1989, 101

238 Dawisha, 1990 (a), 203

239 Korbonski, 1990, 75

240 Kótai, 1987, 314. Korbonski, 1990, 77

241 de Nevers, 1990, 18

‘One cannot count on the Soviet bloc’s dissolution within the foreseeable future. And there is no real chance of one or another of the satellite countries breaking away, either. But there is an opportunity for the satellites to increase their relative independence from the Soviet Union. [...] The more we are able to get the Soviet leadership to accept today, the more we will be able to defend later during a possible backlash.’²⁴²

Gati refers to a private conversation (in October 1988) with Károly Grósz who told him that ‘it was no longer either necessary or customary to ask for Moscow’s “permission” before undertaking a new initiative’ and that when he had recently called Gorbachev to ask for his advice before taking a particularly difficult decision, the ‘answer was that Grósz should be “guided by his conscience”’.²⁴³ We will return to the further implications of a shift in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev in the following chapter.

Conclusions – Foreign policy change 1956-88

Reverting to the aspects of FPC discussed in chapter three – *degree*, time-frame and scope of change – we find that, using Hermann’s terminology, FPC during this period was either ‘adjustment and program changes’ or ‘problem/goal changes’ (in the economic field) but not – at least not consciously – a ‘change of international orientation’. Using Rosati’s concepts we would speak of ‘refinement’ or ‘reform’ but hardly of ‘restructuring’. Concerning the *time-frame*, all the changes I have discussed were ‘gradual’ rather than ‘rapid’.

To analyse the *scope of change*, we need to see when and in which of the foreign policy areas change occurred. To start with *regime stability*, what I have in mind here is the strategies used by a regime to generate or maintain political stability through external support. Support, in this context, does not refer solely to actions by other states or organisations but also includes effects generated by membership in international organisations or the signing of international treaties, which contribute to the stability of a given political system. Such strategies should be seen as a complement to the domestic strategies discussed in chapter two.

As noted above, the Kádár regime initially depended heavily on Moscow. To secure Soviet support, it had to surrender much Hungarian autonomy – not only in foreign policy but also over domestic affairs. There was thus a kind of negative

242 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 25-26

243 Gati, 1989, 106

correlation between regime stability and state autonomy. This basic dependence on external support from Moscow remained strong, despite Kádár's change of domestic strategies to achieve and maintain stability.

At the same time, efforts to establish closer contacts with the West made the Hungarian regime increasingly dependent on the West as well. Hungary's high profile in security policy during the Second Cold War may suggest that the regime itself was aware of this. The decision by President Carter to return the St. Stephen's Crown to Hungary in 1978 also showed that the leader of the Western bloc was actively trying to stabilise the Kádár regime, which was thereby given a clear signal that it was considered legitimate in the West. The growing foreign debt together with Hungary's membership of the World Bank and the IMF added further to this dependence. However, it was not until Gorbachev began to change the rules of the game in the latter part of the 1980s that the Hungarian regime could afford to give priority to its relations with the West.

In the area of *security policy*, traditionally regarded as 'high politics', Hungary initially played a passive part and remained very loyal to the Soviet Union. For example, Hungary took part in the Warsaw Pact led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, albeit without great enthusiasm. Although the *détente* period, beginning in the early to mid-1970s, facilitated closer relations with the West, Hungary did not have to show a high profile on this issue but instead profited from a general improvement in superpower relations. It would, therefore, be wrong to claim that there was much change in Hungarian security policy during this period. Things changed during the Second Cold War, however, as the Hungarian regime came to realise the possible impact of deteriorating superpower relations on Hungary's economic relations with the West. In the early 1980s, Hungary began to play a more audacious and independent role by articulating specific small-state and common European interests but also by claiming that Marxist international theory had not put an end to the existence of state interests in international affairs. In the late 1980s, there was less change in this area, although the external environment became more receptive to similar ideas as Gorbachev rose to power and once again began advocating closer relations with the West – thereby legitimising Hungary's previous efforts.

Trade and economic policy is the foreign policy area where change occurred first and where it was most visible and persistent. Even in the early 1960s, the Kádár regime already aimed to normalise its relations with the West and, somewhat later, actively promoted economic links with Western countries. Hungary's

decision to join the GATT in 1973 should be seen in this context. The economic reforms came to a halt in the mid-1970s and the first oil crisis, accompanied by weakening demand in the West and growing Hungarian foreign debt, made this strategy less successful. At the same time, however, the Soviet decision to raise the price of its energy exports, as well as the détente between the superpowers, provided strong motives for continuing to trade with the West. Links with the West were further strengthened during the early 1980s following the second oil crisis. Despite Hungary's economic difficulties e.g. the accelerating foreign debt and the imbalances in foreign trade, Hungary continued its close commercial contacts with the West and even joined the IMF and the World Bank in 1982. At the same time, the economic decline in the Soviet Union – reflected in Moscow's inability to grant substantial economic support to the Jaruzelski regime in Poland – and higher prices for Soviet exports, made Hungarian economists even less eager to maintain or develop closer contacts with the CMEA partners. Under Gorbachev, the improvement in East-West relations again opened up for Hungarian initiatives. Despite the deepening economic crisis, Hungary continued its efforts to strengthen its ties with the West – not least with the EC.

The question of *national identity* I have confined to one issue, namely to what extent the Hungarian regime tried to protect the interests of the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries – notably in Romania. In this area, the low profile of the Kádár regime began to change rather late. The reason for this was that it would have been against the norms governing relations between Socialist states to criticise the policies of another state and, also, that any decision that might give a boost to nationalism in Hungary would have been potentially dangerous for a regime that had itself been installed by military intervention from abroad. From the early 1980s, however, as things went from bad to worse in Romania, semi-official Hungarian spokesmen began to criticise both the Romanian regime and, later, the passivity of the Kádár regime in this regard. When the Hungarian Government finally brought up the question, first bilaterally and later within the CSCE, it tried to legitimise its efforts by referring to principles adopted within the CSCE and was also indirectly supported by criticism of Romania by some Western states. However, the West had also been slow to realise that a regime that appeared to be relatively 'independent' of Moscow in foreign policy might deserve to be held to account on other issues, such as human rights. During the second half of the 1980s, Hungarian criticism – both official and unofficial – of the Romanian leadership was growing. As the situation in Romania deteriorated

further, and a large number of refugees began to arrive from Romania, this issue became a threat to the stability of the Hungarian regime.

Finally, concerning the question of *autonomy*, the Hungarian regime depended on Soviet support; in order to maintain that support, it had to maintain some degree of loyalty to the Soviet leadership. To discuss autonomy in such a context could, therefore, be considered inappropriate. Nevertheless, I have tried to point out that in some policy areas Budapest and Moscow took different standpoints. In the first half of the 1980s, Hungary became more critical of Soviet foreign policy since the Second Cold War had a negative effect on the preconditions for Hungary's economic policy and, indirectly, on Kádár's domestic stabilisation. Under Gorbachev, the Brezhnev doctrine was finally dismantled and Hungarian (relative) autonomy was re-established. At the same time, Moscow urged Hungary to continue its economic and, subsequently, even its political reforms. However, as this re-establishment of autonomy more or less coincided with the fall of the Communist regime one could argue that the negative correlation between state autonomy and regime stability remained a political fact of life.

Was there a strict logic behind the order in which these changes occurred? I believe there was. Change began in the area of economic and trade policy, continued in the area of security policy and national identity but only in the very last years spread to the two areas of regime stability and state autonomy. One explanation may be that economic questions were considered to be less ideologically sensitive and that it was, therefore, less risky to deviate from the bloc line in this area. Another possible explanation could be that it was only in this area that changes were necessary for the regime to be able to establish or maintain political stability (based on economic performance). In other words, in this area there was a closer link to domestic policy than in the other areas of foreign policy. A possible counter-argument, namely that the regime would have received more support if it had chosen to re-establish Hungarian autonomy, is irrelevant from the regime's perspective, since the regime itself would hardly have survived the attempt – regardless of whether or not such a strategy had succeeded. It is also conceivable that change occurred earlier in the economic area because the positive effects of growing trade with the West were easier to quantify than e.g. the potential benefits of a new security order in Europe.

As security policy was considered to be the most sensitive area of foreign policy in which Moscow would hardly tolerate any deviation, there was little change in this area during the first twenty years of the Kádár regime. It was only after the

first period of détente, when Soviet leaders had themselves indicated that closer contacts with the West did not necessarily have to be seen as something bad, and during the Second Cold War, when the Hungarian leaders came to realise that they had become dependent on economic relations with the West, that some, mainly verbal, changes could be observed in this field. We should remember, however, that verbal changes were probably the only form of change that the Kádár regime could make in this field since other aspects of security policy, such as defence policy, were more directly concentrated in the hands of the leadership in Moscow.

To understand why policy in the area of national identity did not change until quite late we should bear in mind that policy change in this area was likely to lead to reactions in neighbouring countries. Even more importantly, growing nationalism in Hungary would probably have undermined the position of the Kádár regime itself. Finally, one explanation why change in the areas of regime stability and autonomy occurred so late is probably the strength of the link between the power of the Kádár regime and Soviet domination over Hungary. Policy change in these two fields would most likely have weakened the position of the Hungarian regime (and that was also what eventually happened, in 1989).

To summarise, it seems that regime stability – which in the Hungarian context was closely intertwined with state non-autonomy – was the most important goal for the Hungarian regime and that, therefore, change in this field, or in other fields likely to destabilise the regime, was the least plausible form of change. Change in economic and trade policy, on the other hand, was much more likely and easier to bring about since such change was seen as necessary in order to stabilise the regime.

During this period, change took place along all three dimensions identified by Hagan. Hungarian foreign policy thus became more accommodation oriented towards the West than previously. Budapest also tried to become more independent in its relations with Moscow, at the same time as Hungary was gradually growing more dependent on its relations with the West. In addition, the Hungarians signalled their willingness to become more committed towards the West – partly by defending small-state interests, common European interests and détente in the early 1980s and partly by its decision to join the GATT, the IMF and the World Bank and its efforts to establish closer links with the European Communities.

Promoters of change

During the Kádár period, a number of factors functioned as promoters of change. Starting with the domestic promoters, we can exclude ‘domestic realignment or restructuring’. More likely FPC was ‘leader driven’ i.e. the result of a conscious effort made by the Kádár regime. In this context Hermann notes that ‘[t]he leader must have the conviction, power, and energy to compel his government to change course’²⁴⁴ and Salmore & Salmore underline that ‘major successful initiatives [for FPC] would likely be taken by unified regimes, failures would be higher for initiatives undertaken by fragmented regimes, when taken at all’.²⁴⁵ However, it is quite likely that some segments of the administration gradually acquired their own interests in the continuation of the new foreign policy but then, *stricto sensu*, we can no longer speak of this as ‘bureaucratic advocacy’ of change but rather as an example of a stabiliser of the new foreign policy.

Needless to say, it is difficult to quantify or to prove the extent to which these changes were leader driven. Although most of the literature I have referred to confirms that Kádár himself initiated most political initiatives, I do not have reliable first-hand sources that put this proposition beyond all doubt. This is clearly a difficulty we risk encountering, perhaps inevitably so, when trying to apply our model on a closed political system with a lack of open debate and little transparency in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, based on my analysis and my overall understanding of the political system under Kádár, I venture to claim that FPC was indeed leader-driven. However, Kádár is likely to have been influenced by several factors, including the economic crisis, and his scope for manoeuvre was circumscribed by the fact that he had to act on both the domestic and the external arena simultaneously.

Among the external promoters of change, ‘change in global structures and the international position of Hungary’ was clearly important. What I have in mind here is, in particular, Hungary’s changing position linked to the different periods of Cold War and détente between the two superpowers. Changes in superpower relations not only affected Hungary’s capacity to formulate its own foreign policy but also served as a catalyst for such efforts, as in the early 1980s. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the oil crises were perceived as ‘external shocks’ or examples of ‘non-military threats’ since they brought home to the Hungarian leadership how exposed Hungary, as a small country, was not only to changing

244 Hermann, 1990, 11

245 Salmore & Salmore, 1978, 115

terms of trade with Moscow but also to general economic trends in the West. It is interesting to note that this insight did not lead Hungary to withdraw from the world market but, in the long run, rather increased Budapest's interest in developing its commercial and economic links with the West. In this context, we should recall that Holsti found 'non-military threats', such as economic vulnerability and dependence, to be the main external promoter behind FPC.²⁴⁶ The weakening of Soviet power in the 1970s – manifested in its inability to assist the Jaruzelski regime in the early 1980s – further added to Hungary's interest in developing closer links with the West. 'Regional integration' in Western Europe – an example of change in regional structure – probably also stimulated Hungary's wish to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western Europe by making agreements with the EC. The Single European Act can be seen as a sign of what Volgy & Schwarz referred to as integration attempts attaining 'critical mass'.²⁴⁷ The declining economic relevance of the CMEA also added to the Kádár regime's decision to orient itself towards the West.

Among cognitive and policy-related promoters, the 'previous relationship', both with the Soviet Union and with specific Western countries – in particular Austria – is likely to have had an impact on FPC. However, as I have said earlier, it is difficult to see this as suddenly leading to a change in policy. Rather, such factors can be exploited to legitimise a new policy e.g. as in the case of Hungary when the Kádár regime began to articulate 'common European interests' in the early 1980s. I would argue, however, that the previous links with Austria helped to build contacts, and possibly confidence among senior Hungarian politicians when they opened up towards the West. Hungary's previous relationship ('colonial experience?') with the Soviet Union and the country's vulnerability certainly also played its part e.g. when Hungary reacted to Moscow's decision to raise the export price for oil following the first and second oil crises. With respect to 'national identity', the leadership seems to have realised that they would have to pay a high price in terms of loss of domestic stability if they continued to remain silent on the situation of the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries.

It is also quite likely that 'negative feedback' played a role in all the foreign policy areas where change took place. In the economic field, certainly, as the Hungarian leadership realised that its dependence on the Soviet Union was costly and that, furthermore, it did not protect the country from disturbances or

246 Holsti, 1982, 202

247 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 35-36

fluctuations in the Western markets. Negative feedback was also a driving force behind the changes in security policy in the early 1980s since the Kádár regime began to see the likely negative consequences of excessive loyalty to the Soviet Union during the Second Cold War.

Stabilisers

If we move on to stabilisers, what role did they play in preventing or reducing FPC in Hungary under Kádár? Among the domestic stabilisers, it seems reasonable to argue that the 'regime type' basically acted as a stabiliser. Although we have argued that an authoritarian regime can initiate FPC, it is nevertheless the case that an authoritarian system excludes other actors and prevents their initiatives or ideas from influencing the system and initiating FPC. 'Administrative resistance' and 'organisational routine' were other factors that made change more difficult or less likely – not least since many organisational structures were closely linked to, or even intertwined with, Soviet ones. Generally speaking, however, these factors should not be seen as unique to my case but rather as the rule in the foreign policy administration of most countries. Finally, 'resources for foreign policy implementation', if we see 'resources not as constraints on behavior, but rather as determinants of goal orientation in foreign policy',²⁴⁸ also played a stabilising role because of Hungary's initial dependence on Soviet energy and on the Soviet Union as a market for its own export products. However, as Moscow decided to raise energy prices and as Hungary was becoming increasingly dependent on exporting to the West in order to generate hard currency to pay for its imports and to honour its debt service, the economic dependence on the Soviet Union became less of a stabiliser of foreign policy.

'Domestic interests at stake' also clearly militated against FPC. What I have more specifically in mind here are the interests of the regime itself in maintaining political stability and its own position. 'Institutionalisation', which made foreign policy 'embedded in domestic politics',²⁴⁹ 'support' – in the limited sense of support within the political regime – and 'salience' all played a role here. Worth recalling, in this context, is Goldmann's remark that a supported and well-institutionalised policy that is not salient is more prone to change than a similar policy that is considered to be salient.²⁵⁰ Economic and trade policy were most

248 *ibid.*, 30-31

249 Goldmann, 1988, 43

250 *ibid.*, 52

likely seen as being less salient than security policy, and this may well be one reason why change occurred first in the economic field.

Among the external stabilisers, it seems that all those identified in chapter three – bilateral relations (dependence on an external actor and relations with third parties), regional structures and global structures – played a part in stabilising foreign policy, in particular during Kádár's early years in power. As noted by Volgy & Schwarz, the 'regional structure' may act as a powerful stabiliser where there is a regional hegemon and where this hegemon has strong interests in the region,²⁵¹ which was clearly the case in Hungary during Kádár's first years in power. This stabiliser later lost some of its strength during the détente period and also because of the decline in Soviet power.

The 'global structure' is strong during periods of bipolarity and high conflict between the superpowers, which, again, corresponds well to the first decades of Kádár's rule. The détente in the mid-1970s, as well as the improvement in superpower relations under Gorbachev is likely to have reduced the strength of this stabiliser. Hungary's position in the international system also supported a continuation of the foreign policy adopted by Kádár in the beginning. As noted by Hagan & Rosati:

'well-defined global and domestic constraints on policy choices mean that certain foreign policy options are not even considered viable within domestic debates, and their advocates will not emerge as dominant within the political system'.²⁵²

This corresponds well to the situation in Hungary in the early Kádár period. Furthermore, Hungary's 'dependence on the Soviet Union' also served to preserve the status quo. In this regard, Hungary's relations with the Soviet Union fit well into Goldman's description of a policy that has become an institution and that is highly significant in domestic politics, although there was hardly any national consensus over Kádár's foreign policy in the early years of his regime.²⁵³ Concerning 'third parties', it is also true that, in particular during Kádár's first years in power, Hungary's relations with the West were dependent on the general climate in East-West relations. It is also clear that 'international norms'²⁵⁴ – such as Hungary's membership of the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA, as well as various

251 Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 36

252 Hagan & Rosati, 1994, 276

253 Goldman, 1988, 44

254 *ibid.*, 30. Rosati, 1994, 230

other formal and informal agreements with the Soviet Union – to a considerable extent reduced the scope for manoeuvre in foreign policy.

Among ‘cognitive and policy-related stabilisers’, all three qualities of the policy identified by Goldmann – consistency, centrality and (un)testability – seem to be relevant in the Hungarian case. ‘Consistency’ initially made it difficult to change foreign policy. Loyalty to the Soviet Union was possibly considered to have ‘negative side-effects’ but, despite them, such loyalty was thought to ‘produce the intended results’ i.e. contribute to regime stability. As the Hungarian Government gradually began to search for other strategies to preserve political stability, however, the negative side effects of the current policy became more obvious and this stabiliser lost some of its force.

We can apply a similar line of argument in regard to ‘centrality’ since the Kádár regime initially saw a positive connection between its loyalty in foreign affairs and ties to the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and regime stability and, later, some degree of freedom to experiment with domestic political reform, on the other. As the tensions became clear between the economic, political and security links with the Soviet Union and the interest of the regime to establish closer contacts with the West, this stabiliser became less relevant.

The ‘untestability’ of the dogma underlying Hungarian security policy, as compared to the more easily testable tenets underlying the economic and trade policy, contributed to making change in the first area less likely. It was only when a clear connection between the two policy areas became obvious around 1980 that the Hungarian regime dared to modify its policy in the security area as well.

Towards Democracy

The End of Socialism and Transition towards Democracy 1988-90

‘Absolute systems are strong as long as they are absolute. When they begin to reform, they are lost. Yet they cannot avoid reform, or they will explode.’¹

The period 1988-90 is a crucial transition period in Hungarian modern political history. The Kádár regime was replaced by a new Party leadership that eventually resigned as part of a major democratisation of the domestic political system. This was the ultimate result of Kádár’s failing stabilisation strategies. As we will see, however, the emergence of a political alternative was also an unforeseen consequence of Kádár’s opening up towards the West.

During these two years, more significant steps were also taken towards radical foreign policy change. One major event was the decision to dismantle the ‘iron curtain’ along the Austro-Hungarian border. This decision, as well as the political changes inside Hungary, would hardly have been feasible had it not been for the new leadership in Moscow; they changed their approach to Soviet-East European relations, which had until then ultimately been dominated by the Brezhnev doctrine.

This chapter serves as a final account of the Socialist era while providing a bridge to the first period of democratic rule (1990-94), which will be the focus of the two following chapters.

¹ Milovan Djilas quoted in Valerie Bunce, ‘Eastern Europe: Is the Party Over?’ in *Political Science & Politics*, No. 2, 1989, 233

Explaining the end of the Socialist regime

I would argue that the end of the Socialist regime in Hungary can be attributed to four major factors: the *failure of the performance based stabilisation strategies*, accompanied by an economic crisis; the *emergence of a political alternative* – with the West gradually becoming a ‘reference society’ and opposition movements turning into political parties; the *loss of self-legitimacy* and the split within the MSzMP; and, finally, *the withdrawal of external support* from Moscow.

Declining economic performance

*J'ignore quel lien il y a entre le prix de la viande et la mémoire d'un peuple, mais aussitôt que les prix de la viande ont commencé à grimper, les Hongrois se sont ressouvenus que Kádár avait tué Imre Nagy. C'est ce que j'appelle un "développement organique".*²

The political stability of the late 1970s had been precarious. As we saw in chapter four, following Kádár's Alliance policy and the introduction of the NEM, political stability was secured mainly through the regime's capacity to provide relative material wealth. Economic reforms were accompanied by a rapidly growing foreign debt but failed to generate the expected economic growth. In the wake of the second oil crisis, a dramatic rise in interest rates on the international capital market forced Hungary to spend much of the earnings from exports to the West on covering the debt service. As a consequence, the ‘imports of investment goods from the West had to be restricted, and this had a negative impact on economic growth’.³ As to their effects, ‘[e]conomic stagnation and burdensome foreign currency indebtedness were the grave-diggers of this rigid political system’.⁴

Limited political reforms in the mid-1980s brought no permanent solution to Hungary's economic problems. During the second half of the 1980s, the economic situation continued to deteriorate while inflation was rapidly rising. Even in those years when the balance of trade showed a surplus this was not sufficient to service the debt.⁵ Hungary, therefore, had to take new credits just to be able to manage its debt service, which by now had grown to 3-5 per cent of GNP. Real wages fell, and the cuts in public expenditure were significant,⁶ while the gap

2 István Eörsi, ‘Le nom de Marx fait aujourd'hui rougir les jeunes filles’ in *Lignes*, No. 10, 1990, 151

3 Adam, 1995, 209

4 Szoboszlai, 1991, 201

5 Adam, 1995, 85

6 Nielsen, 1990 (a), 36

between Hungary and the Western economies continued to widen.⁷ Economic stagnation was a dangerous phenomenon, since it threatened to obliterate the regime's chances of honouring its implicit commitments as stipulated in the social contract. In fact, this was an utterly serious threat to the main stability strategy pursued by the Kádár regime – economic performance. As noted by Hann, '[i]n a system that has grounded its political legitimacy in "consumerism" [...] the political implications of such a crisis are obvious'.⁸

The main problem with the economic reforms was that they were not – and, for political reasons, they could not be – radical enough. They included elements of a market economy while still operating within the overall economic framework of a command economy and an authoritarian, one-party political system. Bringing about real economic reforms without changing the political system turned out to be an impossible equation:

*Das Reformkonzept stieß jedoch auf ein damals unlösbar scheinendes Dilemma: die Wirtschaftsreform hätte nämlich die tiefgreifende Umwandlung des politischen, institutionellen Systems und der politischen Mechanismen erfordert, was jedoch für die Sowjetunion und die anderen Mitgliedstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages nicht akzeptabel war.*⁹

Slowly, the need for radical political reform was becoming evident.¹⁰ However, the regime proved unable to pursue more drastic economic reforms or to back up economic reforms by political reform. In the mid-1980s, as the economic situation deteriorated while the regime proved unable to respond Kádár continued to lose support:

'Once [Kádár's economic strategy to buy political acceptance] failed, as it did in the mid-1980s, it was evident, though few accepted this in public, that as long as Kádár remained at the helm, the system could only disintegrate from within. The external proprieties were maintained, but by the mid-1980s the stagnation was unmistakable.'¹¹

As the economic problems grew, so political stability was shattered as people began to withdraw their acceptance. The deteriorating economy widely eroded

7 Jasiewicz, 1993, 125

8 Hann, 1990 (a), 6-7

9 Izik-Hedri, 1990, 454

10 Szoboszlai, 1991, 197

11 Schöpflin, 1992, 98

the base for popular support. Although some caveats may be appropriate, we see from public opinion polls that popular trust in the Government's capacity to solve the economic problems rapidly diminished. There was also a shift from concerns about day-to-day economic problems to major concerns about the economy at large which was perceived as being in decline.¹² 'Substantive rationality' as a basis for political stability, therefore, in the long run undermined the position of the regime once it began to underperform.¹³

The regime's inability to tackle the economic problems added to the dissatisfaction of many Hungarians, not least within the elites e.g. intellectuals, economists – a very influential group – and journalists who had supported Kádár during the previous decades.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the economic and political reforms 'provided a material base outside the party-dominated state sector of the economy on which the forces of political pluralism could build'.¹⁵ Many of those who had accepted Kádár in the 1970s and early 1980s had regarded the Hungarian system as the best possible in the Socialist camp while their real ideal had remained the Western systems. This, in turn, meant that little positive backing remained when new opportunities were seen.¹⁶ Schöpflin notes that, as the crisis in the system became more and more obvious, public perceptions of Kádár began to change:

'Kádár, from having been a conservative reformer, had become an opponent of all change, a true reactionary. That was the moment when Kádárism lost the backing – political, intellectual, psychological – of those intellectuals who had played such a vital role in sustaining it from the early 1960's on.'¹⁷

Revitalising the economy would have required removing the political obstacles to change. This would have implied reducing and limiting the Party's control over the political system.¹⁸ In 1987 an important document was published under the title *Fordulat és Reform* ('Turning Point and Reform'). This report, which had been drafted the year before by a number of reform economists, finally reached the CC. The authors, among whom we find the respected economist János Kornai, wrote that without further radical market-oriented reforms Hungary would decline and collapse. Furthermore, they claimed that economic reforms alone were not

12 Swain, 1992, 13

13 Schöpflin, 1990, 5-6. Cf. Gerner, 1984, 171

14 Sword (ed.), 1990, 101. Schöpflin, 1990, 6

15 Swain, 1989, 12

16 Lemaitre, 1989, 164

17 Schöpflin, 1991, 61

18 Schöpflin, 1992, 98

sufficient and demanded institutional reforms as well i.e. democratisation with a modified role for the Party in economic and political affairs. Concerning foreign trade, they argued that the effects of Hungary's membership of the CMEA were becoming increasingly negative.¹⁹ The paper was presented at the request of the Patriotic People's Front (PPF) and could therefore hardly be suppressed. This was just one example of Imre Pozsgay, using his position as head of the PPF to 'provide a protective umbrella for opposition causes, and to create an extra-Party power base for himself'. However, the protection offered proved insufficient; the Finance Research Institute under the Ministry of Finance, until then the employer of many of the economists involved, was closed 'for reasons of economy'.²⁰

In the summer of 1987, György Lázár was ousted and replaced as Prime Minister by Károly Grósz. A series of measures were taken to increase state revenues and also, partly, to try to bridge the gap between the first and the second economy. These measures included the introduction of value-added tax and personal income taxes. Some attempts were also made to increase the economic power of the Government at the expense of that of the Party.²¹ The economic problems nevertheless remained. In 1988 the inflation rate was around 25 per cent while the foreign debt had grown to US\$18 billion. Income taxes were now introduced both in the first and in the second economy. Real income fell; prices were raised on consumption products and unemployment was looming. This continued to reduce even further the popular acceptance of the regime.²²

Adding to the domestic economic difficulties, and with the regime facing declining support and a more outspoken opposition, the growing foreign debt severely reduced the number of feasible policy alternatives. Whereas economic stagnation contributed to the formation of opposition movements, the Government continued to be dependent on maintaining good relations with the West in order to obtain new credits. The regime, which was in the hands of the IMF and keen on preserving its positive image in the West, thus found itself inclined to tolerate the growing opposition.²³ It would indeed have been very difficult for Kádár to employ harsh methods against the dissidents or the emerging opposition movements:²⁴

19 Sword (ed.), 1990, 101. Fejtő, 1992, 180. Skilling, 1989, 187

20 Swain, 1989, 17. Schöpflin, 1991, 61. This document was later published in *Medvetánc*, 2, 1987.

21 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 40. Swain, 1993, 68. László Lengyel, 'The character of political parties in Hungary' in Bozóki, Körösiényi & Schöpflin (eds), 1992, 34

22 Swain, 1992, 10. Klausen, 1990, 147

23 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 27-28

24 László Urbán, 'Why was the Hungarian transition exceptionally peaceful?' in Szoboszlai (ed.), 1991, 305

*'The credit-debt issue had become a central point in Hungary's overall security policy. To remain a first-class debtor, to maintain financial credibility was considered to be the prerequisite of stability. That was seemingly the only way to avoid an immediate collapse which would have meant the end of the communist ruling elite. The leadership was the prisoner of detente policy, the only way to secure continuous Western support.'*²⁵

This may be seen as a parallel development to what happened in foreign policy, where changes in economic and trade policy eventually led the regime to rethink its security policy as well. Here, on the domestic scene, economic reforms eventually opened up for some political tolerance as well – both cases representing a spill-over from a less to a more sensitive policy area.

The emergence of a political alternative

'Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently.' – Rosa Luxemburg²⁶

The second major factor behind the democratisation was the emergence of a political alternative. As we stated in chapter two, acceptance is a relative concept. People's decisions as to whether or not to accept an authoritarian regime are highly dependent on the availability of credible alternatives. From the regime's point of view, ideas about a political alternative are therefore potentially dangerous. In this context, 'alternative' means ideas about different ways of organising society or the political system that are seen as realistic options – reference points for comparison – by a sufficiently large, or influential, part of the population.

The emergence of a political alternative – internally through the opposition and externally through the use of Western Europe as a reference society – was dangerous since the regime was losing its performance-based support. Before the crisis, 'a large proportion of the population did not care about legitimacy as long as the regime was able to ensure a decent standard of living'. However, with the economic crisis, lack of legitimacy became a relevant focus for the opposition and a powerful instrument.²⁷ With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the Kádár

25 Péter Hardi, 'Systemic Changes and Changes in Security Concepts: the Hungarian Case' in Szoboszlai (ed.), 1991, 292

26 Rosa Luxemburg, 'The Russian Revolution' in Mary-Alice Waters (ed.), *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Pathfinder, New York, 1970, 394 quoted in Juan J Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, & Reequilibration*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1978, 97

27 Adam, 1995, 96

regime exposed itself to such threats, both by opening up for increased cross-border contacts with the West through FPC and by tolerating a certain degree of domestic criticism, as a logical consequence of the Alliance policy.

The West becomes a reference society

‘[A]n exclusive domestic perspective cannot fully account either for the survival of East European societies under communism or for their civic demands and aspirations. The role of Western Europe, as a *reference society* [...] is essential in this regard’.²⁸

The first development which is of interest here is the process whereby, from the mid-1970s onwards, the West gradually became a reference society for many Hungarians. The Helsinki process played a major role in this:

‘Im KSZE-Prozeß kam eine eigenartige humanitäre Dimension des Sicherheitsverständnisses zum Ausdruck, die für die freie Strömung von Menschen, Ideen, damit auch für die Geltendmachung der Minderheitenrechte neue Perspektiven eröffnete.’²⁹

Over time, the CSCE process facilitated Hungary’s contacts with the West and also provided a tool for Hungarians interested in the fate of the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries. Through the CSCE process, human rights activists and opposition movements received, mainly moral, support from the West, not least from the United States under President Carter, but also by later US administrations.³⁰

Hungarian dissidents also enjoyed some degree of protection from persecution thanks to the Helsinki Final Act, which thus altered the power balance between the regime and the opposition. East and Central European dissidents began to refer to the Helsinki declaration, and related documents, when criticising their political leaders or various aspects of Government policy. Through such references, their criticism acquired some degree of legitimacy.³¹ Hungarian dissidents could point to the fact that the Kádár regime had accepted certain obligations and that it was not only a domestic, or ideological, question whether or not it chose to honour its commitments. The CSCE was used for ‘testing the legitimacy and

28 Di Palma, 1991, 64

29 László J Kiss, ‘Historischer Rahmen und Gegenwart ungarischer Außenpolitik’ in *Osteuropa*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1993, 564

30 Birnbaum & Peters, 1990, 309. Kathryn Sikkink, ‘The Power of Principled Ideas: Human Rights Policies in the United States and Western Europe’ in Goldstein & Keohane (eds), 1993, 140 & 151

31 Patricia Chilton, ‘Mechanics of Change: Social Movements, Transnational Coalitions, and the Transformation Processes in Eastern Europe’ in *Democratization*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1994, 158

accountability of their rulers' and 'to mount legalistic assaults on the Socialist monolith'.³² This was the case not only in Hungary. Since the Communist regimes had signed the Helsinki Final Act 'it was open to dissenters to reveal the hypocrisy of governments that persecuted citizens on political grounds whilst proclaiming a respect for human rights'.³³ In the Charter 77 Declaration in Czechoslovakia, specific references were made to the Final Act.³⁴ Schöpflin concludes that

'the introduction of human rights into the Helsinki process [...] contributed qualitatively to weakening the legitimating force of Marxism-Leninism [...] transcended the universalist claims of Marxism-Leninism and provided the Central and East European opposition with an intellectual basis from which to attack and thus erode the official systems'.³⁵

As borders became more permeable, and through exposure to contacts with West Europeans, many Hungarians developed a new perspective both on the Capitalist Democracies of Western Europe and on the relative merits of the political and economic performance of their own country. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a gradual shift in orientation which meant that Western Europe gradually became a natural and preferred frame of reference for many Hungarians, in particular young people and the middle class.³⁶ Thanks to the CSCE process and détente the 'Iron Curtain' became less of a barrier to travel. Hungary was one of the countries in Eastern Europe that attracted the largest numbers of visitors from the West. The annual number of foreigners visiting Hungary increased from 6.3 million in 1960 to 15.4 million in 1982. At the same time, the annual number of Hungarians visiting the West multiplied a hundredfold, increasing from 35,000 in 1960 to over 3.8 million in 1980.³⁷ Many Hungarians, therefore, became personally acquainted with people from Western Europe and better informed on different aspects of Western societies. Through its relative accessibility and openness, Hungary also served as a useful rendezvous for people from the divided Germany.

Exposure to Western radio and television broadcasting and the use of new information and communication technology also helped to change the image

32 Kovrig, 1993, 163

33 Michael Waller, 'Voice, choice and loyalty: democratization in Eastern Europe' in Parry & Moran (eds), 1994, 138

34 William M Brinton, 'The Helsinki Final Act and Other International Covenants Supporting Freedom and Human Rights' in Brinton & Rinzler (eds), 1990, 474

35 Schöpflin, 1990, 16

36 Gati, 1986 (a), 207. Kux, 1991, 8

37 Hoensch, 1988, 231

of Western Europe in Hungary. This contributed further to making West European societies and markets look like an attractive alternative.³⁸ Other ways of transmitting 'pro-democratic influence' were 'through culture, consumption patterns, and a proliferation of other demonstration effects'.³⁹ As early as 1982, Linden pointed out that 'the fewer the barriers to trade, travel exchanges and contacts of all kinds there are, the greater are the threats posed by the influence of uncontrolled and uncontrollable ideas'.⁴⁰

Parallel to the growing exposure to the West, the perception of the EC gradually changed owing to the intensification of the West European integration process from the mid-1980s. In the beginning of the 1980s, the general interest in the EC in Western Europe had been fairly low among citizens and Governments alike. Western Europe tried to assert itself, with little success, in international affairs, and to find its role alongside, rather than subordinate to, the United States. The media and analysts referred to the 'Eurosclerosis', 'Eurogloom' or 'Europessimism' that had beset Western Europe.⁴¹ However, the adoption of the White Paper on the completion of the Single Market in 1985, Spain's and Portugal's entry into the EC in 1986 and the signing in the same year of the Single European Act⁴² injected new fuel into the European integration project, which led to restored optimism. The expected economic benefit of deeper integration made EC membership a more attractive option while, simultaneously, raising the cost of staying outside.⁴³ This development is likely to have stimulated a growing interest in the EC among decision-makers as well as dissidents in Hungary but also to have caused real fear of the consequences of a Single (West) European Market in 1993 should the Hungarian economy fail to become more competitive.⁴⁴

The exposure to Western Europe, through travelling, electronic media and culture, and the revitalised EC integration had two consequences which are not unrelated but which may still be analysed separately. *Firstly*, Hungary's relative openness towards the West and its exposure to Western influence helped to

38 Hyde-Price, 1994, 225. Meyer, 1993, 274. Kux, 1991, 6-7. Lincoln Allison, 'On the Gap between Theories of Democracy and Theories of Democratization' in *Democratization*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1994, 16

39 Laurence Whitehead, 'Democracy and Democratization: East-Central Europe' in Whitehead (ed.), 1996, 388

40 R H Linden, 'The Security Bind in East Europe' in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1982, 165 quoted in Gerner, 1984, 134

41 Andrew Moravcsik, 'Negotiating the Single European Act' in Keohane & Hoffmann (eds), 1991, 41. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1990 (a), 18-19

42 Moravcsik, 1991, 61

43 Dahrendorf, 1990 (a), 18-19

44 Braun, 1990 (a), 184. Ralf Dahrendorf, 'Roads to Freedom: Democratization and Its Problems in East Central Europe' in Volten (ed.), 1990 (b), 17

nourish dreams or visions of an alternative in economic (market economy), political (democracy and human rights) and international structures (links to West European or Trans-Atlantic institutions). The significance of providing an alternative should not be underestimated. In 1986 Lendvai observed that

*'[d]ie heutige Generation mißt ihre Erwartungen nicht an der Vergangenheit, sondern an den Versprechungen einer Verbesserung des Lebensstandards und vor allem auch an dessen deutlich höherem Stand im Westen. [...] Diese Probleme, diese Gefährdung der Legitimität bzw. die vergeblichen Bemühungen um Legitimität, werden noch einerseits durch das Ideologievakuum, andererseits durch die Kommunikationsrevolution verstärkt.'*⁴⁵

The Hungarian interest in Western Europe did not only have economic roots. It was also a response to historic, cultural and security concerns. Notably, there were fears that West European integration with Hungary as an outsider 'could help perpetuate Soviet domination of the region [and] could delay the reestablishment [...] of [...] links with the West'.⁴⁶ In Hungary's case, the growing interest in Western Europe and its political and economic systems gradually transformed Western Europe into a set of reference states or a reference society.⁴⁷ The development we have discussed here fits well into a pattern that has been observed also in other cases of democratisation.⁴⁸ In Huntington's words 'the rise and decline of democracy on a global scale is a function of the rise and decline of the most powerful democratic states. [...] That influence is felt both directly [...] and also indirectly by providing a powerful and successful model to be followed'.⁴⁹ With regard to active attempts by an actor to influence politics in another country, the successful promotion of a model does not necessarily require great material resources. As pointed out by Stenelo, such promotion as a means of gaining influence in international politics can therefore be seen as an 'interesting strategic alternative for small states'.⁵⁰

Secondly, as the West was increasingly seen as a relevant point of reference, people's perceptions of their own daily life and of Hungary's economic, political and social structures began to change. The contrast became starker in the 1980s when '[f]or the first time in the history of communism, East Europeans, laymen

45 Paul Lendvai, 'Die innenpolitische Lage in Osteuropa' in *Osteuropa*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1986, 97

46 Braun, 1990 (a), 184-185

47 Di Palma, 1991, 64

48 Nancy Bermeo, 'Democracy and the Lessons of Dictatorship' in *Comparative Politics*, April 1992, 283

49 Samuel Huntington, 'Will More Countries Become Democratic?' in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 99, No. 2, 1984, 206-207

50 Stenelo, Lars-Göran, 'Den internationaliserade demokratin' in Hansson, Göte & Stenelo, Lars-Göran (eds), *Makt och internationalisering*, Carlsons, Stockholm, 1990, 287

and experts alike, admit to a widening gap between East and West'.⁵¹ This was a result of the widening technological gap between Western Europe and the Soviet bloc in the early 1980s, when the rapid technological development in the West showed that the Soviet-type economic system was unable to compete: 'The Soviet world system, as an alternative, had crumbled.'⁵² This contributed to the growing unpopularity of the regime, which, as we have seen, was already facing difficulties because of the economic crisis. While the regime had to pay an ever higher price to fulfil its obligations under the social contract, popular appetites became increasingly hard to satisfy; Hungarians were becoming more familiar with the West European standards of living, welfare and personal freedom, which 'came to contrast increasingly sharply with comparable performance in the Warsaw Pact countries'.⁵³ In short, Western Europe became an alternative for many Hungarians, no longer (only) as a place to flee or migrate to but rather as a model for how they wished to see things develop at home.

The emergence of a political opposition

'Hungarian dissident intellectuals of the 1980s would have been just as at home in the salons and cafes of London in the Victorian eras as in those of Budapest at the end of the twentieth century. In both cases bohemian life-styles, free-thinking, and irreverence for authority were combined with self-assured feelings of intellectual superiority, chauvinist attitudes towards women, and patronizing attitudes towards the poor and the less educated.'⁵⁴

A second, more tangible, aspect of the development of a political alternative is the gradual emergence of a political opposition. This can be seen in the *samizdat* movement in the mid-1980s followed by the formation of new political parties in the last years of the 1980s. To understand the context in which the Hungarian dissidents were operating we should look back at the early days of Communist rule. After the Hungarian Communists had come to power in the late 1940s they made a conscious effort to atomise society⁵⁵ and to strengthen the state by destroying traditional social networks.⁵⁶ As a result, the number of clubs and

51 Hann, 1990 (a), 6. Dahrendorf, 1990 (a), 21-22

52 Bozóki, 1992 (b), 170

53 Whitehead, 1996, 378

54 Bill Lomax, 'The Inegalitarian Nature of Hungary's Intellectual Political Culture' in Bozóki (ed.), 1999, 174

55 Hankiss, 1990 (b), 20

56 Mislivetz, 1989 (a), 101

societies diminished from about 13,000 in the early 1940s to less than 1,000 after the Communist take-over.⁵⁷

From the mid-1970s, a civil society, more or less separate from the official sphere, slowly began to emerge in reaction to both domestic and external developments.⁵⁸ Its members generally had rather vague goals, 'no specific political reforms in mind', and felt compelled to accept 'geo-political realities' i.e. Soviet dominance, and often even the one-party structure.⁵⁹ Thanks to Kádár's fairly successful attempts at co-opting parts of the intelligentsia, and since the regime was less repressive than in most other Central and East European countries, no movement resembling *Solidarność* was formed. Nor did the church play a role similar to the one it played in Poland.⁶⁰ Civil society, according to Merkel,

'was never in open and confrontational opposition to the regime. It was more oriented to the self-organisation of social life in niches which the regime did not control. The civic organisations emerged as the response to the regime's moderate liberalisation and the inadequate functioning of public services or the challenge of the environment'.⁶¹

This analysis is shared by Schöpflin, who argues that, compared with the Polish and the Czechoslovak opposition movements,

'the Hungarians have been rather more modest in their aims [...and] have concentrated on raising the consciousness of the conformist intelligentsia to the wide range of problems to which the political leadership had no solution and, indeed, which it ignored'.⁶²

Garton Ash also notes that the 'democratic opposition' failed to develop 'those links with other classes – above all, workers – without which Solidarity would never have been born'.⁶³

Despite these significant differences, as in other Central and East European countries, the *samizdat* ('self-published') literature and journals played a role in the emergence of a political opposition movement. The most important reason for the emergence of samizdat was the problems associated with getting critical

57 Hankiss, 1990 (b), 20

58 Michael Waller, 'Party inheritances and party identities' in Pridham & Lewis (eds), 1996, 31. Cf. the discussion in chapter four on second and civil society.

59 Skilling, 1989, 182-183

60 *ibid.*, 181. Swain, 1989, 27. Molnár, 1990 (a), 315

61 Wolfgang Merkel, 'Civil society and democratic consolidation in East-Central Europe' in Pridham & Agh (eds), 2001, 106

62 Schöpflin, 1981, 25

63 Timothy Garton Ash, *The Uses of Adversity*, Granta Books, Cambridge, 1989, 134

texts published. This was not so much because of censorship, which officially did not exist. It was rather a mixture of self-censorship and a social institution that functioned as a substitute for a legally regulated censorship.⁶⁴ Behind the samizdat production we find the 'Democratic Opposition', which began to get organised towards the end of the 1970s, inspired by dissident movements in Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1986 Heinrich estimated that a hard core of the opposition, then consisting of the Budapest School and the 'Democratic Opposition', together counted around 300 people.⁶⁵

The Hungarian Democratic Opposition was founded as an underground movement.⁶⁶ Among the people behind it we find e.g. György Krassó, Gábor Demszky, László Rajk (Jr) and Ferenc Kószeg. This movement presented itself as a Hungarian member of the International Helsinki Federation and stayed in touch with similar groups throughout Europe. Other opposition groups active in the mid-1980s included *SZETA* ('The foundation for assistance to the poor') and 'Hungarian Minority Spokesmen'.⁶⁷ Even though these opposition groups consisted of 'a very small percentage of mainly intellectual activists in Budapest and other major towns'⁶⁸ they covered a broad ideological spectrum.⁶⁹

Around the same time, a number of more issue-specific movements also emerged. During the first years of the decade they were mostly concerned with peace issues, whereas from the mid-1980s they concentrated more on environmental questions protesting against the planned hydroelectric plant at Nagymaros, and on the situation of Hungarians in Transylvania. In many cases, these groups tried to get some kind of official recognition and did not want to become too closely involved with the political opposition. However, the protests against the Nagymaros project and the concern over the situation in Romania partly succeeded in mobilising the middle-class and, once again, made it politically more active.⁷⁰

Samizdat became more widespread in the early 1980s when the opposition began to argue more actively for political change based on democracy and respect

64 Balázs, Rab, 'How Self-Censorship Works' in *Index on Censorship*, 4, 1978, Reprinted in Schöpflin (ed.), 1983, 147-149

65 Heinrich, 1986, 88 Skilling talks about fifty to sixty activists and a few hundred supporters. Skilling, 1989, 35

66 Fejtő, 1992, 181

67 Heinrich, 1986, 89-90

68 Corrin, 1993, 188

69 Heinrich, 1986, 90

70 Skilling, 1989, 183. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 38

for human rights.⁷¹ In the autumn of 1981, the first edition of *Beszélő*, which became one of the most widespread and probably influential samizdats, was 'published' in one thousand copies.⁷² Other well-known samizdat publications in the early and mid-1980s were *Magyar Figyelő*, *ABC Tájékoztató*, *ABC Hirmondó* and *ABC Bulletin*. Behind these publications we find a mixture of 'the political opposition and the ecological and peace movements as well as the basic church communities advocating conscientious objection'.⁷³

In June 1985 an effort was made to bridge the gap between the various strands of the opposition. About 45 people secretly met for a two-and-a-half day meeting in Monor, southeast of Budapest. One of the leading organisers was Ferenc Donáth, who had been an active Communist during the War and later became a veteran of 1956. The selection of people invited was intended to represent different ideological strands and various professions e.g. economists, sociologists and writers, including György Konrád and Miklós Haraszti. A number of environmentalists and peace activists also took part. The subjects discussed included the 'vacuum of culture', the situation of Hungarians abroad and the regime's weak response to it, the economic crisis and the need for reform, as well as the need for democracy, in addition to topical social problems e.g. poverty, alcoholism and the decline in welfare. The intellectuals were severely criticised for compromising with the regime. János Kis spoke about the need for radical changes and called for a defined strategy, but his, and others', attempts to establish a common programme or a common front against the regime did not succeed, mainly owing to the various backgrounds and ideologies of the participants. Instead, the existing conflicts between e.g. the Populists and the Urbanists became very visible. Nevertheless, the Monor meeting was a further step signalling the coming fall of the Kádár regime.⁷⁴

From 1987 the regime gradually became more tolerant.⁷⁵ In June a document that was to become influential was published in *Beszélő*. It was called 'A Social Contract' and was, in fact, a radical programme advocating economic and political reform.⁷⁶ The document, which had been drafted by members of the democratic

71 Sword (ed.), 1990, 102. Swain, 1989, 16

72 Snejdarek & Mazurowa-Château, 1986, 378. Skilling, 1989, 34. Lomax, 1984, 95

73 Heinrich, 1986, 85

74 Garton Ash, 1989, 135-136. Swain, 1989, 16. Skilling, 1989, 185-186. Nigel Swain, 'Hungary' in Szajkowski (ed.), 1991, 129. Lengyel, 1992, 34. Swain, 1992, 16

75 Sword (ed.), 1990, 101

76 Skilling, 1989, 186

opposition – János Kis, Ferenc Kőszeg and Ottilia Solt – called for János Kádár’s resignation and stated that without this no change would be possible.⁷⁷ In their reform programme, the opposition stressed the need to circumscribe the power of the ruling Party with a legal framework. They also proposed a way forward, based on compromises, towards a division of power between the Party and the opposition.⁷⁸ The authors did not suggest that the one-party system should be abolished. However, they wanted the role of the National Assembly to be strengthened while the power of regional authorities, the freedom of the press and freedom of initiative should be extended.⁷⁹ In September 1987 the Social Contract ‘was followed by an open letter to the National Assembly, signed by 100 persons (including ten members of the democratic opposition)’.⁸⁰ The publication of the ‘Social Contract’ helped bring about the emergence of a more organised opposition movement.⁸¹

In March 1988 a ‘Call for Action’ was issued to bring together groups interested in environmental protection and human and religious freedom. The Call focused on a dialogue between society, which was about to become organised, and the Party, which was by then disintegrating into various factions. At the beginning of May, the Call for Action led to the creation of an umbrella organisation – the ‘Network of Free Initiatives’. This was a broad organisation that tried to stimulate communication between various unofficial groups, although it did not contain representatives of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum* (MDF)).⁸² Eventually, a majority of its members considered the network structure inadequate and, consequently, in November 1988 a majority transformed itself into a political party – the Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége* (SzDSz)).⁸³ In the latter part of 1988, there was an explosive growth of independent organisations. Whereas there had been less than ten of them in mid-1988, there were more than 50 towards the end of the year. The majority of them were based in Budapest and did not exist outside a number of large cities.⁸⁴ Estimates put the numbers of readers of samizdat at somewhere between

77 Sword (ed.), 1990, 102. Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 24

78 Grémion & Hassner, 1990, 75

79 Swain, 1989, 17

80 Skilling, 1989, 186-187

81 Klausen, 1990, 151

82 Ferenc Mészlivetz, “Dialogue” – and What is behind It? in *Across Frontiers*, Summer, 1989 (b), 31.

Mészlivetz, 1989 (a), 102. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 44

83 András Bozóki, ‘Democracy Across the Negotiating Table’ in *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 125, 1992 (a), 59-60. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 47

84 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 23

1,000 and 20,000. By the end of the 1980s they included members of the Party cadre.⁸⁵

The samizdat culture and the rebirth of civil society provided fertile soil for the emergence of political parties in the last years of the 1980s.⁸⁶ In many East and Central European countries it turned out to be difficult to establish new parties in or after 1989, partly because the word ‘party’ itself had been discredited. Hungary was more successful in this regard. One reason was that the transition process was fairly protracted and thus provided space and time for the gradual emergence of a number of political parties.⁸⁷

Some of the Hungarian parties had existed before the Communists started applying their infamous salami tactics at the end of the 1940s. These included the Independent Smallholders’ Party (*Független Kisgazdapárt* (FKgP)), which was re-born in November 1988 as a revival of a party originally founded in 1945. Another party in this category was the Christian Democratic People’s Party (*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt* (KDNP)), which had originally been founded in 1944 as the Democratic People’s Party and was refounded in 1989, as well as the Social Democratic Party, which was refounded in January 1989.⁸⁸

However, several parties were new and tried to take into account the changes that had affected Hungarian politics, economics and society during the past forty years. In addition to the reformed Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt* (MSzP)), the parties that were later represented in Parliament, following the first multi-party elections in 1990, fall into two opposing ideological strands within the intelligentsia, often referred to as ‘Urbanism’ and ‘Populism’.⁸⁹ Among the former, we find the reformed Socialist Party as well as the two Liberal parties. Among the Populist parties we find the main factions of the MDF as well as the Christian Democratic Party and the Smallholders’ Party. This reflects a fundamental cleavage in Hungarian politics that gave the political scene a different character from that of the political landscape in most West European countries.

In 1987 the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) was formed – a party that represented Populist as well as Christian Democratic traditions. The MDF subscribed to the idea of ‘a “third road” (neither Communist, nor Capitalist)

85 Klausen, 1990, 147. See also Schöpflin, 1981, 26, Schöpflin (ed.), 1983, 146 and Völgyes, 1987, 331

86 http://www.magyarorszag.hu/angol/orszaginfo/allam/part/partok_a.html Saxonberg regards the emergence of political parties as ‘more the effect than the cause of the Hungarian collapse’. Saxonberg, 1997, 145

87 Moisi & Rupnik, 1991, 84-85

88 <http://www.szdp.hu/tortenet.html>

89 Nigel Swain calls the two strands ‘liberals’ and ‘nationalists’. See Swain, 1993, 70. Herbert Kitschelt, ‘The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe’ in *Politics & Society*, Vol. 20, No.1, 1992, 31-32

genuine Hungarian future' and did not exclude contacts, or even making deals, with the reform wing of the Socialist Party (MSzMP), notably Imre Pozsgay.⁹⁰ The MDF was formed on 27 September in the village of Lakitelek 'at a gathering attended by writers and critics of the "populist" persuasion and by reform communists such as Imre Pozsgay'.⁹¹ At this meeting, Pozsgay called for a new constitution that would guarantee freedom of expression.⁹² The Forum had started as an informal discussion group among Populists – more often writers than social scientists; their target group was not the intellectuals but the population at large. They were more nationalistic and concerned with traditional Hungarian values than the Urbanists in the 'Democratic Opposition'.⁹³ The MDF was partly inspired by old Populist leaders e.g. Dezső Szabó and László Németh.⁹⁴

In March 1988 the Alliance of Young Democrats (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* (FIDESZ)), which was a Liberal party, was founded. Somewhat later, as already mentioned, the 'Democratic Opposition' launched its Network of Free Initiatives, which in November 1988 was transformed into the Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége* (SzDSz)), which was a second Liberal party. Although the Network initially had some contacts with the MDF, neither organisation wished to join the other.

Popular political mobilisation was less developed in Hungary than in e.g. Poland. The mass demonstrations arranged in 1988 and 1989 increased the self-confidence of the new elites (leaders of the movements and parties) and prepared them for negotiations and Parliamentary activity.⁹⁵ For various reasons, however, there was no united or dominant opposition movement challenging the regime and instead 'three embryo political parties spoke for the opposition in the "triangular" talks of 1989'.⁹⁶

Great tension between the Urbanists and the Populists could already be observed during the last years of the 1980s among the groups opposing the Socialist regime. This is hardly surprising considering their different backgrounds. The Urbanists and the Populists held strong, mutual prejudices against each other,

90 András Körösekényi, 'Revival of the Past or New Beginning?: The Nature of Post-Communist Politics' in Szoboszlai (ed.), 1991, 171. Cf. Bozóki, 1992 (a), 59

91 Swain, 1991, 129-130

92 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 36

93 Sword (ed.), 1990, 102-103. For a discussion about various cleavages within the opposition, see also Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 38-39

94 Fejtő, 1992, 347

95 Attila Ágh, 'From nomenclatura to clientura: The emergence of new political elites in east-central Europe' in Pridham & Lewis (eds), 1996, 52

96 Waller, 1996, 39

which made any effort such as the Monor meeting referred to above essentially fruitless.⁹⁷ Their opposite views on several important issues came to influence the Round Table negotiations in 1989 as well as the election campaign. By then, the struggle between the Populists and the Urbanists had become at least as important as the competition between the opposition and the old regime. In fact, this tension put its mark on the whole political restructuring during the early years of Hungary's return to democracy⁹⁸ and, as we will see in chapter seven, the 'governing coalition formed after the first free election was indeed based more upon a cleavage line dividing the anti-communist parties, than upon the opposition to the old regime'.⁹⁹

Even if, by comparison, the Hungarian political transition was a fairly extended process the parties initially did not succeed in recruiting large numbers of members. By the end of 1988, the MDF and the SzDSz had only 10,000 and 1,500 members respectively.¹⁰⁰ One year later, after the Law on Political Parties had been adopted by Parliament on 31 October 1989, the number of parties had grown to 28 while around 3,500 associations had registered.¹⁰¹ However, even after the Parliamentary elections in 1990 the six Parliamentary parties had fewer than 200,000 members in total¹⁰² – roughly one fourth of what the membership of the 'old' MSzMP had been in 1989.

97 Körösényi, 1991, 172. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 44

98 Maurizio Cotta, 'Structuring the new party systems after the dictatorship: Coalitions, alliances, fusions and splits during the transition and post-transition stages' in Pridham & Lewis (eds), 1996, 82

99 Cotta, 1996, 92

100 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 30

101 *Parliamentary Elections in Hungary March 25, 1990*, Republic of Hungary, MTI Press, 1990, 16. *Political Parties in the Multiparty System of the Republic of Hungary*, Budapest, 1990, 1

102 András Körösényi, 'Stable or Fragile Democracy? Political Cleavages and Party System in Hungary' in *Government and Opposition*, 1, 1993, 87

The split within the regime and the loss of self-legitimacy

‘Clearly, all political changes originate in divisions of the actual governing power; a government which is united, however small, cannot be moved.’¹⁰³

‘- Are you the Imre Nagy of the 1980s?’

- I always wonder when people ask me that, what their own opinion is of Imre Nagy.’

– Imre Pozsgay in a meeting with students from the Technical University of Budapest in 1987¹⁰⁴

The third major factor behind the democratisation was the emergence of a rift within the ruling regime. The economic crisis and the emergence of a political opposition provoked parts of the regime to react. Hardliners still believed that major political reform could be avoided and, therefore, defended the status quo. Others, referred to as softliners, saw the risk of a revolutionary situation emerging out of popular discontent, as in 1956, and were also eager to play a political role after what they regarded as an unavoidable reform of the political system.

Loss of self-legitimacy, as discussed in chapter two, is likely to have been a contributing factor behind the changing attitudes of the softliners. As Tőkés argues, ‘[b]y the late 1970s, the NEM had become the principal, if not the sole, device for the regime’s self-legitimation’.¹⁰⁵ As early as 1982, Heller speaks of a permanent legitimisation crisis in Eastern Europe and sees ‘the incapability of the ruling strata to elaborate a meaningful and binding formula of self-legitimation’ as one major cause.¹⁰⁶ Schöpflin points out that:

‘An authoritarian elite sustains itself in power not just through force and the threat of force but, more importantly, because it has some vision of the future by which it can justify itself to itself. No regime can survive for long without some concept of purposiveness to project its existence forward in time.’¹⁰⁷

This is clearly applicable to the Kádár regime. In the late 1980s, more and more leading Communists began to lose this vision and some replaced it with notions of multi-party democracy.

103 Plato, *The Republic*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991, 294

104 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 43

105 Tőkés, 1996, 254

106 Heller, 1982, 62

107 Schöpflin, 1990, 6

This illustrates a general phenomenon observed by Di Palma who argues that

‘if the rulers lose confidence in their right to rule – it becomes very difficult to stop the crisis. A “virtuous” regime can live without popular support; it can hardly live when it no longer believes in its own virtue. For at that point it loses the courage to rule against popular sentiments, by secret and devious means, if that is what is necessary’.¹⁰⁸

Diamond claims that loss of cohesion within the regime is a common factor preceding a transition to democracy. He attributes such a split to two factors. The first is a loss of self-legitimacy because the regime has ‘succeeded in solving the problems that ushered it into power [...] or because it has failed to realize its self-proclaimed mission, or perhaps in part because societal values have changed to become less tolerant of authoritarian rule’. The second factor is ‘the shrinkage (often rather abruptly) of their resources, material and coercive’.¹⁰⁹ As argued by Saxonberg, ‘the economic crisis [...] offered society the chance to question the regime’s monopoly of Truth. Simultaneously, it caused many leaders to question their own ideological legitimacy. Hence, the rulers began questioning their right to rule.’¹¹⁰ In Hungary, we see a combination of such factors: failure to realise either Socialist Utopia or economic prosperity, an international political climate less willing to accept non-democratic rule and, finally, a loss of material resources – through the economic crisis – and a loss of coercive resources, due to fear of losing support in the West, changing policy in Moscow and fear of a new 1956.

The lessons from 1956 drawn by the leadership help to explain its relative tolerance vis-à-vis the opposition and, as from 1989, its willingness to negotiate. 1956 had always been tacitly present in the Hungarian political consciousness as a point of reference (or an ideal) but also, for the regime, as a trauma not to be repeated. However, as Urbán correctly points out, the fear of a new 1956 ‘in itself alone does not provide a sufficient explanation, because it had been ever present throughout the last three decades’.¹¹¹

To make this explanation more plausible, we may add both Hungary’s economic crisis and the changes in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. As the economic crisis deepened, people and leaders again started thinking about what had happened in 1956 and hopes and fear again could be felt:

108 Di Palma, 1991, 56

109 Larry Diamond, *Ripe for Diffusion: International and Domestic Factors in the Global Trend toward Democracy*, Paper presented to the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Vancouver, March 20-23, 1991, 33-35

110 Saxonberg, 1997, 303

111 Urbán, 1991, 305

‘Die Ungarn wußten, daß die Reformen von 1968 und die Liberalisierung [...] nicht der Großzügigkeit des Regimes, sondern dessen Angst vor einem “potentiellen 1956” zu verdanken waren.’¹¹²

The Party elite made more direct and frequent references to 1956 in their speeches. The fear within the regime that the economic and social crisis would lead to an outburst similar to the revolt in 1956 finally made them ready to accept a compromise with the opposition.

Certain prominent figures within the MSzMP began advocating more radical reforms in order to come to grips with the economy. Many of the reformers were young; they had been brought up under the Kádár regime, and had never experienced Stalinism under Rákosi. Several of them were hardly genuinely committed Communists but had joined the MSzMP in order to make a career, and some of them presumably also to contribute to change.¹¹³ However, as Kádár refused to take any action, the economic crisis evolved into a political one. Initially, the reformists, with a few exceptions, did not support demands for political reform. Towards the mid-1980s, several leading Party members came to the conclusion that economic reforms without political reforms were a dead end. They also realised that, in the absence of political reforms, there would be no thorough economic reforms. With Kádár displaying clear signs of political sclerosis, some reformists began to advocate political change.¹¹⁴ While on previous occasions hardliners had succeeded in blocking change, the division within the Party and the economic elite now turned out to be one very important precondition for change. This split ‘prepared the ground for the emergence of the second precondition for change: an alliance between reform communists on the one hand, and organized forces of civil society on the other’.¹¹⁵

A key figure among the reform Communists was Imre Pozsgay, to whom I have already referred. He served as Minister of Culture (1976-82) and then became General Secretary (1982-88) of the Patriotic People’s Front (PPF). The PPF was an umbrella organisation, founded in 1954, that included labour unions, churches and various societal organisations loyal to the Party. It was mainly responsible for nominating candidates for the Parliamentary elections, thus functioning as

112 Józsa, 1994, 16

113 András Bozóki & Bill Lomax, ‘The revenge of history – The Portuguese, Spanish and Hungarian transitions: some comparisons’ in Pridham & Lewis (eds), 1996, 190

114 Schöpflin, 1981, 9-11

115 Bruszt, 1991, 224

a tool of the Party for keeping Parliament in its grip. Pozsgay managed to use his position to make the PPF a meeting point for reform-minded forces and a means to strengthening his own power.¹¹⁶ From September 1987, Imre Pozsgay and a few other MSzMP members took part in meetings organised by the MDF. In April 1988 four of them – Mihály Bihari, László Lengyel, Zoltán Király and Zoltán Biró – were expelled from the MSzMP ‘for having taken “positions that were contrary to the party’s policies”’.¹¹⁷ As Saxonberg observes, ‘the Party entered 1988 clearly split between conservatives around Kádár and his ideology chief Berecz and reformers around Pozsgay and Nyers’.¹¹⁸

The softliners were eager to ‘dissociate themselves from the collective “we” of the rulers and instead be able to look back at the Kádár regime from the outside’.¹¹⁹ This was a major reason for their willingness to dialogue. At the same time, the fear of Russian intervention made the opposition hesitant about challenging the legitimacy of the regime. According to Bruszt and Stark, ‘Mikhail Gorbachev did not automatically alter those calculations, for the limits of his toleration were neither clearly articulated nor yet tested’.¹²⁰

The fear among the leadership, not only of being left behind by ‘geo-political realities’ but also of ignoring the will of the people was eventually felt even by the hardliners within the MSzMP. They were finally ‘forced’ to accept pluralism since they were ‘stripped of all counter-arguments by their fear of popular upheaval as in 1956’.¹²¹ So, in addition to the withdrawal of Soviet support and concerns about Hungary’s reputation in the West, the danger of a new 1956 contributed to making the MSzMP leaders accept the emergence of an opposition movement and negotiate with it.¹²² Therefore, looking back at 1956 and its effects on Hungarian politics, we must conclude that it turned out to be a ‘mixed curse’. We could argue that, although there was a high cost, in all the blood that was shed and all the lives that were ruined, what happened in 1956 ultimately made a significant contribution to the demise of the Socialist regime some thirty years or so later.

116 Lars P Poulsen-Hansen, *Politiske partier og bevægelser i Central- og Østeuropa*, Det sikkerheds- og nedrustningspolitiske udvalg, Copenhagen, 1990, 21. Paul Lendvai, *Hungary: The Art of Survival*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1988, 141. Heinrich, 1986, 79

117 Tőkés, 1996, 280. Fejtő, 1992, 184. Sword (ed.), 1990, 103-104. *Keesing's Record of World Events*, April 1989, 36594

118 Saxonberg, 1997, 179

119 Bruszt, 1991, 222

120 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 25

121 Sword (ed.), 1990, 106

122 Urbán, 1991, 305

Just like the opposition, some of the Communists advocating political reforms had been influenced by contacts with the West and had begun to see the West as a reference society.¹²³ Thus, as Sørensen concludes, '[t]he Helsinki factor worked together with the Tocqueville factor [... -] the old ruling elite's loss of belief in its own right to rule, in its own legitimacy'.¹²⁴

The withdrawal of external support

'Despite wishful thinking in the West that a parliamentary system along western democratic lines will eventually establish itself in Hungary, the country's firm ties with the Socialist Bloc rule out any political development which would challenge the ruling party's monopoly of power.'¹²⁵

Finally, the fourth major factor behind the democratisation was the withdrawal of Soviet support for the Socialist regime.¹²⁶ Towards the end of the 1980s, Hungary was ripe for change. The economic crisis and the lack of political reforms had generated pressure for radical steps. Contacts with the West and with dissident movements in other Central European countries had provided ideas about an alternative political system, and there were people both within and outside the Party ready to try to put some of these ideas into practice. It is unlikely, however, that these factors on their own, important though they were, would have been sufficient to bring about the transformation of the Hungarian political landscape, had it not been for the radical reforms in the Soviet Union.

In March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev had been elected General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.¹²⁷ He soon initiated domestic reforms, under headings known as *demokratizatsiya*, *perestroika* and *glasnost*, partly inspired by the Hungarian economic reforms. In his relations with Eastern Europe, Gorbachev explained that the East European Communist parties had to be responsible to their own people.

In the Hungarian case, the changes in Moscow were not so important as a source of inspiration for further reforms. Békés points out that 'Hungary simultaneously

123 Whitehead, 1996, 388

124 Georg Sørensen, *Democracy and Democratization*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1993, 35

125 Hoensch, 1988, 283 (first published in 1986)

126 This section draws on my contribution 'The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1988-9: Interactions between domestic change and foreign policy' in Pridham & Vanhanen (eds), 1994

127 Kux, 1991, 3

played the part of best student and teacher'.¹²⁸ However, the declared intention of non-intervention changed the relative power of the Socialist regime and of the opposition in the internal Hungarian power game. As Swain summarises, '[w]ith the advent of Gorbachev, no fine line had to be trod between what was acceptable to the Soviet Union and what was not'.¹²⁹ Di Palma, discussing the same development, argues that 'once the Soviet hegemon voluntarily and formally abandoned its global goals, East European countries found themselves left to their own devices'.¹³⁰ For the regime, this made the situation rather delicate. Molnar argues that 'Gorbachev did not have to worry about revealing the truth about his predecessors. Kádár, by contrast, was in some ways his own predecessor'.¹³¹

Within the MSzMP, these reforms were interpreted very differently by various groups and individuals. Hardliners saw the new ideas as a threat to their own 'legitimacy', since they knew that the Kádár regime had been installed and maintained with explicit support from the Soviet leadership. Many of them, therefore, hoped that Gorbachev would be swept away in an internal power struggle. Softliners, on the other hand, responded in an entirely different way. Among the softliners we find people like Imre Pozsgay, who was one of the first within the MSzMP who officially re-assessed 1956. Once Gorbachev no longer gave them his backing, some MSzMP members chose to accept, and finally even to negotiate with, the political opposition.¹³²

One very important signal was Gorbachev's speech at the UN in which he announced the unilateral withdrawal of 50,000 out of 565,000 troops from East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.¹³³ Furthermore, the Soviet Union was going to reduce its military strength in Europe by 500,000 troops, 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery pieces and 800 combat aircraft by 1991.¹³⁴ These decisions contributed to heightening 'the East European regimes' already existing doubts about Soviet intent'.¹³⁵ Or, as Gati remarked, the decision 'contained a critical political message to the region's communist leaders: The Soviet Union would no longer protect unpopular East European regimes from their own peoples'.¹³⁶

128 Békés, 2003, 22

129 Swain, 1991, 129

130 Di Palma, 1991, 74-75

131 Miklos Molnár, *From Béla Kun to János Kádár: Seventy Years of Hungarian Communism*, Berg, New York, 1990 (b), xii

132 Urbán, 1991, 305

133 Gati, 1990, 155

134 Braun, 1990 (a), 191

135 Gati, 1989, 111

136 Gati, 1990, 161-162

From early 1989, we also see significant changes in Soviet policy towards Eastern Europe, not least in terms of the concepts used when discussing Eastern Europe. Leading Soviet politicians no longer referred to the ‘fundamental harmony’ in the relations between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.¹³⁷ On a visit to Kiev in February 1989, Gorbachev stated that ‘Soviet relations with East European countries must be based on “unconditional independence [...] full equality and strict non-intervention in internal affairs”’.¹³⁸ Still, many observers were not sure how to interpret the new signals from Moscow.¹³⁹ In July 1989, when addressing the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, Gorbachev went even further and, in effect, repudiated the Brezhnev Doctrine:

‘Social and political orders in one or another country changed in the past and may change in the future. But this change is the exclusive affair of the people of that country and is their choice. Any interference in domestic affairs and any attempts to restrict the sovereignty of states, both friends and allies or any others, is inadmissible.’¹⁴⁰

This speech further strengthened the confidence of the Hungarian political opposition¹⁴¹ who had by then already started negotiating with the Communist regime. A few weeks later, Gorbachev not only accepted, but actually played a catalyst role in bringing about a shift of power in Poland. This can be seen as the first, real test of whether or not the Brezhnev Doctrine had been completely abandoned (although, ironically, the example can be read in two ways!).¹⁴² On 25 October the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that the Brezhnev Doctrine had been replaced by the ‘Sinatra Doctrine’, and on 26-27 October, the Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact meeting in Warsaw ‘affirmed a policy of non-interference in each other’s affairs’.¹⁴³ Around the same time, Nikolai Shishlin, spokesman for the Soviet Communist Party, ‘asserted that the Soviet Union would not object to Hungary’s leaving the Warsaw Pact and becoming neutral’.¹⁴⁴

137 Robert Legvold, ‘The Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy’ in *Foreign Affairs*, No. 1, 1989, 86

138 Adam, 1995, 201 – quotation translated from *Pravda*, 24 February 1989

139 See Holloway, 1989

140 Gati, 1990, 169. Fejtő, 1992, 416

141 Fejtő, 1992, 417

142 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 25

143 Aurel Braun, ‘Epilogue’ in Braun, 1990 (b), 218. Braun remarks that ‘ironically the song [My Way] has dark overtones, mentioning that the “end” is near and that the singer is facing “the final curtain”’. Braun, 1990 (b), 220

144 Braun, 1990 (b), 218, 221

Finally, following the visit of the Hungarian Prime Minister to Moscow in March 1989, ‘Gorbachev noted his support for the Hungarian decision to legalize a multi-party system’.¹⁴⁵ The new climate created under Gorbachev not only made it easier for Hungary to pursue its relative ‘independence’ in foreign policy. It also contributed to a radical restructuring of the Hungarian political system itself. It seems, however, that the Hungarian leaders were still not sure how far they could go with respect to Moscow. When interviewed in 1999, ‘Rezső Nyers marked July 1989 and Imre Pozsgay November of the same year as the point in time when it looked sure to them that the Soviets would not intervene in Hungary, even if the transition was to lead to a total abandonment of socialism’.¹⁴⁶

To conclude and come back to the discussion in chapter two about various providers of acceptance, we see that the Socialist regime gradually lost the support of elites (notably the intellectuals) as well as its own belief in its right or capacity to rule (what we referred to as self-legitimacy). We have also seen that external factors played a facilitating role in bringing about the regime change. The main missing actors in the drama are the bureaucracy and, more importantly, the people. The Hungarian transition was largely a transition among elites.

The change

The fall of the Kádár regime

‘János Kádár’s career as a politician may be described in terms of compensatory efforts to cover up for his complicity in the bloody crushing of the revolution and the betrayal of his comrades. From the moment when 1956 and the fate of Imre Nagy became parts of the dissidents’ agenda, his days as leader were numbered.’¹⁴⁷

Kádár’s last years in power, after Gorbachev had initiated reforms in the Soviet Union, were marked by conservatism and stagnation. Kádár neither took initiatives to change, nor did he show any willingness to resign. He was increasingly losing control and respect, also within the Party. In December 1987 Kádár gave a televised speech in which he denied that a crisis existed.¹⁴⁸ In early 1988, the Government reintroduced 15 March as an official national holiday and about

145 de Nevers, 1990, 21

146 Békés, 2003, 26

147 Tőkés, 1996, 417-418

148 Swain, 1989, 18

10,000 people took part in the demonstrations held in Budapest.¹⁴⁹ Two days later, Kádár repeated that ‘there is no question of any sort of crisis ... everyone has to do their work as before, only better and more diligently’.¹⁵⁰

During the months leading up to the MSzMP Conference in May, which was possibly inspired by the Soviet decision to hold an extraordinary party conference in the summer of 1988, an internal power struggle took place.¹⁵¹ Károly Grósz, who had been Prime Minister since 1987, was entirely occupied by economic reforms. He was well aware of the fact that Hungary was losing substantial amounts in aid and credits because of its failure to sustain the image of being more advanced and reform-oriented than its neighbours, and this at a time when the foreign debt was growing rapidly.¹⁵² Two days before the Party Conference, Gyula Horn, then senior official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, allegedly received a personal message from Gorbachev, intended for Kádár, which in essence said: ‘Thank you for your services, please step down now, in the interests of your country’.¹⁵³

On 22 May 1988, at the Party Conference, János Kádár stepped down from his post as General Secretary and was given the newly created ceremonial post of Party president. The opposition within the MSzMP had agreed on Grósz as his successor, and this had been approved by Moscow, but the Conference turned out to be even more radical than expected. Eight Politburo members (out of thirteen) were dismissed, and the size of the Politburo was reduced. Among the newly appointed members were Rezső Nyers and Imre Pozsgay, whereas no member of Kádár’s inner circle remained. The average age of its members dropped from 60 to 52. In addition to these changes, one third of the CC members were replaced. Reflecting these changes, two thirds of the CC had joined after 1985.¹⁵⁴

The new Party programme gave high priority to the introduction of market economy, while neglecting social and political reforms.¹⁵⁵ The new leadership under Grósz was essentially unstable, but no other political force was yet strong enough to replace it in the short term.¹⁵⁶ The new leaders had agreed to remove Kádár. Beyond that, they were deeply divided among themselves, which led

149 András Gerő, ‘March 15th: The Fortunes of a National Day’ in *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 126, 1992, 122

150 Swain, 1989, 18

151 Tőkés, 1996, 278

152 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 22

153 According to information provided by Miklós Vásárhelyi to the Observer in Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 44-45

154 de Nevers, 1990, 30. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 45. Lendvai, 1988, 149-150. Swain, 1992, 19. Tőkés, 1996, 67. Tőkés, 1996, 284

155 Klausen, 1990, 149. Schöpflin, 1992, 100

156 Bruszt, 1991, 215

to a political stalemate within the regime during the summer and autumn of 1988. Grósz wanted to make the economic system more efficient, if need be by authoritarian methods, whereas Pozsgay was moving in a democratic and more open direction. Pozsgay saw the openings offered by the new signals from Moscow and 'transformed a debate on economic reform into one on democratization and national sovereignty'.¹⁵⁷ Around these leaders, conflicts evolved concerning the speed and scope of reforms. Grósz's reluctance to accept political change radicalised his critics, including those within the MSzMP. This strengthened the position of Pozsgay who was made Politburo member responsible for political reform. He was now supported by a growing movement in the Party and at least tolerated by many non-party members.¹⁵⁸ During the summer, there were ambiguous signs concerning the relative power of reformists and hardliners and the changes in the central leadership were not mirrored in local Party organisations, which refused to organise local Party conferences.

On 16 June 1988 a number of people from the Network of Free Initiatives – a few hundred people celebrating the memory of Imre Nagy – were beaten up and arrested by the police, acting on the orders of Grósz. Most other independent organisations had refrained from participating in the commemoration since it directly challenged the legitimacy officially claimed by the regime. Grósz still argued that the events in 1956 had been a counter-revolutionary manifestation. Meanwhile, demonstrations against the power plant construction at Nagymaros and against the Romanian leader were tolerated. In July both Pozsgay and Grósz stated that a multi-party system was not inconceivable and Grósz said that he intended to resign from his post as soon as possible, while draft legislation was prepared opening up for increased freedom of assembly and public debate. Pozsgay was forbidden by the Party to hold joint meetings with a number of the opposition movements, including the MDF, the Greens and the FIDESZ but, despite this, secret bilateral meetings continued to take place.¹⁵⁹

On 28 August 1988 Grósz and Ceaușescu met in Arad to discuss bilateral issues but failed to come up with a solution. This further weakened Grósz's position, not least vis-à-vis the MDF who saw Pozsgay as a more reliable partner to speak to.¹⁶⁰ Gorbachev had encouraged Grósz to attend this meeting since he feared that

157 Jason McDonald, 'Transition to Utopia: A Reinterpretation of Economics, Ideas, and Politics in Hungary, 1984 to 1990' in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1993, 217-218

158 Bozóki & Lomax, 1996, 190-191

159 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 45. Klausen, 1990, 149. Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 31. Felkay, 1989, 285. Swain, 1989, 19

160 Sword (ed.), 1990, 105. Tökés, 1996, 290

Romania was trying to make the Soviet Union take sides in the conflict between Hungary and Romania.¹⁶¹ In November diplomatic relations between the two countries deteriorated after Romanian police arrested the Hungarian commercial counsellor and declared him *persona non grata*. The Hungarians retaliated by expelling the Romanian political counsellor.¹⁶²

The three months from September to November 1988 were decisive. In September the Government proposed a general amnesty for everybody who had been sentenced in connection with 1956, and the Presidential Council decided accordingly.¹⁶³ Meanwhile, Parliament decided to continue the Nagymaros project despite a report by the Academy of Sciences that recommended a halt to the works. This further convinced members of the opposition that the one-party system had to be abolished.¹⁶⁴ An attack on the media by Party leaders wishing to re-establish harsher censorship was ignored, and the Soviet Union refrained from intervening. It was no longer possible for Communist hardliners to 'play the Russian card'. During this period, as we have already seen, new parties (the SzDSz and the FKgP) were getting organised.¹⁶⁵

Gorbachev's consolidation of power, after Ligachev had lost the power struggle in October 1988, helped further to shake the self-confidence of the hardliners.¹⁶⁶ When they realised that they could no longer count on the Soviet Union they had to adopt a new strategy. Instead of vigorously opposing any kind of reforms, they now opted for a strategy whereby they would steer the reform process from above. The question was no longer whether or not to negotiate with the opposition but how to structure such negotiations.

The *hardliners* demanded that negotiations should be kept within the institutional framework established under Kádár in which the MSzMP had unlimited control.¹⁶⁷ They believed that the MSzMP could create a multi-party system on its own through a form of institutionalised consultations with society ('limited liberalization within society and not democratization of the state'). During the last months of 1988 and the beginning of 1989, the hardliners followed a course of 'defensive liberalization' to shape the new political institutions as much as possible according to their own preferences. They sought to marginalise

161 Tökés, 1996, 289

162 Burant (ed.), 1990, 211-213

163 *Parliamentary Elections in Hungary March 25, 1990*, Republic of Hungary, MTI Press, 1990, 6

164 Swain, 1989, 19-20

165 Sword (ed.), 1990, 105. Schöpflin, 1992, 100. Swain, 1989, 20

166 Bruszt, 1991, 215. Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 25

167 *ibid.*, 218

and weaken the opposition by offering resources to some of the movements while condemning others. The hardliners also applied divide-and-rule tactics, by offering to negotiate bilaterally with some of the movements.¹⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the *sofeliners* within the MSzMP grew into a reformist mass-movement, which ‘unleashed that domino effect which resulted in the collapse of the neighbouring regimes.’¹⁶⁹ It became clear that the reform wing of the MSzMP were emerging as winners in the internal power struggle, although it was not yet clear who would win ‘the national game’. In mid-September 1988, a number of ‘Reform Party Evenings’ were organised, one of them at Budapest’s Technical University where Pozsgay addressed 2,000 people. On 27 September the CC stated that it was willing to discuss with the ‘New March Front’ (launched in 1988 under the influence of György Aczél) and the MDF ‘whilst warning that they included anti-socialist forces’.¹⁷⁰ Despite these late efforts, however, the game continued to develop in favour of Pozsgay, who initially played his cards with great skill. On 24 November Miklós Németh replaced Károly Grósz as Prime Minister, defeating both Pozsgay and Nyers in votes in the CC and among Socialist MPs.¹⁷¹

Late in January 1989, Pozsgay suddenly declared that 1956, which had hitherto been officially described as a ‘counter-revolution’, had in fact been a ‘popular uprising’.¹⁷² Grósz criticised him for this statement, but the popular vote was clearly with Pozsgay. In February the CC convened to discuss the possible creation of a multi-party system and how to interpret the events in 1956; on 11 February, it accepted the introduction of a multi-party democracy.¹⁷³ At the CC meeting, Imre Pozsgay repeated his claims about 1956. About one-third of the CC members criticised Pozsgay and called him a traitor ‘who should be expelled from the Party’.¹⁷⁴ This debate again revealed a serious rift within the Party. Grósz declared after the meeting that in 1956 students and workers had participated with good intentions and that counter-revolutionary people had joined in only later. Meanwhile, the reform process within the MSzMP accelerated. On 7 February the first meeting of the Reform Circle of the Party had taken place in Csongrád. It was attended by around 100 participants who demanded ‘open

168 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 28-29

169 Attila Ágh, *The Hungarian Party System*, Budapest Papers on Democratic Transition, 51, 1993, Hungarian Center for Democracy Studies Foundation, 1

170 Swain, 1989, 19

171 Tőkés, 1996, 296

172 Bozóki, 1992 (a), 60. *Keesing's Record of World Events*, January 1989, 36399

173 Ágh, 1993, 7

174 Z. A. B. Zeman, *The Making and Breaking of Communist Europe*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, 319

Central Committee sessions, reformist economic policies, and the calling of an exceptional Party Congress or Conference in 1989'.¹⁷⁵ In April a national reform workshop was held in Kecskemét, at which 'Pozsgay [...] lost the chance for a clean break with the old regime [...] and his] decision to remain within the MSzMP marked the beginning of a rapid decline in his popularity'.¹⁷⁶

The CC had accepted, 'partly because of foreign policy considerations' that Hungary should become a multi-party system. However, at the same meeting, the hardliners 'took off the agenda every law that would legally guarantee the political organization of society [...] and] tried to [...] conserve the largest possible part of the HSWP's power.' The following month, they declared themselves ready to negotiate but refused to accept the demands of the opposition, tried to minimise the role of the opposition in the negotiations and stressed that 'the party's "historic role" was to act as the big broker [...] a new development in the party's claim to "represent society"'.¹⁷⁷

The National holiday on 15 March 1989 was celebrated in Budapest by an officially supported manifestation in which about 30,000 people took part. Rezső Nyers delivered a speech about the need for self-determination and compared the Soviet influence on Hungary before 1956 and under Brezhnev with the Austrian and Nazi influence earlier in the history of Hungary.¹⁷⁸ However, the official ceremonies were overshadowed by alternative events with 80,000-100,000 participants, organised by 24 organisations that refused to take part in the official celebration. Demands were heard that the Soviet troops should be withdrawn from Hungary, that all the peoples of Eastern Europe should be granted self-determination and that the uprising in 1956 should be celebrated. The alternative 15th March demonstration 'was the public signal that the alternatives could also play the politics of confrontation' and made the opposition clearly visible.¹⁷⁹

One week later, a coordinating 'Round Table' federation was formed by representatives of independent organisations.¹⁸⁰ The main purpose of the 'Round Table' or EKA (*Ellenzéki Kerekasztal*) was to develop common rules for negotiating with the MSzMP. In the EKA, eight organisations took part – the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society (*Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Társaság*), the FIDESZ, the Smallholders Party, the League of Democratic Trade Unions, the MDF, the

175 Swain, 1989, 20-21

176 Bozóki & Lomax, 1996, 191

177 Bruszt, 1991, 219-220. Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 29

178 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, March 1989, 36535-36

179 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 33-34. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 49

180 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 34. Ágh, 1993, 7

Hungarian People's Party (*Magyar Néppárt* (MNP)), the Social Democratic Party (*Magyar Szociáldemokrata Párt* (MSzDP)) and the SzDSz. These organisations agreed not to 'seek a monopoly of power, and that an election should precede further work on the new constitution'.¹⁸¹ Later, the Christian Democratic People's Party also joined the EKA.¹⁸² Thanks to the creation of the EKA, the hardliners effort to divide the opposition by dealing with the alternative organisations individually failed.¹⁸³

At the end of March, the CC invited most social organisations as well as the major opposition movements to establish a national round table for a meeting on 8 April. The opposition jointly refused to attend the meeting, explicitly rejecting such a framework for negotiations.¹⁸⁴ They did so because the ruling Party did not accept their terms for entering into negotiations.¹⁸⁵ Instead, the EKA invited the MSzMP to negotiate with them.¹⁸⁶

The hardliners finally had to realise that their time had passed. They were defeated as a result of cooperation between reform Communists and parts of the opposition, and through 'collaboration among reform circles organizing within the HSWP on the one hand, and reform communists in top HSWP leadership positions on the other'. It was a conscious strategy by the opposition not to let the reform Communists join the EKA hoping that they would instead undermine the ruling Party from within.¹⁸⁷

On 12 April 1989, at a closed meeting of the CC, the whole Politburo resigned. Károly Grósz was re-elected General Secretary, but a new Politburo that included Grósz, Rezső Nyers, Imre Pozsgay and Miklós Németh was appointed. This was seen as a victory for the reform wing within the MSzMP.¹⁸⁸ Two weeks later, Prime Minister Németh 'took the unprecedented step of calling an evening television news program to repudiate a speech of Grósz and distance himself from the party hierarchy. The *government* was clearly separating itself from the *party*'.¹⁸⁹

On 8 May, after a CC plenary session, János Kádár was relieved of his function as Party president and was expelled from the CC.¹⁹⁰ Two days later, Parliament

181 Swain, 1989, 10.

182 Bozóki, 1992 (a), 61. Bozóki does not mention the Hungarian People's Party among the founders.

183 Bruszt, 1991, 220

184 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 29-30

185 Swain, 1989, 21

186 László Bruszt, 'Sur la voie d'un Etat constitutionnel?' in Pierre Grémion & Pierre Hassner (eds), *Vents d'est: vers l'Europe des Etats de droit?*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1990, 79

187 Bruszt, 1991, 221-222

188 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, April 1989, 36594

189 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 37

190 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 51. *Keesing's Record of World Events*, May 1989, 36664. Tökés, 1996, 323

approved Prime Minister Németh's new Government, which he described as a strong pro-reform Government. Németh explained in his speech that the Government would be a decision-making institution, responsible to Parliament, rather than merely implementing decisions already made by the MSzMP. He had not asked for prior acceptance of the changes in the CC, and there was growing tension between Németh and Grósz.¹⁹¹ On 13 May the Government declared that all work on the hydro-electric plant project with Czechoslovakia should be stopped for the time being. Both the Czechoslovak and the Austrian Governments were greatly angered by the Hungarian decision.¹⁹² On 20 May the reform circles of the MSzMP held their first national congress in Szeged. In the beginning of May, the Party leadership had promised to hold a Party conference in the autumn, but after the Szeged meeting the CC changed its plans and decided to arrange a Party Congress. They also decided that 'in the future the Party First Secretary and President should be elected by all 750,000 party members'.¹⁹³ On 30 May the CC announced that the trial against Imre Nagy had been a show trial.¹⁹⁴

The June massacre in Beijing on Tian An Men square was of no comfort to the Hungarian leaders and indeed rather exposed their own weakness. The economic isolation of China after the massacre, in addition to Hungary's 'economic dependence on, and increasing political pressure from, the West', made it quite clear to every potential Hungarian leader that violence against the people was no longer an option.¹⁹⁵

On 16 June 1989, in the Heroes' Square in Budapest a solemn ceremony preceded the reburial of Imre Nagy, his former Defence Minister Pál Maléter, József Szilágyi, Géza Losonczy and Miklós Gimes.¹⁹⁶ There was a sixth, empty coffin, which was to symbolise all those who had been killed or executed during or after the uprising.¹⁹⁷ Between 200,000 and 300,000 people were present, but the Socialist Party was not formally represented.¹⁹⁸ All the Warsaw Pact countries, except Romania, sent delegations to the funeral, and so did Charter 77 and the

191 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, May 1989, 36663-64

192 Kristian Gerner, *Centraleuropas återkomst*, Norstedts, Stockholm, 1992 (2nd edition), 142-143. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 51

193 Swain, 1989, 21. Republic of Hungary, *Parliamentary Elections in Hungary March 25, 1990*, 1990, 7

194 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, June 1989, 36745

195 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 18. Urbán, 1991, 305

196 Sword (ed.), 1990, 106. Cf. chapter four

197 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 51-52. *Keesing's Record of World Events*, June 1989, 36746

198 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, June 1989, 36746. Pierre Kende, 'Hongrie: de la réforme à la transformation' in *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 1990, 37-38. Timothy Garton Ash, *We the People*, Granta Books, Cambridge, 1990, 51. Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 39

Independent Polish Student Organisation.¹⁹⁹ On this occasion, Viktor Orbán from the FIDESZ delivered a harsh speech directed against the representatives of the old regime:

‘We do not understand that the very same party and government leaders who told us to learn from books falsifying the history of the revolution now vie with each other to touch these coffins as if they were lucky charms. We do not think there is any reason for us to be grateful for being allowed to bury our martyred dead. [...] and if we do not lose sight of the ideals of 1956, then we will be able to elect a government that will start immediate negotiations for the swift withdrawal of Russian troops.’²⁰⁰

Negotiations and preparing for democracy

‘In Hungary, they seemed to be saying, the surest way forward is to remember the past.’²⁰¹

‘A monopolistic party régime probably runs the risk of death once it is touched or corrupted by the democratic spirit of compromise’. – Raymond Aron²⁰²

Meanwhile, negotiations had started between the regime and the opposition on 10 June. The EKA had called for two-sided negotiations while the hardliners within the MSzMP ‘still insisted on framing the negotiations in terms congruent with their paternalistic representational claims.’²⁰³ A compromise was found whereby Mátyás Szűrös, the President of the Parliament, would chair the meetings, with the MSzMP, the EKA and the quasi non-Party organisations each seated at one side of the table.²⁰⁴ Very soon, however, as the official trade unions left the talks, the negotiations became bilateral, in practical terms.²⁰⁵ Bozóki has described the EKA as ‘a meeting place of generations, each with a different political socialisation, past experience, historical references, and political culture’.²⁰⁶ After the first meeting, little information about the progress of the talks reached the public. The meetings were not televised and neither side invested much in trying to inform the public

199 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, June 1989, 36746

200 Garton Ash, 1990, 51. Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 39

201 Hawkes, 1990, 49

202 Quoted in Molnár, 1990 (b), xxii

203 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 45. Republic of Hungary, *Parliamentary Elections in Hungary March 25, 1990*, 1990, 7. Swain, 1989, 22

204 Garton Ash, 1990, 57

205 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 47

206 Bozóki, 1993, 102

of how the talks were proceeding.²⁰⁷ As a result, even when the negotiations were concluded, ‘a majority of the people were unable to identify either the parties or the front lines’.²⁰⁸

There was widespread and deep distrust among the public of political organisations, institutions and parties, including those of the emerging opposition.²⁰⁹ The EKA, therefore, agreed on one fundamental principle, namely, that ‘until legitimate authority is created through fully contested free elections, no organization [...] has the right to decide the nation’s future political and economic institutions’.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, the legitimacy of the whole negotiation process has been criticised, including by Tőkés, who called the negotiations ‘a vast collusion of the Hungarian reform elites’.²¹¹ The parties to the talks agreed to discuss political issues in six sub-committees, and economic issues in six other sub-committees.²¹² However, the economic sub-committees virtually disappeared and the agreement finally reached basically did not address economic issues.²¹³ Among the most important issues discussed were the future structure of Government, the drafting of a new constitution, the establishment of a Constitutional court, the drafting of a new electoral law and a law on political parties, the issue of the MSzMP working place Party cells and the question of how to appoint, or elect, a President.²¹⁴

On 24-25 June the leadership structure of the MSzMP was changed, and a four-man Presidency consisting of Grósz, Nyers, Pozsgay and Németh was created. Nyers, who was the great architect behind the reforms, but who had played a less public role than Pozsgay, became the chairman of the Party Presidency. This was a clear setback for Grósz.²¹⁵

On 6 July 1989 János Kádár died. Only a few hours later, the Supreme Court ‘declared null and void the 1958 treason verdicts handed down to Imre Nagy [...] and to eight of his associates, only two of whom were still alive’.²¹⁶ A few days later, George Bush visited Hungary as the first American President. In a speech to Parliament, he praised Hungary’s market economic reforms and the

207 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 47

208 Bruszt, 1991, 223

209 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 44

210 *ibid.*, 1992, 41

211 Tőkés, 1989, 254

212 Bozóki, ‘Political Transition and Constitutional Change in Hungary’ in Bozóki, Körösnéyi & Schöpflin (eds), 1992 (c), 64-65. The political sub-committees dealt with: the amendment of the Constitution, the law on parties and the financing of parties, the electoral law, principles of the amendment of penal law, publicity and information policy, and safeguards on the non-violence of transition.

213 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 46

214 de Nevers, 1990, 31. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 53. Swain, 1993, 71

215 de Nevers, 1990, 31. Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 52. Swain, 1992, 24

216 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 36. *Keesing’s Record of World Events*, July 1989, 36830

steps taken towards political pluralism. He met representatives of the MSzMP – including Nyers, Grósz, Németh and Pozsgay – as well as representatives of the opposition.²¹⁷ In a by-election at the end of the month, the first opposition candidate since 1947 was elected, running as a joint candidate for the MDF, the SzDSz and the FIDESZ. In the course of the next two months, further MDF candidates were elected.²¹⁸

In September, after 238 meetings (!), the Round Table discussions produced a compromise that was accepted and signed by most parties, after which the EKA lost its political role.²¹⁹ The items agreed upon included the drafting of a new constitution and a decision to hold presidential elections and then Parliamentary elections in the spring of 1990. The MSzMP wanted the president to be elected before Parliamentary elections so that Imre Pozsgay would secure that post for himself. Initially, the EKA ‘thought that the dismantling of the old system would not be complete if a President of communist past became the Head of State at an early date’.²²⁰ However, the KDNP, the MNP, the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society the FKgP and finally even the MDF, changed their minds and agreed to an early election of the President by plebiscite.²²¹

The SzDSz and the FIDESZ refused to sign the agreement and instead ‘launched a strident campaign for a referendum over the MSzP’s properties, workplace branches and militia, and whether the president should be elected by popular vote as the MSzP wanted, or by the parliament after the elections as they preferred’.²²² The Social Democrats hesitated but finally signed the agreement, ‘with the exception of the paragraph dealing with the election of the President of the Republic’.²²³ Once the FIDESZ and the SzDSz started their campaign for a referendum, both the Social Democrats and the FKgP joined in.²²⁴

In early October, the MSzMP held what turned out to be its last (14th) Party Congress in Budapest.²²⁵ The reform Communists, including Pozsgay and Németh, proposed to change the name of the Party and to exclude some of its more conservative members. On 7 October the Alliance of the MSzMP Reform

217 *Keesing’s Record of World Events*, July 1989, 36829

218 *Keesing’s Record of World Events*, July 1989, 36830; September 1989, 36895

219 Republic of Hungary, *Parliamentary Elections in Hungary March 25, 1990*, 1990, 7. *Keesing’s Record of World Events*, October 1989, 36960. Bozóki, 1992 (a), 69

220 Bozóki, 1992 (c), 66

221 *ibid.*, 67

222 Bozóki & Lomax, 1996, 191. Swain, 1993, 71

223 Bozóki, 1992 (a), 69. Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 49

224 Bruszt & Stark, 1992, 49

225 Poulsen-Hansen, 1990, 24

Circles officially proposed to change the name of the Party. This was accepted by the Congress, which decided to form a new Party that would advocate multi-party democracy and an efficient market economy. Nyers was elected Party president of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) and Pozsgay was accepted as the Party's presidential candidate.²²⁶

There had been a strong pressure on Pozsgay to break with the MSzMP and found a new Party. Things became more complicated, however, since Miklós Németh emerged as an even more radical reformer, despite the fact that he had held a senior position under Kádár:

‘While Pozsgay and Nyers were split over tactics, a personal animosity between Pozsgay and Németh made it almost impossible for them to talk to one another. Németh, by “out-reforming Pozsgay” may have been trying to secure his own political career in a future coalition government.’²²⁷

Nyers was elected by 87 per cent of the votes.²²⁸ Some members of the MSzMP refused to accept the dissolution of their Party and still considered Grósz to be its General Secretary.²²⁹ The reformed Party initially had difficulties in recruiting members, and it did not develop into a mass Party. While the old MSzMP had had around 700,000 members, only 30,000 joined the new Party, and even some of the Government Ministers did not apply for membership.²³⁰

On 18 October Parliament accepted the constitutional amendments agreed on in the Round Table negotiations.²³¹ It also took a decision to ban parties from being active in the workplace and ordered the dissolution of the 60,000 strong Workers’ Militia with close ties to the Party, and the handing over of Party property to the state.²³² On 23 October, 33 years after the revolution in 1956, Mátyás Szűrös proclaimed the Republic of Hungary and declared that it would be an independent, democratic state based on the rule of law, while the illuminated red star above the Parliament was switched off.²³³

According to the Round Table Agreement, the Presidential elections should have been held on 25 November. However, the SzDSz and the FIDESZ had

226 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, October 1989, 36960-61

227 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 54

228 Poulsen-Hansen, 1990, 25

229 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, October 1989, 36961. Dawisha, 1990 (a), 179

230 Gati, 1990, 173

231 Garton Ash, 1990, 59

232 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 55. Swain, 1993, 72. Tőkés, 1991, 253

233 *Europa-Archiv* 1989, 22, Z198. Kurt Kwasny, ‘Über Ungarn ist der Rote Stern erloschen’ in *Osteuropa*, No. 3, 1990, 241

managed to collect 200,000 signatures (100,000 were needed) from people who demanded a referendum on when the President should be appointed as well as on questions about the assets of the MSzMP, the disbandment of the Workers' Militia and the removal of Party cells from working places.²³⁴ On 16 October their petition was handed over to the National Assembly.²³⁵

The MDF, 'stung by charges that it really supported Pozsgay, not its own presidential candidate, Lajos Für, urged a complete boycott in the hope that the necessary 50 percent turnout would not be reached'.²³⁶ The referendum, which was held on 26 November, covered four issues. However, by the time of the referendum, three of these issues had already been decided on by Parliament; the only outstanding question concerned the procedure for electing the President of the Republic. The turnout in the referendum was 58 per cent, of whom 50.07 per cent voted in favour of postponing the appointment of the President.²³⁷

Beside the MSzP, there were two big losers in the referendum. One of them was Imre Pozsgay, whose chances of becoming President were virtually lost.²³⁸ The FIDESZ, the SzDSZ, the Social Democrats and the FKgP had pressed for the referendum essentially to reduce Imre Pozsgay's chances of being elected President of the Republic. However, it is quite possible that they had overestimated Pozsgay's chances of being elected in a popular vote. As it turned out, Pozsgay actually came to play a rather passive role in Hungarian post-1990 politics. This, according to Tőkés, can perhaps be explained by the fact that he had played and counted too strongly on external support whereas 'Pozsgay's voters were not in London, Washington, Ottawa and Helsinki but in Hungary'.²³⁹ The other loser was the MDF, which had been the target of much of the referendum campaign. The Free Democrats came out as a clear winner and 'both boosted their own membership and established their anti-communist credentials with a wider public'.²⁴⁰ On 21 December 1989 Parliament voted to dissolve the Assembly on 16 March and to hold multi-party elections on 25 March 1990.²⁴¹

234 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 55. Gati, 1990, 174

235 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, October 1989, 36961

236 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 56

237 Bozóki & Lomax, 1996, 191. Swain, 1993, 72

238 Ágh, 1993, 9

239 Tőkés, 1996, 363-365. Republic of Hungary, *Parliamentary Elections in Hungary March 25, 1990*, 1990, 7

240 Garton Ash, 1990, 58

241 Republic of Hungary, *Parliamentary Elections in Hungary March 25, 1990*, 1990, 7. *Keesing's Record of World Events*, December 1989, 37130

Dismantling the iron curtain

‘- How do I get to Austria?

- Follow the trail of abandoned Wartburgs in the woods. When there are no more, you're there.’²⁴²

During the last months of the Socialist regime, two major decisions were taken in the foreign policy field that clearly heralded more fundamental FPC. The story began on 2 May 1989 when the Hungarian Government began dismantling the barbed-wire fence and electronic monitoring devices along the border with Austria.²⁴³ These fences had been put in place in the mid-1960s. Since then, an estimated 300 people had escaped to Austria whereas more than 13,000 had been caught in the attempt. Of the latter, more than 90 per cent came from other East European countries.²⁴⁴ The Foreign Ministry referred to ‘the relaxation of travel regulations for Hungarians in 1988 [...] and the desire to improve the climate for economic relations with the West’ as reasons for this measure.²⁴⁵ From a narrow Hungarian perspective, this was not a dramatic event; Hungarian citizens had already been granted full international passports in January 1989 and were thus free to leave their country – even if legal restrictions still applied on the amount of money they could take.²⁴⁶ However, in the event, the pictures of Gyula Horn, the Foreign Minister, would be remembered later in the summer.

What made this event so dramatic was the impact it was going to have on East Germany. In 1988, 39,000 people had managed to leave the country, which was an increase from an average of 22,000 a year between 1985 and 1987.²⁴⁷ In July tens of thousands of East Germans came to Hungary to spend their vacations there. Many of them never went back. That summer, not only Hungarians and East Germans but a large number of Western tourists as well, visited Lake Balaton – partly because a large part of the Adriatic coast had been temporarily destroyed owing to algae pollution. This provided an opportunity to meet fellow-Germans from the other Germany:

242 George Paul Csicsery, ‘The Siege of Nógrádi Street, Budapest, 1989’ in Brinton & Rinzler (eds), 1990, 289-290

243 Gati, 1990, 171

244 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, May 1989, 36664

245 *ibid.*

246 Swain, 1993, 66. Csicsery, 1990, 291. *Keesing's Record of World Events*, December 1987, 35596

247 Albert O Hirschman, ‘Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic: An Essay in Conceptual History’ in *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 1993, 187

‘To the East Germans, just being around so many of their more affluent Western kin, with their high-tech campers and shiny Mercedeses sharpened the contrast. Getting to know them close up merely rubbed salt in the wounds.’²⁴⁸

In July around 100 East Germans occupied the West German Embassy in Budapest in an attempt to obtain permission to leave for West Germany. This was repeated in August by another 170 people. The two German Governments failed to reach an agreement on how to handle the question. Nor did the Hungarian Government know how to react, and many Hungarians were concerned that the East Germans ‘were now endangering the delicate Hungarian process of slipping quietly out of the Soviet bloc’. Meanwhile, many East Germans (probably as many as 7,000 in August) escaped illegally since they knew that the Hungarian border guards had been ordered not to fire on people trying to cross the border. The only serious incident occurred on 22 August, when a young East German was killed after having attacked a Hungarian soldier.²⁴⁹

Over the weekend of 19-20 August – 20 August being St. Stephen’s Day – a ‘Pan-European Picnic’ was organised near Sopron close to the Austrian border. On both days ‘border walks’ from Hungary to Austria were organised to celebrate the good neighbourly relations. This picnic was organised by the MDF, and also enjoyed the protection of Imre Pozsgay.²⁵⁰ There was substantial reporting in advance of this event in the Hungarian and Austrian media, which meant that when the border opened, about 900 East Germans immediately left for Austria. According to Csicsery, ‘the Hungarian government was exploiting the Pan-European Picnic and had overlooked other illegal border crossings to avoid an open confrontation with East Germany’. Following these events, the GDR announced that it would no longer issue visas allowing their citizens to visit Hungary. In the last week of August, each day hundreds of East Germans left Hungary with documents issued by the Red Cross, while there were still thousands of East Germans left in Hungary. During the first week of September, 200 people a day left illegally.²⁵¹

The Hungarian Government faced a difficult problem. On the one hand, Hungary had signed a bilateral agreement with East Germany in June 1969 not to let East German citizens leave Hungary, ‘even if a third country (that is, West

248 Csicsery, 1990, 291-292

249 *ibid.*, 291-297

250 Swain, 1992, 25. Józsa, 1994, 17

251 Csicsery, 1990, 300-301

Germany) were to accept the validity of their travel documents and allow them to enter that country'.²⁵² On the other hand, during 1988-89 Hungary had been the first East European state to accede to international conventions on human rights and the protection of minorities and political refugees, including the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Convention on Refugees. This was done partly to get a legal 'weapon' against the Romanian Government when discussing the Hungarian minority in that country. In line with the refugee Convention, Hungary could receive East German citizens as political refugees and grant them asylum. In addition, the refugees could refer to the Helsinki Final Act 'which proscribed forcible repatriation of citizens to their home countries if they faced repression'.²⁵³ Finally, the Hungarian Government had more than just legal arguments to think about – not least the impact its decision could have on German credits and investments in Hungary, against the background of rapidly growing foreign debt.²⁵⁴

By early September, there were about 60,000 East German refugees in Hungary eager to leave for Austria. The Németh Government and the West German Government made a secret agreement whereby the refugees would be allowed to leave for Austria. However, before this decision was implemented, the East Germans were apparently informed through a leak on the Hungarian side, which led to immediate protests from the East German Foreign Ministry. The Hungarian Foreign Ministry replied by pointing out that 'the refugee situation amounted to an emergency that entitled Hungary temporarily to suspend the validity of the 1969 agreement and suggested that the overall settlement of the problem would only be possible through direct negotiations between the two German states'.²⁵⁵

On 10-11 September the Hungarian authorities decided to let the East Germans leave, with or without permission. The West German Embassy in Budapest issued more than 6,000 passports to people who were waiting in refugee camps, and the first night more than 12,000 East Germans left Hungary. One week later, Prime Minister Németh declared that the border would stay open.²⁵⁶ In reply to

252 Kun, 1993, 48-49

253 Gerner, 1992, 143. Republic of Hungary, *Parliamentary Elections in Hungary March 25, 1990*, 1990, 5. Csicsery, 1990, 297. de Nevers, 1990, 33. *Keesing's Record of World Events*, November 1990, 37888. *Activities of the Republic of Hungary Regarding International Refugee Matters and Migration*. Fact Sheets on Hungary, No. 3, 1993, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest

254 Csicsery, 1990, 298

255 Kun, 1993, 48-49

256 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 36, 53. Csicsery, 1990, 301. Swain, 1991, 130, Gyula Horn, *Cölöpök, Zenit Könyvek*, Budapest, 1991, 251-253

official East German protests that Hungary had broken the bilateral treaty the Hungarian Government claimed that it was 'merely following the spirit of the Helsinki accords'.²⁵⁷ By the end of the month, more than 25,000 East Germans had used this new escape route.²⁵⁸

Although there may be different legal interpretations as to whether or not this violated the bilateral treaty with the GDR, politically speaking, the decision to let the East Germans leave, taken under Foreign Minister Gyula Horn, gave preference to Hungary's obligations in terms of dealing with refugees, as well as to its image in the West. The Hungarian regime wanted to demonstrate both to its people and to the West German Government and public that Hungary was different from the other East European states. In addition to this, it is not unlikely that the Hungarians also tried to undermine Honecker by allowing to leave 'precisely those citizens who could afford to travel and who thus tended to be members of East Germany's professional elite'.²⁵⁹ The decision was also a clear signal to the Jakes regime in Prague to change.²⁶⁰

If such were the motives, the Hungarian regime managed well in creating a positive image in the West and even better in giving the East German leadership a hard time. The migration of East Germans through Hungary was one catalyst precipitating the fall of the East German regime later in the autumn. Less than two months later, the Berlin Wall was opened and people from East Berlin were again allowed to visit the Western part of their city. The Hungarian decision opened up not only for the 'fall' of the Berlin Wall but also for the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc.²⁶¹ Considering its future consequences, it is worth noting that the decision to let the East Germans leave was probably taken without prior consultations with the Soviet Government and despite vigorous protests from East German authorities. It seems, however, that Chancellor Kohl contacted Gorbachev to see 'what the Soviet reaction would be. Gorbachev replied that 'the Hungarians are good people'.²⁶² When later asked about this in an interview, Németh said that 'he did so because he was convinced, on the basis of a talk with Gorbachev in the beginning of 1989, that Moscow no longer stuck to the Brezhnev doctrine'.²⁶³ The decision, nevertheless, seems to have been received with some unease among

257 Burant (ed.), 1990, 257

258 Hirschman, 1993, 188

259 Gati, 1990, 172-173

260 Iván Szelényi, 'Social and Political Landscape, Central Europe, Fall 1990' in Banac (ed.), 1992, 227

261 de Nevers, 1990, 33. *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 February 1995. Swain, 1992, 2

262 Békés, 2003, 30

263 Adam, 1995, 198

the Soviet leaders, whom Rezső Nyers tried to reassure by stating that both the MSzMP and the majority of the new Hungarian political parties accepted and respected Hungary's participation in the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA.²⁶⁴

As to the Soviet influence on the decision, Reich claims that Moscow had already lost both its interest and its ability to force the Hungarian Government to keep the border closed.²⁶⁵ By the summer of 1989, Moscow's leverage was no longer the key issue. A perhaps more relevant, albeit hypothetical, question would be the following: Bearing in mind West Germany's economic power and Hungary's economic crisis, could Hungary have refused Bonn to let the East Germans go?

264 Fejtő, 1992, 271

265 Jens Reich, 'Reflections on Becoming an East German Dissident' in Prins (ed.), 1990, 89

The First Years of Democracy

Political Stability 1990-94

‘Freedom is not merely the absence of repression. A society in which people are free requires institutions that protect freedom and, above all, it requires people who believe in those institutions. The institutions themselves need to be much more sophisticated because they must allow for the expression of different views and interests, whereas a closed society recognizes only one point of view – the ruling one.’¹

Free elections – a background to the democratic Government

By the time of Hungary’s first multi-party Parliamentary elections since 1949, a relatively well-developed constitutional basis for democracy was already in place. This was largely a result of the Round Table agreement, and it included the newly created Constitutional Court.² The preparation period for the elections was more extended in Hungary than in most other Central and East European countries undergoing a democratisation process.³ This gave the political parties a reasonably good opportunity to get organised and to prepare and communicate their electoral platforms. Several months before the elections, the opposition was diversified and too divided internally to present a united front against the old regime.

1 George Soros, ‘Toward Open Societies’ in *Foreign Policy*, Spring, 1995, 66

2 Romsics, 1999, 435. Edith Oltay, ‘Hungary’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 27, 1992 (a), 17.

A short history of coalition governments in Hungary. Fact Sheets on Hungary, No. 5, 1995, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest

3 Tőkés, 1996, 370-371

The electoral campaign began in early December 1989 and dominated the first months of 1990. The campaign was tough and the mutual accusations among the parties gradually became harsher.⁴ Posters clearly showed that none of the new parties envisaged any form of post-election cooperation with the reformed MSzP.⁵ The main parties competed with each other more in terms of rejecting the past, than in terms of political visions regarding Hungary's future. The Free Democrats accused the MDF of having been willing to strike a deal with the former Communists. The MDF, in turn, made accusations about actions by the Free Democrats in the past while claiming that 'many prominent [SzDSz] members had been socialists in their youth and were the children of bolshevik cadres'.⁶

Hence, it is perhaps not surprising that most voters had a rather incomplete and distorted understanding of what the new parties wanted to achieve.⁷ The electoral law was also difficult to understand and has been characterised by Lijphart as 'much more complex than almost all of the electoral laws in the established western democracies'.⁸ A lack of real political articulation and the relatively low importance of elections under the Socialist regime certainly played a role, as did the weak involvement of grassroots movements in the transition process. As a result, '[v]alues, symbols and styles played a more important role at the first post-communist elections than social classes and interests'.⁹ The MDF, under the leadership of József Antall, managed to strike an appealing balance in their strong criticism of the Kádár period while, at the same time, projecting an image of themselves as a calming force.¹⁰ With the benefit of hindsight, we should perhaps not be too surprised that most Hungarians did not vote for an even more radical break with the past. The Socialist regime, in the opinion of many, had actually managed to deliver a reasonable standard of living for a number of years, before the crisis. Perhaps equally important, it was a system that a significant proportion of the population had been involved in shaping or preserving.

The elections were organised in two rounds on 25 March and 8 April 1990. The turnout in the first round was roughly 65 per cent of the electorate. Only five candidates, out of 176 electoral districts, managed to obtain the required 50

4 *ibid.*, 380

5 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, January 1990, 37194

6 Swain, 1993, 72-73

7 Tőkés, 1996, 374

8 Arend Lijphart, 'Democratization and Constitutional Choices in Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary and Poland 1989-91' in *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1992, 211

9 Körösényi, 1993, 101

10 Romsics, 1999, 439

per cent plus one vote. It could be claimed that the result of the first round was a decision about the past – rejection of the old regime – but that it took another round to decide about the future.¹¹ In the second round, with a lower turnout of 45.5 per cent, the MDF won a great victory while the SzDSz lost. Generally speaking, the voters punished those parties that presented a relatively accurate image of the economic challenges ahead.¹² Tökés concludes that '[w]hereas the meaning of the first round of votes was an unambiguous "mandate for radical change", the message of the second round was "moderation" under the "steady hand" of József Antall'.¹³ Six parties passed the 4 per cent threshold for entering Parliament. The non-reformist Socialist Party (MSzMP), the Social Democrats and the Green Party were among the parties that failed to pass.¹⁴

The elections brought about a radical change in party representation in Parliament; only 5 per cent of sitting MPs were re-elected. They also resulted in fundamental changes in terms of gender and the socio-economic characteristics of the MPs. The percentage of female MPs fell to 7.3 per cent, as compared to 27 per cent (1980-85) and 21 per cent (1985-90).¹⁵ Of these, only one fifth had won their seats in individual districts.¹⁶ Workers were weakly represented with only 4 per cent of MPs compared to 22 per cent before 1990. Instead, Parliament became dominated by intellectuals – three-quarters held university degrees – among whom many had a legal or arts background rather than agricultural and technical subjects, which had previously dominated.¹⁷ Another new element in Parliament was the fact that recognised ethnic minorities – Croats, Germans, Jews, Roma, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks and Slovenes – from now on were guaranteed one seat each out of the 394 seats.¹⁸

11 Tökés, 1991, 255

12 Misha Glenny, *The Rebirth of History: Eastern Europe in the Age of Democracy*, Penguin Books, London, 1990, 80

13 Tökés, 1996, 392

14 For an analysis of voting patterns for different parties, Cf. András Körösiényi, 'Hungary' in *Electoral Studies: An International Journal – Special Issue: Elections in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1990, 343-344. For detailed results from the first elections, see Nigel Swain, 'Hungary' in Szajkowski (ed.), 1991, 129 and Anders Håkansson & Tomas Niklasson, 'Demokratiseringsprocesserna i Östeuropa – händelseutveckling och valresultat' in *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, Vol. 93, No. 4, 1990

15 Tökés, 1991, 257

16 Tökés, 1990, 257

17 Lomax, 1999, 167

18 'Law on Minorities' in *Weekly Bulletin*, 4 May 1990, 11-13. Marian Grzybowski, 'The Transition to Competitive Pluralism in Hungary' in Berglund & Dellenbrant (eds), 1994 (2nd edition), 192

A coalition Government takes shape

‘The years leading up to and immediately after 1989 can be described as an epoch of “symbolic politics” in Hungary. [...] Politics of this kind is more concerned with the past and the future than with the present, and devotes more time to advocating normative visions than to pragmatic problem-solving.’¹⁹

József Antall was clearly the lead candidate to form a new coalition Government. On 29 April, after some rather selective consultations within his own Party, he concluded an agreement – later referred to as a Pact – with leaders of the Free Democrats including János Kis, Péter Tölgyessy and Iván Pető. One of the purposes of this pact was to agree on certain constitutional changes.²⁰ The Pact also addressed the procedure for appointing a President. It ensured that Árpád Göncz, a Free Democrat and President of the Writers’ Association, would be appointed Speaker of the House and caretaker President. The Government also accepted retention of the requirement of a two-thirds majority for ‘constitutional amendments, local government reform, electoral law, and legislation governing the press and media’. In return, the Free Democrats ‘promised not to block legislation which required a two-thirds majority’.²¹ While the Pact may have paved the way for a functioning Government, the lack of agreement between the radical wings of the MDF and the Free Democrats prevented any efficient cooperation between the two parties. According to some critics, the pact ‘forced the Free Democrats to assume a semi-oppositional role and helped to turn the parliament into a “voting machine”’.²²

On 2 May Parliament convened for the first time and learned about the agreement.²³ Árpád Göncz was elected speaker of the Parliament and thus became the country’s interim President pending a decision in the Assembly on the presidential election. He invited József Antall to form a Government.²⁴ A coalition Government was formed, around the Populist and Christian Democratic parties

19 András Bozóki, ‘Rhetoric of Action: The Language of the Regime Change in Hungary’ in Bozóki (ed.), 1999, 264

20 Attila Ágh, ‘Early democratic consolidation in Hungary and the Europeanisation of the Hungarian polity’ in Pridham & Ágh (eds), 2001, 159

21 Swain, 1993, 75-76. Romsics, 1999, 440. Tökés, 1996, 397. Bozóki, 1992 (c), 69

22 László Lengyel, ‘New Ingredients in the Goulash’ in *East European Reporter*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 37.

Alfred A Reisch (ed.), ‘Roundtable: Hungary’s Parliament in Transition, in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 48, 1992 (b), 30

23 Schöpflin, 1992, 102

24 *Keesing’s Record of World Events*, May 1990, 37464

– the MDF, the FKgP and the KDNP. The opposition was divided between two groups – the Liberals around the FIDESZ and the Free Democrats, and the Socialists in the MSzP, who had only received about 10 per cent of the votes cast in the second round.²⁵ On 3 August Parliament elected Árpád Göncz President of Hungary for a period of five years, by 295 votes for and 13 against.²⁶

Kádár and Antall have both been described as products of pre-war Hungarian society. Antall's ideas about his own role and the role of Hungary in the world were very much shaped by his assumptions about the Hungarian nation, history, religion and symbols.²⁷ For him, it was essential to 'catch up' not only with Western Europe of the early 1990s but also with Hungary's past and its 'lost' population. Thus, when Antall presented the Government programme on 23 May, he declared himself to be, in spirit, the 'Prime Minister for 15 million Hungarians'.²⁸ The statement provoked strong reactions in neighbouring countries, which saw this as a declaration of revanchist intentions.

Being a historian, Antall appears to have seen himself, not only as a defender of the Hungarian nation, but also as the successor to the pre- and early post-Second World War Governments now returning to power after a Communist parenthesis. Such an approach was problematic, to say the least. Ágh claims that '[t]he late 19th century and interwar Hungary merged to become a sociopolitical model for the Antall government, instead of aiming at the present political structure in the West European states'.²⁹ He also sees this 'Return to the Past' instead of a 'Return to Europe' as a major obstacle to Hungary's reintegration with Western Europe.³⁰ Many Hungarians, busy coping with the effects of the economic transition, failed to recognise themselves in the images, analyses and conclusions drawn by Antall. His perspective also alienated many Populists within the MDF and the Government coalition more broadly, who did not share Antall's perceptions or ideology.³¹

When it comes to religion, in the summer of 1990 the Antall Government proposed to make religious instruction compulsory in schools, a proposal that largely had to be withdrawn. The following summer, when Cardinal Mindszenty was re-interred and the Pope visited Hungary, Parliament passed a law that

25 'New Hungarian Government Formed – Prime Minister asks for trust and faith' in *Daily News*, Budapest, May 1990

26 Bozóki, 1992 (c), 70

27 Cf. Schöpflin, 1992, 108

28 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, May 1990, 37465. Schöpflin, 1992, 102

29 Ágh, 1995, 57

30 Ágh, 1993, 4

31 Tökés, 1996, 365-368

returned nationalised property to the Church.³² Much political energy also went into questions of mainly symbolic importance such as the design of the Hungarian coat-of-arms. This was criticised by the opposition, claiming that ‘the symbols and myths of communism had been replaced by the symbols and myths of Hungary’s one-time gentry’.³³

Stability strategies under democracy

Opting for legitimacy...

The Antall Government was clearly more ambitious than the Kádár regime in terms of its choice of stabilisation strategies. Coercion was discarded as being an unacceptable strategy, and it opted for legitimacy, rather than mere performance-based acceptance, as a foundation for political stability. The fact that the Government was the first in more than four decades that had been approved by a democratically elected Parliament made it relatively easy for Antall to claim that he was the leader of a legitimate Government. Together with the fairly solid basis for Government stability provided by the Constitution – which included the idea, adopted from Germany, of a constructive motion of non-confidence – this helped the Government to stay in power for the full term of its mandate.³⁴

The Government faced significant challenges in building political stability. A key task was to dismantle old political and bureaucratic structures, inherited from the authoritarian regime, while at the same time consolidating democracy after what was, in essence, a transition of elites.³⁵ There was a lack of organised interest groups, independent unions, informal associations and a politically accountable bureaucracy necessary for building and consolidating democracy.³⁶

This period was characterised by uncertainty with regard to the outcomes, and a high level of popular expectations for the Government to come up with solutions to all sorts of problems. This can be seen both as a heritage from the paternalistic Kádár period, which ‘created a political culture wherein the public expect decisive actions from their leaders and blame the state and politicians

32 Swain, 1993, 79

33 János Kis, ‘Postcommunist Politics in Hungary’ in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 2. No. 3, 1991, 9

34 Lijphart, 1992, 218. Romsics, 1999, 440. Geoffrey Pridham, ‘Rethinking regime change theory and the international dimension of democratisation: ten years after in East-Central Europe’ in Pridham & Ágh (eds), 2001 (b), 75

35 Judith Pataki, ‘The Hungarian Democratic Forum before the Elections’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 14, 1994 (b), 15

36 Valerie Bunce & Mária Csanádi, ‘Uncertainty in the Transition: Post-Communism in Hungary’ in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1993, 246-247

for all that happens, particularly in the economic realm', and resulting from high expectations of a new, democratically elected Government. A third feature of this period was the perception of strong pressures from abroad. Hungary's wish to join Western organisations created external pressure to adapt to Western economic, political and legislative models in order to become an accepted partner.³⁷ This phenomenon, which Ágh calls a 'forced democratization' also provided 'protection against anti-democratic forces and influences coming from inside'.³⁸ A fourth element was a sense of urgency – created by domestic as well as external pressure – which resulted in 'a strong sense among elites of rushing through the transition'.³⁹ This was clearly felt in the pressure to get new legislation through Parliament, where the 'sheer volume of legislation [...] put an enormous burden on deputies'.⁴⁰

A primary task for the new Government was to build a competent and reliable administration. Antall faced a serious problem, namely the lack of expertise and experience – both within the Government itself and at various levels throughout the administration. At the highest level, the Prime Minister initially gave priority to political loyalty rather than expertise and 'he appointed seven teachers from the secondary school where he used to teach as under-secretaries of state in various ministries'.⁴¹ Antall soon realised that this group could not deliver. In response, he increasingly relied on the Office of the Prime Minister and, in Tökés's critical analysis, 'managed to re-create the working style, secretiveness, and unaccountability of Kádár's Central Committee apparatus, vintage mid-1970s'.⁴²

Concerning the lower levels of the administration, Antall early realised that he would have to make use of existing expertise – regardless of party political considerations.⁴³ We may recall that Kádár had come to a similar conclusion in the mid-1960s. During the first two months of the Antall Government only about '100 of the top 700 old nomenklatura positions changed hands'.⁴⁴ The lack of policy and administrative experts Antall could fully trust, the lack of expertise, the lack of a politically accountable bureaucracy and of clearly defined roles and responsibilities, as well as the absence of standard operating procedures, slowed

37 Bunce & Csanádi, 1993, 245-270

38 Attila Ágh, 'The Paradoxes of Transition: The External and Internal Overload of the Transition Process' in *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1994, 15-17

39 Bunce & Csanádi, 1993, 251

40 Oltay, 1992 (a), 18. Reisch, 1992 (b), 27-31

41 Glenny, 1990, 83

42 Tökés, 1996, 397-8, 426

43 Bunce & Csanádi, 1993, 243

44 Tökés, 1991, 259. Bunce & Csanádi, 1993, 244. Fejtő, 1992, 344

down the policy process.⁴⁵ It also, according to Ágh, ‘delayed the fundamental transformation of the economy and society’.⁴⁶

...but ignoring performance

‘Maga szerint miért rosszabb a mostani demokrácia, mint az ezt megelőző diktatúra?
- Azért, mert most már nincs miben reménykednünk.’⁴⁷

Managing the economic transition constituted a second key task for the Government. Ensuring a stable market economic framework and high economic performance was important also from the perspective of maintaining stability. During its first three years in power, ‘economic production dropped drastically and the internal debt climbed to record levels’ although the Government did manage to attract foreign investment and, eventually, to come to grips with inflation. Between 1989 and 1993, GDP fell by 18 per cent. Inflation rose rapidly and reached 35 per cent in 1991 and did not fall below 20 per cent until 1994. Salaries did not follow suit and the real value of net wages fell by 25.7 per cent (between 1989 and 1997) while the real value of pensions dropped by over 30 per cent over the same period. At the same time, official unemployment figures rose rapidly from 14,000 in 1989, to 80,000 at the end of 1990 and to over 700,000 – or 13 per cent of the working-age population (a peak) – in February 1993. This for the most part hit ‘exactly the same groups who had been at the bottom of the social pyramid in the Kádár era too’.⁴⁸

Growing foreign investment was a particularly positive element. During the period 1990-94, Hungary alone attracted almost 50 per cent of the capital invested in the former Communist countries. Reasons given for this included tax incentives granted to foreign investors, the country’s debt payment record and, ‘above all, the country’s political stability’.⁴⁹ Less positive was the Government’s record when it came to keeping the foreign debt under control. Although Hungary maintained its policy of meeting all its external financial obligations⁵⁰

45 Bunce & Csanádi, 1993, 259-260

46 Ágh, 1995, 59

47 - In your view, why is the current democracy worse than the dictatorship that preceded it?

- Because now we no longer have anything in which we can put our hopes. (My translation) *Magyarország politikai évkönyve 1991*, Ökonómia alapítvány – Economix Rt., Budapest, 1991, 789

48 *RFE/RL Research Bulletin*, Vol. XI, No. 3, 1994, 2. Romsics, 1999, 450-453. *The International Herald Tribune*, 9 May 1994

49 Karoly Okolicsanyi, ‘Macroeconomic Changes in Hungary, 1990-1994’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 24, 1994, 24

50 Swain, 1993, 81. Karoly Okolicsanyi, ‘Hungary’s Budget Deficit’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 37, 1993 (d), 45

and honoured its payments the debt continued to grow. Between 1989 and 1993, Hungary paid US\$20.6 billion in principal and interest on its foreign debt accumulated under Kádár.⁵¹ Although the debt remained stable between 1990 and 1992, the gross debt rose by US\$12 billion between 1993 and 1995.⁵² Tőkés's conclusions are interesting and worth citing:

‘Ironically, the same Western loans that had paid for the “good king” Kádár’s popularity in the 1970s, and that twenty years later were still being cherished by the former beneficiaries, became the principal obstacle to the fulfillment of the economic goals of the first freely elected government.’⁵³

The economic record of the Antall Government is clearly mixed. On the positive side, it managed to continue to attract foreign investment, honour its debt obligations and, with a fair amount of success, redirect a major part of Hungary’s external trade. On a more negative note, we could mention slow progress in privatisation, accompanied by falling production, high inflation rates, budget deficits and soaring unemployment. Many of the negative elements, and possibly some of the positive ones, were in fact inherited from the Kádár period and the short interregnum of Grósz and Németh. It was not so much the economic realities that had changed but the political context in which those realities were being handled.⁵⁴

As discussed above, legitimacy played a more important role in Antall’s strategy for political stability than it had done under Kádár. However, Antall’s assumptions about democratic legitimacy and stability probably made the Government less sensitive to performance issues than the Kádár Government had been. It soon turned out that not even a democratically elected regime could afford completely to ignore economic performance as a complementary source of political stability. This eventually provoked a number of crises and inevitably led to a poor result for the coalition parties in the 1994 Parliamentary elections.

Challenges to stability

Looking back at the four years of coalition Government 1990-94, the ability of the Government to survive for four years should be recognised as an achievement in itself. However, a number of threats to stability, inside and outside Parliament,

51 Okolicsanyi, 1994, 25

52 Romsics, 1999, 451

53 Tőkés, 1996, 405

54 Okolicsanyi, 1994, 26

occurred during this period. Some of these were reactions to the policies or the political style of the Antall Government. Others, although it is difficult to categorise neatly, rather reflected the fact that people were not yet used to playing the democratic game and to adjusting their expectations to what one could reasonably expect a Government to be able to deliver. In a way, therefore, the heritage from the Kádár period continued to haunt the democratically appointed coalition Government. I will categorise these challenges based on their origin or, to use the terminology developed in chapter two, which of the providers of acceptance threatened to withdraw their support.

Challenges by the people

On 30 September and 14 October 1990 local elections were held in two rounds. They were important not only as a test of electoral confidence in the Government but also because local authorities had a significant influence over the daily life of ordinary people.⁵⁵ The turnout was low (40 and 30 per cent respectively), which was interpreted by many analysts at the time as a sign of low confidence in the political system and, possibly, in the Government. We should also bear in mind, however, that the Hungarians had been called to the polls rather frequently during the preceding year;⁵⁶ part of the explanation for the low turnout was probably a certain degree of political apathy or voting fatigue.⁵⁷ Among those people who did use their right to vote, most were apparently not very satisfied with the Government. In the cities, SzDSz and FIDESZ were much more successful than the candidates representing the Government coalition parties. In the countryside, independent candidates won a landslide victory.⁵⁸

Shortly after the local elections, there was another sign of popular disappointment and, possibly, lack of confidence in the Antall Government. The triggering event was a Government decision in late October 1990 to raise petrol prices by 65 per cent; this was an attempt to reduce Government subsidies and bring prices closer to the international market level. On 26 October taxi and lorry drivers throughout the country launched a blockade, which included the bridges over the Danube in Budapest. Some of the opposition parties, including the Free Democrats, expressed their support for the protesters. It was also clear that the Government and President Göncz interpreted the situation in different

55 Tőkés, 1996, 401

56 Gerner, 1992, 165

57 Oltay, 1992 (a), 23

58 Bozóki, 1992 (b), 179

ways. Two days later, following directly broadcast negotiations with spokespeople behind the blockade, the Government agreed to reduce the price increase.⁵⁹ The blockade exposed both the weakness of the Government, which was unable to impose its decision, and the lack of popular support, or even understanding, for the painful economic readjustment process ahead.⁶⁰ Only five months after the Antall Government had come to power, it inspired less confidence than the previous regime. Many commentators foresaw increased tensions and a 'hot autumn'.⁶¹

Challenges by elites

The tension between the Antall Government and the President, which had become visible during the blockade, continued throughout Prime Minister Antall's time in power. Its political background was rather obvious since Antall and Göncz came from different parties representing quite different views on where the new democratic Hungary should be heading.⁶² In constitutional terms, the position of the President was weak. He did not have the power to veto legislative decisions, but he could 'make a onetime request for a bill to be reconsidered or a review to be initiated by the Constitutional Court'.⁶³ The Free Democrats were in principle in favour of a weak Presidency but during their time in opposition they saw Göncz as a link to 'real power' and, therefore, supported the idea of his exercising his powers fully.⁶⁴ The tension became more visible in February 1991 when Antall and Göncz clashed over who should represent Hungary at the Visegrád Summit. Finally, both attended. Soon afterwards, Göncz decided that 'a government plan to reorganize the military without consulting him – the commander-in-chief of the armed forces – breached his sphere of authority'.⁶⁵

The most protracted conflict between the two men revolved around media legislation, control over the mass media, and nominations for leading positions in the state controlled media. This has been referred to as the 'Media War'. In 1990 the Prime Minister blocked the bid by the Swedish Liberal daily, *Dagens Nyheter* to buy the *Magyar Nemzet* – one of the leading dailies in Hungary. The reason given by the MDF was that the Swedish daily had been hostile to the

59 Romsics, 1999, 462

60 Tőkés, 1991, 263

61 Swain, 1993, 77. Erzsébet Szalai, 'The Power Structure in Hungary after the Political Transition' in Bryant & Mokrzycki (eds), 1994, 136-137

62 Tőkés, 1996, 401

63 Oltay, 1992 (a), 17

64 Swain, 1993, 76

65 Oltay, 1992 (a), 20

Party during the election campaign.⁶⁶ In the summer of 1991, Göncz refused to approve Antall's nominations for leading posts at the Hungarian Television and Radio. The matter was referred to the Constitutional Court, which stated that Göncz should approve the appointments 'unless the appointment endangered the democratic functioning of the institution involved'.⁶⁷

The controversy continued and in 1992 the President refused to dismiss Csaba Gombár and Elemér Hankiss who were Heads of the state Radio and Television. The Constitutional Court did not support Göncz but 'declared the current law on the media unconstitutional, because it provided no guarantees against government interference in media programming' and 'ruled that the parliament had to adopt a new law on the media by 30 November 1992'. The President refused to comply with the decision 'citing the danger of government control over broadcasting as the reason for his refusal'.⁶⁸ Gombár and Hankiss were also supported by the *Democratic Charter* (see below).⁶⁹ Parliament failed to respect the deadline for adopting a new media law and the issue had to be returned to the Court.⁷⁰ In January 1993 the Heads of the Radio and Television 'resigned under government pressure and were replaced by the deputy chairmen, both of whom supported the government's position on the media'.⁷¹

Unlike the blockade, the Media War 'was essentially an affair for Hungary's political and intellectual élite'.⁷² It should be seen against the background of the media situation during the Kádár era with strong Government control over the media and self-censorship exercised by most journalists. This may well have created expectations within the Government that the media would remain loyal and the new political leaders were not used to a critical press. This was another heritage from the Kádár period. Increasingly, the Government came to regard criticism 'as a form of anti-democratic behaviour and [saw] the duty of the media as being to represent the views and policies of that government'.⁷³

A *second* factor behind the Media War was the fact that the Socialist and Liberal opposition were better represented among journalists. Hence, the Antall

66 Glenny, 1990, 83. Oltay, 1992 (a), 41

67 Oltay, 1992 (a), 20. Fejtő, 1992, 349

68 Oltay, 1992 (a), 42

69 Romsics, 1999, 463

70 Judith Pataki, 'Hungary: Domestic Political Stalemate' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1993, 94

71 Edith Oltay, 'Hungary: Political Fragmentation and Economic Recession' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1994 (a), 78

72 Romsics, 1999, 463

73 Bill Lomax, 'Impediments to Democratization in Post-communist East-Central Europe' in Wightman (ed.), 1995 (a), 181

Government felt isolated and sensed that, in fact, the opposition controlled the media. The Antall Government saw itself squeezed between, on the one hand, journalists supporting the Free Democrats – the largest opposition Party – and, on the other hand, journalists serving the former Communist regime. Meanwhile, journalists accused the Government of trying to control the media and drew ‘parallels between the media policy of the current government and that of the communist regime’. A *third* factor in the Media War was the lack of revised and adequate media legislation, which could only have been adopted by a two-thirds majority, to clarify the rules. The Antall Government prepared a number of draft laws but these were all blocked by the opposition ‘on the ground that they would give the government excessive control over the media’.⁷⁴

There were also critics of the Government who argued that democracy was in danger in Hungary and that the Government was, at least partly, to blame. In May 1990 Mészlivetz expressed his doubts about democratisation of the state as a final objective and advocated a broader democratisation of society, or a socialisation of democracy, in which civil society would continue to play a key role:

‘The multi-party system and parliamentary democracy are only the framework for civil society which continuously redefines and democratizes itself. This framework is not the essence and especially not the aim of civil society.’⁷⁵

The challenges became more articulate in September 1991 when members of the opposition signed what they referred to as a Democratic Charter, the declared purpose of which was ‘to defend the fledgling democracy under threat’.⁷⁶ Most of the signatories to the Charter were Liberal or left-wing intellectuals. Although several of them were active in party politics, and some even were MPs,⁷⁷ they argued that ‘democracy requires not just a parliament and a multi-party system but also the self-organization of civil society’. The Charter fought what they saw as ‘growing tendencies towards censorship and authoritarianism’ as well as racist and extreme views on the right of the political spectrum. The founding document was signed by 160 people ‘and the number of signatories [... later grew] to more than 20,000 – among them International Pen Club President Konrad and the

74 Oltay, 1992 (a), 39-42. Federigo Argentieri, ‘La breve stagione del governo Antall’ in Argentieri (ed.), 1994, 116. Gerner, 1992, 184-185

75 Ferenc Mészlivetz, *Who’s Controlling the Controllers?* Unpublished manuscript, May 1989 (c)

76 Swain, 1993, 80

77 ‘Some of the spokesmen [for the Charter] – such as György Konrad (SzDSz), Iván Vitányi (MSzP), Zoltán Szabó (MSzP), and András Veér (Republican Party) – were active politicians holding high party positions.’ András Körösnéyi, ‘Intellectuals and Democracy: The Political Thinking of Intellectuals’ in Bozóki (ed.), 1999, 241

mayor of Budapest, Gábor Demszky'. Some analysts have criticised the movement claiming that it was 'a characteristic expression of the intellectuals' sense of their own superiority. The movement was initiated by leading intellectual politicians from the Parliamentary parties, who sought to speak to the people not as party politicians, but as intellectuals, 'from above'. The 'spokesmen' of this movement made public, irrevocable moral and political declarations in the name of a people which had never empowered them to do so'. Others were more positive and saw the movement as demonstrating the need for more political dialogue. The original document listed seventeen points on which further developments were necessary to ensure a real democracy in Hungary 'ranging from respect of Hungary's legal system and democratic institutions and the state withdrawal from the important parts of the economy, to the need for state guarantees of basic social welfare rights to all citizens and active contribution from the state in protection of the rights of minorities'.⁷⁸ The only reference made to foreign policy in the Charter was a comment on Government policy concerning Hungarian minorities abroad:

'There will be democracy when the legitimate legislative and executive powers always pay attention not to mix up the concepts of the nation and the state – and while they carry a responsibility vis-à-vis those members of the nation who live outside Hungary, they do not question the fact that these people are citizens of another state.'⁷⁹

On 24 September 1992, in response to the emergence of an extreme right movement, the Democratic Charter organised the biggest demonstration in Budapest since the political changes in 1989 with more than 80,000 participants.⁸⁰

Challenges from within the Government

Threats to stability also emanated from within the coalition Government. It proved difficult for the Prime Minister to keep the coalition together, given the low degree of political consensus between the parties.⁸¹ Furthermore, a number of MP's dissociated themselves from their parties. The root of the difficulties with the Smallholders' Party was the fact that they advocated re-privatisation of land

78 Lomax, 1999, 176-177. Szalai, 1994, 137. Corrin, 1993, 187. Oltay, 1992 (a), 23. András Körösenyi, 'Intellectuals and Democracy: The Political Thinking of Intellectuals' in Bozóki (ed.), 1999, 235

79 'Demokrácia akkor lesz, ha a legitím törvényhozó és végrehajtó hatalom mindenkor vigyáz arra, hogy ne mossa össze a nemzet és az állam fogalmát, és miközben felelősséggel tartozik a nemzet Magyarországon kívül élő tagjai iránt, nem vonja kétségbe, hogy azok polgárként egy másik állam kötelekeibe tartoznak.' *Demokratikus Charta '91* (Photocopy of the original text, My translation)

80 Szalai, 1994, 141

81 Argentieri, 1994, 109

based on the 1947 land registers – their key promise to the electorate – which was not taken up in the Government’s policy.⁸² At the same time, the Smallholders’ Party moved further to the right.⁸³ In February 1992 the party finally split when József Torgyán left the coalition and went into opposition. A quarter of the MPs followed him, while the rest stayed within the coalition.⁸⁴

It also proved difficult to keep the MDF, which had always been made up of different factions, united. In particular, Antall faced growing problems with extremists, notably István Csurka, who made anti-Semitic remarks and eventually challenged his leadership. This should be seen against a background of diminishing popular support for the Government parties. Inside the MDF, the nationalist wing grew stronger and more confident and became more suspicious vis-à-vis Antall.⁸⁵ Many Populists regarded Antall as ‘a discredited latecomer to the party who loaded his cabinet with deferential “liberals” at the expense of deserving Populists’.⁸⁶ István Csurka, who was one of the six vice presidents of the MDF, was a leading figure within this faction.⁸⁷ He had been banned from publishing under the old regime after some of his works had been published in the West and, consequently, resigned from the presidium of the Writers’ Union in 1983. Four years later, he became one of the founding fathers of the MDF. His essays focus on the survival of the Hungarian nation, and he criticised the compromise made with ‘the regime of János Kádár to forgive and forget the revolution in return for the promise of a better material existence’. He was also ‘consistent in maintaining that the Western world had few if any values to offer to Hungarians’.⁸⁸

In late summer 1992, Csurka finally crossed the line. On 20 August he published a tract in *Magyar Forum* in which he ‘sharply criticizes what he [saw] as the weakness of the HDF in dealing with the opposition and propose[d] that [...] Jozsef Antall, designate and train a successor’. Csurka’s text was strongly nationalistic and also anti-Semitic. When Parliament reconvened on 31 August, after the summer break, Antall finally distanced himself publicly from Csurka’s views:⁸⁹

82 Fejtő, 1992, 349. Reisch, 1992 (b), 29

83 Swain, Nigel, ‘Hungary’ in White, Batt & Lewis (eds), 1993, 75

84 Körösiényi, 1993, 90. Edith Oltay, ‘Hungary’s Christian Democratic People’s Party’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, No. 20, 1994 (c), 34. Cotta, 1996, 92

85 Cotta, 1996, 92

86 Tökés, 1996, 426

87 J F Brown, ‘A Challenge to Political Values’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 40, 1992, 24

88 Edith Oltay, ‘A Profile of Istvan Csurka’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 49, 1992 (b), 28

89 Judith Pataki, ‘Istvan Csurka’s Tract: Summary and Reactions’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 40, 1992 (a), 15–21. Swain, 1993, 80. Brown, 1992, 24

‘While I stand entrusted to lead the MDF and the government I have an unbroken obligation to Hungarians, to parliamentary democracy and to the basis of the constitutional state. But I am also obliged not merely to hand over power, as it was handed over to Béla Kun, to Hitler and others throughout history. [---] In Csurka’s pamphlet [...] he makes statements, raises questions and feelings which touch on the masses and then reveals the course open to him. Several of his conclusions, I believe, are wrongly arrived at and are politically dangerous and damaging. I cannot identify with these either on my own behalf or in the name of the government. The presidium and steering committee of the MDF can likewise not identify with them.’⁹⁰

An additional effect of this publication was that it ‘broached the issue of Antall’s health, formerly a taboo subject and doubtless one of great concern to the party leadership’.⁹¹ At the outset of 1993, leading up to the Party Congress on 22-24 January, Csurka’s position apparently strengthened. The conflict was nevertheless largely kept outside the Congress itself, although several speakers distanced themselves from Csurka and expressed their support for Antall.⁹² Statements were made in favour of Hungary’s economic integration with Europe, the need for political stability and the Prime Minister ‘said repeatedly that only a politically stable country would be able to attract much-needed foreign investment’.⁹³ Later in the spring of 1993, the Csurka wing was ousted, but Antall also ‘sacrificed those “national liberals” of the party [...] who were the most vehement opponents of the extreme right’. Csurka started a new movement called the Hungarian Road and also formed the Hungarian Justice and Life Party.⁹⁴

On 12 December 1993 József Antall died from a cancer that had been diagnosed already shortly after he took office in 1990. His death was an event that, briefly, united the country, with more than 250,000 people paying their respects. Although the Hungarian Constitution did not provide clear guidance on how to proceed, and despite the fact that Antall had not appointed a successor, the MDF rapidly agreed on nominating Péter Boross, the Interior Minister, as their

90 From József Antall’s speech in Parliament 1 September 1992, quoted in *East European Reporter*, Vol. 5, No. 5, 1992, 48

91 Pataki, ‘Istvan Csurka’s Tract: Summary and Reactions’, 1992, 22

92 Szalai, 1994, 139. Edith Oltay, ‘Hungarian Democratic Forum Opts for Centrist Policy’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 9, 1993 (a), 23

93 Oltay, 1993 (a), 26

94 Bozóki & Lomax, 1996, 200. Bill Lomax, ‘Factions and Factionalism in Hungary’s New Party System’ in *Democratization*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995 (b), 129

candidate to replace Antall. On 21 December he was approved by Parliament in the first round of voting.⁹⁵

The smooth transition following Antall's death bears witness to the relative stability of the Hungarian political system, despite the various challenges discussed above. An additional explanation may well be the fact that the opposition parties did not yet feel ready to challenge the coalition Government and preferred to prepare themselves properly for the forthcoming elections. The policy of the Boross Government leading up to the elections in the spring of 1994 hardly merits any detailed analysis. Péter Boross managed to continue what his predecessor had initiated, in terms of both domestic and foreign policy. He did not, however, succeed in turning the trend of declining popular support for the MDF and the coalition Government.

A weak Government in a stable system

‘It is generally open to question whether democratic consolidation can be fully achieved in much less than two or three decades, given the central task of acquiring regime legitimation and, with it, adequate progress towards a “remaking” of political culture.’⁹⁶

In addition to the challenges discussed above, electoral preferences gradually shifted away from supporting the coalition Government and moved in favour of the three Parliamentary opposition parties.⁹⁷ Initially, the Liberal parties, notably the FIDESZ, gained support, but from 1993 the MSzP became increasingly popular. Surveys conducted in 1993 showed an increase in voter sympathy from 9 to 27 per cent during the year. This can partly be attributed to dissatisfaction with the Government's handling of the economic issues, with unemployment rising while production and living standards declined. People remembered ‘with nostalgia the days of the Kádár regime, when there was full employment and social security’ and also appreciated the image of a professional and efficient party. The Hungarian Socialist Party also managed to project an image of competence and party unity, in contrast to the constant infighting within the MDF, although it was probably as heterogeneous as most other parties.⁹⁸

95 Judith Pataki, ‘Hungary Achieves Smooth Transition from Antall to Boross’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 1994 (a), 15-19

96 Geoffrey Pridham, ‘Comparative reflections on democratization in East-Central Europe: a model for post-communist transformation?’ in Pridham & Ágh (eds), 2001 (a), 3

97 Ágh, 1995, 58

98 Edith Oltay, ‘Hungarian Socialists Prepare for Comeback’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 9,

The Socialist Party, therefore, found itself in a good position in the election campaign leading up to the Parliamentary elections in May 1994, for which the threshold for entering Parliament had been raised from four to five per cent. The voter turnout was higher than in 1990 (68.9 and 55.1 per cent, respectively in the two rounds), which can be read as a sign of some degree of confidence in the system – perhaps legitimacy.⁹⁹ All the six parties represented in Parliament entered the new Parliament whereas none of the extremist parties, or any other party, managed to win a seat.¹⁰⁰

Despite these elements of continuity, the elections again led to a fundamental change in Parliamentary life. Only just over a third of the deputies elected in 1990 managed to retain their seats.¹⁰¹ Among the new MPs, three quarters had completed higher education, and there were very few blue-collar workers and farmers. The number of female MPs rose from 28 to 43.¹⁰² There was also a massive shift in votes towards the MSzP, who gained 54 per cent of the seats and who together with their coalition partner, the SzDSz, held a two-thirds majority in Parliament.¹⁰³

1994 (b), 21-23. A survey in June 1992 showed that, by then, the Socialist Party still had about the same level of support as in the 1990 parliamentary elections. Judith Pataki, 'Hungarians Dissatisfied with Political Changes' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 44, 1992 (b), 69

99 Edith Oltay, 'The Former Communists' Election Victory in Hungary' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 25, 1994 (e), 1-3. Thomas Lundberg, *Political Transition in Hungary and Poland: Positive Signs for Lasting Democracy* at <http://www.fairvote.org/reports/1995/chp7/lundberg2.html>

100 Oltay, 1994 (e), 1

101 *ibid.*, 2

102 Judith Pataki, 'Hungary's New Parliament Inaugurated' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 29, 1994 (c), 11

103 *Hungary – a Parliamentary Republic*. Fact Sheets on Hungary, No. 6, 1995, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest

Table 7.1. – Members of Parliament by party affiliation¹⁰⁴

	1990	1994
MSzP	33	209
SzDSz	94	69
MDF	165	38
FKgP	44	26
KDNP	21	22
FIDESZ	22	20
Independent MPs	7	-
Agrarian Alliance	-	1
Liberal Civil Alliance Entrepreneurs' Party	-	1

The MDF campaign had 'focused on the need to call former Communists to account, the importance of Christian values, and the country's moral revival'. This strategy did not pay off. Oltay claims that the strong anticommunism of the Government did not go down well with most Hungarians who associated the Socialist Party 'with "goulash communism" rather than terror'. She even argues that it was 'nostalgia for the "good old days" rather than the promise of any economic alternative that boosted the HSP's electoral chances' since, in fact, their economic programme differed little from those of the Liberal parties.

Although the Socialists had gained an absolute majority in Parliament, it tried to persuade the Free Democrats to enter into a coalition. This would give the coalition the two-thirds majority that was necessary to adopt key legislation. Sharing the Government responsibility with the Free Democrats would also give the Socialists someone with whom they could share the blame likely to come for the harsh economic decisions that lay ahead.¹⁰⁵ The Free Democrats could also be useful tool aiding the MSzP leadership to keep down the old Communist faction of the Party.

Before the elections, the Free Democrats had excluded entering into a coalition Government with the Socialist Party if the latter were to achieve an absolute

¹⁰⁴ *Parliamentary Parties in Hungary*. Fact Sheets on Hungary, No. 7, 1994, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest. *A short history of coalition governments in Hungary*, 1995. Regarding the 1990 elections Körösnéni gives slightly different figures for some of the parties – MDF: 164, SzDSz : 92, Agrarian Alliance: 2, Independent candidates: 6, and joint candidates of different parties: 2, András Körösnéni, 'The Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, 1990', in Bozóki, Körösnéni & Schöpflin (eds), 1992, 79

¹⁰⁵ Edith Oltay, 'Former Communists Win First Round of Hungarian Elections' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 21, 1994 (d)

majority and if Gyula Horn were to become Prime Minister. However, an extraordinary Party Congress on 5 June decided to enter into negotiations with the Socialists. Staying in opposition would most likely have made it difficult for the Free Democrats to articulate its criticism amongst much louder opposition parties.¹⁰⁶ The new coalition Government, led by Horn, was confirmed by Parliament on 15 July by a vote of 265 to 93, with one abstention.¹⁰⁷

A few days later, President Göncz 'appointed new heads of the state-owned broadcasting entities', and the new leaders 'immediately fired or suspended leading news reporters who had allegedly been biased toward the previous government'. Thus, one could argue that '[o]n one single day the new coalition government silenced more opposition supporters at Hungarian Television than the previous government had during its entire four-year term'.¹⁰⁸ The results in the local elections held later in the year largely confirmed the shift in party preferences among the Hungarian electorate, in favour of the Socialists and the Free Democrats.¹⁰⁹

Conclusions – Democracy and political stability 1990-94

'Eastern Europe since the fall of communism is not a tabula rasa on to which new institutions, values and behaviour patterns can simply be superimposed at will. On the contrary, it is out of the remains of the old system that the post-communist future will have to be built.'¹¹⁰

In contrast to the Socialist regime that preceded it, the Government that took over in May 1990 was a legitimate Government that had been approved by a multi-party Parliament elected in free elections. It based its rule on a new and democratic constitution and was, thus, essentially different in character from the old regime. As we have seen, the Antall Government based its attempts to maintain political stability on its legitimacy, rather than merely acceptance based on performance. It did not make use of coercion, in any normal sense of the

106 Oltay, 1994 (e), 3-4

107 Edith Oltay, 'Hungary's Socialist-Liberal Government Takes Office' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 33, 1994 (f), 6

108 Judith Pataki, 'Controversy over Hungary's New Media Heads' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 31, 1994 (d), 14-17

109 Romsics, 1999, 443

110 Bill Lomax, 'Obstacles to the Development of Democratic Politics' in Cox & Furlong, 1995 (c), 98-99

word, to control society. Overall, the Government managed to become and stay legitimate in the eyes of most Hungarians. Benefiting from the fact that it was the first democratically elected Government in more than forty years, it attained a high level of legitimacy.

However, despite its legitimacy, the Government did not win broad approval in terms of performance. In fact, it can be described as legitimate but not performing. It was not so much the lack of action but the cost and burden of the economic transition – privatisation (too slow or too fast), inflation, unemployment, poverty and debt – that made many Hungarians highly critical of the performance of the Government. Kis argues that post-1990 ‘[o]nly leaders who can demonstrate or convincingly promise immediate success can count on popularity. There are no reserves of confidence’.¹¹¹ This illustrates the point we made in chapter two, that new democratic regimes are highly dependent on current achievements to gain legitimacy. Ágh draws the following conclusions:

‘Support for democracy was around 70 per cent in Hungary in the 1990s, but approval for the functioning of democracy tended to be around only 20 per cent. [...] The lack of performance legitimacy or, simply said, the low performance of the new institutions has culminated in the period of early consolidation becoming one of a “performance crisis”. It has become the major bottleneck for further democratisation and also for Europeanisation’¹¹²

The challenges to stability, as we have seen, came from various sources – inside the MDF, inside the Government coalition, from the opposition in Parliament, from the President, and from civil society groups outside Parliament, such as the Democratic Charter. Most of these challenges – a typical example being the ‘media war’ – were actually conflicts among elites (a main ‘provider of acceptance’ in a political system) rather than expressions of widespread popular disapproval of the Government or its policies. The challenges by a broader population were of a more temporary character. The challenges discussed here were not a threat to the political system as such but rather to the Government or to certain aspects of Government policy. This brings us back to the distinction made in chapter two between regime stability/political stability, on the one hand, and the stability of the Government, on the other.

111 Kis, 1991, 4

112 Ágh, 2001, 168

The Antall-Boross Government managed to maintain political stability, and even to stay in power throughout its four-year mandate. This is remarkable, given the fact that maintaining stability while you are busy radically reshaping society is bound to be a rather challenging task. Regular opinion surveys since 1991 showed a 'very high acceptance' of democratic institutions, whereas the popularity of the Government continued to decline.¹¹³ Despite some turbulence, party loyalty remained high and 'about 90 per cent of the members of each parliamentary group voted the same way on average in 1990, and this unity further increased in 1991'.¹¹⁴ Likewise, despite some difficulties within some of the parties represented in Parliament, from May 1990 to March 1992 only 'seventeen MPs switched from their parliamentary groups to another one or became independent, i.e. 4.4 per cent of the members of parliament'.¹¹⁵ Although this figure is probably high compared to a stable multi-party democracy, my assessment is that it is surprisingly low for a new democracy with a mixture of old and new political parties and uncertainty about what issues and cleavages are the most relevant. Even Ágh, who is often critical about the slowness of the democratisation process, argues 'that the parliament has fulfilled its role, that parliamentary democracy has been legitimized in Hungary, and that most of the population supports the parliament'.¹¹⁶

Both the stable handover to Boross following Antall's death and the handover to a new coalition Government after the elections in 1994 illustrate the essential stability of the political system, while the election results in 1994 clearly demonstrate the diminishing support for the first coalition Government. This illustrates the point that the existence of alternatives is just as important under democracy as under authoritarian rule. The coalition Government was challenged by political parties from the opposition which presented credible alternatives to Government policy. In the election campaign, we can also see the importance of the past, or a reinterpretation of the past, turning into a political alternative. Both the campaign and the election results pointed to a reassessment of the Kádár era. People remembered 'with nostalgia the days of the Kádár regime, when there was full employment and social security' and also appreciated the image of a professional and efficient Party. The Hungarian Socialist Party also managed to project an image of competence and party unity, in contrast to the constant

113 Oltay, 1992 (a), 23

114 Körösfényi, 1991, 90

115 *ibid.*, 89

116 Reisch, 1992 (b), 28

infighting within the MDF, although it was probably as heterogeneous as most other parties.¹¹⁷ An opinion survey in early 1994 showed that the most important reason for reassessment of the MSzP (given by 69 per cent of MSzP supporters) was that people thought that 'things were better in the old days, when there were jobs and a secure existence'. A positive re-evaluation of the Kádár period could also be registered and 'almost all segments of the population, said that the state should play a more decisive role in regulating and distributing income'.¹¹⁸

This could be seen as shortsightedness on the part of the electorate or that, simply speaking, the memories of the darker sides of the Socialist regime were quickly forgotten. An alternative analysis would highlight the relative sophistication of the result, in that people could distinguish between the legitimacy of the system and the policy of the Government as well as between a Socialist regime under one-party rule and a Socialist Government under democracy. Regardless of which interpretation we prefer, I do find it striking, although not necessarily a bad thing for democracy, that one of the harshest critics of the Socialist regime in 1989, the Free Democrats, were prepared five years later to enter into a coalition Government with the reformed Socialist Party.

117 Oltay, 1994 (b), 21-23

118 Oltay, 1994 (e), 2-3

Foreign Policy Change 1990-94

‘De tous les ordres imposés à l’Europe centrale et balkanique, le russe fut le plus bref. L’ordre ottoman et l’ordre germano-magyar avaient chacun duré deux siècles. L’ordre russe ne dura pas un demi-siècle.’¹

Foreign policy reorientation and disengagement

‘[A]uthoritarian collapse and the shift to democratic transition usually brings a reconsideration of external policy allegiances, and this engages the concern of interested foreign powers.’²

In chapter three I distinguished between four stages in a process of Foreign Policy Change (FPC). To recapitulate, I used reorientation to describe policy-makers’ intent to restructure foreign policy, disengagement when referring to the destruction of old foreign policy patterns, restructuring for the creation of a new set of relationships and, finally, stabilisation when discussing the ‘more time-consuming, and less dramatic, process’ whereby the new policy is becoming consolidated. These stages are analytical categories. In reality, intentions to change, breaking old patterns, establishing new ones and consolidating them are best seen as partly overlapping and intertwined processes. In this chapter, I will

1 Pierre Béhar, *L’Autriche-Hongrie idée d’avenir: Permanences géopolitiques de l’Europe Centrale et Balkanique*, Editions Desjonqueres, Paris, 1991, 154

2 Pridham, 2001 (b), 60

focus on the disengagement and the restructuring of Hungarian foreign policy between 1990 and 1994 during the first years of democracy.

As we saw in chapter five, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry became increasingly pro-active as early as the 1980s. It developed or strengthened bilateral ties with a number of Western states, encouraged regional cooperation and showed a higher profile in international organisations and fora. These changes were also reflected in senior appointments such as the appointment of Gyula Horn as Foreign Minister in the Government of Miklós Németh. Under Horn, the Government 'speeded up the implementation of the foreign policy line formulated in the 1980s' and were helped by the attitude of Western countries who were willing to support the 'emergence of a parliamentary democracy in Hungary rather than to worry about the politicians they were dealing with'. As a result of the changes, the Hungarian foreign ministry in the beginning of 1990 was quite different from what it had been only five years earlier. Even the new democratic Government that took over in May 1990 acknowledged this; in fact, although the democratic transition certainly involved a major rethinking of foreign policy it also contained elements of foreign policy continuity. Several of these policy changes had already been designed, albeit not always implemented, under the Socialist regime.³ Thus, it should not have come as a surprise that 'the socialists' foreign policy preferences [before the 1990 elections] were not appreciably different from those of the five other parliamentary parties'.⁴

The disengagement can be analysed in terms of policy change and a breaking up of old organisational structures. To capture this, I will concentrate on three fundamental changes that constituted a major disruption in the pattern of Hungarian foreign policy, namely, the withdrawal of the Soviet troops stationed in Hungary, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and, finally, the dissolution of the CMEA.

3 Kun, 1993, 47. Reisch, 1992 (a), 34-35. Fülöp, 1994, 117

4 Tökés, 1996, 376

The withdrawal of Soviet troops

‘ *Ki az abszolút naiv?*

*- Az, aki elhiszi, hogy a szovjet hadsereg annak idején azért jött be, mert hívtuk, most pedig azért megy ki, mert küldjük!*⁵

In the late 1980s the official justification for the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary became increasingly difficult to uphold. The troops largely lost their foreign and security policy relevance as a consequence of the détente between the Soviet Union and the United States. Shortly thereafter they lost their domestic policy relevance, as Hungary was rapidly moving towards multi-party democracy. In the autumn of 1988 the Hungarian Foreign Ministry ‘mentioned for the first time the possibility of a partial Soviet withdrawal’. In January 1989 the Soviet Union informed Hungary that the partial troop withdrawals, declared by Gorbachev in his UN speech the month before, would begin in June.⁶ On 16 June, at the ceremony marking the reburial of Imre Nagy, Viktor Orbán raised the more radical demand that all Soviet troops be withdrawn from Hungary. At that time, however, many people, even in the opposition, thought that the issue had been raised ‘prematurely, imprudently’.⁷

During the autumn of 1989, as the country prepared for Parliamentary elections, the question of the Soviet troops began to be seen in a new light. At a meeting of Warsaw Pact Foreign Ministers in October Gyula Horn ‘disclosed that Hungary was holding bilateral talks with the Soviet Union on the eventual withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country’ and at a meeting in the North Atlantic Assembly the month after he called the ‘continued presence of Soviet troops in Hungary “anachronistic”’.⁸ In January 1990 a state-secretary at the Foreign Ministry, Ferenc Somogyi, declared that ‘there are no reasons, be it of a political, military, security or arm control character, that would justify the stationing of foreign troops on the territory of Hungary’, and he also demanded a complete withdrawal no later than 1991.⁹ The same month Prime Minister Németh told Parliament that ‘he had received a letter from his Soviet opposite number, Mr Nikolai Ryzhkov, confirming the view of both countries that the continued presence of an estimated

5 - Who is completely naive? - Someone who thinks that the Soviet army came here in those days because we invited them and that now it is leaving because we send them away! (My translation) *Magyarország politikai évkönyve 1991*, Ökonómia alapítvány – Economix Rt., Budapest, 1991, 790

6 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 45-48

7 Szelényi, 1992, 226-227

8 Kun, 1993, 50-51

9 *The Independent*, 19 January 1990. Dawisha, 1990 (a), 138-139. Knudsen, 1994, 213

60,000 Soviet troops in Hungary was “unjustified and untenable” and was based on what was described as “old historical conceptions”.¹⁰

During talks in Moscow on troops withdrawal, Somogyi was accompanied by three observers from the opposition parties – the SzDSz, the FIDESZ and the MDF.¹¹ On 10 March 1990 an agreement was signed according to which the Soviet Union promised to withdraw most of its soldiers before the end of 1990 and the rest of them before the end of June 1991. The withdrawal was initiated almost immediately.¹² All three observers said they would like to renegotiate the agreement after the Parliamentary elections since they thought it would have been possible to reach a more rapid withdrawal.¹³ In its programme of 1990 the Antall Government called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops:

‘In the interest of the country’s independence and security, the government endeavours to achieve the full withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungarian soil before the June 30, 1990, deadline. Failing this, it shall certainly seek to have the pull-out completed according to schedule.’¹⁴

The agreement on a withdrawal of the Soviet troops was followed by a long and complex dispute about compensation, which continued after the last Soviet soldier had left Hungary. The Soviet side demanded US\$600 million, a figure that was later more than doubled, in compensation for the military bases and equipment left behind.¹⁵ The Hungarians rejected this and asked for compensation of US\$2.3 billion for the ecological damage caused by the Soviet troops – a claim that, in turn, was rejected by Moscow.¹⁶

Until the very last moment the Soviet Union tried to use the troop withdrawal to gain concessions in other fields. According to Prime Minister Antall, ‘during April and May 1991 a number of Soviet officials, including General Yazov, told him the Soviet troops would not leave unless Hungary agreed to certain formulations in the Hungarian-Soviet basic treaty being negotiated at the time. The formulations were unacceptable to the government, and Antall refused to

10 *The Times*, 24 January 1990

11 *Reuters News Service*, 10 March 1990

12 *Keesing’s Record of World Events*, February 1990, 37256. Kun, 1993, 51. Skak, 1996, 228-229

13 *Reuters News Service*, 10 March 1990

14 ‘Programme of the New Hungarian Government’ in *Weekly Bulletin*, 8 June 1990

15 *The Times*, 5 July 1990. *Reuters News Service*, 29 September 1990. *Reuters News Service*, 19 June 1991

16 *Reuters News Service*, 6 March 1991. MTI, *Reuters News Service*, 23 July 1991. Brigitte Sauerwein, ‘Focus on East-Central Europe’, *International Defense Review Special Report*, 9, 1994, 3. Alfred A Reisch, *RFE/RL Newline*, 12 October 1993

oblige'.¹⁷ In June 1991 Lt-Gen Viktor Shilov, Commander of the Soviet Southern Group of Forces, was the last Soviet soldier to leave Hungary.¹⁸

After a series of fruitless talks the compensation issues were finally more or less settled following talks between Prime Minister Antall and President Yeltsin in November 1992, during the first official visit to Hungary by President Yeltsin.¹⁹ The following month an agreement was also reached on the settlement of Russia's trade debt to Hungary. The agreement included delivery of Soviet military equipment, including 28 MiG-29 fighter jets, and other items.²⁰

The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact

Hungary's position and role within the Warsaw Pact had been one of the most sensitive, albeit not officially debated, issues in Hungarian foreign and security policy in the Kádár era. In the autumn of 1988, Imre Pozsgay had privately told FIDESZ leaders that two topics remained taboo – the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and the withdrawal of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact. From then on, however, rapid changes in the political climate dramatically shifted the border line between what was forbidden and what was tolerated.

In February 1989 Oleg Bogomolov, a senior Soviet academician explained at a press conference in Moscow that the Soviet Union would accept a neutral, democratic Hungary.²¹ This was taken up in a press conference in May by Grosz's foreign policy advisor, Gyula Thürmer, who said that 'he believed Hungary would be able to leave the Warsaw Pact if it wanted to do so'.²² Later that month, during a visit to Yugoslavia, Gyula Horn told journalists that Hungary had no intentions of leaving the Warsaw Pact and that doing so was 'unrealistic because of the political and military power balance in Europe'.²³ In September the speaker of the Parliament and Secretary for foreign affairs within the CC, Mátyás Szűrös, said that 'Hungary might seek to quit the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact to become a neutral state on the model of Austria and Finland' but characterised 'Hungarian withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact as a possibility for the "midterm" rather than

17 Kun, 1993, 83

18 Budapest Radio and MTI, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 18 June 1991

19 Karoly Okolicsanyi, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 17 July 1992 (b). *Reuters News Service*, 11 November 1992. MTI, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 12 November 1992

20 *Reuters News Service*, 23 December 1992. Karoly Okolicsanyi, 'Hungarian Foreign Trade in Transition' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 29, 1993 (b), 35. Hungarian Radio (2 June 1993), *BBC Monitoring Service*, 9 June 1993. Alfred A Reisch, 'Hungary Acquires MiG-29s from Russia' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 33, 1993 (d)

21 Hawkes (ed.), 1990, 46-49

22 *Reuters News service*, 18 May 1989

23 *Reuters News Service*, 24 May 1989

the immediate future'.²⁴ In October Imre Pozsgay declared that Hungary 'should stay in the Warsaw Pact until reduced tensions in Europe made military blocs redundant', referring to the on-going CFE (Conventional Armed Forces in Europe) talks in Vienna.²⁵ The CFE negotiations, and the CFE Treaty which was to be signed in November 1990, were based on the existence of two military blocs in Europe. Therefore, it might have been a setback for the negotiations suddenly to change this structure.²⁶ However, Pozsgay also 'called for an end to all military alliances in Europe'.²⁷ That same month the Warsaw Pact Foreign Ministers met in Poland and 'affirmed a policy of non-interference in each other's affairs'. Nikolai Shishlin, a spokesman of the Soviet Communist Party, 'asserted that the Soviet Union would not object to Hungary's leaving the Warsaw Pact and becoming neutral'.²⁸ A similar message was given by Yevgeny Primakov, chairman of the Supreme Soviet and a member of the Politburo, when asked whether Hungary could leave the Warsaw Pact. He replied that we 'adhere very strictly to the non-interference in internal affairs. We proceed from the premise that every country, every state and every people have the right of choice'.²⁹ By that time, of course, with the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy in June 1989, the other taboo in Budapest had already, effectively, been lifted.

In November Gyula Horn 'predicted that East Germany's reforms may lead to reunification and dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and NATO military alliances. Resolution of the German issues could provide for the "simultaneous dismantling" of the two military blocs'.³⁰ In January 1990 General Nikolai Chervov, Chief of the arms control directorate of the Soviet General Staff, said that 'the Warsaw Pact's political consultative committee the supreme policy-making body similar to Nato's North Atlantic Council would probably "cease to exist"'. He also added that 'he expected that eventually the pact would become "a purely political alliance"'.³¹

On 10 March 1990 Gyula Horn 'reaffirmed Hungary's intention to remain in the Warsaw Pact, but argued that the military alliance should be radically

24 *Reuters News Service*, 19 September 1989

25 *Reuters News Service*, 26 October 1989

26 Richard Smoke, 'The security situation of the Central European countries: historical background' in Smoke (ed.), 1996 (a), 97-98. Fejtő, 1992, 421

27 *The Financial Times*, 27 October 1989

28 Braun, 1990 (b), 218

29 *Reuters News Service*, 29 October 1989

30 *The Sunday Times*, 12 November 1989

31 *The Times*, 18 January 1990

restructured and brought into line with the political changes in Europe.³² Shortly before the Parliamentary elections the leader of the Free Democrats, János Kis, claimed that his Party 'would ask parliament to annul the country's Warsaw Pact membership after parliamentary elections'.³³ On 9 May 1990, after the parliamentary elections, the Smallholders Party, the Free Democrats and the FIDESZ tabled a 'parliamentary resolution endorsing the Nagy government's announcement that Hungary was no longer a member of the Soviet-led alliance'.³⁴ By 22 May Prime Minister Antall had made his mind up and declared that his Government opposed membership of the Warsaw Pact, a statement that was a radical shift from his earlier cautious line.³⁵ On 26 June the 'National Assembly instructed the government to begin talks on Hungary's withdrawal from the pact by the end of 1991'.³⁶ Hungary had never been as strategically important as the countries in the Northern Tier and, even during the Cold War, Hungary had been given more room for manoeuvre.³⁷ Moreover, the whole logic of keeping a Soviet military presence in Eastern Europe was about to change as Germany would be (re-)united and the Eastern part of Germany would become part of NATO.

In June the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee (PCC) met in Moscow to discuss the future of the alliance.³⁸ The Hungarian delegation, which was composed of Göncz, Antall and Lajos Für, the Defence Minister, stood firm, with Antall stating 'that Hungary was determined to leave the alliance in a negotiated way and expressed the belief that the military arm of the Pact should be dissolved by the end of 1991'. According to Antall, the Foreign Ministers 'of the other member states insisted on issuing a declaration that would have closely followed the Soviet proposal to "reform and modernize" the Pact mechanism. Contrary to all procedural rules Antall, who chaired the meeting on the final day, ignored these demands and managed to have the Hungarian resolution accepted by the participants, including Gorbachev. The success of Antall's scheme meant that from then on the eventual dissolution of the Pact became inevitable'.³⁹

32 *Reuters News Service*, 10 March 1990

33 *Reuters News Service*, 13 March 1990

34 *The Independent*, 10 May 1990

35 *The Financial Times*, 23 May 1990

36 Skak, 1996, 228. *The Independent*, 27 June 1990

37 Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup, Pierre Lemaitre, Elzbieta Tromer & Ole Wæver, *The European Security Order Recast: Scenarios for the Post-Cold War Era*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1990, 182. Bugajski, 1993, 196. Braun, 1990 (b), 227. Burant (ed.), 1990, 224

38 Kun, 1993, 77-78

39 *ibid.*, 77-78. Bugajski, 1993, 193-194. Fejtő, 1992, 420

In August 1990 Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky confirmed that 'Hungary is resolved to leave the military part of the Warsaw Treaty by the end of this year'.⁴⁰ In October the Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact agreed on abolishing the military arm of the Pact. A PCC meeting planned for November was postponed by the Soviet side, possibly waiting for the signature of the CFE Treaty at the CSCE meeting in Paris in mid-November.⁴¹

In January 1991 Lajos Für explained that, following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and democratisation, his Ministry was preparing a new defensive military strategy. He also mentioned that 'Hungary has stressed that its departure from the Warsaw Pact's military structure does not mean that it will join any anti-Soviet grouping'.⁴² On 21 January, a meeting was held in Budapest between the Foreign Ministers of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁴³ On this occasion the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Jiří Dienstbier, threatened to withdraw unilaterally from the military structure of the Pact at the end of June, together with Hungary and Poland, 'if Moscow continued to block the meeting [to dissolve the Warsaw Pact]'.⁴⁴ According to Skak, that meeting may have led to Gorbachev's letter of 11 February convening a meeting with the purpose of dissolving the military arm of the Alliance by 1 April 1991.⁴⁵

At the PCC meeting, which took place in Budapest on 25 February 1991, the Foreign and Defence Ministers of the Warsaw Pact signed a statement dissolving the military institutions of the Pact from 31 March.⁴⁶ A spokesperson for the Hungarian Government said that the Warsaw Pact had never cared about the security of its participants but had limited the sovereignty of its member countries.⁴⁷ When discussing how to fill the security vacuum in Europe, the Hungarian Foreign Minister stated that 'the Council of Europe, the European Community, NATO, the West European Union, the Treaty on reducing Conventional Forces in Europe under negotiation in Vienna and new bilateral and multilateral agreements being worked out in Eastern Europe formed part of the new security fabric'.⁴⁸

40 Reuters News Service, 28 August 1990

41 Kun, 1993, 88. The Soviet side referred to internal problems. *Reuters News Service*, 24 February 1991

42 *Reuters News Service*, 16 January 1991

43 *Reuters News Service*, 21 January 1991

44 *ibid.*

45 Skak, 1991 (a), 285. Kun, 1993, 88 & 95

46 Bugajski, 1993, 194. Fejtő, 1992, 421. Kun, 1993, 89. Czechoslovak radio, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 13 February 1991. *Reuters News Service*, 25 February 1991

47 *Reuters News Service*, 24 February 1991

48 *Reuters News Service*, 25 February 1991

The formal dissolution of the political structures of the Warsaw Pact took place at a last meeting of the PCC in Prague on 1 July 1991.⁴⁹ After this meeting, when asked about the possible emergence of a security vacuum Antall, replied that ‘the Pact itself had never offered real security to its members’.⁵⁰

The dissolution of the CMEA

Towards the end of the 1980s, the Hungarians proposed to change their trade within the CMEA ‘from state trading to market-based relations’.⁵¹ Somewhat later, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia decided to cooperate ‘to coordinate the disbanding of Comecon’.⁵² At the 45th CMEA Council meeting, which was held in Sofia in January 1990 following the dramatic events of 1989, the rationality of preserving an organisation that ensured a supply of Soviet energy and raw materials in exchange for manufactured goods from East and Central Europe, was questioned. Péter Medgyessy, Hungary’s Deputy Prime Minister, suggested that ‘Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia should form a market-oriented inner circle as a step to reform of the Comecon trading bloc [--- and that --- t]he three nations should seize the chance to replace an “obsolete” Comecon with a new form of co-operation’.⁵³ In August 1990 ‘the Hungarian government [...] called for the dissolution of Comecon, labelling it anachronistic’.⁵⁴

In January 1991 the CMEA switched from barter trade to hard currency accounting and market prices. A meeting in Budapest to dissolve the CMEA was planned for late February 1991 but was then postponed, presumably due to differences between the countries on the post-CMEA cooperation.⁵⁵ In May 1991 the CMEA Council convened in Moscow, for the last time, and decided to dissolve the CMEA. This was formally done on 28 June at a meeting in Budapest. When discussing future cooperation, delegates agreed that this should be based on bilateral agreements. By September 1991 the CMEA ceased to exist, although it had already been dissolved *de facto*.⁵⁶ Commenting on the June meeting, the Hungarian economist László Csaba explained that there would be no new organisation replacing the CMEA: ‘It would be an important sign to the West

49 Bugajski, 1993, 194. Fejtő, 1992, 421

50 Kun, 1993, 91

51 Köves, 1992, 9

52 Bugajski, 1993, 188. Fejtő, 1992, 465. Köves, 1992, 9

53 *The Financial Times*, 9 January 1990

54 *Frankfurter allgemeine Zeitung* (English abstracts), 17 August 1990

55 *Reuters News Service*, 25 February 1991

56 Kun, 1993, 90. Bugajski, 1993, 188. Fejtő, 1992, 465. Köves, 1992, 9. *OMRI*, 25 July 1991. *Reuters News Service*, 14 June 1991

that there are various countries with various problems here which should not be treated as one bloc any more'.⁵⁷

For Hungary, and for Central Europe as a whole, liberation from the ties of the CMEA came as a mixed blessing. During the first few years after 1989, foreign trade in the region declined, rendering the transition more painful for the countries concerned.⁵⁸ Soviet trade with the region, imports as well as exports, fell sharply between 1989 and 1991. In addition, during the first half of 1991 there was a rapid deterioration in Eastern Europe's terms of trade vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The Soviet side also reduced its energy exports, while German unification, and the first Gulf war that led to lost contracts, also had a very negative impact on East European trade.⁵⁹

Hungarian industry was strongly affected by the decline in exports to former CMEA member states. By the end of 1991 Hungarian exports to these countries had diminished to 40 per cent of the 1990 level. Most Hungarian products previously sold within the CMEA could not be sold on the world market, which led to rising unemployment and a decline in industrial production.⁶⁰ Despite all the problems, however, Hungary was in a relatively better position than most other former CMEA members when it came to tackling the new situation. As early as 1990 Hungary's reorientation of trade towards the West was producing results, while the Soviet share of Hungary's foreign trade had fallen below 20 per cent.⁶¹ Efforts were also made to solve the energy problem; in November 1990, a preliminary trade agreement was reached, which 'contained provisions for the fulfilment of shortfalls in Soviet oil supplies through direct deals with republican governments'.⁶²

In May 1991 a cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union was signed by Hungary's Foreign Minister concerning new bilateral trade terms including 'a temporary return to barter contracts'. In June 1991 a protocol was also signed between Hungary and the Soviet Union 'for Soviet compensation for Hungary's construction of the Yamburg gas pipeline: Hungary's contribution was to be repaid through the delivery of 14.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas during the

57 *Reuters News Service*, 28 June 1991

58 *OMRI*, 18 December 1992

59 Slay, 1993, 75-76. Mette Skak, *East Europe, the Soviet Union and Europeanization: A Challenge for the European Community*, Prepared for delivery at the 1991 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, 29 August-1 September 1991 (b), 14

60 Karoly Okolicsanyi, 'Hungarian Foreign Trade Turns from East to West' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 15, 1992 (a), 34-35

61 Köves, 1992, 65

62 Bugajski, 1993, 190

following year'. Hungary also concluded a trade agreement with Ukraine, signed a direct trade pact with the Russian Republic and expanded its trade links with other Soviet republics as well.⁶³ By the end of 1991, two thirds of Hungarian exports and imports (in value terms) went to or came from developed Western countries.⁶⁴ From 1992 Hungarian exports to former CMEA countries increased while Hungary also began to enjoy some of the beneficial effects of the EC association agreement.⁶⁵ For Hungary, the transition in foreign trade thus went relatively more smoothly than for most other former CMEA member states.

Foreign policy restructuring

'Full membership in institutions that provide political, economic and military security – organizations like the Council of Europe, the European Community and NATO – is essential for consolidating Central and Eastern Europe'.

– Géza Jeszenszky⁶⁶

' *Maga szerint mit sikerült elérnie a magyar külpolitikának 1990-ben?*

- *Új barátokat szereztünk távol, és új ellenségeket közel.*'⁶⁷

In the previous section, I discussed the reorientation and disengagement of Hungarian foreign policy. Here, I will instead focus on the Hungarian Government's efforts to set new priorities and build new relations, by restructuring its foreign policy.⁶⁸ I will discuss FPC in the five areas of foreign policy already defined.

As under the old regime, the domestic strategies to achieve political stability had an impact on international relations and on the foreign policy objectives that could be pursued. Under Kádár, the Hungarian regime had balanced carefully between the need to ensure continued Soviet backing and the need for improved relations with the West as a prerequisite for trade and credits that could be used to back up the Alliance policy.

Under Antall, Boross and Horn, the international recognition sought was mainly acceptance by the West, as expressed through close relations and, eventually, membership of the main Western multilateral organisations. At the same time,

63 *ibid.*, 189

64 Slay, 1993, 79

65 Okolicsanyi, 1993 (b), 32-35

66 Géza Jeszenszky in *IHT*, 22 October 1992 quoted in Skak, 1996, 242-243

67 - According to you, what did Hungarian foreign policy manage to achieve in the 1990s?

- We got new friends far away and new enemies nearby. *Magyarország politikai évkönyve 1991*, Ökonómia alapítvány – Economix Rt., Budapest, 1991, 790

68 Cf. the conceptual discussion in chapter three

good relations with neighbouring countries from the former Warsaw Pact were still important – to cooperate on Western integration, to promote regional trade, and to protect the interests of Hungarian minorities abroad.

Key priorities in foreign policy

In his Government programme of 1990, Prime Minister Antall emphasised European integration, EC membership and pan-European collective security. These objectives should be pursued to promote foreign policy independence. They were to be supported through the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops and a strengthening of the Hungarian armed forces.⁶⁹ In terms of *restructuring*, joining the main Euro-Atlantic organisations, promoting regional economic and political cooperation outside Soviet control, and defending the interests of Hungarian minorities abroad were the declared principal objectives.⁷⁰ These priorities remained relatively constant throughout the mandate of the Antall-Boross Government and have been referred to as ‘the “holy trinity” of national, regional and European policies’.⁷¹

The Socialist-Liberal coalition Government that came to power four years later shared the objective of integration with Western organisations. It did, however, make a stronger effort to promote good bilateral relations with neighbouring countries while putting less emphasis on defending the interests of Hungarians abroad. Over time, both Governments came to give relatively higher priority to Western integration as compared to regional cooperation while early plans to promote collective security based on pan-European ideas largely lost their appeal.⁷² The Horn Government, with László Kovács as Foreign Minister, ‘also stressed the precedence of economic interests in the crafting of foreign policy’.⁷³

Western integration meant closer ties with, and eventually membership of, four European or Trans-Atlantic organisations – the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later renamed OSCE), the Council of Europe, the European Communities (EC, later renamed EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Each organisation offered Hungary different opportunities in the five foreign policy areas. The organisations also differed in

69 Programme of the New Hungarian Government in *Weekly Bulletin*, 8 June 1990

70 Romsics, 1999, 458

71 Gusztáv Molnár, ‘A Turning-Point in Foreign Policy’ in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 141, 1996, 75

72 Romsics, 1999, 446. Skak, 1996, 224

73 Imre Varga, ‘Development of the Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Last Ten Years: A comparison of the foreign policy programs of the post-transition Hungarian governments’ in *National Security and the Future*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2000, 123

terms of the cost of membership and with respect to how Moscow would perceive Hungary's closer ties with each of them. Whereas the OSCE was the only pan-European (including Canada, the Soviet Union and the US) organisation, the Council of Europe as well as the EC/EU had a strong West European identity. NATO, by contrast, was the only organisation with a clear trans-Atlantic character. These organisations also differed in terms of their focus. The Council of Europe stood for the rule of law and democracy and came to symbolise, in the short term, a 'return to Europe'. The EC/EU stood for economic prosperity and democracy but membership was more of a long-term objective, given the dramatic transformation required for Hungary to be able to qualify. NATO was the only organisation able to provide military guarantees and security in the long-term, whereas the CSCE was seen as being useful as long as collective security and pan-European solutions to the 'security vacuum' so often referred to in the early 1990s were still under discussion. The CSCE was also potentially relevant because of its focus on human rights and, eventually, minority rights.

Hungary's *relations with neighbouring countries* evolved, in terms of both multilateral cooperation and bilateral relations. In order to understand how these relations developed after democratisation we need to be aware of historic patterns of conflict and cooperation that emerged during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the years following the Trianon Treaty at the end of the First World War and during the Cold War. We should also realise that it would be a serious mistake to think about relations between East European countries during the Cold War as if they were a mirror image of the integration process that was taking place in Western Europe. The multilateral organisations in Eastern Europe were all essentially managed and directed from Moscow. Hence while on the one hand the Cold War tore 'asunder traditional patterns of regional interaction and exchange, and replace[d] them with artificially created bloc structures',⁷⁴ on the other hand these countries 'remained as isolated from each other as they were from the Western states'.⁷⁵

After 1989 Hungary's relations with its neighbouring states were influenced by, and had an impact on, its goals and strategies for the future – not least Hungary's aspirations to develop closer relations with the West and, in particular, its wish to join the European Union and NATO. Multilateral cooperation developed in the framework of both the Central European Initiative (CEI)⁷⁶ and the Visegrád

74 Hyde-Price, 1996, 108

75 Bugajski, 1993, 183-184

76 The Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis saw the CEI as a useful attempt to counterbalance

Initiative. Hungary's relations with its neighbours were also strongly influenced by the issue of *Hungarian minorities* in those countries. Concern in neighbouring countries about possibly revanchist Hungarian policies to modify the Trianon Treaty, which reduced Hungary and its population to a fraction at the end of the First World War, clashed with what the newly elected Hungarian Government saw as their legitimate concern over the conditions of Hungarian minorities in these countries. To generalise, relations were smoother with countries with small Hungarian populations (Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, Ukraine) and more complicated, sometimes antagonistic, in countries with larger Hungarian minorities (Romania, Serbia and Slovakia).⁷⁷

FPC in the five areas 1990-94

Regime stability

The Hungarian Government sought to promote regime stability i.e. stabilising the democratic regime through international recognition and support. This objective was pursued through the CSCE and through membership of Western organisations, in particular the Council of Europe, the EU and NATO. There was clearly a two-way relation here: democracy was seen as a prerequisite for membership while, at the same time, membership was seen as a sign of international recognition of the Government and of the democratic nature of the political system. The Council of Europe served as the initial focus since membership of the Council of Europe was a considerably less sensitive issue in Moscow than membership of NATO while also being more attainable than EC/EU membership in the short term.

In the summer of 1990 a CSCE conference on the 'human dimension' was held in Copenhagen. A declaration was adopted in which the participating states promised to base their political systems on 'the rule of law, democratic institutions, free elections, political pluralism and human rights'.⁷⁸ This was a step away from previous CSCE policy according to which all political systems had enjoyed equal legitimacy.⁷⁹ From this moment, CSCE membership provided an additional, albeit weak, safeguard against a return to non-democratic rule.

German political and economic influence in East-Central Europe. Nicolaus Rockberger, *Centraleuropas renässans: Från Habsburg till Visegrád*, SNS Förlag, Stockholm, 1994, 140-141

⁷⁷ Skak, 1996, 235

⁷⁸ Ole Nørgaard, Per Carlsen & Nikolaj Petersen, 'Danish Ostpolitik 1967-1993: Breakdown of Stability – Unknown Challenges' in Due-Nielsen & Petersen (eds), 1995, 149. OSCE, Chronological review of major CSCE/OSCE events and documents published from 1973 at <http://www.osce.org/documents/chronological.php>

⁷⁹ Neil J Krutz, 'The CSCE in the New Era' in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1993, 19

In May 1989 the Parliamentary Assembly of the *Council of Europe* decided to create the special guest status, which Hungary was granted the following month.⁸⁰ On 6 July Mikhail Gorbachev gave a speech to the Assembly in which he referred in positive terms to the values to which the Council subscribes. He also expressed the view that the Council had an important role in Pan-European cooperation.⁸¹ In early November 1989 Imre Pozsgay, who at that time was still expected to become the Socialist candidate in the Presidential elections, made an unofficial visit to Strasbourg and declared that, for Hungary, joining the Council of Europe was the principal aim as regards cooperation with European organisations.⁸² On 16 November Gyula Horn personally presented Hungary's application – the first among Warsaw Pact countries – for membership of the Council of Europe. On this occasion he 'expressed the hope that membership would improve the prospects for Hungary's eventual accession to the European Communities'.⁸³ In February 1990 Catherine Lalumière, the new Secretary General of the Council, visited Hungary and met Mátyás Szűrös, the interim President, and the Foreign Minister.⁸⁴

In March and April 1990 the Parliamentary Assembly sent ten members, at the invitation of the Hungarian Parliament, to observe the Parliamentary elections in Hungary.⁸⁵ On 6 November Hungary formally joined the Council of Europe during a ceremony in Rome. Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky 'paid tribute to his predecessor, Gyula Horn, for having first established contact with the Council, but he emphasized the fact that it was only the free multiparty elections held in Hungary earlier that year that qualified the country for admission'.⁸⁶ In April 1991 a Hungarian was appointed as the first East European judge at the European Court of Human Rights.⁸⁷ In June 1992 the Parliamentary Assembly convened in Budapest, in what was its first meeting in a Warsaw Pact country.⁸⁸ The Council of

80 Katlijn Malfliet, 'The Political Reforms in the Central and Eastern European States: Some Considerations on the Formation of Transitional Institutions' in House of Representatives Belgium (ed.), *From Disunity to Unity: Reflections on the Democratization Process in Central and Eastern Europe*, Brussels, 1990, 56. *Agence Europe*, 3 October 1990. *Council of Europe Co-operation and Assistance Programmes for the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe*, Council of Europe, Information Paper SG/INF 91(1), Strasbourg, 9 January 1991, 4

81 Malfliet, 1990, 56

82 *Reuters News Service*, 6 November 1989, *Agence Europe*, 3 February 1990

83 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, November 1989, 37048

84 *Agence Europe*, 3 February 1990

85 *Agence Europe*, 23 March 1990. Kovrig, 1993, 173

86 Kun, 1993, 72-73

87 *Agence Europe*, 3 October 1990. Kovrig, 1993, 176

88 *Reuters News Service*, 18 June 1992. At this meeting, Yugoslavia's special guest status was revoked in protest against the ethnic fighting. *Reuters News Service*, 30 June 1992

Europe offered Hungary advice and assistance on constitutional and institutional matters in the transition to democracy and the rule of law. Such assistance focused on three priorities: consciousness raising and information, assistance, and membership.⁸⁹ A key component of support for the two latter priorities was the Demosthenes Programme, which was adopted in March 1990.⁹⁰

As part of the Demosthenes Programme the Council set up a special commission (the European Commission for Democracy through Law or ‘the Venice Commission’) to assist countries in drafting new constitutions and other legal documents of fundamental importance.⁹¹ This Commission ‘assisted Hungary in drafting its law on minorities, and has taken an initiative to draw up its own “Draft Proposal for a European Convention for the Protection of Minorities”’.⁹² Thus the Council of Europe, while unable to provide economic support on the scale of the EC, ‘can address some of the legal aspects of democratic government which are beyond the remit of the CSCE’ building partly on its experience from helping to establish democracy in Portugal and Spain.⁹³

The Council of Europe also provided an important check on Hungary’s progress towards democratic maturity (*Demokratie-Fähigkeit*) with a view to future membership of the EC/EU.⁹⁴ In other words, joining the Council of Europe provided an international approval of the basic standards in terms of respect for human rights and ‘a seal of legitimacy for their political and economic reforms and [...] a first springboard toward EC membership’.⁹⁵

Gradually, however, the focus shifted towards EC/EU membership as a priority objective. As Hyde-Price observes,

‘[t]hroughout the region, it is widely believed that membership of the Union would not only symbolise their entry into the European family of democratic states, but it would also stabilise their tender democracies, provide the environment for achievement of prosperous social market economies and – above all – ensure their security’.⁹⁶

89 *Council of Europe Co-operation and Assistance Programmes for the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe*, Council of Europe, Information Paper SG/INF 91(1), Strasbourg, 9 January 1991, 3. Kovrig, 1993, 173-175. Hyde-Price, 1996, 191

90 Ingrid Wetterqvist, *Samarbetet med Central- och Östeuropa*, UD informerar, 3, 1991, Utrikesdepartementet, Stockholm, 1991, 20-21. Hyde-Price, 1994, 242-243. Tomas Niklasson & Anders Sannerstedt, ‘Europe Safe for Democracy? The Council of Europe and Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe’ in *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, Vol. 96, No. 1, 1993, 69-81

91 Malfliet, 1990, 59. Andersen & Skak, 1993, 32-33. Hyde-Price, 1996, 191-192

92 Hyde-Price, 1996, 192

93 Hyde-Price, 1994, 240-241

94 Malfliet, 1990, 55

95 Bugajski, 1993, 206. Hyde-Price, 1994, 244, Hyde-Price, 1996, 193-194

96 Hyde-Price, 1996, 197

According to Flockhart & Wyn Rees, '[t]he attraction of membership of the EU was that it offered access to western markets, direct investment and it bolstered the legitimacy of newly independent states'.⁹⁷

Security

The Hungarian Government sought to promote security mainly through intensified contacts with the CSCE and NATO as well as through the Visegrád Initiative. Hungarian foreign policy gradually progressed from neutrality and non-aligned status, which were seen as realistic options, via pan-European security as ensured by the CSCE/OSCE, to an application for membership of NATO. It is likely that this shift, or rather the idea of neutrality or pan-European security, was more of a tactical move than an idea born of genuine conviction. The idea of seeking NATO membership could provoke reactions both in Moscow and in the West, which did not see either Hungary or NATO as ready for such a move. To a broader public, neutrality may well have looked attractive 'probably in consequence of the 1956 Declaration of Neutrality and the successes of Austrian foreign policy'.⁹⁸ As early as July 1990, however, Foreign Minister Jeszenszky said in an interview:

'I do not think neutrality will be the general line Hungary will follow. [--] As long as the [Cold W]ar was waged, the possibility of neutrality for a country that was not a voluntary member of the Warsaw Pact was a very attractive idea. But if the Cold War is hopefully and happily really over and the Soviet Union and the West no longer regard each other as possible enemies, then it no longer makes sense to declare oneself neutral.'⁹⁹

The coup attempt in Moscow and the clampdown in the Baltic Republic added to the sense of urgency, while the dissolution of the Soviet Union made NATO membership appear a more acceptable option – in Moscow as well as in Brussels and Washington.

During most of 1990 the Hungarian Government argued in favour of a pan-European system of collective security, in which the *CSCE* would play a leading role.¹⁰⁰ This was the only organisation that, at the time, could aspire to a pan-

97 Trine Flockhart & G Wyn Rees, 'A core Europe? The EU and the WEU' in Park & Rees (eds), 1998, 64-65

98 László Valki, 'Hungary's Road to NATO' in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 154, 1999

99 Alfred Reisch, 'Interview with Foreign Minister Geza Jeszenszky' in *Report on Eastern Europe*, 27 July 1990, 3

100 Hyde-Price, 1996, 240

European perspective.¹⁰¹ Politically, it would be less sensitive in Moscow's eyes to let the CSCE, rather than NATO, handle conflicts in Eastern Europe. From a practical point of view, however, this made little sense since the CSCE had neither mechanisms for conflict mediation nor resources to enforce its decisions.¹⁰² Some have argued that the perceived attractiveness of the CSCE also reflected the naiveté or 'the political idealism of former dissidents'.¹⁰³ However, the advocacy of collective security based on the CSCE may equally well be interpreted as a rational choice for East European leaders eager to establish international guarantees to ensure that the recent dramatic changes were irreversible, while the CSCE also offered an argument vis-à-vis Moscow in favour of the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. The time was simply not yet ripe to argue for security guarantees from the West or for NATO membership.¹⁰⁴

In November 1990 the CSCE Summit adopted the 'Charter of Paris for a New Europe'. Behind this ambitious title one can see a strong bid, despite substantial scepticism from Western states, to institutionalise a pan-European system for conflict prevention and collective security. The document reflected proposals in this direction put forward notably by the Czechoslovak Government. As a result, the CSCE set up a permanent Secretariat in Prague, a Centre for Conflict Prevention in Vienna and an Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in Warsaw.¹⁰⁵ In January 1991 CSCE attempts to deal with the situation following the Soviet military intervention in Latvia and Lithuania were blocked by a Soviet veto.¹⁰⁶ Possibly as a reaction, the first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, held in Berlin in June 1991, established an Emergency Meeting Mechanism that would allow the CSCE to discuss a matter following a request by one participating state.¹⁰⁷ Hungary welcomed this decision.¹⁰⁸ The Helsinki conference in 1992 'agreed in principle to the possibility of future CSCE peacekeeping operations', a proposal supported by Hungary.¹⁰⁹

101 Kovrig, 1993, 179

102 Bugajski, 1993, 213

103 Piotr Switalski, 'An Ally for the Central and Eastern European States' in *Transition*, Vol. 1, No. 11, 1995, 26

104 Switalski, 1995, 27

105 Pál Dunay, 'Hungary: defining the boundaries of security' in Cowen Karp (ed.), 1993, 147. Hyde-Price, 1996, 241. Zielonka, 1992, 44-45. Bugajski, 1993, 213. Adrian Hyde-Price, 'The OSCE and European security' in Park & Wyn Rees (eds), 1998, 26

106 Riina Kionka, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 18 January 1991

107 Bugajski, 1993, 216

108 Dunay, 1993, 147

109 *ibid.*, 147. Hyde-Price, 1996, 242

Although Hungary continued to see the CSCE as useful for addressing issues about ethnic minorities (see below), from late 1991 the CSCE began to be perceived as less relevant as regards offering security guarantees. Among the reasons for this changed perception we find CSCE incapacity to intervene in the Baltic Republics following the Soviet veto in early 1991. The incapacity of the CSCE to intervene in regard to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and the conflict in merely added to the scepticism and lack of confidence in this organisation as a serious component of the new European security architecture. Instead, Hungary, together with Czechoslovakia and Poland, began to orient themselves more directly towards NATO membership. It was only this type of collective defence alliance, they believed, which could provide real security guarantees.¹¹⁰

By 1994 it had become clear to most people that the CSCE had lost whatever opportunity it might have had to play a key role in European high politics. In the CSCE Parliamentary assembly, no consensus could be found on the status of national minorities – which among other issues reflected France's failure to recognise its own minorities.¹¹¹ In preparation for the CSCE review conference held in Budapest in the autumn of 1994, Germany and the Netherlands proposed that the conference be reformed and given a primary role in handling disputes within the region before such disputes could be taken to the UN.¹¹² These proposals were reflected in the outcomes of the Budapest conference.¹¹³ At the same time, and despite these efforts, Russia began to lose heart in its own proposals to turn the CSCE into a key institution for European security.¹¹⁴

In the final analysis, the Budapest review conference and the Summit in December 1994 achieved little beyond a change of name for the organisation, from a Conference to an Organisation – the OSCE.¹¹⁵ The Summit was marked by disputes over NATO enlargement, President Yeltsin's warning of a 'Cold Peace', issues related to Bosnia, and Russian peace-keeping operations in Russia's

110 Switalski, 1995, 27. Adrian Hyde-Price, 'Future Security Systems for Europe' in McInnes (ed.), 1992, 49-50. Michael Andersen & Mette Skak, *The New Western Ostpolitik: Challenges, Current State & Issues*, Institute of Political Science, University of Aarhus, Paper for the ECPR Joint Session of Workshops, Leiden, 2-8 April 1993, 1993, 39. Hyde-Price, 1996, 242

111 Michael Mihalka, 'Restructuring European Security' in *Transition*, Vol. 1, No. 11, 1995, 5. Janos Matus, 'Hungary' in Smoke (ed.), 1996, 181-182

112 Mihalka, 1995, 4

113 Switalski, 1995, 28. Richard Smoke, 'Synopsis of arms control agreements' in Smoke (ed.), 1996 (b), 311

114 Mihalka, 1995, 6

115 *ibid.*, 7

'near abroad'.¹¹⁶ It was nevertheless an important meeting for Hungary, which took over the one-year rotating chairmanship. Less than a week after the Summit, Russian troops intervened in Chechnya. As chairman of the OSCE, Hungary decided to play a leading role in handling the Chechen crisis under the direct leadership of László Kovács, the Foreign Minister. Overall, Hungary handled its chairmanship skilfully and managed to draw a clear line between its national interests and its role as chairman.¹¹⁷

In January 1991 the Foreign Ministers of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia met to prepare for a forthcoming Summit to be held in *Visegrád* in Hungary in mid-February.¹¹⁸ Given the sense of a common security threat, *Visegrád* also led to military cooperation between the participating countries based on bilateral agreements signed in the first months of 1991.¹¹⁹ One objective of the *Visegrád* document signed in February was to 'continue tripartite consultations on questions affecting the security of the participating states. [...] The further escalation of the crisis in the Baltic states, the gradual dissolution of the Soviet federation, and the sharpening of the tensions between Yugoslavia's republics all demanded such consultations'.¹²⁰ Following the Prague Summit of *Visegrád* leaders held in May 1992, 'emphasis was placed on future co-operation with and eventual membership of NATO and the WEU' while Antall and Havel 'reiterated that intra-Triangle co-operation does not aim at the formation of a new bloc or alliance'.¹²¹ Eventually, the common approach to EC/EU and NATO membership was undermined by the strategy of 'individualisation' used by both organisations. In the case of NATO, the Clinton visit to Prague in January 1994, where all negotiations took place on a bilateral basis, in practice meant that *Visegrád* cooperation on joining NATO was dead.¹²²

As early as February 1990 Foreign Minister Horn spoke out in favour of Hungary's becoming a neutral state and, on another occasion, mentioned the possibility that Hungary might one day join *NATO*. This met with a cool reaction in Brussels.¹²³ The new Hungarian Government was initially not too explicit about

116 Hyde-Price in Park & Wyn Rees (eds), 1998, 32

117 Switalski, 1995, 28

118 Kun, 1993, 93-94

119 Magarditsch Hatschikjan, 'Foreign Policy Reorientations in Eastern Central Europe' in *Aussenpolitik* (English edition), Vol. 45, No. 1, 1994, 57. Paul Latawski, *The Security Road to Europe: The Visegrad Four*, Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies (RUSI) Whitehall Paper Series 28, London, 1994, 18

120 Kun, 1993, 95-96. Latawski, 1994, 15

121 Dunay, 1993, 152-153

122 Matthew Rhodes, 'Post-Visegrad Cooperation in East Central Europe' in *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1

123 Kun, 1993, 51

its wish to join NATO. With Soviet troops still in the country and Hungary formally a member of the Warsaw Pact, it had to act with caution. However, the Hungarian position was most likely formulated more out of prudence than out of conviction. Unlike the former Charter 77 activists in power in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarians did not advocate the dissolution of NATO.¹²⁴ In July 1990 the Soviet Foreign Minister suggested that the East European countries should participate in future consultations with NATO. Hungary accepted this proposal but it also 'remained firmly opposed to considering any formal association with NATO'.¹²⁵

In May 1991 the Hungarian Defence Minister Lajos Für explained that Hungary was not striving for NATO membership but that it 'wanted to find the organizational forms that would guarantee the security of the region until the emergence of all-European security structures'.¹²⁶ The following month, shortly before the final withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky said that "NATO membership is not on our agenda," but added that some form of relationship with the Western European Union [...] was being sought'.¹²⁷ Simultaneously, further steps were taken to strengthen cooperation. In June 1991 the North Atlantic Council meeting in Copenhagen issued a statement on 'Partnership with the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe'. While this was a further signal of NATO's interest in contacts with Hungary and the other Warsaw Pact countries, it contained neither security guarantees, nor any explicit reference to future membership.¹²⁸ At that stage the Soviet Union was still a powerful state and warned explicitly against NATO expansion.¹²⁹

The summer of 1991 saw a series of events that would impact on Hungary's assessment of the need for NATO membership. Soviet troops withdrew from Hungary, as planned, and the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. However, war also broke out in Yugoslavia, and in August there was a coup attempt in Moscow. At the Cracow Summit of the Visegrád group in October 1991 all leaders spoke out in favour of institutionalised cooperation with NATO 'at a qualitatively higher level', together with security guarantees, for which in particular the war in Yugoslavia had served as a catalyst. From this moment, joining NATO was officially recognised as an objective by all three Visegrád countries. Leaders in the

124 Skak, 1996, 245

125 Kun, 1993, 79

126 *ibid.*, 92

127 *Reuters News Service*, 11 June 1991

128 Hyde-Price, 1996, 245

129 Felkay, 1989, 64

West reacted with caution, and both Manfred Wörner and the US President Bush said that attempts by the Visegrád countries to join NATO were premature.¹³⁰

Prime Minister Antall followed up on the new position when addressing the North Atlantic Council in late October 1991. He explained what he saw as NATO's interest in institutionalising relations with the Visegrád countries and argued in favour of 'special handling' of the three countries by the West when it came to relations with NATO. However, when the NATO leaders met at the Summit in Rome the following month they were not ready to consider any special treatment for the three countries. Instead, they made it clear that they did not think these countries differed 'from the rest of the former Warsaw Pact, including the Soviet Union'.¹³¹ The Rome Council established the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which was based on a proposal put forward by Germany and the US. The NACC was set up as 'a framework for consultations and cooperation on security and related issues where alliance members could offer experience and expertise' including on the issue of democratic concepts of civil-military relations.¹³² The NACC made no differentiation among former Warsaw Pact members. It did not result in much substantive military cooperation and did not discuss enlargement.¹³³

Over the next years, Hungarian efforts to join NATO intensified. There are several reasons for this, one being the perception of increased insecurity following the breakdown of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. A complementary explanation, advanced by Skak, is that NATO became 'a substitute reintegration target [... once] the EC had revealed itself as protectionist and self-contained towards the East in the crisis over the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty'.¹³⁴ In June 1993, in response to Prime Minister Antall, the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said that '[e]ven if Hungary does not become a NATO member in the near future, it should feel its security is provided for'. Hungary responded favourably to NATO requests by cooperating in enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia.¹³⁵ A further step towards membership was taken in January 1994 when the NATO initiative on 'Partnership for Peace' (PfP) was adopted by the NATO Summit in Brussels.

130 Hyde-Price, 1996, 244. Skak, 1996, 245. Kun, 1993, 113-114

131 Kun, 1993, 114

132 Hyde-Price, 1996, 246

133 Andrew Cottey, 'NATO transformed: the Atlantic Alliance in a new era' in Park & Wyn Rees (eds), 1998, 44, 47

134 Skak, 1996, 244

135 *ibid.*, 245

One of the features that made Pfp interesting was its reference to a future NATO expansion, albeit without a specific timetable.¹³⁶ In early January Boross welcomed the Pfp initiative while the Hungarians 'made it clear that they considered the partnership the first step to NATO membership'.¹³⁷ In fact, all countries that had been invited, including Russia, joined or expressed an interest in joining Pfp.¹³⁸

1994 and 1995 saw a major and complex debate about the future of NATO and the question of NATO enlargement. Russia's reactions to enlargement and the implications this would have for Russia's domestic and foreign policy were a major concern. Critical voices also referred to the inadequacy of NATO when it came to addressing the type of non-military security problems faced by Hungary and its neighbours.¹³⁹ Russia explicitly opposed NATO enlargement, and in 1994-95 it tried to revitalise the CSCE/OSCE to present it as an alternative.¹⁴⁰ More importantly, from NATO's point of view, the Alliance was facing tough questions about its relevance given its inability to respond effectively to the Yugoslav conflict. NATO's credibility was only re-established in 1995 after Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia, which led to the Dayton peace agreement.¹⁴¹

Trade and economic policy

Substantial change was required in Hungary's trade and economic policy as the CMEA was dissolved and trade with former CMEA members diminished substantially. The Hungarian Government sought to compensate for this by, on the one hand, promoting regional cooperation – which included the setting up of a Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and, on the other, striving toward EC/EU membership, which included the signature of association agreements. There was an inherent tension between strengthening regional cooperation with former CMEA members and early EU membership; the EU was seen as possibly regarding regional cooperation between these countries as a potential alternative to EU membership. Together with the fact that trade between these countries was relatively insignificant, this eventually made the Hungarian

136 Hyde-Price, 1996, 247. Cottey in Park & Wyn Rees (eds), 1998, 47. Felkay, 1989, 80. Michael Mihalka, 'Squaring the Circle: NATO's Offer to the East' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3 No. 12, 1994, 4
137 Alfred A Reisch, 'Central Europe's Disappointments and Hopes' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 12, 1994 (a), 28

138 Felkay, 1989, 65

139 For some of the arguments in this debate, see Cottey in Park & Wyn Rees (eds), 1998, 47-51, Hyde-Price, 1996, 248-251, and Tomas Niklasson, *NATO Enlargement and Central Europe – From Stable Insecurity to Unstable Security?* Unpublished paper presented at the 'Stable Peace' panel, Second Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Paris, 13-16 September 1995

140 Felkay, 1989, 67

141 Cottey in Park & Wyn Rees (eds), 1998, 45

Government focus almost exclusively on EU membership and improving trade relations with the West.

During the last years of the old regime, Hungary had approached the *EC* to promote cooperation. In September 1988 Hungary signed a ten-year trade and commercial and economic cooperation agreement with the EC. In July 1989 the G7 Summit in Paris decided that economic support would be provided to Hungary and Poland by the G24 group of OECD countries and that this support should be channelled through the EC. This was the beginning of the so-called PHARE (Poland and Hungary: Assistance for the Restructuring of the Economy) programme, which was later extended to other countries.¹⁴²

It was clear from the very outset that EC membership was a primary foreign policy objective for the Antall Government. In June 1990 Hungary established direct diplomatic ties with the EC with an EC delegation to open in Budapest later that year as well as a Hungarian EC representation in Brussels. Antall hoped to secure associate membership by January 1992 and full EC membership at a later stage.¹⁴³

The EC Summit in Rome in December 1990 made it clear that the accession of East European applicants was not likely before the year 2000. The European Council did, however, authorise the Commission to initiate talks on associate membership agreements, with agricultural exports likely to be the most difficult negotiation issue.¹⁴⁴ From a Hungarian perspective, negotiations were slow. Worried by the coup attempt in Moscow in August 1991, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia urged the EC to speed up negotiations. The request was initially turned down because of a French veto concerning quotas for East European exports of meat, but a solution was found in October and the negotiation process could be accelerated. In December 1991 the EC initialled an association agreement that gave the three countries 10 years to open their markets to West European goods. This was the first official indication of their future integration with the EC.¹⁴⁵

During the first year following the signature of the agreement, Hungary managed to increase its exports to the EC by only 10 per cent, whereas EU agricultural exports to Hungary increased by 54 per cent, resulting in a significant Hungarian trade deficit.¹⁴⁶ Compared to the other former CMEA countries,

142 Hyde-Price, 197-198. Flockhart & Wyn Rees, 1998, 68

143 Kun, 1993, 72

144 *ibid.*, 99

145 Jan B de Weydenthal, 'Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland Gain Associate Membership in the EC' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, No. 6, 1992, 24. Kun, 1993, 115-116

146 Skak, 1996, 243

however, Hungary was relatively more successful when it came to redirecting its trade. The EU's share of Hungary's total foreign trade rose from 25 per cent in 1989 to 50 per cent by 1992, while exports to former CMEA countries fell to 23 per cent.¹⁴⁷ The association agreements came into force on 1 February 1994, following ratification by all EC member states. The objectives of the Europe Agreements were to improve access opportunities to EC markets, to prepare the countries for EC membership, and to set up a preferential trade system. The agreements were conditional not only on economic reform but also on political democratisation but were somewhat ambiguous about membership.¹⁴⁸ It should be noted, however, that 'at least initially, the Europe Agreements were not seen by the EU side as preaccession agreements. The preamble [...] only recognized accession as the wish of the associated country, not as an objective of the EU'.¹⁴⁹ Grabbe & Hughes claim that these Agreements could 'counter domestic pressure for protection'. In Hungary, they argue, 'protection was reintroduced in areas where the Europe Agreement imposes little discipline, suggesting that the Europe Agreement is partly responsible for maintaining liberalization in [Central and East European] trade policy'.¹⁵⁰

Meanwhile, the Copenhagen Summit in June 1993 had given a clear and positive signal ('Eastern European countries that so desire shall become members')¹⁵¹ including an agreement on entry criteria, which became virtually irreversible after the Essen Council in December 1994. The Essen meeting also introduced a system for involving Ministers from candidate countries in the Council meetings.¹⁵² On 1 April 1994 a further step was taken when Hungary, together with Poland, applied for membership of the EU, following a Parliamentary vote with 233 MPs for and none against. While the new coalition Government that came into power in 1994 continued to pursue EU (and NATO) membership as foreign policy objectives, the Socialists were slightly less enthusiastic than the Free Democrats and wanted both issues to be settled or ratified through referenda.¹⁵³

147 *ibid.*, 244. Alexis Galinos, 'Central Europe and the EU: Prospects for Closer Integration' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 29, 1994, 22

148 *Relations between Hungary and the European Union*. Fact Sheets on Hungary, No. 4, 1995, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest. Hyde-Price, 1996, 198-199. Flockhart & Wyn Rees, 1998, 68

149 Graham Avery & Fraser Cameron, *The Enlargement of the European Union*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1999, 17

150 Heather Grabbe & Kirsty Hughes, *Enlarging the EU Eastwards*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Pinter, London, 1998, 33

151 Karoly Okolicsany, 'Trade between East Central Europe and the EC Moving Forward' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 35, 1993 (c), 46

152 Hyde-Price, 1996, 200. Flockhart & Wyn Rees, 1998, 69

153 Skak, 1996, 244-247

Trade was also promoted through the *Visegrád Initiative*. The meeting that gave the group its name took place on 15 February 1991 in the historic town of Visegrád north of Budapest, where the three Kings of Poland Hungary and Bohemia had met in 1335 to stand united against the Roman Empire of the German Nation and to agree on a common customs and trade policy.¹⁵⁴ The meeting led to a shift in focus 'from dealing with the East to integrating with the West'¹⁵⁵ and towards further political cooperation.¹⁵⁶ At the meeting, Antall, Havel and Wałęsa signed a Declaration of Cooperation on the Road to European Integration.¹⁵⁷ This declaration emphasized their wish to strengthen their ties with Western Europe through the EC and the Council of Europe.¹⁵⁸

The group was also inspired, or strengthened, by declarations made by EC countries that they regarded regional cooperation within the group as a prerequisite for entering Western organisations.¹⁵⁹ At the meeting, Géza Jeszenszky noted the difference between the Pentagone (which later developed into the CEI) and the "Triangle" 'which was becoming a forum for political coordination'. At the same time, it was important to strike the right balance between demonstrating the capacity to cooperate with the neighbouring countries while avoiding giving the impression that a new bloc was emerging, which could, in fact, slow down Western integration.¹⁶⁰

The Visegrád meeting in February 1991 was followed up by a letter from Béla Kádár, the Hungarian Minister for International Economic Relations, suggesting the establishment of a free-trade zone. Poland was positive whereas Czechoslovakia 'showed some hesitation'.¹⁶¹ Six months later, on 20 August 1991, an emergency meeting was held in Poland, at the initiative of President Wałęsa, in response to the coup attempt in Moscow.¹⁶² On 5-6 October the three leaders met again in Cracow where they 'issued a joint declaration [...] declaring their principal aim as full membership in all the European political, economic, legal, and security systems'.¹⁶³ This 'Cracow Declaration' stated that the three countries

154 Skak, 1991 (a), 285

155 Milada Anna Vachudova, 'The Visegrad Four: No Alternative to Cooperation?' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 34, 27 August 1993, 40

156 Kun, 1993, 95

157 Hyde-Price, 1996, 123

158 Bugajski, 1993, 186

159 Hyde-Price, 1996, 123

160 Kun, 1993, 94-95

161 Karoly Okolicsanyi, 'The Visegrad Triangle's Free-Trade Zone' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 15 January 1993 (a), 19

162 Kun, 1993, 108-109. Latawski, 1994, 19

163 *Reuters News Service*, 6 October 1991. Bugajski, 1993, 186. Kun, 1993, 108-109

aspired to ‘an association with the European Community, extension of relations with the Atlantic Treaty, including their institutionalisation [...] and the West European Union, as well as to [the] strengthening of the CSCE process and its institutions’.¹⁶⁴

In May 1992 a third Summit of the Visegrád Initiative was held in Prague. The meeting focused on closer relations with the EC¹⁶⁵ and on regional economic cooperation. The three countries agreed to ‘apply jointly to become EC members, while membership of NATO and the Western Union were long-term goals’.¹⁶⁶ Hungary welcomed a joint approach to the EC, and Antall found that it was best ‘to sit together in the dentist’s waiting room’.¹⁶⁷

From the Prague Summit onwards, stronger emphasis was also put on reaching a free-trade agreement.¹⁶⁸ In April a Central European Cooperation Committee was set up to ‘eliminate economic and trade barriers between the three countries, and to speed up their entry into the EC’.¹⁶⁹ In the second half of 1992, this Committee decided to opt for a free-trade zone. The analysis at the time was that striving for even closer economic integration could have jeopardised EC/EU membership.¹⁷⁰ Despite Czechoslovakia’s disintegration, Poland and Hungary moved ahead with their plans of establishing a free trade zone. During Polish Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka’s two-day official visit to Budapest in September 1992, she and József Antall agreed that Hungary and Poland should ‘create a bilateral free trade zone, possibly as early as 1 January 1993 [---] Antall also urged the EC to provide a clear outline of the conditions the “triangle” countries would have to fulfill to become full members of that body’.¹⁷¹ In 1992 Hungary’s trade with Poland amounted to US\$800 million and its trade with Czechoslovakia to US\$300 million (roughly equally divided between the Czech and Slovak parts of the country).¹⁷²

The Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) was finally signed in Cracow in December 1992, despite the impending dissolution of Czechoslovakia.¹⁷³ The countries agreed to remove all national barriers and to let trade ‘proceed

164 ‘The Cracow Declaration’, 6 October 1991 in *European Security*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1992, 104 quoted in Latawski, 1994, 16. Hyde-Price, 1996, 124-125

165 Vachudova, 1993, 41

166 *BBC Monitoring Service*, 8 May 1992. Latawski, 1994, 17

167 Reisch, 1992 (b), 32

168 Kun, 1993, 110

169 Edith Oltay, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 21 April 1992

170 Zielonka, 1992, 42-43. Latawski, 1994, 20

171 Louisa Vinton & Karoly Okolicsanyi, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 24 September 1992

172 Alfred Reisch, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 4 March 1993

173 Hyde-Price, 1996, 125-126. Slay, 1993, 85

according to the same regulations prevailing in the European Community', by 2001.¹⁷⁴ The agreement did not, however, cover services, capital or labour.¹⁷⁵ In March 1993 the first tariffs 'were abolished for "non-controversial goods" traded between the Visegrad Group of countries'.¹⁷⁶ Béla Kádár underlined that the agreement would be 'an opportunity to show that Hungary and Slovakia are able to work jointly, thereby contributing to the security and political stability of East Central Europe'.¹⁷⁷ At a meeting in Prague on 4 February 1994, the Finance Ministers of the Visegrád states 'agreed to speed up by three years the implementation of their Central European Free Trade Agreement'.¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the CEFTA members demonstrated no strong commitment to move ahead. This was partly owing to the fact that their trade with the EU greatly exceeded intra-CEFTA trade. With the exception of Czech-Slovak trade, 'inter-CEFTA trade accounts for less than 10% of the total trade of any member state. By contrast, the EU accounts for half of each CEFTA member's trade'.¹⁷⁹ In 1994 Latawski concluded that CEFTA would become redundant and that it 'is more important for the example of economic cooperation it sets rather than the actual longevity of the agreement'.¹⁸⁰

Soon after the Prague Summit, differences began to emerge between Hungary's wish for a common line vis-à-vis the EC and the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Václav Klaus, who opted for an '*Alleingang*' and who 'rejected the agreement that bound Czechoslovakia to apply for membership together with its Visegrad partners'.¹⁸¹ At the Davos meeting in February 1993, Václav Klaus told journalists that 'while cooperation among the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland makes sense because all these countries are undergoing similar problems, "it would not benefit the rest of the world" if they were to establish a new institution with "buildings, representatives, and secretaries"'.¹⁸² Hungary reacted to such statements by defending a common approach while excluding any further institutionalisation of the Visegrád cooperation.

Before the break-up of Czechoslovakia, Hungary had been the most critical member vis-à-vis a common approach to the EC. Antall often underlined that

174 Charles Trumbull, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 22 December 1992

175 *Heti Világgazdaság – Reuters News Service*, 13 February 1993

176 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, March 1993, 39388

177 Alfred Reisch, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 3 March 1993

178 Jiri Pehe, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 7 February 1994

179 *The Economist*, 16 September 1995

180 Latawski, 1994, 21

181 Vachudova, 1993, 45

182 Jan Obrman, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 1 February 1993

“any action institutionalizing our triangular operation would be a major mistake,” arguing that institutionalization might actually impede integration into Western European political and economic structures. He and his cabinet members had continuously stressed the informal nature of the triangle, frequently describing it as a “political club”.¹⁸³ In January 1993 the Prime Minister’s press office stated that ‘in Budapest, the Visegrad group is considered a loose cooperation framework, which facilitated the conclusion of the associate membership agreement with the EC and contributed to Hungary’s approach to NATO, the Western European Union, and other international organizations’.¹⁸⁴ At the same time, a spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry ‘recalled that the goal of the Visegrad Triangle was to promote the integration of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary into Europe. Herman said that “until now Budapest felt that the [grouping] was a valuable tool [to achieve this goal], but it is now difficult to predict how this cooperation will evolve in the future”’.¹⁸⁵ In general, however, Hungary acted diplomatically and explained away the Czech Prime Minister’s statements as ‘being a matter of emphasis, not of basic change’.¹⁸⁶

National identity

As before, I will limit the question of national identity to the efforts made by the Hungarian Government to protect the interests of the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries – in particular in Romania and (Czecho-)Slovakia.¹⁸⁷ This was a key issue for the Antall-Boross Government, starting with the declaration by Prime Minister Antall in May 1990 that he was ‘in spirit’ the Prime Minister for 15 million Hungarians. To provide an institutional response to this declaration, a Secretariat of Hungarians Abroad was set up under the Prime Minister’s Office.¹⁸⁸

The Hungarian Government sought to promote the interests of Hungarian minorities abroad mainly through the CSCE, the Council of Europe, the Central European Initiative and through direct bilateral contacts with Romania

183 Zoltan Barany, ‘Visegrad Four Contemplate Separate Paths’ in *Transition*, 11 August 1995 (b), 57

184 Vachudova, 1993, 42

185 Edith Oltay, *RFE/RL Newline*, 12 January 1993

186 Vachudova, 1993, 42

187 While these relations were often rather conflictual, Ukraine’s approach to handling the Hungarian minority issue was praised in Budapest as a role model. Alfred A Reisch, ‘Hungary’s Foreign Policy toward the East’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 15, 1993 (b), 41-42. Alfred A Reisch, ‘Hungarian-Ukrainian Relations Continue to Develop’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 16, 1993 (c), 23-25

188 Edith Oltay, ‘Minorities as Stumbling Block in Relations with Neighbors’ in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 19, 1992 (c). *Hungarian Minorities in the Carpathian Basin*. Fact Sheets on Hungary, No. 1, 1992, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest

and Slovakia. Hungary tried to promote its cause by pushing the CSCE/OSCE towards tackling minority issues. Hungary was also eager to have the Council of Europe develop a European convention on human rights, which could partly help addressing minority concerns.¹⁸⁹ Hungary also sought to protect the interests of the minorities in Romania and Slovakia through bilateral contacts, although these often backfired, as well as through the regional frameworks for cooperation. It is clear, though, that there was often a tension between Hungary's wish to protect Hungarians abroad and its desire to develop good relations with its neighbours – in particular with Romania and Slovakia. At the same time, closer relations with the EC/EU offered a framework for solving bilateral issues with respect to minority rights.

The 1990 *CSCE* Copenhagen document contained a long section on the rights and protection of minorities, which was a key interest for Hungary. In September 1991 the Conference meeting in Moscow on the Human Dimension endorsed a proposed set of recommendations for protecting the political and cultural rights of ethnic minorities. While the Hungarian delegation would have preferred a stronger wording on this issue,¹⁹⁰ the CSCE was clearly seen as potentially useful. The organisation provided some degree of international recognition of the Hungarian political system and it provided a framework for promoting the protection of Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries. From a Hungarian perspective, the CSCE was also helpful in establishing a clear link between the ethnic minority issue and security.¹⁹¹

In 1992 the CSCE met again in Helsinki where it had all started 17 years earlier. A major focus of this meeting was on conflict prevention and crisis management. Based on a Dutch proposal, actively supported by Hungary, the idea of a High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) was adopted.¹⁹² The former Dutch Foreign Minister, Max van der Stoep, was later appointed to this post.¹⁹³ Despite the lack of progress on a European Charter on Minority Rights, the HCNM did eventually get involved in minority-related issues in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.¹⁹⁴

189 *Hungary's Security Policy in the 1990s*. Fact Sheets on Hungary, No. 1, 1991, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest

190 Kovrig, 1993, 165

191 Switalski, 1995, 28

192 Kovrig, 1993, 168. Switalski, 1995, 28

193 Hyde-Price in Park & Wyn Rees (eds), 1998, 28

194 Alfred A Reisch, 'Slovakia's Minority Policy under International Scrutiny' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 49, 1993 (e), 37 Switalski, 1995, 28. Hyde-Price, 1996, 243

The *Council of Europe* was also seen as useful by Hungary because of its interest in human rights and minority issues. At the Copenhagen Conference of the CSCE in June 1990, the Council's expertise and role complementary to that of the CSCE in this regard was recognised.¹⁹⁵ Although the European Convention on Human Rights does not specifically refer to minorities, many of the individual freedoms covered address common minority concerns. Hungary was active in calling for a European convention on human rights and for developing the Council of Europe's capacity for dealing with such matters.¹⁹⁶

Hungary also tried, largely supported by Italy but against the will of Czechoslovakia, to use the CEI for addressing minority rights. In June 1990, at the CSCE meeting in Copenhagen on Human Rights, the five countries presented a joint twenty-point proposal on the collective rights of minorities.¹⁹⁷ At a Summit held in Venice in August 1990, the participating states pledged in the final declaration to safeguard minority rights. The declaration stated that 'special attention has been attributed to the question of minorities, to the protection of their rights and to the creation of conditions for the preservation of their national ideology'.¹⁹⁸

In 1993 Hungary took over the rotating Presidency of the CEI. During its Presidency the CEI continued to address minority rights. Meanwhile, Slovakia and the Czech Republic argued that the CEI was not the right forum and that this issue should be referred to the Council of Europe or to the OSCE.¹⁹⁹ Finally, the Prime Ministers meeting in Budapest in July 1993 'adopted a watered-down proposal' calling for a draft instrument on minority rights.²⁰⁰ At a press conference, Mečiar 'rejected the idea that Hungary should supervise the Hungarian nationalities living in Slovakia'. In his reply, Antall referred to the Council of Europe Declaration from Copenhagen in 1990 'that the matter of nationality and minority rights, just like human rights, cannot be considered only as an internal matter. It is simply not an internal matter, but a general issue'.²⁰¹ In the final document (of a meeting between CEI Foreign Ministers in November 1993), the 'ministers called upon the working group [on minorities] to conclude the formulation of [an instrument for the protection of minority rights in the CEI region] as soon

195 Hyde-Price, 1994, 241

196 Kovrig, 1993, 181-182

197 Hyde-Price, 1996, 111-112

198 *The Times*, 2 August 1990

199 Polish Radio, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 19 July 1993. Hyde-Price, 1996, 114

200 *Reuters News Service*, 17 July 1993. Cf. Sharon Fisher, 'Slovakia's Foreign Policy since Independence' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 49, 1993 (b), 31

201 MTI 17 July 1993, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 19 July 1993

as possible, taking into account the need to strengthen the balance between the role of the state and the rights of persons belonging to national minorities'. They also stated that this instrument would contribute to the activities pursued by the Council of Europe on such matters.²⁰²

In 1994 Italy assumed the Presidency of the CEI. Following months of work, preparatory talks on a document concerning the protection of national minorities, for a meeting of Foreign Ministers in Trieste in early March 1994, reached a standstill. Slovakia and the Czech Republic proposed to postpone the finalisation of the document until the Council of Europe had agreed on a Convention on this issue.²⁰³ Géza Jeszenszky criticised this proposal saying that those who take such a stand 'only hope that the issue will be removed from the agenda'.²⁰⁴ At the CEI meeting of Prime Ministers in Trieste on 16 July 1994, Gyula Horn 'expressed pleasure over an agreement reached by the foreign ministers on a document on protecting ethnic minorities. Hungary presses for acceptance of such a document by November at the latest following coordination with the CSCE and the Council of Europe'.²⁰⁵ In November, at the Turin meeting of CEI Foreign Ministers, Kovács 'noted with satisfaction that at the end of the consultation it would be possible to sign the CEI document on protecting national minorities which, at last, has now been coordinated'. By signing this document, the states recognised 'the right of persons belonging to national minorities to exercise fully their human and basic freedom rights, both individually and jointly with others, without any discrimination'.²⁰⁶

It would be fair to say that the Antall Government gave primacy to protecting the Hungarian minority in *Romania* at the expense of improving bilateral relations between the two countries.²⁰⁷ On 1 June 1990 the 70th anniversary of the Trianon Treaty was commemorated with speeches and demonstrations held in both countries. The newly appointed Prime Minister said that he condemned the Treaty 'historically speaking' but reminded the audience that Hungary was a signatory to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which renounced the violent changing of borders.²⁰⁸ On the same occasion, all the political parties represented in the Hungarian Parliament published a statement that 'the borders of Hungary,

202 MTI 20 November 1993, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 22 November 1993

203 *Reuters News Service*, 4 March 1994

204 MTI, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 8 March 1994

205 MTI 16 July 1994, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 18 July 1994

206 Hungarian Radio, 19 November 1994, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 21 November 1994

207 Kun, 1993, 105

208 *Keesing's Record of World Events*, September 1990, 37743

whether just or unjust in their existing form, [are] realities that determine contemporary European stability' while it also said that they would expect host nations 'to ensure the individual and collective rights of the Hungarians living beyond Hungary's borders'.²⁰⁹ There was little progress on the minority issue, and relations 'also worsened in the economic sphere'.²¹⁰ A speech by Defence Minister Lajos Für (in his capacity as vice chairman of the MDF) in February 1992 in which he talked about 'a Hungarian "language nation" that transcended the country's borders and about Hungary's security interests, which required the protection of the ethnic-Magyar minorities abroad' provoked reactions in neighbouring states.²¹¹ In September 1993, almost four years after the previous official visit to Romania by Gyula Horn, Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky paid an official visit to Romania, but little significant progress was recorded. A few days after the visit, the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee partly managed to persuade Jeszenszky of the utility of Romania's being accepted as member of the Council of Europe; he finally abstained from voting rather than vetoing Romania's (and Slovakia's) admittance to this organisation.²¹²

As with Romania, Hungary's relations with *Czechoslovakia (and later Slovakia)* became heavily influenced by concerns over minority rights for the ethnic Hungarians. A perhaps equally damaging controversy, which had already become an issue during the Communist regimes, was a conflict over the dam project at Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros. In 1977 the two countries (together with Austria) signed an agreement to build a number of dams and hydroelectric power plants on the Danube. In Hungary, concern over the environmental consequences of this huge projects led to the emergence of a protest movement, the Danube Circle, 'which became one of the catalysts for the emergence of a wider "civil society" in Hungary'.²¹³ In January 1990 the Czechoslovak President, Václav Havel, and the Foreign Minister, Jiří Dienstbier, visited Hungary but did not have enough time to discuss these issues in detail with the Németh Government.²¹⁴

In October 1989 Hungary had decided to stop the works on its side of the border where only 10 per cent were finished, whereas the Czechoslovak side had completed 90 per cent of their works.²¹⁵ The conflict over the dam escalated

209 Kun, 1993, 70

210 *ibid.*, 69-70

211 *ibid.*, 106

212 Skak, 1996, 236-7. Dan Ionescu & Alfred A Reisch, 'Still No Breakthrough in Romanian-Hungarian Relations' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 42, 1993, 26 & 28-31

213 Hyde-Price, 1996, 95

214 Kun, 1993, 57

215 Skak, 1996, 241-242

in 1991. In April the Hungarian Parliament asked the Government to start negotiations for cancellation of the 1977 treaty. The Czechoslovak Environment Minister warned that unless the controversy was solved it could lead to armed conflict between the two countries. In March 1992 the Hungarian Parliament presented an ultimatum threatening to abrogate the 1977 treaty unless they stopped working on the dams. Since no solution was found, in May 1992 the Hungarian side unilaterally declared that it was no longer bound by the 1977 treaty.²¹⁶

Nevertheless, Slovakia decided to proceed with the plans and to complete a power station on its side of the border. This, however, would mean diverting the river course, and negotiations reached a deadlock.²¹⁷ Completing the dam had become much more than a question of the supply of energy – important though this may have been. It was also very much a question of national pride and assertiveness for a state about to become independent.²¹⁸ On the Hungarian side, the conflict may also have been influenced by the fact that the project had been launched by the old regime. At an EC-Visegrád Summit in London in October 1992, both sides agreed that the dispute should be referred to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. This finally happened, following some further efforts at persuasion by the EC, in early 1993.²¹⁹ Relations between the two countries improved slightly after the Horn Government had come to power in 1994. In July Horn spoke about solving the conflict without any prejudices while still emphasising that environmental issues must remain decisive. He described a solution to these problems as a step towards an inter-state treaty on which he promised to consult the Hungarian minority in Slovakia before ratification by Hungary.²²⁰

These two conflicts were sharpened as a result of rising Slovak nationalism from 1990 onwards. This later became manifest in the new Constitution – which talked about the Slovak nation rather than about Slovak citizens – as well as in new and discriminatory language and land laws.²²¹ Hungary tried for some time to block Slovakia's entry into the Council of Europe but was finally convinced

216 Hyde-Price, 1996, 95-96. Kun, 1993, 106-107. Karoly Okolicsany, 'Hungary Cancels Treaty on Danube Dam Construction' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 26, 1992 (b), 46

217 Karoly Okolicsany, 'Slovak-Hungarian Tension: Bratislava Diverts the Danube' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 49, 1992 (c), 51. Romsics, 1999, 461-2

218 Sharon Fisher, 'The Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Dam Controversy Continues' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 37, 1993 (a), 7. Hyde-Price, 1996, 96

219 Hyde-Price, 1996, 96-97

220 Skak, 1996, 241-242

221 Hyde-Price, 1996, 94

that it would be better to have Slovakia as a member in order to be able to exert pressure. In June 1993 Slovakia finally joined the organisation after having removed some discriminatory measures.²²² In the election campaign in the spring of 1994, relations with the newly independent Slovakia became a controversial issue. While the Socialists recognised the importance of protecting the Hungarian minorities abroad, they argued that the Antall-Boross Government had used this as 'the sole criterion for dealing with neighbours'. Instead, they argued, 'this foreign policy objective needed to be balanced with two other foreign policy goals: integration in European multilateral organisations, and good relations with Hungary's neighbours'. However, building mutual trust, as the Socialist called for in the election campaign, turned out to be more difficult in practical terms.²²³

Membership of the *EC* was pursued not only as a trade and economic objective. It was also seen as a response to the emerging security vacuum in East-Central Europe following the Soviet troop withdrawal, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the fall of the Soviet Union and the ongoing war in former Yugoslavia. While Hungary saw EC membership as beneficial for its security, the EC was cautious about importing new bilateral conflicts into the family. For this reason, an initiative originally put forward by the French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur in 1993, was launched by the EC in 1994 as the 'Stability Pact'. The initiative focused on the countries that had signed Europe Agreements and requested them to respect 'the maintenance of good neighbourly relations, the settlement of border disputes and the respect for minority rights'.²²⁴ The Pact would be guaranteed by the CSCE and 'represented a major exercise in preventive diplomacy, whereby ethno-national conflicts would be pre-empted by agreements on borders and minority issues'.²²⁵

Autonomy

Under Kádár, the regime largely sacrificed state autonomy for the benefit of regime stability. The question of autonomy took on a quite different character following democratisation and the disengagement that included the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. From now on, it became meaningful to make a distinction between the two issues and regime stability and state autonomy were no longer by necessity conflicting objectives. As discussed

222 *ibid.*, 94-95

223 *ibid.*, 97

224 Flockhart & Wyn Rees, 1998, 68

225 Hyde-Price, 1996, 254

above, to protect the territorial integrity of Hungary and to provide military defence, NATO membership became a major foreign policy objective.

As it turned out, the issues were more complex. Hungary was eager to become a full member of both NATO and the EC/EU. Béla Kádár argued that '[i]n the case of Hungary, economic and military integration are inseparable. Without economic integration, NATO membership itself would not be effective'.²²⁶ By necessity, this would mean that the country would have to give away part of its autonomy in order to gain international recognition for the new political order, access to markets and security guarantees. As Hyde-Price concludes,

'[t]he Visegrad countries will also have to [...] come to terms with the fact that rejoining Europe will require them to surrender some of their hard-won sovereignty and independence to a Union which is less than a federal state but more than an international organisation'.²²⁷

A superficial analysis could lead to the conclusion that this is similar to what Kádár had done when he subordinated the national sovereignty of Hungary by listening closely to Moscow and by being a loyal member of the Warsaw Pact. There is one fundamental difference: a nine-letter word spelled democracy. The decisions to join NATO and the EU, which Hungary eventually did in 1999 and 2004 respectively, were taken by a freely elected Parliament, following open debates and referenda.²²⁸ Furthermore, decision-making within both organisations is unquestionably far more democratic than had been the case within the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA.

Despite this fundamental difference, '(re-)joining Europe' is not necessarily an easy process. Bideleux, quoting Ágh, points to 'the potentially troublesome fact that the states of East-Central Europe will not long have recovered their full national autonomy and sovereignty before they will be expected to start surrendering it again as the price of admission to the EU'.²²⁹ However, Bideleux

226 Béla Kádár, 'Timing Entry into the EU' in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 141, 1996, 50

227 Hyde Price, 1996, 204-205

228 On 16 November 1997 Hungary held a referendum on NATO membership. 85 per cent of those who voted were in favour, with a turnout of 49 per cent of the electorate. The referendum on EU membership was held on 12 April 2003. While close to 84 per cent voted in favour of joining the EU, the turnout was only around 46 per cent. It is also worth noting that the enthusiasm for joining the EU, as measured in opinion polls, shifted significantly during the first years of transition from 45.2 per cent positive (1991) to 33.6 per cent (1996). Attila Ágh, *Democratization and EU Integration: The Accession Capacity of the Hungarian Parliament*, Budapest Papers on Democratic Consolidation, No. 272, 2000, 9

229 Robert Bideleux, "'Europeanisation" and the limits to democratisation in East-Central Europe' in Pridham & Ágh (eds), 2001, 37 (with reference to Attila Ágh, *The Politics of Central Europe*, SAGE, London, 1998, 81)

actually welcomes this process, which implies a 'shift of emphasis, from unfettered sovereignty and democracy to a supranational liberal legal order that drastically curtails national sovereignty and democracy' and describes it as 'the greatest gift that Western Europeans can bestow on their eastern "cousins"'.²³⁰ Miszlivetz also largely welcomes the process but underlines its inherent complexity and contradictions. In 1989, he says, 'East Central Europe fought its revolutions against the Soviet empire and the Yalta system on the basis of national identity and the realization of the total sovereignty of the nation-state' and after the transition 'the vacuum in security and politics began to be filled by nineteenth-century conceptions of sovereignty'.²³¹ However, he argues, 'the Europe that East Central Europeans so desire is already passed. Even if there are remnants of ethnic conflicts, Western Europe has moved beyond the nineteenth-century notion of absolute sovereignty'.²³²

The breakdown of Yugoslavia

The breakdown and bloody dissolution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), with the outbreak of war in the summer of 1991, was a process for which the Hungarian Government was largely unprepared. Finding responses to these events put considerable stress on the Government and they also had implications for the way in which Hungary could pursue its major foreign policy objectives. I will discuss this development by focusing on the Hungarian minorities in FRY, the risk of military spill-over and Hungary's contribution to international peace efforts, economic implications, and the overall impact on stability and the political mood in the region.

The largest Hungarian minority in FRY was to be found in Vojvodina (a semi-autonomous region within Serbia).²³³ Before the war broke out the Hungarian population was estimated at 400,000 people. Of these, 35,000 people (close to 10 per cent) fled to Hungary in the early period of the war. Later on, ethnic Hungarians continued to seek refuge in Hungary as they got involved in ethnic conflicts or were forced to resettle to provide space for Croats resettling into Croatia from Serb-held territories or for Serbs fleeing from Croatian- or Bosnian-

230 Bideleux, 2001, 50

231 Ferenc Miszlivetz, 'The Unfinished Revolutions of 1989: The Decline of the Nation-state' in *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 1991 (d), 791-792

232 *ibid.*, 796

233 For a discussion on how the autonomy of this region changed under Milošević, see Hugh Poulton, 'Rising Ethnic Tension in Vojvodina' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 50, 1992, Stan Markotich, 'Vojvodina: A Potential Powder Keg' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 46, 1993, and Edith Oltay, 'Hungarians under Political Pressure in Vojvodina' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 48, 1993 (b)

held areas.²³⁴ Receiving and caring for these people put additional stress on the already weak Hungarian economy. Hungarian concerns for and statements with respect to the Hungarian minority in Serbia also led to tensions with Belgrade. One example of this was 'Hungarian statements suggesting that the outcome of the civil war might alter the legality of the Treaty of Trianon and that some territorial adjustments could be made in the future'.²³⁵

In the early stages of the war there was also some fear of military spill-over into Hungary. At the political level, Hungary's relations with the Government in Belgrade were tense following a Hungarian arms deal with Croatia. Serbian military aircraft also repeatedly violated Hungary's air space and in October 1991 Serbian bombers attacked two Hungarian villages, presumably by mistake.²³⁶ Following this incident, the two countries 'agreed to create a neutral airspace corridor along their shared border, and to install a hotline between their air defence commands'.²³⁷ The Antall Government managed to keep Hungary out of the war in former Yugoslavia, despite strong support among many Hungarians for Croatia and Slovenia, which led to further tensions in Budapest's relations with Belgrade.²³⁸ Hungary also 'asked for and obtained EC and UN observers to monitor its own borders with Serbia'.²³⁹

Throughout the war Hungary tried to strike a balance between fostering good relations and further integration with the West, including the EU and NATO, and maintaining reasonably good relations with the Government in Belgrade. In October 1992 Hungary allowed AWACS surveillance aircraft from NATO to fly over Hungarian airspace to monitor the non-fly embargo in Bosnia-Herzegovina.²⁴⁰ While NATO welcomed this, a year later Hungary decided not to allow overflight by the same planes when these were involved in operations to strike Serbian positions around Sarajevo. Inside Hungary, this position was criticized as potentially harmful to Hungary's prospects of NATO membership.²⁴¹

The Hungarian economy also fell victim of the breakdown of Yugoslavia, not just because of the influx of refugees but primarily because of the impact of UN

234 Felkay, 1989, 125

235 Kun, 1993, 107-108

236 Hyde-Price, 1996, 229-230

237 *ibid.*, 238

238 Kun, 1993, 107-108

239 Alfred A Reisch, 'Hungary Pursues Integration with the West' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 13, 1993 (a), 34

240 Hyde-Price, 1996, 229-230. Stan Markotich, 'Former Communist States Respond to NATO Ultimatum' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 1994, 8

241 Skak, 1996, 238

economic sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro, given the fact that FRY had been one of Hungary's principal trading partners.²⁴² In 1994 the accumulated economic impact of this trade embargo on Hungary was estimated at US\$1.2 billion.²⁴³ The Antall-Boross Government expressed its scepticism vis-à-vis such sanctions, mainly due to their economic impact on Hungary. In February 1994 'Jeszenszky said his country would be the first to welcome the lifting of sanctions and termed them "bankrupt"' although he also promised that Hungary would not move alone on this.²⁴⁴

Beyond its human, military and economic consequences, the perhaps most dramatic impact of the breakdown of FRY on Hungary was on the international mood and perceptions of the stability and future prospects for this part of the world. Hungarian leaders were clearly worried that the war in former Yugoslavia would 'serve to shy the EC further away from cooperating with post-communist states.'²⁴⁵ Or, as noted by one official in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry: 'The crisis zone – in which our country may be regarded as a secure island – makes foreign observers wonder what security means in insecure surroundings.'²⁴⁶ Less than two years after the fall of the old regimes in Eastern Europe and the lifting of the Iron Curtain, it was clear that the new Europe was not necessarily an altogether peaceful place. This would also have implications for key actors in the West as regards their willingness both to invest in this part of the world and to open their institutions to new members.

Conclusions – Foreign policy disengagement and restructuring 1990-94

*'La politique extérieure des pays en transition de l'Europe centrale et orientale comporte deux tendances principales : l'"européanisation" et la "renationalisation".'*²⁴⁷

In the last part of this chapter, I will analyse FPC during the first years of democracy. *Firstly*, I will analyse these changes with respect to the aspects of FPC discussed in chapter three. *Secondly*, I will discuss links and tensions between

242 Hyde-Price, 1996, 229-230

243 Oltay, 1994 (a), 79

244 Skak, 1996, 237-238

245 Mette Skak, 'Post-Communist Foreign Policies: Initial Observations' in *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1992, 293

246 András Kelemen, 'New Hungarian Foreign Policy' in *The Hungarian Observer*, 5

247 László Poti, 'Les aspirations et dilemmes de la politique hongroise face à la crise yougoslave' in *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 1992, 323

the various foreign policy objectives and change in different areas. *Finally*, I will identify significant promoters of change and key stabilisers, while recognising that the latter concept is probably more difficult to use in periods of rapid and dramatic FPC.

Aspects of foreign policy change 1990-94

This period clearly differed from the Kádár era, with respect to the *degree*, time-frame and scope of change. During the early 1990s, we find that, using Hermann's terminology, FPC was very much about a 'change of international orientation'. If we apply Rosati's concepts, this was a period of 'restructuring', meaning major changes in programme, goals, strategy and/or international orientation.

Concerning the *time-frame*, these changes were 'rapid' rather than 'gradual'. Finally, in terms of the stages of change, we can distinguish two partly overlapping processes, namely one of 'disengagement' with the breaking up of old structures such as the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA, and one of 'restructuring', with the establishment of multi-lateral cooperation in Central Europe and efforts to join Western organisations.

I have already discussed the *scope of change*, with respect to the various policy areas and possible tension between foreign policy objectives. In addition to that, we may conclude that change occurred along all three dimensions identified by Hagan – 'accommodation/confrontation', 'independence/interdependence of action' and 'level of commitment'. Hungary continued to become more accommodation oriented towards the West and to make a radical break leading to real independence from the Soviet Union/Russia. Hungary also made firm commitments to the West, notably by striving towards membership of the major West European and Trans-Atlantic multilateral organisations – the Council of Europe, the EC/EU and NATO.

FPC and tension between foreign policy objectives

Under the Antall-Boross and Horn Governments, foreign policy change occurred in all the five areas introduced in chapter two. There was no immediate correlation between the individual officially declared objectives of foreign policy and specific policy areas, as these objectives and the various strategies used to achieve them responded to needs in several areas.

We can also conclude that there were inherent tensions between some of the objectives. The most obvious tension we have seen relates to the difficulty

in strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation while at the same time protecting the interests of the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries. In an interview in *Die Welt* in August 1993, Antall made the following remark: 'I wish to make it clear that a precondition to establishing good relations with our neighbours is the correct treatment of the local ethnic Hungarian minorities.'²⁴⁸ Though not necessarily contradictory in nature, pursuing these objectives simultaneously proved difficult, which can be attributed both to the tone of some of the messages delivered by Hungarian politicians and to the domestic politics of some of Hungary's neighbours. This in turn, interpreted in the West as a conflict over minorities, was a factor that is likely to have reduced the enthusiasm within the EU and NATO for bringing Hungary on board. Finally, we saw some tension between Hungary's wish to promote regional cooperation and its wish to join the EU and NATO. Whereas lack of regional cooperation could be seen as a lack of preparedness for further integration efforts, there was also a fear that institutionalised integration in the region could be seen as a substitute for security guarantees by NATO or the more attractive internal market of the EU. Inotai argues that some 'Western attitudes [...] proved counterproductive to regional economic relations' partly because they 'were perceived as a protection of Western markets' and because of 'fears of being treated as a bloc'.²⁴⁹

With the transition to democracy, Hungarian foreign policy underwent rapid and major change. The new Government launched a major attempt to challenge and break ('disengage') with some of the fundamental principles underpinning Hungarian foreign policy for the last four decades – the stationing of Soviet troops on Hungarian soil, Hungary's membership of the Warsaw Pact and its membership of the CMEA.

This meant that Hungary had to search for new bearings ('restructure') in foreign policy – including means to fill the security vacuum and to reorient trade following the dissolution of the CMEA. The Antall-Boross Government focused on integration with the West, improving relations with neighbouring countries through multi-lateral cooperation and normalisation of bilateral relations, and protecting the rights of Hungarian minorities in some of these countries – notably Romania and Slovakia.

248 József Antall, 'Hungary Can Assume a Bridgehead Role in the Region. Interview with *Die Welt*, 16 August 1993. Translated and published in *The Hungarian Observer*, 2

249 András Inotai, *On the Way: Hungary and the European Union – Selected Studies*, Belvárosi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1998, 143-144

Hungary's multilateral relations with neighbouring countries in the West should be seen in a long-term perspective that includes the country's aspirations to join NATO and the EU. In addition, Hungary's ability to develop multilateral relations with other former Warsaw Pact members and with Yugoslavia was affected by its concerns for Hungarians in the neighbouring states. In the case of Slovakia, bilateral relations were also influenced by a conflict over the Nagymaros power plant, which would affect the flow of the river Danube. Needless to say, the wars that broke out in Yugoslavia, beginning in 1991, also had a significant impact on these relations. As noted by Moïsi & Rupnik, '*[l]’Europe centrale est prise entre les processus de désintégration à l’Est auquel elle tente d’échapper et le processus d’intégration à l’Ouest de l’Europe dont elle reste pour l’instant exclue*'.²⁵⁰

The focus of multilateral cooperation with former Warsaw Pact countries was primarily on trade, mutual support in building democracy and on preparing for membership of Western organisations.²⁵¹ There was less interest in security and defence issues since these organisations did not provide a credible alternative to NATO membership.²⁵² A multilateral organisation was also less suited to deal with issues of national identity and autonomy. These relations were furthermore influenced by Hungary's ambition to join NATO and the EU and by the way in which such multilateral regional cooperation was perceived (as being perceived...) in the West. Good multilateral relations in the East were a prerequisite for improved relations with the West and for joining the EU or NATO, neither of which wanted to bring new ethnic tension, minority problems or border conflicts into their organisations.

Reactions from the West, urging Hungary and the other countries concerned to cooperate did, at times, contribute to improve relations but when the pressure was too strong, the reaction was sometimes the opposite.²⁵³ In particular, it was important to avoid the impression that multilateral cooperation among these countries could serve as a substitute for joining the West: 'Indeed, a good deal of anxiety has been displayed by the new governments over recreating some new Eastern bloc that would keep apart the two halves of Europe rather than bringing them closer together.'²⁵⁴

250 Moïsi & Rupnik, 1991, 109

251 Hyde-Price, 1996, 134

252 Jahn Otto Johansen, *Hva vil skje med Øst-Europa?*, Den norske atlantehavskomiteé, Det sikkerhetspolitiske bibliotek, No. 3, 1994, 23. Smoke, 1996 (a), 100. Daniel N Nelson, 'Democracy, Markets and Security in Eastern Europe' in *Survival*, No. 2, 1993, 168

253 Mette Skak, 'Entrapment og abandonment i "den nye orden"' in *Nordisk Østforum*, No. 4, 1993, 55

254 Bugajski, 1993, 185

Tension also arose between the wish to develop good bilateral and multilateral relations with neighbouring countries and the wish to protect the interests of Hungarian minorities in those countries. Such tension was reduced under the Horn Government, which 'attached greater significance to improving relations with its neighbours than did its conservative predecessor'.²⁵⁵ This change in priorities, and in 'style and method', while the strategic objectives remained the same, was visible within weeks of the Horn Government's coming to power.²⁵⁶ Romsics argues that this shift was made in order to 'meet the expectations of the Western integrative bodies that Hungary was seeking to join'.²⁵⁷

The competition between the East and Central European countries as to who would join the EU and NATO first may also have complicated relations and the development of multilateral cooperation. Gradually, however, there emerged a recognition that integration with the West would depend on good relations with the neighbours, as early hopes of success in efforts to win privileged treatment by the EU or NATO were abandoned.²⁵⁸

Promoters of change

The promoters of change that stimulated FPC during the early years of democratisation were partly different from those accounting for change during the Socialist era. Domestic promoters of change were clearly stronger than under Kádár. The transition to democracy and the shift in Government is a clear example of 'domestic restructuring' which strongly influenced the course and direction of FPC. The initiative for change came from the new leaders ('leader-driven change') whereas the administration was both a tool for and a hindrance to FPC. Finally, the 'economic conditions' as they became manifest in the economic crisis, rising foreign debt and loss of old markets added to the pressure for change and limited the options available for the new Government in terms of foreign policy in the economic and trade area.

Under external promoters of change, 'change in regional structure', with the re-definition of the scope and borders of West European and Trans-Atlantic organisations, and 'change in global structures', with the end of the Cold War, both provoked and responded to FPC. 'External threats', in terms of the military

255 Hyde-Price, 1996, 132-133

256 Alfred A Reisch, 'The New Hungarian Government's Foreign Policy' in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 33, 1994 (b)

257 Romsics, 1999, 461

258 Józsa, 1994, 24

superiority of the Soviet Union and dependence on new markets and on Western credits, also contributed to FPC while adding a sense of urgency.

Among cognitive and policy-related promoters, we see that the 'previous relationship' with the Soviet Union (perhaps similar to what Holsti referred to as a 'colonial experience') had a strong impact on the definition of Hungary's new foreign policy objectives – both in terms of fundamentally changing the character of that relationship and in terms of developing new ties with the West. 'Attitudes towards other states', in particular Hungary's attitudes towards the West, which had changed gradually and which could now be expressed openly, also contributed to FPC vis-à-vis the West European and Trans-Atlantic organisations. 'Negative feedback' continued to be a major source of change in that the negative experience of being dependent on the Soviet Union – politically, economically and militarily – influenced and contributed to FPC.

Stabilisers

Stabilisers are difficult to use as a concept during a period of drastic FPC.²⁵⁹ On the one hand, we may still have stabilisers that make it difficult to move away from the 'old' policy and that consequently slow down or complicate the disengagement process. Simultaneously, other factors may already act as stabilisers with respect to the 'new' policy that is about to be formulated. It is clear that using the same concept for different factors that affect the process in opposing directions is not ideal, to put it mildly. This is less of a problem when we discuss promoters.

Having pointed out this conceptual problem, I will limit myself to focusing on the first type of stabilisers i.e. those that somehow limit the pressure for change and that stabilise the old policy. This makes sense from a theoretical point of view, since we will then have a concept for factors that go against the promoters of change. It also makes sense from a practical point of view, since it is likely, I would argue, that stabilisers of the new policy develop in parallel with or slightly following the adoption of a new policy, rather than preceding it.

Among the domestic stabilisers of the old policy, 'organisational routine' and a lack of 'resources for foreign policy implementation' are likely to have been the strongest. Specifically, they include established administrative bodies and networks used to deal with e.g. the Warsaw Pact or the CMEA, but not ready to

²⁵⁹ Skak makes a similar observation and argues that, by definition, 'it would seem that postcommunism is devoid of stabilizers'. Mette Skak, *Reemergence of the Left – What Does it Mean for Foreign Policy in East Central Europe?* Paper for IPRA XV General Conference, 1994, 3. Skak, 1996, 23-24

take up the challenge of handling relations with the EC/EU or NATO. The lack of resources relates to financial resources, the lack of military capability, and a lack of experience and knowledge – both in highly specialised fields, such as international trade negotiations, and when it comes to language skills. Initially, ‘administrative resistance’ can also have played a role, but this is likely to have changed over time as various parts of the administration tried to position themselves for new tasks.

Among the external stabilisers, both ‘regional and global structures’ established during the Cold War slowed down the process of FPC. It is easy to forget, when looking back at this process, that those engaged in it did not regard the outcome as given. Questions regarding NATO membership, or the degree to which the Soviet Union would continue to try to influence the former Warsaw Pact members, were still hotly debated. One could probably also argue that the lack of new established structures, as well as attempts to experiment with regional organisations that did not survive for long, slowed down the FPC process.

In terms of cognitive and policy-related stabilisers, ‘concepts and analytical models’ developed during the Cold War still had an impact, which slowed down the FPC process. For example, Hungary had not developed, nor did it have the immediate capacity to do so, its own security strategy or military planning. Developing the capacity and actually carrying out the tasks required some time, which prolonged the period of transition to a new foreign policy.

Conclusions

Conclusions

‘History forgot to end.’¹

Throughout the empirical part of this study, I have drawn conclusions, which I will not repeat here. At the end of chapters four and seven, I made a conclusive assessment about the stabilisation strategies used by the Kádár regime and the democratic Government and the extent to which these had been successful. Chapters five and eight ended with conclusions about the degree, time-frame and scope of FPC during the two periods, as well as the impact made on the process of change by stabilisers and promoters. Lastly, chapter six, while containing no final section explicitly called ‘conclusions’ is in itself structured according to an explanatory framework which allows us to draw conclusions about the democratisation process.

In this final chapter, I will address four issues: *Firstly*, I will make some comparative remarks about stability under Kádár, the democratic Government and during the transition phase. *Secondly*, I will summarise the main differences between FPC under Kádár and post-1990, while also highlighting some aspects of foreign policy continuity. *Thirdly*, I will discuss links between domestic stability strategies and FPC under the two regimes, which is a key aspect of my study, and make some observations about continuity and change from the Kádár regime to the democratic Governments of Hungary in the early 1990s. *Fourthly*, I will make some final observations about the theoretical concepts I have used.

1 László Lengyel, ‘Nineteen-Ninety’ in *Magyarország politikai évkönyve 1991*, Ökonómia alapítvány – Economix Rt., Budapest 1991, 48

Stability in a comparative perspective

In this study, I have analysed stability during three periods: the Socialist regime under János Kádár (1956-88), the period of transition to democracy (1988-90), and the first years of democratic governance (1990-94). Under Socialism, I have argued, the regime did not opt for legitimacy while its search for stability relied on the (potential) use of coercion, to a decreasing extent, and on economic performance, to an increasing extent. Although I do not dismiss Soviet support for the Kádár regime as a key factor in its longevity, I would claim that the Alliance policy and the economic reforms generated some degree of acceptance among large segments of the population, which helped to keep the regime in power. These policies, however, also contained the seeds of the collapse that would follow after Kádár. Unsustainable economic reforms, which were not backed up by political reform, led to an economic crisis that undermined performance as a stabilising strategy. At the same time the Alliance policy, characterised by a fair degree of tolerance vis-à-vis dissenting views, opened up for the emergence of dissidents, samizdat production, opposition movements and, finally, the foundation of political parties – in short, a political alternative.

The brief transition period 1988-90 is also interesting with respect to stability, or rather the lack of it. In chapter six, I analysed the main factors leading to the fall of the Socialist regime. Economic reforms generated pressure for political reform without which, it was argued, the economic reforms would not be successful. At the same time, political reform was seen as a threat both to the regime itself and, possibly, to Moscow. This contradiction – which Brzezinski presented as a dilemma between economic success and political stability – proved insoluble, until there was a radical change in Soviet policy vis-à-vis the East European satellites. By then, opposition to political reform could no longer be accepted as a way of preventing a new Russian intervention. Instead, it was quite obvious that the resistance to change was a concern mainly among those who were eager to stay in power at all cost.

If it is clear why the regime did not pursue political reform, we may still wonder why it did not resort to coercion when under threat, as it had indeed done in the early 1980s. There were a number of contributory factors, including the loss of self-legitimacy, as we discussed in chapter six, and possibly fear of the reaction from its Western creditors and trading partners. It would probably also be justified to refer to the '1956 factor' as something that limited the regime's

freedom of movement. A bit of coercion – yes. Coercion on the massive scale that would have been required to withstand the rising pressure for reform in 1988 onwards – no. There were, as it turned out, limits to the power of an authoritarian regime – not so much in terms of formal authority but with respect to its actual freedom of manoeuvre.

The fact that the transition was essentially a transition among elites is worth repeating. Members of the political, economic and social elites took part, but the bureaucracy and the people at large were largely spectators of the events. The low degree of popular involvement created problems in the first years of democratic rule and may, according to Romsics, help explain the low level of participation in most of the elections in the 1990s.²

Under democracy, the new Government thought of itself as legitimate, which seems to have been accepted by the people at large throughout its mandate. It did not use coercion to stay in power and may not have sufficiently appreciated the extent to which even a legitimate, democratic Government would have to rely on economic performance to maintain public support. As I have said, we can think of the post-1990 democratic Governments in terms the converse of those applying to the pre-1985 Kádár regime: legitimate but not performing. In fact, the economic difficulties of the early 1990s provided a certain degree of continuity from the Socialist period through the transition phase and into the democratic period. As Kornai, himself a macroeconomist, has argued: ‘One need not be a macroeconomist to understand the fundamental relationship between the present-day cutbacks and the previous average living standard’.³

In fact, with respect to economic performance, the democratic Government found itself in the middle of conflicting demands. *Firstly*, it had to come to grips with Hungary’s economic difficulties, in particular its foreign debt – to attract foreign investments and to persuade the IMF and Western creditors to grant new loans. *Secondly*, the new Government was facing high expectations from the people: this was a legitimate Government; democracy was supposed to bring all good things; the Kádár era still persisted, in the form of expectations of the leaders to respond in a paternalistic fashion by providing solutions to all kinds of problems. *Thirdly*, the new regime did not have the benefit of a past record of successful governance or economic achievements. This lack of a reservoir of

2 Romsics, 1999, 442. Cf. Körösiényi, 1991, 102. András Körösiényi, ‘The Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, 1990’ in Bozóki, Körösiényi & Schöpflin (eds), 1992, 75

3 János Kornai, ‘The Social Issue in the Era of Transition: János Kornai in Conversation with Mihály Laki’ in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 141, 1996, 62

legitimacy or a capital of trust, as I suggested in chapter two, did affect the new Government negatively, in the sense that it became particularly dependent on current performance. These various pressures became too much to handle for the Antall-Boross Government, and people in general became discontented about their new leaders' inability to deliver. Objectively speaking, however, these perceptions of weak performance were probably exaggerated due to high expectations after the regime change.⁴

The Socialist regime managed to maintain stability for more than 30 years but ultimately collapsed. Under democracy, by contrast, we already saw a shift in Governments after only four years. However, the political system did not change and was not even seriously threatened by the various challenges discussed in chapter seven. This leads us back to the distinction between regime stability/political stability and the stability of the Government. Under Socialism, it was virtually impossible to distinguish between the Kádár leadership, on the one hand, and the political system as such, on the other. There was no established system for replacing leaders, which ultimately meant that, when the leaders were criticised, their fall would risk bringing with it the collapse of the entire system. In the Hungarian case, this was a two-step process, whereby the replacement of Kádár in 1988 signalled the regime change that was to follow the year after. Under democracy, there are established procedures for replacing the Government. We could say that an authoritarian system is unpredictable in its procedures but predictable in terms of outcomes, whereas democracy is predictable in form but unpredictable with respect to the outcomes: we know that there will be elections but we do not know who will win. When people began to criticise the new leaders appointed in 1990, they were also aware of the fact that they would be able to vote them out in the next elections, without necessarily taking to the streets. Political instability, in the sense of a weak government, did not automatically translate into a crisis for democracy as a political order.

Foreign policy change in a comparative perspective

As we have seen, FPC was a permanent feature of Hungarian foreign policy throughout the period we have studied, although the degree, time-frame and scope of change were far from constant. In chapter five, we analysed FPC under Kádár in some detail. Under the Kádár regime, the gradual change that happened

⁴ Kis, 1991, 6

took place within some relatively clear parameters dictated by perceptions of what Moscow could accept, as an ultimate limit, and the need for economic ties with the West, as an enabling factor. Early attempts to open up for increased Western trade and credits were later followed by change in the area of security policy. This may serve to illustrate the difficulty of containing FPC in one area or, to phrase it differently, the potentially contagious nature of FPC, from less to more sensitive policy areas.

Change was much more drastic during the transition period and during the first years of democratic rule, as we discussed in chapter eight. There was now a switch in focus from East to West with a new emphasis on Western integration, but also on relations with neighbouring countries and concern about Hungarian minorities abroad. This was also a period when the set parameters were changing, which made the navigation process rather difficult to handle for those who were in command. The tone and style in which FPC was carried out also changed. During the Kádár era, FPC largely took place in silence without any loud declarations. What counted was what you could get away with doing, not what you said you were going to do. Under democracy, FPC happened in the context of an open debate and was made public through official declarations. Foreign policy was one of the arenas where politicians did their best to win popularity although there was a high degree of consensus and, as in most countries, the man in the street took less interest in foreign policy than in domestic affairs.

I have argued that, under Socialism, FPC was influenced both by the regime's search for domestic political stability and by external events that called for a response. We saw, for example, that changes in foreign trade and economic policy between 1963 and 1974 followed on from Kádár's new strategy to maintain political stability, whereas Hungary launched its small-state doctrine, largely in response to the deterioration in superpower relations in the early 1980s. I would argue that this continued to be the case under democracy, when for example membership of the Council of Europe was seen as useful to support the democratisation process at home whereas NATO membership was largely dictated by concerns over what was going on in the Soviet Union/Russia and, to some degree, in the Balkans.

It is more of a challenge to assess the extent to which there was continuity between foreign policy under the Socialist regime and foreign policy under democracy. It would obviously be difficult to conceal the fact that there was a rupture in some aspects. The Soviet troop withdrawal and the dissolution of the

CMEA and the Warsaw Pact clearly limited Moscow's opportunities for directly influencing Hungarian (foreign) policy. Likewise, it would be hard to assert that application for membership of the EU and NATO did not constitute major change. Yet, from the perspective I have applied in this study, one could argue that the change that happened in 1989 and the following years was partly more of an acceleration of existing trends than a change of course. During 25 years, the Kádár regime had quietly done what it could to improve its relations with the West. It had reoriented part of its trade and had become heavily dependent on Western credits. It had also demonstrated an interest in cross-border cooperation with countries like Austria and Italy, had opened up its borders to the West and had declared that small countries had common interests, regardless of their political systems. With respect to Hungary's relations with the East, there were certainly many Hungarians, most likely a clear majority, who would have liked to limit Moscow's influence under Kádár. However, the regime was greatly dependent on support from Moscow; hence, it would be difficult to argue that there was a conscious attempt made by Kádár to lessen his dependence on Moscow. To conclude, the post-1989 sea-change in Hungarian foreign policy was linked primarily to breaking with Moscow, which had not been on the official agenda since November 1956, and not to '(re)turning to Europe' which had in practice been a key feature of Hungary's foreign policy since the early 1960s.

To some extent, continuity was also ensured by some more fundamental constraints which did not change 'just' because there was a shift in the political system or the Cold War came to an end. Hungary remained a small power, strategically located in the centre of Europe. It continued to be highly dependent on its environment with respect to raw materials, investment, credits and trade. Likewise, it remained too small to be able to guarantee its own security in military terms. Finally, it also quickly came to realise that in the globalised Europe of the 1990s state sovereignty had become less of an absolute value:

'[W]hile visions of the small, sovereign states helped East Central Europe to break away from their peripheral dependence on the Soviet Union, once released these conceptions could only impede their participation in those processes necessitated by West European integration'.⁵

5 Miszlivetz, 1991 (d), 798

Links between the search for regime stability and foreign policy change

‘Initially it seemed that constructing a working model would be nearly impossible. None of the designs at the time could solve the complex interaction of the elements.’
– On the creation of Rubik’s cube, also referred to as the Hungarian cube

In chapter two, I specified five assumptions, drawn from the literature, which I thought could be useful for exploring links between domestic and foreign policy. It is now time to come back to these to see what they have to offer for our analysis of the Hungarian case.

My *first* assumption was that political leaders hold a central position in that they have to think and act at two levels simultaneously. As I have said, however, their perceived and effective degree of control is likely to be higher in the domestic area. Although I would not claim to be able to generalise on this issue from the Hungarian case, I have been able to show that building on this assumption when studying domestic, or foreign, policy may draw our attention to aspects or issues that we would not have seen if we had focused solely on one of the areas. I will come back to this point towards the end of this chapter.

My *second* assumption was that domestic and international policy outcomes are mutually affected by what happens at the two levels, and that neither of the two levels takes precedence over the other. Well before 1989, in the 1970s and the 1980s, we can observe a complex relationship between domestic stability and foreign policy change. Kádár’s quest for political stability called for economic reforms, which required a change in foreign orientation. In the 1980s, and even more so after 1985, however, it is clear that Hungarian foreign policy became more independent of Moscow.⁶ Despite, or partly due to, the economic crisis Hungary continued its efforts to maintain and strengthen the ties to the West. This has been well summarised by Izik-Hedri:

Interessanterweise wurde die ungarische Wirtschaftskrise von einer erfolgreichen Außenpolitik begleitet, wie die auf Verwirklichung der Schlussakte von Helsinki gerichteten Maßnahmen, die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zum Westen – auch in der Zeit der wiederentstandenen sowjetisch-amerikanischen Spannungen –, das Aufkommen der Nationalitätenfrage in der ungarischen Außenpolitik und nicht zuletzt der Beitritt Budapests zum Internationalen

6 Barany, 1995 (a), 187

*Währungsfonds (IWF) und zur Weltbank sowie das Abkommen mit der Europäischen Gemeinschaft dokumentieren.*⁷

The makers of Hungarian foreign policy based their initiatives on 'common European interests', 'small-state interests' and the CSCE process in advocating détente, a continued East-West dialogue and international protection of collective minority rights. Hungary's awareness of being a small state dependent on the world market was also integrated with theoretical insights about interdependence, security, integration and the connection between domestic and international security.⁸ Interestingly enough, this greater assertiveness in foreign policy emerged roughly at the same time as the Kádár regime stepped up the use of coercion against dissidents inside Hungary. Perhaps contrary to what one might have expected, the regime seems to have come to the conclusion that Moscow would be more concerned about domestic tolerance going too far than about changes in the foreign policy doctrine.⁹ While Hungary was becoming more independent vis-à-vis Moscow it was nevertheless losing sovereignty in foreign affairs in relation to the West, not least because of its rapidly growing foreign debt:

'The regularisation of relations with the leaders of the West coincided with the period when Hungary's economic problems were becoming acute and living standards were beginning to slip. --- Not surprisingly, the party propaganda machine attempted to switch the focus of attention away from seeking, as hitherto, to legitimise the régime, and Kádár in person, through the constant rise in living standards but towards his increasing recognition abroad. The trick worked for a few years.'¹⁰

Under democracy, we have seen what might be considered a paradoxical situation. Once Hungary, after more than 40 years, got the opportunity to re-establish national sovereignty and independence, it immediately opted for integration into Western organisations, notably the EU, in an effort to gain international recognition, promote the economy and anchor the democratic rule firmly in international structures. Again, it is difficult to argue that either the domestic or the external arena would take precedence over the other.

A *third* assumption was that, facing pressure for adaptation, leaders will want to maximise their benefits while maintaining a maximum degree of autonomy.

7 Izik-Hedri, 1990, 455

8 Skak, 1991 (a), 283

9 Cf. Lomax, 1984, 100-101

10 Romsics, 1999, 411-412

Although intuitively one would expect this to be the case, ‘maximising benefits’ and ‘maximum degree of autonomy’ are concepts that are difficult to operationalise in the analysis. Kádár tried to balance the pressure to be a loyal member of the Eastern bloc, while at the same time trying to retain a certain degree of autonomy, although mostly defined as autonomy for the regime rather than for Hungary as such. We have seen that the Kádár regime mainly followed a policy of acquiescence. Acquiescence, as defined by Petersen, ‘presupposes a limited degree of influence capability and a great dose of stress sensitivity. [...] Acquiescent insiders will typically be small and comparatively poor member states without political or economic clout, and furthermore countries who are essentially dependent on the Union’. Gradually, however, Kádár tried to move towards a policy of balance which, again according to Petersen’s definition, is ‘a policy of give-and-take, of accepting the conditions of interdependence and trying to exploit them to further national interests’.¹¹

As previously stated, the idea that Kádár remained completely loyal to the Soviet Union in foreign policy throughout his years as a leader is an over-simplification as, I hope, I have been able to demonstrate. A more accurate description is perhaps offered by Gati who compares Kádár’s relations with the Soviet Union to the Horthy regime’s relations with Nazi Germany during the end of the Second World War:

‘Even as Hungarians fought and died for the Third Reich during World War II, Horthy – and particularly his prime minister, Miklós Kállay – tried to keep the door open to the Western allies, Great Britain and the United States. Kállay’s diplomatic stance became known as *hintapolitika*, literally “seesaw policy,” meaning a small state’s maneuvers to gain a measure of independence under the shadow of a dominant great power.’¹²

In the early years of the Kádár regime, Hungary’s foreign policy was very much based on the Soviet *de facto* veto right over Hungarian foreign policy. This right was based on the fact that the Hungarian political leadership was dependent on Soviet political support for its own survival. Additional reasons were Hungary’s economic dependence on cheap energy supplies and export markets for low quality products and Soviet military power and presence on Hungarian soil. Thus, for the Hungarian leaders to question the Soviet Union’s right to make its voice heard in

11 Petersen, 1998, 43-45

12 Gati, 1986 (a), 169-170

Hungarian foreign policy matters would not only have been dangerous; it would have amounted to a kind of political suicide.

The validity of this assumption is more difficult to demonstrate in the post-Socialist period. We have seen that the newly elected leaders, and large parts of the population, were willing to join NATO and the EU, which clearly meant giving up part of the newly won independence. Perhaps the solution to this apparent paradox lies in the fact that Hungary wanted to 'return to Europe' and that by giving up some of its formal sovereignty it hoped to regain parts of its lost identity.

This brings me to my *fourth* initial assumption, namely that strategies of political leaders will be based on (their perceptions of) the international position of the state as well as its domestic strength and cohesion. By way of comparison, we may regard the Hungarian and Romanian regimes in the 1970s and the early 1980s as two extremes in their choice of domestic and foreign political strategies. In exchange for showing general loyalty to the Soviet Union in foreign affairs, Kádár was allowed to experiment with economic, and some political, reforms at home. Schöpflin (1981) concluded that 'Hungary has bartered away its independence in foreign affairs in exchange for the Soviet Union's benevolent acceptance of relative relaxation at home, of not insisting on an excessively strict interpretation of Marxism-Leninism'. The price paid by the Hungarians contributed to regime stability in the short run. For the Soviet Union the benefits from accepting reforms were stability and peace in this Central European satellite.

Hungarians did not forget to demonstrate that Ceaușescu's 'independent' foreign policy hardly put the Romanians in a better position.¹³ In contrast to Kádár, the Romanian leader opted for 'a stance of unpopular domestic Stalinism characterized by repression, austerity, hyper-investment, and insistence on systemic legitimation, balanced by truculent nationalism and external defiance of the Soviet Union.'¹⁴ For the greater part of Kádár's rule it is not hard to tell which policy style was responded to most favourably through Western foreign policy although, belatedly, this began to change in the last years of the 1980s.¹⁵

Under democracy, the first democratically elected leaders still based their foreign policy strategies on the perceived place of Hungary in the international system, taking domestic factors into account. The difference may have been that in the early 1990s it was difficult to say very much with confidence about

13 Schöpflin, 1981, 22. Cf. Volgyes, 1982, 93. Swain, 1991, 129. Fülöp, 1994, 116

14 Rothschild, 1989, 206. Schreiber, 1991, 26

15 Reisch, 1992 (a), 34-35

the structure of the international system, and that the domestic situation was rather unpredictable. What the Hungarian leaders did not forget, however, was that Hungary was a small state, a fact that would not change regardless of the character of the international system. Hungary's new foreign policy was based on this fundamental premise and on the idea that the interests of Hungary, as a small state, would be better protected if it were part of an alliance.

Finally, I assumed that political leaders might be able to use 'synergistic issue linkage' to ensure better outcomes than would have been possible by addressing only one level. In other cases, however, the two-level game presents the political leaders with more constraints than opportunities. The Kádár regime tried to create and maintain political stability through a mixture of external (Soviet) support and domestic strategies. Whereas the first method tended to limit FPC the domestic strategies, and notably the economic reforms, opened up for and later stimulated change in the field of economic and trade policy. The inherent tension between these two strategies for creating regime stability was thus reflected as a 'tug-of-war' between stabilisers and promoters of change – between stability and change in foreign policy.

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, there was a tendency towards change in Kádár's use of stability strategies, in which he increasingly tried to rely on domestic support from the people, and even from the West, partly at the expense of being supported by Moscow. Eventually, however, Hungary's growing dependence on the West also called for changes in security policy and, finally, in the areas of regime stability and state autonomy. Other factors played a more prominent role, however, for Kádár's decision to bring up the question of Hungarian minorities in Romania. Most probably, the main reason was that the Hungarian regime began to fear it would otherwise lose domestic support. Hence, there was a close but complex connection between efforts by the Hungarian regime to create and preserve political stability and its foreign policy on two fronts:

*'Die Anpassung Ungarns an die weltwirtschaftlichen Beziehungen und an die zwangsläufige Blockzugehörigkeit bildete sich zu einem inneren und äußeren Konflikt der ungarischen Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik heraus [---] Er war sogar "dreiseitig" hinsichtlich der Krise der innenpolitischen Entwicklung und führte zur latenten "schleichenden Reorientierung".'*¹⁶

16 Kiss, 1993, 565

It was not only the Hungarian regime that found it difficult to handle the two-level game. Western countries did not always find it easy to time appropriate responses to foreign policy overtures from Budapest, simultaneously taking the domestic situation in Hungary into account. Occasionally, this led to some rather unfortunate policy contradictions:

‘By way of an interesting dialectic, in the post-1974 years when “reform” became increasingly confined to rhetoric but was less evident in a perceptible growth of actual well-being, foreign recognition also rose to prominence among the factors that comprised the domestic legitimacy of the regime.’¹⁷

Kádár’s attempts to balance the influence of Moscow made Hungary more dependent on good relations with the West. This shows how difficult – or even futile – it may be for a small state that is heavily dependent on the outside world to try to (re-)establish and maintain a significant degree of autonomy over its foreign policy. The high degree of interdependence that today links most states makes such attempts unlikely to yield a substantially higher degree of autonomy – except for very limited time periods. Much more likely, the outcome of such efforts will be new dependence, although perhaps on different actors or in a revised form.

In 1988 Kádár stepped down from power although he kept a symbolic post in the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party. This marked the end of a fascinating – at least for those of us who did not have to live through it – period in Hungarian history and the beginning of substantial changes – both domestically and in foreign policy. Romsics tends to see the changes in 1989 as fundamentally generated by external circumstances:

‘Kádár’s step-down from power in 1988 and the fall of the Hungarian Communist régime in 1989 [...] were ultimately due to altered external circumstances. In this case that alteration was a combination of a change in US policies towards the USSR and East Europe and a weakening of the Soviet position.’¹⁸

This, I think, is too much of a simplification. As I have shown, Hungarian foreign policy was far from static under Kádár. As Skak concludes with respect to the new Government that took office in 1990: ‘Hungary’s aspirations for a return to Europe [...] can be traced back to Kadar and the post-Kadar years in particular’

17 Kontler, 2002, 452

18 Romsics, 1999, 413-414

and the minority agenda left ‘the new government with few options other than pursuing its goals all the more vigorously and unambiguously’.¹⁹ However, since 1989 and during the years of democratic transition and consolidation, change has been much more pronounced, as the country has had to adapt to new neighbours and new institutions while being restricted by scarce resources (human, intellectual and financial) for foreign policy making. The first democratic Governments continued to use foreign policy to promote domestic values (economic performance and democracy) while using domestic reform to prepare for joining the EU. As we discussed above, Hungary indeed re-conquered parts of its sovereignty, only to find that it once again ‘had to’ give up substantial parts of it – albeit, this time, voluntarily.

This brings us back to Carlsnaes’s discussion about the dynamic interaction over time between actors and structures. As will be recalled, he argued that foreign policy actions might lead to outcomes that affect what he referred to as the ‘structural and dispositional dimensions’. This is illustrated by the Hungarian case. Over time, the choice of domestic stabilisation strategies under Kádár and the opening up towards the West is likely to have affected Hungarian leaders, not just at the most superficial level of intentional behaviour but even in their outlook on the world. I would also dare to argue that the new people who were brought into the administration under Kádár to implement the new foreign policy, such as Gyula Horn or László Kovács, eventually had an impact on the policy beyond what was foreseen. We have seen that FPC eventually had unforeseen impact not just in the links that were developed between different objectives (such as trade and security) but also long-term by contributing to the democratisation process. Thus, ‘intentional behaviour’ of political leaders had long-term consequences which eventually brought about dramatic changes in the structures in which foreign policy making took place and the definition of foreign policy interests.

Revisiting theory

Finally, I would like to return to the theory I have used in this study to reflect and draw some conclusions. I have used concepts and ideas focusing on three different issues – political stability, foreign policy change (FPC), and links between the domestic and foreign political arena.

To start with political stability, the key concepts I used – stability, legitimacy, performance and coercion – were useful to illustrate the different strategies used

19 Skak, 1996, 229

by the Socialist regime and the democratically appointed Government after 1989. While, as I mentioned in chapter two, it may be difficult to distinguish between legitimacy and performance based stability when a regime performs, the concepts become useful for analysing cases where a regime does not perform but stability is maintained. Self-legitimacy turned out to be a useful concept when we were looking at one of the key factors behind the democratisation process, namely the split within the regime. We also introduced the idea of 'negative legitimacy', which underlines the important fact that people tend to compare a political regime, not necessarily with an abstract ideal, but with what they see as feasible alternatives. The idea of comparison, in fact, probably also underlies the other two central concepts – performance and coercion – so that the carrots (performance) and sticks (coercion) regimes can offer are also compared with what an alternative leader is likely to be able and willing to provide. The importance of alternatives, or perceptions of alternatives, was again underlined when we analysed the democratisation process following Kádár.

A comparison between the Socialist regime and the Antall-Boross Government points to some interesting and, perhaps, surprising differences. Initially, the Antall Government enjoyed high levels of support because it was seen as a legitimate successor to a non-democratic regime. When it failed to perform, however, people still considered it as legitimate but withdrew their support in the elections of 1994. At that point, the nostalgia for the Kádár era – or at least for some of its performance was clearly visible and the Boross coalition lost power. As I have argued, it is only in a democratic system that we can make a meaningful distinction between the stability of the Government (or the decision making group) and the stability of the political system.

It is probably fair to say that foreign policy change (FPC) is the part of the study where I have invested most in discussing theory to develop, or apply, a model. I find the core concepts – promoters and stabilisers – helpful in structuring the analysis. However, for analytical purposes they are not unproblematic. To start with, we saw that, when analysing the dramatic FPC that took place following democratisation, 'stabilisers' were difficult to use as a concept in the analysis. If there is nothing to stabilise, what role would they play?

A more fundamental difficulty is that we sometimes find it difficult to maintain a clear-cut distinction between promoters of change and stabilisers. I mentioned this possibility already in chapter three, and referred to Goldmann, who has made a similar observation. To recall the discussion, Goldmann asked

whether domestic political change should be seen as a promoter of change or as a weakening of a stabiliser. This is clearly a problem when we come to our analysis of post-democratisation FPC. I have also seen that similar 'factors' e.g. the relations between the two superpowers, sometimes contribute to explain stability while, during different time periods, help us understand FPC. One could indeed consider whether the model should be further developed by looking at one rather than two lists of factors to explain FPC. Perhaps, promoters and stabilisers could be seen as similar phenomena that take on different values and, hence, affect foreign policy in opposing directions with respect to stability and change, as suggested by Kleistra & Mayer? A more thorough model for analysing change should also probably consider to what extent stabilisers and promoters really are independent variables vis-à-vis each other and, if they are not, to reflect how they may interact. For example, one could speculate that stabilisers may become stronger, to a certain point, when deployed to 'fend off' promoters of change that are gaining in strength. An even more ambitious objective would be to design a framework that covered both FPC and domestic policy change. Such a model should help us to capture the impact on both of domestic, external and cognitive promoters and stabilisers, if we continue to treat them as separate analytical categories. I am afraid though that such a model, although comprehensive and potentially elegant, would be far too complex to use in empirical research.

Perhaps, the most useful aspect of my model is not the two concepts but the mapping of explanations at three levels (introduced by Goldmann) – domestic, external and cognitive – which help us search for alternative or complementary explanations for FPC? Another value of this model, beyond the question of which concepts we use, lies in the idea that foreign policy stability and FPC are the results of a complex power struggle. There is, however, a clear risk of over-complexity, and I think my model might benefit from further simplification and a reduction in the number of categories used to explain FPC. Despite scope for improvement, I find that the model and the concepts have helped me in the analysis. Finally, any explanatory model that is used to analyse events in the past runs the risk of falling into the trap of determinism. In particular, we may fail to see important factors that were pushing the development in another direction but that were not strong enough and then we take a short cut and assume that everything was pointing in one direction. However, the inventory of explanatory factors used in this study does help us to keep our eyes open and to see trends and factors pushing in a different direction.

Finally, the links between domestic and foreign policy and between stabilisation strategies and foreign policy change are a key theme of my study. Here, I have relied more on a perspective, a way of seeing, than on a strict model. I hope that I have been able to tell an interesting story about how domestic policy and foreign policy interacted in Hungary over a period of 40 years. The character of the political leadership changed, and the global scene underwent significant change. Still, I find that throughout this period, analysing the two-way links between domestic and foreign policy, with the political regime right in the centre, helps us see connections and understand issues in a new light. János Kádár was put in power by a foreign state and was kept in power by a combination of external pressure and domestic performance, combined with the possibility of coercion. Stability based on economic performance called for FPC, which in turn helped political alternatives to develop. Under the democratic Governments, we see again that the domestic political system is likely to be affected by foreign policy, in this case moving towards NATO and EU membership, which in a significant way will influence domestic policy for the foreseeable future.

But do these links exist? Were the politicians aware of them and did they act more or less according to the strategies I have constructed? Or are they simply constructions made by a researcher looking back at behaviour that can be observed? We have seen a few examples in the study where leading politicians have spoken out about links between domestic and foreign policy. We have also seen, and this is perhaps the most striking example, that Hungary pursued a different foreign policy compared to most of the other countries in the Soviet bloc during the Second Cold War in the early 1980s. We could argue with some certainty that this was done taking the domestic arena into account. However, based on isolated statements and this case alone I could not possibly claim to know whether János Kádár or József Antall would have recognised themselves in the story I have been telling. I would argue, though, that bringing such links into the analysis helps us to understand. Considering the two-level game does not necessarily make our research task easier but it opens our minds. However, some readers may find the ‘Hungarian cube’ too complex, too time consuming, or slightly flat in all its three-dimensionality as a tool for analysing politics. They may seek some comfort in the fact that traditional two-dimensional chess is still rightly considered a perfectly decent – and highly sophisticated – game.

Epilogue

Since 1994, when this study ends, Hungary has held two Parliamentary elections, and on both occasions, the Parliamentary majority shifted. In 1998 a coalition Government was formed in which the renamed FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Party, the FKgP and the MDF joined forces under a FIDESZ Prime Minister – Viktor Orbán. The FIDESZ had in the meantime occupied new space within the political spectrum by moving closer to the conservative and nationalist camp. The 2002 elections resulted in another Socialist-Liberal Government (MSzP and SzDSz), initially with Péter Medgyessy as Prime Minister and then, from September 2004, led by Ferenc Gyurcsány, after Medgyessy had lost the support of the SzDSz following a reshuffling of the Government. Beyond this regular change of Governments, the political system itself has not undergone any major changes or been exposed to significant challenges. This being said, participation levels in the elections have remained low. The macro-economic situation is still troubling: unemployment figures are around 7 per cent; the foreign debt/GDP remains at over 60 per cent, and the real budget deficit is likely to be over 8 per cent of GDP. The next Parliamentary elections are expected in April 2006. According to opinion polls in January, the again renamed FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Union and the MSzP together would get close to 90 per cent of the votes, while the MDF and the SZDSZ would get around 3 per cent each, thus not reaching the 5 per cent threshold.

Looking beyond the period studied here, the foreign policy priorities initially formulated under Antall largely stood the test of time. Analysing how foreign policy developed throughout the 1990s, Varga argues that the ‘strategic directions of the foreign policy of the Hungarian state were crucially determined by the program of the first democratic government’.¹ Major developments in foreign policy since 1994 include a marked improvement in Hungary’s relations with its neighbours, expressed e.g. in a bilateral Treaty with Slovakia in 1995 and a bilateral Treaty with Romania in 1996. The main objectives of Western integration have been achieved, with NATO membership in 1999 and accession to the EU in May 2004. Hungary has also managed relatively well in terms of diversifying its foreign trade, and the situation in the neighbouring countries to its south has improved remarkably since the Dayton peace agreement in 1995. Beyond that,

¹ Varga, 2000, 117

the man in the street does not seem to take a keen interest in foreign affairs and cynical remarks can be heard about Hungary receiving instructions, first from Vienna, then from Moscow and now from Brussels.²

This autumn, Hungary will commemorate the uprising in 1956. This brings us back to where we started this study. Fifty years will have passed since Hungarians took to the streets to fight for independence and democracy. After a long detour of thirty years of Kádárism, a stable democracy has now been established. So has national sovereignty although, as we have pointed out, for a small state in today's Europe, it may be necessary to trade off some of this to gain a stronger voice, or at least be part of a mightier choir. Hungary's memberships of the EU and NATO today offer external legitimation for the democratic system, access to a market that provides opportunities for prosperity, and security guarantees. While this does not necessarily correspond to the ideal of unrestricted and full sovereignty, it compares rather favourably, I would argue – both with the previous realities (Soviet occupation, and memberships of the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA) and with the illusory alternative of splendid isolation.

2 *The Financial Times*, 12 December 2005

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