

REMEMBRANCE AND SOLIDARITY

studies

IN 20TH CENTURY EUROPEAN HISTORY

Consequences and Commemorations of 1989 in Central Europe

Human Rights and the Legacies of 1989

Revolution by Song: Choral Singing and Political
Change in Estonia



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Photo on the front cover: Prague protests in November 1989 during the Velvet Revolution © Karel Cudlín

Photo on the back cover: Kitchen for the unemployed in Poznań, 1931

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REMEMBRANCE AND SOLIDARITY
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CONTENTS

Editors' Preface	5
<i>Editors</i>	

ARTICLES

The Consequences of the System Transformation of 1989 in Poland	11
<i>Antoni Dudek</i>	
The Opposition Movement in Slovakia in the Period of Normalisation	41
<i>Beata Katrebova-Blehova</i>	
Passing the Torch, Despite Bananas. The Twentieth-Anniversary Commemorations of 1989 in Central Europe	63
<i>James Krapfl</i>	
The Better We Understand Dictatorship, the Better We Can Shape Democracy – on Dealing with the Heritage of the Ministry for State Security in Germany	103
<i>Roland Jahn</i>	
Regime Change in Hungary	111
<i>Ignác Romsics</i>	
The Two Sides of Regime Change – The Hungarian Experience	141
<i>Bálint Ablonczy</i>	

From Civil Society to Neoliberalism and Armed Intervention?
Human Rights and the Legacies of “1989”
Robert Brier 157

Revolution by Song: Choral Singing
and Political Change in Estonia
Joseph Ellis and Keeley Woo 189

The Bulgarian Round Table and its Contribution
to the Constitution of 1991
Dimitar Ganev 211

The Polish Pro-Independence Diaspora in the West
in the Face of the Political Breakthrough of 1989
Paweł Gotowiecki 221

Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany
and the People’s Republic of Poland in the view of
the Political Changes at the End of the 1980s
Burkhard Olschowsky 243

BOOK REVIEWS

Russian Spies. From Stalin to Putin by Patrick Pesnot
Przemysław Furgacz 269

The Stockholm “Solidarity” Memoirs
Paweł Jaworski 273

CONFERENCE REPORTS

European Year of History. Turning Points in the 20th Century
European History. Europe between War and Peace 1914–2004
Dominik Pick 281

EDITORS' PREFACE

Dear Readers,

It is our great pleasure to present you with the 3rd Special Issue of *Remembrance and Solidarity. Studies in 20th Century European History* journal. It is devoted to the “second” anniversary being celebrated in this “extraordinary year” of European remembrance, which is the 25th anniversary of the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. The careful observer can see that the anniversary referred to above, at least in Western Europe, has been pushed into the background by the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. However, the year of 1989, while symbolizing events less dramatic, bloody and harrowing as those of 1914, would seem to be of similar significance in terms of the periodization of European history. In fact, a number of historians subscribe to the belief articulated by Eric Hobsbawm that 1914 marked the beginning of “the short 20th century”, which symbolically ended in 1989. In light of recent events in the eastern part of Europe, I would like to express my wish that Hobsbawm be proven correct in his belief that “the age of extremes” has come to a close.

In one of his short stories, Mark Twain writes about a painter who put his canvas opposite a mirror, and the artist's cat went and brought his animal friends to see the masterpiece. A donkey, however, says that he did not see anything special in the painter's room apart from... “a handsome and friendly donkey.” A bear, in turn, said that the donkey had lied, and asserted that the apparently beautiful painting shows an ordinary bear. All the other animals went one after another to the painter's room, and all they ever saw was their own reflections for they unintentionally and unknowingly stood between the mirror and the masterpiece. The author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* concluded that “You can find in a text whatever you bring, if you will stand between it and the mirror of your imagination.”

While preparing the current issue of *Remembrance and Solidarity. Studies in 20th Century European History* we were driven by the idea of looking at the year of 1989 from two extreme perspectives: that of a painting and of its reflection in a mirror. We were especially interested in showing this

groundbreaking period by juxtaposing the views presented by two generations: renowned scholars and researchers who witnessed or otherwise took part in the turbulent transformations at one extreme, with the other extreme composed of younger generation who, for natural reasons, could not be fully conscious observers of the Autumn of Nations and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Thus the first five articles represent the voice of the “older generation” (the quotation marks are vital here). They touch upon the heritage of 1989 in individual countries of Central Europe in an attempt to draw comparisons between processes. In these texts you will find an analysis of the influence of the events of 1989 on the political scene and its stability (e.g. the presence of politicians active in 1989 in present-day affairs); the public debate on decommunization after 1989; the contours of the economic transformation; foreign politics (the process of Central Europe’s reorientation towards the West, revisiting the relationship with Russia).

The remaining six articles are the work of younger scholars engaged in a kind of a “dispute with the older generation” (Bálint Ablonczy vs. Ignác Romsics), or who are beginning to explore entirely new areas (Paweł Gotowiecki, Robert Brier).

The first voice of the older generation is the article by the Polish historian Prof. Antoni Dudek, *The Consequences of the System Transformation of 1989 in Poland*. Prof. Dudek’s paper presents a range of attitudes expressed by Polish politicians, historians and the general public towards the events of the year 1989, which in Poland are viewed primarily as the Round Table talks, and refers to public debates concerning decommunization, the direction of economic transformation and the shape of the political system.

The next article in this group is *The Opposition Movement in Slovakia in the Period of Normalisation* by Beata Katrebova-Blehova. The Slovakian historian and political scientist analyzes resistance movements and their ideological premises. She also studies the forms of resistance which made the Czech and Slovak anti-communist movements different from each other. *Passing the Torch, Despite Bananas. The Twentieth-Anniversary Commemorations of 1989 in Central Europe* by the Canadian professor James Krapfl is a major contribution to the discussion of the heritage of 1989. This article

provides an interpretation of various patterns of observance regarding the Autumn of Nations' twentieth anniversary in the political culture of Central European countries. He analyzes individual national meanings of the peaceful revolution of 1989, emphasizing their significance in shaping political awareness.

The Better We Understand Dictatorship, the Better We Can Shape Democracy – on Dealing with the Heritage of the Ministry for State Security in Germany by Roland Jahn is the last voice of the “older generation.” The author, a former East German dissident, was expelled from his country in the 1980s for open criticism of the communist authorities. Since 2011 he has held the office of Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service (Stasi). In his article, Jahn analyses the activities of the Stasi Records Agency and its usefulness in studying the history of the communist dictatorship in East Germany.

The article by Hungarian historian and journalist Bálint Ablonczy focuses on the characteristics of the Hungarian communist regime and the circumstances surrounding the democratic takeover.

Robert Brier, an employee of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, examines the role of respect for human rights as one of the most important drivers of the transformation which eventually led to the demise of communism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Joseph M. Ellis and Keeley Wood of Wingate University, NC (USA) devoted their article to the “revolution by song” in Estonia, analyzing the function of choral singing as a key component of Estonian social capital and as a contribution to the country's liberation from Soviet dominance.

Dimitar Ganev, PhD candidate at Sofia University (Bulgaria) has prepared an article that examines the relatively little-known role and influence of the Bulgarian Round Table on the democratic transition in that country.

Paweł Gotowiecki, a historian and journalist from Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski (central Poland), writes about the complicated relationships between the Polish pro-independence diaspora in the West and the national democratic movement fighting communism in Poland.

EDITORS' PREFACE

Burkhard Olschowsky, a scientific associate in the Federal Institute for Culture and the History of Germans in Eastern Europe in Oldenburg, investigates political relationships between Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany and presents previously unknown facts, drawing mainly on the archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The current volume closes with reviews and a report from the third International Symposium “European Remembrance” held in Prague (Czech Republic) on April 9–11, 2014.

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ARTICLES

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION OF 1989 IN POLAND

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a number of attitudes of Polish politicians, historians and general public towards the events of the year 1989 which in Poland are understood primarily as the Round Table talks, the June parliamentary elections and the formation of the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki. The article also covers the most important disputes which arose in Poland after 1989, concerning the issue of vetting and decommunization; the shape of the political system; the direction of the transformation of the economic system; and the basic directions of foreign policy. According to the author, in spite of the fact that the legacy inherited from the era of communist rule is gradually losing its importance, it still has a significant impact on various spheres of public life in contemporary Poland.

When communist rule collapsed in 1989, Poland differed from the other Soviet Bloc countries in four major respects. First, agriculture had not been collectivized, which meant that over seventy per cent of arable land was privately owned.¹ The second factor was the strong position of the Catholic Church, symbolized by the pontificate of John Paul II and the communist authorities' conciliatory policy towards the clergy throughout the 1980s. The numerical strength of the democratic opposition made for the third distinction. At the end of the 1980s more than 20,000 people were actively involved. The fourth difference was the scale of the economic crisis: it was deeper than in the other Soviet Bloc countries and had been deteriorating steadily since the late 1970s.²

Considering all these factors, it could have been expected that the system transformation would be different than in other countries where the Autumn of Nations resulted in the fall of communist governments. When we look back at these events twenty-five years later, however, it seems that there were more similarities than discrepancies. The latter applies mainly to the first phase of the transformation when, due to the effective tactics of General Wojciech Jaruzelski's ruling party, large-scale civil protests (e.g. massive strikes or street demonstrations) did not occur. The objective of this article is a short analysis of the long-term impact of the events of 1989 on the following spheres: 1) the decommunization and lustration proceedings; 2) the shape of the Polish political system; 3) the structure of the Polish economy; 4) the foreign policy of the Third Republic of Poland. Before discussing these points, let me first outline the public debate on the events of 1989 which is still present in the Polish public sphere.

The Dispute over the Events of 1989

The considerable majority of analyses and assessments of the events of 1989 – which in Poland were identified with three milestones: the Round Table talks, the parliamentary elections of 4 June, and the establishment of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government – can be classified as either affirmative or critical. Obviously, both trends are gradable and vary in many aspects. The common denominator for the affirmative category, however, may be defined as a conviction that the process of democratization, triggered by the Round Table talks, was the optimal solution for a deeply divided society, and, in particular, that it allowed for a bloodless and evolutionary eradication of the dictatorship. As Aleksander Kwaśniewski, a government delegate to the Round Table talks and a future president of Poland, wrote: "The Autumn of Nations began on 6 February, 1989. The Round Table changed more than our country. It was the turning point in the contemporary history of Europe and the world [...]. A new line in political thinking was conceived; a wall of mistrust replaced with dialogue and discussion rather than confrontation; those who had, until recently, been enemies, became political partners. Agreement grew out of the seed of responsibility for Poland. Through this agreement Poland now has every opportunity to develop, to let its citizens enjoy fundamental freedom and better living conditions."³ Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Solidarity delegate and a future prime minister, wrote of the significance of the event in a similar way, though less apologetic in tone: "The Round Table was a compromise, but the compromise which paved the way to the future [...]. One of the elements of the compromise

was accepting joint accountability for the controllable development of the situation [...] assuming joint liability for the future was natural; no signed accords were needed.”⁴

In both these opinions one common element is clearly visible. It could be summarized as the opinion that the communist and the opposition elites, acting out of concern for the future of the nation, reached an agreement that allowed for political and economic evolution. From this perspective, the most striking outcome of the Round Table talks and the subsequent events was not the 200-page-long written covenant, whose provisions were largely never to be implemented, but the creation of a platform for communication and an atmosphere of mutual trust within groups of people from two separate camps: the government and the opposition.⁵ This interpretation of the Round Table and the following events has become predominant in both the post-communist left (embodied mainly by the Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej [Democratic Left Alliance]) and the liberal part of the former Solidarity (originally the Unia Wolności [Freedom Union], now to a considerable degree the Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform]).

The critical group is far more internally diversified than the affirmative one. Some politicians in this camp were ready to accept the Round Table compromise as a reasonable tactical move by the opposition, but rejected the subsequent politics of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government. This government, as well as Lech Walesa's presidency, was only possible because of the shock which the monopolistic ruler, the Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza [Polish United Workers' Party], sustained by losing the 4 June elections. This point of view was expressed by Lech Kaczyński and Jarosław Kaczyński. The former, who participated in all the closed talks in the Ministry of Internal Affairs conference center in Magdalenka, said: “I treated those talks as a chess game, the most appropriate move in the given circumstances. The others perceived them as a fundamental agreement between the two elites; a point of view I reject.” According to Lech Kaczyński, the results of the Round Table talks “could not possibly be seen as a binding agreement. There was no such agreement. This meaning was attributed to the talks *post factum*.”⁶ Thus, the future president of Poland's view was that the Round Table talks had a merely provisional, tactical character, and that after a victorious election the Solidarity camp should have rejected the “spirit of the Round Table” and taken more radical action, later called decommunization. “Decisive moves should have been made,” said Jarosław Kaczyński,

“to delegalize the PZPR and take over the enforcement agencies, arrest the heads of the security service and the PZPR, to seal the archives of the Central Committee [of PZPR], the MSW [Ministry of Internal Affairs] and the MON [Ministry of Defense]. The process of the enfranchisement of the *nomenklatura* should have been stopped at once, and the work of restoring seized property should have been begun.”⁷ This view has become a key element of the political narrative created in 1990s by the PC [Center Agreement], now continued by PiS [Law and Justice].

The radical version of the critical judgment is particularly popular outside of PiS's right-wing circles. Kornel Morawiecki, the leader of *Solidarność Walcząca* [Fighting Solidarity], who opposed the Round Table talks and called for the boycott of the 4 June elections, gave the following assessment of the events as being not fully democratic, in 2009, from a perspective of twenty years: “Now we can see the consequences of the Round Table compromise: unsettled accounts with communism, false authorities, hiding collaborators from justice, plundering public property on the one hand, and the poverty and vegetation of many anti-communist underground resistance fighters on the other. We are starting to realize that the Round Table squandered the great idea of Solidarity. This is true not only in Poland, but in all the post-communist countries that followed in our footsteps, and which eventually found themselves in the reality of an unfair *nomenklatura* capitalism.”⁸ From this perspective, unlike the Kaczyński brothers' account, it was not Mazowiecki's government or Wałęsa's presidency and their negligence that was the source of evil, but the Round Table talks as such. Morawiecki's views won support in some radical right circles. In June 2013, representatives of more than ten right-wing organizations comprising the *Ruch Narodowy* [National Movement] announced in their congress that their objective was to “overthrow the Round Table republic,” which, in their view, was the present political system of the Third Republic of Poland.⁹

It is not particularly difficult to notice that the affirmative and the radically critical theories converge at one point: they both consider the Round Table a kind of founding myth of the Third Republic of Poland. Only moderate critics tend to attach less significance to the talks as such, focusing their charges on the proceedings of the second half of 1989 and the following years, when the three consecutive Solidarity governments (led by Mazowiecki, Bielecki, and Suchocka, respectively) did not trouble themselves with decommunization. In this narrative, President Lech Wałęsa is the locus of

bitter criticism, as the man who overthrew Prime Minister Jan Olszewski's government for his attempt at launching the lustration process.¹⁰

These radical differences among politicians translate into the public perception of the events of 1989. In 2009 and 2010, sociologists of the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) conducted a public opinion survey in which personal assessments of the Round Table talks were probed. The respondents were given three choices, adhering to the three above-described characteristics: affirmative, moderately critical, and radically critical. The survey conducted in 2009 and repeated a year later brought similar findings, which confirmed that the public debates and disputes that accompanied the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the communist rule did not have a substantial impact on the popular perception of the Round Table. The detailed findings of the survey are presented in the grid below:

In your opinion, the way of handling the political transformation in Poland developed during the Round Table talks was:	Respondents' choices	
	Jan 2009	March 2010
	[per cent]	
– the best, the most appropriate for that time and situation	30	31
– It had advantages, but the concessions made to the communist side were too great	37	39
– fundamentally wrong, an unnecessary concession to the communists	8	7
– I don't know	25	22

Source: CBOS, *Polacy o Magdalence, okrągłym stole i poczuciu zdrady* [Poles on Magdalenka, the Round Table, and the Sense of Betrayal], July 2010, p.4.

It is worth mentioning that the great majority of the critical attitudes to the Round Table (visible in the grid) do not translate into equally strong popular support for decommunization. The same survey asked: "Do you think that [the Mazowiecki government] is justly aiming to reconcile the above political divisions and to include all the social groups in building a democracy?"

Fifty-four per cent of the respondents answered “yes,” whereas only twenty-nine per cent supported the view that Mazowiecki’s government “should have striven to settle the accounts with the old system and its people.” The remaining seventeen per cent had no opinion on the matter.¹¹ As such, it is clear that, although most Poles shared a skepticism about the Round Table, they paradoxically approved of the political line developed there.

The extreme interpretations of the events of 1989 presented by politicians have had an impact on both public opinion and the historians. In professional circles there are scholars who have been writing about the transformation of 1989 in an affirmative tone,¹² as well as moderately critical ones.¹³

As the group of professional historians specializing in this problem is relatively small, quantitative analyses are impossible.

By contrast, the radically critical views so strongly represented in political journalism¹⁴ have not been confirmed in any publication complying with scholastic standards.

Decommunization and Lustration

The disputes about the events of 1989 are usually accompanied by discussions on the issues of decommunization and lustration. The term “decommunization” itself is defined in several ways. It is most often understood as a process of dismantling various remnants of the communist system in two categories: 1) reengineering the political system, resulting from the communist party’s loss of monopolistic rule, or the change in the party exercise of power from totalitarian to authoritarian; 2) a change in mental attitude, behavior, and the system of values in individuals and social groups. Globally, two models of decommunization have appeared. The first, observed mainly in China and the post-Soviet states, encompasses changes in the economic system (liberalization of the economy) while the authoritarian rule of the communist party is retained (China, Vietnam) or the power is shifted to elites deriving directly from this party or intelligence services subordinate to the party (Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan).

The second model of decommunization was applied after the fall of communist regimes in Central and Easter Europe in 1989. The model was based on constructing, in each of the countries of the Bloc, a new order based on a liberal-democratic value system. In these countries an economic

transformation consisting in establishing a free market and privatization of its broad definition was accompanied by developing a democratic political structure based on the multi-party system, with the legislative branch the most important power in the tripartite system. In most of the post-communist countries in Europe, a dispute soon appeared as to whether changes in social life, like free elections, establishing free press, enacting a new constitution, and changing the structure of ownership in economy were enough to ensure the genuine decommunization of the state and society.¹⁵

Those who advocated a more profound decommunization called for extending the scope of change to the personal sphere (removing communist officials and secret police officers from most or all civil service positions and posts and enacting the lustration process); the educational sphere (historical politics based on an unequivocal criticism of the communist rule), and the symbolic sphere (changing street, institution, and public facility names in all cases when they were named after communist activists). They argued that otherwise, informal ties connecting former communist apparatchiks would continue to exist, and echoes of communist propaganda would remain strong in the society as a whole.¹⁶

In Poland, the only professional group that actually underwent this kind of verification were officers of the communist security service [Służba Bezpieczeństwa], in 1990. Approximately 14,000 functionaries were verified, of whom more than 10,000 passed. These became the base personnel of the UOP (State Security Agency), while the rest ended up in the police forces, where, as recently as 2005, they still constituted approximately eleven per cent of the command.¹⁷ Since Lech Wałęsa's presidential campaign of 1990 with its "acceleration of change" slogan, the issue of decommunization has recurred, in most cases sparked by right-wing circles, usually together with a call for lustration. In December 1991, representatives of the KPN [Confederation of Independent Poland] proposed a bill to restore independence, which included the verification of judges, prosecutors, and attorneys, as well as the revision and nullification of some legal acts passed under the communist regime. The bill was rejected at the first reading. The draft of the *Ustawa o dekomunizacji życia publicznego w Polsce* [Act on the Decommunization of Public Life in Poland] proposed by some MPs representing AWS [Solidarity Electoral Action] in June 1998 suffered a similar fate. This bill posited, among other things, a ten-year ban from civic functions for the higher officials of the communist state apparatus.¹⁸

In an axiological sense, the breakthrough of 1989 was finally reflected in the preamble to the Constitution of April 2, 1997, which begins with the words, “Having regard for the existence and future of our Homeland, which recovered, in 1989, the chance for a sovereign and democratic determination of its fate [...]”. It is worth mentioning – leaving aside the question if, in 1989, citizens really could determine anything in a fully democratic way – that the Constitution did not break its ties with the legal legacy of the People’s Poland. Even if Article 13 clearly prohibited “political parties and other organizations whose programs are based upon totalitarian methods and the modes of activity of Nazism, fascism and communism [...]”, this had no practical consequences for the decommunization process.¹⁹ After the right wing’s electoral victory in 2005, some ideas to give decommunization a legal framework returned, but more time and effort was devoted to the issue of lustration. The only legislative project that went beyond this problem, and which ultimately turned into an act of Parliament, was the *ustawa dezubekizacyjna* (an act to reduce some of the pension benefits of former members of the Polish State Security Service [popularly known as “ubeks”] between 1944 and 1990).²⁰ In accordance with this act tens of thousands of people had their pensions reduced by approximately thirty per cent.

In the symbolic sphere, decommunization manifests itself in such activities as those of the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [Institute of National Remembrance], whose chairman has been sending notifications to local authorities since 2007, calling their attention to streets, squares etc. named after communist functionaries or commemorating events of the communist era. The final decision to change such names belongs to the local governments, and due to the organizational problems and costs this can entail, it is often opposed, so that a name dating back to the People’s Republic era times remains untouched.²¹

Of all the facets of decommunization, the story of lustration is the most turbulent. The procedure of lustration (or vetting) involves examining the past of all those holding public offices in the light of their possible collaboration with the communist secret service.

The first official lustration initiative took place on 19 July, 1991, when the Senate passed a resolution to vet candidates running in the parliamentary elections to ensure that they had not been communist security agents. This resolution however, was not enacted, and the Minister of the Interior of

the time, Henryk Majewski, stated that lustration “would politically destabilize the state.” The next effort was made on 28 May, 1992, when the Sejm passed a resolution requesting the Minister of Internal Affairs to present information on all state officials, local councilors, judges, prosecutors, and attorneys in law who collaborated with the SB [Security Service] and UB [Security Office]. An attempt to enforce this resolution by Minister Antoni Macierewicz led to a severe political conflict and contributed to the fall of the minority government of Prime Minister Jan Olszewski, which finally happened on the night of 4 July, 1992. On 19 June, 1992 the Constitutional Tribunal declared the resolution unconstitutional, reasoning that exposure of secret collaborators’ names without providing for appellate procedures may lead to cases of infringement of personal interest.

It was not until 1997 that the Sejm of the second term passed the lustration bill. This legal act obliged all persons holding public positions (including MPs, higher civil officials, judges, prosecutors, and the heads of public mass media institutions) to submit declarations concerning their work or service in the security organs of the communist regime. The act stipulated that a confession of collaboration would not bear any legal consequences, only attempts to conceal this fact would result in legal sanctions for those being vetted.

The truthfulness of the declarations was to be verified by a special Lustration Court, and the role of a prosecutor was to be assumed by the Public Interest Ombudsman [Rzecznik Interesu Publicznego], appointed by the First President of the SN [Supreme Court]. Nevertheless, passing the legal act did not start the lustration procedures at once. The new regulations were boycotted by the majority of the judicial circle (more than six thousand members at the time). As such, it was impossible to choose twenty-one judges to sit on the Lustration Court over the following period.

This situation only changed after the next parliamentary elections. In 1998, the Sejm of the third term passed an amendment to the defunct law on lustration by a vote of the AWS-UW coalition. As a result, a department of the Warsaw Appellate Courts was appointed to verify lustration declarations. In October 1998, Adam Strzembosz, the First President of the Supreme Court, nominated Bogusław Nizieński Public Interest Ombudsman, and the lustration started early in 1999. Over the next five years Judge Nizieński’s team checked over 18,000 declarations. During these procedures 741 potential “lustration liars” were identified, but only 153 cases (approximately

twenty per cent) were passed on to the court; for most there was insufficient evidence, apart from operational records, to make a case (the files had been either destroyed or hidden). Of the above-mentioned cases the court declared fewer than one hundred “lustration liars,” with some trials lasting years. The rulings in particular cases gave rise to controversies, but their repercussions were limited by the fact that the defendants requested most trials to be closed.

In the fall of 2001, after the electoral victory of the SLD [Democratic Left Alliance], President Aleksander Kwaśniewski filed an amendment proposal to the lustration law. Part of the proposal was the exclusion of people who had worked for the communist intelligence and counter-intelligence in the Ministry of the Interior and Military Special Service from the lustration process. Adopting this amendment would have put an end to some trials of SLD officials (Józef Oleksy, Marek Wagner, Jerzy Jaskiernia and others), because, in the People’s Republic of Poland, members of PZPR were recruited as secret collaborators mainly via intelligence and counter-intelligence services. But the opposition passed the amendment to the Constitutional Tribunal, which, in a ruling of June 2002, lifted it on procedural grounds. In September the issue of the amendment was back in the Sejm, following a familiar path: in October 2002 the anti-lustration coalition of SLD, UP [Labor Union] and some Samoobrona [Self-defense] deputies passed an amendment which made communist intelligence and counter-intelligence collaborators exempt from lustration and the term “collaboration” defined in a way that was exceptionally favorable for former agents of the SB and the military service. Again the opposition passed it on to the Constitutional Tribunal. In its verdict of May 2003, the Tribunal ruled that exempting the collaborators of the intelligence and counter-intelligence services from lustration proceedings violated the constitutional rule of civic equality under the law.²²

After the electoral victory of the center and right parties in 2005 and under the pressure that resulted when the IPN [National Remembrance Institute] disclosed materials incriminating more public figures (the first famous case concerned a former spokesperson of Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government, Małgorzata Niezabitowska), work commenced on another amendment to the lustration law. This time the new parliamentary majority called for a broadening of the scope of lustration to include more professional groups. In October 2006 the act on the disclosure of information contained Security Service Organ documents collected between 1944–1990, assuming

a considerable extension in the number of civic posts subject to lustration. Very soon President Lech Kaczyński proposed an amendment to the newly enforced law. He claimed that the provisions of the new law did not sufficiently protect the interests of people persecuted by the communist secret police. A new version of the law originated in the Chancellery of the President and was passed in the Sejm in January 2007.²³

This was immediately sent to the Constitutional Tribunal by the SLD deputies. The most controversial part was the IPN's publication of the list of the names of people who had been secret collaborators of the communist security service, and the obligation to submit lustration declarations by people in dozens of public capacities, including journalists, academics, members of boards of public joint-stock companies and banks, members of supervisory boards of these institutions, tax advisors, and sports association authorities. Verification of these declarations was handled by the IPN Biuro Lustracyjne [Vetting Office], replacing the defunct Public Interest Ombudsman; the charges submitted by its prosecutors were to be dealt with in the courts. Compulsory declarations, along with numerous legal flaws in the act, triggered a wave of protests and calls for boycotts.

On 11 May, 2007 the Constitutional Tribunal declared many provisions of this act to be unconstitutional. The most significant consequence of this verdict was to narrow down the list of positions which required lustration declarations to be submitted by those holding or applying for them, and exempting the IPN from having to prepare an online catalog of individual sources of information registered by the communist security service.

It should not be expected, however, that disputes over lustration regulation have been resolved. Nonetheless, since 2007 political tension tied to historians or journalists revealing cases of public figures' collaboration with the SB has eased considerably.²⁴

The Shape of the Political System

The Round Table agreed that two new institutions would be introduced to the Polish political system: the President and the upper chamber of the parliament, the Senate. In the short term, the government's consent to free Senate elections was of fundamental significance. On 4 June, 1989 the Solidarity candidates won by a landslide, taking 99 out of 100 seats in the Senate and all thirty-five per cent of seats in the Sejm, the maximum

they could win. As a result, the election was the turning point in the process of ending communist rule in Poland.²⁵ Looking back on these events twenty-five years later, it seems, however, that far more important for the political system of the Third Republic of Poland was reestablishing the office of President. According to the Round Table agreement, entered into the PRL constitution as early as April 1989, the President was to be elected by the National Assembly, i.e. the combined chambers of the Parliament, for a six-year term. The president was endowed with extensive powers, as the communist authorities meant for him or her to guarantee that overall control of the transformation process would be maintained by the forces in power to date.

Consequently, the president was equipped with a legislative veto (which could be overruled only by a super-majority of two-thirds of the Sejm) and the right to dissolve parliament if the Sejm fails to form the government within three months or to pass a central state budget, a bill, or a resolution that “would prevent the president from executing his or her constitutional rights.” The President’s duties include overseeing the armed forces, presiding over the National Defense Committee, submitting motions to the Sejm to nominate or dismiss the Chairperson of the NBP [the National Bank of Poland], and calling for a state of emergency for a period of up to three months. Its extension would require the approval of the parliament.²⁶

In June 1989, after a crisis of several weeks, the National Assembly elected Wojciech Jaruzelski president, as the only candidate. However, he was chosen by a majority of only one vote, and, because this was an open ballot session, it soon turned out that this was only possible because of the group of more than ten Solidarity deputies who cast void ballots or declined to vote. This diminished Jaruzelski’s political power, which was eventually far more limited than his formal presidential prerogatives. This, combined with the rebellion in the ZSL [United Peasant Party] and the SD [Democratic Party], former PZPR satellites, paved the way for Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government, based on the coalition of these deputies with the parliamentary representation of Solidarity, i.e. OKP [Citizens’ Parliamentary Club].²⁷

The political system that emerged in Poland after two far-reaching amendments to the constitution, made first in April and then in December 1989, displayed – despite the strong formal position of the president as the head of the state – the qualities of a parliamentary cabinet system. As a result

of the December amendment, the ideological preamble was removed, and the article about the leading role of the PZPR, dissolved in January 1990, was replaced with one ensuring freedom for political parties to be created and to function. Articles mentioning socialism and a planned economy were also eliminated.²⁸

An amendment made in September 1990 also bore significant consequences for the budding political mechanisms in Poland. The amendment resulted from a “war at the top,” a conflict within the Solidarity camp.²⁹ The conflict led the camp to splinter into two groups: advocates of a moderate course of change, endorsed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government, and supporters of the Solidarity leader, Lech Wałęsa, who called for accelerating the pace of reform, thus demonstrating his presidential ambitions.

The dispute was not settled until the early presidential election, whose rules were since the previous year. In September 1990 an amendment to the constitution was voted in, introducing direct presidential elections. In this way, a president elected by popular vote of the nation was joined to the parliamentary cabinet model, resulting in numerous clashes between consecutive presidents and prime ministers. In spite of the gradual weakening of the position of President (stipulated first in the “Small Constitution” of 1992 and then in the current Basic Law, enacted in 1997), the manner of choosing someone for the office of President still gives him or her a strong mandate to participate in governing the country, especially in the fields of foreign affairs, defense politics and domestic security. The “broken executive”³⁰ inherited from the first period of the transformation was particularly evident during the stormy cohabitation periods: Lech Wałęsa and Prime Minister Olszewski (1992), President Aleksander Kwaśniewski with Jerzy Buzek’s government (1997–2001), and President Lech Kaczyński with Donald Tusk’s government (2007–2010). It is worth mentioning that bitter arguments could also be observed even when both the president and the prime minister were from the same political camp, as was in the case with Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leszek Miller.³¹

The “war at the top” precipitated the process of numerous parties emerging from the Solidarity camp, which, together with the SdRP [Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland],³² built on the ruins of PZPR, and the PSL [Polish Peasant Party], set up a transformed ZSL [United Peasant Party] and made the framework of the party system. Various political groups emerging

in large numbers in 1989 and 1990 called for legal regulations to normalize the process of how political parties were established and functioned. In July 1990 an act on political parties was passed, giving groups of as few as fifteen people the right to set up a political party. If the activities of a given party strove to violently overthrow the constitutional order of Poland, then the Constitutional Tribunal, acting upon the notification of the Minister of Justice, had the right to declare that party illegal. This law also gave parties the right to run registered trade (in the form of cooperatives or holding company shares), while stating that all party sources of finance should remain open and transparent. Accepting foreign financial and material aid was prohibited.³³ The next act on political parties, still in force today, was passed on 27 June, 1997. Setting up political parties became more difficult, as the application to register a new party had to be signed by 1,000 citizens. As the act demanded the re-registration of all existing parties according to the new law, the number of parties dropped dramatically, from approximately 300 to fewer than a hundred, of which only a dozen or so were really active. The new law introduced a mechanism of limited subsidizing parties and the reimbursement of the costs of electoral campaigns from the central state budget, which was intended to curb corruption.³⁴

The consolidation of the political scene in Poland lasted over ten years and was only finalized in the first decade of the 21st century. In early 1990 the Sejm election statute, which had no electoral threshold, resulted in the fragmentation of the party system. This statute, employed in the first free parliamentary elections (held in October 1991), atomized the political scene. The strongest party – Unia Demokratyczna [Democratic Union], created by Tadeusz Mazowiecki after he had lost the presidential election – received only 12.3 per cent of the votes, which translated into sixty-two seats of a total of 460 in the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament. A close runner-up, the post-communist SLD [Democratic Left Alliance] gained 12.0 per cent and secured sixty seats. Candidates for as many as twenty-four parties won their mandates. In addition, fourteen electoral committees picked up fewer than ten seats. The turnout of 43.2 per cent was nearly twenty per cent less than that of the semi-free elections of 4 June, 1989.³⁵ In the following years this downward tendency stabilized, and now Poland is among the EU countries with the lowest electoral turnout, varying between forty-one and fifty-four per cent in the parliamentary elections, whereas in presidential elections it tends to be somewhat higher, reaching fifty to sixty-eight per cent. The lowest number of eligible voters come to cast their ballots in local elections

(thirty-four to forty-six per cent) and the European Parliament elections (twenty-one to twenty-four per cent).³⁶

Although the next election, in 1993, was held under a modified voting system, with a five per cent threshold for individual parties and eight per cent for coalitions,³⁷ which considerably limited the number of the parties in the Parliament (up to six at the highest) in the following terms, it was not until 2001, with the introduction of a system of financing political parties from the central budget, that the party system finally stabilized.³⁸ As a result, representatives of only four major parties have dominated the Sejm since 2001: SLD, PO [Civic Platform], PiS [Law and Justice], and PSL. Since then, only two parties have left the Parliament, Samoobrona [Self-defense] and Liga Polskich Rodzin [League of Polish Families], and only one managed to pass the threshold: Ruch Palikota [The Palikot Movement].

The very summit of the political elite in contemporary Poland appeared to be far more stable than the party system itself. It may easily be said that the core of this elite was formed between 1989 and 1991. Among the five leaders of the parties which won their seats in the election of 2011, there was only one politician (Janusz Palikot) who had not sat in the first democratically elected parliament (since WWII) twenty years before. The other four had either been PZPR activists before 1989 (Leszek Miller, the SLD leader, and Janusz Piechociński of PSL) or came from the pre-Round-Table democratic opposition (Donald Tusk, leader of PO, and Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of PiS). Of course, in the lower levels of the party and the political hierarchy there was a rapid turnover (especially before 2005), but politicians whose careers in the democratic Poland started with the breakthrough of 1989 still form the majority and hold the most prominent positions in party apparatuses.³⁹

This is why the term “generation of 1989” often crops up in political journalism. Even if there is a degree of exaggeration in this view, it remains unquestionable that one’s assessment of how the liquidation of the communist dictatorship was accomplished is among the most important factors dividing the political scene in Poland.⁴⁰

Economic Transition

Unlike the change in the political system, the Round Table was rather insignificant in economic terms. After a few months the heads of the Solidarity camp realized that they were only fossilizing the inefficient system of the

socialist economy and were helpless to overcome the deep crisis. One of the most prominent symptoms of the crisis was hyperinflation, which reached 639 per cent in 1989. The same year, against a backdrop of a rapidly deteriorating state-owned sector which dominated the economy, there was an explosion of private entrepreneurship. This was possible through acts on “entrepreneurial activities” and “entrepreneurial activities with participation of foreign entities” passed in December 1988, following a legislative initiative of the last communist government, led by Mieczysław Rakowski.⁴¹ This reform package provided ample scope for economic freedom, limiting the reams of obligatory permits and concessions to only eleven branches of economy (mining, arms trade, alcohol production, and a few others). A new law on foreign exchange,⁴² enacted on 15 March, 1989, was also significant, as foreign currency became a commodity; another act (on banking law) allowed for banks to be established by legal and natural persons.⁴³ Legal reforms in economic freedom, together with signs of new economic policy sent by Rakowski’s government, led to considerable growth in the private sector. In the first half of 1989 nearly six thousand commercial law companies were registered, which meant a fourteen-fold rise compared to the end of 1988. Companies also began to emerge in the public sector, and in the first half of 1989 their number doubled to more than two thousand.⁴⁴ A substantial number of these companies became the main medium for the massive flow of national property into the private hands of members of the communist apparatus, a phenomenon later referred to as “the enfranchisement of the *nomenklatura*.”⁴⁵ The transformation from merely administering public property to ownership status should be considered a key factor in the whole process, as it was one of the main catalysts in the deconstruction of the communist regime.

There was a dramatic intensification of the draining of state-owned property after the act of February 24, 1989 was passed on “some conditions of consolidation of the national economy,”⁴⁶ providing for the private use of state-owned property in the form of lease, tenancy, or by making in-kind contributions to mixed-capital companies. Contracts with these companies were signed by directors of state-owned enterprises, who were also partners or shareholders in the same companies. When, at the end of 1989, the General Prosecutor Office, acting on the order of Mazowiecki’s government, examined the scope of the above proceedings, the number of “*nomenklatura* companies” set up by the members of the communist regime apparatus totaled 1,593. Most of these belonged to people in the economic apparatus

(approximately 1,000 directors, managers, and chief accountants and 580 chairpersons of various cooperatives), considerably fewer to functionaries of central and local administration (nine voivods [provincial governors], fifty-seven mayors and heads of lesser units) and to party officials (eighty).⁴⁷ In fact, the number of companies of this kind was much higher, because the above estimate does not include companies in which shares were held by the family members of the *nomenklatura*. It was not until 1990 that regulations prohibited persons occupying higher posts in the state administration from taking up shares in privately-owned companies.

The new economy team, led by Leszek Balcerowicz, Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister, undertook to control the budget deficit in 1989. The interest rates in banks (almost exclusively state-owned at the time) soon rose sharply, which curbed the loss to the state treasury from loans that were granted. Subsidies of meat, bread, and other goods were stopped, and the indexation of wages limited. The price of alcohol and custom taxes were raised, and taxes levied on currency exchange bureaus. At the same time, the basics were developed for a stabilizing package, to be enacted at the beginning of the following year. The premises of this program, announced in October 1989, encompassed three main directions of change: 1) reforming public finance and restoring a balanced budget; 2) introducing free-market mechanisms; 3) changing the economy ownership structure.

The first of these goals was to be achieved primarily by lifting the automatic index adjustment of wages and drastically curbing their growth. In January 1990 a free pay-raise index (defining the rate of pay-raise which was free from a restrictive tax – commonly known as *popiwek*) was set at 0.3 of the price-increase index, and in the following three months, to 0.2. Moreover, the program limited preferential loans and financing the budget deficit by central bank loans, reducing various subsidies and abolishing most tax credits. Prices to remain under government control (e.g. coal, electricity, heating gas, gasoline, rail, and road transport tickets) were drastically raised (by up to 400 per cent). In the long term, three more taxes were introduced: a corporate income tax, VAT, and a personal income tax.⁴⁸

Free-market mechanisms were supposed to start functioning after most prices were freed up, making loan interests more realistic and introducing internal currency exchangeability. The initial fixed rate (an anti-inflation “anchor”) was set at 9,500 old zlotys per one US dollar. Consequently, external

exchangeability was ensured, as well as demonopolization and decentralization of the economy; a stock market was established, and the system of social insurance and the public system were reformed. The structural change in the ownership model was to come through large-scale privatization and by marking out municipal property and lifting limitations in trading land, buildings, and apartments. On December 17, 1989 a package of eleven bills intended to bring about fundamental changes in the Polish economy was presented in the Sejm. Had all the parliamentary procedures been observed, the proceedings on such significant bills would have lasted for months, and the outcome might have been noticeably different from what the initiators had intended. At that moment however, both the parliament and President Jaruzelski demonstrated exceptional unanimity, and by no later than the end of 1989 the new regulations had become law. The final shape of the program was by far more stringent than its original premises. The tightened parameters came from Balcerowicz team's conviction of the necessity of shock therapy and an assumption that only such a radical scheme had a chance to stop the inflation.

The first weeks after new rules of the "economic game" had been introduced showed that the path of reform would be more difficult than had been expected. Admittedly, the zloty/US dollar exchange rate was stabilized, the long lines outside the shops had disappeared, there were more commodities in stock, but the prices were alarming. A new symbol of the free-market economy soon appeared – street trading. With relatively lower margins, this helped to soften somewhat the harsh consequences of the falling living standards. In 1990 real wages dropped by 23.9 per cent compared to the previous year, and overall consumption financed by personal income by 15.5 per cent.⁴⁹ The most severe hardships were felt in the rural areas, as farmers were painfully struck not only by the tightening of the loan policy and the rapid growth of production costs, but also the relaxing of food import strictures. These agricultural problems were aggravated by the domination of pseudo-communal plants in the food processing industry. These factories were unable to function in the new economic reality. It turned out that the deeply fragmented Polish agriculture and farming system, which had avoided collectivization in the communist era, had serious difficulty adjusting to the free market environment, where there was no economic assistance from the state.

The decline in production proved more significant than Balcerowicz's team expected, entailing a higher deficit and unemployment rate. The latter rose

to 12.2 per cent (2.1 million people) by the end of 1991. The deepest slump was observed in transportation, iron and steel production, mining, textiles and the electrical machinery industry. Considering the overwhelming majority of the public sector in the economy, this decline could not possibly be compensated by a dynamic rise in private enterprises, whose production in the first nine months of 1991 alone rose by 20.3 per cent, compared to the analogous period in the previous year.⁵⁰

The recession was primarily an aftermath of the painful process of adjusting state-owned enterprises to the market environment. The sudden drop in trade among the countries of the former Soviet Bloc, especially the Soviet Union itself, also contributed to economic hardships. This, consequently, was caused by both a departure from the transferable ruble as a currency for economic exchange for hard currency settlement, and the mounting economic crisis in the post-communist countries. Exports to the USSR dropped by at least half in 1991, which was impossible to counteract by trading with the EEC countries.

Favorable business conditions returned only at the end of 1992 and the beginning of 1993, and in 1995 a record-breaking GNP growth of seven per cent was observed. In the years to come, mainly because of turbulence in the world markets, the economy of Poland experienced periods of slow-down (2001–2002, 2009, 2012–2013), but in the twenty years since Poland's GNP has never been in decline, which proves the direction taken in the first stage of the transformation was correct.

An important element of the reform was establishing the Warsaw Stock Exchange in 1991. The first headquarters of WSE was also symbolic, as it was located in the former seat of the KC PZPR [Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party]. In 1991 the market capital of all the companies listed on the GPW amounted to 161 million zlotys. The first strong bull market was observed in 1993, followed by a spectacular slump the next year. This, however, did not discourage investors from seeking gains in the Warsaw Stock Exchange. At the end of 2013 there were 449 companies listed on the WSE, whose total market capital amounted to more than 840 billion zlotys.⁵¹

The economic transformation, in which some of the former communist apparatus members managed exceptionally well and profited, led to significant

economic inequality within the society. This stirred a wave of aversion to the market changes, especially privatization, from a large group of the society. Most of the particularly bitter criticism was targeted at Deputy Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz, despite his leaving the government at the end of 1991.⁵² He was accused, primarily, of extreme monetarism, neglecting the social costs of the transformation, but also of some erroneous moves, like a miscalculated zloty-dollar exchange rate that was kept fixed for too long. He was also attacked for his reluctance to explain the sense of the reforms to the society, a policy Balcerowicz himself admitted, arguing that “in Polish conditions, explaining the meaning of the reform would have a marginal rather than fundamental importance.”⁵³

It is worth noting, however, that neither under the post-communist Left governments (1993–1997, 2001–2005), nor the Nationalist Right (2005–2007), were substantial turns in the economic course of action made, whose basics had been developed in 1989–1991. Alternative economic programs devised after 1989, which always featured a return to a greater state role, have never been tried out in practice, due to a lack of political support.

While it may be true that the “Balcerowicz plan” could have been carried out more sparingly toward the society, this issue – especially when pondered against the backdrop of the scale of economic collapse in other post-Soviet countries – is and will remain disputable. It is evident, however, that Balcerowicz’s reform package saved Poland from the disaster of hyperinflation and, more or less smoothly, but definitively and with conviction, introduced the country into a free-market reality. As a result, the fastest progress on the road from a realist socialist system to a Western-style democracy in the first years after 1989 was indeed visible in the economics.

In the twenty-five years since the collapse of communist rule Poland has made a great leap forward. In 2012, the Polish economy occupied twenty-first place in the world and sixth among the EU countries in terms of GNP.⁵⁴ Life expectancy at birth has also increased by nearly ten years. The percentage of students in the younger generation has grown fourfold, the number of citizens choosing foreign countries as their holiday destination has also increased. However, despite a manifold increase in GNP per capita in this period (according to IMF estimations up to \$20,500 in 2012) the level of affluence of Polish society, measured by this factor, puts Poland in forty-seventh place in the world.⁵⁵ Economic inequity is still above the

EU average, and numerous parts of the country (especially in the Eastern provinces) have high unemployment and poverty-stricken areas. A serious stumbling block to the harmonious development of Poland has long been poor power distribution and road infrastructure, as well as a health service plunged into permanent crisis and a rapidly growing public debt, which exceeded PLN 900 billion in 2013.

Reorientation of Foreign Policy

What appeared to be the ultimate challenge to Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government in shaping foreign policy was reengineering relationships with the USSR and the other countries of the Soviet Bloc where the communist regimes collapsed in 1989. An event of great importance for Poland and the rest of Europe was the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the spark that set off the reunification process of the two German states. The decision to coordinate operations to unify Germany was made at the NATO and Warsaw Pact foreign ministers conference in Ottawa in February 1990. The formula adopted there was later known as Two-plus-Four talks, that is, East Germany (GDR) and West Germany, plus the USA, the USSR, Great Britain, and France. The "2+4" conference commenced in Berlin in March 1990 and was held in five rounds. Krzysztof Skubiszewski, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, was present at one of these, held in Paris, devoted to the official recognition of the Oder-Neisse borderline between Poland and Germany by the future united German government. The decision was made that Poland and Germany would enter a border treaty, which took place on 14 November, 1990. The "Two-plus-Four Conference" was concluded on 12 September with the signing of the *Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany*. The treaty provided for the unification of the territories of East Germany, West Germany, and West Berlin, and secured the position of the new state as fully independent and as a new member of NATO. The official reunification took place on 3 October, 1990, which was technically accomplished by the accession of the former GDR, divided into five federal Lands, to the Federal Republic of Germany.⁵⁶

The government of the reunited Germany consented to Soviet troops being based in former GDR territory until the end of 1994, but beginning in 1990 contingents were gradually withdrawn, partly via Poland. The question of a Soviet contingent of 60,000 personnel in Poland was first taken up by Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government as late as the fall of 1990, as, until then, the presence of the Soviet troops was treated as a kind of insurance

against possible problems in negotiating the Polish-German borderline treaty. Polish-Soviet negotiations over withdrawing the contingent from Poland lasted over a year. Facing stiff opposition from the Kremlin, the Polish side threatened to blockade the transport of Soviet soldiers leaving the German territories through Poland as its ultimate argument. The final agreement, resolved at the end of 1991, provided for the last Soviet troops to leave by the end of 1993. Before these talks had ended, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved in Prague on 1 July, 1993, and an agreement disbanding the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance was signed two days earlier in Budapest. At the same conference, a Soviet proposal to establish a new international economic organization was turned down. In August 1991, after the unsuccessful August Coup, organized by a group of communist hard-liners led by Soviet Vice-president Gennady Yanayev, the collapse of the Soviet Union entered its final stage. It eventually ended in December 1991, when, on the ruins of the communist Soviet empire, fifteen new states emerged. Four of the new independent states bordered Poland: Russia, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. In Poland, the fall of the Soviet Union was more than welcome, as expressed by the fact that Poland was the first country in the world to officially recognize Ukrainian independence.⁵⁷

Despite bitter internal conflicts, Poland was dominated by the view that strengthening ties with the West was necessary, though in the years of 1990 and 1991 alternative concepts also arose. By mid-1991 Minister Skubiszewski (in office throughout 1989–1993) stated that Poland was not interested in NATO membership due to “the balance of powers in Poland’s region” and promoted the concept of a new European security system based on the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.⁵⁸ Minister of Defense Piotr Kolodziejczyk went even further, when, in September 1991, he voiced his hopes that in the future NATO would cease to exist.⁵⁹ The Polish government did focus on economic integration with far more determination at the time, as reflected in the signing of the association agreement with the European Economic Community in December 1991. At the same time, Poland strove to develop regional cooperation with Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, which resulted in these countries signing a declaration of cooperation on 15 February, 1991 in Visegrád (Hungary). The Visegrád Group was originally an alliance against the imperialistic policy of the Soviet Union, but after its dissolution the focus changed to promoting the integration of its member-states with the European Union. In the mid-1990s the group found itself in a deep crisis, its activities gradually freezing. The main

reason for this was the attitude of Czech Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus, who took the view that the Group would hinder his country's integration with the EU. The next serious blows to the solidarity of the Group were Poland's and Hungary's formal application for EU membership in April 1994, and the Slovak isolationist policy under Vladimir Meciar's government.⁶⁰

In 1992 the government led by Prime Minister Jan Olszewski, and its successor under Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka, officially declared Poland's readiness to join NATO. A pro-West foreign policy was then continued by the post-communist SLD-PSL coalition in 1993–1997, whose three consecutive governments were active in seeking support for Poland's membership in NATO, and for commencing official talks with Brussels about future accession to the European Union. This meant a fundamental shift in the post-communists' attitude to NATO, for in 1990 the SdRP Supreme Council passed a resolution clearly stating that “[...] in a situation where Europe is divided between military blocs it is unacceptable for NATO to reach as far as Poland's borders, as it is untenable for Poland to relinquish the security guarantees of our membership in the Warsaw Pact. Hence the necessity to keep a strong Polish army and to allow Soviet troops to be temporarily based in Poland, on mutually agreed upon and observed rules.”⁶¹

In February 1994 Poland joined the Partnership for Peace program, proposed by US President Bill Clinton's administration as a kind of interim stage for states aspiring to NATO membership.

After a few years of hesitation, resulting in part from Russian protests, in the mid-1990s the Clinton administration decided to start the process of eastern NATO expansion. In 1997 Russian opposition was finally overcome by signing an agreement on a special relationship between Russia and NATO, and two months later, in Madrid, the leaders of NATO member states made the decision to invite Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to begin accession talks.⁶²

The process of Poland's accession to the alliance was concluded by the Center-Right government with Jerzy Buzek as Prime Minister. In December 1997 the “accession protocol” was signed in Brussels, providing membership for three Central and Eastern European countries. Next came the process of the protocol's acceptance and ratification by the parliaments of all the NATO member states. Apparently, the most important step in the process

was the consent of the United States Senate, expressed by a vote of 80 to 19 (with the formal requirement of a two-thirds supermajority) on 30 April, 1998. This decision was preceded by a months-long campaign led by Polish communities in the USA, which contributed to overcoming the reluctance expressed by some influential American politicians, who were afraid of provoking Moscow. Certain Republican circles were also unwilling to subscribe to an initiative undertaken by Bill Clinton's Democrat administration.⁶³

On 12 March, 1999 in Independence, Missouri, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bronisław Geremek, handed to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright the act of Polish accession to the North Atlantic Treaty. Negotiations on Poland's membership in the European Union, commenced in November 1998, proved much more difficult. Jerzy Buzek's government announced that Poland would be ready to become an EU member on 1 January, 2003, but objections of the current member states, who feared an influx of cheap labor and the massive costs of modernizing Polish agriculture, hindered the negotiations, and the final date of Poland's accession was not set during the tenure of Jerzy Buzek's government.⁶⁴ This occurred under the leftist coalition (SLD-PSL) government led by Leszek Miller. Negotiations were officially completed by resolving the most important problems of Polish agriculture and the openness of EU labor markets to Polish citizens during the EU summit in Copenhagen in December 2002.⁶⁵ On 16 April 2003 Polish delegates signed the Accession Treaty with the European Union in Athens.

Yet, signing the treaty was not tantamount to Poland and nine other countries in the European Union gaining membership. In most cases the membership had to be approved by referenda. In Poland, EU membership was accepted in a nationwide referendum held on 7 and 8 June, 2003, when seventy-seven per cent of voters said "yes" to Poland's accession, and the turnout was nearly fifty-nine per cent. In May 2004 Poland became a full member of the European Union, an act which concluded Poland's road to the western military and political structures which had begun during the 1989 transformation.

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THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT IN SLOVAKIA IN THE PERIOD OF NORMALISATION

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to the Czechs, the Slovakian resistance towards communist dictatorship grew out of other motives, springing to life from different ideological premises and – not least – historical experiences quite different from those faced by the Czechs. These assumed a much more religious and national character and found expression in myriad ways, ranging from pilgrimages and petitions to the efflorescent Samizdat press and written declamations against the infringements of the communist church secretary. The spate of protests in Bratislava on 25 March, 1988 initiated by Slovaks abroad and organised by the laity of the Catholic Church was the first public demonstration for the observance of citizen and human rights in the entire Eastern Bloc before 1989. The various attitudes of Slovaks towards their Czech counterparts was no doubt one of the reasons why the best known opposition movement – Charter 77 – was not able to maintain itself in Slovakia.

Alongside religiously motivated aspects of the resistance, the political energies of Slovaks likely drove environmental activities. Environmental protectionists expressed their main criticism against the pollution of the Slovak capital by means of a leaflet campaign which caused a great stir under the name Bratislava/nahlas, and was rightly characterized as a kind of “Slovak Charta.”

The following study analyzes the concrete activities of the Slovak opposition movement which became stronger in the second half of the 1970's and had a hand in the downfall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. The analysis proposes the study of the different forms of resistance that took place in each parts of the country merits individual attention in order to see how the political and social motivations of Czechs and Slovaks differed from one another.

The resistance against the dictatorial rule of the two communist parties: the statewide Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ)¹ and the Communist

Party of Slovakia (KSS)² – a unit responsible for the Slovak territory – was driven in Slovakia by completely different motives. The underlying incentives included different attitudes towards ideological premises and, last but not least, a historical experience that was different from that of the Czechs. Despite many transformations that took place in the last decade exposing Slovaks to the oppressive and strange Bolshevik ideology with its impact on all areas of life, Slovak mentality, as opposed to Czech, proved to be rather conservative, based on traditional values and committed to the Roman Catholic or Lutheran faith. Therefore, the opposition movement in the 1970s and, above all, in the 1980s developed strong religious-driven grounds expressed in mass demonstrations during pilgrimages claiming the restoration of religious freedom. The revival of religion was confronted with harshly enforced atheist campaigns.

Apart from the religious aspects of Slovak resistance broadly described in a separate chapter, the struggle for the retrieval of political and civil freedom was equated with national liberation. Consequently, it was meant to solve the Slovak issue. The then centralized state was transformed into a federation in accordance with the Constitutional Act No. 143 of 27 October 1968. However, it brought no fulfilment of Slovak citizens' national aspirations. Not only the ban on the Communist Party federalisation, which in view of specific political power relations would have constituted a necessary condition for state federalisation, but also a gradual return to party centralism as well as an unchanging centralistic economy structure were preventing the practical enforcement of the Act to a considerable extent. The power monopoly of the Party was then contradictory to national sovereignty. The political centre of Czechoslovakia remained at the same time the centre of the Czech Republic. As a result, Czechs identified the republic with the Czech state. On the contrary, Slovaks perceived the federation as a bizarre and hostile creation.³ Supreme power was still exercised by a more or less ten-member steering committee of the centrally ruled KSČ. Therefore, the newly established republic governments possessed a partly decentralised function since such areas as cultural policy were pursued only at republican level. Consequently, the federal Ministry of Culture no longer existed after 1968.⁴ On the other hand, the relevance of national councils diminished significantly after the adoption of the Constitutional Act No. 117/1969. Moreover, the federation lost its decentralising function also from an economic perspective due to the implementation of a binding five-year plan for the national economy.⁵

Charter 77 and Slovaks

The lack of two components in the civil rights movement – national and religious – may well have been one of the most important reasons that Charter 77 gained no significant support among Slovaks. The Italian publicist Leo Magnino, who advocated the sovereignty of Slovakia, wrote about the citizens' initiative in the same year the document was published: "Charter 77, being an open revolt against the dictatorship, generated a wide response in the Western world. Not surprisingly, this act aroused a feeling of moral and civil solidarity among all free people. However, we do not find included in Charter 77 – apart from a fair intercession for freedom and respect for the human rights of individuals – any of the demands made by the Slovak nation, of which we know was likewise longing for freedom and state independence. Only little by little have we learned that the absolute majority of the Charter 77 signatories were Czechs, and what is more, communists who were once in power."⁶

Slovak citizens naturally associated the guarantee of human rights with the principle of national self-determination. With this in mind, one of the most relevant expatriate Slovaks, a supporter of politically active exile organisations and, for many years, the editor at Radio Free Europe in Munich, Imrich Kružliak, wrote in the exile monthly magazine *Horizon* published in the Slovak language (and which he himself edited): "As far as the Slovak people are concerned, the fight for human rights has been always been connected with the fight for the rights of a nation. It also corresponds to the sense of our national philosophy, according to which not only does an individual deserve to benefit fully from the dimension of humanity, but also that a nation has to be provided with a human face. Today as well it is our task to combine the struggle for human rights with the struggle for a dignified self-realisation of the nation."⁷

It appears that the chartist civil rights movement developed within the Czech community and was orientated only towards the needs of the Czech part of the republic until the very end. The initiative underlying its creation was conceived within Czech intellectual circles and without consulting Slovakian. Miroslav Kusý and Dominik Tatarka were the only Slovak representatives involved in its preparation. Others learned about the initiative either from state television or from foreign broadcasting stations such as the Voice of America or Radio Free Europe.⁸ Nevertheless, those Slovaks who signed it had to suffer a great deal. For the liberally oriented writer Dominik Tatarka, the author of *Farská republika* (The Parish Republic), a novel much acclaimed

by the local communist founding fathers, it meant being banned from publication and isolated for the rest of his life, which had an enormously negative effect on him. Two Catholic priests, Marián Zajíček and Róbert Gombík, were granted government permission to exercise their priestly ministry while others were forced into exile. Accordingly, the number of those who dared to express their sympathies by signing the document possibly exposing themselves to persecution remained small, which definitely corresponded with the calculations of the state authorities.⁹

The example of two Catholic clergymen, young chaplains Marián Zajíček and Róbert Gombík, illustrates that the individual biographies of Charter signatories did not necessarily run along anti-communist lines. Gombík – a priest with government permission – had been a registered secret agent of the State Security Service since 1973. Even if the absolute credibility of the security service records cannot be assumed, a file registered in his name was maintained under the code name “Clergyman”.¹⁰ However, his loyalty to the communist regime began to waver with the implementation of Charter 77. According to the entries in his file, from that moment he was no longer willing to collaborate with the State Security.¹¹ Eventually, together with his friend Zajíček, also a Catholic priest, he was denounced as “a threat to the national order”, and both were subject to a criminal prosecution that, however, was never concluded. After imprisonment, they were released again, which occurred most probably due to the tremendous reaction of Western media and the exile press. The most drastic measures resulting from the signing of Charter 77 involved revoking the permission to exercise the priestly ministry and the introduction of remuneration payments which resulted in existential hardship. As far as it was possible to follow the life of Gombík, he exhausted his spirit of resistance in the mid-1980s regaining government permission as he revived his contacts with dissidents.¹²

Also, the introduction of the official Catholic hierarchy to Charter 77 on the one hand, and the secret actions of individual church structures on the other hand, were not fully explained and still need to be thoroughly analysed. Doubtlessly, the declaration of Slovak bishops and ordinaries enforced by the regime and signed by the regime-dependent Association of Catholic Clergy *Pacem in Terris* and the St. Adalbert Association on 17 January 1977 can be deemed a shameful document.¹³ The rather cautious behaviour of some hierarchs as, for example, that of the bishop of Tyrnau Július Gábriš, who took an increasingly critical stand on the regime’s policy, mostly in the

1980s¹⁴, was not necessarily unjustified. For instance, Gábriš criticized the presence of former high rank party functionaries, such as Pavel Kohout among the signatories of the Charter since it could change the perception of the initiative to being a platform for the return of former prominent party officials.¹⁵ Certainly, it was a novelty in the civil rights movement in the Eastern Bloc countries that a group consisting mostly of non-Christian members demanded exactly the introduction of religious freedom. Nevertheless, the Church was entrusted by the foreign Catholic press with the task of supporting the Charter, as this long-lasting solidarity wave would bring unambiguous profits to the oppressed Church.¹⁶ Obviously, this kind of support on the part of Slovak bishops, who at that time found themselves under constant persecution, was impossible and the risk of embarrassment in front of their own congregation had to be accepted.¹⁷

The most famous Slovak signatory of Charter 77 active abroad, Miroslav Kusý, former professor of Marxism-Leninism and, for some time, the head of ideology department in the Central Committee of the KSS, whose polemical contributions on the internal situation of the country were broadcasted by the Radio Free Europe, tried to find an answer to the problem of minor support and admiration among Slovaks towards the so-called Czech parallel culture. The main reason for this could be two different paths of development that the Czech and Slovak nations had taken before 1968 and in the following years. Slovaks, who started to consider themselves as a modern nation for the first time (!) as a result of the industrialisation and urbanisation of the country in the 1960s, reflected the suppression by Novotný's regime primarily as a nation and defended themselves against it. This overemphasis on the nationally-perceived obligation appeared also as far as the violation of civil and human rights was concerned. The effects achieved by Slovaks due to the establishment of a federation sated national demands for only a limited period of time. Therefore, the development in the post-invasion era was no longer as intense as in the Bohemian part of the country. No remarkable change of course took place. There were even some areas that brought a considerable profit (better professional advancement). "Based on this statement on the development after August 1968, another view emerges among Slovaks regarding the Czech parallel culture in general and with reference to Charter 77 in particular. They consider it to be a typically Czech matter and reaction to the typically Czech reality that we [Slovaks] are not characteristic of."¹⁸ According to Kusý, at the beginning, Slovak ambitions to obtain their own statehood did not exist, because the

problem of the constitutional position of Slovakia in relation to the Czech state was solved by the implementation of federal structure. In his opinion, it was only about economic, cultural and social equality. Consequently, the national issue was no longer in the foreground since Slovak people (even without their own country!) would feel equal to other European nations: “The Slovak citizen will consciously become more and more a citizen of Europe and of the world.”¹⁹ (However, Kusý with his wishful perception had to be wrong because the national element once again became an essential part of the political development after 1989 upon which a sketch of the establishment of an independent state emerged.)

Both the openness of Charter signatories to dialogue with the regime that had already violated human dignity with its materialistic footing, and the lack of distance to communism as an ideology were strongly criticized and mostly by Slovak émigrés in the West. Emil Vidra, the founder of an organization protecting human rights in Slovakia²⁰, was extremely critical of Charter 77. The organization had been founded in 1968 during the Prague Spring. Paradoxically, none of the later Charter signatories – and reform communists at that time – attended the inaugural meeting, although each of them received a personal invitation.²¹ Vidra’s response to the accusations of Gustáv Husák was also refused by the editorial staff of the *Literární listy* magazine as many of its members at that time later became signatories of Charter 77. Vidra accused Charter 77 of not rejecting communism unequivocally. In his view, the Charter might have done harm to some representatives of communist power, but not to communism as a whole.²²

The directions of Slovak exile policy, even if different from the evaluation of Charter 77 by Czech emigrants, were not entirely disapproving despite of the fact that, due to a considerable Czech influence, a large part of the global community considered precisely this dissident group to be representative of a nationwide Czechoslovak anti-communist opposition. Each center of Slovak political exile was aware that the objective to bring the communist system to a collapse should be reached jointly and together with the Czech people. In this respect, public defamatory statements on Charter 77 were rather avoided.²³

Opposition based on faith: *Ecclesia silentii*

Secret churches in Czechoslovakia that were brought into being upon the initiative of both Pope Pius XII and Msgr. Gennaro Verolino,²⁴ the Vatican Chargé d’Affaires in Czechoslovakia after the WWII were gradually gaining

in strength from 1949 as the first secret bishops were consecrated. The first secret consecrations had taken place in 1949. Kajetán Matoušek was ordained Suffragan Bishop of Prague on 17 September 1949 and František Tomášek was ordained Suffragan Bishop of Olmütz on 14 October 1949. *Ecclesia silentii* became reality in Slovakia with the secret consecration of Štefan Barnáš as the Auxiliary Bishop of Spiš on 5 November 1949.²⁵ The subsequent consecrations involved Pavol Hnilica on 2 January 1951, Ján Chryzostom Korec on 24 August 1951, Dominik Kaľata on 9 September 1955 and Peter Dubovský on 18 May 1961. The principal duty of secret bishops was to ordain secret priests in order to secure the survival of the Church oppressed by the regime.²⁶ Bishop Korec alone ordained 120 secret priests by 1989, the majority of whom belonged to a secret male order. In this way, the Church was strictly covered by a (secret) religious community²⁷ and the secret Church was protected from the risk of being infiltrated by the State Security.²⁸ However, as the State Security exposed secret consecrations, secret bishops had to emigrate (Hnilica, Kaľata, Dubovský) and others were sentenced to long-term imprisonment (Korec). After the great wave of rehabilitation in the 1970s, which was a short period of liberalisation during the Prague Spring, and after its suppression, underground activity started again in the 1970s.

In 1968, a mathematician and secret priest, Vladimír Jukl, together with a physician, Silvester Krčméry, started to organise small groups of university students in Bratislava. Both of them had gained sufficient experience in the youth apostolate, being former members of the Catholic lay organisation “Rodina” (The Family), which was established by Stjepan Tomislav-Podglajen (in Slovakia known as Stjepan Kolaković-Podglajen) – a Croatian missionary and lay apostolate promoter in the 1940s. Students were getting together with the aim of deepening their religious life. Their representatives summoned all higher education institutions in Bratislava several times a year to attend large meetings where future activities were coordinated. By 1989, a total of one hundred meetings of this kind had taken place with ten to fifteen participants gathering on a regular basis. After graduation most of them returned to their hometowns and helped with the establishment of a nationally widespread network of Catholic activists.²⁹

An organisation of Christian families was founded in a similar way. On this basis, the activities of underground missionary work could be disseminated throughout the whole country.

In 1974, four laymen³⁰ established the Fatima community. Being a lay community under the jurisdiction of the secret bishop Korec, its main duty was to “create, lead, expand and coordinate small Catholic communities of workers, young people and children”.³¹ It was given its Statutes, according to which the community was ready to give assistance to the Church whenever it required urgent help and whether it was related to the apostolate, or to the fulfilment of such duties for which the responsible organs had not yet been appointed by the Church.³² From 1975, their members³³ organised meetings with local activists four times a year in many Slovak cities in order to exchange information, to plan joint activities and to distribute religious foreign literature and the latest publications by samizdat. The network that was built due to these activities included 150 towns and villages with a total number of 400 activists. The activities of the secret apostolate, whose members stayed in regular contact with the “official” Church, not least in order to discuss their plans with them, mostly with the Bishop of Tyrnau, Július Gábriš, and the Diocesan Administrators, Štefan Garaj and Ján Hirka, remained unnoticed by the public until 1983; however, to their own surprise, they benefitted enormously from it in the following years.³⁴

A new self-awareness provided by the election of a Slavic Pope and, simultaneously, a feeling of no longer being isolated from the Church behind the “Iron Curtain” were conditions for a greater independence of the opposition after the Catholic Church was again subject to even more severe oppression in the 1970s and 1980s. Cardinal König stated in an interview that the community of believers began to fight stronger than before when they felt the violation of their citizen rights.³⁵ They used to cite the Declaration of Human Rights signed by the Czechoslovak government in Helsinki in 1975, which from that moment on was included in the legal system. Employment bans for clergy used as a frequent anticlerical measure and targeted at priests characterized by taking successful pastoral care of their congregations³⁶ were no longer accepted with resignation. An increased number of cases was observed when the affected communities submitted a complaint about the actions of district and regional Church secretaries and wrote on their own to the head of state and parliament providing a complete number of complainants’ signatures. A letter of complaint from 1979 by a Catholic community from the Budweis Diocese addressed to President Husák asking for the abolishment of the employment ban for their priests was signed by 190 persons.³⁷

Letters of complaint, after protests, represented a particularly widespread form of opposition, being a valuable historical source providing information about the state of the Church as well. Most famous are the letters written by Msgr. Viktor Trstenský,³⁸ in which he protests against the suppression, persecution and abuse of the Church and the injustice against his own person. Only in the years 1975–1989, he wrote 65 letters. Twelve of them were addressed to President Husák, to the Chairman of Government, Peter Colotka, to the Minister of Culture, Miroslav Válek, to the television, press, and the Church hierarchy, etc.³⁹ Moreover, cases were multiplying in which individuals were no longer afraid of submitting complaints to the official institutions. In this manner, parents protested when their children were refused to be enrolled in religious class, young priests – when they were forced to join the priestly movement “Pacem in Terris” that was loyal to the regime, and priests without posts – after being deprived of their permission to perform their priestly ministry.⁴⁰

One of the most remarkable protests,⁴¹ almost without precedence in the whole Eastern Bloc, was organised in October 1980 in the seminary of Bratislava where 120 out of 147 seminarians united in a two-day hunger strike (20–21 October 1980) against the influence of the regime-dependent Association of Catholic Clergy “Pacem in Terris” (in the seminary). In a letter to Cardinal Tomášek and Slovak ordinaries theology students protested against the interference of the Association in the seminary’s issues. In addition, they called on all of the clergymen in the country to boycott the organisation.⁴² As eleven students were suspended for one year at the beginning of the summer semester 1981, 100 students decided to leave the seminary as well, sympathizing with their colleagues who had been punished. Although all but seven seminarists withdrew their claims upon the seminary management’s request and continued their studies, they kept protesting against the actions taken by the authorities. The wave of solidarity coming from abroad, for instance, from the seminaries of all Austrian dioceses, from 600 students and professors of the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Munich and from the Jesuit University of Philosophy, with the famous theologian Karl Rahner, not only undermined the position of the Pacem in Terris Association, but also submitted various requests to the Czechoslovak president, Gustáv Husák, to cancel the suspension of the eleven students.⁴³

The increased activity of Catholics in the 1980s could be noticed through the dissemination of samizdat periodicals, i.e. those magazines and information

leaflets that were printed underground without the participation of the National Printing Office and without a special permission and being distributed via secret networks of students, Christian families and laymen. In 1973, a group of Catholic clergymen from Spiš decided to publish a philosophical-theological underground magazine *Orientácia* (The Orientation), which, in 135 issues during its eleven-year existence, printed original texts written by renown Catholic intellectualists from Slovakia and translations of important works written by foreign theologians as well as other information related to the current situation of the Church.⁴⁴ Since an issue consisted of barely 20 copies – they were reproduced on a typewriter – its reach within the Spiš region was limited. Nevertheless, it became a platform for artistic creation for Catholic intellectuals otherwise condemned to silence during the period of normalisation.⁴⁵ This tradition was followed later in June 1982 by another Catholic samizdat magazine *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť* (The Religion and Modern Times). The magazine created by a group consisting of a mathematician, František Mikloško, a lawyer, Ján Čarnogurský and a mathematician and priest, Vladimír Jukl, could reach the whole of Slovakia with an issue of up to one thousand copies, thereby satisfying the needs of the already well developed “secret” underground Church for religious literature.⁴⁶ From 1982, a great number of new titles appeared so that by the end of 1989 there were fourteen Christian samizdat magazines with a total circulation of 7,760 copies.⁴⁷ Various magazines were printed illegally in the Czech Republic between 1988 and 1986. Some nine of them belonged to the Christian underground.⁴⁸

The meaning of samizdat literature for the opposition and for the survival and continuous existence of an uncensored and free culture of writing cannot be underestimated. While the regime was issuing tons of atheistic literature – only the Church Secretariat of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture published a hundred copies of so-called reference books propagating atheistic ideology between 1975 and 1986⁴⁹ – the editing, publishing and distribution of each samizdat edition involved a high risk. Jozef Oprala, a Jesuit, priest and theologian responsible for the publication of the illegal magazine *Una Sancta Catholica* recalled: “Today we perceive those deeds as a kind of heroism that was necessary and, at the same time, provoked suffering. The existence of those courageous men [the publishers of samizdat magazines] was related to a great deal of patience and caution. One cannot describe exactly what was happening in the families where samizdat was developed. Small flats in panel buildings, tiny rooms or prudently furnished weekend

cottages or cellars gave shelter to the publication process of samizdat. An unbelievable fairy tale and, at the same time, a testimony to the strength and courage of the Christian soul... It united us as the atheistic oppression enslaved our spirit and human beings were racked by the wheel of moral deformation [...] The Catholic samizdat in Slovakia is a noteworthy cultural, religious and deeply human phenomenon consisting of what should be admired by the world in the Slovak soul.”⁵⁰

The pilgrimage to Velehrad that took place on 6–7 July 1985 to commemorate the 1100th anniversary of the death of St. Methodius, who had been pronounced patron saint of Europe alongside St. Cyril four years earlier, was a significant turning point in the relations of the Church with the totalitarian regime. One month before, on 2 June 1985, Pope John Paul II published the Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, in which he emphasized the meaning of the two brothers’ achievements in the evangelisation in the Slavic countries.⁵¹ The years of self-sacrificing work of small religious communities in Velehrad were visible in the underground. A Slovak activist, Vladimír Jukl, recalled: “With the help of communities, we invited young people to come to Velehrad on Saturday, 6 July. We used all underground structures to spread this information. We mobilized everyone upon whom we had some influence: young people, families, priests, movements, orders... The information was also broadcasted by Anton Hlinka on *Voice of America* radio station. Slovakia began to move towards Velehrad.”⁵²

Almost 150 000 people participated in the pilgrimage to Velehrad. The majority of them came from Moravia and Slovakia. Considering that a pilgrimage to Levoča took place on the same day, the number of pilgrims was exceptional. The leadership of the Party wanted to convert this unique event into a “Peace Festival”; however, without much success. As the Czech Minister of Culture, Milan Klusák, who could not bring himself to pronounce the word “saint”, preceding the names of the two patrons, turned to the believers with a call for peace. He was booed – possibly the first time that the “normalised” regime lost in an open confrontation with its own citizens.⁵³ The pilgrimage was a manifestation of loyalty to the Pope, Cardinal Tomášek and the Church; a manifestation of the restored strength of *Ecclesia Silentii* and the members of its congregation who were no longer afraid.⁵⁴ The pilgrimage came as a shock to the regime, from which it never recovered. The leadership of the Party had to admit that the Church had at its disposal an extremely effective information network, since the

unparalleled mobilisation of the community of believers took place without the participation of the state media. It became clear to them again that they were universally hated and each anonymous gathering posed a risk to the regime.⁵⁵ The Church opposed the regime as the true and only challenger, whom they had already buried and now had to be afraid of again. Consequently, one of the most important objectives of the communist church policy failed, i.e. to eliminate the Church as a real opponent together with its ambition to be a mass organisation.

The regime was put on trial by the religious population once more with a petition entitled: “The recommendations of Catholics on the resolution of the situation of believers in the ČSSR”⁵⁶. The petition’s text was prepared by a group of Moravian Catholics under the leadership of Augustín Navrátil. A one-time signature collection campaign began on 29 November 1987. An incredibly large increase in the number of signatures could not have been possible, had it not been for a personal letter from Cardinal Tomášek addressed to the congregation on 4 January 1988, in which he appealed to Christians to get rid of “their fears and lack of courage being unworthy of a Christian” and to sign the petition.⁵⁷ It was an important decision because without the patronage of the Czech Primate in the initiative, it would not have achieved such an outstanding success and would have been labelled by the regime (as) a kind of “provocation by illegal and hostile structures”. The demands presented in the 31-paragraph petition included the separation of the Church and the state, the abolition of regulations discriminating against the Church, especially the Act No. 217/1949 on the economic hedging of the Church and the amendment to the Constitution concerning the claims included into the petition⁵⁸. During the first months, the petition was signed by around 300,000 members of the congregation. By the end of 1988, the number of signatures amounted to 501,590, including 291,284 Slovaks and 210,306 citizens from Bohemia and Moravia.⁵⁹ In response to this, the regime imprisoned Navrátil, the initiator of the petition, in the psychiatric department of a military hospital. Nonetheless, the petition largely united believers with non-believers and Catholics with Protestants, so that it was perceived by Catholic activists as a kind of referendum against the existing system.⁶⁰

In the second half of the 1980s, traditional pilgrimages in Slovakia reached as yet unknown proportions as to the number of pilgrims. From 1983, as the pilgrimage to Levoča alone attracted 150,000 participants, high numbers of pilgrims became visible. In the summer of 1987, their number increased,

amounting to 250,000 people, probably on the occasion of the Marian Year, previously declared by the Pope. Considering that only during the Marian Year the total number of pilgrims reached an incredible 600,000, consisting mostly of young people, compared to the Communist Party of Slovakia with its 450,000 members at that time, it was an important sign of the invincible religiousness of Slovaks, as well as of their rejection of the atheistic ideology propagated by the state and became clear evidence of the disproportion between those in power and the oppressed.⁶¹

Candle Demonstration on 25 March 1988

The Candle Demonstration on 25 March, 1988, which was the first open protest carried out by Slovaks against the communist regime⁶², is a well known and recorded event in their historiography. 25 March was proclaimed the Remembrance Day of the Slovak Republic, thereby making it the focus of public attention. Interest among historians was aroused also by a wide range of historical sources. On 30 November, 1989, a commission was established by the Slovak National Council intended to investigate an excessively violent attack by the police on a peaceful gathering of believers in Bratislava.⁶³ The commission was active until 20 March, 1990 and collected extensive documentation from the governmental institutions involved: the police, security service, prosecutor's office, high ranking KSS officials as well as the participants concerned.⁶⁴ The demonstration was widely reported abroad; about three months after the event, a collection of authentic documents appeared in Austria. They were smuggled across the border by Bishop Korec and his helpers, and then published abroad.⁶⁵ By 1998, elaborate work, based on a variety of archival sources and oral history was published by Ján Šimulčík.⁶⁶ Finally, we should mention that twenty years after these memorable events, an academic conference dedicated to the Candle Demonstration was organised. The results of the conference will be published in an anthology in the spring of 2014.

A direct incentive for the demonstration came from part of the Slovak political emigrant community in the West, to be precise from its leaders – the editors of Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, the priest Anton Hlinka and the chairman of the Slovak World Congress, Marián Šťastný. The idea was then picked up by the leaders of Catholic dissidents and transformed into a well-coordinated secret structure.⁶⁷ The Candle Demonstration in Hviezdoslav Square on Friday, 25 March 1988, was the first street demonstration demanding the free appointment of bishops, full religious freedom

and respect for civil rights.⁶⁸ The announcement of such a demonstration was the logical result of the growing activity of the community of believers in the country, whose resistance gained not only a religious, but also a civic dimension. Through the third demand concerning observance of civil rights, the opposition movement decided to open itself to the non-believer part of the population on the one hand, thereby showing their solidarity, but on the other hand, Catholics showed that they were struggling not only for religious, but also for political freedom.⁶⁹

The reaction of the regime constitutes an example of a government apparatus that, being deep in crisis, acting defensively and wanting to save face, reached for violent and repressive measures. The minister of Culture, Miroslav Válek, described this situation a few days after a brutal police action targeted at a few thousand peaceful demonstrators,⁷⁰ who wanted to ask for freedom by singing, prayer and lighted candles in their hands. Válek watched the course of the demonstration and its bloody denouement from the window of the Carlton Hotel which was transformed into the operational headquarters of the security forces. He commented on what he saw on 20 April 1988 during the anniversary meeting of the Pacem in Terris Association: "During the last few days, the public was thrilled by a demonstration that took place in Bratislava. I openly admit that it was my duty to see the truth with my own eyes. And so I observed the whole demonstration. Unfortunately, the majority of you in this room trust foreign media than more our own. The demonstration was dispersed because it was illegal. But there were neither dogs nor rubber truncheons and tear gas. There was only water and cars [...]. However, there was also another option: to let the demonstration pass with the security forces successfully selling candles. But we know that the demonstration was only a part of a carefully planned campaign. Nothing has been written about the dogs, but about the impotence of the state, the disintegration of power structures and the victory of the believers over the state..."⁷¹

The Party leadership considered the Candle Demonstration *a priori* as an attempt to activate the opposition in a political direction. Therefore, the KSS politburo, that held a meeting on 15 March, was eminently interested in: 1) hindering the demonstration in general, 2) requesting the participants to leave the square, if, however, the demonstration takes place, and 3) dispersing them, if the two previous measures failed.⁷² During the meeting, a political commission was formed consisting of the Slovak Minister of Culture, Válek, Minister of the Interior, Lazar, other high rank party officials,

the representatives of the security forces and the police. The commission worked out specific counter-measures against the demonstration. A day before, Oberst Mikula, Chief of Police of the city of Bratislava, asked the Federal Minister of the Interior, Vajnar, to “grant him authorisation to enforce extraordinary security measures from 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. on 25 March 1988”⁷³ in order to prevent the demonstration. Large-scale and very extensive preparations illustrated that the regime wanted to make every effort in order to avoid potential confrontation with opponents at all costs. Preparations ranged from the mobilization of all available means of political power, through the introduction of certain measures in higher education institutions and student residences, where no lectures were held on 25 March, thereby forcing the students to leave on Thursday evening, as well as other measures concerning traffic and hospitals that were preparing to admit a large number of injured, to the detention of leading Catholic activists. The demonstrators were violently dispersed, by 1,061 policemen, 20 cleaning vehicles, 17 police cars, 8 convoy vehicles, 2 water cannons, 2 buses, and 3 tanks.⁷⁴ In the aftermath of the brutal course of action, 14 people were injured, and 99 were arrested and interrogated, including foreign journalists.⁷⁵

The images from Bratislava evoked a wave of indignation and protests across the entire world. All prominent newspapers reported on the events for several days. Among other things, the media pointed out the lack of potential to reform the system under the rule of the new Secretary General, Miloš Jakeš,⁷⁶ as well as the scale of religious repression and its relation to the ongoing Czechoslovak-Vatican negotiations concerning the appointment of bishops.⁷⁷ The names of the main activists, Ján Čarnogurský and František Mikloško, became known to the world’s public. Media coverage and the resulting political protests additionally strengthened the critical attitude of the West towards the Czechoslovak state leadership, increasingly mired in international isolation.

The Candle Demonstration of 25 March 1988 was the culmination of underground Church activity and the activity of Slovak Catholic emigrés. It was simply a public peace demonstration that electrified the global political scene and attracted the gaze of the media, although it was violently suppressed by the regime. It was an incentive for further demonstrations of Czechs and Slovaks against the regime and gradually developed into an open confrontation between the street and authority. The demonstrations took place throughout 1989 and eventually put an end to the persecution of the

Church. As the Velvet Revolution began, the 17 November 1989 became a special occasion of great joy for the Church as its members could finally catch a glimpse of freedom.

Bratislava/nahlas

An important role in the increased activity of the civil opposition movement in Slovakia was assigned to the environmentalists whose critical views on the disastrous situation of the environment in the capital of Slovakia attracted public attention and caused disruption politically. The most relevant points of their criticism were summarized in the samizdat magazine *Bratislava/nahlas* (Bratislava Aloud) that was published in October 1987 with an issue of two thousand copies and announced to the general public on 25 October, 1987 on Voice of America. There, a group of around 80 persons, mostly members of the Slovak Association of Environmentalists,⁷⁸ highlighted the air pollution in the city of Bratislava, which proved to have the highest level of contamination in the whole of Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, attention was drawn to the enormous waste of water resources caused by damaged water piping, to the contamination of water, resulting primarily from the activity of the oil-processing industry, as well as to noise pollution. Another point concerned the catastrophic condition of Bratislava's Old Town monuments that, in large part and probably deliberately, were destined to fall into decay, since the timely renovation either did not take place at all or was delayed.⁷⁹ The publication aroused a wave of indignation among people spanning the major part of the Republic. A circulation of another 30,000 copies of *Bratislava/nahlas* was prepared. Even the state security forces were not able to confiscate them. The initiative of young environmentalists, who became the most active participants of the Velvet Revolution later on, was rightly hailed as the Slovak Charter 77⁸⁰ since it gained the wider support of society and addressed the main needs of the capital's inhabitants.

The process of gradual rapprochement of the ever-growing opposition movement was present both in the Czech and Slovak parts of the country in the last two years before the collapse of the communist monopoly on power. However, by August 1989, when judicial proceedings were brought against the so-called *Bratislavská päťka* (Bratislava Five) – a group of the five most famous dissidents in Slovakia,⁸¹ and the trial was a catalyst for further bonding both within the opposition and between dissidents and the rest of the population. This criminal trial evoked a wave of indignation reflected by numerous protest resolutions. A letter to the president written by Slovak

intellectuals, in which they pleaded for the suspension of the trial, was signed by historians, writers, journalists, still active or banned from their profession, alongside the representatives of the civil-liberal dissident groupings with Milan Šimečka Sr. as their leader, as well as by the secret Catholic clergy, including prominent names, such as Alexander Dubček and the secret bishop, Ján Korec.⁸² A similar protest letter to the president was sent by Slovak sociologists whose signatures provided an exemplary list of the future political and social, pro-western and pro-American, prominence of Slovakia, with Magda Vašáryová and Martin Bútora as the future Slovak Ambassador to the US and one of the founding fathers of foreign policy in the independent Slovak Republic of the 1990s, to mention but a few.⁸³ “Therefore, we turn to you, dear Mr. President, so that you contribute to the recovery and moral restoration of our society and support further development of the idea of national reconciliation based on a political dialogue. This idea has become a hopeful starting point for overcoming the crisis also in other countries in the world. Some of them barely know anything about our democratic traditions. Therefore, we shall prove that these are precisely our national traditions, and not the legacy of Stalinism that will determine the future of our nation.”⁸⁴

Conclusions

The real revolution, which began with the violent suppression of a student demonstration on 17 November 1989 at Národní Třída Avenue in Prague, originated from people’s (unsatisfied) expectations and was a thoroughly idealistic, social, political and, last but not least, religious phenomenon.⁸⁵ Slovaks and Czechs detested the communist regime not because it was socialist, but because of its inhumane, bureaucratic and oppressive policies.⁸⁶ Equally, no one wanted to return to the thieving capitalism implemented in the early 1990s. The fundamental concepts of humanity, religious freedom, social peace and even love and mutual respect were the core elements of the long-lasting ideology of the opposition. Lastly, if it had not been for the support of the Slovak political diaspora, not only the wide media coverage of every injustice committed by the governance apparatus on its own citizens, but also the successful outcome of the revolution and the establishment of an independent Slovak state three years later would not have been possible.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 KSC – the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Paradoxically, the Party was responsible exclusively for the Czech state territory – after the transformation into a federative state in 1968, the existence of a separate Communist Party of the Czech Socialist Republic was not allowed.
- 2 KSS – the Communist Party of Slovakia.
- 3 Jan Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. Století. Česko-slovenské vztahy, 1945–1992* (Bratislava: VEGA, 1998), p. 276.
- 4 Cf. Beata Blehova, “Die Kulturpolitik in der Slowakei und der Beginn der Normalisierung,” in Peter Bachmaier, Beata Blehova, *Der kulturelle Umbruch in Ostmitteleuropa* (St. Pölten: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 171–189.
- 5 Rychlík (1998), pp. 282–287.
- 6 Quotation after Leo Magnino, “Slowaken sind reif für Eigenstaatlichkeit,” in *Slowakei* 16 (Munich, 1977–1978), p. 97.
- 7 Imrich Kružliak, “Za ľudské práva,” in Imrich Kružliak, *V čakárni dejín. Obrazy slovenských osudov*, (Bratislava, 1999), p. 272. Originally printed in *Horizont*, July/August 1978.
- 8 Peter Balun, “Akcia ‘Kniha’. Charta 77 na Slovensku,” in *Pamät'národa* 1 (2007), p. 84.
- 9 Until 1989, Charter 77 was signed by 37 Slovaks. See Vilém Prečan, *Charta 77. 1977–1989. Od morální k demokratické revoluci. Dokumentace* (Scheinfield-Schwarzenberg: Čs. Středisko nezávislé literatury/ Bratislava: Archa, 1990), pp. 487–514 (List of signatories.).
- 10 Balun (2007), p. 87.
- 11 Ibidem.
- 12 Ibidem, p. 94.
- 13 Pavol Čarnogurský writes that by creating the declaration and signing this shameful document the Slovak Church hit rock bottom. See Paľo Čarnogurský, *Súboj s komunizmom* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2013), pp. 186–188.
- 14 Gábriš, to the great dissatisfaction of the party leadership, was becoming more and more critical and hostile towards the regime and advocated for the Association of Catholic Clergy Pacem in Terris after its activity was officially prohibited by Vatican in a papal decree

Quidam episcopi. See Jozef Hal'ko, "Biskup Július Gábriš a Združenie katolíckych duchovných Pacem in Terris," in *Pamät' národa* 3, vol. 3 (2007), pp. 30–45.

15 According to the personal testimony of the priest Zajiček. See Balun (2007), p. 86.

16 See "Die 'Charta 77': ein politisch-kirchliches Dilemma," in *Herder-Korrespondenz*, vol. 31, no. 3, (Munich, 1977), pp. 116–119. This outstanding analysis was published under the initials R.S.

17 The declaration of Czech bishops of 14 January 1977 with František Tomášek on the top of the list had a substantially different wording; therefore, it appeared that they managed to oppose to the pre-fabricated statement of the ecclesiastical office. A dissociation from Charter 77 cannot be concluded on the basis of this document. See "Die 'Charta 77': ein politisch-kirchliches Dilemma," reference as above, p. 119.

18 Miroslav Kusý, "Slovenský fenomén," in *Listy* vol. 15, no. 5 (Rim, 1985), p. 35.

19 Kusý (1985), p. 36.

20 Slovenská organizácia na ochranu ľudských práv (SONOP). Emil Vidra belonged to the anti-communist resistance fighters whose services were not recognized by the Slovak society, although a commemorative plaque can be found in his historical house in Bratislava. After the 2nd World War, he became a member of the Labour Party (Strana práce). Following the invasion of 1968, he emigrated to Vienna, where he established contacts with Slovak exile organisations. (Personal report of Ján Bobák to the author.)

21 František Braxátor, *Slovenský exil 1968*, (Bratislava: Lúč, 1992), pp. 113–114.

22 Ibidem.

23 Ibidem, p. 114.

24 Gennaro Verolino travelled around the country before his deportation from Czechoslovakia on 24 March 1949 in order to authorize bishops to create a secret hierarchy. Hansjakob Stehle, *Eastern politics of the Vatican, 1917–1979* (Athens, 1981), p. 273.

25 See Václav Vaško, *Neumlčená. Kronika katolíckej cirkve v Československu po druhej svetovej válce*, vol. 2 (Prague, 1990), p. 111.

26 For more information on secret consecrations see František Vnuk, "Tajné vysviacky pred 50. Rokmi," in *Kultúra* 21 (2000), p. 10–11.

27 All 56 monasteries with six Catholic male order communities were violently attacked in the night of 13 to 14 April 1950 during the so called *Akcia K* (sk. Akcia kláštor, lit. Action Monasteries). The monks were concentrated in special centres and, consequently, forced into the civil life or pastorate. See, among others, František Vnuk, *Popustené putá. Katolícka cirkev na Slovensku v období liberalizácie a nástupu normalizácie (1967–1971)*, (Martin: Matica Slovenská, 2001), pp. 134–135.

28 See Ján Chryzostom Korec, "Tajne vysvätení kňazi za komunizmu," in Ján Šimulčík, *Zápas o nádej. Z kroniky tajných kňazov 1969–1989* (Prešov: Michal Vaško, 2000), p. 9.

29 Cf. Šimulčík (2000), p. 43.

30 Jukl, Krčméry, Rudolf Fiby and Eugen Valovič.

31 It was described in the report of Fatima community concerning the conference of Slovak bishops in 1990. Here, quotation after Šimulčík (2000), p. 13.

32 Šimulčík (2000), p. 12.

33 By 1989, the community increased in number up to 24 members and 40 employees.

34 Šimulčík (2000), p. 82.

35 “‘Der Widerstand ist selbstverständlicher geworden.’ Ein Gespräch mit Franz Kardinal König,” in *Herder Korrespondenz* 37/7 (Freiburg, 1983), p. 307.

36 In the eyes of Church secretaries, priests were guilty of “illegal activity” when they dared to condemn in their preaching the anti-Christian smear campaigns spread in the mass media, to give their opinion about atheism, and to defend themselves against the distortion of Christian truths and moral principles. They were suspected by the state organs whenever they maintained contacts with their congregation members, especially young people while preparing them for sacraments, providing pre-marriage catechesis, and organising groups of ministrants and boy choirs or any kind of charity activities among the old and sick people. See “Die Lage der katholischen Kirche in der Slowakei,” in *Slowakei* 16, 1977/78 (Munich), p.81.

In accordance with paragraph 178 of the Penal Code, for those “crimes” they could be convicted of “thwarting the state control over the Church” and given a prison sentence. Those elements of the offence were not explicitly named by the Penal Code, thus their identification was incumbent upon a free judgement of Church secretaries. Otto Luchterhand made a reference to this speaking about a “blurred lawlessness of the religious community” in Czechoslovakia. See Otto Luchterhand, “Organe des Staates zur Kontrolle der Kirchen. Die Religionsbehörden in kommunistischen Staaten,” in *Herder Korrespondenz*, 38/6 (Freiburg, 1984), p. 265.

37 Jozef Nechluwyl, “Zwischen Druck und Widerstand. Zur Lage der Kirche und der Christen in der ČSSR,” in *Herder Korrespondenz* vol. 33, no. 3 (Freiburg, 1979), p. 158.

38 Viktor Trstenský was born in 1908 in Trstená, ordained as a priest in 1931, arrested and sentenced to imprisonment in 1949, in 1951 convicted again for five years, released from prison in 1954, in 1958 convicted again for a fifteen-year imprisonment, granted an amnesty in 1960, in 1969 priest in Stará Ľubovňa. In 1974, after only five years, he was deprived of his permission to perform priestly ministry again and returned to be active as a priest no sooner than in 1989. For his merits, Pope John Paul II appointed him a papal Prelate in 1994. See Július Paštéka et al., *Lexikón katolíckych kňazských osobností Slovenska* (Bratislava: Lúč, 2000), p. 1412f.

39 Cf. Viktor Trstenský, *Nemôžem mlčať*, Contents (Bratislava, 1995), pp. 681–686.

40 Nechluwyl (1979), p. 158.

41 The Austrian radio station ORF described it as one of the most spectacular actions that ever occurred in a communist country. See Anton Hlinka, *Sila slabých a slabosť silných* (Bratislava, 1990), p. 134.

42 See “Skandal um Studentenausschluss in Bratislava,” in *Slowakei. Kulturhistorische Revue*, 17, 1979/80 (Munich), pp. 100–102. The article printed here was used by the Catholic News Agency (KNA).

43 Ibidem, p. 101f.

44 Rudolf Lesňák, *Listy z podzemia. Súborná dokumentácia kresťanskej samizdatovej publicistiky na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1989* (Bratislava: Lúč, 1998), p. 31.

45 Works by a poet, Janko Silan, a theologian, Pavol Strauss and an art historian, Ladislav Hanus, among others, were published for the first time in the *Orientácia* magazine. See Lesňák (1998), pp. 31–52.

- 46 Ján Šimulčík, *Svetlo z podzemia. Z Kroniky katolíckeho samizdatu, 1969–1989* (Prešov: Michal Vaško, 1997), p.18.
- 47 Between 1969 and 1989, a total number of 23 Christian and 4 liberal periodicals were printed illegally in Slovakia. Šimulčík (1997), p. 24.
- 48 See Johanna Posset, *Česká samizdatová periodika, 1968–1989* (Brno: Paseka, 1990), p.180.
- 49 “Sekretariát pre šírenie ateizmu?,” in *Svedectvo* (samizdat), 2/1, 1988.
- 50 Lesňák (1998), p. 17.
- 51 See the Circular Letter *Slavorum Apostoli* by the Pope John Paul II addressed to bishops, priests, order communities and all the faithful in remembrance of the evangelising work of the Saints Cyril and Methodius 1100 years ago, 2nd June 1985, in *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls*, p. 65.
- 52 Vladimír Jukl, in Ján Šimulčík, *Zápas o nádej. Z kroniky tajných kňazov 1969–1989* (Prešov: Michal Vaško, 2000), p. 60.
- 53 Kardinál Tomášek. *Svědectví o dobrém katechetovi, bojácném biskupovi a statečném kardinálovi* (Praha 1994), p. 110, ff.
- 54 For an elaborate description of the Velehrad pilgrimage see Václav Benda, “Jak dál po Velehrade?,” in *Rozmluvy. Literární a filozofická revue*, Nr. 6 (England: Purley, 1986), pp. 7–37.
- 55 Ibidem, p. 14.
- 56 Podnety katolíkov na riešenie situácie veriacich občanov v ČSSR. Also known as 31-Paragraph Petition (31 bodová petícia). The Slovak text printed in Jozef Žatkuliak ed., *November 1989 a Slovensko. Chronológia a dokumenty 1985–1990* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku a Historický ústav SAV, 1999), pp. 185–187.
- 57 Cardinal’s letter printed in Ján Šimulčík, *Čas svitania. Sviečková manifestácia – 25. Marec 1988* (Prešov: Michal Vaško, 1998), p. 25.
- 58 For the text of the Petition (in English) see George Weigel, *The final Revolution. The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York/Oxford, 1992), p. 239f.
- 59 This number was mentioned in a telegram of the Prague Archbishopric to the Commission of the Slovak National Council regarding the investigation of police attack on the congregation on 25 March 1988, Šimulčík (1998), p. 237.
- 60 In paragraph 29, a demand was made to modify several articles of the Constitution in the sense of the claims included into the petition. See Weigel (1992), p. 181.
- 61 Cf. Hlinka (1990), p. 184. See also Ján Šimulčík, *Katolícka cirkev a nežná revolúcia* (Prešov: Michal Vaško, 1999), p. 12.
- 62 Cf. Padraic Kenney, *Karneval revoluce. Střední Evropa 1989* (Prague: BB/art, 2005), p. 54.
- 63 Komisia SNR na dohľad prešetrenia zásahu ZNB proti zhromaždeniu veriacich 25. marca 1988 v Bratislave.
- 64 A total number of 97 witnesses were interrogated. The documentation is archived in the Slovak National Archives. For more information about the commission’s work see Patrik Dubovský, “Sviečková manifestácia,” in *Pamät’ národa* (Ústav pamäti národa), vol. 4, no. 1 (Bratislava, 2008), pp. 46–51.

- 65 The collection was published under a pseudonym that was used by Korec as a camouflage: R.V. Tatran, *Bratislavský veľký piatok: Zbierka autentických dokumentov o zhromaždení veriacich 25. marca 1988*, (no indication of place: no indication of publisher, 1988), p. 222. After November 1989, the book was two times reedited, firstly in 1994 and secondly in 2008 – on the 20th anniversary of the demonstration.
- 66 Šimulčík (1998), p. 275.
- 67 See Ako sa pripravoval 25. marec. In: Ján Čarnogurský, *Videné od Dunaja. Výber z prejavov článkov a rozhovorov*. (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1997), pp. 370–374.
- 68 The demonstration was announced by František Mikloško in a letter to the National Committee of the City of Bratislava on 10 March 1988. Printed in: Šimulčík (1999), p. 35.
- 69 Cf. Šimulčík (1999), p. 33.
- 70 The figures concerning the number of participants of the demonstration differ. Most probably, 3000–4000 people came to the Hviezdoslav Square by 5.15 p.m. Then, the square was cordoned off, forcing the other 8000–10 000 people to wait in the nearby streets and under the Bridge of the Slovak National Uprising. See Šimulčík (1999), p. 138.
- 71 The speech of the Minister of Culture was published in a Catholic informative leaflet by Samizdat. Here quoted after Šimulčík (1999), p. 158.
- 72 According to the statement of Ladislav Sádovský, the Head of the Department of Public Administration in the Central Committee of the KSS. See Šimulčík (1999), p. 49.
- 73 The letter was published in Šimulčík (1999), p. 46.
- 74 Šimulčík (1999), p. 139.
- 75 According to the report of the General Prosecutor's Office of 31 January 1990. Šimulčík (1999), p. 137.
- 76 Der Kurier, 27.3.1988.
- 77 Die Presse, 28.3.1988.
- 78 Slovenský zväz ochrancov prírody a krajiny (SZOPK). See Mikuláš Huba, "Bratislava/ nahlas po dvadsiatich rokoch," in *Pamät' národa* 4 (2007), p. 104.
- 79 Výňatky z publikácie *Bratislava/nahlas* In Jozef Žatkuliak ed., (1999), pp. 173–179.
- 80 Huba (2007), p. 106.
- 81 A lawyer, Ján Čarnogurský, a sociologist, Miroslav Kusý, a writer, Hana Ponická and a Catholic dissident, Anton Selecký.
- 82 A letter of Slovak opposition activists and intellectuals to the President on the suspension of the criminal trial against the members of the so-called "Bratislava's Five" (30.8.1989). In Jozef Žatkuliak ed., (1999), p. 300, ff.
- 83 A letter of Slovak sociologists to the President (7.9.1989). In Jozef Žatkuliak ed., (1999), p. 302, ff.
- 84 Ibidem.
- 85 Cf. James Krapfl, *Revolúcia s ľudskou tvárou. Politika, kultúra a spoločnosť v Československu po 17. novembri 1989* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009), p. 23.
- 86 Ibidem.

PASSING THE TORCH, DESPITE BANANAS. THE TWENTIETH-ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIONS OF 1989 IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

The 2009 commemorations of the revolutionary events of 1989 provided an excellent opportunity to observe where central European political cultures stood a generation after the annus mirabilis. This article interprets the twentieth-anniversary commemorations in Poland, Hungary, Germany, the Czech and Slovak Republics, and Romania, based primarily on the author's firsthand observations. It argues that patterns of observance fell along a spectrum from relatively "democratic," foregrounding citizens in public space, to "aristocratic," privileging elites and barring access to citizens. The more "democratic" societies were nonetheless divided over the question of whether democracy or consumption was the central aim of civic engagement in 1989.

Fedor Gál, one-time chairman of the Slovak civic initiative Public against Violence, expressed surprise in late November 2009 at the "tremendous explosion" of public discourse set off by the twentieth anniversary of the revolution of 1989.¹ For the entire year preceding the anniversary, Czech students had conducted an "Inventory of Democracy," calling on elected officials to prove by 17 November 2009 that they were responsive to their electorate. Newspapers, radio, and television, throughout 2009, reprinted or rebroadcast the news of "twenty years ago today." Museums, theatres, and other cultural institutions across the Czech and Slovak Republics put on exhibits relating to 1989. The anniversary was the theme of film festivals, conferences, and a greater number of moderated discussions than any individual could hope to attend; even *Česko Slovenská SuperStar* (a newly "federalized" Czecho-Slovak spin-off of Britain's *Pop Idol*) addressed it. On

November 17 itself, the smorgasbord of commemorative acts, became truly bewildering, with over a dozen different simultaneous events in Prague alone.

To anyone who had been following the memory of 1989 closely, such an “explosion” was only to be expected. Similar phenomena had occurred on the fifteenth anniversary, the tenth anniversary, and so on back to the “one-month anniversary” in December 1989.² The political cultures of the Czech and Slovak Republics are inscribed within the collective memory of 1989, such that the anniversary regularly invites vocal comparison of present-day realities with the ideals of a mythic (though by no means mythical) founding moment. The twentieth-anniversary commemorations were more extensive, to be sure, than any in the previous decade – but this, too, was to be expected, since twenty years marks the turning of generations and citizens had often said in 1989–90 that it would take this long to assess the fruits of their efforts.³ That Gál could have been surprised was indicative of a social fragmentation of memory – a phenomenon evident not just in the Czech and Slovak Republics, but throughout central Europe.

This article describes and analyzes the twentieth-anniversary commemorations in Poland, Hungary, Germany, the Czech and Slovak Republics, and Romania. It is based in part on my own observations (from May to December 2009) and in part on a survey of relevant discussions and coverage in the media of the countries in question. The anniversaries demonstrated the continuing importance of 1989 in all six countries as a founding moment on which the legitimacy of present-day regimes depends at least in part; the commemorations invariably sought to specify the meaning of 1989 in order to emphasize this legitimacy or to question it, and in order to support arguments for how the appurtenant political communities should evolve. Degrees of agreement about the meaning of 1989 were reflected in patterns of commemoration, which ranged from extensive, harmonious consensus in Germany and the Czech Republic to tense and clearly dysfunctional disagreement in Hungary. In Germany and the Czech Republic, commemorations were vividly “democratic” in nature; citizens rather than elites were at the centre of attention, and the activities both reflected and facilitated a renewal of civic engagement in public affairs. In Hungary, by contrast, the official commemorations were highly “aristocratic” – almost exclusively the affairs of state officials and privileged guests, and mostly off limits to ordinary citizens. Commemorations in other countries fell in a spectrum between these two extremes.

Though commemorations in the more “democratic” countries were characterized by a visible consensus, this was not a consensus about the exact meaning of 1989. In both Germany and the Czech Republic, there was a debate between fundamentally opposing interpretations of 1989 that took as their rival symbols the torch and the banana. Citizens organizing commemorations in Leipzig chose as their iconic image a photograph of a child on her father’s shoulders carrying a candle like a torch; they argued that the revolution had primarily been about democracy and that the torch needed to be passed on. The mayor of Prague, by contrast, chose the banana as the emblem of activities that his office sponsored, suggesting that the revolution had primarily been about material well-being, now happily improved. Despite disagreement about the meaning of 1989, however, participants in the “democratic” commemorations still functionally agreed about how to disagree. They could express opposing views in the same physical space without any fear of violence. In the more “aristocratic” countries, by contrast, there was a crisis of meaning, with the opposing camps literally unable to share public space and with barricades separating people from elites. In Hungary, moreover, the fear of violence was palpable.

“It all started in Poland”

My first encounter with Polish commemorations of 1989 was in Bratislava, where a red-and-white billboard at the main train station greeted visitors with the bold words (in English) “Freedom: Made in Poland.” Such billboards, I soon learned, were widespread across central Europe, along with signs proclaiming “It all began in Poland.” There were outdoor exhibits in Berlin, Prague, Bratislava, and Timișoara about the Polish road to 1989, and the Polish Institutes in the various capitals organized discussions and film screenings throughout the summer on this theme.

I arrived in Cracow on June 3 to find the city modestly decked out for the anniversary of the June 4 elections in which Solidarity candidates won a resounding victory over their Communist rivals. Banners fluttered on Rynek Główny, and outdoor exhibits were stationed in various parts of the city. That evening, however, a television debate made clear that the anniversary would be a contested one. Viewers were invited to vote via their mobile phones on the question: “Did the elections of 1989 mark the end of Communist power in Poland?” According to the vast majority of respondents, the answer was “no.”

On the anniversary of the elections I went first towards Wawel Castle. At 11 a.m., Prime Minister Tusk was to meet his counterparts from Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Romania, to be followed by a *Te Deum* in the cathedral and the sending of “a message to young Europe.”⁴ The entire hill was cordoned off, however – this commemoration was to be an exclusively elite affair. All those admitted at police checkpoints, their names ticked off a list, were in suits – even the group of middle school students who, presumably, were to represent “young Europe.” Now and then sirens would announce the arrival of cars and minibuses, some with diplomatic flags and all escorted by several police cars. Being present at the site I could learn little more than that this commemoration of Poland’s first democratic election since 1928 was closed to democratic participation, but on the evening news I learned that Greenpeace activists had somehow got in to stage a demonstration. Otherwise the event was as decorous as could be desired. Cardinal Dziwisz led the religious service, and Chancellor Merkel of Germany concluded her speech with the Polish words “dziękuję bardzo, Polsko” (thank you very much, Poland).

The only popular forms of commemoration I encountered that day in Cracow were a small renters’ protest, consisting of a march from Rynek Główny to the castle, and a more substantial anarchist march. Over 100 people took part in this second procession, which began at noon in front of the main train station and continued around the Ring and south to the foot of Wawel hill. Their lead banner proclaimed “without us there is no democracy,” while another declared “enough compromises: class war continues.” Amid the black or red and black flags were signs announcing affiliations, e.g. the Anarchist Federation, the Polish Association of Syndicalists, the New Left, and Young Socialists. While generally young, the marchers were not exclusively so; grey-haired old ladies walked alongside middle-aged men, and many of the participants in the earlier renters’ protest had joined this crowd. While some of the marchers wore black and a few had bandanas tied over their faces, most were dressed in ordinary street clothes and did not seek to hide their identity. Indeed, the well-behaved, polite manner of this demonstration made the extent of the police escort – perhaps one heavily equipped policeman for every marcher – seem ridiculous. Passers-by seemed to enjoy the scene even if they did not cheer the protesters (though the ranks of the marchers did swell somewhat as they progressed); the streets were lined with people taking photographs.

From television that afternoon I learned that things were much more interesting elsewhere in Poland. In Katowice, the trade union Solidarity had organized a demonstration larger than anything in Cracow under the banner “Silesia protests.” A placard in the crowd confirmed what one of the speakers said: “things are not as they should be,” and the ceremonies featured a coffin – suggesting, perhaps, the death of the dream of 1989. The real centre of events, however, was Gdańsk. While in one part of the city Tusk sat down with Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa for a conference on “Solidarity and the Fall of Communism,” at the shipyard an outdoor platform provided a space for workers and clergymen to address a crowd. The present chief of Solidarity spoke, as did a priest who related 1989 to John Paul II. President Kaczyński, sporting a button with a cross, declared that “twenty years ago the Polish people said no to Communism.” For some in the crowd, though, this was evidently not enough. One banner called for the end of political parties as such.

During the day the crowd in Gdańsk was smaller than the one in Katowice, but in the evening the proportion reversed itself. The shipyard became the site of a grandiose public ceremony organized by the European Solidarity Centre, a new state-funded institution in Gdańsk, under the theme “It began in Poland.” Monolithic red dominoes were set up in a line leading from the stage, each bearing the name of a formerly Communist country. From the stage, a grinning Lech Wałęsa pushed the first domino (Poland), which knocked down Hungary, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and fifteen others, culminating in Mongolia. At that moment fountains burst into action while red and white confetti fluttered above. The subsequent item on the program was a Scorpions concert, for which there was now a huge crowd. The band commenced with heavy metal and a few times invited the crowd to fill in for their vocals, but hardly anyone seemed to know the words. Only when the time came for “Wind of Change” – the last number, just before 11 p.m. – did the audience really join in. Many held their hands up in the V-sign and swayed.

I don’t know how many Poles joined in the 8 p.m. (20:00) “toast to freedom” proposed by journalists from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the newspaper founded to support Solidarity in the run-up to the 1989 elections, but the day did seem to be the occasion for discussion, even if it was quiet compared with what would take place in eastern Germany and the Czech Republic in the fall.⁵ Polish television broadcast footage from June 1989 (reminding people of

the joy they had visibly felt after voting) and held several discussions on the theme of the anniversary – including one comparing independence in 1918 and 1989. Television interviewees included a boy born on 4 June 1989, Wojciech Jaruzelski, and President Kaczyński. Jaruzelski emphasized that the elections would never have happened without him, and Kaczyński complained that June 4 was not a public holiday. There were commemorative events in dozens of other cities, and special Masses were said throughout the country.⁶

The fragmentation of memory is quite visible in the Polish case, not just because of the protests or the refusal of the president and prime minister to appear in the same place, but also because of the enforced separation between people and elites.⁷ It seems that official organizers put more effort into foreign policy than providing an opportunity for civil society to renew itself. It is significant, though, that no one challenged Solidarity as a sacred anchor of collective memory. The logo was used in both official and protest commemorations – even Greenpeace invoked it (though with green lettering, not red). It is also significant that elitism was counterbalanced by dignified protest. The same would not be true everywhere else.

“1989 was made possible by 1956”

The twentieth anniversary of the reburial of Imre Nagy did not become the occasion of as much public discussion as the anniversary of the Polish elections. There were commemorative events, but not as big, and if anything the exclusion of ordinary citizens from participation was more complete.

I missed an event that was to take place at Plot 301 early in the morning, but made it to Martyrs' Square downtown for a ceremony at 9 a.m. The square itself was completely blocked off, and from none of the surrounding fences was it possible to see clearly what was going on. A military band and a group of two or three dozen grey-haired men in suits were gathered around the statue of Imre Nagy, together with a gaggle of photographers, while policemen and well-dressed security thugs chatted here and there in other parts of the enclosed space. There was a speech about freedom, some singing, and the laying of wreaths.

Only on Nádor utca was there anything like a congregation, but there were as many police and guards as onlookers. A couple of youths were there with a large Hungarian flag, while a middle-aged woman stood right at the fence

with a small flag, emblazoned with the numbers 56/96, over her shoulder. There were maybe two dozen onlookers in all. An older man in a black suit stood at the fence with a bouquet of white flowers, while a young man held a single flower in paper. I overheard a passer-by speaking on his mobile phone about what happened “twenty years ago,” and I witnessed an older man walking a bicycle, who evidently wanted to cross the square to get home, arguing with the police to no avail. Five minutes after the ceremony ended we were allowed to enter the square and see the wreaths that had been left, guarded by two soldiers in interwar-style dress uniform.

From the distance with which I could view Heroes’ Square at 10 a.m., its wide space appeared to be festively arrayed with toy soldiers and a variety of Hungarian flags. The brass band was there, neatly lined up on the square’s front left quadrant, while a military choir stood in formation behind them, to the left of the flag-surrounded catafalque. Opposite them stood a large crowd of grey-haired men in suits, enlivened now by the presence of a few women in more colourful dress. In the front right quadrant stood a cluster of soldiers with wreaths, while a central red carpet leading to the catafalque was lined by soldiers bearing a variety of Hungarian flags. All the soldiers, once more, were wearing interwar-style dress uniforms.

The square was closed off to the public, so I could observe the ceremony only from across the street, where about as many people watched with me as had been on Nádor utca in the morning – including some of the same ones. The woman with the 56/96 flag was debating about the nature of “the Hungarian person” with a portly man whose T-shirt featured a map of pre-Trianon Hungary and the inscription: “to the god of the Hungarians.” As the ceremony across the street continued, the debate expanded to include more onlookers and to touch on the themes of Viktor Orbán and the present (Socialist) leadership, the role of the Communists, and Hungarians in Slovakia and Ukraine, all the while returning to the dates 1956 and 1989.

The only official commemorative event at all accessible to the public was an evening concert on Heroes’ Square. It was a much less exalted affair than the concert in Gdańsk – no well-known political or cultural figures took the stage – but still, several hundred people came. In between performances of famous opera choruses and arias, a male and a female speaker (both too young to remember 1956, possibly teenagers in 1989) read prepared comments on the significance of the day. “Without 1956, there would have been

no 1989,” read the man. “1989 was an important year in Europe,” read the woman, “but the Hungarian revolution of 1956 was what made it possible. We are gathered here to commemorate an event that took place in 1989, but the key date of that year was not June 16, but October 23 – the beginning of the Hungarian Republic. In October 1989, freedom and love stood next to each other. The ideals of 1989 were Hungarian independence, democracy, and Europe.” The crowd did not appreciably diminish when a rain shower burst in the middle of the concert, and they joined in singing Verdi’s “Va, pensiero” as well as the national anthem.

Whereas the official slogan of the Polish commemoration was “It all began in Poland” (in 1980), the officiators at the Hungarian commemoration insisted that it really all began in Hungary (in 1956). Whereas the Poles made their claims known throughout central Europe, however, the Hungarians kept their beliefs largely to themselves. The country attracted attention in early July, when the increasingly popular but arguably fascist Magyar Guard was dissolved by court order, but less so on the October 23, anniversary of the revolution of 1956 and the founding of the (non-People’s) Republic of Hungary in 1989, when the Guard successfully defied this order. While the president and Socialist prime minister attended an official ceremony off limits to the public in Kispest, Viktor Orbán of the opposition Young Democrats led his supporters in a rival commemoration in Buda, and Krisztina Morvai of the far-right Jobbik party addressed a crowd of thousands on Elisabeth Square in central Pest, with uniformed Guardsmen in attendance. As night fell, the Jobbik crowd – including the outlawed Guardsmen – invaded the square in front of Parliament, shouting across the heavily policed barricades at the government officials gathered for another official commemoration inside. The police did not intervene, and the Guardsmen were visibly proud of what they took to be not just a symbolic victory.⁸

“Jesus Christ, thank you for the peaceful *Wende*”

Germany also conducted an anniversary foreign policy, but it was less arrogant than Poland’s. In all four of the Visegrád capitals, the German embassies organized events under the banner “Germany says thank you,” spanning several days in June. The one I witnessed in Bratislava featured theatrical performances, concerts, discussions with German and Slovak writers, and a curious machine with which individuals could produce postcards with their photograph and handwritten “greetings of freedom.” The campaign explicitly declared that the German revolution of 1989, and subsequent

reunification, would not have been possible without the efforts of opposition movements in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.

Germany's official foreign policy was complemented by an extensive domestic discourse, particularly in the former GDR. There were exhibits throughout the "neue Bundesländer" on the revolution and about everyday life in the preceding decades. Museums and civic associations organized programs for schoolchildren, who of course had no memory of Communism or the revolution. New films premiered with titles such as *Wir sind das Volk* (We Are the People) and *Das Wunder von Leipzig* (The Miracle of Leipzig). Commemoration activity was particularly intense in Leipzig, with public discussions every Monday in the former Stasi headquarters, a weekly walking tour "Following the Traces of the Peaceful Revolution," and at least a dozen long-running exhibits in museums, churches, theatres, and schools.

I arrived in Leipzig on October 9, just in time to catch the end of the "Democracy Market" on the city's central Grimmaische Straße. Thirty-three citizens' initiatives – some international, others national or very local – manned tables set up along the street, distributing literature, gathering signatures on petitions, and explaining their ideas to passers-by. The groups included Amnesty International, ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens), a German movement for "More Democracy," a "Christian Initiative for the Unemployed," an "Anti-Privatization Initiative," and a local group rallying under the slogan "No to the military airport."

A stage was set up at the intersection with Universitätsstraße where readings, discussions, and allegorical performances had taken place throughout the day. When I arrived, a man was reading a poem he had written with the refrain "Freedom will be defended." Hardly anyone was listening. Nearby was a "round table" (both literally and figuratively, with a sign attesting to the latter), where someone recorded an interview with the poet after he had finished. Later, I found the poet manning the ATTAC table. He told me that the city had spent roughly €900,000 on the official celebrations, but that the Democracy Market was at participating groups' own expense. It was, however, endorsed by the citizens' initiative "Day of the Peaceful Revolution," which coordinated most of the official celebrations.

Peace prayers began at 5 p.m. in the Nikolaikirche. Admission was open to the public until capacity, but the line was so long that by the time I arrived

I knew I had no chance. I therefore contented myself with milling about the huge crowd outside. The mood was positive. On the square, around a banner that read “The Third Way: Consensus Structure,” a group began singing the “Ode to Joy” while some of their number passed out leaflets summarizing Helga LaRouche’s interpretation of the past twenty years. A solitary man held up a poster declaring his “private protest” (target unspecified). The police were around, but not an overwhelming presence as in Cracow or Budapest. They wore dress uniforms (not in the interwar style), stayed in groups of two or four, and were not visibly armed. All ages were present, as was a greater number of wheelchairs than one normally sees on cobblestoned European squares. There were a few obvious foreign tourists, but mostly I heard German, and I noticed that people were speaking to strangers. Almost everybody had a camera or camera-equipped mobile phone.

The LaRouche choir was still singing after 45 minutes. I noticed more placards in the crowd: “Freedom of movement for all: abolish residence requirements” and “One of the 70,000 does not feel himself after twenty years to be just betrayed and sold.” At around 6 p.m. the services in the Nikolaikirche ended and the crowd started drifting in the direction of Augustusplatz. People were clearly coming from work now, and the crowd was growing. As the sea of humanity bore me in the direction of Grimmaische Straße I heard a loud voice proclaiming the need to defend socialism and urging citizens to disperse. It turned out that loudspeakers were set up at the intersection of Ritterstraße and Grimmaische Straße, broadcasting the speeches of twenty years past. Hearing it before seeing it was surreal.

At the entrance to Augustusplatz young people were handing out candles, neatly nestled in clear plastic cups to keep out the wind, but many people had brought their own. It was not long before the immense square was absolutely full. Around me I spied more banners, e.g. “Jesus Christ, thank you for the peaceful *Wende*” and “Non-violent revolutionary cells at the Central Theatre.” Way up front near the opera house, I knew, candles were being placed in large frames so that the wording “Leipzig ’89” could be read from the sky, but there was no hope of approaching through the dense throng. As the sun set, speakers on a platform in front of the opera house began to address the crowd. Though Kurt Masur and Hans-Dietrich Genscher spoke briefly, the masters of ceremonies were Jochen Lässig and Katrin Hattenhauer, local civil rights activists before and since 1989.⁹ Hattenhauer, who had been imprisoned for participating in the first Monday demonstration in September

1989, emphasized how important it was that everything took place in 1989 without violence and urged the crowd to continue in this tradition tonight. Together they spoke for only about ten minutes, which seemed to me just right. It was long enough to give focus to the event, but not so long as to deflect attention away from the real phenomenon of the evening: the tens of thousands of people assembled on the square.

At about 7:15, in the dark now, the crowd began moving off the square to march around the Ring. The march was combined with a “Light Festival.” At 21 “stations” on the route from Augustusplatz to the Runde Ecke (the former Stasi headquarters now turned museum), artists from across Europe had set up thought-provoking exhibits involving light and sometimes sound or *tableaux vivants*.¹⁰ Stations of the Cross? Certainly it was a time for reflection, and though people conversed with one another, the mood was – for lack of a better word – reverent. As fate would have it, out of the tens of thousands of people marching I ran into the anti-globalization poet. I could tell that he preferred solitude to company, but it would have been impolite to say nothing, so I asked what he thought of the event. “I have mixed feelings,” he replied. “There are probably more people marching tonight than there were twenty years ago, but I am unsure of their motivations. It is good, though, that young people can gain experience participating in something like this, and it is good that it brings people into contact with modern art.”

At the Runde Ecke, “cannon” periodically blasted into the air above the marchers little slips of paper, each of which bore the typewritten codename of a Stasi agent or informer. The route of the march officially ended there, but many people continued on as if they intended to go around one more time. Others went into the Stasi museum, which was keeping its doors open until midnight. Among the activities taking place there were a “free reading” from Timothy Garton Ash’s *The File*, a screening of *Das Wunder von Leipzig*, and “guided tours” of Stasi files. My last image from the evening was back at the Nikolaikirche, where again it proved impossible to get in – this time for a concert conducted by Kurt Masur. At the side of the church, however, many candles were lit alongside flowers and a small, handmade poster: “swords into ploughshares.” A woman, perhaps in her 50s, stood vigil beside the candles, with tears in her eyes.

Whatever mixed feelings one might have about the aims behind the commemorations of October 9, it would be hard to imagine a more balanced

and tasteful way to organize them. The multiple activities and events allowed practically everyone to observe the anniversary as he or she saw fit, individually or collectively. As seems befitting a “democratic” revolution, moreover, the *demos* was really at the centre of attention throughout the day. An official ceremony had taken place in the Gewandhaus in the morning, with Chancellor Merkel and various other political figures in attendance, but it was open to the public and the dignitaries mingled with citizens afterwards, shaking hands and signing autographs.¹¹ The high point of the day, moreover, was clearly the prayer service in the Nikolaikirche and the march around the Ring. Eastern German newspapers the next day confirmed that roughly 100,000 people had taken part – over a third more than in the original march.¹² (Western German newspapers, in remarkable contrast, provided little or no coverage of the event.¹³) The poet was perhaps right that the experience would not convert many participants to greater civic activism, but because the commemoration had allowed them to *do* something – indeed, fulfilled a *desire* to do something – civic awareness was surely strengthened, renewing a sense of having a stake in a community of citizens. There was, finally, no kitsch (save possibly for the Stasi confetti at the Runde Ecke). Perhaps there would be a month later in Berlin, as there would be in Prague on November 17, but in Leipzig on October 9 there was nothing to detract from the earnestness of the commemoration.¹⁴

The next day anarchists, mostly but not all from eastern Germany, converged on Leipzig for an anti-commemoration. Over a thousand youths dressed in black marched from the main train station to Augustusplatz behind a banner that read “Still not lovin’ Germany: die Revolution – ein Mythos, die Freiheit – eine Farce, Deutschland – eine Zumutung” (the revolution – a myth, freedom – a farce, Germany – an imposition). They chanted “never again Germany!” as they marched, and several held aloft cardboard bananas on sticks. Others bore placards that read “the great Leipzig swindle,” “still loving communism,” or “against GDR-nostalgia: for a radical social critique”; two marchers carried Israeli flags. At Augustusplatz one of the marchers read a speech, in which she claimed that most East Germans were motivated in 1989 not by democratic consciousness but by consumerism, which led to a reawakening of German nationalism. She criticized united Germany as a racist “fourth Reich,” in which the myth of a dictatorial GDR diverted the attention of both westerners and easterners from the preceding regime and precluded critical debate about real socialism. She acknowledged that as a result of 1989 easterners had more civil rights and in many cases higher

living standards than before, but insisted that “the transition from really existing socialism to capitalism was not a comprehensive emancipation,” since the basic freedoms of the Federal Republic were bound up with the capitalist logic of valuation and could thus be violated. As evidence she cited surveillance of workplaces, public spaces, and the internet. She concluded by insisting that the “really existing Germany” was an imposition, and led those assembled in shouting “for something better than Germany! For something better than the nation!” Police were more numerous at this demonstration than they had been in Cracow, though they were less heavily armed. Onlookers, however, were less amused than their Polish counterparts had been (a woman next to me exclaimed that the anarchists should be sent into a wasteland), but most went about their business rather than listening to the long speech, and the event concluded without incident.

The anarchists were implicitly arguing against the “Leipzig Theses” that the citizens’ initiative behind most of the commemorations, “The Day of the Peaceful Revolution,” had published on September 4. In these eleven theses the activists had argued that, precisely to overcome the legacy of National Socialism, the political identity of *all* Germans needed to rest on the twin pillars of the Federal Republic’s Basic Law and the Peaceful Revolution. They insisted that democratic engagement, incarnated in Leipzig on October 9, was what had made possible the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9 and subsequent reunification, yet they expressed concern that Germany was now becoming a “spectator democracy.” In order to revitalize democratic engagement, they hoped to harness “the power of memory” by drawing German attention away from November 9 and its accompanying narrative of a passive *Wende*, riveting attention instead on October 9 and the active yet peaceful revolution that citizens in Leipzig had begun.¹⁵ In keeping with this aim they committed themselves to elaborate commemoration not just of the twentieth anniversary, but of all subsequent anniversaries at least until 2014.

“The Day of the Peaceful Revolution” was not the only group that came into being in 2009 with the goal of making the memory of 1989 a force in the present. On October 9 itself, Christian Führer – the pastor of the Nikolaikirche in 1989 – and several colleagues announced the creation of “The Peaceful Revolution Foundation.” Führer declared that “the Peaceful Revolution must continue,” and specified that in the wake of the global financial crisis, the revolution should not limit itself to a renewal of democratic

political engagement, but must also tackle economics. “I have in mind the Jesus mentality of sharing,” he said. “Instead of encouraging greed, we must share work, prosperity, and income with those who are weaker.” The foundation issued a “Charter for Courage” (clearly inspired by Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia), the signatories of which pledged to advance in specific ways four core ideals of the Peaceful Revolution: “no violence,” “swords into ploughshares,” “*we* are the people,” and “open for all.”¹⁶

“Make way for the Tunnel of Democracy”

As in Germany, the public discourse surrounding the anniversary in the Czech Republic began long before the crucial autumnal dates. Already in January, newspapers and radio stations began revisiting the news stories from twenty years ago “on this day,” highlighting the twentieth-anniversary commemoration of Jan Palach’s death in January 1989, the circulation of the “Few Sentences” manifesto in June, and the August and October protests coinciding with the anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion and the founding of Czechoslovakia. Special museum exhibits and conferences started inviting attention in early 2009 as well, until by autumn the country was thick with them. Refreshingly, all these manifold forms of commemoration took place in a spirit of genuine curiosity and open inquiry, exploring topics and interpretations that had hitherto received scant attention in the public sphere. Most of the exhibits were organized by small town museums, libraries, theatres, and other cultural institutions, and focused on what citizens in that particular locality had done in 1989, reminding the public that the revolution was not confined to Prague. Conferences, for the most part, were more serious and scholarly than they had ever been before, and when prominent personages of 1989 spoke at them, they engaged in hitherto uncharacteristic self-criticism.¹⁷ The revolution was clearly something that lots of Czechs wanted to reflect upon in the anniversary year, and they wanted to do so in new ways.

The high point of the year naturally came on November 17, the anniversary of the “massacre” (as it was called in 1989) that sparked the revolution. Though local organizers planned candlelight marches, concerts, and other commemorative events throughout the country, the greatest concentration of commemorative energy was in Prague. As in Leipzig, independent civic groups were behind most of the activities in the Czech capital, but there were so many of them (at least twenty) that it was impossible for one person to attend them all.¹⁸

An 8 a.m. text message from a friend alerted me to a student initiative to prevent President Klaus from laying a wreath at the plaque on Národní třída that marked the spot where the greatest violence had taken place on 17 November 1989. The idea was to reincarnate the student guards of 1989 by physically, albeit non-violently, blocking access to the spot once the president arrived. In an effort to keep the city police from finding out, my friend told me, the plan was not being advertised publicly, but circulated only via Facebook and personal communication. I reached the memorial shortly before Klaus's scheduled arrival and found a thick crowd around it, but no clearly discernible "blockade." Because of the crowd I could not see Klaus's coming, but I certainly heard it. From the opposite end of the archway under which the plaque was situated came cries of "Shame! Shame!" as well as booing and whistling, rejoined by other voices shouting "Long live Klaus!" Police evidently ensured that the president was able to lay his wreath, after which he disappeared into a high-class café adjacent to the archway. The shouting continued, however, with the shouters dividing into distinct camps, each of which seemed to unite multiple sets of constituents. Present and former "students" were evidently in the group protesting Klaus, while young Civic Democratic Party activists and anti-EU nationalists comprised the group protesting the protesters. Members of the first group displayed such banners as "Klaus is not our president! –students of 1989" and "Schröder-Gazprom, Klaus-Lukoil," as well as EU flags. Members of the opposing group brandished placards saying "Enough of the EU," "Berlin – Moscow – Brussels," and "Klaus's guarantee to business." "Shame!" cried the one side. "Long live Klaus!" shouted the other. After perhaps fifteen minutes of this Klaus emerged from the café, followed by city police whose jackets identified them as an "anti-conflict team," and exited stage left. Rock music commenced from a podium down the street, but did not deter the protesters and anti-protesters from continuing their war of words. "Long live Klaus!" shouted one side. "Somewhere else!" responded the other. The drama fizzled out about forty minutes after it began, though I noticed that the Klaus supporters held out longer – perhaps because they had a megaphone.

Whereas Leipzig had a Democracy Market, the City of Prague sponsored a "Socialist Market" on its Old Town Square. Advertisements scattered about the city promised that food and drink would be available "at socialist prices" (e.g. 2.90 crowns for a beer) but it turned out that this was to be for only half an hour later in the afternoon. Meanwhile, stands situated about the square offered sausages, beer, tea, and mulled wine at contemporary capitalist prices.

In the centre of the square, however, two “fruit and vegetable” stands and a booth labelled “Tuzex” (the Communist-era hard-currency shop for Western goods) were supposed to represent socialist reality. Long queues snaked in front of each of them. No produce was visible on the counters of the fruit and vegetable stands, but the women staffing them would reach down below the counters and produce for each customer one small orange. The “Tuzex” counter displayed chocolate eggs from (West) Germany and a handful of other insignificant items for five or six “coupons” each. The coupons could be obtained only from shady “moneychangers” supposedly circulating around the square. If Leipzig didn’t have kitsch, Prague certainly did.

The message became clearer when I returned to Národní třída, where I found the entrance to the street from the Vltava embankment embellished by a large inflated gate on which was written “What we would be running for if it hadn’t happened.” Go-carts in the shape of bananas raced along the street, the prizes being toilet paper, bananas, and similar items that had at times been scarce prior to the revolution. For the organizers, evidently, this was what the revolution had been about.

Upon this happy scene of consumer satisfaction there burst a large group of young people dressed in black, some holding banners with the letters “DS” for the arguably fascist *Dělnická strana* (Workers’ Party), accompanied by lots of riot police.¹⁹ They congregated in front of the space between the National Theatre and the New Stage, where their chairman, with a megaphone, delivered a speech. He had reached his peroration by the time I got close enough to hear, but the point seemed to be that the situation in 2009 paralleled that which existed prior to 1989. This thesis garnered enthusiastic applause from the black-clad youths, none of whom appeared to be old enough to remember life before 1989. The group then began to march in the direction of the bridge spanning the Vltava from Národní and I realized at that moment how large it was. I estimated 300, though newspapers the next day claimed only 200.²⁰ They chanted “Dělnická strana” as they marched, police on every side, and quite a lot of them made the finger sign – to everyone around, it seemed. I was glad to leave the scene and head south along the embankment to Albertov, where a re-enactment of the 1989 march was set to commence, but when I looked back now and then I could still see a huge crowd on the bridge, where evidently the Workers’ Party adherents had stopped, and I heard some choral shouts. A helicopter hovered overhead.

Anyone who did not know the layout of Prague's New Town could still have found the way that day to the Natural Sciences campus of Charles University in Albertov, simply by following the masses of people heading in that direction. In 1989, a student-organized commemoration of the Nazi execution of Czech students in 1939, which had begun at Albertov and continued to the National Cemetery, had turned into a march of perhaps 50,000 towards Prague's downtown core, where they were brutally intercepted on Národní třída. In 2009, an independent civic initiative called Opona (the Curtain) invited citizens to join a commemorative march along the same route. I arrived at Albertov at around 3 p.m., shortly before the event was scheduled to commence, and made my way uphill toward the front, where a platform had been erected. On my way I encountered a bearded youth distributing what I guessed might be information about the event. "What are you handing out?" I asked him in Czech. "Flyers with the program," he answered in Slovak. Over the course of the afternoon I would hear Slovak quite frequently.

The crowd was already thick around the grandstand, so I made it only as far as the entrance to the geography building, perhaps fifty meters away. After about fifteen minutes of what seemed to be irrelevant rock music, speeches began, but the sound system was so poor that it was impossible to make out most of the words. Fortunately I was later able to obtain an outline of the speeches from the organizers, according to which – after a few introductory words from a moderator – a spokesman for Opona addressed the crowd. According to the organizers' program, the essence of his speech was:

We have something to celebrate! Fellow thirty-somethings! We do not live in totalitarianism!

Besides being a celebration, today's march is a reminder of what happened here twenty years ago. By recalling the Communist past of our country we are trying to contribute to the self-assessment of this nation and particularly of the young generation. If this self-assessment and a coming to terms with the period of totalitarianism and its consequences do not occur, we cannot expect that our democracy will develop in a good direction.

We thank not only those who have turned out today, but all those who strive for democracy and freedom.

Do not let yourselves be provoked by extremists. We won't have anything to do with extremists!

The moderator then invited a Slovak guest, Milan Žitný, to speak for a couple minutes, followed by Šimon Pánek – one of the most prominent students of 1989. After his two minutes, Pánek welcomed two “foreign” guests, one from Russia and one from China (note that the organizers did not consider Slovakia “foreign”).

After a musical interlude, the moderator invited two representatives of the student initiative “Inventory of Democracy” to speak, noting that their declaration was being distributed among the people. These two students were allotted nine minutes according to the program – more than anyone else received. While I couldn’t hear them, I noticed at that time a commotion in the crowd behind me and heard a loud, clear voice cry out (in Slovak) “Make way, please, the Tunnel of Democracy is coming!” The voice turned out to be that of a young man dressed in a comic suit and hat, leading a “train” of other young people who held aloft a large tube of brown cloth given shape by hoops sewn in at intervals of a meter or so. White letters between the hoops identified the tube as, indeed, “the Tunnel of Democracy.” The gag clearly alluded to the many “tunnelling” scandals of the past twenty years (in which enterprise managers enriched themselves by metaphorically building secret tunnels through which assets could be embezzled) and produced lots of laughter and smiles among those able to see it.

The next speaker was Martin Kotas, the founder of a civic movement that had supported the installation of NATO radar in the Czech Republic before U.S. President Obama pulled the plug from the project in October 2009. The point of his one-minute address was:

Democracy isn’t for free. If we give up on it for reasons of repulsion and hopelessness, we will lose it. It is difficult to work towards it but easy to lose it. Therefore, the revolution of 1989 will continue only when young people take responsibility for the situation in society and join political parties (excepting the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia). If you’re angered, then join one of the parties.

Finally, the moderator invited the actor Tomáš Matonoha to present his “open letter to the Communist Party” – little more than a long string of extremely vulgar Czech words that he composed in response to a Communist proposal in the Czech parliament to restrict usage of such language in certain

media.²¹ Matonoha introduced his “letter” by noting that it was addressed not only to the Communist Party, but “to all *Lumpen* who want to abuse or suppress our freedoms for their own personal interests.”²²

“Are we going?” people started to ask, once the inaudible speechmaking had evidently stopped. “We’re going,” spread the answer through the crowd. I took a position on the steps of a research institute halfway down the street, where I could observe the march as it passed. Since the part of the crowd that had been behind me was now at the front of the procession I could from this position survey only a portion of it, but this was enough to reveal certain facts. First, the marchers included people of all ages, from toddlers in strollers to grey-haired grandparents, but I would guess that the median age was thirty-something. Newspaper reports the following day confirmed that many participants were veterans of the 1989 march, often now with young children in tow.²³ University students (of 2009) also seemed to be a significant contingent. Second, nearly all of the many placards and banners in the procession were handmade – as they had been in 1989 – and in pleasing contrast with the boring, lifeless, printed placards that one usually sees in political demonstrations these days. The placards and banners in this procession were creative, lively, and often humorous (usually involving untranslatable puns), and some were minor works of art. Even more remarkable was the diverse nature of opinions that these handmade creations expressed. Not far from a placard demanding Havel’s reinstatement as president (“Havel back to the Castle”) was one condemning Havel as a criminal. A few meters behind a placard encouraging citizens to “support Klaus” was one declaring that “Klaus is not my president.” If ever there was such a thing as a democratic parade, this was it. The opinions expressed were diametrically opposed, but still all could agree on a framework for expressing them, and through their participation in this commemorative reincarnation, all celebrated this framework.

I opted not to follow the crowd to the National Cemetery so that I could take up a position on the embankment, whereby I would be able to watch the entire procession pass and gain a sense of its size independently of unreliable media reports. Many other people had similar ideas, and I found the embankment lined with people carrying flags, placards, and in some cases flowers. One young man (perhaps my age, actually – in his late thirties) particularly impressed me, with a solemn expression and a modest orange flower sticking up out of a small, beat-up backpack that might have

been new in 1989, along with a sign: “Let us reason democratically: freely and responsibly.” Many people who looked to be my age were there with children in strollers – often with flags attached.

The head of the procession arrived shortly after sunset and found me in front of a building that, I soon discovered, happened to be the very one where Olga and Václav Havel had lived in 1989. From this position I watched the entire procession pass by, recording all the placards that had escaped my attention before. I also noticed how a woman’s voice repeatedly sounded from a position to my right, recalling how Olga Havlová had waved to the marchers from her window and enjoining the commemorators to thank Olga and Václav Havel. Applause inevitably followed and a white sky lantern rose into the air. The first time I heard the applause I thought it was touching. By the fifth time I began to wonder at its consistency, following the announcer’s speech each time with the same intensity. I learned from the next day’s newspaper that there were “professional applauders” in the crowd, thus accounting for the consistency but also – to my mind – inviting comparison with the secret police agents who, in 1989, had been planted in the crowd and guided it toward the trap set up on Národní třída.²⁴

The procession took 35 minutes to pass me, and given the width of the street, the pace of the marchers, and the varying density of the crowd, I estimate that at least 24,000 took part (significantly more than the five to ten thousand reported in newspapers the next day).²⁵ I then followed to Národní, where at 6:00 a concert was set to begin. As I entered the boulevard I passed a woman on the steps of the National Theatre handing out treats to her three children: “Chocolate for the demonstrators,” she said with a smile. I stayed for only the beginning of the concert – long enough to witness Michael Kocáb play a few notes and hear Václav Havel be introduced, but since the concert was being broadcast by Czech Television and a recording was made available on the internet, I was able to reassure myself later that I hadn’t missed anything.²⁶ Havel did little more than introduce Joan Baez, limiting his substantive address to “I have been a citizen and now I rely on you, my fellow citizens.” Otherwise the point of the concert, as its moderator put it, was: “Those who want to celebrate, let them celebrate; those who don’t, let them refrain. We have freedom of choice.”

My choice was to make it to the top of Wenceslas Square in time to get a good position for observing the Inventory of Democracy happening that

was set to begin at 6:30. Approximately 2,500 people turned out for this student-led event – those who, as one of the moderators put it, “do not mean to content themselves with a party on Národní třída, but who want to consider where we are after these twenty years and what will come next.”²⁷ The students began by summarizing the results of their previous year’s appeal to politicians to give them a “present” for their “twentieth birthday” in the form of restrictions on the immunity of parliamentary deputies, regulation of lobbying, the reigning in of “wild riders” to legislation, and depoliticization of media oversight boards – i.e. the removal of “legislative absurdities” that, as the students put it, “place our democracy at times at the level of banana republics.” A representation of the gift that the students had in fact received had been unveiled in a Prague park the previous week – a sculpture its author described as an example of “fecalist realism” – but the students insisted that their failure had been mixed with hope. By personally visiting deputies and publicly reporting on their activities, they had succeeded in getting motions onto the floor of parliament. In other words, citizens *could* have an influence. The students then read sections of their “Student Proclamation on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Velvet Revolution.”²⁸ They emphasized in these selections the risk of unfreedom in the present, asking “why” – twenty years after the supposed end of Communism – “do we still feel powerless? Why is there such tolerance for corruption? Why do we regard only our own material security as important?” “Entering public space is getting harder and harder and soon will be entirely closed off to decent folk,” they said. “There is a danger that in ten years we will be able only to lament that our democracy failed to reach its thirtieth birthday.”

At this point sheep masks were distributed through the crowd in preparation for the promised happening: an Orwellian “fairy tale” in which four students with pig masks danced on the stage and impersonated well-known Czech politicians. Playing on the Czech words *občané* (citizens) and *ovce* (sheep), the pigs addressed the crowd as “ovčané” and thanked them for allowing pigs to abuse their positions. “There is no one else to vote for,” they emphasized, “so please continue to vote for us and remain exactly as you are.” In the end, at a sign from one of the moderators, the crowd took off their masks and became citizens again, whereupon the pigs fled the stage. The moral of the story, explained the student dramaturge behind it, was that “even after twenty years we are still more *ovčané* than *občané*.” “We lack skills and competence that should normally belong to citizens in a democracy,” and as a result, “politicians here enjoy exactly such a life as these pigs; they get

away with the most obvious roguery because no one has a vision that might compete with them.”

To conclude their event the students introduced “Truth and Love himself” – Václav Havel. There was a moment of laughter when one of the student moderators had to intervene because Havel wasn’t speaking directly enough into the microphone, but his speech here was more substantive than it had been on Národní. He bemoaned the fact that the gulf between politics and society was deepening. “Politics,” he said, “should attract people and not repulse them.” He expressed his admiration for the student initiative precisely because it sought to correct this situation, and he emphasized the necessity for all citizens to shoulder their share of responsibility. The students then distributed candles for people to lay before the statue of St. Wenceslas, “to thank him thus for sticking with us on every occasion,” and closed by leading those assembled in the Czech national anthem. A few lone voices continued with the beginning of the Slovak anthem (which everyone twenty years previously would have sung) and then there was applause. Discussion groups formed and continued on the square for some time afterwards.

“What kind of Tiananmen Square...?”

The anniversary commemorations in Slovakia fit somewhere between the democratic German/Czech pattern and the aristocratic Polish/Hungarian paradigm. The civic dimension was markedly weaker in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic (a difference that Slovak commentators often lamented) but on the other hand, there were no barricades.

June’s “Germany says thank you” events in Bratislava were poorly attended and even the moderators made jokes that devalued the anniversary, but they were overshadowed by a high-profile rumpus on the occasion of a state visit by the Chinese president, Hu Jintao. Slovak human rights activists greeted Hu and his delegation in front of the downtown presidential palace with signs drawing attention to the plight of Chinese political prisoners and to other human rights violations; members of the delegation physically attacked the Slovak protesters and Slovak police intervened on the side of the Chinese. Several protesters were beaten and arrested. The irony of such an event on the twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre – at a time when Slovakia was otherwise celebrating the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution – was not lost on journalists across the political spectrum. “What kind of Tiananmen Square would please [President] Gašparovič?”

asked one.²⁹ Jeremy Irons, accepting a prize at the Trenčianske Teplice film festival – which this year was devoted to the anniversary and featured a new documentary on the revolution in which Irons had participated – earned vigorous applause when he criticized Slovak authorities for their refusal to stand up for the ideals of the revolution.³⁰

On the occasion of the November anniversary itself, rival commemorations took place in Bratislava. Though in Slovakia, as in the Czech Republic, November 17 is a state holiday (the “Day of the Fight for Freedom and Democracy”) President Gašparovič chose to spend the entire day in Austria, while Prime Minister Fico spent most of it in London, where he told his audience at University College that “speakers at the revolutionary stands were not always just and fair people” and asked, “How can one esteem November 1989, when the promises of a higher living standard have not been realized?”³¹ Fico returned to Bratislava that evening, just in time to attend a concert organized by the speaker of Parliament for members of the governing party and their coalition partners in the new building of the Slovak National Theatre. Zuzana Mistríková, Ján Čarnogurský, Martin Bútora, and other former “speakers at the revolutionary stands,” for their part, officiated at a well attended ceremony on Hviezdoslav Square (site of the city’s first revolutionary meetings in 1989), where a replica was unveiled of Daniel Brunovský’s “Heart of Europe” – a sculpture originally formed out of barbed wire taken from the border with Austria in one of the greatest Czechoslovak happenings of 1989 (the sculpture had subsequently been destroyed in a flood). “Nothing is ever definitively won,” the speakers lamented. “The struggle continues and will continue.”³² Members of opposition parties left candles and proceeded to their own concert in the old building of the National Theatre. Meanwhile, the Plastic People of the Universe opened a third, independently organized “Concert for Those Who Noticed” in Bratislava’s Park of Culture and Rest. The title of this most well attended event alluded to a statement by Róbert Fico in 2000, when the future prime minister had claimed not to have noticed in 1989 that any “fundamental change” occurred.³³

The political split in Bratislava had its parallel in other cities as well. In Košice, for example, the mayor’s office sponsored the ceremonial installation of a plaque on the downtown library building, from the balcony of which speakers had addressed mass meetings in 1989. In opposition to the mayor’s initiative, the local founders of Civic Forum (which in Košice had

been more prominent than Public against Violence) independently organized their own ceremony to install a plaque on the building where they had established their coordinating centre. Unlike the split in Bratislava, this one was not overtly partisan (the mayor belonged to one of the parties that participated in the Hviezdoslav Square commemoration), and though the two sides disagreed about how exactly to memorialize the revolution, they both agreed that it should be memorialized.³⁴ Nonetheless, the inability of the two groups to cooperate speaks to the absurd extremes to which Slovak political discourse was fragmented (why not, after all, have two plaques?). The comparison with Košice is also revealing in another sense. In Bratislava, several founders of Public against Violence set up an anniversary exhibit in the gallery where their initiative had come into being, focusing on its leaders and their undertakings. The ladies selling tickets told me that hardly anyone visited. In Košice, by contrast, a group of young artists organized an exhibit showcasing the diversity of local civic initiative in 1989, including revolutionary texts that ordinary citizens had generated, and I could see for myself that visitation rates were high. The contrast suggests that the “success” of commemorative activities might be tied with 1) the ability to reach out to ordinary citizens, such that they can see themselves reflected in what is being commemorated, and 2) the ability to pass leadership roles on to a new generation. Part of the reason why, on the whole, commemorations in the Czech Republic were more engaging than those in Slovakia may not just be that Czech organizers were better at following these two principles, but also that many of the brightest Slovak youth go to study and work in the Czech Republic – an exit/voice dynamic reminiscent of that between the two Germanies before 1990.³⁵ (Indeed, the chief coordinator of the Košice exhibit moved to Prague in 2011.)

“Heroes never die”

A wide range of commemorative activities took place in Romania in the fall of 2009, though they were more common in the formerly Habsburg parts of the country than elsewhere. Beginning in September, special religious services marked revolution-related anniversaries in Cluj and Timișoara; in November a new play about the revolution premiered in Oradea, and the exhibition *'89 Retro*, showcasing young Romanians’ artistic interpretations of Communism, travelled from Cluj to Timișoara through Arad and Oradea. The main events, however, began on December 14 in Timișoara, the eve of the day when, twenty years previously, Communist authorities had attempted to evict Pastor László Tőkés from his residence at the downtown

Hungarian Reformed Church, only to meet with the determined resistance of his parishioners. The conflict had set off a week of dramatic events, and the city was prepared to remember them with seven days of discussions, exhibits, film screenings, and more active forms of commemoration.

The first event I witnessed in Timișoara was a series of public addresses by Lech Wałęsa, Emil Constantinescu, Viktor Orbán, and László Tőkés in the university aula on December 15. The event began an hour later than scheduled, by which time the aula was about two-thirds full; students made up a large portion of the audience, but there were many others, mostly dressed in suits. A moderator from one of the Hungarian minority groups sponsoring the event began by introducing the speakers in relation to their “struggle” against Communism. Wałęsa, “a simple worker,” and Orbán, “a young student,” had shown that even the powerless could effectively challenge the Communist regime. In Romania, unfortunately, “Communists did not disappear; they transformed themselves in very efficient ways,” such that Emil Constantinescu’s administration from 1996 to 2000 marked the only time Romania had had democracy. László Tőkés, instrumental in sparking the Romanian revolution and now a delegate to the European Parliament, “continues to fight against Communism.”

Wałęsa received vigorous and lengthy applause when he rose to speak. Through an interpreter, he emphasized the role of Christianity in opposing Communism and sustaining civil society, making references to Pope John Paul II. He appealed to his audience “to believe.” Constantinescu pointed out that, when he visited Poland as Romania’s president, the first thing he did was to convey to Wałęsa the homage of the Romanian people. Instead of “Christianity,” however, Constantinescu emphasized “morality,” referring to Václav Havel and positing the moral impact that “Central Europe” should exert on international affairs, informed by its experience of totalitarianism and the struggle to overcome it. He also expressed the hope that this anniversary would re-establish the dignity of the revolution in Timișoara, which contained all the acts of a real revolution (presumably in contrast with the not-so-real one that took place in Bucharest). Timișoara, he said, should be the symbol of the revolution.

So far, so good. Then Viktor Orbán spoke. Unlike Wałęsa, he did not use an interpreter, and in reaction to this offensive gesture half the audience walked out. Orbán continued the theme of a particular Central European

wisdom, highlighting again the experience with fascism and Communism but also castigating “the West” for its compromises with Communism and its naive sympathy for socialism based on lack of experience. “History has shown,” he insisted, “that freedom and independence are tied together,” and he suggested that Central Europeans should stand united to preserve both (in the face of threats to both the East and the West).

Pastor Tőkés began with a blessing in both Hungarian and Romanian. Perhaps because most of those who did not understand Hungarian had left, however, he continued solely in that language (as a result of which more people left, leaving the aula only one-fourth full). Tőkés thanked Wałęsa for his solidarity and the people of Timișoara for their tolerance and ecumenical spirit. He also spoke of Romanian solidarity with Hungary in 1956 and of how Romanians view Poland as a symbol of freedom, again sounding the Central European theme. He concluded with a blessing as he had begun.

December 17 was the anniversary of the day when armed forces had opened fire on protesters in Timișoara. Romanian television marked the anniversary by broadcasting recordings of the Securitate coordination of the attack and by commemorating the dead, while in Timișoara a large cross made up of votive candles was set out on Victory Square in front of the opera house. Early in the evening, after a memorial service in the Orthodox cathedral, a march set out from the church to Heroes’ Cemetery on the opposite side of town. At the entrance to Victory Square the crowd of perhaps 200 mostly but not exclusively young people passed a monument to the revolution, buried beneath wreaths after a ceremony earlier in the day, and proceeded to the cross of candles, where they knelt in silence. Several carried placards emblazoned with the symbol of a hand in the V-sign or the words “eroii nu mor” (heroes never die) and “respect.” A group near the front of the procession carried a large Romanian flag with a hole in the middle. From the square the marchers proceeded to the alley next to the opera house, where they paused to take in the screening of victims’ faces on a wall opposite the Opera, which had commenced at sunset.

By this time the crowd’s numbers had grown and its composition become more overwhelmingly young and male. A number of youths had maps of Greater Romania sewn onto their jackets. As they proceeded past the army building on Liberty Square, where someone left a candle burning atop a cannon, the chants of these young men became more aggressive. “Down with

Communism!” they cried. “Down with Communists! Freedom! Timișoara!” At the next stop on their itinerary, the Museum of the Revolution, as many as could fit took up positions on the outer rim of the courtyard or one of the two encircling balconies above, but still people were left waiting outside. The ceremony was brief, centring on the dedication of a new monument to the victims of 1989: a bell-like sculpture around which individuals lit votive candles. The crowd then continued its march to the cemetery, chanting slogans on the way, and left candles and wreaths at the gravesites.

The killing had continued in Timișoara on December 18, so this, too, was a day of mourning. The focal point of the day’s events was a performance of Verdi’s *Requiem* in the opera house at 6 p.m., but before this another candlelit march set out, this time from the Reformed church where Tőkés had been pastor in 1989. Following a roundtable discussion sponsored by the president of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, which had culminated in the inauguration of a “Revolutionary Pantheon” and the ceremonial lighting of the renovated church building, participants and parishioners gathered outside. Instead of the simple Orthodox candles that participants in the previous day’s march had brought with them, expensive-looking gas torches were distributed to those outside the Reformed church, along with white armbands on which were printed the words (in Romanian) “Timișoara, first city free of Communism, 1989–2009.” The crowd was smaller than on the previous day, but was more mixed in terms of age and gender and was markedly better dressed. Most spoke Hungarian. Following a short speech by Tőkés, in which he referred to the Hungarian 1848 hero Sándor Petőfi and liberty, we walked the short distance to the Orthodox cathedral, where on the steps a prayer was said in Romanian. We then proceeded across the square to the Opera, arriving early and obtaining good seats. The program featured not only Verdi’s *Requiem*, but also readings of specially composed poems by Herta Müller and Viorel Marineasa. It was broadcast live on Romanian television and simultaneously screened outside on the square, though when I went outside to check very few people stood watching it – perhaps because of the extreme cold.

The only event of significance that I noticed on December 19 (a Saturday) was an ecumenical service in the Reformed church at 5 p.m. Though the pews did not fill up, the organizers did an impressive job of gathering prominent representatives from all of Timișoara’s major religious and linguistic communities, including the Romanian Orthodox bishop,

German- and Hungarian-speaking Roman Catholics, the Greek Catholic bishop, Hungarian-speaking Lutherans and Romanian-speaking Baptists, a Ukrainian Orthodox clergyman, and the head of the Jewish community. The present pastor of the Hungarian Reformed church began the service by emphasizing that the revolution did not come from abroad, that it began “here in Timișoara” thanks to the faithfulness not just of the Hungarian Reformed community, but everyone. Provocatively, though, he proposed that the revolution had no heroes, “for no one but Christ is the truth, the way, and the life.” The theme of a pluralist Timișoara was picked up by several speakers, including the Romanian Orthodox bishop and the leader of the Jewish community, who suggested that a unique chance existed in Timișoara for ecumenism. The German-speaking Catholic emphasized the theme of a divine origin to the revolution, asserting that “freedom is a gift from God and a grace to us all,” and added that there is no freedom without responsibility. Each speaker spoke his own mother tongue (sometimes adding some sentences in another language) and headphones provided simultaneous interpretation to the dignitaries (the congregation, evidently, was assumed to understand all the languages spoken). Tóké wrapped the service up with a quotation from Scripture and the claim that what happened in 1989 was not a mere “regime change,” but a “revolution,” which was not just about Communism and in which the Church was strong. He thanked those who had come, saying that they represented “the true Timișoara,” and expressed his hope that the memory of the Timișoara revolution would continue to inspire common efforts across confessional and linguistic divides to solve common problems.

Sunday, December 20 was a quiet day in Timișoara. A heavy snowfall and temperatures below -10°C kept most people indoors. Nonetheless, at 10 a.m., members of the “Victory Association of Revolutionary Fighters in Timișoara” met in the County Council building for a “festive assembly” dedicated to the anniversary of the “unleashing” of the Romanian revolution, the constitution of the Romanian Democratic Front (RDF), and the proclamation of Timișoara as a city free of Communism. At midday, founders of the RDF repaired to the balcony of the opera house, where they reread their twenty-year-old proclamation to a largely empty square.³⁶ They later complained of the low turnout, claiming that it showed the people of Timișoara to be apathetic, but the freezing cold and lack of any prior publicity for this event might be better explanations. When at 1 p.m. sirens sounded throughout the city, most people could probably only guess what it meant.

According to flyers that *were* posted around the city, the week's events were supposed to culminate in a "spectacol festiv" on Victory Square at 6 p.m. When the event finally started at 6:30, the temperature was -11°C and falling, and the square was nearly empty. The program began with a series of speakers from the Victory Association, starting with its president, the eccentric Lorin Fortuna. A teacher in the Electrotechnical Faculty of Timișoara's polytechnic before 1989, Fortuna has since become a self-proclaimed prophet of esotericism, preaching that members of the "gorrillian" civilization, descended from the ancient Dacians and centred in Romania, are the original inhabitants of our planet but must now fight against various invading civilizations from outer space. At the "spectacol festiv," however, he limited himself to more commonplace political commentary: what happened in Timișoara was an authentic revolution and "today marks the most important anniversary in our history"; the National Salvation Front in Bucharest was subversive and stole the revolution. When the speeches were done a music ensemble, dressed in folk costumes beneath winter coats, came on stage and with what must have been freezing fingers played a number of lively tunes. There were more people in front of the grandstand now (perhaps two dozen) and they danced to keep warm. Finally, at 7:30, a brief fireworks display over the cathedral consummated the event.³⁷

Conclusions

What was the significance of these commemorations? First of all, they showed that 1989 remains a politically potent point of reference in central Europe. Even if there was disagreement about the exact meaning of 1989, there was substantial agreement that something meaningful happened in that year, and no government or head of state could ignore it. The commemorations were attempts to fix the meaning of events through collective acts of signification, and needless to say the promulgated meanings had significant implications for the present, being either calls to action or appeals to accept the status quo. While the commemorations allowed space for discussing particular political questions of the day, however, they transcended ordinary political debates by inviting citizens to focus on the framework through which political issues are resolved (or not), since in one way or another this framework was founded in 1989.

It is noteworthy that in Leipzig, Prague, and Timișoara, commemoration organizers made a determined effort to rehabilitate the notion that genuine revolutions had commenced in their cities in 1989. This did not go without

saying. In Germany, Leipzig's elaborate insistence on the narrative of a "Peaceful Revolution" was self-consciously directed against a more nationally hegemonic Berlin-centred narrative of a mere *Wende*, or "turn." Though *Revolution* was the term that East Germans themselves most commonly used in 1989, Helmut Kohl and the West German press followed Erich Honecker's successor Egon Krenz in favouring the less radical-sounding moniker, which eventually became standard across reunited Germany.³⁸ Similarly, in the Czech Republic, the term *převrat* (reversal) largely supplanted the originally dominant *revoluce* in the mid-1990s, until shortly before the twentieth anniversary the original conceptualization made a comeback. In Timișoara, as in Leipzig, there was an explicit effort to rehabilitate the idea of *revoluție* by emphasizing its origins in local civic engagement prior to its "theft" by elites in Bucharest. The argument in Leipzig and Timișoara, as throughout the Czech Republic, was that the real meaning of 1989 was to be found not in the doings of elites in the capitals, but among citizens who had mobilized themselves as a force in public affairs. The relatively democratic nature of the commemorations in these locations can be directly related with the revived memory of democratic revolution.

The more aristocratic commemorations were correlated with a lack of revolutionary experience in 1989. Hungarian politicians have often attempted to make the revolutionary experience of 1956 substitute for the lack of one in 1989, but evidently the memories are too dim to serve this purpose, or they have not been effectively transferred to younger generations. In 2009, neither 1989 nor 1956 seemed capable of uniting citizens across the political spectrum. Whereas in other countries, despite political disagreements, citizens could still functionally agree on a framework for expressing them in public space, the framework in Hungary seemed to have fallen into dysfunctionality. By contrast, though most Poles concur that their country experienced no revolution in 1989, they still have a functional equivalent in the memory of Solidarity in 1980–81, which helps to explain why the separation of political elites from citizens – and of political elites from one another – was more laughable in 2009 than frightening. There might have been a fight over the legacy of Solidarity, but not over the remembered moment of collective transcendence itself.³⁹

The awkwardness of commemoration in Slovakia, despite an experience of democratic revolution essentially akin to that of the Czech Republic, resulted in part from attempts by prominent political figures to discredit

that experience. Slovakia was the one place in central Europe where *revolution* had never gone out of fashion as the proper name for what happened in 1989, but Prime Minister Fico nonetheless argued in 2009 that this revolution had failed and so saw no reason to encourage celebration. Opposition party leaders responded by appropriating for themselves the legacy of the revolution – in such a clearly partisan way that it became difficult for citizens across the political spectrum to revive the ethos of pluralist dialogue that had in fact characterized all of Czechoslovakia in 1989. With it being so easy and desirable, both politically and economically, for civic-minded young Slovaks to move to the other successor state (or elsewhere in Europe), it was not surprising to see a more aristocratic (or mafia-like) political culture emerging in Slovakia despite the revolutionary experience of 1989.

It cannot escape a historian's notice that the two countries where barricades separated people from elites were the two countries that once had the largest aristocracies in Europe – a social peculiarity that left its mark on Polish and especially Hungarian politics well into the twentieth century. It is also a remarkable coincidence that the two countries with the most democratic commemorations were Germany and the Czech Republic – successor states of the Holy Roman Empire with similar patterns of medieval settlement (a greater number of smaller towns per unit area than in countries to the east) and similar trajectories of early modern industrialization (likewise more evenly distributed across territory than was the case farther east). The traditions of dead generations may indeed weigh on the brains of the living, if not necessarily as the nightmare that Marx bemoaned.⁴⁰ However, the mixed cases suggest that while the *longue durée* may cast an influence, it is not inescapably deterministic. Slovakia, after all, is just as much a successor state of the Kingdom of Hungary as is today's (ex-Republic of) Hungary, and if the Hungarians of Hungary could not organize pluralist commemorations, the Hungarians of Romania could.⁴¹

Between the “democratic” and “aristocratic” extremes of political culture, the anniversary commemorations revealed a spectrum of variation. With the exception of Hungary, the various efforts to articulate the meaning of 1989 were all characterized by a remarkable degree of pluralism. On the streets and on the internet there was, indeed, an “explosion” of anniversary-related discourse, allowing for the side-by-side and for the most part tolerant expression of multifarious views. Even the shouting match between Klaus's critics

and supporters on Národní was good-natured, with the two sides chanting against each other in harmonious counterpoint. The anarchists in Cracow and Leipzig marched under the sign of pluralism as well. The black-clad Poles were quite mild-mannered, settling into discussion groups as soon as they reached the barricades at Wawel Hill. Their German counterparts seemed less intent on discussion than shouting, but they showed no sign of disrespect for the rules the city imposed on their protest. Only irredentists in Hungary and neo-fascists in the Czech Republic inspired fear, but in the latter case, at least, they were easily cowed. When a group of these youth tried to disrupt the late-afternoon commemorative procession, marchers carrying pro-Klaus placards united with their opponents to tell the would-be disruptors to “go home!” – and they did.⁴² After the Inventory of Democracy happening a middle-aged Workers’ Party supporter even settled into a passionate but civil debate with the students.

Despite the pluralism of anniversary commemorations, however, one could not help noticing that the various strands of discourse remained largely separate, with little consequential dialogue among them. The separation was enforced in Hungary and Poland, and the refusal of political elites to share a stage with one another extended to Slovakia as well, though no barricades were set up to keep citizens out. In the Czech Republic, by contrast, Havel and Klaus famously appeared together at a commemorative concert that Havel sponsored on 14 November, but discourses were sundered here as well.⁴³ In Brno, for example, an assortment of cultural intellectuals and invited guests assembled with Havel in a theatre on 19 November to discuss “Czech visions” for the 21st century under the banner “Dawn in Bohemia.”⁴⁴ While a group of protesters stood outside, asking when dawn might break in Moravia, a mass meeting took place on the city square that had been the focal point of civic gatherings twenty years previously, where people heard a concert mixed with speeches by former activists even as present-day activists circulated in the crowd, passing out flyers. Though it would have been easy and potentially productive to connect the conversations taking place among these three groups, there was no attempt to do so – quite unlike 1989. Whereas the revolutions of 1989 were made possible by the coming together of diverse groups of citizens and the discovery of a common language, in 2009 memory was socially fragmented. One could see this in Timișoara as well, where despite sincere and often successful efforts to integrate Hungarian and Romanian commemorations, a significant degree of separation nonetheless persisted.

In Leipzig and especially in Prague, the deepest discursive divide was between those who saw the revolution's meaning in democracy and those who identified it with material prosperity – the torch versus the banana. The separate commemorations organized by Prague's mayor and the Inventory of Democracy students illustrate the substance of this divergence particularly well. At the Socialist Market, as at the Národní třída races, freedom was explicitly equated with “freedom of choice”; on Wenceslas Square it meant the ability to participate in government. It is not a coincidence that the mayor at the time, Pavel Bém, was a member of Václav Klaus's Civic Democratic Party and that the celebrations sponsored by his office promulgated a line equating political and economic freedom, in harmony with Klaus's neoliberal ideology. In this line of thinking, the political arena is considered a kind of market, with voters free to choose parties just as they might select produce. The students, by contrast – whether or not they had read Hannah Arendt – agreed with her that “freedom [...] means the right ‘to be a participator in government,’ or it means nothing.”⁴⁵ Which interpretation had been dominant in 1989? Evidence from East Germany and Czechoslovakia suggests that material issues were not actually at the forefront of citizens' minds when they took action in 1989, though of course they were amenable to opportunities for material improvement should these arise.⁴⁶ At the time it was probably not immediately obvious to most people that they had to choose between democracy and prosperity. Even in 2009, the necessity of choice was not necessarily obvious to central Europeans, though the lesson of Bratislava's Tiananmen Square was clearly that the cost of economic development might well be political freedom. It seems fair to say, however, that material satisfaction is not what motivated citizens in 2009 to attend prayer services in the Nikolaikirche or to march around Leipzig's Ring, and those of Klaus's supporters who showed up for the Národní rumpus or marched in the anniversary procession demonstrated by their actions that even they believe democracy requires civic engagement outside the framework of elections and political parties. Though many of those who stayed home may have been celebrating the banana (one need not enter public space to do so), those who participated in public commemorations clearly paid homage to the torch.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the twentieth-anniversary commemorations was the passing of this torch to a new generation. In Germany, the Czech and Slovak Republics, and Romania, at least, the generation just coming of age was keenly interested in the events of 1989. The organizers of

commemorative acts and exhibits in these countries were often young people with no direct experience of the revolutions, and their undertakings – with a new focus on the experiences of ordinary citizens in 1989 – succeeded in transmitting knowledge and even intuition to a new generation. As a 17-year-old participant in the Leipzig march explained, “Now I have a better *feeling* for what it was like then.”⁴⁷ Re-enacting the collective experiences of 1989, even if the original sense of risk could not be reproduced, constituted an excellent means of handing down a revolutionary tradition. This is a good thing, if we agree with the mayor of Leipzig that “democracy must every day be won anew.”⁴⁸ It was significant, moreover, that the revolutionary tradition being reproduced was a self-consciously non-violent and pluralist one, capable of uniting rather than dividing. Such a tradition seems to have become firmly rooted in Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland, and to a significant extent in Slovakia and Romania as well. In Poland people could laugh at the barricades because, despite political divides, there was really no chance of violence breaking out. In Hungary, by contrast, the threat of violence was vividly apparent, such that laughter was unthinkable. (It is not coincidental that Hungary was the only place in central Europe where soldiers figured in the anniversary commemorations.) If there is such a thing as historical policy, it would seem worth the attempt to write Hungarian citizens back into their history (particularly the history of what Hungarians call “the regime change”), in order to give them something to be proud of that lies more within the realm of human agency than “the god of the Hungarians.”⁴⁹ As the Leipzigers noted, political identity must be founded on some collective point of reference, and the Hungarians desperately need a positive foundation.

Can anything of the revolutionary tradition of 1980–89 be transferred beyond the boundaries of central Europe? The disregard with which the western German press treated the Leipzig commemorations is not encouraging in this regard. Though the inhabitants of the former Ottoman and Romanov Empires may draw inspiration from 1989, the relevance of the revolutions to what used to be called the “First World” has apparently been lost on it. Arguably this is a result of neoliberal interpretations of 1989 that remain hegemonic in western Europe and its former colonies, according to which all that happened was the “collapse” of Communism and the concomitant reaching out of “East” European masses for the bananas of the West. Failure to appreciate the more radical implications of 1989, however, means passing up the chance to learn from a revolutionary tradition capable

of integrating atomized societies and establishing functional democracy – complete with the wisdom (perfected after twenty-odd years) that democracy can never be established once and for all, but “must every day be won anew.” Organizers of 25th-anniversary observances might therefore seek to extend their commemorative foreign policy to the increasingly divided societies of western and southern Europe – if not farther afield.

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ENDNOTES

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1 This was spoken at a public roundtable with Jiřina Šiklová, Václav Žák, and Milan Hořínek, “Beseda k 20. výročí sametové revoluce,” Olomouc, 21 November 2009.

2 James Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989–1992* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 221–25; Jiřina Šiklová, “Everyday Democracy in the Czech Republic: Disappointments or New Morals in a Time of Neo-Normalization,” in Grażyna Skąpska and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska (eds.), *The Contemporary Moral Fabric in Contemporary Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 93–101; Andrew Lass, “From Memory to History: The Events of November 17 Dis/membered,” in Rubie Watson (ed.), *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism* (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 1994).

3 See, for example, Martin Kukučka, “Voláme po demokracii...,” *Trenčianska verejnosť* 2, no. 2 (25 January 1990), p. 1; and “Výzva klubu angažovaných nestraníků,” *List koordinačního centra Občanského fóra v Pardubicích*, no. 18 (29 April 1990), p. 6.

4 National Centre for Culture (Warsaw) and European Solidarity Centre (Gdańsk), website for “The Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Outbreak of World War II and the 20th Anniversary of the Collapse of Communism in Central Europe,” page “Spotkanie przywódców państw na Wawelu,” available online: <http://3989.pl/w404.pl.html>.

5 Piotr Pacewicz and Piotr Najsttub, “Nie ma wolności bez radości,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4 June 2009, p. 2.

6 An extensive list can be found at the aforementioned website website for “The Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Outbreak of World War II and the 20th

Anniversary of the Collapse of Communism in Central Europe,” available online at: http://3989.pl/pl,d2,baza_wydarzen.html?wydwdgdata=2009=6=4.

7 “Prezydent i premier w Gdańsku, ale osobno,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 4 June 2009, available online: http://www.rp.pl/artykul/304373,315202_Prezzydent-i-premier-w-Gdansk-ale-osobno.html.

8 Ildikó Csuha, “Orbán a józan észről, győzelemről és újjáépítésről,” *Népszabadság*, 24 October 2009, available online at: http://nol.hu/lap/mo/20091024-orban_a_jozan_eszrol_gyozelemrol_es_ujjaepitesrol; Robert Hodgson, “Far Right Takes Centre Stage,” *Budapest Times*, 26 October 2009, available online: <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/2009/10/26/far-right-takes-centre-stage/>; Attila Kálmán, “Vesszen Trianon! – kiabálták francia vendégeiknek a jobbikosok,” *Népszabadság*, 24 October 2009, available online: http://nol.hu/belfold/tobb_ezren_a_jobbik_rendezvenyen; Susan C. Pearce, “Budapest, Hungary: October 23, 2009 Commemorations,” on the travel blog “Commemorations of the 1989 ‘Autumn of Nations,’” available online at: <http://susancpearce.wordpress.com/2009/10/23/october-23=2009-commemorations/>.

9 Kurt Masur had been the Gewandhaus orchestra conductor in 1989 whose personal appeal to local Party functionaries had been instrumental in preventing a Tiananmen Square-style massacre in Leipzig. Hans-Dietrich Genscher had been the West German foreign minister in 1989–90 and thus one of the architects of unification.

10 Photographs of the installations and information about the artists and their motivations can be found in the bilingual publication edited by Thomas Seidler, *Lichtfest Leipzig / Leipzig Festival of Lights: 20 Jahre nach der Friedlichen Revolution / 20 Years after the Peaceful Revolution* (Leipzig: Leipziger Medien Service, 2009).

11 Thomas Mayer, “Wortfeuerwerk eines Bürgerrechtlers,” *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 10 October 2009, p. 3.

12 Peter Krutsch, Mathias Orbeck, and Thomas Mayer, “Über 100 000 beim Lichtfest,” *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 10 October 2009, p. 1; “Deutschland dankt den Helden von Leipzig... und 100 000 zogen um den Ring,” *Bild* (Leipzig), 10 October 2009, pp. 6–7. Newspapers in other cities, it should be noted, published substantially lower estimates; according to the *Freie Presse* (Chemnitz) the number was 70,000 (“Sie können für immer stolz sein,” 10 October 2009, p. 1), while the *Ostthüringer Zeitung* (Gera) placed it as low as 50,000 (“Glücklicher Tag der deutschen Geschichte,” 10 October 2009, p. 1). The *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* (Halle) agreed with the Leipzigers’ figures (“Leipzig feiert die friedliche Revolution,” 10 October 2009, p. 1).

13 *Die Zeit* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* completely disregarded the commemoration, while the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* carried only a short article limited to the doings of Kurt Masur and the politicians in attendance (“Leipzig feiert die friedliche Revolution,” 10 October 2009, p. 4).

14 Western German newspapers *did* give coverage to the November 9 commemorations in Berlin, as of course did their eastern counterparts. For non-journalistic observations, see Susan C. Pearce’s travel blog “Commemorations of the 1989 ‘Autumn of Nations,’” available online at: <http://susancpearce.wordpress.com>, and Barbara J. Falk’s article “Berlin Wall: A Miracle in the Capital,” *The Mark*, 11 November 2009, available online: <http://pioneers.themarknews.com/articles/657-berlin-wall-a-miracle-in-the-capital/#.UmXzPbyvUy4>. Swine flu, alas, prevented me from attending.

15 The full text of the Leipzig Theses can be found at the “Day of the Peaceful Revolution” available online at: <http://www.herbst89.de>.

16 Führer, quoted in “Wo ist der Schwung geblieben?” and Peter Krutsch, “Friedliche Revolution muss weitergehen,” *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 10 October 2009, p. 18. The full text of the Charter can be found at the Foundation’s website, available online: <http://www.stiftung-fr.de>.

17 Particularly noteworthy were Martin Bútora’s and Petr Pithart’s addresses on 16 September 2009 at the conference “1989: Society, History, Politics” in Liblice, where they identified as erroneous the decisions to embark on rapid rather than gradual economic transition and to give the new federal parliament elected in 1990 a mandate of only two years. Václav Havel, speaking in the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava on November 18, also said he would have done certain things differently.

18 See Jana Sotonová, “Oslavy v Praze: 20 akcí, 1000 policistů,” *Hospodářské noviny*, 16 November 1989, p. 3.

19 The Czech Supreme Administrative Court ordered the party’s dissolution in 2010 as a result of its affinity with Nazism and sanction of violence, declaring that the party constituted a direct threat to democracy.

20 Petr Weikert, “Extremisté v Praze řádili, střetli se s policií,” *Hospodářské noviny*, 18 November 2009, p. 7; “Neonacisty vyhnali z centra: Ti se pak poprali s policisty,” *Mladá fronta dnes* (Prague), 18 November 2009, p. C3.

21 Matonoha originally read his letter on the HBO comedy show *Na stojáka* (Stand-Up) in 2006; a recording is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djFcjDyaZNY>.

22 The Communists, for their part, celebrated the anniversary of 17 November 1939, but refused to celebrate 17 November 1989. For their interpretation of the “reversal” that occurred in 1989, see the numerous articles in *Haló noviny* from 16 and 18 November 2009.

23 Lenka Tréglová, “S pivem, dětmi a hlavně bez obušků,” *Mladá fronta dnes*, 18 November 2009, p. A3; Michaela Poláková, “Pochod připomínal streetparty,” *Lidové noviny*, 18 November 2009, p. 3.

24 Tréglová, “S pivem.”

25 Petr Blahuš, “Česko slavilo pád komunismu,” *Právo*, 18 November 2009, p. 1; Petr Kupec, “Praha vzpomínala,” *Mladá fronta dnes* (Prague), 18 November 2009, p. C1.

26 A videorecording of the concert, under the official title “20 let bez opony,” available online at: <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10249870304=20-let-bez-opony/>.

27 Police and organizers agreed on the estimate of 2,500, though I think this is high; since I was at the front of the crowd, however, I could not get an overall view. “Studenti vyzvali lidi, aby nerezignovali na politiku,” *Lidové noviny*, available online at: http://www.lidovky.cz/studenti-vyzvali-lidi-aby-nerezignovali-na-politiku-pc7-/zpravy-domov.asp?c=AO91117_204336_In_domov_kim.

28 The text, “Prohlášení studentů ke 20. výročí sametové revoluce,” can be found at: http://www.stuz.cz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=670:studentske-prohlaseni-inventura-demokracie-2009&catid=53&Itemid=73.

29 Andrej Matisák, “Aký Tchien-an-men by sa páčil Gašparovičovi?,” *Pravda*, 19 June 2009, p. 4.

30 “Jeremy Irons kritizoval postup slovenskej polície počas čínskej návštevy,” *Sme*, 20 June 2009, available online at: <http://kultura.sme.sk/c/4899260>. The documentary, directed

by Cory Taylor, was entitled *The Power of the Powerless* (Los Angeles: Agora Productions, 2009).

- 30** Róbert Fico, speech at University College London, 17 November 2009, available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzOHQBxVEok>; Monika Tódová, "Fico: Ako môžeme oceniť november?," *Sme*, 18 November 2009, p.1.
- 32** Lenka Davidová, "Odhalené srdce pripomenulo pád totality," *Bratislavský kuriér*, 23 November 2009, p.4.
- 33** Quoted in *Domino fórum* (Bratislava), no. 50 (2000).
- 34** Jana Ogurčáková, "Mesto Košice sa nedohodlo s aktérmi novembra," *Košický korzár*, 14 November 2009, available online at: <http://kosice.korzar.sme.sk/c/5109112/mesto-kosice-sa-nedohodlo-s-aktermi-novembra.html>; Ogurčáková, "Oslavy Nežnej revolúcie Košičanov nezaujali," *Košický korzár*, 16 November 2009, <http://kosice.korzar.sme.sk/c/5113160/oslavy-neznej-revolucie-kosicanov-nezaujali.html>.
- 35** Albert O. Hirschman, "Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic: An Essay in Conceptual History," *World Politics* 45, no. 2 (Jan. 1993), pp. 173–202.
- 36** Ștefan Both, "Timișorenii au uitat prima zi de libertate," *Adevărul de seară* (Timișoara), 20 December 1989, p.1.
- 37** I was unable to attend the commemorations in Bucharest on December 21 and 22, but the sociologist Susan C. Pearce observes that they were more sombre than the events in Timișoara and that the cold snap and imminence of Christmas negatively impacted popular involvement, though there was evidently a constant stream of people waiting to write in the "guestbook" at a commemorative exhibition in the subway. See "Bucharest, Romania," on Pearce's travel blog "Commemorations of the 1989 'Autumn of Nations,'" available online at: <http://susancpearce.wordpress.com/2009/12/31/bucharest-romania/>.
- 38** See Gareth Dale, *The East German Revolution of 1989* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2006), p.59.
- 39** On the Polish debate over whether there *should* have been a revolution in 1989, see Artur Lipiński, "Meanings of 1989: Right-Wing Discourses in Post-Communist Poland," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (eds), *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2013), pp. 235–52.
- 40** Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p.15.
- 41** Following the Young Democrats' "electoral revolution" in 2010, they proceeded to draft a new constitution that went into effect in 2012, as a result of which the official name of the country changed from "the Republic of Hungary" to just "Hungary." It is worth noting that Prime Minister Orbán presented this "revolution" as making up for the lack of one in 1989. "Orbán Viktor: Most tetszettünk forradalmat csinálni," *Népszabadság*, 14 May 2010, available online at: http://nol.hu/archivum/egy_ciklus_kezde_eskere_gyultek_ossze_a_kepviselek; Dóra Matalin, "1989 forradalom volt, 2010 nem az," *Népszabadság*, 20 May 2010, available online: http://nol.hu/belfold/20100520-1989_forradalom_volt_2010_nem_az..
- 42** Jakub Pokorný, "Táhněte domů, neonacisti!" *Mladá fronta dnes*, 18 November 2009, p.A2.
- 43** Jana Sotonová, "Havel: Země vzkvétá, ale...," *Hospodářské noviny*, 16 November 2009, p.1.

- 44 The reflections that formed the basis for their discussion were published in Tomáš Mozga, Barbara Gregorová, and Pavel Jílek (eds), *Česká vize: Hledání identity 21. století...* (Brno: Dialog centrum, 2009).
- 45 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963; rev. ed. 1965), p. 218.
- 46 Mike Dennis, *The Stasi: Myth and Reality* (Harlow, Engl.: Pearson/Longman, 2003); Krapfl, *Revolution*, pp. 79–81.
- 47 Quoted in Mathias Orbeck and Peter Krutsch, “Ein Abend voller Emotionen,” *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 10 October 2009, p. 17. Emphasis added.
- 48 Burkhard Jung, quoted in Peter Krutsch, “Das Ei schweigt,” *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 10 October 2009, p. 18.
- 49 So far the only effort to shed light on popular civic engagement in Hungary in 1989 is Alan Renwick, “The Role of Non-Elite Forces in the Regime Change,” in András Bozóki (ed.), *The Roundtable Talks of 1989: The Genesis of Hungarian Democracy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), pp. 191–210.

THE BETTER WE UNDERSTAND DICTATORSHIP, THE BETTER WE CAN SHAPE DEMOCRACY – ON DEALING WITH THE HERITAGE OF THE MINISTRY FOR STATE SECURITY IN GERMANY

Roland Jahn, journalist

Former East German dissident

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to inform readers about the legally regulated tasks of the Office for GDR State Security Documents and the experiences and scale of reappraisal of the SED-Dictatorship (SED – Socialist Unity Party of Germany) in the last 25 years. Dealing with the past and the people involved, the author follows the principle of explanation, not revenge. The main goal is to understand how people behaved and what consequences their actions had on their social and work environment. Explaining the differences between democracy and dictatorship and sensitizing young generation in this respect is one of the major challenges to the Stasi Records Agency and other institutions in the international process of revisiting the past.

“How did you manage to ensure that the victims of the dictatorship did not take vengeance on the perpetrators?” I was asked this question in the summer of 2012 by a visitor to our archives in Berlin. Farah Hached is a lawyer from Tunisia. Amid the turmoil of the Arab Spring, she quit her job as she wanted to take an active part in the reconstruction of her country. Now she is a leader of the “Democratic Lab” association and in this way she wants to support her country in its difficult transition to democracy.

The question of “transitional justice” is what brings many visitors from Arab countries to our archives, with Ms. Hached among them. They are all working now on transforming the injustice of the old regime into a new society. How can they ensure the future of a new social order? They want to learn from us how past injustice is dealt with in Germany.

“How did you manage to ensure that the victims of the dictatorship did not take vengeance on the perpetrators?” For the last 20 years, with the formation of the Stasi Records Agency, we have gained considerable experience with this timely and crucial question posed in Tunisia and other Arab countries. I always reply by saying: “We do not settle accounts with the past; we clarify it by means of using the secret police records.” This is the explanation which satisfies the victims, and in this way it makes it possible to create a comprehensive view of the perpetrators.

To this end, we found a legal solution and created a law which guaranteed transparency of state actions on the one hand and the protection of the personal rights of the victims of the dictatorship on the other. This answer seems to me to be obvious. It is, however, not so convincing at first. In countries where laws for decades obeyed the will of the powerful and not the principle of the rule of law, legal regulations do not seem to be an effective tool used for protection against revenge.

It is real-life practice that convinces the visitors in our archive. I convince them by explaining in detail how the law works and by pointing out that access to the records of the victims is something very personal; that only the people about whom the Stasi secretly collected information are allowed to see it. And that any person who was spied on and mentioned in the files, was then erased from the document, and thereby protected. Our visitors find it convincing.

I further explain to them that we should of course name the people involved in the operations of the secret police. After all, the individual who acted on behalf of the state and for the state, should not be anonymous. The fact that the state interfered with the lives of its citizens should be disclosed by means of the records. The disclosure of such information is strictly regulated and limited to the people concerned and journalists and researchers, as well as public bodies. Our Arab visitors find it impressive.

It consoles them further when I add that even in Germany the leading politicians in 1990 came close to not revealing the records of the secret police of the GDR for fear of mischief and revenge. The actions of the Germans were thoroughly planned and for over 20 years now the access to the Stasi records has been a key way to come to terms with the SED dictatorship.

The fact that we have now become a model for many societies in a rebuilding phase is in a way a side effect. But whenever I guide visitors through the archive, I am particularly aware of the uniqueness of the attempt to set up the Agency.

Reappraisal of the SED dictatorship – the contribution of the Stasi Records Agency

The form of file disclosure developed for the Stasi records has allowed for transparency and clarity, both of which form a fundamental part of the reappraisal process of the SED dictatorship in Germany. Thanks to the courageous East German citizens who saved the Stasi records from destruction, people the world over can now have an insight into the heart of the apparatus of repression and control in a dictatorship. The records are archived and made accessible both in Berlin and in twelve regional offices in the former GDR states. 111 kilometres of shelf files, which stretches to nearly 160 kilometres if filmed documents are included, constitute an impressive monument to the surveillance apparatus.

“...so that [individuals] ...can clarify what influence the State Security Service has had on their personal destiny.” – this is the first and overarching purpose of the records’ disclosure as described in the first paragraphs of the Stasi Records Act (StUG). Until today, providing individuals with an access to the records that the Stasi collected about them remains one of the most extensive tasks of the Stasi Records Agency. The records often include personal items such as letters and photo albums, which can be returned to those spied upon – a rather tangible compensation for the intrusion in their lives.

Since the first citizens were given access to their personal records on 2 January, 1992, the Agency has received over 2.8 million requests to view records and to decrypt code names. Those who exercise their right to view records decide to have a look at their past, a look at their records, which gives them hope for clarification of their own biography. It takes effort. It also means that they have to overcome fear of disappointment. It is not uncommon for them to read in the files that it was a friend who betrayed them, or that a colleague was responsible for a downturn in their career. However, many people also find out that others remained silent, did not say a word, refused to cooperate. That knowledge brings clarity.

The information contained in the files also has material consequences. If it were not for the Stasi records, hardly any former victim of persecution

could prove the official reasons for his conviction. Absent the rehabilitation that the Stasi files make possible, previous convictions would still be valid and compensation claims would be groundless. The judicial system in the GDR was always subject to the political interests of the SED. This is well documented in the files. Preservation of the records makes it possible to compensate for the injustice suffered under the dictatorship by means of the law. Creating transparency of the work of the secret police in the past means that people should know today whether any former Stasi-employees or informers hold public office. The Agency has so far responded to 1.7 million requests concerning the vetting of employees of the public sector. A further objective of the Stasi Records Act is to ensure that this clarity is established.

This process is designed in such a way that each public body may make a request to the Stasi Records Agency about a group of people specified in the Act. We then provide, where appropriate, relevant documentation in the event that there are indications of collaboration with the Ministry for State Security. If someone continues to hold an office in spite of indications of collaboration with the Stasi as revealed in the files, then the decision is in the hands of the relevant authorities. The transparency of such decisions and the open discussion about them are desirable goals, though ones which have rarely been achieved so far.

Documentary research conducted by scientists and journalists may also shed some light on the functioning of the Stasi. The Stasi Records Agency has processed 26,000 requests from journalists and scientists in the past 20 years. Such requests often involve a significant part of the records. Copies of thousands of pages are made available every year to researchers. Numerous publications, newspaper articles, television reports, but also documentaries reflect the results of the research.

Due to the fact that the Stasi records clearly document state actions of the party and the secret police, they function as a primary source for the explanation of the functioning of the dictatorship. Using the Stasi records to teach the public about the structure, mode of action and methods used by the secret police is, therefore, another fundamental pillar of our work. It is not only by means of its own research department, but also thanks to exhibitions, events, conferences and scientific publications that the Agency offers services to the public and provides a wide range of opportunities to come to terms with the SED dictatorship.

The dialogue with the younger generation

Almost 25 years after the peaceful revolution of 1989, fewer and fewer people in the reunified Germany have any personal experience with the GDR and what life was like in a divided Germany. They rely on the information provided to them by their parents or grandparents as well as through the media and in the course of education. Studies show substantial deficits in this matter. Young people appear not to be able to imagine the nature of the dictatorship of the SED regime and sometimes cannot see the difference between dictatorship and democracy. Accusations do not help in this regard. It is mainly a matter of providing starting points to make young people interested in these questions and raise public awareness.

If we, as a society, want to motivate and enable young people in the course of their education to create democracy today and in the future, the detailed study of our common past offers a great learning opportunity. This includes a keener understanding of how dictatorships work, even if their operations were not so brutal at first glance. It is crucial to me that young people can understand what dictatorship stands for, especially in the case of the GDR. What it means to wall off the whole nation, to limit the freedom of travel, of speech and of assembly. This includes fathoming the everyday pressures to adapt as well as seemingly trivial decision-making situations. Especially in everyday life, where one was forced to show commitment to the rulers and their ideologies in ostensibly insignificant rituals, there is a key to the functioning of the dictatorship. The very recognition of this adjustment serves as a compass to guide people in the democratic way of life.

Authentic places are particularly useful to provide information about the bygone era. Beginning in 2012, the Stasi Records Agency together with the Civic Association “Anti-Stalinist Action” (Ger. “Antistalinistische Aktion e.V.”, ASTAK) took over the operation of the Stasi Museum in “Building 1”. “Building 1” is the former official residence of the Stasi Minister Erich Mielke at the Stasi site in Berlin-Lichtenberg. “Building 1” is part of an enormous complex which housed the Ministry for State Security for nearly 40 years.

The archive of the Stasi Records Agency also has its own office. At the historic site of the former command centre of the secret police, the educational work of the Stasi Records Agency is continued. A permanent exhibition at the site of criminal masterminds has been organised in collaboration with

the ASTAK. In a few years, this will create new job opportunities for young people to work at the authentic site.

The exhibition, the archive and the historic site form a unique ensemble as regards the question of the functioning of the instruments of repression. In addition to the memorial to those persecuted by the Stasi in the former prison in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen there will be another place set up in Berlin-Lichtenberg. Those responsible for the repression will serve here as a starting point for the discussion about the “GDR State Security.” A special library of the Stasi Records Agency will operate here as well. These are steps that have put us on the way to developing a “campus of democracy” right in the centre of dictatorship.

The power of authentic sites offers a unique opportunity to deepen the understanding of these times. So do the witnesses—people who can describe the functioning of the SED dictatorship from their own experience. Here come to mind those who experienced repression in the form of patronising, career manipulation, political persecution or even confinement. These are the real witnesses of life in a dictatorship. However, reflections on the everyday life of a citizen of the GDR who did not act against the regime, also constitute an important source for the study of the dictatorship.

What was it like in the GDR? How did people experience the GDR? What was it like for example, to be a teacher, a police officer or a mechanical engineer in the GDR? It is of the utmost importance to me that these discussions are open and always aim at clarification. The notion of repayment is often discussed in the public debate when the question of a person’s life in the GDR emerges – especially when the person was involved in the state apparatus or worked unofficially for the state security. But it must be made clear that here we are talking about clarification, not about settling accounts with the past. It is only through open discussion that can we actually step by step decrypt 40 years of the SED dictatorship. This is an insightful way to proceed, especially for the next generation and one that we will not be able to pursue in the same way in the future.

A comprehensive evaluation of GDR biographies is essential. It is our common challenge to create the atmosphere for this to happen. The people who have experienced the functioning of the Stasi or had a share in it can tell us about their point of view, which we can then critically analyse by knowing

the files. But this calls for an atmosphere of mutual attention, openness and the assumption of individual responsibility for the injustices that were perpetrated.

The Stasi Records Agency in the context of international reappraisal

In addition to the aforementioned visitors from Arab countries who have been coming to our archive of late, the work of the Agency gained attention worldwide right from the outset. The model of the legally regulated file disclosure developed in the GDR and reunited Germany often serves as a guide and important reference point for many societies in a transitional stage from dictatorship to democracy. Irrespective of the place, there is always a discussion on how to deal with the knowledge of those in power, of the former dictators. This information can in most cases be found in the records of the dictatorship-supporting secret police and intelligence services.

The peculiarity of the file disclosure in Germany plays an important role in the discussion about the German model. We are happy to share our experiences, but we are aware of how limited these can be when transferred to other countries. As the GDR State Security was dissolved, its data also became a thing of the past. No newly established institutions file for access to the documents. Our process is unique due to the fact that not only the Stasi, but also the history of the GDR ended in 1990. This happened as a result of the transformation process of the GDR which led to its accession to the 40-year-old well-tested democracy. This looks different in other countries and we learn it every time we get in touch in the archive with a group of people who are in the process of dealing with the consequences of dictatorship. In many discussions our international partners analyse the questions which are evident to us and in this way they give us the possibility to examine our own work in a critical way.

It was completely natural to create a network of institutions dealing with the reappraisal of the secret police of the communist bloc. The creation of the “European Network of Official Authorities in Charge of the Secret Police Files” in December 2008 is a milestone in this collaboration.

Conclusions and future perspectives

20 years after the formation of the Stasi Records Agency, the use of the Stasi records remains an essential avenue for the reappraisal of the SED dictatorship. The demand for the personal access to the records remains

significant. The use of the files through research and the media is also on the rise. Clarification has no sell-by date. We see it clearly in the work of the Stasi Records Agency.

Still, we are only in the early stage of understanding why the dictatorship functioned for nearly 40 years. As time goes by from the dissolution of the GDR, new opportunities for the discussion about those times emerge. Although the innerworkings of the Stasi can still be the subject of hot debate, it is also time to tell the real story beyond the Stasi's involvement.

Why would someone be an employee of the Stasi? What did he do and think of being in its service? The records tell the story only from one point of view, namely that of the secret police. They are an important and priceless treasure. But while it is still possible to do so, people who experienced these events need to be questioned.

So what is the aim of the archive and the reappraisal? In the end, it is not about records, but about people and their fate. It is about comprehending how people behave and what the consequences of such behaviour are. The better we understand dictatorship, the better we can shape democracy.

ROLAND JAHN

Born 1953. In 1982 he was sentenced to 22 months imprisonment formally for displaying a Polish flag with the forbidden symbol of the non-communist trade union Solidarnosc in the GDR. After an early release from prison Jahn was forcibly extradited to West Germany in June 1983. He moved to West Berlin and began to work as a journalist – bridging the information gap between East and West. Since March 2011 he has worked as Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records.

REGIME CHANGE IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper Ignác Romsics, drawing on his own book on the regime change in Hungary, succinctly presents this process from five different perspectives. They are: 1) the National Round Table negotiations held from June to September in 1989 as well as the peaceful political transition in the end of 1989 and in 1990 that resulted from the decisions made at these negotiations; 2) foreign policy reorientation from the early 1990s until the accession to the European Union in 2004; 3) the transition to a market economy that began in the late 1980s; 4) the emergence of the ideological-cultural pluralism which replaced the dominance of Marxism in the 1990s; 5) ambivalence about lustration. One of the main aspects in each perspective is the evaluation of the extent and nature of elite change. The author comes to the conclusion that while the political elite was replaced to a large extent, the elite groups of the late Kádarian-era in cultural and economic life have essentially retained their influence and positions until recent times. The author points at a lack of public accountability as one important reason for this situation.

By regime change and its synonyms I mean the process of transition during which the one-party dictatorships created by Soviet pressure in the aftermath of World War II were changed into parliamentary democracies across Eastern Europe based on multi-party systems, as well as the process during which centrally planned economies founded on state ownership were substituted for market economies based on private ownership. Parallel with this transition, qualitative changes were also taking place in various sub-systems of society, such as cultural life. Similar to most major shifts in world history, this transition resulted from the convergence of several external and internal factors, as well as their impact on one another. The key moment in this transition was the realignment of international power relations, namely the

end of the Soviet and American rivalry, which had been going on since the end of World War II, with an American victory. Another important factor was the historic defeat of centrally planned economies based on state and public ownership by capitalism that had its foundations in private ownership and the automatism of market mechanisms. The impact of individual initiatives and internal social movements should not be overlooked, either. They contributed to the transition in that they tried to subvert and/or reform the system by way of taking advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves – oftentimes by even creating these opportunities as well. This process started in Hungary during the last third of the 1980s and became irreversible with the free general elections that took place in the spring of 1990. The key event on the path of this transition – revolutionary in its content, but peaceful in its form and outward manifestation – was the so-called National Round Table (NRT) negotiations. The talks started on 13 June 1989 and ended on 18 September of the same year. They were held between the State Party (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, MSZMP) and its satellite organizations, as well as the representatives of the parties and organizations set up by the opposition in 1988 and the beginning of 1989.

* * *

During the opening session of the National Round Table talks the lawyer Imre Kónya, on behalf of the opposition organizations, stated that the aim of the negotiations was to ensure the peaceful transition from the dictatorial system to a representational democracy taking *de facto* account of the will of the people. “The will of the people” – he added – “should be made manifest in open-ended and free elections, from which no party or political organization is to be excluded as long as they accept the principles of democracy and distance themselves from the application of force.” During the second plenary session on 21 June, Imre Pozsgay, representing the Socialist Workers Party, reacted to this by saying that MSZMP accepts an electoral system based on free elections that expresses the will and intentions of citizens by means of the struggle among the parties.¹

At the multi-level talks, discussion was going on simultaneously in various sub-committees with the participation of 1,302 representatives and experts from the three “sides”. According to expectations and preliminary statements of intentions, the parties involved agreed on the process of substituting the one-party dictatorship with a multi-party democracy, as well as on other

key issues. The legal framework of the new Republic of Hungary was designed during these talks, which were referred to as “negotiation revolution.”

Of the recommendations of the National Round Table negotiations, decisions concerning the modifications of the Constitution were of the greatest importance. These decisions filled the previous framework of the Constitution with content based on entirely new values, which in many respects resembled the democratic Act I of 1946, adopted prior to the communist takeover. It was agreed upon that instead of a “people’s republic” Hungary would become a “republic” in which the principles of both “bourgeois democracy” and “democratic socialism” would be adhered to. In the new state nobody would have the opportunity for the exclusive exercise of power and no single party could impose its will over the people. The passage about the “leading role of the Marxist-Leninist party of the working class” was deleted and the multi-party system was declared. The new economic system of the country was envisaged as a market economy that would “also take advantage of the benefits of planning” and where “public and private ownership are on equal footing and enjoy equal protection”, an economy that “acknowledges and supports the right of enterprise and the freedom of competition”. It was recommended that the Parliament should function as the chief organ of the state power and the popular representation of the Republic of Hungary, whose members, being professionals and rewarded accordingly, would be elected by the people for a term of four years. Next to jurisdiction, the exclusive competences of Parliament came to include the most important decisions concerning personnel, such as the appointment of government members, as well as the heads of other important state bodies. In case of extraordinary external or internal situations, the Parliament had the power to proclaim martial law, to sign peace treaties, to declare a state of emergency, and to command the armed forces inside and outside the country.²

The parties agreed that the previous multi-member Presidium incorporating the functions of the head of the government would cease to exist and the new position of the President of the Republic would be created instead. A near consensus was reached that the powers of the would-be president – again in the spirit of Act I of 1946 – should be limited.

Act XXXI of 1989, which amended the Constitution of 1949, was the most important of the so-called cardinal laws that were adopted by the

communist parliament. As a token of respect for the 1956 revolution and war of independence, the Act went into effect on 23 October, 1989. The republic was declared on Kossuth Square on the very same day by Mátyás Szűrös, communist chairman of parliament, who became the temporary president of the republic. In his speech that thousands were listening to, he referred to several prominent Hungarians as the predecessors of the nascent democracy in Hungary, among them Lajos Kossuth, leader of the 1848 revolution and war of independence; Mihály Károlyi, leader of the democratic revolution of 1918 and president of the republic proclaimed in November 1918; and Zoltán Tildy, president of the so-called second Hungarian Republic, declared in 1946.³ Legally, and to a certain extent in reality as well, the party state and along with it state socialism ceased to exist. After 40 years of a forced detour, Hungary could finally return to the parliamentary system whose foundations had been laid in 1848–49 by the “founding fathers” of the modern parliamentary Hungarian state.

Having ratified the recommendations of the National Round Table talks, after 23 October the old parliament continued with the adoption of the cardinal laws of the new Republic of Hungary. Act XXXII, declared on 30 October, provided for the creation of the Constitutional Court. Such a body had never existed in the life of the Hungarian state. The members of the Constitutional Court were to be elected by parliament for a term of 9 years and the court was granted extensive powers. Its tasks included the preliminary and follow-up judicial reviews of the acts of parliament, the examination of complaints filed for violation of constitutional rights, the interpretation of the constitution, as well as the elimination of conflicts of competence between state bodies and local governments. The Constitutional Court, serving as the main body for the protection of the Constitution and the rule of law, had the right to dispose of acts that were violating the Constitution and to destroy any governmental action in violation of laws. By this, the Constitutional Court became one of the most important bodies of the new system of public institutions and had a crucial role in maintaining the checks and balances in relation to the parliamentary majority and the government. The Constitutional Court started its work on 1 January, 1990. László Sólyom, a professor of law and a former advisor of environmental protection movements, became the President of the Court.⁴

Act XXXIV on election of the members of parliament also came into force on 30 October. According to this act, parliament was to have a total of

386 members, out of which 176 members were to be elected as individual candidates from their constituencies, 152 members on the basis of regional (counties and the capital) party lists, whereas 58 members on the basis of national party lists. Due to the mixed nature of the election system, each voter could cast two votes: one vote for an individual candidate running for the seat in the single-seat constituency of their residence, and one vote for the regional lists of the parties. The elections had two rounds in individual constituencies. In case none of the candidates could win more than 50 per cent of the votes during the first round, a simple majority was sufficient in the second round. The first three candidates who collected the highest number of votes during the first round were eligible to run in the second round, as well as those candidates who received at least 15 per cent of the votes. In order to guarantee the smooth operation of the Parliament, the election act favoured the bigger or more influential parties as well as candidates. One of the means to achieve this was to bind the fielding of a candidate to certain conditions. In individual constituencies 750 recommendations bearing signatures were needed to field a candidate. Regional lists could only be set up by parties that were able to field candidates in at least one fourth of the individual constituencies of the given region, which meant 750 signatures per candidate. The condition for setting up a national list was that the given party had a minimum of seven valid regional lists out of a maximum of 20. An even stricter element of electivity was the so-called thresholds requirement, which was set at 4 per cent by the Act. If the number of votes cast on regional lists for a given party did not reach this proportion of the total number of votes cast nationally, then the party could not get a mandate based on regional and national lists. Eligibility to vote was bound to two basic conditions by the Act: Hungarian citizenship and 18 years of age.⁵

After the resolution of 18 September, the process of party formation accelerated and the MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) split into two at the beginning of October. The majority of its previous members, those in favour of reforms and who were flexible and were willing to listen to the challenges of the times, founded the Hungarian Socialist Party. The minority, however, loyal to their principles, created the (Marxist-Leninist) Workers' Party, which was essentially communist in its nature.⁶

During the free elections of 1990, 42 per cent of the votes were won by the Hungarian Democratic Forum, which had been established in the fall of 1987 with a conservative-national orientation. Twenty-four per cent of

the votes were obtained by the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats, which was founded in 1988. Eleven per cent of the votes went to the newly re-organized (1988–89) Independent Smallholders' Party, which was of long-standing. The Hungarian Socialist Party gained 9 per cent of the votes, and the radical-liberal Alliance of Young Democrats, established in 1988, as well as the Christian Democratic People's Party, each took 5 per cent of the votes. Compared to the old parliament of 1985–1990, the composition of the new parliament was radically different. Ninety-five per cent of the seats were taken by newly elected representatives. This development represented a complete change of the elite from the point of view of both social background and political orientation. The ratio of former MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) members dropped from 75 to 13.5 per cent, whereas the proportion of former communist party secretaries and other party and committee functionaries declined from 15 to less than 2 per cent. The ratio of representatives with a university degree rose from 59 to 89 per cent. Among the university graduates, the proportion of deputies with degrees in agriculture and technology, forming a very decisive group within the elite of the Kádár-era, dropped from 53 to 18 per cent, whereas the ratio of those with degrees in law and the arts jumped from 23 to 51 per cent. 70 per cent of representatives belonged to the so called unaffiliated intellectuals (researchers, economists, teachers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, engineers, etc.), while the number of workers did not even reach 4 per cent, unlike their proportion of 22 per cent between 1985 and 1990. It was also characteristic that the ratio of the economic leaders – directors of factories, chief engineers, secretaries of cooperatives, and agronomists – of the previous system diminished from 32 to 11 per cent, while the proportion of entrepreneurs of the new type and who were newly represented in parliament, did not reach 2 per cent.⁷

The changes in the composition of the representatives attest to an almost complete change of the political elite. We must be aware, however, that in public administration and in leadership positions of local governments the scope of this change was much less significant. By the end of 1990, of the most important 700 positions of the old establishment only 100 were affected by the changes. The new ministers of the government – as insisted on by József Antall, the new Prime Minister – were without exception *homo novus* and had not been affiliated with any party before 1989. Of the 71 newly appointed under-secretaries, however, 29 had held high government offices prior to the regime change. At the level of heads of directorates and departments continuity was even more striking. The results of the municipal

elections held in September – October of 1990 also brought changes on a limited scale. One third of the new representatives at the local levels had occupied high positions before 1990. Fifty-five per cent of mayors of small settlements as well as eighteen per cent of the mayors of towns had been council members during communist times.⁸

Taking everything into consideration, the change of the political elite in 1990 can only be regarded as partial and by no means complete. This can partially be accounted for by the lack of an alternative political elite, and in part by the patriarchal internal relations of small settlements. The landscape became even more complicated with the results of the 1994 elections, during which the Hungarian Socialist Party obtained 54 per cent of the mandates on its own, and as a consequence in the majority of ministries the pre-1990 status quo was restored. If we also take into account the results of the elections in 1998 as well as of later years, it can be seen that we are not talking about the change of the political elite as a whole but rather about its circulation. This circulation is reflected in the party affiliations of future prime ministers as well. Miklós Németh, who became head of government in 1988 as a young reform-communist, was followed in his office in 1990 by József Antall, a leading intellectual with no party affiliations but who could be considered a conservative-liberal on the basis of his principles. After his untimely death in 1993, he was succeeded by Péter Boross who represented very similar values. However, the politician forming the government in 1994, Gyula Horn, was a former MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) member, also serving in the paramilitary organization of the Kádár regime, which established itself in the country in 1956–57. He was also active as the minister of foreign affairs during the 1998–90 Németh administration as well as head of the Socialist Party after 1990. In 1998, Gyula Horn was succeeded in office by Viktor Orbán, leader of the Alliance of Young Democrats, who turned conservative after starting out as a liberal politician. In 2002, Orbán was followed by Péter Medgyessy, the minister of finance and later deputy prime minister of the Grósz and Németh governments before the regime change, who was a member of the Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), as well as an officer in the communist intelligence services. He was succeeded in 2004 by Ferenc Gyurcsány, one of the leaders of the Communist Youth Organization prior to 1989.⁹

Foreign policy was entirely unrepresented among the controversial issues of the National Round Table negotiations. One could learn about the foreign

policy ideas of the opposition parties and of the State Party from their proposed programmes as well as from the statements made by their leading politicians in 1988–89. In summary, the essence of these are as follows: both the opposition parties and the reform-minded politicians of MSZMP considered it to be their strategic objective to achieve Hungary's neutrality and thereby to restore the country's independence as well as its external sovereignty. The opposition parties – especially SZDSZ and Fidesz – in general phrased this objective in clearer and more radical terms, whereas the reform socialists – especially initially – were using a language that was less clear and more cautious. The parties also agreed that this aim was to be achieved not unilaterally but by taking advantage of the changes in the international balance of power and with the approval of the Soviet Union. However, the sections of the State Party not committed or only partially committed to reforms, envisaged the future of Hungary within the framework of the Soviet systems of alliance and they did not even aim at restoring the country's independence. The prime minister, Miklós Németh, and the minister of foreign affairs, Gyula Horn, both belonged to the reform socialists. Accordingly, they represented the policy of distancing the country away from the Soviet Union and its integration organizations initially with caution but later with more courage. This was demonstrated by the release of Eastern German tourists into Austria in August and September of 1989.¹⁰

The opening of the Austrian-Hungarian border and the release of the German tourists acted as a catalyst in the process of transition throughout Eastern Europe. At the same time, the developments of regime change in the other countries of the Soviet bloc also had an effect on the transition process in Hungary. The collapse of the Berlin wall and the prospect of the unification of the two German states, which could be regarded as a legitimate expectation based on various declarations, created a new situation in the politics of alliance and the military balance of power. It was obvious that a member state of NATO could not unite with a country from the Warsaw Pact and also that a new Germany could not belong simultaneously to two different systems of alliance. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from the territory of the German Democratic Republic and the suspension of the country's membership within the Warsaw Pact could still not be taken for granted in the end of 1989 but it could realistically be expected. This was suggested by the fact that in January 1990 Gorbachev accepted the idea of German unification. The gesture was noted in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, countries that all had Soviet troops stationed on their territories.

In the spirit of the reorientation of foreign policy, on 16 November, 1989 the Németh government announced the intention of Hungary to join the Council of Europe and later in January 1990 requested the Soviet leadership to withdraw the full contingent of Soviet troops from Hungary the following year. The resolution concerning the withdrawal of troops was signed in Moscow on 10 March, 1990. During the days following the signing of the document, the minister of foreign affairs, Gyula Horn, announced that Hungarian diplomacy from that day on would aim at reorganizing the Warsaw Pact into a consultative political organization. At that time Horn still had the idea that the reorganization of the Warsaw Pact would take place parallel with the reorganization of NATO and over time by way of these reorganizations a collective European security system would emerge that would include the United States as well as Canada among its members. On other occasions, however, he made statements suggesting that with the passage of time Hungary may also become a member of the various political organizations of NATO.¹¹

The would-be prime minister, József Antall, announced in the very same period that having seceded from the Warsaw Pact, Hungary would either be neutral or would seek its place within a unified Europe which was already in the making. However, after forming the government in May 1990, he outlined a much clearer system of objectives. His programme contained four basic goals: 1) secession from the Soviet system of alliance and by this the restoration of the external sovereignty of the country; 2) further approach to and eventual accession to the Western European integration organizations, primarily to the European Communities; 3) mutually beneficial cooperation with the states of the Eastern and Central European region; 4) increasing protection and support for the Hungarian national minorities living in neighbouring countries.¹²

In order to restore the external sovereignty of the country, between 7–8 June 1990, during the Moscow meeting of the political consultative body of the Warsaw Pact, Antall stated that the organization “as one of the remnants of European opposition” had lost its main function and was “in need of revision”. He suggested that by the end of 1991 the military cooperation within the organization should entirely cease to exist. He also stated that Hungary wished to revise its membership. He recommended that in the future a pan-European system of alliance should safeguard the security of the continent that would also include the United States, Canada, and the

Soviet Union among its members. In line with Antall's announcements, the minister of defence, Lajos Für, informed his Soviet counterpart, Jazov, that Hungary would withdraw its forces from under the command of the combined armed forces and would no longer participate in any joint development or military exercise in the future.¹³

The announcements of the Hungarian delegation surprised and confused the participants of the meeting. Contrary to Antall's vision, Gorbachev believed that the Warsaw Pact should be maintained with some minor modifications and by the "democratization" of the decision-making levels as long as NATO continued to exist. This approach was fully shared by the Bulgarian and Romanian delegation, whereas the Poles and the Czechs were vacillating between the Soviet and Hungarian proposals. As a compromise between the various standpoints, the final communique of the meeting suggested to revise the nature, function and activities of the organization more decisively than was originally proposed by Gorbachev, however, there was no mention about the Hungarian intention of secession.¹⁴

During the weeks following the Moscow meeting, crucial bilateral and multilateral agreements that were of great importance for the future of Eastern Europe as well, were signed by the leading powers of the world. In return for various guarantees as well as for the financial support earmarked by Chancellor Kohl, on 14–16 July Gorbachev agreed that the unified Germany would be a member of NATO. It was also here that an agreement was reached about the withdrawal of Soviet troops stationed in the Democratic Republic of Germany. With these concessions the Soviet Union suffered another major strategic defeat. On 31 August in Berlin representatives of the two German states signed the reunification document. On 12 September, the so-called 4+2 negotiations were completed as a result of which the United States, Great-Britain, France, and the Soviet Union waived their rights concerning control over the two German states. Simultaneously, Germany obliged itself to acknowledge the Western borders of Poland. In the meantime, a separate agreement was also signed by Germany and the Soviet Union. According to this agreement, Germany pledged 12 billion German marks as a contribution to the costs of the withdrawal of Soviet troops to be completed by 1994, and agreed to provide an interest-free loan for the Soviet Union in the amount of 3 billion marks. The unification of the two German states was declared on 3 October, 1990.¹⁵

Parallel with the above mentioned events, the representatives of the member states of the Warsaw Pact were conducting consultations concerning the future of the organization. As a result of the German guarantees, Poland and Czechoslovakia felt less threatened by the West and during the summer and autumn months they moved closer to the Hungarian position. On 16 August, 1990 during a meeting in Budapest, the representatives of the three countries accepted a proposal concerning „the gradual phasing out of the military organizations of the Warsaw Pact”. If this happened – they believed – then the alliance would lose its power and rationale for existence and sooner or later would automatically cease to exist. By this time, the Romanian position became more distant from the Soviet standpoint, while the Democratic Republic of Germany demonstrated an understandable lack of interest and *de facto* seceded from the organization. As a result of the NATO membership of the unified Germany and the establishment of a common Czech-Polish-Hungarian position, the future of the Warsaw Treaty was in essence sealed. By autumn, the Soviet position of June was essentially supported only by the Bulgarians. As before, Gorbachev reacted to the new situation not in a confrontational way but by acknowledging the seemingly inevitable developments. In a letter sent to the representatives of the member states in the beginning of 1991, he wrote that he agreed to the dissolution of the military functions of the alliance and, if the member states insisted, even to its complete abolition. As a result, during a meeting in Prague on 25 February, the political consultative body of the alliance first disbanded the military bodies of the organization, and later, on 1 July, 1991, the whole organization itself.¹⁶

A few days before the disestablishment of the Warsaw Pact, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the territory of Hungary had been completed. Since 10 March 1990, more than 100,000 Soviet citizens left the country with 50,000 soldiers among them. Their equipment – approximately 20,000 vehicles, 860 tanks, nearly 1,500 armoured vehicles, 622 missiles and 196 rocket batteries – was transported to the Soviet Union by 1,500 trains. The last Soviet unit crossed the border on 19 June, 1990. Hungary, having established its internal sovereignty in 1990, with this event also regained its external sovereignty – its independence.¹⁷

Simultaneously with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the economic integration organization of the Soviet bloc, CMEA, also ceased to exist. This was formally announced at the last meeting of the representatives of the member states in Budapest on 28 June 1991. At the end of the shortest

meeting in the history of the organization – lasting a mere 15 minutes – the representatives of the nine member countries signed the protocol about the disestablishment of CMEA with no debate whatsoever. This move was met with even less opposition on the part of the Soviet Union than the termination of the Warsaw Pact. A considerable number of Soviet economists believed, along with Gorbachev, that maintaining the organization would not be advantageous for the Soviet economy either. This factor made the acknowledgement of the historic defeat somewhat easier. In the aftermath of these events the reorganization of foreign trade relations accelerated. The share of the Soviet Union in the Hungarian export-import turnover, which had been on a constant decline since 1983, was lower by 40–50 per cent in 1991 than in 1990 and by this the total volume dropped below 18 per cent. The same figure in relation with the unified Germany was almost 25 per cent already at that time.¹⁸

To the extent the Antall government, in regard to the dismantling the Eastern systems of alliance, could rely on the initiatives of the Németh government they could also expect similar support in the field of joining the Western integration organizations. One of these integration organizations was the Council of Europe that made a decision about the accession of Hungary in October 1990. The accession document was signed by Géza Jeszenszky in Rome on 6 November, 1990.¹⁹

Joining NATO and the European Union took a much longer time. One of the major reasons was the Soviet, later Russian, opposition to the Eastern expansion of NATO. Therefore, the leaders of the Euro-Atlantic organization made it obvious only in the end of 1993, the beginning of 1994, that they supported the accession of Eastern European post-communist countries. From then on the preparations accelerated. In February 1994 Hungary signed the framework document of Partnership for Peace, then in 1995 it provided a logistics base for the NATO forces participating in the war in Bosnia. Fulfilling the security expectations of the organization, Hungary signed agreements with Ukraine in 1993, Slovakia in 1995, and Romania in 1996, in which, in return for guarantees of minority rights it acknowledged the existing borders of the country. In the autumn of 1997, during a referendum with a 49 per cent turnout, 85 per cent of voters supported the application for admission of Hungary into NATO. Hungary, together with Poland and the Czech Republic, became a full member of the organization on 12 March, 1999.²⁰

The signing of the association agreement with the European Communities on 16 December, 1991 can be considered the first significant step towards EU membership, which had been defined as an objective already in 1990. The essence of the agreement was the creation of an agenda regulating the gradual phasing out of industrial tariffs by 2001. Although the Republic of Hungary applied for accession on 1 April, 1994, accession negotiations were taking place up until the end of 2002. During this time the trade relations between Hungary and the European Union were expanding rapidly. In 1989 the share of the still 12-member organization in Hungarian exports amounted to 25 per cent, while in case of imports the figure was 29 per cent. By 2000 these numbers increased to 76 and 71 per cent respectively.

In April 2003 a referendum was held in Hungary, the results of which were very similar to those of the referendum in 1997. Forty-eight per cent of the voters participated in the referendum, 86 per cent of whom supported accession that took place on 1 May 2004.²¹ By this act, all restrictions on tariffs were abolished between Hungary and the other member states, and several countries allowed for employment of Hungarian citizens. On 21 December, 2007 Hungary joined the so-called Schengen area.

The disintegration of the Warsaw Pact together with the stalling of NATO's expansion in Central and Eastern Europe resulted in the creation of a power vacuum. This fact made the idea of cooperation within the region even more urgent. The historical cooperation along the Italian, Austrian, Yugoslav, and Hungarian borders, known as the Alps Adriatic Working Community, was raised to the level of states on 12 November, 1989. With the accession of Czechoslovakia in May 1990, the number of member states increased to five (Pentagonale), and later with the accession of Poland to six (Hexagonale). The first summit of the organization took place in Venice on 1 August, 1990. The resolution that was adopted set very ambitious goals, such as the construction of new motorways and railways that would connect the member states from the north to the south and from the east to the west. However, the resources necessary for the realisation of the objectives were absent. Partly because of the lack of funds and partly because of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the organisation could not fulfil expectations and by the mid 1990s it silently ceased to exist.²²

Next to Hexagonale, the outlines of a more promising regional cooperation were beginning to emerge in the 1990s. The member countries of this

cooperation included Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. The credit for the initiative should go to the new president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, and to his minister of foreign affairs, Jiří Dienstbier. The Czechoslovak leaders first consulted with Jaruzelski and Wałęsa about the plan, then they brought up the subject in January 1990 in Budapest as well.²³ During a meeting in Paris in November, Antall, Hável and the Polish head of government, Mazowiecki agreed to conduct consultations on a regular basis and to coordinate certain decisions concerning the foreign policy of their countries. Following a preparatory meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs, the representatives of the three countries signed a treaty for cooperation in Budapest on 15 February, 1991. Unlike Hexagonale, the cooperation of the Visegrád Three, then later – after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993 – the Visegrád Four proved to be longer lasting and more successful.²⁴ However, the lack of economic complementarity, the Slovak-Hungarian conflict, as well as the lack of interest that the Czech Republic demonstrated for years once again prevented the deepening of this cooperation.

The third important aspect of the nascent Hungarian foreign policy was the increased protection and support for the Hungarian national minorities – altogether some 2.5 million people – living in the territories of neighbouring countries. In the treaties signed with Ukraine, Slovakia, and Romania Hungary obliged itself to respect the 1920 Trianon borders, while Ukraine, Slovakia and Romania pledged to guarantee minority rights in accordance with European standards. Although these steps could be considered important achievements from the point of view of the stability of the region and Hungary's neighbourhood policy, they did not have a profound impact on the expansion of the rights of the Hungarian national minorities. Autonomy and self-management of the kind that was achieved in Switzerland or even in Spain was not part of the notion of minority rights of any of the leaders of these countries. Therefore, the Hungarian minorities in these states have not been granted these rights ever since. Yet, due to the more or less democratic conditions, their situation became far better than it had been prior to the changes of governments. They were granted the rights to set up political parties, schools, and various organizations. Obstacles that prevented contact with the mother country were also removed.

All the new governments of Hungary managed to establish fruitful and friendly relations with two of the successor states of Yugoslavia: Slovenia and Croatia. This can be explained by the fact that the number of Hungarians

in both of these countries is minimal so conducting a more generous minority policy posed no danger for these states. The 20,000 Hungarians living in Croatia enjoy wide ranging cultural rights and the 6,000 Slovenian Hungarians – living mostly along the River Mura – can even boast a certain degree of territorial autonomy. Their legal status is guaranteed by agreements protecting the rights of minorities, which were signed with Slovenia in 1992 and with Croatia in 1995.

With Serbia, however, relations remained tense up until the end of the 1990s. As a consequence of the dissolution of the Yugoslav state and the nationalistic policy of the Serbian government, the existential conditions of ethnic Hungarians of Vojvodina – which previously enjoyed extensive autonomy – deteriorated dramatically. The normalization of Serbian – Hungarian relations started only in the new millennium. The treaty for the protection of minorities was signed in 2003 and it confirmed the rights of some 300,000 Serbian Hungarians, mostly living in Vojvodina, for cultural autonomy.

In the field of Hungary's neighbourhood and minority policies, the adoption of the so-called Status Law or Benefit Law of 2001 can be considered a significant step. This law provided various – primarily financial – benefits for Hungarian families across the borders whose children were attending Hungarian schools. Those who were given Hungarian identity documents from Hungary were also entitled for travel benefits inside the country. More than 90,000 people applied for and received such a document by the end of the last millennium. Expanding the framework of the previously conducted support policy, this law established a new relationship between the Hungarian state and the national minorities living in neighbouring countries. It also demonstrated and strengthened the togetherness of the Hungarian nation defined in cultural terms.

Because of the Benefit Law and the Orbán government's more active minority policies between 1998 and 2002, the relationship between Hungary and its neighbours became more tense by the turn of the millennium. Although these relations somewhat improved during the governance of the socialist-liberal coalition that came to power in 2002, they were still not without problems. Reconciliation of the type that occurred between France and Germany after World War II is hindered both by the nationalistic forces of the neighbouring countries and by the unclear attitude toward the nation on the part of the Republic of Hungary. As an example one could mention

the referendum of December 2004 concerning dual citizenship, which was unsuccessful because of several factors. They include the contradictory messages conveyed by the opposing political forces, the low turnout, and the division of voters. The Orbán government that took office on 3 May, 2010 wanted to remedy this situation by attempting to regulate the issue of dual citizenship. A new law, adopted in the end of May, states that on the basis of individual applications and by way of an accelerated procedure Hungarian citizenship can be granted to non-Hungarian citizens, whose ancestors were Hungarians or who originate from Hungary and / or can demonstrate their knowledge of the Hungarian language.²⁵

The National Round Table talks, in essence, did not address the economic transition whose roots go back to the golden times of the Kádár-era. The process of reforms prior to 1989 had three successive phases: 1) the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) of 1968, that decreased the role of central planning, increased the independence of companies, and allowed for the differentiation of prices and wages; 2) reforms carried out between 1978 and 1982, the most important among them being the support for various small businesses and economic associations, as well as the legalization of the so-called second economy; 3) the decision of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party that aimed at the creation of guided market economy, based on mixed – state, cooperative, and private – ownership. This latter formed the basis for the transformation of the state's ownership rights onto the so-called company councils, of which 50 per cent consisted of company leaders and 50 per cent of the workers' representatives. This was followed by the adoption of the Bankruptcy Act of 1986, which allowed for the liquidation of non-competitive companies. The two-tier banking system came into effect on 1 January 1988, placing the process of applying for credit on new foundations. Then on 1 January, 1988, corporate tax and personal income tax was introduced. This process was completed by the Association Act, which was adopted on 10 October, 1988, and became effective on 1 January, 1989. It allowed for the transformation of state companies into economic associations, the inclusion of foreign direct investment, and the establishment of companies, whose employees could not exceed 500 in number. This act formed the basis of the so-called spontaneous privatization, meaning the privatization of state assets.²⁶

Through the process of spontaneous privatization, which took place with the complete exclusion of social control, the incumbent company management

could acquire property with extremely favourable conditions. This process, which took place behind the scenes, was called by Elemér Hankiss “the conversion of power”,²⁷ but the general public simply referred to it as the transition of power or the transition of ownership.

It was the democratically elected Antall government that put an end to spontaneous privatization. From then on, it was possible to privatize or establish associations only with the appraisal by independent external experts of the assets to be privatized, or by way of public tenders. Despite the new regulations, privatization continued to be the hotbed of corruption, only the circle of those implicated became more difficult to define. To sum it up, in a decade the property relations of the economy changed dramatically. In 1989, still 80 per cent of the GDP was produced by state companies while the share of private enterprises amounted only to 2 per cent. At the end of the 1990s, the share of public ownership dropped to 30 per cent whereas the share of private ownership stabilized around 70 per cent. In other words, by the end of the decade Hungary transformed itself into a market economy of mixed ownership in which private ownership regained the upper hand.²⁸

As the restructuring of property relations was taking place, due to problems inherited from the past as well as to changes in external economic conditions, the economic crisis continued to deepen. In 1993, gross domestic product was already 18 per cent behind the level of 1989. The decline in production went hand in hand with the rise in inflation. After being 29 per cent in 1990, the rate of inflation increased to 35 per cent in 1991, and it was not until 1994 that it returned to under 20 per cent. The drop in GDP led to an abrupt fall in incomes. Between 1989 and 1993, real wages and pensions combined fell by more than 15 per cent. Nevertheless, the volume of convertible foreign debt continued to rise and by 1994 it reached 28 billion dollars. While average income declined, disparities in incomes increased. In 1993–94, the average income of the top 10 per cent of the population was almost eight times higher than that of the lowest 10 per cent, whereas it was only 4–5 times higher in the 1980s. The people who were living under or around the officially defined poverty line were unskilled workers, peasants, agricultural workers, people on widows’ pensions and on disability pensions, as well as the unemployed. The number of the jobless increased from 14,000 in 1989 to over 600,000 by 1993. 71 per cent of families with three or more children and 56 per cent of the Roma population belonged to the poorest stratum of society earning less than 50 per cent of the average income. During the

last decades of the Kádár-era, 62 per cent of the active working age Roma population worked on a regular basis. By 1993, this figure dropped to 22 per cent and, in essence, it has not changed ever since. Owing to the permanent loss of jobs and to their low level of education, the overwhelming majority of Roma people occupied a place among the poorest third of society, that is to say among the estimated one and a half million poor.²⁹

The deterioration of living conditions and the rise in the disparity of living standards had a disheartening effect on a significant part of the society, which led to a loss of enthusiasm for regime change. For these unfavourable trends many put the blame on the new system as well as the government embodying it. By 1994, dissatisfaction with the governing coalition rose to such levels that during the second free elections the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) suffered a resounding defeat and the successor of the communist state-party, MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party), gained an absolute majority.

After hitting bottom in 1993, most of the economic indicators started to improve from 1994 onwards. In 1994, per capita GDP grew by 3.3 per cent, in 1995 by 2 per cent, and from 1997 the annual rise amounted to more than 4 per cent. In 1998, per capita gross domestic product was only 5 per cent lower than the level in 1989. By 1998, inflation decreased to 14 per cent and unemployment fell to 9–10 per cent of the active population. By 1995, the volume of gross national debt grew to 31.6 billion dollars, later it began to decrease. In 1997, it amounted to only 22 billion dollars thanks to revenues generated from privatization, while the volume of net debt also declined from 16 billion to 10.6 billion dollars. Despite these favourable economic changes, the shrinking of incomes and household consumption stopped only in 1996. By this time, the real value of net wages was 26 per cent lower, whereas the value of pensions was 31 per cent lower than their respective levels in 1989. Income and consumption levels in the middle of the 1990s were comparable to the figures in the second half of the 1970s. Most probably this economic situation contributed to the fact that by 1998 the support for MSZP (Socialist Party) decreased compared to 1994, therefore Fidesz, having gained 38 per cent of the votes and having entered into a coalition with the Independent Smallholders' Party and MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum), had the opportunity to form a government.³⁰

During the four years of the Fidesz – FKGP (Independent Smallholders' Party) – MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) government, led by Prime

Minister Viktor Orbán, recovery from the economic crisis continued to take place. Owing to the increased GDP growth rate of 4–5 per cent, in 1999, per capita GDP caught up with the 1989 level and in 2001 it even surpassed it by 8 per cent. Simultaneously, the inflation rate of 8–9 per cent in 1999–2001 decreased to 5.3 per cent by 2002. The proportion of the unemployed dropped from 9.6 per cent in 1998 to 5.8 per cent in 2002. Per capita real wages, as well as household consumption reached the level of 1989 only in 2001. In the meantime, differentiation of incomes continued to take place. Despite the general improvement of the economy, in reality only a minority of the people experienced a rise in living standards, while the bigger part of the population even in 2001–2002 was poorer than 12 years earlier. In spite of favourable economic developments, similar to all post-regime change governing parties, Fidesz also suffered a defeat at the hand of the voters during the general elections. The socialists and the free democrats were invited back by the voters and Péter Medgyessy was given the mandate to form a new government.³¹

The favourable economic trends taking place from the middle of the 1990s came to a halt after the turn of the millennium. From about 2001–2002 onwards, signs of worrisome disparities started to manifest themselves in the economy. Although until 2006 the dynamic growth of GDP continued to take place with only some minor fluctuations, a grave budget crisis developed by the middle of the decade. This was partially due to the unjustifiably high wages before the elections of 2002, and to a large extent to the redemption of the election promises of the Medgyessy government in 2002–2003. As a result of the 50 per cent pay rise for civil servants, tax-exemptions for those earning only the minimum wage, the increase in family allowances, as well as the introduction of the 13th month pension, by 2002 real wages finally caught up with the 1989 level and in 2006 they even surpassed it by 24 per cent. Public spending on education, health care, as well as on other social programs also increased significantly. However, there were not enough funds in the budget to finance these costs along with the ever rising rate of motorway construction. Following good old practices, the Orbán, and more pertinently the Medgyessy, as well as the Gyurcsány governments, made up for the rising deficit of the budget by taking out credit from foreign sources. Therefore, from 2000 the net foreign debt of the country again started to rise and by 2006 it reached 38 billion euros. This amounted to an almost four fold increase compared to the level of 1999. Between 2001 and 2006, the deficit of the state budget in relation to GDP grew

from 52 to 66.5 per cent, whereas the balance rose from 3.5 to 9.2 per cent. These indicators were almost as negative as those of the record low period of 1993–94.

In order to restore the balance, the second Gyurcsány government introduced numerous austerity measures during the fall of 2006 and in 2007. As a result, the budget deficit decreased to 3.3 per cent by 2008. Apart from this, most economic indicators continued to deteriorate. The annual growth of GDP, which had been around 4 per cent, fell to 1.1 in 2007 and to 0.5 per cent in 2008. Real wages declined by about 5 per cent in 2007 and grew by less than 1 per cent in 2008. Gross foreign debt relative to GDP again jumped to over 70 per cent, while the rate of unemployment approached 10 per cent. These woes were only aggravated by the global economic crisis that began to manifest itself from the autumn of 2008. The resulting social and economic situations, along with sharp political conflicts, were undoubtedly among the main reasons for the street demonstrations and unrest in Budapest between 2006 and 2008. All this spelt the end of the Gyurcsány government in the spring of 2009. The so-called technocratic government, led by Gordon Bajnai, took up the task of crisis management and introduced further austerity measures.³²

By 2010, the accumulated problems led to the complete transformation of power relations among political parties. One of the major forces administering regime change, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), had disintegrated already before the elections. The same fate awaited the Hungarian Democratic Forum as well, which still ran in the elections but did not manage to have a single representative in parliament. MSZP (Socialist Party) suffered a major blow as well: it received a 20 per cent support on regional lists but succeeded in getting only 15 per cent of the seats in parliament. The far-right Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), founded in 2003, fared much better. Another new party, the liberal LMP (Lehet Más a Politika – Politics Can Be Different), however, could gather only 4 per cent of the seats. The absolute winner of the elections was the coalition of Fidesz and the Christian Democrats that took 52.7 per cent of the votes on regional lists. Due to this result and their outstanding performance on constituency lists, they obtained 68 per cent of the seats in parliament. No other party had gained such a victory since the regime change in Hungary. These results significantly increased the scope of action of Fidesz, which, similarly to its previous term of office in 1998–2002, was led by Viktor Orbán.

In 2006, the volume of GDP, reflecting the total achievement of various fields of the economy, surpassed the 1989 level by 32 per cent. Of course, the overwhelming majority of other countries in the world were also developing. In 2006, per capita GDP in Hungary amounted to 60 per cent of the one measured in the old 15 member European Union, just like in 1989. With this result in 2006, among the 25 countries of the European Union Hungary occupied 21st place. Since then the position of the country has further deteriorated.³³

Due to the long pre-history of economic transition and the specific features of privatization, the pre-regime change entrepreneurial–managerial elite in Hungary managed to retain about four-fifths of their positions until the turn of the millennium. The sociological features of this group were summarised by Iván Szelényi in 1998 as follows: “they were recruited primarily from the middle layers of the late Kádarian nomenclature. Their average age was around 45 and they worked in mid-managerial positions already during the 1980s. A large segment, at least half of them, were also members of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party. It is fair to say that they joined the party not because of ideological commitment but rather out of practical, pragmatic considerations. [...] a major part of their members held degrees in technology or economics and many of them belonged to first generation intelligentsia. Their parents were likely to form the ranks of the upwardly mobile workers and the more well-to-do stratum of the peasant population but we may also find petit bourgeois citizens among their grandparents. Their way of thinking was clearly pragmatic already during the 1980s: this stratum was the first to realise [...] that it was possible to transform the economy in such a way that the transition, instead of harming their interests, would even benefit them personally.”³⁴

This sociological generalization can be illustrated with the concrete examples of Sándor Demján, the second richest person in Hungary today, as well as the career of billionaire Gábor Széles. Sándor Demján (1943) started his career in a cooperative in the countryside in the 1960s, and in 1976, he became the director of the Budapest Skála Department Store, unique for its entrepreneurial spirit and profit-oriented philosophy. Because of his achievements, in 1986, he was entrusted with the creation of the first Hungarian commercial bank (Magyar Hitelbank). Similarly to Skála in the field of trade, Hitelbank was a pioneer in the construction of the new banking system. Among other things, he played a key role in bringing foreign capital

to the country, as well as in the selling of state-owned companies. Since 1990, Demján has been the head of several large international investment companies.³⁵ Gábor Széles (1945) studied to be an engineer and worked for many years at the Geophysical Institute of ELTE University. Taking advantage of the opportunity, together with two of his associates, he established an economic cooperative called Műszertechnika GMK. They designed and produced various scientific equipment at their own risk and for their own profit. In 1988, when the Companies Act allowed them to transform into a company, already some 600 people were employed by the enterprise. In 1989, he joined the Hungarian Democratic Forum and in 1991, he bought Videoton, one of the biggest electronics factories of Hungary. Between 1996–1997, he put it back on its feet, then in 1998, he acquired Ikarus, the only bus factory in Central Europe. In the end of the 1990s, he employed 21,000 people in his three large companies.³⁶

The gradual loosening of intellectual life determined by the hegemony of Marxism goes back to the 1960s. Similarly to the reforms of the centrally planned economic system, the intellectual policies supported works with a Marxist orientation and the ones that were at least in tune with the party line; tolerated writings that although not Marxist, but at least did not enter into open polemics with Marxism; and prohibited the unmistakably anti-Marxist and anti-regime products of the intellect. According to this, using French examples, the writings of not only Louis Aragon, Roger Garaudy, and Jean-Paul Sartre were translated into Hungarian but also a few works by Francois Mauriac, Teilhard de Chardin, and even the *Mémoires de guerre* by Charles de Gaulle. Raymond Aron, however, was considered to be forbidden fruit up to the very end. Due to the greater degree of openness, one of the main characteristic features of the cultural life of the Kádár-era was the partially latent, partially open separation of different intellectual trends, that is to say, the emergence of a kind of limited ideological pluralism. However, the various ideological, generational or regional groups, or schools of thought were still not allowed to become institutionalized and independent organizations with a financial basis of their own. Of course, the freedom of churches was also constrained. The teaching of religion was continuously banned from 1949.³⁷

Liberalization continued during the 1980s. Although illegally, the influential periodical of the democratic opposition, entitled *Beszélő*, started to be published in 1981. The Open Society Foundation of George (György) Soros,

which supported anti-Marxist opposition movements on a regular basis, could operate in Hungary from 1982, and from 1984 it continued its activities in cooperation with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The foundation of the so-called folk-national opposition, the Bethlen Gábor Foundation, came into being in 1985. In the end of 1986, the Writers' Association removed almost all protégées of the Party State from among its leaders by voting them out. They replaced them with mostly prominent figures of the opposition. In 1989, the Publishing Directorate, which had the function of granting permission for various products of the press, was discontinued. The compulsory teaching of the Russian language was abolished in schools; and the previously closed sections of libraries, where anti-Marxist and anti-regime books had been kept, became open for everyone. The teaching of religion in schools became possible and religious orders, banned in 1950, were also allowed to resume their activities.³⁸

The intensive intellectual atmosphere, so typical of the second half of the 1980s, entailed the direct political role of the cultural elite and their organization into ideological movements. The first leaders of the opposition parties came almost exclusively from the ranks of the intellectual elite. In 1990, about half of the ministers of the Antall government were university professors or researchers at the Academy of Sciences. The majority of those who stayed in their professions either remained with the Socialist Party (MSZP) or joined the elite surrounding the liberal parties. The support for the national-conservative side was limited among the cultural elite, and it was minimal among the media-intellectuals. Today this situation has changed significantly. In the first half of the 1990s the churches regained many of the schools they had owned previously, and for the first time in Hungarian history, Catholic and Protestant universities were established. The overwhelming dominance of the socialist and liberal media intellectuals also decreased to some extent. The so-called national-conservative side has for years had a national daily paper (*Magyar Nemzet*), two weeklies (*Heti Válasz*, *Magyar Demokrata*), numerous periodicals (*Magyar Szemle*, *Valóság*, *Hitel*, etc.), several radio stations, and two television channels.

As can be seen, from an ideological-political point of view, the Hungarian cultural elite has changed significantly. It essentially adapted to the political spectrum. As to its personal composition, however, the change could be regarded as minimal. These changes are partially connected with the rehabilitation of people who had been removed from academic research

institutes and universities because of their critical activities (Ágnes Heller, Sándor Radnóti, György Bence, etc.). Partially they can be accounted for by the natural generational mobility. It should also be noted that the regime change in Hungary did not entail the institutional removal of any university professors, high priests, chief editors or any members of the Academy. In case it happened, those removed could go on with their careers in different elite positions. The cultural elite can, therefore, be characterized with a continuity and permanency of a similar or even higher degree than in the case of the economic elite.

On the basis of all the above mentioned factors we can state without exaggeration that although regime change did take place in Hungary, a change of elite either did not happen or did so to a very limited extent. This is all the more surprising because before the 1990 elections the majority of the opposition parties demanded a “major spring cleaning” and there were also many among the ranks of the winning party, the Hungarian Democratic Forum and its partner, the Independent Smallholders’ Party, who advocated a radical clean-up at all levels and in all areas of public administration, the economy, and social life. This wish was reflected in the so-called *Justitia* plan of 1990 that called for the complete “screening” of the post-1956 economic, political, and cultural elite with the purpose of “impeaching and prosecuting the individuals responsible for the catastrophic state of the country”. Furthermore, the plan demanded the revision of all transactions of privatization and the full re-examination of leaders during that period, as well as their successors.³⁹

The *Justitia* plan, however, was rejected not only by the MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party), the party most involved, but also by the liberal SZDSZ (the Alliance of Free Democrats) and Fidesz (the Association of Young Democrats), not implicated in the process due to the young age of its constituency. Referring to the embeddedness of the entire society during the Kádár – regime, one of the leaders of the Social Democrats (SZDSZ) warned that “those in search of individuals responsible for the past might end up finding collective responsibility”.⁴⁰ Instead of the *Justitia* plan, SZDSZ proposed the exclusion of former secret agents from public life. According to assumptions at the time, the implementation of this proposition would have decimated primarily the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and to a certain extent that would have endangered the parliamentary majority of the coalition. József Antall did not embrace this or the *Justitia* plan. He feared

that both solutions, as well as their myriads of combinations, would easily lead to witch-hunts and may shake the faith of the people in democracy. Domokos Kosáry, the new president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, took a similar stand to that of József Antall. Drawing on the lessons of the purges of the 20th century, whose outcome in all cases turned out to be counterproductive, he resisted every attempt at a cleansing in the realm of science based on political considerations in retrospect.

Alongside the fear of witch-hunts, we know of two further explanations why impeachment and large scale personnel changes were not carried out. Rudolf Tóké, an American political scientist of Hungarian descent, assumes that there was a “tacit agreement” on the part of reform communists and opposition leaders to “avoid reprisals against former party members in the aftermath of the transition”. That is to say, the price paid for the peaceful transition was the lack of accountability.⁴¹ Péter Kende was of a similar opinion. He believed that compensation for the lack of accountability was “in essence revolutionary change without a revolution.”⁴²

Ferenc Gazsó, a Hungarian sociologist, however, maintained that regime change had been “preceded by a radical shift of elite that took place during the 1980s.” In other words, the ranks of the economic and cultural elite, and partially the political elite as well, had been filled with competent intellectuals, therefore, a radical elite change after 1990 would have been entirely unreasonable, unnecessary and, for lack of an alternative elite, even unfeasible.⁴³ Though phrased with different words, essentially the same conclusion was reached by Erzsébet Szalai in the middle of the 1990s when she wrote that “in the end of the 1980s, the communist nomenclature as a homogeneous social group did not exist any more” and within the party bureaucracy, as well as the state bureaucracy, a “traditional pro-order stratum” was competing with a “technocrat-reformist stratum” representing the interests of “enlightened managers and entrepreneurs”.⁴⁴

To a certain extent, probably each of these factors contributed to the fact that a market economy, parliamentary democracy, and ideological pluralism was established in Hungary paradoxically by a post-communist elite, which to a large extent was identical with the communist elite prior to the regime change. Ultimately, this could be the explanation why the outcome of so many consultations, debates, and all the legal fuss about delivering justice ended up to be two – in essence – ineffective acts. One of them is Act XC

adopted on 22 October 1993 that provided for the prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity that would never expire under the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which had been signed by Hungary as well. The other one, Act XXIII, provided for the screening of the past of individuals holding important public offices, such as MPs, ministers, under-secretaries, etc. If persons in high positions turned out to have been officers or agents of the internal counter-intelligence of the Ministry of the Interior, or if they had been informed about the decisions of this particular department; if they had served in the special police forces between 1956–57; if they had joined the Arrow Cross Party prior to 1945, then the special judicial body in charge of the investigation would request their resignation. If they complied with the request their past would not be made public. If not, the judicial body would publish its findings in the Hungarian Gazette. In order to safeguard the authority and reputation of the first democratically elected legislative body of the country, the act entered into force only after the term of office of the Parliament had expired.

On the basis of Act XC of 1993, the office of the attorney-general indicted 28 people in a total of 7 cases. The accused were commanders in charge of the volley fired during and after the 1956 revolution, or represented the ranks of junior soldiers and people serving in the special police forces. The trials, having passed through the labyrinth of constitutional reviews and appeals, lasted for years. The last verdict was passed in 2003. Most of the proceedings ended with acquittal, several of the accused died in the meantime, and in the case of other accused persons imprisonment could not be carried out due to amnesty or the suspension provisions of the courts. There were only three exceptions: two people accused and convicted in the Salgótarján case, and one in a case in the town of Tata. They spent two and three years in prison, respectively.

The application of Act XXIII of 1994 also yielded meager results. Since its scope of action covered only politicians who were still holding leadership positions and was not applicable for those who had already left politics, as well as the members of the business, intellectual and religious elite of the country, it did not have the effect of a complete clean-up of public life. Of the 11,000 people screened in 10 years until the end of 2005, only slightly more than 200, that is less than 2 per cent, were found to be implicated. However, based on the materials of the Historical Office, which was set up in 1997 and where a certain part of state security documents were kept,

more and more renowned church leaders, sports people, artists, scientists, and journalists turned out to have had some level of contact with the internal security forces. Agent lists, as well as other documents exposing certain individuals also appeared from various other sources, the origins of which may not be clear even today. Over the years, numerous political and public scandals emerged concerning these documents, with the biggest one having erupted following the 2002 elections. It was at that time that the general public learnt that the new Prime Minister, Péter Medgyessy, worked for a few years as a top secret agent for counter-espionage in the capacity of a financial expert. The committee that was set up following the eruption of the scandal established similar suspicions in relation to several former ministers and under-secretaries. As a consequence, a need was expressed for a new screening or agent act that would be more encompassing than the previous one. This time again, the adoption of such an act was prevented by the lack of agreement among the parties. This is considered to be, by many, the biggest handicap of the regime change that needs to be remedied by all means possible, while others would like to personally forget the whole issue and wish it were forgotten by everyone else as well.⁴⁵

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THE TWO SIDES OF REGIME CHANGE – THE HUNGARIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the change of the communist/socialist regime in Hungary. The author approaches the topic scientifically, but also gives his personal experiences. The article is divided into three parts. The first, entitled “Symbols of a transition,” deals with the anomalies of the old regime, its structure and how it was operated. The author also describes the vagueness of the Hungarian new/old elite regarding the path that Hungary should have followed right after the fall of communism.

In the second and the third sections, “Lack of peaceful disagreement” and “Economic transition and its social consequences” he gives an overview of the main problems and disputes in Hungary in the last two decades. He finds the roots of the recent problems to a large degree in the change of regime, how it happened, what legislative measures have been implemented and which measures fell short. He deals in detail with the expectations of the Hungarian society in the years of the change of regime, and before and after Hungary become a member of the EU.

I. Symbols of a transition

For me regime change, the change of the political system, started with a fair amount of crying. I started to shed tears not because of a mass event in the streets, the declaration of the republic or because of the first free elections. I was not even eight years old at the time and my father did not let my younger sister and me go swimming. We used to go to swimming lessons with Uncle Tibi, who wore a frightening beard on his face, but he had a rare gift for teaching us youngsters to swim. I started to cry together with my sister because we liked Uncle Tibi's classes and we did not really understand the reasons why we had to stay at home. My father said something like we had to watch history in the making on television. It

was 16th June 1989. This was the day when Imre Nagy, the prime minister of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, who had been sentenced to death in a showcase trial, was reburied along with his fellows in martyrdom. Since then I have watched the sequence of events several times, and my heart sank every time at the sight of the ceremony taking place on Heroes' Square, one of the most famous places in Budapest. The crowd was dignified, the Gallery of Art, decked in black and white, was very solemn. Well-known actors were continually reading out the names of workers, students, soldiers, and intellectuals murdered during the repressions in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution.

To make the drama of the summer of 1989 perceivable for a child as well, even more complete: János Kádár died on 6th July, the very same day when the Supreme Court officially acquitted and rehabilitated Imre Nagy, whom János Kádár had sent to the gallows. The leader of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, omnipotent for decades, had lived to see the reburial of his one-time rival. During the reburial ceremony he stood confused, deserted even by his own people, fighting with his demons. He lived to see the lie tumble as a house of cards which once served as the foundation of the whole system. According to this lie, 1956 was a counter-revolution, our Soviet brothers actually stretched out their helping hands for which we had to be eternally grateful. Luckily, thanks to our leaders – the official explanation went on – since then we had managed to stand on our two feet and our lives had improved. Sooner or later a flat was allocated to everyone and having waited for many years we might even be lucky enough to be able to buy a Trabant or Wartburg manufactured in the Democratic Republic of Germany. Also, a summer holiday at Lake Balaton was more or less everyone's right. We could even travel to the West – once in three years – and politics more or less left us in peace. As long as you did not criticise too loudly you could go on living your own life. That was a rough summary of the Kádarian deal.

This explanation of the world around us that defined the lives of generations was particularly dangerous because it was not entirely false. Compared to the other countries of the Bloc (but only to them!) things were not that bad in Hungary. The official propaganda did not hesitate to refer to the allegedly lazy Poles, who had critical shortages of goods during the state of emergency, to the rigid Czechoslovakian system, or to the ever darker conditions in Romania.

The Hungarian system was rightly called goulash communism, only the ingredients were rotten. The meat stunk, the vegetables were withered and the potatoes were stale. The dictatorship was founded on fundamental lies: 1956 was not a counter-revolution but a revolution, the Soviets were not helping but occupying, and contrary to all the slogans we were not allowed to live free lives, to travel freely, to start a business freely, to pray freely – all the things that for any citizen of the allegedly decadent West were commonplace. But this was not the only reason why the Hungarian goulash was going off: the Kádárist economic system, falsely presented as pleasant, was also a lie. “You pretend that you are paying us we also pretend that we are working” went the cynical saying of the Hungarian workers about the socialist “economy,” in which basically everyone was lying to everyone. Workers were lying about their work, company directors were lying about the productivity of their companies, and the state was lying just about everything. Statistics at the time of the regime change was aware of about a million of unemployed people “within the gates” whose work was essentially not needed, but they could not be laid off as in the existent socialist system unemployment was not allowed to exist. During the time of regime change there was a moment rarely mentioned, but one that still defined the subsequent years and even decades of Hungary. It was when the prime minister of the last communist government, Miklós Németh, admitted that by the end of 1989 the gross foreign debt of the state had reached 20 billion dollars. He was also forced to confess that the administration was publishing false figures about the debt as early as the middle of the 80s, fearing that they might scare away foreign investors.

So, the ideological and economic foundations of the communist system were false. The description phrased by the political scientist, István Bibó, himself a democrat who was imprisoned for participation in the events of 1956, perfectly fitted the regime. He maintained that one can occasionally lie in politics, but no system can be founded on lies forever. We might add that if one still attempts to do so, one has to pay dearly for a long time for such deception.

This is true even if we already know that without the geopolitical constellation the collapse of the dictatorship would not have taken place in Hungary nor elsewhere in the region. The Soviet Union simply collapsed under the weight of its own internal problems, its economy – except for the military industry – failed to function in almost all areas. It still might have had the

strength to intervene in Central Europe, but it no longer had the will to do so. The most dangerous opposition in world history – because it threatened the deployment of nuclear weapons – ended in the Visegrád countries without a bullet being fired. In the period that followed, similarly to other countries of the region, Hungary first joined NATO and later the European Union. The most aching failure of regime change in Hungary was that despite the success of the process on a historical scale, according to every study not only do many people feel nostalgic for the “jolliest barrack,” but also a stunningly high number of citizens are dissatisfied with the performance of the post-Soviet administrations and the general support for the institutions of the democratic system of government is remarkably low. This situation is further worsened by the struggle among the elite that erupted in 1989–1990, manifesting itself in cultural-symbolic matters, and which stunned the observer by its fierce and, at the same time, hopeless nature. It looked as if Hungary in many aspects could not cope with “freedom regained” and its politicians and smaller and larger communities were unable to find common ground even on the most fundamental issues. What is the function of government in the economy? When and how should it intervene? What happened during the process of privatization? What is to happen with the education and the health systems? And in general, what happened to us in the 20th century? In what ways should we remember and think about the Trianon peace resolutions, about World War II, about the Holocaust, about 1956, or about regime change? There are so many controversial issues in which we seem to be even farther from a common ground than we were at the start of the process in 1989–1990.

Without trying to bore the reader with Hungarian internal political developments, it is my contention that the governance of Fidesz (who was given an unprecedented electoral mandate in 2010 since the change of the political system by having gained two thirds of the votes in the parliamentary elections) could be described as an attempt to solve this complex heap of Hungarian problems. The leaders of Fidesz (active student leaders during the period of transition) can be characterized by their occasionally distasteful (ab)use of power, an almost exclusive preference for voluntarism as opposed to compromise, the use of simplifications in their rhetoric wherever possible, and their tendency for arguments of the kind of the “fight of good against evil.” They understood that by 2010 the system, created with regime change, simply used up its own reserves. This was signalled not only by the forward thrust of the far-right, which by riding the waves of hopelessness

and despair gained 17 per cent of the votes. The political credibility of the system of regime change was also eaten away by corruption and incompetence, which essentially ruined the social liberal government in power between 2002 and 2010. Ideological capital ran out completely because of the almost civil war-like opposition of the right and the left following the leaking of the “lie speech” given by the Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány, in 2006. By that time the opposing sides could not even agree on the meaning of words and their strength was enough only to render those in power untrustworthy, but not to have a decisive victory over them. This only aggravated and intensified a very dangerous feeling, the complete lack of trust on the part of a significant segment of the Hungarian population in all sorts of institutions, specifically in the governments in power.

This kind of attitude was present already before the time of the regime change, and it was not by accident that the first freely elected prime minister, József Antall, addressed the citizens of the country when introducing the government program of 1990 by saying, “I call for the Hungarian nation from this place to get rid of the lack of trust that has been engrained in our psyche for decades, and even centuries, to regard the institutions of the country as their own, as institutions that work in their interests, in their protection and in their service.” It is not a coincidence that one of the new buildings of the European Union in Brussels bears the name of this very same prime minister who passed away in 1993. Despite all attempts to prove to the contrary, he was a man of immaculate democratic credentials, and a statesman of European calibre who understood what could poison the public and social relations, as well as the economy of the country that just recently regained its independence.

2. The lack of peaceful disagreement

In Hungary, lack of trust has roots going back farther than communism, but the four decades of dictatorship amplified this phenomenon tremendously. According to the leaders of Fidesz, who regained victory in 2010, which greatly contributed to the prevalence of this lack of trust was that during its first term the freely elected parliament was not able to complete regime change with a symbolic act of jurisdiction, the adoption of a new constitution. They believed that by such a symbolic act it would have been possible to say that “these institutions are already yours, they were set up by the authorization of the Hungarian people, therefore they will work in the service of the Hungarian people.” This lack of completion was also

symbolised by the fact that in Hungary communist leaders were not held responsible in the aftermath of 1989. It is also of symbolic importance that it was not until 2013 that the district attorney charged a former minister of the interior, Béla Biszku, of war crimes and other criminal activities for the key role he played in the repressions that followed 1956. After the crushing of the revolution, the accused was a member with voting and decision-making rights of the innermost party leadership, the Provisional Executive Committee, which was the central governing and decision-making body of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and was established in early November 1956. This committee set up a special police force with the aim that in the aftermath of the revolution and war of independence it could function as an organ both securing the peace and assisting in repression, as well as acting against the civilian population. The units of this police force working under the Provisional Executive Committee, with Biszku among its ranks, opened fire with the aim of deterrence against the unarmed civilian population in several major cities and towns in Hungary, killing children and women alike. The fact that Biszku was left unharmed and unaccountable for so long also became a symbol of the unsettled nature of the past, which many ascribe to the accounts of the 1989 constitutional system.

If we want to understand why some considered the issue of the new constitution so central, we have to know that the new democratic constitution, which was accepted at the round table talks of the opposition and ratified by the last parliament of the Party State, was originally also considered temporary by the participants of the 1989 "negotiation revolution." This was evident by the wording in the preamble to the constitution "to facilitate the peaceful transition into a rule of law that is to establish a multi-party system, parliamentary democracy, and a social market economy." By 2010 this became a strange anachronism, not only because the first free elections had already taken place in the spring of 1990, but also because by then all the former socialist countries – with the exception of Hungary – had adopted their new constitutions. The fact that the new institutional system still remained operational for two decades is largely due to the Constitutional Court. In 2010, however, the adoption of a new constitution suddenly came within reach, which had been attempted since 1990 by all governing forces in one way or another, proving the need for correction. Voting for a new constitution between 1994 and 1998 – although the necessary parliamentary majority did exist – could never take place due to the disputes between the governing socialists and the liberals. Later, however, the plans could not materialize

because of the ever deepening lack of trust among the participants of the Hungarian political scene.

According to the debatable, although strongly supported right-wing evaluation of the situation, the ambivalent nature of the regime change stemmed from the fact that in Hungary the change of the system, the transition from dictatorship to democracy, and the adoption of the new constitution did not go hand in hand. We need to know all this to be able to understand why Fidesz, obtaining on its own the majority necessary for the creation of a constitution, insisted so much in 2010–2011 on drawing up and adopting a new constitution even though the opposition parties, initially cooperating in the work of the parliamentary committee, finally withdrew from the process. Moreover, in their rhetoric they clearly equated the adoption of the constitution and, later the constitution itself, with the current political interests of the government and promised to modify it as soon as the opportunity presented itself. It is not difficult to see that the whole constitutional process, carried out by the governing party and lacking not only consensus but also parliamentary compromise, as well as the attitude of the opposition who viewed even their intentions with suspicion and “welcomed” the outcome with fierce criticism, further strengthened the ideological conflicts already present in Hungarian society, and intensified the lack of trust in institutions as well as in the constitution. Of course, it cannot be excluded that with the passage of time Hungary will also follow the model of the French Fifth Republic. The public system, hallmarked by the 1958 constitution and tailored to Charles de Gaulle, was fiercely attacked by the left and initially criticised by François Mitterand himself, who wrote a book about it entitled “Le coup d’état permanent.” However, upon coming to power in 1981, Mitterand took advantage, perhaps even more than his president-predecessor, of its framework, which provided almost unprecedented power in Western democracies for a head of government in a “republican monarchy.” It is possible that such a scenario may evolve in Hungary because, despite the contradictory government and opposition rhetoric, the new constitution is 80 per cent similar to the old one. This is to say that even the current governmental majority, which proclaimed a complete new beginning, did not distance itself from the main directions of the governmental system and the division of power. Its amendments were, primarily, ideological in nature, or can be traced back to the practice of the Constitutional Court during the past two decades: It could also be considered as an attempt to level out the unevenness of the previous constitution. Still, in case of a political turn to

the left, chances are very slim for reasonableness, which can only partially be explained by the politics of power of the right. We are probably talking about something much deeper here. As the English conservative philosopher, Roger Scruton, who often visits Hungary, recently perspicaciously noted: "People here somehow seem to be incapable of peaceful disagreement." What a precise formulation!

Keeping a distance and reflecting upon ourselves and our environment is probably more important and necessary in Hungarian public life than anywhere else. Public life is ruled on a daily basis by decade-long grievances, unforgivable personal animosities, unfortunate half-sentences uttered 15 years ago that are used as reference points, as well as taboos and excommunications that make rational debates impossible. Whereas if we allowed for the contrasting of interests, the emergence of a multitude of opinions, heated debates or – God forbid – even a negative campaign that would by no means spell the end of democracy or a national tragedy. Hungarian public life, despite all rumours to the contrary, is no more evil than the French, German – or let us be more modest – the Slovak, Polish or the Romanian one. My biggest cause for concern is that empathy disappeared from decisive segments of the Hungarian public in relation to different opinions, perspectives, and even narratives. We seem to have an inability to place ourselves into other people's frames of mind, to understand the motives of the ones standing against us, and to accept the validity of experiences that are fundamentally different from ours. Although our politicians have undoubtedly played their parts in the development of the current situation, only the smaller part of the responsibility can be ascribed to them. Although it may feel good for many to divide the nation into a corrupt and irresponsible political elite that is busy digging trenches and stirring up hatred on the one hand, and unfortunate, deceived voters and citizens yearning for peace on the other, I believe it is a highly misleading attitude. The Hungarian political elite are neither better nor worse than the country they come from. If you like, our representatives and party leaders are reflections of our society. They are like Hungarian football, Hungarian gastronomy or the Hungarian traffic culture. Yes, our politicians throw mud, they are petty and egotistical but do we, citizens, workers of the press, push them in the direction of a different kind of attitude? Despite the continual bashing of politics and the state, in Hungary everyone expects everything from the state: the director making films that nobody cares about as well as the pensioner criticising the local store operated by the local government. Internal conflicts among intellectuals

evolve into battles of big politics because the party logo functions as an excellent way of distinguishing between friend and foe, and with a bit of luck, it may also secure us favours, membership on a board of trustees, or may bring us business orders for our enterprise.

This sort of behaviour makes it impossible to conduct constructive debates about the directions of the economy or of foreign policy, as well as about the evaluation of our past. This almost constant phenomenon since the regime change destroys not only the morale of the country, but its competitiveness as well. In Hungary, the majority of those with strong political preferences perceive taking account of or understanding anything that differs from the line – or the perceived line – of their favourite party as a betrayal. This attitude is obvious if one watches the call-in programmes of any television channel, and listens to the arguments of the callers that are ripe with hatred. Hungarian public life and the Hungarian public *per se* tend to think in a weird winner–loser frame of mind. According to this perception, acknowledging or accepting any comment phrased “on the other side,” however legitimate it may be, weakens the camp of one’s own and its chances at elections. One may accept this way of thinking from a politician, but much less from rational people considering themselves intellectuals.

3. The economic transition and its social implications

One of the longest lasting impacts of regime change from an economic point of view is that while the relatively low, but at least equal, standard of living of Kádárism disappeared, considerable differences of wealth emerged in Hungarian society which came to tolerate them with increasing difficulty. In the first few years following the regime change of 1989–1990, one million jobs disappeared and a stunningly large number of people (typically miners and workers of former state factories representing heavy industries that produced hazardous, but still not competitive products) fled to various kinds of social programs. According to astonishing data, while the number of unemployed in 1990 hardly exceeded 20,000, in 1993 it was almost 700,000. Although this number dropped during the following years, one may imagine the tensions created in Hungarian society by the thirty-fold increase in unemployment.

Moreover, for a segment of the middle class to stay afloat and not hit rock bottom came to be an everyday experience. However, with the passage of

time, this became a frustrating experience for an increasingly wider section of the society. It was not only their own lives that took an unwelcome turn, they also had to realise that despite all their efforts, their children were also unlikely to fare any better.

This situation inevitably led to major frustration and was coupled by another kind of dissatisfaction that had political consequences. Similarly to other former socialist countries, Hungary also had to face a clear contradiction in 1989–1990. As described by the co-authors Tamás Kolosi and Ákos Róna Tas, the logic of the political regime change necessitated an extensive change of elite. However, because of the change of the economic system, the importance of market automatisms increased, which, in turn, favoured the previous elite in their retention of power. The political right which formed the first government of the regime change had to face a strange dilemma in 1990: to the extent that they insisted on the change of the elite, to the same extent they hampered the economic regime change as well as the expansion of market conditions, and vice versa. The stronger the power of privatization and market automatisms became, the more likely the economic elite of the previous system was to be successful amidst the new conditions as well.

Only a strong middle class could have been able to come to terms with this contradiction and the tensions stemming from it. A middle class, however, evolved only partially due to the reasons described above. The process of transition of positions by the previous elite led to the phenomenon called “clotted structures” by sociologist Gyula Tellér. This scenario took place not only in the economy but also elsewhere starting from government offices, to trade unions, and security services. Although it was impossible not to recognise the aspiration for positions in the criticism on the part of the political right, in general, this sort of power-transition still deteriorated the chances for the establishment of democratic pluralism, as well as a real parliamentary rotation system. The social historian, Tibor Valuch, stated that in approximately half a decade following regime change and amid increasingly market-type conditions, the role of education, professional skills and expertise, especially convertible knowledge, came to be more highly appreciated. The value of symbolic capital such as relationships, creativity, entrepreneurship and adaptability significantly increased during the social position-transfer. Despite all strategies to the contrary, the increase in disparity of income and wealth was constant and of an accelerating rate ever

since the beginning of the 90s. A highly numerous stratum of entrepreneurs, large and small, developed rapidly. In 1997 in every 10 Hungarian households there was one entrepreneur. The number of individual and corporate business people exceeded one million, however, every third one was a member of an enterprise that did not carry out any real activities. This means that there was no direct correlation between the entrepreneurial spirit, self-care, risk-taking and competition that was so much desired and the seemingly large number of entrepreneurs. These processes, taking place in the labour force and the economy, struck the Roma segment of Hungarian society much harder than the general population. Although their partial modernization and integration did take place during socialism, it mostly happened by way of sweeping the problems under the carpet. The Roma workers of low educational background were absorbed by the Hungarian industry as simple labourers, but no further efforts were made at their real integration and education. It was even considered a taboo to discuss their situation. According to studies, during the period following regime change, approximately 70 per cent of Roma heads of households were poor, and this figure in essence has not changed ever since.

When analysing the process of disillusionment we must mention the following: parallel with the economic changes, in effect – using the jargon of journalism – the big story was gone. The dream, although not worked out in all its details but shared universally, dissipated. But what was it all about? Hungary from the beginning of the 90s posed in the role of the “top student.” Building on its previous relative openness it actually carried out everything that foreign advisors recommended or that was useful for foreign enterprises. Among these were many things necessary for the setting up of a market economy, just like a significant part of foreign businesses also contributed to the creation of the new economic system by bringing useful technological expertise and capital to the country. Other companies, however, without even concealing it, were only interested in buying a market in Hungary and acquired the companies, offered at very reduced prices, but otherwise requiring only minimal investment to make them competitive (for example in the food industry, which was profitable even during the dictatorship) only to phase them out in order to make way for their own products and services. With time this economic policy concentrating only on liberalization, deregulation, and privatization – that is exclusively on things that attract capital – caused major social disillusionment and frustration and was less and less capable of mobilizing imagination and setting up new goals.

Not to mention that there was something disturbing in the compliments for being a good student that the first post-regime change governments received from international financial organizations or Western governments. This sort of mentality considered it just natural that the nature of the relationship could be perceived exclusively in the dissymmetrical system of relations between “teachers” (developed countries and international organizations) and “students” (Hungary and the other countries of Central Europe). The representatives of this attitude, initially quite gracious, with time watched with a certain degree of impatience that the “students” were not progressing fast enough with their “homework” and were still not living – and even more annoying – still not thinking the way it was accepted in the West. This sort of attitude simply did not take account of the burdened legacy of communism or of the even deeper historical, economic, and social determining factors. In Hungary, in the first decade after regime change – except for a few marginal and feeble attempts – it was not even conceivable that there might be a different narrative other than the fast process doing away with the state and that in certain cases there is a clear need for a more decisive representation of our national interests. Neither left nor right posed basic questions: the right out of gratitude for winning over oppressive communism and the left for fear of losing its “reformist” legitimacy in the eyes of the West, as well as losing and the social capital that it acquired still as a State party and in its immediate aftermath during the 80s.

As stated by the political scientist of the left, Balázs Böcskei, owing to its deficits of origin, the post-party left governing the country between 1994–1998 and 2002–2010 (pre-party: CMEA, post-party: European Economic Community) wished so much to be compatible with Europe that because of its aspirations to adopt to European patterns it was unable to offer contemporary, let alone left-wing answers for current social conflicts. They managed society (or at least they tried) but did not analyze it. This situation could best be described by the term cognitive dissonance: the country was not perceived in the framework of a world order but instead it was suggested that it was enough to follow European patterns and the country would prosper automatically. This approach does not take note of the fact that European politics itself is also the scene of power games therefore it can be characterized by a lack of balance, uncertainty and a geographical market-based division of labour. Roger Scruton’s criticism of Europe is also received by the technocratic practice of force and inertia: “If a problem pops up we solve it by way of a regulation. However, the

solution of one problem leads to another one but that one – just because it belongs to a different part of the machinery or because it is engrained in the future – it is overlooked by the machinery of jurisdiction. What makes things worse, nothing can be reversed that has already been approved by the plan. Under such circumstances, with determining factors of foreign and domestic politics there was not even a chance to discuss, let alone, reach a consensus between right and left in issues of fundamental importance. These issues include: Can the state really be only a bad proprietor? What consequences can the swift liberalization of strategic fields such as the energy sector have? Why is it a taboo to bring up the issue of confining the economic power dominance that stifles the layers of small enterprises and “family capitalism”? This economic power dominance could be controlled by setting up institutions that keep a functioning free market capitalism in check and – where needed – establishing balance between the state and the market, which has been functioning well in most Western countries since the end of World War II or even earlier.

Hungarian society was in a sense chasing a mirage, a *fata morgana*, the well-known fixture of the Hungarian *pusztá*. When the dream – so widely shared around the time of regime change in Hungary concerning a quick catch-up with the West (by this Hungarians meant catching up with the standard of living of the Austrians with whom they used to live together in a common empire and who also functioned as an eternal reference point for Hungarians) – dissipated, people switched to hope that the accession to the European Union would bring about this brave new world. Then on 2 May 2004 Canaan still did not come and politicians did not do much to help a more realistic evaluation of the situation. It is enough to mention only one renowned item of the billboard campaign of the government about European accession which portrayed one of the privileges of EU membership by suggesting that the one-time Hungarian citizen could also open a coffee house in Vienna. In reality, though, this ideal is much farther from the actual reality of Hungarians than the Hungarian capital is from the Austrian one. After joining the European Union we started to hope that having warmed up a little bit and learned the rules, we would finally be able to catch up with the so much desired object of our dreams – the West. The remnants of this illusion were smashed to pieces by the crisis that started at the end of 2008 and since then we are not even sure what the “Western model” is all about. Is it something epitomized by Germany, France, England, or Scandinavia? Unfortunately, the years of daydreaming

were spent in the worst possible way. Just to top off our woes, blinded by the glow of shop windows that we yearned for, we were busy not with the values that the European Union was founded and grew big on (the establishment of clear relations, accumulation of wealth by way of hard work, self-discipline, moderation, investments and planning) but above all we wanted to join the happy ranks of consumers. Since we stretched ourselves more than our blankets would have allowed us to do we were forced to apply for loans. From the beginning of the year 2000, the Hungarian state was taking out loans to finance investments and their operations, local governments were applying for credit, aimed at developments, and citizens also became indebted because of their pursuit of products of consumer society. It all amounted to absurd political irresponsibility. This led to a situation when the socialist-liberal government, handing out portions of the budget in the hope of winning the elections of 2006, worked up the budget deficit to 9.2 per cent, a world record at the time. The end result came to be a lethal cocktail: large state debt and budget deficit, indebtedness of both local governments and citizens, which are outstanding even in a European comparison, coupled with weak growth. So by now it is understandable why Hungary was the first country to resort to the IMF for help in the fall of 2008, and why Budapest is known in the news primarily for the tools it tries to use in fighting state debt, budget deficit, and indebtedness.

During the five years since the outbreak of the economic crisis, the social-economic heap of problems came back to haunt us with overwhelming force. We have been carrying all the problems described above ever since the time of regime change although they were somewhat masked by the “top student” success stories of the 90s and the early 2000s. The economic hardships were amplified by the near pathological nature of the conflicts of Hungarian public life that was further worsened by the fundamentally differing assessments of the Hungarian past of the 20th century, a century bringing tragedies one after the other. (For some time, the right has been defining itself against the economic and intellectual mainstream as the preserver of values seemingly abandoned by the West, such as nation, work, family, faith, merit, effort, and enterprise.)

It would undoubtedly be beneficial for the economic performance of the country as well if this state of warlike preparedness subdued so that at the time of the 25th anniversary of regime change at least in a few key issues we would not need to conduct polemics in Hungary.

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FROM DISSIDENCE TO NEOLIBERALISM? REFLECTIONS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS LEGACY OF 1989

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ABSTRACT

International respect for individual rights experienced a tremendous boost from the revolutions of 1989. Many of the revolutions' protagonists – the so-called “dissidents” – had been involved in a broader human rights revolution since the late 1960s. Is respect for human rights thus a legacy of their struggle and of 1989? To answer this question, the essay seeks to reconstruct the specific meanings human rights acquired in the writings of East-Central European and Soviet dissidents and contrasts it with the social “imaginaire” underpinning the human rights culture of our time. The article is thus a contribution to a new historiography of human rights which understands them as a contested notion.

It is now clear that the “events of 1989” ushered in fundamental changes in European affairs and world politics. Chief among them is an unprecedented proliferation of human rights norms. The end of the Cold War, the expansion of international human rights treaties, the democratization of many post-communist countries and their later EU accession have all dramatically increased the respect and protection of individual liberties in Europe and worldwide. Concepts like “humanitarian intervention” or “responsibility to protect” describe a very robust interpretation of this “extension of international law from the exclusive rights of sovereign states towards recognizing the rights of all individuals by virtue of their common humanity” (Dunne 2007, 44). But the collapse of state socialism and the Soviet withdrawal from East-Central Europe not only paved the way for this proliferation of human rights; some of the main protagonists of the *annus mirabilis*, the so-called dissidents of the Soviet bloc¹, were simultaneously protagonists of an international human rights revolution in itself. In the

late 1960s, when human rights were still the domain of obscure organizations and international lawyers, they began to challenge their governments by taking international human rights treaties seriously. Thus, they partook in a rather sudden breakthrough of human rights activism in the 1970s and 1980s (Moyn 2010, ch. 4; Eckel and Moyn 2013).

But what are human rights? Which grievances should be framed as universal rights claims and which should be left to the democratic deliberations of national societies? In our own time, with more and more people invoking human rights for their diverse goals, this has become an increasingly difficult question. For many dissidents, this does not seem to have been a major issue. One of dissidence's iconic texts – Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 – was, as Jonathan Bolton (2012, 153) notes, written in an uninspiring language – a choice that seems to have been deliberate. Many dissidents had experienced directly what a painful and fundamental impact the ideas found in “intricate and abstruse books of philosophy” (Miłosz 1953, 3) could have on the lives of entire societies; many dissidents had also once been adherents of such ideas. In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, therefore, the turn towards human rights was a turn away from explicit ideologies. Against the elaborate social blueprints of the “age of ideologies”, the dissidents did not propose a utopian vision of their own, but the apparently simple idea that everyone, everywhere is entitled to a minimal protection of his or her liberty. The dry, almost bureaucratic language of Charter 77 was intended to convey a self-evident moral message by letting injustice speak for itself (Bolton 2012, 193).

The transnational community of human rights activists, too, eschewed debates about political philosophy or ideological program. Amnesty International, for instance, declared that the precise reasons for political repression were not relevant to its work, merely the fact of repression itself. This anti-political interpretation of human rights was reinforced in 1989 when western observers were trying to make sense of what went on in Warsaw, Prague, or Leipzig. Jürgen Habermas or Ralf Dahrendorf saw little revolutionary in what was happening in Europe's east at the time. The demonstrations seemed completely devoid of innovative political ideas. The people in the state socialist countries, it seemed, did not want a new experiment but to catch up with processes already under way in the West. The fall of Communism, Habermas thus wrote, was merely a “rectifying revolution” – the East's return onto a universal path of progress embodied by the West (Habermas 1990; Dahrendorf 1990). Some dissidents subscribed to this view. “We did

not invent this pursuit of liberty,” Ludmila Alekseeva wrote; “we reinvented it for ourselves and our country. [...] We were ignorant about the West, where such ideas had been around for centuries” (quoted in Nathans 2007, 633).

My central thesis in this article is that we will be unable to assess and understand the human rights legacy of 1989 if we adopt this apolitical and naturalizing language. In this essay, I therefore seek to historicize this reading of human rights and of 1989 by bringing out the multiple meanings human rights could have in East and West. My interpretation is thus an attempt to contribute to an emergent historiography of human rights which, as Johannes Paulmann (2013, 336) writes, “highlights ruptures rather than continuities, in which human rights emerge as a historically fluid, highly contested concept rather than as a fixed doctrine.”²

Firstly, such an approach can reveal how innovative dissident activism really was. Alexeeva is correct that the term “human rights” had been around for some time. The idea, however, that such rights can be claimed against one’s own state had not had much traction until it was picked up by, among others, an isolated band of intellectuals in the Soviet Union (Eckel and Moyn 2013). Secondly, it will demonstrate that the dryness of the dissidents’ human rights conceals how the emergence of dissidence resulted from and was accompanied by very intense debates about democracy and totalitarianism, philosophy and religion, literature and national culture. Like the strings on a guitar, human rights claims needed these debates as the corpus or sounding board which amplified them and provided them with social meaning. Thirdly, the legalist language of human rights leaves one puzzled as to how human rights emerged from the obscure texts of international law to become a rallying cry for global activism. The language of human rights may be that of international law, but human rights campaigns were driven by solidarity and political identification. The question of how human rights transformed international politics, then, is also the question of why human rights made certain political claims resonate with distant audiences (Eckel 2009; Eckel 2011).

If human rights need such a “sound board” of political commitments, they can mean different things to different people. Soviet bloc dissent did not witness today’s elaborate discussions about the scope of human rights; most dissidents, moreover, preferred an activism focused on political and individual rights. Programs to implement social and economic rights, they feared, would reintroduce the very utopian projects the dissidents had come

to reject. And yet, they translated the abstract language of human rights into their specific discourses and thus gave them a specific meaning. Even political rights can be based on different understandings of the “selves” or subjects that are the bearers of rights, of their relations to other people and to the wider social world; they also imply specific ideas about those who suffer persecution and those who are called upon to help them. It is only by assessing this context of human rights activism in the Soviet bloc and by reconstructing the specific meanings which human rights thus acquired that we can answer the question as to whether the human rights regime of our own time is a legacy of 1989.

The Literature on Human Rights during the Cold War

The literature on human rights during the Cold War overwhelmingly focuses on the consequences of the Final Act of the Conference on Security of Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), a major success of East–West détente, signed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975 by the Soviet Union and its allies, by the members of NATO, as well as by the non-aligned European states. Crucially, the Final Act defined respect for individual rights as a pillar of a cooperative framework of international relations. It thus not only connected human rights to détente, a policy the Soviet bloc was vitally interested in, but also introduced periodic review conferences that monitored the implementation of the Final Act’s provisions. This way, dissidents in the Soviet bloc were given a forum where they could expose how their governments violated the human rights section of the Final Act. Using this approach, private individuals from Eastern Europe turned human rights into a central issue of East–West relations and tied it to the gains Moscow hoped to reap from the CSCE process (Thomas 2001; Snyder 2011; Peterson 2011).

In any account of dissent, thus, the “Helsinki effect” will play a major role. Yet the overwhelming attention it receives – especially together with attempts to explain the end of the Cold War – has two very problematic consequences. First, by indiscriminately labeling a wide array of dissent initiatives as “Helsinki inspired” or even as “Helsinki watch groups” these studies create the impression as though the CSCE somehow “created” Soviet bloc human rights movements (Thomas 2001, ch. 5; Snyder 2011, ch. 3; Eichwede 2010). This is false. Dissent originated in the mid-1960s when the Russian mathematician Aleksandr Volpin had the seemingly paradoxical idea that the best way to sustain some degree of individual liberty in the USSR was to demand that the Soviet authorities respect their own constitution

and laws. 1968 became an important year for this movement of “rights defenders”: The United Nations had declared it an international year of human rights to commemorate the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Moscow had signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights along with the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This prompted the “rights defenders” to shift their focus to international treaties and appeal to the international community for support. The *Chronicle of Current Events*, the Soviet Union’s most important samizdat periodical to document human rights abuses, was founded in 1968 and was initially called “An International Year of Human Rights” and each of its issues featured article 19 of the Universal Declaration on its cover.³ The first Soviet human rights group, the Initiative Group to Defend Human Rights, was founded in 1969 by the signatories of a petition to the U.N. Human Rights Commission; a year later, a more organized Committee on Human Rights was formed in Moscow. These groups also began to establish international contacts. They would befriend western journalists and establish a Soviet section of Amnesty International (Horvath 2005; Voronkov and Wielgoch 2004; Nathans 2007; Nathans 2013; Metger 2013; Walker 2010).

This kind of activism was an important inspiration for other non-conformist intellectuals in the Soviet bloc. Poland had witnessed nationwide student protests in 1968. The authorities had reacted with police repression and by orchestrating an anti-Semitic campaign to purge the Community party and Warsaw University of revisionist intellectuals and student radicals. During the early 1970s, after they had been released from prison, these non-conformist groups sought new ways of broadening the sphere of individual liberties in Poland. Completely disillusioned with the possibility of reforming Soviet-style communism, they perceived the Soviet rights defenders as a model they wanted to adapt to their own situation. A second, rather unlikely inspiration came from the Catholic intelligentsia in Poland which, under the influence of personalist philosophy and the Second Vatican Council, had come to perceive human rights as a possible common ground with post-Marxist intellectuals.⁴ The event that electrified these groups in 1975 was not the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, but the Nobel Peace Prize for Andrei Sakharov, the leading exponent of the Soviet human rights movement (Friszke 2011, 79–81). It took another year until these activists founded Poland’s first opposition organization in the communist period, but this had nothing to do with the CSCE. Instead it was domestic labor unrest that prompted them to create the Workers Defense Committee. Though human

rights language featured prominently in this activism, the Final Act was only marginally important as a source of inspiration being usually overshadowed by the covenants of 1966 which came into force in 1976 (Mazowiecki 1978, 143–144; Jarzabek 2013).

Even with Charter 77, the initiative which can most clearly be related to Helsinki, the situation is much more difficult than the idea of a “Helsinki effect” suggests. Here, as in Poland, the direct reason to form an initiative was domestic: a government crackdown on Prague’s musical underground.⁵ The decision to invoke international human rights documents came only after the decision to draft a note of protest to the government. Charter 77, moreover, referenced the final act only indirectly as confirming the human rights covenant of 1966 (Bolton 2012, c. 5, esp. 143–144).

None of this is to say that the Helsinki Final Act was unimportant. It strengthened and focused existing groups, especially in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. The Soviet “rights defenders” reconstituted their movement as Helsinki monitoring groups and one of the first spokespersons of Charter 77, Jiří Hájek, considered the CSCE a tremendous opportunity (Domnitz 2013). The emergent transnational Helsinki network was also an important medium to internationalize the dissidents’ cause, as Sarah Snyder (2011) has demonstrated. But, important though it was, the Final Act itself did not create anything in the Soviet bloc. The CSCE process, moreover, provided much less protection than is often assumed. When the second CSCE review meeting, held in Madrid, closed in 1983, the Moscow Helsinki network had been crushed and all leading figures of East-bloc human rights activism were either in exile or in prison.

The Helsinki narrative has another problematic aspect. By tracing the rise of human rights activism to an international document, it overlooks the complex processes in which activists in Eastern Europe appropriated the new vernacular of rights in their specific cultures. The focus on the “Helsinki effect” supports the very naturalizing tendency I seek to criticize in this article. The next section is therefore devoted to tracing these processes.

Truth, Dignity, Community: Human Rights in the Soviet Union and East-Central Europe

To what extent can we actually speak of a common or similar way in which human rights were understood by non-conformist circles in the Soviet bloc?

The terms “dissent” or “dissidence” were labels introduced by western journalists and many of those thus labeled disliked these monikers (Havel 1985). The movements subsumed under the term “dissent,” moreover, had a very diverse membership. The physicist and secular liberal Andrei Sakharov and the mysticist and Russian nationalist Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, the reform communist Zdeněk Mlynář and the existentialist playwright Vaclav Havel, the former student radical Adam Michnik and the devout Catholic Lech Wałęsa – all these diverse people were labeled dissidents. The political realities of state-socialism made communication between these diverse groups very difficult. Direct contacts were sporadic, mail would be intercepted, and telephones were bugged. Does it then make sense to look for the common outlines of the human rights concept of dissident intellectuals in Eastern Europe?⁶

Dissent certainly never was a transnational movement comparable to, say, nineteenth century worker internationalism. However, non-conformist intellectuals did share similar experiences of life in a Soviet-style society. Even before the creation of the Helsinki Network, moreover, these intellectuals were in touch with ethnic diaspora groups in the West, professional Cold Warriors, correspondents, and human rights activists. These exchanges were intensified when many prominent dissidents – Jiří Pelikán from Czechoslovakia, Leszek Kołakowski from Poland, Natalia Gorbanevskaya from the Soviet Union – were forced to emigrate to the West. *Émigré* journals, which were smuggled into Eastern Europe, as well as the programs of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, would provide information about developments in the Soviet bloc and thus foster the circulation of ideas among intellectuals from different parts of the Eastern bloc. In the late 1970s, there were even direct meetings between dissidents group, especially Polish and Czechoslovak (Vilímek 2013; Kind-Kovács and Labov 2013; Friszke 2011, 423–433).

Two seminal texts: dissident Adam Michnik’s essay “The New Evolutionism” and Vaclav Havel’s “The Power of the Powerless,” were actually products of such transnational exchanges. Michnik’s essay was based on a presentation he gave at a conference held in 1976 in Paris to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Hungarian uprising. Western intellectuals, scholars, activists, and politicians, veterans of the East European and Russian *émigré* circles were attending, as well as prominent recent political exiles from behind the Iron Curtain (Ostrowska 1976). “The Power of the Powerless” was written for a Polish-Czechoslovak seminar on human rights activism to

take place during clandestine meetings on the Polish-Czechoslovak border (Keane 1999, 268). While these meetings did not come to pass and while the essay itself bears the unmistakable philosophical imprint of its author, "The Power of the Powerless" nevertheless betrays its transnational origins; in fact, it reads like a summary of discussions that had been held in, as well as between, different parts of the Soviet bloc over the previous ten years or so.

The similar themes discussed by dissident intellectuals and their similar form of activism, then, are strong evidence for the existence of a transnational *Verstehensgemeinschaft* or "epistemic community" (Haas 1992) based on shared normative beliefs, a common way of understanding life in state-socialist societies, and the joint political project of increasing respect for human rights by the paradoxical strategy of "radical civil obedience" (Nathans 2007, 630; see especially Falk 2003).

What were the central ideas of this *Verstehensgemeinschaft*? One of them was truth. From Kolakowski's "Theses on Hope and Hopelessness" (1971) to Solzhenitsyn's "Live not by Lies" (1974) to Michnik's "New Evolutionism" (1985, originally published in 1976) and Havel's "Power of the Powerless" (1985, originally published in 1978) or "Politics and Conscience" (1984), there seems to have been a consensus among these authors that the power of the socialist systems rested on their ability to saturate public life with ritualized ideological lies. This point was made most famously and most elaborately in Havel's allegory of a greengrocer who put the slogan "Workers of the world unite!" into his shop window. The greengrocer, Havel explained, was not stating his ideological beliefs; indeed, he was indifferent as to the slogan's meaning. What he communicated, instead, was his subordination to the authorities: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace" (Havel 1985, 27–28). Though the greengrocer would not have put up the slogan himself, its ideological content had an important function nonetheless: it cloaked the greengrocer's obedience in a statement of lofty principles and thus spared him the embarrassment of openly displaying his submission. The fact that public life in state-socialism was plastered with slogans no one read or cared about convinced the greengrocer that he was merely doing what everyone else did and it showed that everyone contemplating dissent from this practice faced the threat of social exclusion.

One consequence of this analysis was a strong commitment to individual autonomy and a complete rejection of all things ideological. Any social blueprint or political program that would restrict individual liberty for the sake of a radiant future or some collective ideals was discarded. This current was particularly strong among Polish intellectuals like Michnik or Jacek Kuroń, who had a past of Marxist activism. “[...] we had already experienced the adventure of a utopian faith,” Seweryn Blumsztajn, a close friend and political companion of Michnik and Kuroń, said, “that it was possible to create an ideal society, and had learnt that the final social result would always be unjust. So this time we were not interested in any ‘final’ aim or idea. Instead, we sensed that we were by-products of the failure of ideology – of the entire 50-year communist experiment” (quoted in Luxmoore and Babiuch 1995, 79; Gawin 2013).

This rejection of ideologies, of what we would now call “metanarratives,” did not turn the dissidents into post-modernists *avant la lettre*. On the contrary, their quest for individual autonomy and liberty was not a quest to live any kind of life; by refusing to put up phony slogans, Havel’s greengrocer “discovers once more his suppressed identity and dignity. He gives his freedom a concrete significance. His revolt is an attempt *to live within the truth*” (Havel 1985, 39). Havel’s allegorical greengrocer stood for the conviction that the citizens of the Soviet bloc, by perpetuating a ruling ideology and thus “living in a lie”, were complacent in their own oppression. “[...] we lie to ourselves for assurance,” Solzhenitsyn wrote. Thus, “[...] it is not they [the authorities] who are to blame for everything – we ourselves, only we.” The first step to both one’s own self-liberation and the liberation of society, therefore, was not a retreat into the privacy of one’s idiosyncratic beliefs but a commitment to truth. “If we did not paste together the dead bones and scales of ideology, if we did not sew together the rotting rags, we would be astonished how quickly the lies would be rendered helpless and subside. That which should be naked would then really appear naked before the whole world” (Solzhenitsyn 1974).⁷

Given, on the one hand, the dissidents’ rejection of ideology and, at times, even of positivism and, on the other hand, their commitment to objective truth, their writings often had strongly religious connotations. This is most obvious in the case of Solzhenitsyn or of Catholic activists like Tadeusz Mazowiecki in Poland or Václav Benda in Czechoslovakia. But even an intellectual like Kuroń, a former Communist and lifelong non-believer,

discovered religion as a conceptual grounding in a social world characterized by state arbitrariness and the pressure to publicly conform to obvious nonsense (Gawin 2013, 218–223). Havel, too, never considered himself Christian and only very reluctantly, if at all, used the word “God” in his philosophical essays (Hipp 1995, 323–325); yet his writings have clear religious references. In “Politics and Conscience,” he compared totalitarianism to a smokestack he had seen as a boy. This “soiling of the heavens’ offended me spontaneously. It seemed to me that, in it, humans [...] destroy something important, arbitrarily disrupting the natural order of things, and that such things cannot go unpunished.”⁸ He felt his revulsion so deeply because, as a boy, he was still deeply rooted in “‘the natural world,’ or *Lebenswelt*”⁹, that is, the world of one’s “direct personal experience” and a world that “functions and is generally possible at all only because there is something beyond its horizon, something beyond or above it that might escape our understanding and our grasp but, for just that reason, firmly grounds this world, bestows upon it its order and measure, and is the hidden source of all the rules, customs, commandments, prohibitions, and norms that hold within it.” It thus “bears within it the presupposition of the absolute which [...] we can only quietly respect.” For Havel, the crime of totalitarianism was that it denied this wider horizon in the name of a pseudo-scientific ideology and *therefore* colonized the “natural world” submitting it to “the irrational momentum of anonymous, impersonal, and inhuman power – the power of ideologies, systems, apparatus, bureaucracy, artificial languages, and political slogans.” Resistance to totalitarianism thus meant to “honor with the humility of the wise the limits of that natural world and the mystery which lies beyond them, admitting that there is something in the order of being which evidently exceeds all our competence. We must relate to the absolute horizon of our existence which, if we but will, we shall constantly rediscover and experience” (Havel 1984).

This (quasi-)religious approach also provided the framework for the dissident interpretation of human rights. In a comment on Charter 77 that was hugely influential in Czechoslovakia, Havel’s philosophical mentor Jan Patočka wrote that

The concept of *human rights* is nothing other than the conviction that states, too, and all of society are placed under the supremacy of moral feeling; that they recognize something unconditioned, above them, something weighty and sacrosanct

(untouchable) even for them; and that, by their own powers with which they create and secure *legal* norms, they intend to contribute to this goal. (quoted in Bolton 2012, 155–156)

In Poland, Kuroń wrote that what he took away from his dialogue with Catholic intellectuals was the idea of “transcendent Moral Law. This gave a new, deeper meaning to our traditional left-wing belief in human freedom within a just social order – the most important value. Now our starting point was the sovereignty of the human person and from that point of view we reassessed the values of our vision of a just and free order” (Kuroń 2011, 378).

The writings of Kuroń not only show how dissidents sought a transcendent, even divine grounding of their human rights activism – the “sovereignty of the human person” is a term from the Catholic philosophy of personalism, which was widely used by Cracow’s then archbishop Karol Wojtyła (Porter-Szűcs 2011, 149–151). Kuroń’s texts also highlight the dissidents’ clear preference for individual rights and political freedoms. The linchpin of the transcendent order was human dignity, the absolute value of every individual human being which had to be defended against totalitarian attempts to submit it to ideological or collectivist projects. What united the diverse groups in the Polish opposition movement, Kuroń wrote, was the emphasis they all put on the ‘value of the individual, on inalienable human rights’ (Kuroń 2010, 45). For Kuroń, the main axis of political conflict in Poland did not revolve around the dichotomy “left vs. right” but “totalitarianism vs. democracy” (Gawin 2013, 334).

In acknowledging this dichotomy it is important to avoid a misunderstanding. Though using a term like “totalitarianism” and focusing on individual rights, few dissidents adopted classically liberal ideas, let alone a Cold War mentality. The post-totalitarian world inhabited by Havel’s allegoric greengrocer differed from George Orwell’s dystopian vision of *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, where Winston Smith, the novel’s main character, could escape “Big Brother’s” all-encompassing gaze only by hiding in an alcove in his apartment. Havel’s fictional greengrocer, in contrast, could have easily retreated to the relative liberty of his privacy by playing the system’s game, but he thus would have left the system’s fundament intact. In Havel’s analysis, then, totalitarianism enslaved the individual by colonizing *social* life. The individual choice to begin “living within the truth” became a political act only if it was made public through the refusal to participate in the system’s

rituals. By ceasing to put phony ideological slogans into his shop display, by publicly manifesting his dissent from the system's ideology, the greengrocer was sure to suffer repression, but he achieved a significant triumph nonetheless. He "shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system. He has shown everyone that it is possible to live within the truth". With his example, the greengrocer could awaken among his fellow citizens what Havel considered a universal longing of human beings "for dignity and fundamental rights."¹⁰ This longing was the "power of the powerless"; awakening it through a multitude of individual acts of defiance, Havel believed, could have corrosive consequences for the system.¹¹

The struggle for individual rights was therefore a struggle to reclaim a public space. In both theory and practice, this aspect was brought out most clearly in Poland. The most promising strategy of the opposition, Michnik or Kuroń argued, was not the direct confrontation of the government but the self-organization of society. Beginning with small groups and milieus, an independent space of social communication was to be created where individuals could discuss and solve the problems that concerned them directly; gradually, the public space would be reclaimed from the system. Only by thus assuming a position of strength would society be enabled to lead meaningful negotiations with the government (Michnik 1985).

Here, we encounter an important difference from the individualism of classic liberalism. In dissident writing, individual autonomy was defined as against the state or the system, but not against society. Manifesting one's individual autonomy from the state was, as Jerzy Szacki (1995, 85) has shown, "inseparable from the desire to participate in a community." This community was often, though not exclusively, defined in national terms (cf. Cizewska 2010; Kopeček 2012). This focus on the national community may seem paradoxical given the universality of human rights. In part, this reliance on national traditions was due to the necessity of translating abstract human rights claims into a language comprehensible for a larger group of people, as Michal Kopeček (2012) or Kacper Szulecki (2011) have shown. Yet it also followed from the very logic of dissident thought. As Kolakowski wrote, the power of a totalitarian system to colonize the public space rested on its ability to deform language and deprive it of its meaning. Words like "friendship" or "brotherhood" lost their meaning in public parlance because they were constantly used to describe Poland's relationship to the Soviet Union. To reclaim the public sphere thus meant to reclaim language. Cultivating

national language and culture was thus seen as a means of empowering the individual to confront totalitarianism; compared with the obvious non-sense of “newspeak”, the traditional language – which, of course, was constructed too – appeared “authentic”. The same impulse, then, to find a “pre-” or even “anti-political” sphere of “authentic social experience” that had led the dissidents to discover human rights may have led them to discover national culture (Gawin 2013, 317–326).

While the dissidents’ “collective individualism” (Szacki 1995, 84–92) was to some extent a result of the specific situation in post-Stalinist state socialism, many dissidents believed that their political thought could provide a general alternative to Western individualism. Kuroń, for instance, rejected the tolerance of “classic liberalism” which he saw as indifference to another person’s feelings or social situation (Kuroń 2010, 63). For Kuroń, in contrast, tolerance and respect for the autonomy of the human person was always intertwined with questions of solidarity and of love. Following a Marxist anthropology, Kuroń believed that all human beings create their world and thus themselves through their creative activity. Since humans could create their world only in cooperation with others, human identity was unthinkable in a social vacuum. Love in Kuroń’s understanding was “the desire to identify with another human being, to constantly overcome and constantly discover his distinctiveness.” Because this process was “endless, constantly fulfilling itself and unfulfillable,” love becomes ever “deeper, richer, fuller” (Kuroń 2010, 61). His anthropological credo was therefore that “*to be human* [być po ludzku] means *to be creative* [tworzyć] and *to love* and what is more they are in fact *one and the same thing*” (Kuroń 2010, 67).¹²

Though Kuroń would become an activist for the formal guarantee of individual rights and invoke international treaties, he had, in fact, a much “deeper” or “thicker” understanding of human liberty than the dry language of human rights activism suggests. For him, individual autonomy was thinkable only within a community of human persons and freedom meant the freedom to create the social world together with them. If Kuroń was no advocate for social or economic rights this was not because he had a preference for classical liberalism. Instead, he was concerned that this would increase the power of the state and thus reinforce the very social alienation he wanted to overcome (Kuroń 2010, 113). Politics, he insisted, had to come “from below”; they had to originate in the activity of human persons who jointly and in solidarity solved the problems that concerned them directly. Paradoxically,

maybe, he declared the establishment of a parliamentary democracy to be his long-term goal and he defended this preference against western interlocutors who considered parliamentarianism an outdated system. Yet the formal guarantee of individual autonomy and the right to cast a ballot was only a precondition of human liberty, not liberty itself. “I declare,” Kuroń wrote, “that within a parliamentary system I will join a movement for direct democracy. Without representative (parliamentarian) democracy, however, direct democracy is completely defenseless vis-à-vis the power of the state” (Kuroń 2010, 84). Formal representative institutions and the guarantee of rights, then, were to protect and enable citizens to come together in smaller or larger social associations in order to solve their collective affairs in creative ways.

Kuroń’s social vision thus went beyond the struggle with totalitarianism. In once again strikingly Marxist language, Kuroń argued that totalitarianism was not rooted in a specific ideology but in the modern human condition. “And, more precisely, in man’s loneliness and thus impotence toward powerful political and economic organizations – especially the state – which are the result of a far-reaching division of labor” (Kuroń 2011, 378). A very similar idea can be found in a more elaborate form in the writings of Havel. The two themes of his writings are the question of human identity and of human responsibility. Inspired by Patočka, Havel, too, believed that freedom could not be conceived and realized in abstraction from society. Responsibility, therefore, means the individual’s responsibility before the transcendent horizon of the “natural world” but also the responsibility for the freedom of others (Hipp 1995; Findlay 1999). Describing how Charter 77 was drafted in response to a crackdown on the musical underground in Prague, Havel defined freedom as something shared and lost by the human community:

Everyone understood that an attack on the Czech musical underground was an attack on a most elementary and important thing, something that in fact bound everyone together: it was an attack on the very notion of living within the truth, on the real aims of life. The freedom to play rock music was understood as a human freedom and thus as essentially the same as the freedom to engage in philosophical and political reflection, the freedom to write, the freedom to express and defend the various social and political interests of society. People were inspired to feel a genuine sense of solidarity with the young

musicians and they came to realize that not standing up for the freedom of others, regardless of how remote their means of creativity or their attitude to life, meant surrendering one's own freedom. (Havel 1985, 46–47)

Though the “natural world” or *Lebenswelt* Havel wanted to defend against totalitarianism was given in one's individual experience, it was always a world shared with others.

If surrendering someone else's freedom, however remote her political attitudes or geographical location, meant to forsake one's own freedom, the relationship between the dissidents and their western sympathizers was not ‘asymmetrical’; the dissidents' experience had a universal importance. For Havel, the chimneys he saw as a boy were “not just a technologically corrigible flaw of design, or a tax paid for a better consumerist tomorrow, but a symbol of a civilization which has renounced the absolute, which ignores the natural world and disdains its imperatives.” Totalitarianism, therefore, was “a convex mirror of all modern civilization and a harsh, perhaps final call for a global recasting of how that civilization understands itself.” Western generals drawing up plans to “dispatch [totalitarian] systems from the face of the earth” would be “no different from an ugly woman trying to get rid of her ugliness by smashing the mirror that reminds her of it.” Indeed, the arms race was a product of the same objectivism that tried to colonize the natural world. “Such a ‘final solution’ [of destroying totalitarianism militarily] is one of the typical dreams of impersonal reason – capable, as the term ‘final solution’ graphically reminds us, of transforming its dreams into reality and thereby reality into a nightmare” (Havel 1984).

Havel seems to have seen the western world even less as a political model than Kuroń. Western society, he wrote in “The Power of the Powerless”, could “only with great difficulty be imagined as the source of humanity's rediscovery of itself” given its “mass political parties releasing the citizen from all forms of concrete and personal responsibility,” its “complex focuses of capital accumulation engaged in secret manipulations and expansion” and “the omnipresent dictatorship of consumption, production, advertising, commerce, consumer culture.”¹³ He favored “anti-political politics” instead, “that is, politics not as the technology of power and manipulation, of cybernetic rule over humans or as the art of the utilitarian, but politics as one of the ways of seeking and achieving meaningful lives, of protecting

them and saving them. I favor politics as practical morality, as service to the truth, as essentially human and humanly measured care for our fellow humans” (Havel 1984).

Before summarizing these observations and asking ourselves what the human rights legacy of dissent might be, it is important to underline a tension in dissident thought: The dissidents’ insistence on the collective context of liberty, the (quasi-)religious dimension of their thought, and the reliance on national traditions made their discourse susceptible to the very totalitarianism they sought to transcend. And indeed, there were authoritarian and nationalist tendencies in the dissident movements of the Soviet bloc. Examples are Solzhenitsyn’s conviction of Russian superiority or, more generally, the scare of “russophobia” that befell many former heroes of the Soviet dissident movement as well as nationalist and anti-Semitic currents in the Polish underground of the 1970s and 1980s. The writers discussed here were aware of that problem (Kuroń 2010, 123–128),¹⁴ but their thought is characterized by a tension between, on one hand, an almost post-modernist rejection of any meta-narrative or collectivist ideology and, on the other hand, the intellectual quest for an objective footing in religion or an authentic experience in national culture (Elshtain 1992). The latter, at any rate, were judged by their ability to protect and sustain individual human beings and to empower them to reclaim their *Lebenswelt*.

Which specific understanding of human rights emerges from this discussion of dissident thought? Four points seem most important: Firstly, dissident thought was characterized by a sharp focus on the individual, on the dignity and value of every human being. Following from this was a rejection of all kinds of systematic ideologies or utopian projects willing to sacrifice human freedom and individual autonomy for the sake of a national collective or radiant future. Secondly, many dissidents saw the individual embedded in a transcendent, even divine order of reality. On one hand, this meant that oppressing individual rights, stifling human autonomy was not merely the violation of a legal norm but of a natural order of reality. On the other hand, this idea of a transcendent order meant that liberty was bound to strong normative commitments – a commitment to choose truth over lies and a commitment to answer a call to responsibility for other human beings and the social world. Thirdly, liberty thus understood was possible only within a social community and in mutual solidarity. Freedom did not mean the freedom to retreat to the private sphere but the freedom to actively

participate in public life and to shape, together with others, the public affairs of one's community. Finally, though the dissidents would invoke international treaties, though they formed a transnational *Verstehegemeinschaft*, and though they declared their solidarity with victims in other parts of the world, their activism remained focused on their immediate, local context. They did not differentiate between the struggle for rights and the struggle for self-determination; they made no distinction between civic and human rights, because, for them, claiming one's universal rights meant to become a citizen – an active participant in social life.

The general “social imaginaire” which emerges from these four points was one in which human rights were supposed to empower individuals to become the agents of their own fate. The dissidents were usually grateful for international support and mobilizing it was an important aspect of their activism. But they did not want westerners to fight their struggles for them. Indeed, many believed that the dissidents' experience had a wider significance and that the West could learn something from it.

The Fate of Dissident Thought in the 1980s

What is left of this specific way of thinking about human rights and of conducting human rights activism? To what extent has it left behind a legacy, that is, to what extent was it preserved in a distinguishable form and had a lasting influence on social life and international politics after 1989? This question is complicated by the fact that what we are dealing with here is a set of ideas and concepts whose meaning, as the preceding section should have shown, was never fixed. The process of appropriating dissidents' ideas and thoughts for other contexts, moreover, began already during the 1970s.

Though dissident activism was focused on the domestic context of individual countries, from its very beginning, it had a transnational horizon. When they were not in prison, many dissidents had to support themselves through badly paid unskilled jobs or were unemployed. For Havel, an important source of income was the publishing and staging of his plays in the West. But receiving western aid was not only a matter of supporting individuals: Funds were needed for the costly production of samizdat or to support the families of political prisoners; western correspondents had to be contacted to get one's message onto the radio waves of the BBC or RFE (Radio Free Europe); western politicians and organizations had to be lobbied to put human rights onto the agenda of the CSCE or the U.N. (Bolton 2012, 103–104, 136, 148,

205; Brier 2011; Goddeeris 2010; Metger 2013; Snyder 2011; Szulecki 2011; Walker 2009, 377, 384–387; Walker 2010)

From the beginning of their activism, then, dissidents addressed audiences in the West. An important step in the development of Soviet dissent occurred in January 1968 when Pavel Litvinov and Larisa Bogoraz protested against a political trial by issuing an appeal that was not addressed to the Soviet authorities but to international public opinion (Horvath 2005, 56–57). The conference in Paris where Michnik gave his talk about the new evolutionism was not only intended for émigré groups but also garnered significant French and international attention (Ostrowska 1976). Havel's "Politics and Conscience" was written as a speech on the occasion of his receiving an honorary doctoral degree from the University of Toulouse (Havel 1984). Such international awards ceremonies were a frequent forum to address international attention, though, like Havel in 1984 or Andrei Sakharov and Lech Wałęsa for their respective Nobel lectures, such speeches were usually read not by the recipients themselves. Jonathan Bolton (2012), then, is certainly correct that dissent was often misperceived; yet, as Julia Metger (2013) argues, it seems as though these misperceptions were actually an important part of the story of dissent.

How, then, was the dissidents' message received internationally? The first appeals from the Soviet Union raised little interest in the West except for a small group of émigrés and Cold War Warriors. This would change rather radically a few years later. A key event was the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in 1973 and its author's forced exile a year later. Paradoxically, the book's impact was particularly deep in France, whose cultural life experienced a veritable "*choc du Gonlag*."¹⁵ The "Soviet dissident" became a celebrated figure of the French left-wing intelligentsia which shifted its sympathies from the anti-colonial liberation struggles in the 1960s to human rights activism and a "crusading anti-totalitarianism" in the 1970s and early 1980s. By the early 1980s, Marxism – once the Master Narrative of the French left – had fallen completely out of favor.

Two aspects of "*l'affaire Soljenitsyne*" are particularly puzzling. Firstly, Solzhenitsyn's work did not reveal anything fundamentally new. His panorama of the Soviet labor camps may have been particularly impressive and his indictment of the Soviet system particularly stringent, but there was little in his book that was not known in the West already. And yet, French

intellectuals – few of whom were actually Soviet sympathizers – would indulge in self-criticism arguing that the *Gulag Archipelago* had opened their eyes to the “true nature” of communism. Secondly, Solzhenitsyn – whose reactionary views became increasingly apparent – was an unlikely hero for intellectuals with libertarian left-wing views and often a Trotskyite or Maoist past. Yet major public intellectuals and philosophers – such as André Glucksmann or Claude Lefort – would compose entire books centered on Solzhenitsyn and his writings in order to sketch a new approach in left-wing politics.

The broad popularity, then, which non-conformist intellectuals from the Soviet bloc received rather suddenly in France had as much to do with French intellectual politics as with those intellectuals themselves. ‘*L'affaire Soljenitsyne*’ was less prompted by the publication of the *Gulag Archipelago* than by how the French Communist Party (PCF) criticized its author and a French libertarian left journal that defended him. Among libertarian left-wing intellectuals and former student radicals, these attacks exacerbated fears about what they saw as the authoritarian tendencies of the established Left. Since the events of May 1968, France’s libertarian left – the so-called “Second Left” or “*deuxième gauche*” – had grown critical of the traditionally state centered approach of France’s leftist establishment and its main political force, the PCF. Favoring grass-roots democracy and workers self-management, the Second Left believed that this statist approach would lead to authoritarianism. When the PCF attacked Solzhenitsyn, his book could be read not only as a description of the Soviet past but also as a dark vision of a French future under the government of the French communists. The dissidents were popular, then, because of how they served as a powerful symbol for French intellectual life. As victims of the very revolutionary violence the PCF and its supporters had once considered legitimate, they condensed and focused the Second Left’s criticism of statism and its authoritarian potential. As lonely intellectual figures braving a Marxist orthodoxy, the dissidents were also a symbol around which French intellectuals could fashion their own identities as newfound critics of Marxism.

This French “anti-totalitarian moment” (Christofferson 2004) reached its apogee in a broad wave of sympathy and support for the Polish Solidarity movement. The sheer breadth of this movement turned it into an international icon of non-violent resistance against communism – a process accentuated and reinforced by the 1983 Nobel Prize for Lech Wałęsa. Two examples demonstrate the surprisingly different uses to which this symbol

was put. On 21 October 1983, the Ethics and Public Policy Center – a conservative think-tank from Washington, DC – bestowed its annual award for integrity and courage upon Lech Wałęsa. The award ceremony at New York’s Waldorf Astoria Hotel, which Wałęsa could not attend, featured a videotaped salute by President Ronald Reagan and was attended by a “who’s who” of the American foreign policy establishment. The evening’s keynote address, given by US Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, only touched upon Poland and Solidarity. In a talk entitled “We and They”, Kirkpatrick argued instead that the West needed to overcome its self-doubts and demoralization to confront what she saw as a “discouragingly familiar” pattern of Soviet expansionism (*Ethics and Public Policy Center* 1983; Kirkpatrick 1988, 35–41).

On the next day, some 6,000 km east of New York, another woman spoke to a major political gathering on a foreign policy question and, again, Poland’s Solidarity was a point of reference. Petra Kelly – a leading figure of the West German peace movement – addressed several hundred thousand people who had come to Bonn to demonstrate against the deployment of medium-range nuclear missiles. The demonstrations in Bonn and elsewhere, she said, were part of an international movement that transcended the competing political systems of the Cold War. “We now have the opportunity to live the beginnings of a society without violence,” she concluded. “[...] a Solidarność for peace, not only in Poland” (Kelly 1990). Two years later, she would even label dissident anti-politics an example for the Western left.

“Anti-politics” does not want power from above or share that power. That would be its very own contradiction. It already possesses power, but in a completely different moral and ethical sense. Through civil courage, through the capacity to endure suffering, but never inflicting it on others, through creative “disobedient” forces that range from Philip Berrigan and Liz McAlister and the US Pledge of Resistance to Vaclav Havel (Charta 77) to Adam Michnik (Solidarnosc) to Katja Havemann (Women for Peace)! (Kelly 1985)

These three examples – the French Second Left, U.S. neoconservatives, and West German peace activists – highlight the “thinness” of the human rights culture that would emerge in the late Cold War: The symbols and narratives of this culture are, as Kenneth Cmiel (1999, 1248–1249) noted, powerful

not because they accurately convey a complex situation of political oppression, but because they evoke emotions. Images and pictures that “scream pathos or heroism [...] allow viewers to ignore any thicker, local context and to click on the phrase ‘human rights’ in their minds.” This culture turned social movements like Solidarity or exemplary individuals like Solzhenitsyn into “icons” – larger-than-life images which embody values like courage, defiance, integrity.

This “iconization” constitutes the appeal of human rights. At least apparently, Solzhenitsyn or Solidarity did not represent specific political views, but the universal right to express those views freely. But our three examples raise the question of how far this anti- or pre-political neutrality of human rights went. Individuals and groups in France, West Germany, and the U.S. did associate more particular political visions with the symbolic figures of human rights and the very “neutrality” of human rights culture may have enabled them to do so. In this culture, the specific features of dissident movements – such as the religious and national(ist) views of Solzhenitsyn or Solidarity’s character as a trade union – merely served to underline the universality of human rights, not to acquaint international audiences with the complex historical situation in which they were active. Mark Bradley (2012, 337) highlights how this culture thus tended to drain “the structural forces and local particulars that gave rise to [rights] violations” from such iconic cases. Yet an equally important aspect was how this culture, presenting local activists as victims of the violation of universal norms, drained from them their specific political aims and social visions. The terms these activists used to define their goals – “human rights” or “democracy” – may therefore have been given new meanings, and goals may have been ascribed to these activists which had not been originally theirs.

All three interpretations– the anti-totalitarian leftist, the neoconservative, and the pacifist – captured something correct about dissent. There *were* significant parallels between anti-politics and the direct democratic thinking of the French Second Left. Though anti-totalitarian and anti-statist, both French intellectuals and people like Havel or Kuroń remained committed to questions of social solidarity. Kelly, too, could point out significant similarities between her idea of an “*Anti-Parteienpartei*” and the political theory of Michnik or Havel. But by calling them peace activists, she also brushed aside important differences and conflicts. When she gave her speech in Amsterdam, a dialogue between western peace activists and representatives of

Charter 77 had begun. This exchange, however, had been brought about by a major disagreement: the question of how to balance the goal of disarmament and that of protecting human rights in the Soviet bloc. Underpinning these debates were fundamentally different political lexicons; “totalitarianism” – one of the central terms of dissidence – was a concept most western peace activists considered an expression of a Cold War mentality. The dialogue between the peace activists and the dissidents thus remained fraught with conflict and misunderstanding. Havel even gave a *votum seperatum* in which he rejected the peace activists’ overwhelming focus on disarmament as lacking responsibility (Ziemann 2009, 368–370; Szulecki 2013).

The rhetoric of Ronald Reagan and Jeane Kirkpatrick – with its stark moral choices between liberty and tyranny, good and evil – resonated strongly with many dissidents, especially in Poland. This rhetoric, however, transported a larger social vision that was much further away from dissident thought than that of the French and West German left. For Havel, the arms race was an expression of the very technical civilization which was responsible for the crisis of modern society. The dissidents’ approach to human rights, moreover, was universal. “All totalitarian regimes are the enemy,” Michnik wrote in 1977, “whether capitalist or communist, Chile, the USSR, China or anyplace else where basic human rights are trampled upon and people are beaten down and oppressed in the name of higher ideals, religious or secular” (Michnik 1993, 192). As a political prisoner in the 1980s, he would speak out for Chilean rights activists and Solidarity repeated declared its solidarity with Chilean workers (*Le Monde* 1983). Reagan and Kirkpatrick, on the other hand, represented an approach to human rights activism which, under the name of “democracy promotion,” was willing to differentiate between authoritarian governments, where the focus should not be on human rights but the gradual building of democratic institutions, and totalitarian regimes (Kirkpatrick 1979; Bright 1990). This neoconservative approach to human rights was based on a specific social vision: Though anti-etatist, it understood society more as composed of isolated individuals who pursued their self-interest than the heavily embedded actors Havel or Kuroń saw as the bearers of human rights. Reagan finally was convinced the U.S. was the “city upon a hill” that embodied a fully democratic society (Reagan 1982). Havel’s sense of a universal crisis of modernity was completely alien to him.

This leads to a final aspect: Havel was, as noted, convinced that the relationship between, on one side, him and his fellow activists and, on the other

side, their western supporters was not asymmetrical; the West could learn as much from the dissidents' experience as the dissidents could learn from the West. In reality, however, the democratic transitions after 1989 were a very one-sided endeavor. Rather than rejuvenating democratic processes in Western Europe, the "post-communist" countries of Eastern Europe were forced to diligently meet criteria held up to them by the West in order to be allowed into the European Union. What many intellectuals in East-Central Europe had dreamed of in 1989 was a reunification of Europe – a meeting of equals, Smolar noted. Yet, "Instead of the dreamed-of union of equals, Central and East Europeans are faced with a laborious fulfillment of conditions from Brussels, a rigorous application of the EU's commandments spelled out in 80,000 pages of regulations (the so-called *acquis communautaire*). European unification resembles the unification of Germany, except that in Europe as a whole the West lacks the same sense of profound ties with, and obligation toward, the East" (Smolar 2001, 12–13). 1 May 2004, the day when most post-communist states in East-Central Europe joined the EU is thus often seen as the completion of their transition to "normalcy." "Democracy," Havel had criticized already in 1994, "is seen less and less as an open system best able to respond to people's basic needs, that is, as a set of possibilities that continually must be sought, redefined, and brought into being. Instead, democracy is seen as something given, finished, and complete as is, something that the more enlightened purchase and the less enlightened do not" (Havel 1995, 48).

Moreover, the "social imaginaire" underpinning the global human rights regime that came into being after 1989, with its dense network of NGOs, the International Criminal Court, and concepts like "humanitarian intervention" or at least the "responsibility to protect," differs markedly from the "social imaginaire" of dissent. Both historians and political scientists have shown how, already in the 1970s but even more so after 1989, human rights campaigns are sometimes driven more by the needs and worldviews of NGOs and international institutions than by the actual victims of oppression. Which victims are able to make their voice heard depends as much on their ability to communicate with the gatekeepers of the world of transnational NGOs as on the repression of their suffering (Keys 2012; Simpson 2009; Bob 2005). Indeed the very term "victim" marks a move away from the discourse and thought of the dissidents who, though they certainly *were* victims, saw themselves rather as protesters and activists, as individuals who made moral choices and who claimed a universal right.

The locus of agency, then, shifted from those opposing repression and struggling for self-determination to international actors and, paradoxically, governments (Cohen 2008; Guilhot 2005; Ingram 2008).

Human rights, it turns out, were no fixed set of norms the dissidents could invoke. As they began to oppose their governments and to address an imaginary “court of world opinion” they became participants in a process in which different actors in different parts of the world were competing over the meaning of human rights and of human rights activism. These debates turned the dissidents into international icons, but there was a price they would have to pay for this status. The richness of their debates on human rights and totalitarianism, on democracy and solidarity, on human agency and its ramifications, as well as the idiosyncrasies of these debates and their authoritarian potential, were stripped down to those aspects which tied in with aspects of western political struggles. As a result, the dissidents came to symbolize an understanding of human rights which differed fundamentally from their own vision of the 1970s. After 1989, democratization was defined as an imitative process where institutions were transferred from West to East rather than as a process of exchange where the West might learn from the East’s experience and the international protection. And human rights activism became the domain of transnational groups and governments, who protect victims, rather than a process driven by local practices and struggles of the victims themselves.

From Dissidence to Neoliberalism?

Was there a “human rights legacy” of 1989? Or were the dissidents a symbol which was hijacked for the project of a global neoliberal hegemony – with human rights activists serving as the latter’s “organic intellectuals,” as some writers indebted to Antonio Gramsci seem to suggest?¹⁶ Were human rights transformed from “weapons for the critique of power” into elements “of the arsenal of power”?¹⁷

This, too, seems to be an oversimplification. For all its thinness, human rights was a language of empowerment. French intellectuals, American neoconservatives, and peace activists competed over the meaning of human rights precisely because it had become a powerful source of international legitimacy. As international icons, the dissidents were valuable in these debates because, through their suffering and resistance, they embodied the ideas associated with human rights. This exposed them to clashing interpretations, but it also

endowed them with moral authority and symbolic power. The dissidents were rarely shy to use this authority to make clear demands on their Western supporters. Challenging the West to live up to the values it had signed in Helsinki, then, they also challenged the West to define its identity.

Before the dissidents forced human rights onto the international agenda, all three western groups discussed above – the French Left, U.S. neoconservatives, the West German peace movement – had been indifferent or critical about human rights activism. This is most obvious in the case of France: As Claude Lefort observed in 1980 in a seminal article of the French human rights discourse: “The spread of Marxism throughout the whole of the French Left has long gone hand in hand with a devaluation of rights in general and with the vehement, ironic or “scientific” condemnation of the bourgeois notion of human rights.” It had only been after “the efforts of dissidents throughout the socialist states, availing themselves of the Helsinki Agreements in order to demand respect for human rights,” that individual rights “no longer seem to be formal, intended to conceal a system of domination; they are now seen to embody a real struggle against oppression” (Lefort 1986, 240–241). West German peace activists, too, had been critical about human rights activism in East–West relations. They feared it might exacerbate the Cold War but they also seemed to have submitted to an inverted Cold War thinking themselves. Seeing the U.S. as the main culprit in the arms race, they believed that supporting dissidents would simultaneously strengthen the U.S. Kelly’s approach signals a new attitude from a figurehead of the peace movement. She started to see peace and human rights as two sides of the same process and, in defending this approach, even argued that, in terms of their human rights record, western societies were superior to those of the Soviet bloc (Fischer et al. 1986).

Jeane Kirkpatrick or Ronald Reagan, finally, may have portrayed U.S. human rights policies as a simple continuation of the Cold War. In reality, however, both had been critical of human rights activism before Reagan came to office deeming it naïve and preventing Washington from fending off Soviet influences in Central America. One of Kirkpatrick’s most famous texts, in fact, is an article in which she rejected human rights activism’s universal approach outright and demanded different approaches for dictators in Latin America and in the Soviet bloc (Kirkpatrick 1979). Leading neoconservative intellectuals had little use for the activism of the dissidents or a social movement like Solidarity. They may have admired the dissidents and considered

Solidarity's suppression tragic, but seem to have believed that their fate had been inevitable anyway (Kahn and Podhoretz 2008; Krauthammer 1982).¹⁸

Even after 1989, dissidents could challenge and provoke western audiences. An emergent narrative may portray the expansion of the EU as a process in which West European countries shepherded "post-communist" societies into the democratic club. But the political scientist Frank Schimmelfennig (2001) has argued that EU enlargement ran counter to the interests of the majority of its members and there was, hence, little enthusiasm for it. In this situation, Czech President Havel used his iconic status as a former dissident and the EU's public commitment to human rights to "shame" West Europeans into beginning the process of enlargement. While East European human rights activists certainly could not control the shape of the "liberal international order" that would emerge after the Cold War, they were not its passive victims either.

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ENDNOTES

1 For my understanding of the problematic terms "dissent" and "dissidence" see Brier (2013), pp. 13–18.

2 Paulmann's text is a review of Hoffmann (2012). Such an approach need not necessarily question the validity of human rights as demonstrated by Hans Joas (2013); Joas (2000). For the history of human rights see Eckel (2009); Moyn (2012); Pendas (2012); for major texts of this new approach see the contributions to the volume edited by Hoffmann as well as Eckel and Moyn (2013); Iriye, Goedde and Hitchcock (2012); Moyn (2010); Simpson (2009). For applications to Eastern Europe see Nathans (2007).

3 The English translations of the *Chronicle* are available online from Amnesty International at: http://www.amnesty.org/en/ai_search?title=chronicle+of+current+events. The Russian original is available from the homepage of Memorial, a Russian NGO that collects the documents of Soviet dissidents at: <http://www.memo.ru/history/diss/chr/index.htm>. (both accessed Jan. 2013).

4 For Catholicism's mid-1960s about-face on human rights see Moyn (2011); Sutor (2008).

5 Snyder (2010, 69–70) tells this story the wrong way round emphasizing international causes and relegating the crackdown on Prague, the main reason for the creation of Charter 77, to a footnote.

6 The following account is based on my own research on Polish dissent as well as on Friszke (2010); Friszke (2011); Gawin (2013); Arndt (2013). My account of Charter 77 draws heavily on Bolton (2012) though, obviously, I come to different conclusions regarding the existence of a transnational dissident community. For the history of Soviet dissent see Nathans (2007); Nathans (2013); Luks (2010); Walker (2009); Walker (2010).

7 For references to Solzhenitsyn's text see Kuroń (2010), p. 55; Havel (1984).

8 Quotations are from the unpaginated online edition of Havel's text.

9 Havel adopted this term from his mentor Jan Patočka but used in a different way. Findlay (1999), pp. 420–421.

10 Havel (1985), pp. 39–40, 42.

11 Kuroń

12 Though Kuroń (2010, 8, 59) proceeded from Marxist ideas in this text, there are obvious parallels between this reasoning and the French personalist philosophy favored by Warsaw's Catholic intelligentsia. On personalism in general see Moyn (2011). For its relevance for the Polish opposition see Miller (1983).

13 Havel (1985), p. 91.

14 Another example is the book *Genealogies of the Defiant* [*Rodowody Niepokornych*] by the Catholic writer Bohdan Cywiński (1971). One of the most influential texts of early Polish dissent, it sketched human rights and national history as a field where Catholics and Marxist intellectuals could meet. Its account of Polish nationalism and Church history openly discussed and strongly condemned nationalism.

15 The following account is based on two competitive but ultimately complementary accounts of French post-war intellectual history Khilnani (1993); Christofferson (2004). See also Horvath (2007); Howard (2002); Johnstone (1984).

16 Stuart Shields, "Historicizing Transition: The Polish Political Economy in a Period of Global Structural Change – Eastern Central Europe's Passive Revolution?," *International Politics* vol 43, no. 4 (2006), pp. 474–499; Jarle Simensen, "The Global Context of 1989," in *Transnational Moments of Change. 1945 – 1968 – 1989*, ed. Padraic Kenney and Gerd-Rainer Horn (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), pp. 157–172.

17 Nicolas Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers: Human Rights & International Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 5.

18 For the development of Reagan's human rights policy see Bright (1990).

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REVOLUTION BY SONG: CHORAL SINGING AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN ESTONIA

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ABSTRACT

After being subsumed by the Soviet Union during World War II, Estonia suffered greatly during occupation. But one area that the Soviet authorities could not completely control was Estonia's tradition of "Song Festivals". Sung primarily in the Estonian language, these choral festivals lasted through Soviet rule, and became the bedrock for preserving Estonian culture. Moreover, this singing tradition spilled over into Estonia's fight for freedom, as Estonians used song as a peaceful, non-violent means of protest. Estonia's "Singing Revolution" lasted roughly from 1987–1991 and resulted in independence for Estonians. This paper will assess this period of Estonian history by using survey data and over 30 participant interviews gathered by the authors. These structured, in-depth interviews assess the meaningfulness of the Song Festival tradition and crystallize the role of these festivals in post-independence Estonia. More specifically, the authors also will connect discussion of these song festivals to the social capital literature made famous by Robert Putnam. The authors argue that song festivals and choruses were a significant component of fostering social cohesiveness and civic engagement among Estonians – both native and abroad – and thus served as a bulwark against the intrusion of Soviet ideology.

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union is one of the monumental episodes of the 20th century, resetting the world politically, economically and ideologically.

Perhaps the most fascinating turn of events in the build-up to this collapse lies in the myriad of avenues through which revolutionary activity was fomented and spurred throughout the Eastern bloc. From Romania's very violent turn of events over Christmas in 1989, to Czechoslovakia's relatively peaceful "Velvet Revolution," change in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union proceeded in very different ways. One of the more remarkable stories of revolutionary activity was that of Estonia's so-called "Singing Revolution," an effort by native Estonians to protest Soviet occupation through song. Though Estonia is not the first (nor will it be the last) country to use song as a form of political and social protest, the Estonian experience is germane for what it says about the position of music within Estonian culture and language. In addition, as the authors argue in this essay, music – particularly choral music – was a central organizing tool for Estonian protest. Borrowing from the voluminous work on civic engagement and social capital in the political science discipline, the authors will contend that the Estonian "Singing Revolution" was a combination of cultural re-awakening and political strategy that fostered community activism. Estonian choral music and singing during the Soviet collapse not only rekindled a notion of "Estonian-ness," but also provided a platform for many individuals who were otherwise not politically active to engage in social and governmental protest.

For this article, over thirty Estonian song festival performers were interviewed, many of whom participated in the political struggle of the mid-to-late 1980s. These interviews provide an enriching narrative of Estonian views on song and its relation to social and political change. Moreover, these interviews offer further insight into the differences between Estonian choral protest and other countries' use of song protest. This matter is particularly relevant given recent musical protests, such as Russia's feminist-inspired Pussy Riot, and the musically-charged protests lodged by Syrian youth against the Syrian government and President Bashar al-Assad (MacFarquhar 2011). In all of these instances, although music was the medium by which grievances were transmitted, the songs were varied in audience, content, arrangement and perhaps most importantly, participants.

This essay is organized into three parts. First, an overview of the Estonian political situation in the 1980s is examined, with special attention paid to the effect of Soviet occupation on Estonian politics and society. Second, the history of the song festival tradition will be analyzed, including interviews with participants. Lastly, the third section links both the political history of

Estonia and its history of song festivals to the literature on social capital. Though it is truthful to argue that “singing” was a major catalyst in ending Soviet occupation, the manner in which this unfolded requires further distillation. Thus the third section explores how song choirs became important networks for political and social change within a closed-off environment like the Soviet Union. The authors also will touch briefly on how singing allowed social networks to be fostered across Estonian expatriate and émigré communities in the USA and Europe, and what this meant for the preservation of Estonian culture as a whole.

Occupation and Revolution in Estonia

Estonia’s tortured relationship with outsiders dates back centuries, as it was settled and occupied by countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Russia for roughly 700 years, in what Kyllike Sillaste entitled Estonia’s unfortunate history of “conquest and survival” (1995, 119). However, by 1919, Estonians declared their independence, wrote a constitution, and enacted a democratically-elected parliament. This first “independence period” brought the flourishing of Estonian schools, business and culture, an era that lifted Estonian society to a level comparable with “Western” neighbors such as Finland. Even so, twenty years following independence, in 1939, the dream of freedom was halted. German and Soviet forces used Estonia as one of their theaters of war during World War II, with both militaries taking turns ruling parts of the country. By the culmination of the war, Soviet forces dominated Estonian territory and incorporated Estonia into the Soviet Union. For Estonians, the period from 1945–1953 was especially traumatic, termed by Estonian political scientist and politician Rein Taagepera as the “years of genocide” (Mertelsmann and Rahi-Tamm 2009, 308). “Approximately 8,000 were arrested for political reasons during the first year of Soviet rule” noted Olaf Mertelsmann and Aigi Rahi-Tamm. “Of these, only a few hundred survived” (2009, 310). Anatol Lieven, in his book *The Baltic Revolution*, argued that the Estonian population had declined by 25-percent in the 1940s, and further speculated that “it is difficult to exaggerate the amount of damage done to the Baltic States by Soviet rule” (1994, 82).

The penetration of Soviet influence into Estonian political and cultural life was particularly galling and unsettling for Estonians. Not only were they unable to control their political fortunes or to possess autonomy over political decisions, but Estonian language and customs were struggling to maintain a foothold. “As early as 1959,” wrote political scientist David

Smith, “over 50 per cent of the school-age urban population of Estonia were native speakers of Russian, receiving their education in Russian language schools, where little or no Estonian was taught” (1999, 296). Other scholars estimated that by the 1980s, less than 70 per cent of the population were actually “Estonians,” as years of industrial plans and collectivization campaigns brought growing numbers of outsiders to the region (Sillaste 1995, 122).

As in the rest of Eastern and Central Europe, and throughout the Soviet Union, things began to rapidly change for the people of Estonia in the 1980s. While it is true that economic and political softening brought by *glasnost* and *perestroika* augmented changes in Estonia, the tipping point occurred in 1987, over environmental problems related to open-pit phosphate mining in north-eastern Estonia. As political scientist Andres Kasekamp points out, environmental concerns were a catalyst for revolutionary spirit in all three of the Baltic States, and especially in Estonia (2010, 161). However, environmental harm related to phosphate mining was not the only issue, as the mine also sought to employ over 100,000 workers who were *not* from Estonia (Smith 1999, 297). From 1987 onward, Estonians proceeded down a political path that would radically alter the prospects for future generations. This path included large-scale social activism that rallied native Estonians against what they saw as Soviet and Russian occupation.

From 1987–1990, Estonia formed several new political and civic movements, including the Estonian Popular Front – an organization led by Edgar Savisaar and composed of many reformist communists – the Estonian National Independence Party, a group that argued that Estonians never relinquished their independence to the Soviet Union to begin with, and the National Heritage Society, a “proto-political force” that, among other things, challenged Soviet authority by restoring Estonian monuments and the Estonian tri-color national flag (Lieven 1994, 217–220). Additionally, Estonians took to the street to protest, when, in 1989, they locked arms with Latvians and Lithuanians in a 400-mile long human chain connecting Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn, an action known as the “Baltic Chain.” This protest commemorated the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which had given the Soviet Union control over the Baltics (Sillaste 1995, 123). By 1990, many communist governments throughout Eastern Europe – in Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Romania among others – had collapsed or were on the brink of collapse. Soviet-occupied spaces such as Estonia and the rest of

the Baltics followed suit. In April 1990, Estonia “simply cancelled the Soviet annexation, and declared that Estonia was in a period of transition to full independence” (Lieven 1994, 242). A provisional government was formed around members of the Popular Front and headed by Savisaar.

Not all shared in the independence struggle in 1990, however. Thousands of Russians who feared their own political and cultural extinction formed the group Interfront, and staged a sort of insurgency against the new government, attacking the Estonian parliament building (the Riigikogu) located on Toompea Hill in Tallinn. Savisaar went to the radio broadcast tower in an attempt to alert the public, declaring: “Interfront gangs have surrounded Toompea Castle and are attacking. I repeat – Toompea is under attack!” (Vesilind 2008, 146). Estonians flooded up the hill, chanting for freedom, and surrounded the Interfront group. Remarkably, no one was injured or hurt in the protests and counter-protests. The Russians filed out peaceably, and Estonians returned to their homes.

This episode marked a turning point in the Estonian independence narrative. Estonians remained united behind this cause and let little stand in their way. The following year, in August 1991, the Soviet Union was collapsing upon itself – Gorbachev was removed from power, a coup was being staged in his place, and Boris Yeltsin was moving Russia towards independence. Clumsily, Soviet tanks were still moving in the Baltics, having killed 14 Lithuanians in an effort to take television communications away by knocking out and scrambling their TV tower (Vesilind 2008, 148). The tanks then rolled on into Latvia, and later, Estonia. But, Estonians staged physical and human blockades to protect the tower, and two young, Estonian border policemen stood guard until the Soviets retreated, never to return. Estonia was a free country again.

Methodology

A key component missing from the previous narrative (and existing literature generally), is a substantive discussion of the contribution made by Estonian singing, especially the long-standing tradition of choral music within Estonian society. Ultimately, one cannot fully understand the Estonian independence movement without referencing singing. In 2008, this notion was made famous by James and Maureen Tusty’s documentary *The Singing Revolution* and Priit Vesilind’s accompanying book of the same name. Though research into Estonia’s choral traditions and song festivals has been advanced

by a number of scholars (Thomson 1992, Puderbaugh 2006, Brokaw and Brokaw 2008), *The Singing Revolution* documentary broadcast the Estonian independence saga to wide and far-reaching audiences beyond academic communities. Not only was there limited distribution of the film in theaters, and thousands of copies of the film sold and distributed to libraries, but PBS (Public Broadcasting System) picked up the documentary as well, airing the story to millions of Americans through their televisions.

Drawing on the inspiration of Tusty's film, the work done by many scholars on this topic, and the courage demonstrated by the Estonian people in the face of cultural and linguistic annihilation, the authors continued to delve further into Estonia's singing revolution. In particular, the authors were not only interested in the history behind the singing, but also the effect of this singing in the lead-up to independence. In the following section, Estonian singing traditions are examined, both through secondary research and through 34 semi-structured interviews conducted by the authors via surveys, emails, and face-to-face contact. The interviews were conducted in English, over the course of four months in the Spring and Summer of 2013. All face-to-face interviews were conducted at the LEP-ESTO festival – a convention that brings together native and ethnic Estonians – in San Francisco, California. The interviewees were a diverse lot – from teenage to senior citizens, from Estonian-natives to first- and second-generation people of Estonian heritage residing outside of Estonia, and from veteran choral performers to prideful on-lookers. This diverse selection was culled intentionally, to achieve a variety of perspectives on Estonian singing, and to demonstrate its meaningfulness to the Estonian people.

Before proceeding, the authors must clarify the general use of the words “song festival” in the Estonian culture. In short, there are many different types of Estonian song festivals. The most notable of those forms is the *Laulupidu* – literally meaning “song festival.” *Laulupidu* occurs every five years – the last being in 2009 and the next one in 2014. The festivals are the largest gathering of Estonian choirs in the country and typically are the festivals to which our respondents refer. However, there are many other song festivals in Estonia, including the Estonian Night Song Festival (*Öölaulupidu*), the Estonian Youth Song and Dance Festival, the Viljande Folk Festival, and more recently, the Punk *Laulupidu*, among others. These festivals occur in the intervening years between the larger, more prominent *Laulupidu*, though they are no less important to some Estonians.

Singing and Song Festivals in Estonia

Estonia has a rich folklore and storytelling tradition that dates back centuries. The most famous of these stories was that of the mythological giant *Kalevipoeg* (Kalev's son), a tale that tells the national story of the Estonian people. But other, less famous, stories began to be collected in the early 19th century. Jakob Hurt, a German pastor dubbed the "King of Folklore," persuaded Estonians to begin collecting and writing down the literally hundreds of thousands of stories and tales passed through the generations (Thomson 1992, 15). This ongoing project created a repertoire of Estonian narratives that became crucial to preserving Estonian culture, but also served as a natural springboard to the composition of Estonia-specific songs. During what is known as the "National Awakening" period of Estonian history, poets such as Lydia Koidula constructed a narrative from which future generations of composers would borrow. Koidula's place in Estonian history is so significant that following independence her picture was placed on the former 100-kroon bank note (Thomson 1992, 76).

Coupling the growth of folklore literature with an already rich tradition in music and choir singing, Estonia began hosting a Song Festival (*Laulupidu*) in the nineteenth century. The first festival began in 1869 and was organized in part by Johann Voldermar Jannsen, a newspaper publisher who created the Estonian-language newspaper (*Postimees*) and was also the father of Koidula (Vesilind 2008, 32; Thomson 1992, 75). In the university city of Tartu, and in conjunction with the national awakening, the festival was held in an effort to raise the national consciousness of the Estonian people and to encourage them to embrace Estonian as the official language of the state. "I think that in general the first song festivals were not so much about politics," said Estonian song festival participant Merit Künnapuu, "than cultural awakening and identity" (Künnapuu, Merit. Survey Interview. 22 February, 2013). Tartu saw 51 male choirs consisting of 845 musicians, with 10,000–15,000 in the audience during the first year of the Song Festival (Raun 2001, 75). Singing came naturally to the people of this small Baltic country; "you get three together and they start singing" said Mari Truumaa, an Estonian-American (Truumaa, Mari. Personal Interview by Authors. 29 June, 2013). The festivals then played out uninterrupted for three decades before Estonia was rattled with revolution and war. The singing resumed during Estonia's first period of independence from 1923–1938, but was halted due to Soviet occupation and the introduction of communism. The 1938 festival was in fact the last

festival that was entirely an Estonian project, “rife with Estonian nationalism” (Puderbaugh 2008, 33)

Thought of as “one of the darkest sides of Stalinism,” the decrease in cultural output and expression is what weakened Estonia the most in the early years of occupation. In typical communist fashion the Soviets fought for “ideological purity” and banned many aspects of Estonian culture including literature and the arts (Raun 2001, 186). What they did not ban at first, however, was soon molded into something that was no longer Estonian in nature, but Soviet-inspired and then Estonian-produced. In this way, literature could be published only if the author was an Estonian Communist Party member (ECP), theatres could produce only Soviet Russian or Soviet Estonian works, and composers were encouraged to create music that reached the masses of people. This same concept was used to neatly package the Estonian song festival tradition into something that was Stalinist in spirit, and as this event encouraged a mass participation it offered the perfect opportunity to establish the new principle of “national in form, socialist in content” (Raun 2001, 188).

Kai Põld, an Estonian born before the Soviet era of occupation and attended every song festival since his childhood, expressed a sentiment that many of his fellow countrymen felt when their twenty-year bout for independence was contested with the onset of WWII: “What can one do when there are one million Estonians and 150 million Russians? What more than wait. So we worked and sang and waited” (Põld, Kai. Email Interview, May 22, 2013). While Hitler began his invasion of Central Europe, the small Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were disregarded by the rest of Europe and left “for 50 years to the barbarian Soviet Union,” as Leonardo Meigas, a veteran of all song festivals dating from 1965, acrimoniously recalled (Meigas, Leonardo. Email interview, 4 July, 2013). Communism had settled effortlessly into Estonia, and with a population of only 1.3 million it infiltrated all aspects of everyday life, making it impossible for the Estonian people to embrace their own cultural heritage and long-enduring traditions.

Many families fled the country during the 1940s, narrowly escaping the desolation the Soviets would reap upon their homeland and its people. Truuma’s family – for example – lived in the city of Tartu in Estonia, but left for the United States in 1952 after being displaced persons in Germany for six years. Upon her marriage in 1965 she claimed that “at the time there really

was no hope of Estonia, at least in my lifetime, to become free” (Truumaa, Mari. Personal Interview by authors. June 29, 2013).

The Soviet Union, however, underestimated the strength and perseverance of Estonians. While their plight was not unique in the grand scheme of war and occupation, their sentiment toward the situation was. Estonians collectively refused to acknowledge their perceived hopelessness with the same pessimism that potentially could have become their downfall, but instead came together as a nation. Instead of feeling guilt that their sons and daughters could grow up knowing nothing beyond foreign oppression, they channeled their energies into fighting using their one strength: singing. While defeating 150 million Russians was unrealistic, so was silencing one million Estonians. Estonia was ready to raise its voice.

“Singing is the best therapy in everything. You can sing about your joy, pain, longing, grief, dreams... and express yourself through music,” said Estonian native Kertu Vallerind, who has performed in every song festival since 1976. “And to do that together with thousands of other singers, it’s such a powerful feeling. It makes you feel that you can move mountains, and you can in your soul!” (Vallerind, Kertu. Email Interview. 7 June, 2013). In late June 1947, following a conscious collaboration with the Soviet government, Estonia was allowed to resume their century long tradition and continue the beloved Song Festival, but with very strict guidelines. This was the first song festival since the 1938 festival, which was a wholly Estonian performance. However, in 1947, Soviet influence on the musical program was apparent to all Estonians.

The repertoire started with *God Save the Tsar*. “A lot was forbidden,” said Vallerind, referring to absence of many Estonian choral classics. But Estonians eluded the Russians by hiding messages in verse. “The censor couldn’t stop you as the message was hidden carefully into the text and melody – through ‘flowers.’ The censor didn’t notice it or they just couldn’t find a proper reason to decline” (Vallerind, Kertu. Email Interview. 4 June, 2013). For many people, it was not the words they were singing or the communist propaganda that united the country, but the feeling of togetherness through choral music. Estonians were able to experience a sense of cultural identity that was not present during the majority of their occupation. “It was a tool that we used to show to the Soviets that they did not manage to kill our culture and spirits and that if we wanted to restore our freedom then there was nothing that would stop us,” said Künnapuu (Künnapuu, Merit. Survey Interview. 22 February, 2013).

Eva Türk, an Estonian born during the end of Soviet occupation, recalled: “My grandmother used to say some decades ago when we were a part of USSR: ‘Attending the festival makes me feel Estonian again...’ I think that this says a lot” (Türk, Eva. Survey Interview. 22 February, 2013). Even so, the 1947 Soviet-influenced festival was not the same as the pre-war performances. First generation Estonian-American Aavo Reinfeldt said that if he had to describe those first festivals “the words I would use would be gray, somber, unified sadness” (Reinfeldt, Aavo. Personal Interview by Authors. 29 June, 2013). As David Puderbaugh argued, the purpose of the festival from the Soviet perspective was to attain three main objectives. The Soviets wanted to create a sense of comfort in the wake of war and devastation, to celebrate the Soviet Union’s victory over Germany, and to show off the Soviet economic and societal advancements made in Estonia (Puderbaugh 2008, 35).

Though the 1947 festival was still shrouded in communist ideology, 28,000 people came to sing and another 100,000 filled the audience, the largest turnout in Estonian history. With the Soviets keeping a close watch on the repertoire, Estonians spent two days singing compulsory songs centered around socialist themes, such as the nobility of hard work and the glorifying of the deeds of Stalin, Marx, and Lenin. “It was better to continue our national events than not do it,” said Pöld (Pöld, Kai. Email Interview. 22 May, 2013). Accordingly, it was when Gustav Ernesaks took the stage that Estonia was exalted for the first time in years. Ernesaks led the choir in “Mu isamaa on minu arm,” a poem written by Koidula during the national awakening movement and a song that is considered the unofficial national anthem of Estonia. Put to a new arrangement, thousands of Estonians sang this song in their native tongue, expressing hope for the future of their homeland through the lyrics. The Estonians sang: *Mu isamaa on minu arm // kell’ südant annud ma // sull’ laulan ma // mu ülem õnn // mu õitsev Eestimaa*. This translates in English as: *Land of my fathers, land that I love // I’ve given my heart to her // I sing to you // my supreme happiness // my flourishing Estonia!* The song slipped past the Russian censors and the true message it conveyed was lost in translation.

Ernesaks is arguably the most famous conductor in song festival history, and an enormous statue of him graces the song festival grounds in Tallinn today. Perhaps not surprisingly, during the 1940s and 1950s, some Estonians looked upon Ernesaks with great suspicion, as a sort of Soviet traitor. Someone like Ernesaks would have been among the handful of Estonians permitted to

travel throughout the Soviet Union, and his attempt at conducting Soviet-themed material proved problematic for his reputation at the time. “[He] was considered a collaborator,” Põld said, “But nobody told him that he was treated like a national hero, for he started [sic] continuing our song festival tradition” (Põld, Kai. Email Interview, May 22nd, 2013).¹ The following year three conductors were declared “enemies of the people” and arrested. Ernesaks was able to escape arrest and possible deportation because of his high public profile in society, both among the Estonian people and Soviet dignitaries. Still, during the 1950s, the song was banned from the song festival and did not reemerge for a decade (Puderbough 2008, 41).

In 1960, as the Fifteenth Estonian song festival was winding to an end and people were filing out of the song festival grounds, following a repertoire that contained the customary Soviet songs, the opening lyrics of *Mu isamaa on minu arm* were heard quietly trickling through the audience. A tune that had not been heard publicly in over 10 years quickly picked up with vigor until thousands of Estonians were singing the song that had first struck a cord with the Estonian people in 1869 at the first song festival. The people knew what they wanted and were rebelling in the only way they knew how. One participant recalled: “Why people are still crying, singing ‘Mu isamaa on minu arm?’ Because having homeland is more important than having home. Losing it you can’t buy a new one” (Meigas, Leonardo. Email Interview. July 4, 2013).

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the song festivals continued, each with a mixture of Soviet and Estonian songs. But following the backlash over phosphate mining in 1987, Estonians began to organize more and more public protests centered around their singing culture. A prominent example is the June 4th, 1988 rally, where close to 100,000 people marched and sang songs, working their way from Old Town Tallinn, and weaving down the street toward the Song Festival grounds, about a four kilometer walk (Puderbaugh 2008, 41). Noted Meigas: “In 1988, spontaneous night festivals of young people singing old forbidden songs [fed] our belief and hope to live in our free homeland someday again” (Meigas, Leonardo. Survey Interview. February, 20, 2013). The song protest participants were a diverse lot, ranging from formal conductors, to noted Estonian rock stars like the late Alo Mattiisen.

Without sacrificing one life or shedding an ounce of blood Estonia had managed to restore its independence peacefully. Though it would be an overstatement to suggest that song alone brought forth revolution, it is not

hyperbole to remark that choral music in some ways saved Estonia. Most Estonians do not deny the importance of the song festival tradition during the Soviet period, nor the challenges it presented to communist authority. “In the Soviet period, under the Russification pressure it was the only legal public way to demonstrate mental and cultural togetherness of a small nation,” said Meigas (Meigas, Leonardo. Survey Interview. February 20, 2013). After the Soviets left and the Republic of Estonia was once again independent, some Estonians worried that the tradition would diminish in its breadth and significance, since there was no longer a direct cause to precipitate the act of engaging in song. “The one in 1990 [song festival], it was like everyone was convinced they would become free...it was a tremendous nationalistic movement,” said Truuma. “And I thought, well now that everyone is free maybe not everybody is going to participate, oh no! It was raining on the parade, everybody was doing it anyway. We were sitting in the rain. Whenever it started raining everybody put their ponchos on... They said there were over 20,000 singers...” (Truuma, Mari. Personal Interview by Authors. June 29, 2013).

Liina Steinberg, an Estonian veteran of six song festivals, believes the song festival tradition is “the most visible part of Estonian culture.” As she states: “...Estonian music can be enjoyed without knowing the Estonian language – so the song festivals provide everybody with a more tangible example of Estonian culture” (Steinberg, Liina. Survey Interview. February 22, 2013). Türk furthers the sentiment by saying that the song festivals give her “a feeling of being one of many – it is part of my cultural consciousness” (Türk, Eva. Survey Interview. February 22, 2013). This is important as even Estonians – admittedly so – are typically regarded as being a very reserved group of people. In this regard, Künnapu said: “I think we don’t really appreciate each other that much and we rarely refer to those cultural ties in our everyday life. It seems to me we mostly come together and feel united when in trouble” (Künnapu, Merit. Survey Interview. February 22, 2013).

Stories like Liina’s, Eva’s and Merit’s were told to the authors in numerous ways by numerous interviewees. One of the key themes that emerges from the authors’ interviews with these diverse individuals of Estonian heritage is the notion of music as a source of collective action, or more broadly, as a vehicle for bringing people together in common pursuits that transcend the songs themselves. It is important, though, to distill what is unique about the role that song played in fostering these larger pursuits in Estonia and

for Estonians living outside of their native land. Such an understanding, it follows, will permit a thorough recognition of the sources underlying – and the after-effects of – forms of civic engagement across other cultures. To directly address these matters, the authors turn to a discussion that links the unique traits of Estonian song with existing literature that addresses the notion of “social capital.”

Singing, Engagement and Social Capital

What separates much of Estonian protest music from music in the rest of the world is the use of choruses as the primary framework for musical expression. While it is true that Estonian song festivals occasionally feature solo performances – Tõnis Mägi’s version of *Koit* is an excellent example – most of the music is structured around the choral traditions of the country. The most rudimentary (and perhaps most important) quality of a chorus is the amount of participation that it engenders. When respondents noted that 20,000 singers would sing all at once this was not an exaggeration. Including the audience, which would frequently join in, over 100,000 Estonians could sing in unison at a song festival. The group-dynamic of choral singing in the Estonian case also helps to make sense of the success and peacefulness of the revolution in the country.

To understand this idea, Robert Putnam’s books *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000) provide some insight. Putnam’s work on the concept of *social capital* was developed in these books, the first about civic engagement in Italy, and the second about declining civic engagement in the United States. Social capital – as he defines it – is “features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (1993, 167). Putnam’s work set off a firestorm of debate in the political science community about the extent to which these social networks impacted politics, and whether increased social capital was, on balance, a healthy component of political communities. While the authors do not wish to delve too far into those debates, we do think the social capital literature has relevancy to this particular project on Estonian choral singing.

In this regard, Matthew Baggetta at the University of Indiana examined in detail the use of choirs as important social networks. In his study of Boston-area (USA) choirs, he argued that choral groups offered “opportunities to interact with others, experience [in] governance, and [connection]

with community institutions” (Baggetta 2009, 194). Baggetta also touched upon two other important components of choir groups in his research. First, he noted that choirs create great opportunities for individuals to assert “organizational management,” as member-volunteers often are tasked with organizing and planning choral practices and events (2009, 187). “Choruses are relatively complex managerial undertakings,” Baggetta stated, “with substantial budgets, limited staff presence and significant amounts of volunteer labor” (2009, 189). Second, Baggetta highlighted the collaborative nature of the choral experience. Choirs frequently interact with other musicians (vocalists need instrumentalists, for example) and people of various ages and skillsets. Choirs also frequently perform in the community, connecting not only with other artists but also with people who hold only a passing interest in music (Baggetta 2009, 189).

Choirs in Estonia certainly provide the kind of networking and organizational components Baggetta observed in Boston-area choirs. Survey respondent Viivi Verrev stated that being part of choirs in preparation for a song festival “are great practice in organizing a major event on a tight budget” (Verrev, Viivi. Survey Response. February 25, 2013). Another interesting example of the organizational power of choral groups was relayed by Leonardo Meigas, an aforementioned singer: “Edgar Savisaar, the newly elected Prime Minister, managed to get a message on the radio saying ‘Toompea is under attack. I repeat, Toompea is under attack!’ I left my frightened and crying nine-month pregnant wife waiting at home and I rushed to Toompea, being really ready to meet a conflict. But when I got there, I saw a crowd of perplexed and downcast Russians already descending with their red flags...” Meigas explained that this event happened on a Tuesday, which has been a traditional rehearsal day for amateur choirs who practice in schools, theatres, and other venues with large recital halls. “That’s why many angry Estonian choirs quickly reacted,” Meigas clarified. “Nearly a thousand men got through in 15 minutes to Toompea to protect our newborn independence!” (Meigas, Leonardo. Email interview. July 31, 2013).

Singer Hanna-Liina Vosa, arguably one of the most popular performers in Estonia, got her start singing traditional songs in a song festival choir. While she has had a successful career in theatre, starring in many big name musicals such as *Grease*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Les Misérables*, and even having an audience with and performing for Queen Elizabeth II, she has not forgotten her roots, and performs in many Estonian festivals, most recently

singing at the 2003 song festival and the 2009 Tallinn Days in Moscow. “It means a lot to people who are from smaller places in Estonia because they practice, they rehearse the songs all year and then they come together and it kind of expands, but they feel like they really give it their all,” said Vosa. “Because they feel like their voice counts even though there are 20,000 people singing” (Vosa, Hanna-Liina. Personal Interview with Authors. June 29, 2013). Respondent Kersti Kittus agreed. She noted: “...Choir singing is an important part of social life outside of the big cities like Tallinn and Tartu” (Kittus, Kersti. Survey Response. February 23, 2013).

As Künnapuu stated, the song festival is an event that has the power to bring everyone together, “[...] no matter the age, gender, economic background; it’s all about the love for the country and to feel that connection and sense of belonging” (Künnapuu, Merit. Email interview by authors. June 5, 2013). In the same breath, Eva-Tiina Põlluste, an Estonian veteran of nine song festivals, noted: “In my opinion Estonians are quite individualists, but sometimes you would like to feel that people around you are similar and thinks and likes the same. So that is what unites us on the song grounds and we can feel that we are the same nation and we breathe in same rhythm” (Põlluste, Eva-Tiina. Survey Interview. February 22, 2013).

Especially following the fall of the Soviet Union when Estonia was free to sing as she pleased, the people needed an event that was going to unite them again as a country and make them forget the evils they had faced to reach that point. As Reinfeldt stated:

Estonians’ spirit does come alive during song festivals because everything aside there is nothing to be afraid of. When you’re afraid you don’t want anyone to overhear what you’re saying. When you’re afraid you don’t want anyone to read your letters. But everyone knows how to sing. Everyone knows how to hold hands. Everybody knows what it means when your emotions sort of take over. And imagine the power of thousands not thinking of negative things, but positive (Reinfeldt, Aavo. Personal Interview by Authors. June 29, 2013).

Even those Estonians that moved abroad following independence have not lost their cultural roots, with many returning year after year for the song festival. Besides coming home every five years to sing for their country,

those Estonians that have moved abroad often join choirs in other countries, like the European Choir of Estonians that was founded in 2007. One member, Mairis Minka, grew up during Soviet-era Estonia but currently lives in Luxembourg, where she was a part of a few different choirs before going back to her roots and joining an Estonian-based group. “I have been living in Luxembourg ten years and there was a period of my life where I was searching for some choirs but I didn’t match with these Luxembourg choirs,” said Minka. “I was singing there but I didn’t feel well there, it’s not at all the same singing Vivaldi, it doesn’t touch you” (Minka, Mairis. Personal Interview by Authors. June 29, 2013). “SILLER” is another choir that seeks to unite Estonians living abroad, translating in English to “a group of Estonians living in Finland.” Co-founder Maria Lume helped start this choir in 2006, because much like Minka in Luxembourg, no matter where they are, “singing is in the blood of all Estonians.” While this group is based in Helsinki, their objective has always been participation at the song festival in Estonia, which they “do not consider an obligation, but rather a privilege” (Lume, Maria. Email Interview. May 27, 2013).

What makes this Estonian tradition all the more unique is the staying power it had with the people. “In Estonia the folk dance and singing is not dying out, it’s getting more and more popular, while in other countries it’s not popular,” stated Tuuli Solom, a member of the Choir of European Estonians who grew up during Soviet-era Estonia, but now lives in Germany. “That’s the phenomenon in Estonia. Even though we do these traditional things we try to modernize it also, it will not stay in the old fashioned way” (Solom, Tuuli. Personal Interview by Authors. June 29, 2013). Upon gaining independence, some feared that the song festival would lose popularity, especially with the younger Estonians being a generation removed from the devastation of war and foreign occupation. As Trummaa said of the post-independence festivals: “And I thought, well now that everyone is free maybe not everybody is going to participate” (Truumaa, Mari. Personal Interview by Authors. June 29, 2013).

Once again, Estonians impressed their adversaries by capitalizing on their newfound independence. The song festivals were considered vital, and a way for the people to sustain their optimism for the future and to promote much needed nationalism among the smallest of the Baltic countries. As Solom emphasized, by modernizing the festival and composing new melodies and songs, such as *Rahu* (a pop song performed by the famous contemporary

group *Ruja*) and *Isamaa ilu boieldes*, (an upbeat rock song written by the late Mattiisen), the tradition has not been left stuck in the nineteenth century. “I think it’s delightful to see how eager the young generation is to perform and wear national costumes,” said Steinberg. “Some smaller cultures face the problem that the younger ones don’t want to carry on the cultural traditions of the nation.” This does not seem to be true, however, in the Estonian case.

Proof of this assertion lies in the story of Estonian orchestra conductor Jaan Ots, who was born in 1988, and is currently a rising star within the Estonia orchestral community. Too young to remember the major strife between Soviet Russia and Estonia, Ots feels the passion of the song festival every time he attends. “Music-making together, and so many people together, and good music and good emotions that unite people and this feeling that you get... It’s such an international feeling, it’s not only about Estonians. If you can create a good energy with singing and making music, that’s the most important thing I think” (Ots, Jaan. Personal Interview with Authors. June 29, 2013). “I am not worried about the younger generation,” added Künnapuu. “Maybe 100 years from now [the] song festival will be just another social event but right now it is so much more” (Künnapuu, Merit. Email Interview. June 5, 2013).

For now, the song festival is not diminishing in value or representation. “Knowing the historical, political and cultural meaning of these festivals to Estonians and taking into account that during such a festival about ten per cent of our nation is present,” said Steinberg, “you feel and see history in making.” (Steinberg, Liina. Email Interview. June 5, 2013). An Estonian respondent named Maria, who asked for her last name to be withheld, is a veteran of six festivals. She believes the song festival still helps the people unite in a very special way, and said: “There is a hint of nostalgia in song festivals when singing songs had a political impact, but there’s also a lot of joy and it seems that song festivals help people believe in a better tomorrow (Maria. Survey Interview. March 12, 2013). Added Ots: “There is a kind of atmosphere that you cannot find anywhere else. Maybe you can but it isn’t in any way special (Ots, Jaan. Personal Interview by Authors. June 29, 2013).

Künnapuu best summarized the significance of the song festival and choral singing for Estonians both near and far:

These days a lot of people go abroad to work, study or just have an adventure. And many stay abroad. But our song festival is something that always brings people back. No matter the age, gender, economic background; it's all about the love for the country and to feel that connection and sense of belonging. There are always a lot of expatriate Estonians going to song festivals who emigrated during the cold war. Their life is not in Estonia anymore but I think every Estonian is at least a little bit of a nationalist at heart. And with a population of 1.3 million we need that something that will always bring us together. (Künnapuu, Merit. Email Interview. June 5, 2013).

Conclusion

Estonia is not the first country to use song as a form of political and social protest.² For example, in her study of the French Revolution, Laura Mason uncovered how a revolutionary song culture was a critical piece of understanding that period of French history. As she noted about Paris at that time: "It was a city that encompassed a cacophony of voices as revolutionaries and royalists filled streets... giving speeches, rioting and throughout all, singing" (1996, 2). The same was true in Cuba in the 1950s, as Fulgencio Batista's army clashed with the burgeoning communist movement led by Fidel Castro. All the while, however, Cuban music exploded in popularity both at home and abroad. "Batista's final years in power are thus associated simultaneously with pleasure and political repression, hedonism and terror" (Moore 2006, 27). Cuba is a particularly interesting case as artists both hailed the coming revolution with songs such as "En eso llego Fidel" (That's When Fidel Arrived), but also grew to be critical of the restrictions placed upon them, opting for exile rather than for censorship (Moore 2006, 60–67).

Dozens of other examples also could be mentioned, including the folk and rock protests of American music in the 1960s or the recent punk protests of a band like Russia's Pussy Riot. Music is a wonderful medium for rallying people to engage in activities in which they might not otherwise partake. Valerie Samson's study of music during the Tiananmen Square protest represents a case in point. "[...] Music was a significant factor in politically arousing protestors to such a degree that they increasingly engaged in risky behavior," Samson wrote. She also noted that

music “enhanced [...] audience participation. [T]hese performances were auditory realization of the abstract concept of democracy” (Samson 2012, 518, 527).

Of course, not all politically-charged protest music is necessarily uplifting or constitutive to healthy communities or democratic practices. This is certainly true of the plethora of neo-Nazi bands in places like the United States, Germany and England. Consider the Croatian band called Thompson. While their music and lead singer Marko Percović Thompson are widely popular on Croatian radio, he has been accused of glorifying the *Ustaše*, Croatian soldiers that collaborated with the Nazis during World War II (Muršić 2012, 191). The popularity of his music coupled with on-going political and religious tensions in that area, demonstrates how song also can rally communities in very *divergent* directions.

The Estonian case is special because the music was, as one might infer from the interviews discussed herein, almost exclusively uplifting. It was also inclusive of many participants from different walks of life, a hallmark of what Putnam defines as “bridging” social capital (Putnam 2000, 22–24). More specifically, the songs united people around themes that were universal, like nature, or even the honey bee. For example, the classic song festival tune *Ta lendab mesipuu poole* roughly translates to “He flies toward the beehive,” and is a song about the return of bees to the hive. Some bees are lost along the way, but others have returned home. The subtext is obvious to an Estonian, but the theme of returning home is a universal one.

To draw a quick illustration in closing: Creedence Clearwater Revival’s song *Fortunate Son* is an appropriate example of 1960s protest music that emerged in the United States around the time of the Vietnam War. The song details how many *fortunate sons* were able to avoid serving in Vietnam by being well-connected, or having wealthy fathers, while thousands of lower – and middle-class people were sent overseas. The song was direct, blunt, and for many, divisive and scandalous. While it would be a mistake to assume that *everyone* in Estonia unites around the themes of the song festival – ethnic Russians living in Estonia have their antipathies, for example – the content and melodies of the songs are designed to bring everyone together, and during the independence period from 1987–1991, this was true for many. After countless emails, conversations, interviews and surveys conducted by the authors, the primary realization of this research is not only that Estonians

love to sing, but also that, for many, the act of singing represented a central organizing force in their lives. And thus, singing is a critical part of understanding the evolution of Estonian independence.

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ENDNOTES

1 This has some parallels to the story of the Russian Dmitri Shostakovich, one of the preeminent composers of 20th century and someone who played on both sides of the ideological divide. On the one hand, Shostakovich was a favorite composer and propagandist of Stalin and the Soviet government; on the other hand, his music had a sub-text that went deeper than the surface level, and even was critical of Soviet form. "To Shostakovich, music was the true language of multiplicity, which always expressed the truth, never lied, yet was always subject to interpretation," wrote Jennifer Gertsel. "With music he felt he was able to say everything and admit nothing" (Gertsel 2012, 156).

2 Estonia's neighbors, Latvia and Lithuania, have very proud and storied singing festivals and choral traditions also. Though the focus of this paper was only on Estonia, a number of works have addressed the importance of song in the lives of Latvians and Lithuanians. See Janis Chakars (2010) "Work Life in the 'Singing Revolution'", John Ginkel's "Identity Construction in Latvia's 'Singing Revolution'", and Guntis Šmidchens (2013) *The Power of Song*, which compares Estonia's, Latvia's and Lithuania's singing cultures.

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THE BULGARIAN ROUND TABLE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONSTITUTION OF 1991

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the influence of the Bulgarian Round Table at the beginning of the democratic transition and its practical contribution to the formation of the frame of the Bulgarian political project for democracy.

The first part of the paper looks at the role and the importance of the Bulgarian Round Table. This has neither been studied in depth in the national context (due to the short historical perspective and the still existing political controversies), nor amongst the international scientific community (due to the priority given to other Central and Eastern European Round Tables).

The second part of the paper pays attention to the political conditions influencing a possible transition to democratic governance and formation of such a type of non-traditional institution, as the Round Table. The focus falls on the role which the Bulgarian Round Table played in the overall national political process.

The third part of the paper analyses all agreements which the participants of the Round Table reached, and the extent to which they affected the texts of the Bulgarian Constitution of 1991.

Introduction

The Bulgarian Round Table sets the beginning of the democratic transition in our country. The meaning of this institution goes far beyond its time and space dimensions. The discussions at the Round Table reflect significantly on the entire process of democratization that followed, creating the framework for Bulgarian democracy. It is precisely in this respect that that Bulgarian Round Table has not been scientifically explored. The comparatively little investigative interest for this institution contrasts strongly with its importance for the establishing of democracy and the path of Bulgaria's democratic development. The collision of points of view has an effect not only on the

institutional architecture of Bulgarian democracy nowadays, but also on the political and ideological concept of an entire generation of Bulgarians. The live broadcasting on national television and radio of the discussions at the Round Table gave Bulgarians the chance to observe a large and important political discussion, which inevitably helped their spiritual liberation.

Ignoring at first sight the ideas of the different participants discussed at the Round Table for a Bulgarian political project of democracy, the question about the product, which this non-traditional institution creates, concerns the life and being of everyone of us in one way or another.

Because of the comparatively recent sessions at the Round Table in a historical perspective, the question about its role and importance is not yet fully formed. The considerable political and social polarization of the Bulgarian Round Table is one of the major factors for public opinion about it to be strongly divided. On the one hand it is reckoned to be “the most prosperous and fruitful period during which the transition is channeled and accelerated”, as “the most successful shape in Bulgarian conditions for the realization of the peaceful and civilized transition” and as “the most constructive and effective institution after November 10th”. (Prodanov et al. 2009, 113). On the other hand, it is also referred to as “a political circus” and “a deadly machine” (Prodanov et al. 2009, 113). Another factor, which casts a shadow over the role and the importance of the Round Table in the creation of a political project for democracy is the convention of a Great National Assembly, which in fact adopted the Constitution that is in effect in Bulgaria up to the present-day. But it should not be forgotten that it was at the Round Table that the decision for the convening of an institution to create a new fundamental law was taken and, secondly, many of the articles set in the Constitution in effect were previously passed by consensus by the participants at the Round Table. In this sense we need to pay deserved attention to the role of this institution in the creation of a Bulgarian political project for democracy.

The Bulgarian Round Table

The request for round table talks was first uttered in public by Zhelyu Zhelev. Yet there remain doubts that it was actually the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) who established this form of dialogue, hoping that in this way the opposition would not be able to influence the political crisis with civil protests. The first unofficial contacts in which the possibility of starting

negotiations with the rulers is discussed are between Andrey Lukanov and leaders of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). Some of the participants in these events recall that the communist party leaders tried to prevent the creation of a united opposition in December, probably understanding the additional difficulties which it would bring to the regime (Peeva 1997, 45).

Preliminary discussions began only a week after the invocation of Zhelev. There are many different interpretations of the efficiency of the authorities: 1) there could have been secret meetings and negotiations between the leaders of the opposition and the regime on which the decision for a round table had been taken before the readiness of the opposition for a dialogue being publically expressed; 2) party leaders could have believed that some dialogue with the opposition was inevitable and they preferred using their tactical advantage in swiftly started discussions when the UDF was weakly organized and not capable of reaching common preliminary positions and strategies. The events of December in Romania and precisely the sentence by a special military tribunal and the following execution of Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife evoked fears of a similar scenario in Bulgaria. Moreover, these events coincided with the nationalist euphoria that followed the decision of the Central Committee of the BCP to restore the names of Pomaks and Turks (29 December 1989). The growing political tension from the nationalist meetings organized in large parts of the country threatened not only the party elites but also the opposition, because the restoration of the names was one of the main aspects in the activities of human rights defenders. So both main political opponents faced the necessity to overcome a wave of nationalism. It was no coincidence that one of the first topics suggested in the agenda of the Round Table was the reaching of an agreement on the national issue (Peeva 1997, 46).

The Bulgarian Round Table sat from January 3rd to May 15th 1990. It presented two basic points of view – that of the rulers and that of the nascent opposition, although other organizations also participated in the sessions – the National Front (NF), the Trade Unions, nationalist and youth organizations invited by the BCP/BSP (the Bulgarian Communist Party / later the Bulgarian Socialist Party) in order to strengthen its positions (Kalinova and others 2006, 258). With the presence of similar formations the rulers tried to save them as support for the party and at the same time wanted to overcome the creation of two opposite blocks of rulers and opposition during the negotiations (Prodanov and others 2009, 108). Despite these attempts

other organizations sat at the Round Table but as part of the ruling quota. The representatives of the opposition were not a homogeneous group either. There were two kinds of participants from the UDF: 1) representatives of the UDF as a coalition: Zhelyu Zhelev and Petko Simeonov; 2) representatives of the parties, which were part of the coalition – Petar Dertliev (the Bulgarian Socialist and Democratic Party – BSDP), Milan Drenchev (Bulgarian Agrarian National Union “Nikola Petkov”), Aleksandar Karakachanov (Green Party – GP) and others (Kolarova 1996, 196). Because of the coalitional character of the UDF at that time, its representatives often expressed their own opinions which had not been agreed upon with the official leaders. That is why we cannot judge that each speech by a member of the BCP/BBSP or the UDF delegation reflected the party’s position, because there were no preliminary consultations inside the formations for a common position on each problem.

The parties from the opposition understood full well that the Round Table would legitimize them. The very fact that they sat opposite the BCP gave them the acknowledgement that they were the political opposition. That is why the UDF was determined to resist the constant attempts of the rulers to turn the Round Table talks from two-sided into multi-sided by including different bureaucratic organizations as a third party. It is the same reason why the oppositional coalition insisted that the delegates on both sides should have a permanent staff, because of their concerns that during the Round Table the BCP would set third-class functionaries against them, with whom the leaders of the opposition would be humiliated (Simeonov 2005, 129–130).

The Round Table played a significant role in Bulgarian political life in several aspects. First, after 45 years, Bulgarians could hear for the very first time an opposition speaking thanks to live broadcasting on Bulgarian National Television (BNT) and Bulgarian National Radio (BNR). This allowed the leaders of the opposition to legitimize themselves in the eyes of society and in this way for the first time the media monopoly of the Communist Party was broken. Apart from the representatives of the opposition, the Round Table also legitimized as democrats the reformers inside the BCP/BSP. The leaders of the ruling party were in a completely different situation as they had entered into a dialogue, a state that Communists had not been in for decades. Practically the sessions at the Round Table demonstrated another kind of political life – a democratic one, in which the representatives of the BCP/BSP are a factor.

Second is the role of the Round Table as a factor in breaking the ice of fear and contributing to the people's spiritual liberation. It is very important for Bulgaria, bearing in mind that protests like those of the workers in 1954 in Poznan and other cities in Poland did not take place, nor was there a national uprising as in Hungary in October 1956, nor a "Prague Spring" as in Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968, nor periodical riots as in Poland in 1956, 1970 or 1980, when the trade union "Solidarity" appeared. (Zhelev 2005:320).

Third, the Round Table has a specific institutional place in the Bulgarian political system. After the acceptance of its status the Round Table was defined as an organ which expressed the political will of Bulgarians and guaranteed the irreversibility of the democratic process. Despite not being the result of elections but of political agreements, it obtained the status of most important governmental body by the power of the imputed obligation of the participants in it "to use their presence in the legislative and executive bodies and their social influence in order to fulfill the terms of the agreements voted with consensus" (Prodanov and others 2009: 110). Also "no law or important political decision can be taken by the government and the National Assembly without the preliminary agreement on the Round Table" (Stenograph: 6). The political monopoly of the Bulgarian Communist Party was broken by these agreements.

The Round Table in Bulgaria should not be interpreted just as conversations and consultations between the rulers and the newly formed opposition. The pressure from the street had a significant influence on the decisions at the Round Table. Not once did the opposition leave the sessions of the newly formed institution, despite disagreement with some of the rulers' demands and initiate protests for the acceptance of opposition's claims. This shows that the scheme of the Round Table was not at all restricted by its own political geometry inside the hall. It continued outside, on the streets and squares (Zhelev 2005:319). In this sense the Round Table without the street support of the people would be nothing (Zhelev 2005:319).

Agreements at the Bulgarian Round Table and Their Impact on the Constitution of 1991

The negotiations at the Round Table came to a formal end on May 15th 1990 but its influence does not end there. As we can judge for ourselves, its

meaning does not stop with the termination of the discussion around it but has an important contribution to make to the preparation of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria of 1991.

To what extent are the settings of the agreements transferred to the Constitution of 1991?

The texts in Bulgarian Constitution of 1991 are not only the fruit of the work of the Great National Assembly. The political frame of the Bulgarian project for democracy was already set during the discussions and the accepted agreements between the two parties at the Round Table. Some of the settings in the final documents of the forum are implemented almost literally in the fundamental law of 1991.

Even though some of the texts cannot be found as officially included in the political agreements, a large part of them had been discussed at the Round Table. In this sense the negotiations between rulers and opposition in the beginning of the changes had an important role for the creation of the basis of the Bulgarian project for democracy.

“The agreement on the political system” in its second part accepts “basic elements of the democratic and humane political system”. Even though today this seems absolutely logical, in the beginning of 1990 it was not clear at all. In this document the development of the Bulgarian political system as a democratic one is already established.

The frame of the democratic form of ruling is mentioned in the agreement exactly as a “national sovereignty, which is executed by a Parliament, elected by fair competitive elections.” The sovereignty can be organized directly and by a referendum in the cases and ways described in the law. “The reporting of the government before the Parliament” is almost literally set in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria of 1991 and precisely in art. 1, sec. 1: “Bulgaria shall be a republic with a parliamentary form of government”.

In “The agreement on the political system” are included also “bodies for local self-government, formed by free elections, on which is guaranteed the full autonomy within the Constitution, the order, the legitimacy and the national independence and territorial integrity of the State”, set an year later

in the fundamental law in art. 2, sec. 1: “The Republic of Bulgaria shall be an unitary State with local self-government” as well as additional guarantees for local democracy are extended in chapter 7 of the Constitution: “Local self-government and local administration”.

Entirely in the spirit of the European traditions is also the text of the agreement, which guarantees “division of the authorities in accordance with the commonly accepted standards of the parliamentary democracies and constitutional guarantees against the excessive concentration and abuse of power by individuals or institutions”, which is literally transferred as art 8 of the Constitution: “The power of the State shall be divided between legislative, executive and judicial branches”.

A main aspect of the political democracy appears also to be “the multi-party system as an expression and guarantee of natural functioning of the democratic and pluralistic political system with free competition of different political ideas and movements...” which is also guaranteed by the Constitution in the fundamental law of 1991 in art. 11, sec. 1: “Political activity in the Republic of Bulgaria shall be founded on the principle of political pluralism”.

The text stating that “the political decisions shall be taken by the competent state bodies in accordance with the majority rule with a guarantee for the minority rights...” opens the way for the development of Bulgaria following the model of liberal democracy.

The topic of property does not remain untouched – “Guaranteed equality of all forms of property before the law as an obligatory prerequisite for the natural growth of economic relationships where is excluded the possibility of forced and any other illegal acquisition or change of the character of the property in the State...”. This text unambiguously declares that during the transition to democracy and market economy the private property will be equal to any other, which is guaranteed by the Constitution in art. 17, sec. 1: “The right to property and inheritance shall be guaranteed and protected by law”.

In “The agreement on the political system”, the main framework of the Bulgarian political project for democracy is described. Nevertheless, the texts, obvious for us, this base on which the constitutional model of Bulgarian

democracy will be built, are not unimportant. At that moment of break-up the consensus reached on these topics between rulers and opposition is not insignificant.

“Agreement on basic ideas and principles of the law project for changing and amending the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria” is the greatest contribution among all documents voted on for the forming of the Bulgarian political project for democracy. In the first part, “Common principles of the political system”, 5 articles are already described, in the following order:

1. Definition of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria as a State of democracy, governed by the rule of law.
2. In the constitutional text as a basic beginning of the political system shall be included the principles of political pluralism, democracy and humanism.
3. In the constitutional text shall be proclaimed that the People’s Republic is united and inseparable as a State and it recognizes and contributes to the development of local self-government, which is defined by law.
4. There shall be implemented consistent and full de-ideologization of the constitutional texts.
5. The Bulgarian language shall be declared as official in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria.

The texts written in the agreement are found almost word for word in the new fundamental law. Art.1 is included already in the preamble to the constitution of 1991, where only the word “social” is added in accordance with the model of old European democracies. Ar. 2 and 4 form the entire spirit of the constitutional order and art.3 and 5 are set almost literally in art.2, sec. 1 and in art.3.

In the second part of the agreement, “On the economic system”, apart from establishing “free initiative and economic competition in all equal forms of property”, an accent is put on the social model which will serve the Bulgarian economic system through art.2 stating that in “conditions of a market economy the State will protect the socially weak layers of the population and unemployment shall be established in a constitutional order as one of the main secured social risks”.

The third part of the document, “On the basic rights and freedoms of the citizens”, is of specific significance, because it guarantees that the

rights and freedoms of the citizens are among the most important elements of any democratic system. Despite not being extensive and solid on this issue, this part of the agreement gives the basic guidelines and the spirit of the second chapter of the Constitution of 1991. The adopted international acts on this issue set in “The agreement on the political system” establish law mechanisms and create real conditions for the realization of the constitutional rights and freedoms of the citizens. In the part for “organization of the State authorities during the transition to parliamentary democracy”, together with texts defining the functions, tasks and time-frame of the Great National Assembly, also the powers, functions and the mandate of the Head of State are established, in the following texts:

- To personify the unity of the nation and to guarantee the sovereignty, territorial integrity, the defense and the national security of the State;
- To secure the functioning of the state organs according to the Constitution and the laws;
- To represent the State in the country and in international relations;
- To appoint a government after its program and cabinet receive the approval of the Parliament;
- To address the nation and the Parliament;
- To lead the defense and the national security of the State and to perform the functions of Commander of the Armed Forces;
- To appoint ambassadors, to accept letters of credence, to give awards and titles, as well as to grant pardons, to give citizenships and rights of shelter, to sign international contracts, to perform other representative functions;
- During the execution of his powers he/she issues decrees and decisions which do not have a legislative character;
- When the national security of the State and territorial integrity are threatened, in times of natural disasters and in cases when the functioning of the State organs is affected, in accordance with the Constitution and the laws there can be declared full or partial mobilization or a state of emergency as per a suggestion by the Council of Ministers, when the National Assembly does not sit. In these cases the National Assembly shall be gathered immediately in order to make a decision.
- May declare a state of war in the case of armed attack against the People’s Republic of Bulgaria or in the case of a necessity to execute an international obligation for mutual defense, if the National Assembly does not sit in session and cannot be gathered in order to debate on the decision;

– Cannot perform any other leading state, political, social and economic functions, cannot be a party leader and cannot be a deputy in the National Assembly.

Probably these texts seem quite familiar, because they are all set in the Bulgarian Constitution of 1991. Of course, there they are extended with many more details and with additional elements of his/her powers, but the frame for the functioning of the future Head of State is established exactly in the “Agreement on basic ideas and principles of the law project for changing and amending the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria.”

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THE POLISH PRO-INDEPENDENCE DIASPORA IN THE WEST IN THE FACE OF THE POLITICAL BREAKTHROUGH OF 1989

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze perception of political transformation in Poland in the years 1988–1990 by Polish independence émigrés in the West. It presents assumptions which guided the émigrés and indicates the objectives of their political activities. The different points of view of the reality in Poland between the independence émigrés and the national democratic opposition are explained. The article demonstrates the dilemmas of the émigré leaders arising from the peaceful transition and gradual democratization of Poland, instead of the expected break with the legacy of communism. The closing paragraphs attempt to clarify the meaning of Polish President-in-exile Ryszard Kaczorowski's symbolic transfer of authority to Lech Wałęsa, democratically elected in presidential elections in Poland.

The workers' strikes of August 1980 and the establishment of the NSZZ Solidarność [Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity"] have found their well-deserved place among the most meaningful events in the post-war history of Poland and the entire Eastern Bloc. It was not the first time in the twentieth century that the whole world turned its eyes toward Gdańsk and Warsaw. Interest among political leaders and the societies of the West accompanied Solidarity throughout this multimillion-member trade union and social movement's nine-year journey: from the August strikes in Wybrzeże (the Coastal Region), through Martial Law, to the non-violent system transformation of 1989.

The events in Poland were also followed by Polish political immigration to the West. Poles living in London or America, although deprived of direct contact with their country for a long time, still considered Polish issues a frame of reference in their public activities. Having spent decades in exile, the emigrants had to face the changes taking place in their homeland and confront them with their own hopes and their ideological and political mission.

In order to depict this confrontation, we ought to clarify, first of all, who the post-war pro-independence Polish émigré community was, and what their goals and values were.

The Indomitable Poles of London

As an outcome of World War II and the arbitrary political decisions made at the Yalta Conference, Poland fell within the Soviet sphere of influence. The shifting of the country's borders (Poland lost its eastern borderlands, including Vilnius [Wilno] and Lviv [Lwów], to the Soviet Union, and was compensated, at Germany's expense, with the "Regained Territories"), governed by communists installed by and subservient to the Soviets, was difficult for most of society to accept. The postwar reality was unacceptable for most of the civilian refugees and the soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West, who found themselves in Western Europe at the close of World War II. Their opposition to the Sovietization of Poland caused them to stay abroad and wait for changes in the international political situation. This laid the foundations of the postwar Polish diaspora in the 1940s, which was decidedly anti-communist and pro-independence.

At the time, London was the center of the Polish diaspora's political life. Since 1940, the Polish Government and the President in exile had been based there, by invitation of the British authorities. Since the Constitution of Poland, in force on 1 September, 1939 (the "April Constitution"), allowed the government of Poland to act abroad, the legal continuity of the Polish state was preserved throughout the whole of the war with Germany, fought by Polish armed forces outside Poland. Despite the Yalta agreement and the fact that the United States and United Kingdom withdrew their recognition in July 1945 and established diplomatic relations with the government in Warsaw, most Polish emigrants, including the Polish Armed Forces in the West, still under arms, recognized the authority and command of the London president and government. This fact considerably shaped

the profile of the Polish pro-independence émigré community, which took the form of a state in exile. It survived for nearly half a century as such, with a president, government, and a quasi-parliament. The “state in exile,” while rather symbolic, had to be anchored in a doctrine accepted by the émigré community as a whole. The foundation of this doctrine was, first of all, legalism and the conviction of its special importance for the émigrés’ main goals and tasks. The notion of legalism, according to the émigré theorist, should be understood as “an uninterrupted continuity of a legitimate legal order of the state when another, competing, and present legal order of another state comes to exist” (Gawenda 1959, 120). What constituted this competing and present legal order for émigré legalists in the post-war period was the internationally recognized People’s Republic of Poland. The foregoing guarantee was to be ensured by the office of President of the Republic of Poland and his Cabinet, who had the sole right and obligation to represent and act on behalf of the Polish state and nation. As such, only the President and the government were empowered to decide on peace and war, or on the issue of the country’s borders, which was especially important for the Polish emigrants from the Eastern Borderlands. Consequently, this right, according to the pro-independence émigrés, was then denied to Stalin-imposed Warsaw Government, which “Polish London” considered as subservient to the Kremlin usurpers.

Apart from defining the status of the Polish Government in Exile, legalism had two meanings for the Polish emigrants. The first pertained to the sphere of symbols and was crucial to the community which mainly founded its collective life on imponderables. In this sense, legalism was the basis for creating and cultivating a myth of the steadfast existence of the Polish State in Exile. This myth manifested itself in rituals, special celebrations of national holidays and the way the President of the Republic of Poland was worshipped (a word we use deliberately). The President was not only a political leader of the émigré community; he was the symbol of the perseverance and resistance of the Polish diaspora.

The third function, apart from the political and legal role and mythmaking, was the integration of legalism. The symbolic nature of the Polish state in exile involved the establishment of several competing political centers over a period of half a century. Despite this, the part of the émigré community which appealed to legalism, though internally at odds, remained the most significant. The presence of the president in exile in public life turned him

into a symbol of the opposition against the Soviet dominion of Poland, and a natural political leader. This perception of the head of state prevented the Polish communities abroad from disintegrating entirely. Obviously, identifying the entire pro-independence émigré community with the legalistic center would be a blatant historical falsehood. After 1945, there were groups which, for various reasons, defied legalism, but by their nature remained political émigré communities. In 1980s the Stronnictwo Narodowe [National Party] kept its distance from the legalist centers, and the editorial team of the Parisian *Kultura* was fully autonomous in its actions, focusing mainly on affecting the Polish society in Poland, rather than the émigrés. In the present article, however, in analyzing the attitudes of the Polish pro-independence émigré groups, I will focus mainly on the legalist communities, recognizing the President in Exile as the Head of State.

It could be said that the principle of legalism and the form of existence adopted by this group, as a “state in exile,” organized the thinking of émigré elites. The end of the harshest phase of the Cold War, a prolonged stay in a foreign land, and the unforeseeable prospect of the émigrés’ political mission ever coming to an end were accompanied by two advancing processes. One of these was the Polish émigrés’ gradual assimilation into the countries where they had settled; the other was the unintentional narrowing of their viewpoint to intra-émigré matters. The political elites of the émigré circles had contented themselves with partisan pushing and shoving for decades, or with quite serious political games in the émigré “parliaments,” growing increasingly distant from the interests of Poles in Poland, and less and less aware of the intricacies of Polish politics back home. It should be explained here that this is by no means a condemnation. It comes from the very nature of exile: as they were anchored in the law, politics, and symbolism of the Second Republic of Poland (1918–1939), this was quite a natural point of reference for the political émigré elites. Apart from natural generation changes, the inner circle of the Polish communities abroad, for all the time they functioned as a political diaspora, was composed almost exclusively of people who had spent their adult years, or at least their adolescence, in prewar Poland. Subconsciously then, their perception of the contemporary state was shaped by the traditions of the Second Republic. Over the years the pro-independence émigrés’ tendency to mythologize the past did not wane or vanish; on the contrary, it grew stronger with time. The émigré society was growing old, the nostalgia for their country was growing stronger, and the urge to counteract the official communist propaganda falsifying

the interwar image of Poland only intensified their idealization of the past (Lencznarowicz 2009, 400).

A lack of understanding of contemporary Poland, despite the best intentions and the desire to maintain ties with the country, manifested itself clearly on the rare occasions when the “old emigrants” made contact with people representing the new, postwar reality of Poland. Adam Michnik’s account of his meeting with Polish émigrés, when he visited London in 1970s as a young representative of the democratic opposition, is typical:

I was learning about a different Poland, one that was completely new to me. A Poland of the ‘Indomitable Poles of London.’ This Poland was alive only in [my interlocutor’s] mind, but still present as a real part of his life. A Poland of the manor houses of the Polish gentry, a Poland of the cavalry, of Pilsudski and Wieniawa, of lancers and the legend of the Polish Legions. A country of his childhood... My interlocutor was aware that Poland as he knew it no longer existed, and nothing could possibly bring it back to life. Therefore, he did not long for Warsaw, Poznań or Łódź; Wrocław and Szczecin were empty words for him; while Wilno and Nowogródek, Lwów and Stanisławów constituted an ineradicable part of his memory. He still stood before a prewar map of Poland (Michnik 1988, 78).

This reflection by one of the leaders of the emerging Polish democratic opposition conveys not only the thinking of some postwar emigrants, but also a cognitive dissonance experienced by a Pole from behind “the Iron Curtain.” This dissonance was caused by a meeting of two people who shared the same language, but actually belonged to two different worlds and two different realities – one “in Poland” and one as an emigrant. Of course, the evocation of the past did not obscure the present for all emigrants. In his article Adam Michnik refers to the Parisian *Kultura* as an example of a Polish magazine published abroad that focused on dialogue with contemporary Poland. On the whole, however, the paths of the “Vistula Poles” and those living on the Thames had diverged over time.

Problems in communication were not entirely due to psychological differences or to the conflicting identities of the Warsaw Poles and the London

Poles. The pro-independence emigrants decided to stay in the “free world,” with a sense of a political mission. The postwar émigrés called themselves the “battling emigrants” (Terlecki 1946), who, having rejected the Yalta agreement, incarnated the idea of Polish opposition against the superpowers’ dictates. Thus, the ultimate goal of the political émigré community was not to encourage Polish domestic policy to head toward democratic reform and to free the country from Soviet dominance, but to overrule the Yalta decisions and to restore an independent Poland. An exile columnist wrote: “Ideologically and politically, the émigré community must remain faithful to the doctrine in its purest form. The doctrine for which they left country in 1939 to fight for freedom, territorial integrity, and the independence of Poland.” (Günther 1946).

The “Thaw” after Stalin’s death and the end of the Stalinist terror brought little change to the exile leaders’ perception of the country. It was still a maximalist approach. An undisputed émigré frontrunner, General Władysław Anders, said to the veterans in 1956: “We will never accept a compromise with the occupant. We shall stay true to our program of fighting for a unified and independent country, with Lwów and Wilno in the east and the Regained Territories in the west” (Orzel Bialy 1956). An interesting sketch by Jan Maciejewski and Krzysztof Mazur points out that “this sort of absolutism in the sphere of symbols, the praise of ideological purity and aversion to political ambiguity” was bringing the pro-independence exile community closer to an Icarus approach. This was in the extreme idealization of their political problem: the Polish exile Icarus flew closer to the ideal, melting his wings which kept him in contact with reality (Maciejewski 2002, 16–27).

The “indomitable Poles of London” had to match their viewpoint with those of the students who protested in 1968 (represented by Adam Michnik, quoted above), or those of workers who fought for their rights during various “Polish months.” For the latter, especially the generation born after World War II, the People’s Republic of Poland was their homeland, albeit one riddled with evil and injustice, governed by tyrants who suppressed student gatherings and gave orders to open fire on workers. Although there were groups and communities with pro-independence programs throughout the communist era, none of the irredentist movements – apart from the anti-communist armed resistance groups of 1940s – in postwar Poland was on a mass scale. Even the KPN [Confederation of Independent Poland],

an organization of an openly pro-independent character established in the 1970s, was perceived by many democratic opposition leaders as extreme and fundamentalist. To say nothing of the government in exile, functioning abroad for dozens of years, which rejected the Polish reality on principle.

Solidarity and Martial Law

Most émigré leaders were well aware of the discrepancies between the programs of the pro-independence émigré communities and the emerging democratic opposition, which became plainly evident after Solidarity was established. Though they generally sympathized with the Polish workers who decided to rebel, the exile leaders surely realized that the road to independence would be very long. After years spent in foreign lands and a great many disappointments the emigrants were rather skeptical about the international situation, which they saw as a pivotal factor in the potential for profound system changes in Poland, and which, at the same time, they saw as deeply saturated (too deeply, in fact) with the spirit of *détente*. Some émigré leaders believed that the emergence of Solidarity had the potential to change international politics; on the other hand – mindful of the experiences of Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1956 and 1968, respectively – they warned the union against escalating radicalism and provoking Soviet intervention (Friszke 1999, 435).

It should be emphasized that the emigrants, still true to their goals, remained exceptionally tactful with the Polish movement, refraining from imposing their point of view on Solidarity leaders. From 1980–1981 the political émigré community tried to perform a merely ancillary function, providing information, material aid, and political initiatives on the international scene, and did not attempt, with a few exceptions, to interfere with the Solidarity camp tactics or support particular Polish opposition groups. We should note that the scale of the workers' protests and the scope of concessions they gained from the ruling communist party astonished the émigré communities, who were quite unprepared for a scenario of this sort.

Martial Law was imposed in Poland on 13 December, 1981, radically changing the emigrants' perception of the changes occurring there. In spite of advance warning signals, General Jaruzelski's *coup d'état* was a major surprise for the émigré groups, and, at the same time, pointed the way for further activities. Referring to the developments in Poland, Prime Minister-in-Exile Kazimierz Sabbat said: "The émigré community is now the only spokesman

for the will and stance of the country in the free world. Again.” (Machcewicz 1999, 235).

After 13 December, 1981, most of the pro-independence emigrants’ activities focused on humanitarian aid, speaking at international forums for civic freedoms in Poland, and organizing the lives of new emigrants. The mainstream émigré community sympathized with underground resistance in Poland, tried to provide them with any aid they needed, and acted as their advocates in the countries of the free world. The mere existence of the underground Solidarity, often drawing from independence rhetoric and defying the political system in Poland, served to give meaning to their mission. Some significance should also be attached to advances toward the exile circles made by a few opposition leaders, e.g. Leszek Moczulski, the leader of KPN, who recognized the authority of the President in Exile in his official statement in London. The importance of this event, together with the awareness that there were clearly anti-communist forces in Poland, overshadowed other, often negative experiences of “old emigrants” with young and impetuous Solidarity fighters. The old émigré circles also merged to a very limited degree with the new ones that came to the fore under Martial Law (Friszke 1999, 458–459).

To summarize, it can be said that, in the 1980s, the perception of the émigré society resembled, to some degree, that of the late 1940s and early 1950s. With its military oppression, organized underground resistance, and repressive apparatus, the country still validated the existence of the Polish political émigré community and, to a great extent, defined its role. Internationalizing Polish affairs, on the other hand, in the form of restrictions imposed by Western countries after 13 December, confirmed the old émigré thesis that the fundamental priority was to change the politics of the West and abolish the Cold War order. It was no coincidence then, that one of the most important dates commemorated by émigré circles in the 1980s was the fortieth anniversary of the Yalta Conference (London celebrated “Yalta Week,” co-organized by Central and Eastern Europe emigrants). The pro-independence émigré community’s first and foremost task remained the overthrow of the Yalta agreement and its consequences (Tarka 2003, 259–260).

The Round Table

Initially, the émigré community did not attach much weight to either Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms or the attempts made by General Jaruzelski’s

government to open a dialogue with the opposition; however, the swift events of the summer and the fall of 1988 did echo in "Polish London." When, at the end of August of 1988, the government proposed a dialogue with the opposition and the initially vague idea of a "round table," the expatriate community received it with skepticism. While not rejecting the idea of discussion with the communists on principle, they expressed two major reservations. First, the experience of the 1980–1981 period, combined with a conviction of inalterability of the regime, made them look upon the ruling party's gestures with the greatest suspicion, and without faith in their good intentions. Expressing his profound mistrust, President-in-Exile Kazimierz Sabbat warned: "The communist party will not relinquish its power, its absolute power, as this would mean its self-destruction. The party will not adhere to any treaties. All arrangements are only a maneuver in a moment of weakness." (*Dziennik Ustaw RP* 1989 No. 1 – Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland /in-exile/). Secondly, a dialogue between the troubled ruling party and part of the democratic opposition risked the incorporation of this part of the democratic resistance into the apparatus of the current system, consequently delaying interminably the prospect of restoring genuine independence. This would have been a devastating blow to the ideas represented by the pro-independence expatriates. Nor should it be neglected that the London émigré community maintained a much warmer relationship with those opposition leaders, who – like the aforementioned Leszek Moczulski or Kornel Morawiecki of the Fighting Solidarity – belonged to a group that strongly opposed any negotiations with the communists. Quite naturally, their standpoints and tough stance toward the communists were closer to London's outlook than the apparently conciliatory attitude of the group gathered around the Solidarity leader, Lech Wałęsa.

While no formal statements were made by the London expatriate officials openly criticizing Wałęsa and his camp (including the closest aides: Adam Michnik, Bronisław Geremek, or Tadeusz Mazowiecki), it was frequently emphasized that they did not represent the whole of the opposition. "Back home in our country not everybody is involved in the talks. Those who do are dubbed the 'constructive opposition,' ready to participate in the elections, which in fact will not be elections. But there is a growing group of activists in Poland, pro-independence assemblies, whose goal is that of the 'indomitable' Poles of London and other expatriate towns and cities: a truly independent and free Poland," said President Sabbat on 1 April, 1989 (*Dziennik Ustaw RP* 1989 No. 2).

Considering the above, it would be fair to say that, in late 1988 and early 1989, the émigrés' satisfaction with the increasingly visible decay of the regime was mixed with openly expressed doubts about the role of the Polish opposition in the process of the system transformation. "Polish London" read the idea of the Round Table and the acceptance of Solidarity members as power-sharing partners as a government bluff. It is worth mentioning that this skepticism about the negotiations between the regime and the opposition was shared by the legalist circle in London and *Kultura* in Paris, who were traditionally more flexible and prone to dialogue. On the other hand, among the few who supported the tactic of negotiating with the communist rule was a long-standing head of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański (Friszke 1999, 465–467).

The Round Table talks, which included government officials, some opposition members, and observers representing the Catholic Church, were held between 6 February and 5 April 1989. The most important points to be negotiated were: the government's consent to relegalize Solidarity, the organization of a semi-free parliamentary election in which non-partisan candidates (including Solidarity ones) could run for thirty-five per cent of seats in the Sejm (the lower chamber); a fully free election to a newly-created upper chamber of the parliament (the Senate), and the restitution of the office of the President of Poland.

The official stand of the legalist circle on this momentous event was drawn up during the meeting of members of the London government and the representatives of political parties in exile, called by President-in-Exile Kazimierz Sabbat on 5 April, 1989. They did not discard the significance of the talks on principle, and some positive effects were mentioned, like the government concessions, but on the whole, a deep pessimism about the Round Table agreement dominated the statement. It was pointed out, not without cause, that the right of the opposition to run for seats in the parliament was counterbalanced by reinstating the office of President, who was to be endowed with nearly dictatorial powers. The majority of émigré leaders saw the agreement as a device to prop up the shaky system, rather than to provide for real system transformation (Friszke 1999, 469–470).

Admittedly, the leaders of the expatriate community did not call for a boycott of the election (though the Government in Exile did call upon the émigrés

not to vote, which almost amounted to the same thing), but, characteristically, they stressed it was non-democratic and that there was risk of ballot rigging. The Government in Exile on the one hand admitted that the electoral success of Solidarity candidates would be in the nation's interest, but on the other, they sympathized with the part of the Polish opposition who decided to boycott the election (*Dziennik Ustaw RP* 1989 No. 4).

The result of the parliamentary elections of 4 June, 1989 (the second round was held on 18 June) and the landslide victory of the Solidarity candidates, who took nearly one hundred per cent of the free seats in both chambers, is often considered a symbolic date in the history of Poland. The symbolic significance of the date is not connected with the end of communism as such, but as the most important event in the whole process of political transformation of 1988–1990. Obviously, this point of view was unacceptable for the pro-independence expatriates, and for the legalist group in particular. This group had never hoped that the government in exile would one day return to Warsaw to rule the country. The émigré community had been ready to accept a free decision made in Poland since the end of World War II. What the “Polish London” hoped for was the President of the Government to have the chance to go to the free country and present their insignia of the office to democratically elected authorities. Regulated, quasi-free elections, communist-controlled administration, military, and police forces bore no resemblance to democratic representation. Consequently, this façade of democracy (the “contractual” Sejm was perceived as such) blurred the line between communist regime and independent state. This sort of “soft transformation,” incorporating the opposition into the intact apparatus of oppression, was exactly what the émigrés feared most.

Anxiety about the future course of events predominated the presidential circle leaders' addresses after the results were announced. The political elites focused on the elections as a sort of referendum. The results were to be seen as a mass disapproval of the current authority, expressed by the whole society. At the same time, the seats held in parliament by numerous significant representatives of the opposition could, as President Sabbat pointed out, result in the neutralization of Solidarity within the communist power apparatus. One ominous harbinger of this direction was the election of General Wojciech Jaruzelski as President, which was announced as a stage in the execution of the Round Table agreement (*Dziennik Ustaw RP* 1989 No. 4).

One of the most pessimistic evaluations of the situation in Poland was expressed by Prime-Minister-in-Exile Edward Szczepanik during the inaugural sitting of the seventh tenure of the National Council, held on 4 July, 1989 (Turkowski 2002, 83). Choosing this date for the opening of a new term of this semi-parliamentary body, whose members were in part elected, in part appointed by the representation of Polish émigré community, was a clear signal that the expatriates had not yet accomplished their mission and, in fact, were still far from it. In a resolution of 10 June, 1989 the National Council confirmed this point of view, stating that the primary goal of the émigré community, and now the opposition circles in Poland as well, should be to abolish the Yalta Agreement and to restore a fully independent Poland (Dziennik Ustaw RP 1989 No. 4).

On 19 July, 1989, the Sejm of the People's Republic of Poland, with some opposition deputies voting in favor, elected as president Wojciech Jaruzelski, the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party. On the same day, the President in Exile, Kazimierz Sabbat, died in London of a sudden heart attack. The symbolism of these two events could not possibly be more vivid, as the tragedy of an individual and a generation. After Kazimierz Sabbat was officially pronounced dead, Ryszard Kaczorowski was sworn into office on the same day in the President's headquarter at 43 Eaton Place. In spite of the changes underway in Poland, the expatriate society stayed as alert as half a century before (Górecki 2002, 238).

Mission Accomplished

While upholding its political stance, the pro-independence émigré community could not neglect the changes in Poland, especially as they started to diverge more and more from the pessimistic forecasts formulated during and immediately after the Round Table talks. The growing unrest in the communist camp, comprised of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's coalition government, made the decay of the old system all too clear and discredited the theory that this was a trap set by the ruling party. When one of the opposition leaders assumed the position of Prime Minister, this was generally warmly welcomed in "Polish London." Both the legalists and their opponents, the National Party, expressed their satisfaction. It might be said that the pessimistic attitude was giving way to expectations for more rapid political change in Poland (Cichocka 2012, 76).

The pro-independence diaspora spelled out their stance, expectations, and forecasts for further developments during the Third Worldwide Free Poles'

Congress, held in London on 15–16 September, 1989. Apart from the representatives of the pro-independence community, it was attended by delegates representing various organizations and political parties from Poland, including Solidarity, Solidarity of Individual Farmers, the NZS [Independent Students' Union], and the Confederation of Independent Poland. The Congress referred to the situation in Poland and defined the position of the pro-independence emigration community against the backdrop of the current events in the country. In the final declaration it was emphasized that, despite the positive developments in Poland, the system remained communist and externally imposed. The émigré community appreciated the political achievements of Solidarity, stressing that further support would be conditioned by Solidarity's commitment to the further "eradication of Sovietism" in Poland. This clause echoed previously expressed fears that the reforms that had started only a few months before would come to a halt. The Congress, having spelled out their approval for Mazowiecki's team, stressed that they "in particular supported" the "independent opposition," that is, the extra-parliamentary wing of the opposition camp, including the KPN [Confederation of Independent Poland] and "Fighting Solidarity" (Rynkiewicz 1996, 589–591).

During this congress, there was a discussion on the conditions by which the émigré authorities' mission could be considered complete. With reference to this issue, Prime Minister Edward Szczepanik stressed that *conditio sine qua non* was free parliamentary elections in Poland. According to Szczepanik, these could be held when the USSR abandoned the Brezhnev doctrine and all the political forces in Poland were given equal chance to run for parliament. Interestingly enough, Szczepanik estimated it would take dissident underground groups a couple of years to emerge from hiding. Szczepanik's final condition was the initiation of economic reform (Szczepanik 1995, 8–10).

Curiously, while presenting an electoral ultimatum, the issue of national independence, Szczepanik was relatively soft on the other diaspora flagship: Poland's territorial integrity. The Prime Minister in Exile voiced his hopes that Krzysztof Skubiszewski, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Mazowiecki's government, would address the issue of reversing the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the Yalta Agreement, consequently restoring the 1921 Treaty of Riga and the Polish-Soviet borders it established. This statement was much milder than an earlier address in the National Council, in which the issue

of reestablishing the 1921 eastern borders was among the most inflexible demands (Habielski 1999, 475–476).

In fact, however, these comments diverged dramatically from the foreign policy of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government. Minister Skubiszewski had no intention of raising the question of the eastern border, and in 1990 he stated explicitly that Poland would lay no territorial claims against any of its neighbor states. This official stance of the Polish minister caused some friction in London – the Government in Exile had never officially renounced the right to the Eastern Borderland, reserving this right for the parliament – but no immediate negative response was forthcoming (Tarka 2003, 265). It seemed as if the border issue, so important immediately after World War II, was now only theoretical, and treated halfheartedly by the political émigré community in London.

As a condition for ending the expatriate political mission, free parliamentary elections were also included in the National Council resolution of 2 December, 1989. Hopes were expressed that the newly-elected free Sejm and Senate would be a Constituent Assembly (Dziennik Ustaw 1989 No. 6). The émigré leaders realized, of course, that it would be unrealistic to expect a restoration of the constitution of 1935, though the exile structures had been based on this constitution since 1939. However, they hoped at least to ensure a kind of symbolic continuity of the state, to avoid a situation where the émigré authorities would return the insignia of the office to representatives of Polish officials functioning on the basis of the Stalinist constitution, albeit modified. On 29 December, 1989 the Sejm of the People's Republic of Poland passed amendments to the constitution, changing the official name of the country to the Republic of Poland [*Rzeczpospolita Polska*]. February 1990 saw the restoration of the prewar coat of arms, a crowned white eagle. In the first months of 1990 the remnants of the previous system swiftly disappeared. The institution of local governments was restored, and the Security Service [*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*] disbanded. Even if the Round Table agreement seemed to function directly after General Jaruzelski was elected President, after a few months Poland's thorough transformation was an undeniable fact.

The pro-independence émigré community welcomed the changes with deep satisfaction, and, it is worth emphasizing, with genuine realism, given that the changes did not always match their expectations. The non-violent

transformation and smooth transition from the communist era to democratic reality precluded proclamations of non-continuity between the PRL and the Third RP, which meant that the emigrants' legalism could only be recognized in symbolic way. This also meant resigning from territorial claims in the East, rejecting the April Constitution (though in April President-in-Exile Ryszard Kaczorowski was still calling for its restitution), and abandoning the idea of a one-time act, albeit symbolic, that would signify breaking with the tradition of the People's Republic of Poland. Changes in the name of the country and modifying its coat of arms could not be recognized as acts of this nature, since the office of President was held by the General, who had stood behind Martial Law.

Nevertheless, the émigré community accepted this reality. Although the idea of *restitutio ad integrum* (i.e. declaring the entire legal heritage of PRL void) was still alive in late 1989 and early 1990, given the political environment of the time, this solution was pure fiction. Jerzy Jan Zaleski, a minister in several governments in exile, admitted that demanding *restitutio ad integrum*, which he himself advocated, was wishful thinking on the part of the epigones of the Second Republic of Poland. It seems that most pro-independence emigration leaders were aware that this extreme understanding of legalism could only come about if the communist rule was overthrown, but not when a non-violent transformation was underway (Zaleski 1995, 195).

In the first months of 1990, in the legalist circle of the Polish pro-independence émigré society, there was little controversy in assessing the events in Poland. The only reasonable conclusion could be to end the fifty-year mission. It was irrelevant to continue the activities of the authorities in exile with the process of democratization underway in Poland, and the Brezhnev doctrine, which had restrained Polish independence, practically invalid. To continue the mission when Poland was regaining the attributes of an independent state would pose the risk of being completely incomprehensible to Polish citizens both in Poland and abroad. The only question was how to choose an appropriate moment to close the mission and make a symbolic return.

In March 1990, Prime-Minister-in-Exile Edward Szczepanik presented two possible scenarios for concluding the political mission in exile. The first, mentioned mainly *pro forma* to appeal to the émigré community, assumed

the *restitutio ad integrum* option, reinstating the Constitution of 1935 and organizing parliamentary elections based on its provisions (incidentally, the April Constitution contained clauses which were far from democratic). The other scenario was free parliamentary elections, based on the existing election statute and other regulations, a new constitution passed by both chambers, electing a President, and the President in Exile handing over the insignia of office. The second scenario basically coincided with the general statements of the émigré community from the preceding months, and seemed more probable. In early 1990, however, the path to its implementation seemed rather long. General Jaruzelski was still in office, hopes for dissolving the “Contractual Sejm” appeared faint, and changing the constitution rather unlikely (*Przekazanie insygniów* 2000, 37–39).

One more important issue had to be addressed: official contacts with Polish authorities. Although the legalist circles maintained close contacts with various opposition communities (especially close with those who recognized the authority of the émigré political structures) in “Polish London” in the latter half of the 1980s, there was a forty-five-year tradition of disregarding and boycotting official representatives of the PRL. After the government led by Tadeusz Mazowiecki was established, the situation became equivocal. On the one hand, Mazowiecki enjoyed popularity among the émigré leaders; on the other, they could not help treating him as a representative of the communist state. This reserve in contacts with “Polish London” was visible on both ends. As such, during the first visit of the Polish Prime Minister to London from 26–27 February, 1990, an official meeting between the authorities in exile and Tadeusz Mazowiecki was not held. But the political situation in the first half of 1990 presented no formal obstacles to strengthening relations. All the more so, that the émigré community did not want to be a passive bystander to the events in Poland. On 11 May, 1990 Aleksander Hall, a member of Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government paid a visit to President Kaczorowski. This marked the beginning of formal relations between the Polish officials and the pro-independence émigré community (Friszke 1999, 479–480).

In the summer of 1990 it turned out that the scenario to conclude the émigré mission, developed a few months earlier, failed to match up to reality. Under pressure from the right wing, General Jaruzelski decided to resign from office; this was confirmed by a resolution in the Sejm. Thus, the expected order of elections was reversed: instead of parliamentary elections

and a change of the constitution, a free presidential election was to be held first. Moreover, the presidential election was to be universal for the first time in Polish history. This fact was important for the emigration legalists, as the National Assembly still consisted of the deputies and senators who, some twelve months earlier, had taken an oath of allegiance to the People's Republic of Poland.

The Polish authorities in exile faced a historic decision about handing over the office of the President in Exile to the President of Poland to be elected in free, democratic elections, before they were held. The pivotal question was, as President Ryszard Kaczorowski rightly pointed out, whether a newly elected president would take the office from the successor to the prewar tradition of free Poland, or from the communist apparatchik, the man behind Martial Law of 1981. In spite of complaints from some émigré politicians, who lamented the fact that the government in exile would conclude its mission while Poland was still waiting for democratic parliamentary elections, hopes for the former option prevailed. On 12 October, 1990 President Kaczorowski announced his intention to hand over his office to the President of Poland, chosen in a universal and democratic election (Turkowski 2002, 91–93).

On 9 December, 1990, in the run-off, Lech Wałęsa, the Solidarity leader, was elected President of Poland. Having arranged the details for the transfer of the insignia of presidential power, Ryszard Kaczorowski arrived in Warsaw on 22 December, 1990, on board a government plane, received with all the honors due to a head of state. On the same day, at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, there was a ceremony where the presidential insignia were handed over to Lech Wałęsa (Górecki 2002, 250–254).

The day before, in a special address, Ryszard Kaczorowski explained:

Giving over the office of the President of the Republic of Poland to Lech Wałęsa tomorrow at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, and passing the insignia of this office, I entrust him with the whole, independent, free, democratic and just Poland, for which the soldiers of September 1939, soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West and the brave Home Army, fought in the past. To them, above all, I pay my tribute today. I shall entrust President Lech Wałęsa with care over the

pro-independence émigré community, which completed its mission by prudently preserving the idea of an Independent Poland. It did not manage to reach all of its political goals. The political parties created in the free country shall take over its mission. (Suchcitz 1997, 678).

In the Realm of Symbols

The ceremony held on 22 December, 1990 can be summarized in one sentence: the pro-independence émigré community completed its mission with its head held high. With his decision to accept the insignia of the office from Ryszard Kaczorowski, the President-elect confirmed that the Third Republic of Poland was the successor to prewar Poland. I believe, however, that his general statement should be supplemented by a deeper reflection on the actual meaning of the symbolic transfer of the office from the head of the state-in-exile to the President of the nation. I can say without hesitation that on that day, at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, two Polands met. One, for fifty years on foreign soil, took pride in their tattered flags, and the other one, whose founding myth originated in recent events, in the rebellion of young Polish workers. Two Polands, two generations, two historical experiences, far apart.

The celebration at the Royal Castle had no legal or constitutional significance. During the political transformation in Poland, no one had seriously questioned the legal continuity between the People's Republic of Poland and the Third Republic of Poland. Regardless of the wishes of the émigrés, who would have been more than happy to erase the PRL period from the nation's history textbooks, undermining this continuity was inconceivable. Obviously, this did not preclude the existence of another succession: between the Polish state-in-exile and the Third Republic. In this case, however, we are talking about two fundamentally different entities, out of which only one – the successor – met the criteria of statehood. According to international legal regulations, the Polish state-in-exile failed to meet these criteria. Its organs and institutions, anchored in prewar traditions, exclusively served the pro-independent émigré community. So the émigrés' Poland with its President, parliament and government constituted a kind of alternative statehood for the reality in postwar Poland. Its statehood, however, was more of a symbolic nature, recognized only by those who consented to it.

Therefore, the transfer of the insignia of office was largely symbolic as well. At the same time, it should be mentioned that it was the émigré society who needed the symbolism of 1989 more than the citizens in Poland. The émigrés expected recognition for their fifty-year mission in an extremely hostile environment, with dim chances for success, but with the deep conviction that their path was morally and historically right. The victorious Solidarity less needed legitimization from the pro-independence émigré community. Some leaders of the political elites did not entirely treat them seriously.

This state of affairs should not, however, be attributed to the ill will of local politicians. It was more because of Poland's unusual path from communism, which determined the place of the pro-independence diaspora in this process. In the atmosphere of "national reconciliation," it was pushed into the background.

For the same reason, the Round Table became the symbol of the transformation (including the informal meetings of the communist dignitaries and Solidarity leaders in Magdalenka, whose celebratory pictures were later revealed), rather than the ceremony with Wałęsa and Kaczorowski. The émigrés could not ignore this fact, and it is unsurprising that they felt disappointment, which only became more profound in light of the two consecutive victories of the post-communist left: the parliamentary elections in 1993 and the presidential elections won by Aleksander Kwaśniewski in 1995.

On the whole, however, historical justice had been served to the pro-independence émigré community. It could be said that both the Round Table (accepted by at least some of the post-communist camp and the Solidarity elites as a model of "wise agreement over political differences") and the heritage of Solidarity have become the founding myths of the Third Republic of Poland. This was still insufficient. The collective identity of Poles and the sense of historical continuity called for other references, legends, myths, and paradigms. The prewar period, the time of the Second World War, and early post-war years were explored in seeking them. The figure of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the martyrdom of the Polish officers in Katyń, the heroic story of the Warsaw Uprising, and the tragic fate of anticommunist "cursed soldiers" were all evoked.

The Institute of National Remembrance was established from this attitude and to promote national heritage; research on little-known aspects of Polish history (such as the anticommunist armed resistance) was also initiated. There were also attempts to consciously shape the politics of memory. Opened in 2004, the Warsaw Uprising Museum might serve as a good example of this tendency.

Mythologizing the Second Republic of Poland made the society start to notice the heritage of the pro-independence émigré community. The last president in exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski, became widely known; moreover, he was recognized as a symbol of the link between contemporary and historical Poland. His tragic death in the plane crash in 2010 near the Smolensk airport had all the hallmarks of a symbol: the last leader of the Polish diaspora flew together with the President Lech Kaczyński to Katyn to pay homage to officers of the Second RP, murdered on Stalin's order in 1940. To some extent, it can be said that Kaczorowski's death was the closing episode of the Polish pro-independence diaspora's mission.

It seems that only now, twenty-five years after the political transformation, we can grasp the meaning of the pro-independence émigré community at that time. Handing over the insignia of the office to the President Lech Wałęsa built a historical continuity between the second and the third republics of Poland. Even if in the late 1980s and the early 1990s the need for this continuity was not clear to all, it is now considered to be a substantial contribution to the Polish historical identity.

Handing over the office to Lech Wałęsa, Ryszard Kaczorowski legitimized not only the Third Republic of Poland, but also the "Polish road to freedom." This road, in the eyes of the stolid Polish émigrés, was far from perfect, marked with half measures and compromises. Yet, as the process of democratic transformation progressed, both sides symbolically recognized that it led to establishing a free, independent Poland – a country which draws upon both the history and achievements of Solidarity and of "the indomitable Poles of London," filled with sacrifice and self-denial.

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RELATIONS BETWEEN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND THE PEOPLES' REPUBLIC OF POLAND IN VIEW OF THE POLITICAL CHANGES AT THE END OF THE 1980S

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the political relations between Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany at the end of the 1980s branded by the tumultuous events which took place in Poland at that time. These events included, among other things, amnesty for political prisoners, the Round Table talks between Solidarity and the authorities as well as the establishment of democratic government – a novelty in Poland and in the countries of the Eastern Bloc since World War II. New archive documents shine a fresh light on the negotiations between the two countries concerning a series of economic, political, ethnical and cultural topics, and depict the changes of underlying political conditions in Poland. This paper seeks to analyze the intentions and the bilateral engagement of the negotiating parties, in particular, Helmut Kohl and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, on the background of the radical changes of 1989.

In the beginning of the 1980s, despite the American sanction policy and the “cold times” in relations between global superpowers, Polish relations with the Federal Republic of Germany were kept safe from severe damage. Bonn proved to have been far from ready to subordinate its trade interest and relaxing policy to a tightly construed alliance solidarity with the US. The relation of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Peoples' Republic of Poland differed in several aspects from Warsaw's relations with other Western countries. Contrary to the US and Great Britain, Bonn restrained itself from criticism against the introduction of martial law in Poland on 13 December, 1981 and rejected both trade and industry sanctions towards this

economically wounded land between the Oder and Bug rivers, considering it a punitive and controversial instrument regarding its actual effectiveness. With three quarters of Poland's debt, the Federal Republic could count itself as by far the greatest creditor in the "West" among the countries of the "Paris Club."¹ The requirement of genuine economic reforms enabling Poland to repay its debts in the medium term was one of the constant postulates in the Eastern policy of Helmut Kohl's government.

The relations, as measured by the expectations of both parties, reached a period of stagnation after the repealing of martial law in the summer of 1983. Warsaw hoped for close economic cooperation mostly through granting high unbound loans. Bonn was basically prepared to support Poland, yet – after the experience of the rampant loan policy of the 70s – demanded improved economic framework conditions, which in practice meant the implementation of economic reforms and real prospects for the repayment of open credits.²

Apart from the economic fixation of Poland on the Federal Republic of Germany, the variety of bilateral contacts constituted yet another unique characteristic of their relations – Poland was visited by both the parties represented in the German Bundestag and the representatives of federal states. They had often specific contact persons to turn to and adjusted their own Polish policy agendas accordingly. The special character of those relations originated also from the past events of World War II – not only from the approach to the formerly Eastern German territories, now belonging to Poland, but also from the German specificity as a two-state country and the question of its reunification. Although the Federal Republic had no common border with Poland, as opposed to the GDR, the question of the border on the Oder and Neisse rivers became an unexpectedly current issue in the relations between Eastern Germany and Poland in the late 1980s.

According to many Christian Democrats, complete peace rested not only on external peace, but was also based on a "stable blueprint for long-lasting peace in Europe, which would return personal, unionistic and political human rights to our Eastern neighbours."³ This standpoint expressed by Alois Mertes, the parliament's Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was an essential prerequisite to link the German and Polish questions and to seek communication with Solidarity representatives. On 30 June 1983, Artur Hajnicz, a journalist and Mazowiecki's confidant, came to Bonn to

have a long conversation with Mertes and to meet the Federal Chancellor. Apart from Poland's internal political situation, the host was particularly interested in the opinion of the opposition on the German question. The message provided by Hajnicz was short and precise: Solidarity supports the reunification in the first place, but also the unconditional recognition of the Oder-Neisse border. The major part of the Polish opposition advocated for the aim of German unity within the borders of both German states.⁴

Soon after Mikhail Gorbachev appeared on the political stage, these issues gained unsuspected momentum. According to Dieter Bingen, the Jaruzelski Team soon realized "that Gorbachev's European offensive threatens the status quo, which means that the communist German policy could reach an impasse in no time. Gorbachev's idea of a common home could hardly be harmonized with the Polish defensive status quo orientation. What by now seemed to be a closed German chapter for the communist regime remained an open issue for the oppositional groups in Poland which, from the perspective of Polish national interest, still had to be solved. The leaders of the Polish opposition represented a combination of bold and realistic reasoning, thus supporting the German federal considerations on the European and German unification process, beholding no threat for the Polish state."⁵

The policy towards Poland presented by the Christian-liberal federal government under Helmut Kohl's leadership was characterized in the 1980s by the actual continuation of Willy Brandt's Eastern policy and, on the other hand, by the emphasis on the legal position concerning the former German territories across the Oder-Neisse border. Under international law, these areas still belonged to Germany as long as there were no regulations provided in a peace treaty with the Big Four. This split was supposed to politically bind the right wing of the Union parties including the expelled Germans. Helmut Kohl felt obliged not only by the content of the Treaty of Warsaw 1970. Also Genscher, backed by Kohl during his meetings with Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marian Orzechowski, President of the State Council, Wojciech Jaruzelski and the assistant Marshall of the Polish Sejm, Mieczysław Rakowski, solicited for trust and encouraged the Polish government to pursue economic reforms and take pragmatic approach towards the German minority. The simultaneous attention dedicated to the group of actively operating expelled Germans was politically transparent and troublesome in terms of the atmosphere of bilateral relations, yet, at no moment did it change the operative foreign policy. Contrary to social

democrats, right-wing politicians gave more attention to the Polish opposition and some of their mentors were unanimous with the Solidarity standpoint that there is a need to strive for German unity within a European peace order. That aim, together with the linkage with the Western Europe democracies, would help Poland to free itself from the strategic predicament between Germany and the Soviet Union.⁶

Eventually, the liberal and Christian democrats were even more unsuccessful in their policy towards Poland than the social-democratic governments a decade previously. This situation was caused not only by the stiff attitude of Jaruzelski's team. The Polish demand for new loans was opposed to the federal German wish to open consular offices in Cracow and Wroclaw (Breslau), and to establish a German Cultural Institute in Warsaw. Poland objected to the proposal of Breslau as regards the name and place for the consular office. Finally, the establishment of a German Cultural Institute failed due to the objection of the GDR, which maintained its own Cultural Institute in Warsaw and sought to avoid a more attractive competition. The recognition of the German minority in Upper-Silesia and the compensations for Nazi forced labourers were considered a particularly tender spot in bilateral relations.⁷

After his triumph in the elections to the German Bundestag in 1987, the re-elected Chancellor Kohl assured that he would revive relations with Poland and make it a priority of his third term. This declaration was insofar interesting as the relations between Western Germany and Poland had remained in stagnation since the beginning of 1980s, even though the Federal Republic had adopted a softer approach towards Jaruzelski's team than towards the US and Great Britain. The Christian-liberal government exercised a pragmatic attitude towards bilateral problem solving. The Polish side, however, interpreted the diplomatic standstill as a lack of goodwill. Several delays of the long planned visit of Hans-Dietrich Genscher had repeatedly given the Polish government a reason for such an assumption.⁸

The amnesty for Polish prisoners announced in autumn 1986 and the removal of economic sanctions by the Reagan administration in 1987 opened new options to the federal German parties for the design of Eastern policy. Social democrats still maintained regular contacts with the Polish opposition, which could also be accounted for by the fact that Willy Brandt was replaced by Hans-Jochen Vogel in the chairmanship of the party.⁹ Henceforth, the

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Genscher, wanted to combine his official visit in Poland with a meeting with the representatives of Solidarity, yet the Polish regime declined.

Both parties had great expectations towards the official visit of the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, in Poland, which took place on 10–13 January 1988. Warsaw hoped for economic support whereas Bonn was planning to open a new chapter of bilateral relations. The two neighbouring countries established three working teams: for Disarmament and Policy, for Economy and for the remaining bilateral issues, which was deemed a true achievement.¹⁰

However, the conversation between Genscher and Jaruzelski was not really calculated to open a new phase in the relations between Western Germany and Poland – the dissensions were too significant. Jaruzelski was interpreting the tense relations in his own manner. He reproached the Federal Republic for its participation in the NATO sanctions against Poland in January 1982. He claimed that it was the reason why the Polish national economy suffered a 14-billion-dollar loss and urged that it was time for the federal government to draw on the good relations from the 1970s as if it was the Federal Republic's obligation towards Poland. Finally, Jaruzelski took exception to the coverage of the Polish visit on the German World Service (Deutschlandfunk) radio calling it biased and criticized the meeting between Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Lech Wałęsa. For years, Polish authorities had been trying to present Lech Wałęsa as an externally manipulated or politically insignificant private person and isolate him. Genscher dismissed the accusations explaining the cause and effect as well as the reference to the freedom of press, and did not let anyone dissuade him from the meeting with the former chairman of the Solidarity trade union.

Although the leaders of the Polish United Workers' Party still disapproved of this kind of meeting, they were unable to prevent them. An internal paper issued by the Party in February 1988 concerning the meeting of Western politicians with Polish oppositionists measured out the pros and cons of the meeting practice. The expansion of contacts with the West strengthened Poland's international position: it could present itself as a tolerant country which, owing to its stability, was even able to afford a legal opposition. On the other hand, the opposition was "strengthened and stimulated in its destructive, anti-constitutional actions". Hence the official policy became

“preposterous”, “exposing the internal strife” of numerous Poles. The authors of the paper came to the conclusion that the advantages of the meeting practice of that time prevailed.¹¹

The talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marian Orzechowski, proceeded in a more positive manner. According to Genscher, the Treaty of Warsaw from 1970 expressed what the governments and people in both countries strived for: a new start into a better future. Genscher left no doubt about the validity of the Treaty as a core element of the social-liberal Eastern policy. The answer of Orzechowski, who as a historian occupied himself intensely with the history of Silesia in the 1970s,¹² was at that moment remarkable. He seized on Genscher’s words about the “historical and moral dimension” and indirectly acknowledged the fate of Germans, who lost their homeland. Therefore, the Polish side recognized for the first time the expulsions and the historical and political problem of Poland, however, not attaching it to the right of domicile.¹³

The issue of the German minority traditionally remained for Polish authorities a trouble area they wanted to avoid and the existence of which they bluntly denied for a long time. If nothing else, this approach was rooted in Bonn’s ambiguous statements on the unchanged validity of the 1937 borders – the way Friedrich Zimmermann, the Minister of Internal Affairs from the Christian Social Union¹⁴, expressed it in 1983.¹⁵ This immediately triggered Warsaw’s open statements of fears concerning possible alterations of the Oder-Neisse border. In the opinion of the Polish negotiators, Polish concession concerning the German minority would undermine the ethnical integrity and thus the territorial sovereignty of the country, indirectly strengthening revisionist requests in the environment of the expelled associations.¹⁶

During his visit to Poland, Hans-Dietrich Genscher met in the German embassy with 12 members of the DFK (Deutscher Freundschaftskreis), established in the middle of the 1980s. The Germans, residing mostly in Upper Silesia, handed the Minister a petition in which they expanded on the discrimination of that group in Poland.¹⁷ The Polish party reacted to the meeting with dismay; the free development of cultural and linguistic traditions Bonn had hoped for was still unthinkable at the beginning of 1988.¹⁸

Genscher’s encounter with Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek and Janusz Onyszkiewicz during the first official visit of the

German Minister of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw after the imposition of martial law was more than just of symbolic importance. In that conversation, Wałęsa requested economic support for Poland, which was supposed to depend on progress in respecting human rights in Poland. On the one hand, Genscher's aim was to oppose the impression of relying one-sidedly on the readiness of the authorities to introduce reforms. On the other hand, Genscher could "unvarnishedly" gather information regarding the internal political situation of the neighbouring country and the opposition's foreign policy ideas. Moreover, the federal government ostentatiously set an example for the support of a consistent democratization process in Poland.

For federal politicians the meetings were at times both enlightening and disconcerting. The abovementioned four politicians of the opposition brought forward the issue of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and breathed a wish for the Federal Republic to withdraw it together with the additional secret protocol in a purely moral gesture towards Poland. Genscher was listening, bewildered, and did not comment. Later his side claimed that "he didn't want to enrage Poles against the Soviet Union."¹⁹ Yet bringing up this subject was not accidental. The debate on historical and political taboos was far more advanced in Poland than it was in its neighbouring countries, although the subjects of the fourth partition of Poland 1939 and the murder of Polish officers in Katyn were two of the most frequently discussed matters. These historical and political as well as moral issues, not acknowledged in bilateral relations thus far, entered official policy through the Polish opposition and media.

The negotiations of financial and economic issues, so important for Polish authorities and their existence in view of the dramatic indebtedness and lacking innovation in Polish industry, were symptomatic of the stagnating relations between Bonn and Warsaw. Warsaw was desperately dependent on new unbound loans from the federal German banks, state loans and investments as well as on contractual regulation of old debts. In return, Bonn demanded an agreement on investment protection, environmental issues as well as scientific and technical cooperation.²⁰

The difficulties in negotiations were based on different expectations: Poland was gradually solving political questions depending on the extent of German concessions in the economic area, but most of all on loan extensions. For the Federal Republic the situation was exactly the opposite. Moreover, Western

German bankers and industrialists were sceptical concerning new loans for Poland, notwithstanding the fact that the country could barely redeem the loans from the 1970s. As Minister of Foreign Affairs, Orzechowski, had already visited Bonn between 6 and 8 April 1986, and the German party made it clear that the new financial support was conditional upon exact indications and calculations regarding the purpose of loans and the form of debt redemption in order not to repeat the mistakes committed in the 1970s. The information provided by the Polish party was less than insufficient, resembling economic platitudes mixed with wishful thinking about future economic relations. Jaruzelski engaged himself personally and urged the Prime Minister, Zbigniew Messner, to have a demand profile and exact calculations prepared by particular ministries and the directors of combine enterprises. The result was disillusioning: it revealed the system-determined planning inability within the Polish national economy.²¹

The three newly established working groups helped to rectify and prevent the paucity of information concerning Polish economic data, yet a breakthrough in negotiations did not come. There were also no players in the political environment who could create trust despite the complicated circumstances. Diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Poland were fostered by the annual German-Polish forum. Poland was represented mostly by the PUWP scientists and journalists. On the German side, the talks were attended also mostly by scientists such as the history professor, Hans-Adolf Jacobsen. More importantly, politicians such as Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Volker Rühe, deputy Chairman of the Bundestag fraction of the CDU/CSU, used the forum to communicate their concerns, rightly assuming that they would reach Jaruzelski and the Polish authorities. In this way, Mieczysław Rakowski, a publicist and Deputy Marshall of the Polish Sejm, Władysław Markiewicz, a sociology professor and chairman of the German-Polish commission for school books, and Ryszard Wojna, a journalist and member of the Polish parliament, as the Polish chairmen of the forum could make an effort to work towards closer relations with the Federal Republic, which obviously displeased Wiesław Górnicki, a journalist and consultant to Jaruzelski, an influential personality, traditionally critical towards Germans.²²

The impact of the efforts taken by Rakowski, Markiewicz and Wojna was limited also because the generals, including the Minister of Internal Affairs, Czesław Kiszczak, and the Minister of Defence, Florian Siwicki, perceived

the Federal Republic through the German Federal Armed Forces. They considered it to be an expression of American interests in Europe and a direct adversary of the Polish army. A policy deprived of old stereotypes, avoiding even occasional conjuring of German revanchist ideology, thus building the psychological foundations for a reconciliation, had too few advocates among the members of Polish authorities and the leading party.²³

As far as the German party was concerned, such personalities as Berthold Beitz, for decades a chief representative of the Krupp company, or Karl Dedecius, translator and founder of the German Poles Institute, campaigned for an improvement and assisted Genscher, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in his official visit to Poland. The German political and parliamentary sphere was almost devoid of people who knew Poland well, let alone those who mastered the Polish language, which hindered permanent work on the improvement of bilateral relations. The officials from expellee associations and the CDU/CSU Bundestag deputies, such as Herbert Hupka and Herbert Czaja, were suspicious about the meetings with Polish government representatives as long as the situation of the German minority did not improve. On the one hand, the Federal Chancellor, Kohl, devoted much attention to Germans in Poland, also taking into consideration the conservative milieu in the Christian Democratic Union of Germany. On the other hand, he proved to be open to expert opinions. Therefore, at the end of February 1989, he assigned Hans Koschnick, the mayor of Bremen from the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), known for his good contacts with Poland since the 1970s, to sound out the situation before his planned journey to Poland and to invest in trust for the dialogue partners from Warsaw.²⁴

Additionally, since the establishment of Solidarity, Polish negotiators could hardly speak for all of Polish society, which aggravated the situation even more. They had no credentials. After the official visit of Hans-Dietrich Genscher to Poland, the meetings with the Polish opposition became a common practice for federal German politicians during their visits in the neighbouring country, especially since the Polish opposition was represented by such great intellectuals as Stanisław Stomma and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who had been involved in a dialogue and a Christian-based reconciliation with the Eastern and Western Germans for decades.

Despite the efforts of the three working groups, bilateral talks advanced with difficulty. It was due to the negotiations concerning the investment

protection agreement, since the parties were unable to decide on a common wording with respect to German citizenship. On the basis of political considerations regarding the past, Poland refused to accept the broad definition of blood-related “Germans” (*ius sanguinis*) present as a legal requirement in federal German nationality law until 1999. Cooperation in science and technology faltered due to the fact that Polish negotiating partners were unwilling to integrate with West Berlin institutions. The establishment of a general consulate remained impossible because the German party wanted to use German names of the now Polish territories in the definition of the jurisdiction included in the documentation. Above all, the names of former German cities on Polish territory were not accepted by the Polish party who additionally suspected Germans of a “revisionist” attitude.²⁵

Until the end of 1988 negotiations in the three working groups brought no expected results. The Polish party complained about the allegedly absent will to cooperate on the German side and about destructive behaviour when the German press reported on the ongoing talks. There was some progress in other areas: the youth exchange and the cultural cooperation of both countries had apparently experienced a revival. The ongoing exodus of numerous Poles (in part with German ancestry) to the Federal Republic was allowed, of course, without conceding that there was a German minority in Poland. Polish negotiators cautiously opened to the subject of German resistance, in case of irrefutable evidence, such as the one regarding Krzyżowa/Kreisau.

Additionally, the negotiating range in Warsaw was internally elicited. This included cooperation with relevant organizations like “Volksbund deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge” on the historically fragile question of German war graves. “German minority” remained an unchangedly delicate subject. Due to the fact that this issue was frequently bespoken during the talks and that it was personally important for the Federal Chancellor, Kohl, the Polish side contemplated a sign of goodwill for further negotiations. In a conversation with Dieter Kastrup, a political director in the Federal Foreign Office and Genscher’s negotiator for difficult diplomatic missions, the facilitation of German language classes in the Opole-Silesia was conceded as a possible sign of benevolence – the classes had been practically prohibited to the German minority in this area for more than 40 years. According to the negotiating directive, further steps on the subject of the German minority had to be coordinated with the “highest authority“, which meant with Wojciech

Jaruzelski personally, and what is more, they were tied with a notable complaisance in financial issues on the German side.²⁶

During the preparations for the meeting of Tadeusz Olechowski²⁷, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, with Hans-Dietrich Genscher on the margins of the UNO plenary assembly in New York on 26 September 1988, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs came to the conclusion that the negotiations in the working groups had failed. The lack of perspective for Polish financial and economic policy was dramatic. The economic situation of the country was increasingly worsening, which was reflected in galloping inflation, so painfully perceptible by each and every Pole. At the end of 1988 it reached 60 per cent.²⁸ Additionally, new strikes emerged in Poland in April and May as well as in August 1988. The strikes of early spring were violently suppressed, which was broadly and negatively commented on by the German media. Federal diplomacy restrained from critical comments. Social democrats were openly worried about the violence used recently against the strikers, as were the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) and the governor of Rhineland-Palatinate, Bernhard Vogel. His friend from the same party and CDU's Secretary General, Heiner Geissler, made it clear that the actions were a violation of basic human rights.²⁹

In October 1988, given the economically and politically chaotic situation, Prime Minister Zbigniew Messner was replaced by the eager to act and politically skilful Mieczysław Rakowski. A year before, the latter wrote a 60-page-long analysis of the situation where he addressed, in an unusually obvious way, not only the economic and technological but also political weaknesses of the country.³⁰ He did this also being convinced that he was able to find solutions to the crisis. From the perspective of foreign policy he hoped that the good contacts with the Federal Republic he had built up when he was chief editor of the magazine "Polityka" would prove to be useful for economic support. From 20 to 23 of January 1989, Rakowski visited the Federal Republic of Germany on the occasion of the 75th birthday of Willy Brandt, for which Richard von Weizsäcker invited a small number of Brandt's friends to Villa Hammerschmidt. In a long conversation with Helmut Kohl, both politicians expressed the wish to open a new chapter in bilateral relations and reach swift results. Rakowski made a few substantial concessions in political issues which were important for Bonn (youth exchange; the establishment of the Goethe Institute, German minority associations and consular offices in Hamburg and Cracow, etc.) in order to settle

the repayment of the so-called jumbo-loan amounting to billions in form of a “zlotysation”, which meant the assignment of monies in Poland, e.g. to “joint ventures”. Moreover, the conversation resulted in the dissolution of the three working groups assigned a year earlier and in the appointment of the Head of the Foreign Policy Division in the Office of the Federal Chancellor, Horst Teltschik, as the Personal Commissioner for the Development of the German-Polish Agreements. Rakowski assigned the same function to the Head of the Foreign Affairs Division of the Central Committee of the PUWP, Ernest Krucza, a native-born Upper Silesian and a specialist in German issues. Hence the Federal Foreign Office got left out.³¹

The negotiations between Personal Commissioners overlapped the Round Table talks between Solidarity and the government taking place from 6 February until 5 April, 1989. Contrary to what the Polish side apprehended, the talks which altered the political foundations of the country had no direct impact on the bilateral negotiations, yet they created an unusual atmosphere, especially for Rakowski’s government. At the beginning of the negotiations, at the end of January 1989, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs suspected that the German negotiating partners were delaying the solution of the economic problems waiting for a Solidarity government with which they could make arrangements.³²

Horst Teltschik stressed Kohl’s personal interest in the German minority. A solution to this problem would speed up the resolution of the remaining open issues. According to Teltschik, the Federal Chancellor would have been confronted with little understanding for his possible engagement in the “Polish” issues in his own party and government, if, after his visit to Poland, he had been unable to show a presentable achievement in negotiations concerning the cultivation of German culture and language in Poland – in accordance with the regulations of the Vienna Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Despite all the concessions on the cultivation of German culture and language in Poland, the term “German minority” remained unacceptable for Ernest Krucza and the Polish government.³³

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejoiced that, in consequence of the new political situation in Poland defined by the admission of Solidarity and the (semi)free elections planned for 4 June, 1989, Western countries changed their approach towards Poland and indicated their readiness for economic support. Henceforth, the Federal Republic of Germany lost its

leading role in the normalization of relations with Poland. Warsaw erroneously inferred from these circumstances that from now on Bonn would be put under pressure by other Western capitals to reach certain outcomes in negotiations with Warsaw. Polish diplomacy perceived itself, particularly before the upcoming 50th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, as morally strengthened to achieve economic concessions from the Federal Republic, yet together with other Western countries.³⁴

The outcome of the Round Table talks, being an unprecedented example of peaceful transformation from dictatorship to democracy, left a lasting positive impression in the West. Teltschik revealed to his Polish pendant that standby-loans were to be expected from the US and France. The "Paris Club" also wanted to participate in the restructuring of the liabilities due in 1989. According to Teltschik, 520 million German marks from the jumbo-loan were to be frozen, the rest was to undergo "zlotysation" for bilateral projects possibly agreed on in the future, also in the area of culture and environmental protection. For Helmut Kohl a three billion Hermes guarantee expected by Mieczysław Rakowski was unrealistic. It could only be a smaller, tightly outlined loan for machines, jointly coordinated investment projects and "joint ventures." For Poland, taking into consideration its enormous financial problems, the proposal was far below expectations. The trust that was lacking in the Polish economy after the bad experiences of the 1970s and the uncertainty about the results of the election of June 4, made the federal government cautiously wait. The hope cherished by Warsaw that Bonn's political concessions made at the beginning of the negotiations would imply economic compromise dissipated leaving only discontent. It was symptomatic that Kohl's official visit in Poland, initially planned for May, then for July, was finally delayed until late Autumn 1989.³⁵

The negotiations and, even more so, the development of the situation in Poland were closely observed by the relevant German parties and the media. The Round Table talks in Warsaw closed successfully on 5 April, 1989 giving the country a completely new perspective. Consequently, the Greens sent a telegram with best regards to Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuroń – the protagonists of Solidarity. The assistant CDU/CSU leader, Volker Rühe, spoke of a historical breakthrough for both parties. The West had to encourage Poland to further transformations through economic and cultural cooperation.³⁶ On the request of the Green party, a debate on matters of topical interest

in terms of German-Polish relations took place in the German Bundestag on 19 April 1989.³⁷ In this way, the Greens wanted to explicitly appreciate Solidarity's achievements in the Round Table talks. The entire party acclaimed the "Round Table" talks and their results. According to Otto Graf Lambsdorff, the Federal Chairman of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), they were necessary to enable effective economic and financial support. In particular, Poland needed relief in the servicing of its foreign loans.³⁸

Irrespective of the verbal expressions of affection, there were still reservations in the CDU, and even more distinctly in the CSU, against further loans for Poland. The German-Polish talks were suspended for four months due to the contradictions in some aspects between the negotiating commissaries, but also because of the Polish demands, deemed excessive, and the rightist anti-Polish resentments, additionally piqued by the inflow of Polish emigrants and German repatriates from Poland.³⁹

The German government was interested in starting prompt negotiations with the new Polish government and its Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, in order not to lose control over the refugee issues and the federal reactions, as well as in sending a signal of political support to Warsaw. On August 31, Helmut Kohl had an extensive telephone call with Mazowiecki during which they agreed to continue the talks between the commissioners mid-September. In the very same conversation, 50 years after the outbreak of World War II, Kohl expressed the wish to come to a "lasting reconciliation".⁴⁰

In his statement during the budgetary debate on 5 September 1989, Kohl referred to the Polish transformation and its possible consequences for German-Polish relations. He claimed, among other things, the following: "Twelve months ago, the news that has reached us right now from Warsaw was still unthinkable. With the election of a Prime Minister from the representatives of the opposition, the parliament made clear that it wants to pursue the way towards democracy. What we have to do in our negotiations with Poland includes two components that should be addressed equally: on the one hand, we aim at making the long overdue step towards lasting reconciliation between Germans and Poles; on the other hand – and this goes way beyond our bilateral relations – Poland is an example of a giant attempt to form a liberal democracy out of a communist regime. (...) Poles do not need a good word, but plain tangible support."⁴¹ Kohl's words were also directed to Wałęsa, who was visiting Germany from 5 to 8 September 1989.

Solidarity was already emancipating in terms of foreign policy, although, as an organization, it was officially re-admitted on 5 April 1989. It was reflected by the meetings of foreign visitors with Solidarity protagonists, mostly in Warsaw and Gdańsk, but was also observed in the growing number of political foreign visits of Lech Wałęsa, Bronisław Geremek and Tadeusz Mazowiecki. The monopoly of the PUWP in foreign policy issues⁴² was thus irretrievably broken.⁴³

Even before Tadeusz Mazowiecki established his cabinet, he delegated Mieczysław Pszon, an expert on German issues and chief editor of the Catholic newspaper “Tygodnik Powszechny”, to continue the negotiations with Teltschik. In September, Pszon and Teltschik were already able to work out a breakthrough in negotiations about the package of previously contentious issues and a notified Common Declaration of both governments.⁴⁴

In his first negotiation round with Teltschik, Pszon pointed out the historic dimension of the proceeding system transformation, which spread beyond Polish borders, but also demanded Germany’s support in order for the democratic transition to succeed. In particular, the new democratic Polish government counted on the financial support of the Federal Republic and other Western countries.⁴⁵ These words had an effect inasmuch as Teltschik – unlike in his conversations with Krucza – did not question the substance of Polish requests. At the same time, once more, he corroborated the need to recognize the rights of Germans in Poland on the basis of the regulations of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, without bestowing a privilege on Germans in comparison to other minorities. Pszon accepted this regulation without further ado, causing discontent in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which assisted the negotiations. Knowing that the “re-emergence” of Germans in Poland would probably evoke irritation between the Oder and Bug rivers, he asked to mention this issue only marginally in the common statement that was to be signed by Kohl and Mazowiecki, or to include it only in an additional protocol. Both parties sought to solve open issues as soon as possible. Newly emerging problems, such as GDR refugees in the federal German embassy in Warsaw, were ignored for the moment and negotiated separately involving the GDR.⁴⁶ The issue of compensations for Polish forced workers in the period of national socialism was left aside, as the Federal Republic did not show any signs of willingness to concede. Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Helmut Kohl wanted to initialize all subjects on the occasion of the German official visit

and thus welcome the political breakthrough in Poland with a new phase of bilateral relations.⁴⁷

After only the second hour of talks which took place on 14–16 September 1989 in Bonn, Mieczysław Pszon and Horst Teltschik arranged for the Federal Chancellor to set out on his long-awaited visit to Poland on November 9. However, the preparations proceeded with discrepancies provoked by one item of the agenda on which the Federal Chancellor had insisted. It referred to the proper place for the reconciliation gesture between Germany and Poland. Based on the well-intended invitation of the Opole-Bishop, Alfons Nossol, Kohl suggested a reconciliation mass to be celebrated on St. Anne's Hill (Góra Św. Anny).⁴⁸

Annaberg was a symbol of bloody conflicts between Germans and Poles in the national fights for Upper-Silesia in the early 1920s.⁴⁹ The Federal Chancellor favoured this place also due to the special attention he gave during the negotiations to the German demographic group in Poland. In the light of mutual tabooing and creation of historical myths and the aftermath of the communist and national education policy, neither was the place suitable for the reconciliation gesture, nor would the majority of Poles understand its choice. Both the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Skubiszewski, and the Prime Minister, Mazowiecki, let the Federal Chancellor know that a visit to the Annaberg Mount was not welcome, even more so as there was a significant pressure of “public opinion” imposed by the media influenced by the PUWP. After several telephone calls with Tadeusz Mazowiecki and the more or less forced withdrawal of the invitation by Bishop Nossol, Kohl gave up the visit.⁵⁰

As an alternative location, Pszon and Mazowiecki suggested the former Moltke Manor in Lower-Silesian Kreisau. This was the place of execution of those Hitler opponents who dared to resist, and it entered history as the “Kreisau Circle”. The “initiation” for Kreisau could be traced back to a session entitled “Christ in the Society” from 2–4 June 1989, organized by the Catholic Intelligence Club (KIK) in Wrocław and the Aktion Sühnezeichen/GDR. At the end of the session, its participants signed an appeal, addressed to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Federal Government. They requested including the plan to establish a meeting centre in Kreisau in the German-Polish negotiations. Therefore, the Foreign Office was informed about the engagement aimed at supporting the choice of this place of

remembrance. Tadeusz Mazowiecki had known about this initiative run by his friends from the Catholic Intelligence Club and the Aktion Sühnezeichen at the latest since August 1989.⁵¹ Helmut Kohl accepted the suggestion of Kreisau after several telephone calls with Mazowiecki, especially as Bishop Alfons Nossol was supposed to celebrate mass with the consent of Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz residing in Wrocław.⁵²

On the very first day, the visit of the Federal Chancellor to Warsaw was put in a surprisingly epoch-making context by the spectacular opening of the Berlin Wall. With the slightly hesitant consent of the hosts, the Federal Chancellor took a break in his visit in Poland and on November 12 came back to a changed Germany. On the same day, both government heads took part in a bilingual mass in Kreisau. Kohl and Mazowiecki embraced in a gesture of liturgical greeting of peace, which expressed the will of reconciliation between the two countries. This gesture was for both men connected with a certain liability. Ingested by the symbolism of the place, the Federal Chancellor may have forgotten that Tadeusz Mazowiecki seemed almost like a coerced guest on foreign territory, where hundreds of Germans from the land of Opole Voivodship welcomed Kohl with conspicuous German banners as “our Federal Chancellor”.⁵³

Originally, the common statement was supposed to be signed on November 10. The ceremony had to be postponed, not only because of the fall of the Berlin Wall, but mostly because of the discrepancies in the Oder-Neisse border issue. On 8 November, one day before the official visit to Poland, the German Bundestag adopted a resolution backed by the SPD; the Greens abstained. The resolution provided that “The German Bundestag affirms the Treaty of Warsaw of 7 December, 1970 as a strong foundation of relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Peoples’ Republic of Poland. The German Bundestag stands by the known constitutional and international-law-based foundations of our internal and Eastern policy – this obviously includes as well that the Federal Republic will abide by the wording and the spirit of the Treaty of Warsaw in all its parts. We cannot and we do not want to change our legal position. [...] At the same time, both parties declare that the aforementioned Treaty does not violate the agreements concluded earlier by the parties or the international bilateral or multilateral agreements relating to the parties. It also includes, that we still have not concluded a peace treaty. [...] The course of history cannot be turned back. We want to cooperate with Poland for a better Europe

of the future. The inviolableness of the borders is the basis for peaceful coexistence in Europe.”⁵⁴

The resolution was preceded by an intense debate in the German Bundestag, after which 26 delegates from the right wing of the CDU/CSU parties, politically engaged in the expellees issues, refused to follow Kohl’s direction and voted against the resolution. In a parliamentary debate, Hans-Jochen Vogel, the SPD parliamentary leader said: “You, Federal Chancellor – and I say it as a request in consideration of the sensitivity and the importance of the subject – should internalize this phrasing without reservation. The motion is an opportunity to do it. Should you repeat in Warsaw what you have said lately on this subject in front of the Association of the Expellees and what you unfortunately, only indistinctively modified, just said, then your visit, to which also we, social democrats, wish full success in the interest of German-Polish understanding, will be severely tarnished. Poland rightfully expects no constitutional deductions, but a binding political statement, that the Germans consider the Polish western border as final once and for all.”⁵⁵

The resolution resonated as far as Warsaw. Tadeusz Mazowiecki requested from Helmut Kohl that the border description from the resolution of the German parliament be included in the common statement. Kohl refused, indicating, among other things, the unfavourable preparation of the resolution for his government. Moreover, he pointed to the fact that he was “put under pressure by both extreme left and extreme right”. It would be wrong to expect from him a final regulation of the border. According to Kohl, the Oder-Neisse border could be recognized by the German government only in the name of all Germans, yet it was still too early for that.⁵⁶ Mazowiecki received this unambiguous attitude with disappointment. Due to his long-lasting contacts with both German states and his engagement in Solidarity’s activity, he was convinced that political transformation in Poland and the beginning of a non-communist government would, or even should, enable the recognition of the border. Such recognition as the one Mazowiecki kept accentuating in the months that followed would significantly facilitate his already complicated governmental task in reference to the wary post-communists and their supporters. As he had a great deal of difficult issues to solve, he expected from Helmut Kohl a concession on the border question.⁵⁷ Kohl eschewed, for his priority was German unification and by his account it was the reunified, sovereign Germany that could decide the Polish Western border, just the way it happened a year later in the German-Polish

border treaty. Artur Hajnicz, a thorough political observer and journalist connected to Solidarity, got to the heart of the dilemma: both heads of governments stuck to their negotiating positions, even worse, they were unable to tell each other what the other party so badly expected to hear.⁵⁸

Even if the meeting between Mazowiecki and Kohl in Kreisau and in Warsaw in November 1989 should not be overrated, it marked the end of a decade of Western German and Polish relations characterized by fears, prejudice and mistrust – a legacy of World War II. The recognition of common values and the implementation of rules of conduct acceptable to both parties was an important step in the establishment of mutual trust. Furthermore, together they established the premise for democratic Poland and united Germany to define and pursue common interests in the 1990s. It was remarkable that the understanding with Poland and the fall of the Berlin Wall happened simultaneously. The “German Democratic Revolutionaries” between the Oder and Werra rivers liberated themselves not only from dictatorship, but they also freed themselves and others from the burden of forced division as a legacy of World War II. In this respect, the understanding with Poland and reunification were not events of a merely national dimension: they were a symbol of post-war epoch closure and the end of the continent’s division.⁵⁹

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BOOK REVIEWS

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RUSSIA: A CHECKIST STATE
 PATRICK PESNOT *RUSSIAN SPIES: FROM STALIN TO PUTIN*
 (FR. LES ESPIONS RUSSES, DE STALINE A POUTINE),
 (WARSAW: MUZA SA, 2013)

There are few countries in the world in which various secret services have, over the centuries, played such a major, significant, and infamous role as they have in Russia. From the notorious Ivan the Terrible's *oprichnina* to Vladimir Putin's secret service, the Russian political police have always enjoyed a tremendous influence on the fate of the country and the peoples living within its boundaries, whatever shape Russia has taken throughout its history. In most cases this influence was exerted by criminal or murderous means.

Patrick Pesnot, a French writer and journalist specializing in the secret service or, in a broader sense, in historical sensation, shares his reflections on the titular issue in *Russian Spies: From Stalin to Putin* in an interesting and compelling way. Pesnot's book is not a thorough and in-depth study of the evolution of the Russian intelligence over the last century; instead, it is a subjective choice of stories connected with Russian intelligence activities. In the eighteen chapters of his book, the author analyzes various aspects and cases of the Soviet, and then Russian intelligence working both inside the USSR/Russia and abroad in the twentieth century, and at the turn of the new millennium.

In one of the most interesting parts of the book Pesnot touches on the time of the system transformation in the Communist Bloc countries, in particular

the bloody Romanian revolution, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, and the process of the decomposition of the Soviet Union.

Pesnot argues that the overthrow of Ceaușescu was the result of a US-Soviet conspiracy. Both superpowers, acting in line with a behind-the-scenes agreement, disposed of the dictator through the sinister Romanian political militia, *Securitate*. According to the author of the book, in the late 1980s every other *Securitate* functionary was a Soviet intelligence informer or a secret collaborator. Being so deeply infiltrated, the Romanian political militia was in fact totally subservient to Moscow. The entire Romanian revolution was by no means a spontaneous act; on the contrary, it was played according to a script written in Moscow. Admittedly, the author's reasoning is suggestive and convincing. The Velvet Revolution, as Pesnot argues, was also controlled. He lists a number of strange coincidences, instances of inexplicable behavior of Czechoslovak security forces, which form a picture of a controlled removal of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from power. The French journalist argues that in this case, too, the initiative came from Moscow. While other communist parties in the satellite countries obediently and meekly followed the Kremlin directives on political and economic liberalization, the leaders of the communist party in Czechoslovakia were not so eager to make more than cosmetic changes, and clung onto power for dear life. As Gorbachev did not like this very much, a scenario was developed in the Kremlin to make the rulers of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia renounce their power.

The chapters of the book describing the political transformation of the USSR are very interesting. Pesnot claims that it was not Vladimir Putin, but Yuri Andropov who laid the foundations of the current power of the secret service in Russia. It was under his command that the KGB [Committee for State Security] reached its all-time peak of power and influence in the Soviet Union. Throughout his entire career in the KGB and the Soviet Communist Party, Andropov was committed to making the KGB not only an important tool, as it was before, but indeed the central instrument of power in the USSR. And he undoubtedly succeeded.

Pesnot describes how the KGB infiltrated the democratic opposition in the USSR, and even in some cases created it. All this was in order to maximize control over changes in the country. The book contains passages on the Soviet secret police preparing for the inevitable political transformation

by taking enormous amounts of capital out of the USSR through various channels, which then returned to the Russian Federation to become the foundation for the gigantic fortunes of *oligarchs* – a new Russian business elite, in most cases connected in various ways to the Soviet or Russian secret service. The author of *Russian Spies...* claims that as early as in Andropov's time it was evident (at least for him) that the USSR would not survive and would lose the Cold War. Thus, long before the Gorbachev era began, he started comprehensive preparations to guide the Soviet Union through the system transformation. All in all, Pesnot's version of the former Eastern Bloc transformation bears slight resemblance to what is commonly believed about these events in our country.

The book is full of other interesting theories, usually backed with fine examples and arguments. Several pages are devoted to Russia under Putin. These chapters provide an inside story of the Chechen war and Putin's rise to power, though the author's revelations add little to what has already been revealed by Alexander Litvinienko and Yuri Felshtynski. In this respect, therefore, the book is not innovative, though the fragments about Putin's scams in the St. Petersburg Mayor's Office or disappearing documents concerning a secret biography of the incumbent President of the Russian Federation are a good read.

The book teems with mysterious suicides, unexplained murders, and accidents met by important Russian dignitaries, businesspeople, and officials. All this adds up to an image of Russia as a mafia state, where violence, crime, deceit, and trickery are par for the course in how the highest state officials wield power. Patrick Pesnot seems to share Spanish crime-fighting prosecutor Jose Grinda Gonzales's opinion about Russia. Quoting a diplomatic cable revealed by WikiLeaks, Gonzales, in a private conversation with the American ambassador in Madrid, said that "Russia is a corrupt, autocratic superpower run by Vladimir Putin, in which the officials, the oligarchs and organized crime hand-in-hand create a virtual mafia state."

In sum, the book will be interesting for all those who are interested in the history of Russian secret services and also for those who are unsatisfied with the conventional, naïve story about the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, told to gullible listeners as the only indisputable truth, challenged only by "conspiracy theory freaks."

PRZEMYSŁAW FURGACZ

Read international relations at Jagiellonian University, earned his PhD in political science, and wrote his doctoral dissertation on the position of the People's Republic of China in the military security policy of the United States during the presidency of George W. Bush. He has published academic and feature articles in numerous journals and magazines, such as Politeja, Przegląd Morski, Kwartalnik Bellona, and others. His research focuses on US security policy, military science, and international economic relations.

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**THE STOCKHOLM
“SOLIDARITY” MEMOIRS**

TORBJÖRN NILSSON & THOMAS LUNDÉN
(EDS) *1989 THROUGH SWEDISH EYES:
WITNESSES’ SEMINAR OF 22 OCT., 2009*,
(STOCKHOLM: SAMTIDSHISTORISKA
INSTITUTET, CENTRE FOR BALTIC AND EAST
EUROPEAN STUDIES, 2010).
FREDRIK ERIKSSON (ED.) *IT ALL
BEGAN IN POLAND: SWEDEN AND
“SOLIDARITY” 1980–1981*, (STOCKHOLM:
SAMTIDSHISTORISKA INSTITUTET, 2013).

Among the sources used by scholars of contemporary history, oral accounts are becoming increasingly popular. These are told by eye-witnesses, people who had major or minor impacts on the events in question, or who have knowledge that could not possibly be found in written sources.

This method, however difficult in its techniques, has become practically indispensable. It encompasses not only individual interviews, but also panel discussions. Meetings of this nature, called “witnesses’ seminars” (*Vittnesseminarium*), have been regularly held by the Contemporary History Institute at Södertörn högskola in Stockholm since 1998. After each of the meetings a precise account of all the speeches and discussions is published.

Over the last few years four of the meetings have dealt with the historic events of 1989. The first, held in 2006, concerned Sweden’s role in the Baltic

States’ struggle to break free from Soviet domination. A year later Swedish policy towards the Baltic States in the first years of their independence became the focus of discussion. The opening of the 2009 sessions was marked by a conference devoted to the meaning of “the peaceful revolution of 1989” and the subsequent “witnesses’ seminar.” This time, the subject was treated from a broader perspective, inviting panelists who were able to talk about the changes in the GDR, Poland, Hungary, and the USSR from a Swedish perspective. A seminar organized on 13 December, 2010, devoted entirely to Polish issues, was an important complement to the above-mentioned series of meetings. The last two publications are particularly noteworthy, because this is where the voices on Polish events were heard. These voices represent part of Swedish historical memory dealing with the proceedings of the 1980s.

We should note that during the first of the two seminars the discussion revolved primarily around the demolition of the Berlin Wall on the night of 9 November, 1989.

Jan Blomqvist, Sweden’s military attaché in Bonn, focused on the German context of the dissolution of the Communist Bloc. He mentioned that the reunion of the two German states swiftly became a point of debate between the superpowers. He praised the policy of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had been taking advantage of all possible opportunities to maximize his gains. Ingrid Thörnqvist, a Swedish TV reporter, who was in Berlin on that day, interviewing passers-by about their emotions, first followed in Blomqvist’s footsteps. The Swedes could hardly believe what was happening. First reports of the opening of the border crossings in the capital of the GDR were unconfirmed, so not counting their chickens until they were hatched, the journalists remained rather conservative in their enthusiasm.

Örjan Berner, the Swedish ambassador in Moscow at the time, also spoke about the Berlin events. For him, the reaction of the Soviet authorities was key. As he recalls, there was a cool reception to the news from Berlin, with visible symptoms of being taken by surprise. At least nobody spoke of a military intervention, a fact which was decisive in the Swedish perception of the situation in the GDR. As for the long-term aftermath of the liberation of the Soviet satellite countries, the reaction of the West, including Sweden, was more reserved. What the western democracies feared most was the prospect of unpredictable domestic turmoil within the Soviet Union itself, which could easily lead to a civil war.

Journalist Arne Ruth of *Dagens Nyheter*, a leading Swedish daily, emphasized that the fall of the GDR and the rapid changes in Eastern and Central Europe were a great surprise. Now it seems obvious that these countries took the path leading to NATO and the European Union, but back then it was simply inconceivable. In Ruth's opinion, a few other important figures of the time apart from Helmut Kohl should be mentioned: US President Ronald Reagan, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and above all, the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The notion of fear about Europe's future made I. Thörnqvist reflect upon the chronology of its origins. She mentioned that the anxiety appeared right after the rise of the “Solidarity” independent trade union, when it was the deepest. Western observers were afraid of pan-European destabilization. Ingrid Thörnqvist also supplemented the list of main actors of the time, mentioning the role of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, the Protestant Church in East Germany, trade unions in various countries which had their ties to Solidarity, because “Poland was where the collapse of the Berlin Wall began.” Thörnqvist added that it had always been her conviction that “it was the Poles who did all the work, paved the way to freedom, fought against the regime through acts of resistance and made several endeavors.” She recalled the elections of 4 June, 1989 and the fact that a few weeks later Tadeusz Mazowiecki became prime minister of the first non-communist government in the Eastern Bloc. The others only followed in Poland's footsteps.

Örjan Berner mentioned that he had a chance to observe the Polish grass roots movement of the anti-communist opposition in mid-1980s, when he was the ambassador in Warsaw. At a glance, this social movement seemed genuinely invincible, but on the other hand, the attitude of the regime, which still had the power to take repressive measures, was very important. From the Swedish perspective, then, the eventual changes came as a surprise, for the communist repressions were not lifted or diminished. According to Berner, the internal economic problems appeared decisive.

In his final statement, Arne Ruth stressed that the prime mover of the change was “the civil revolt, which coincided with the Soviet domestic crisis.” Without the civil opposition, anchored in the tradition of the Polish KOR [Worker's Defense Committee] and the Czechoslovak Charter 77, the transformation would have been far less likely. It was the resistance of individuals, then, that made the first step in undermining the dictatorship.

A follow-up seminar, devoted to the Swedish response to the events in Poland in 1989, was also held. Sten Johansson, a renowned social-democratic politician, once the editor-in-chief of *Tiden* magazine and an adviser to Olaf Palme, talked about his contacts with Maria Borowska, who was spreading knowledge about the real nature of the communist dictatorship and the democratic opposition in the PRL (People's Republic of Poland). With admiration, but doubtful of its effects, he observed the phenomenon of *samizdat* in Poland and the activities of the Workers' Defense Committee in the 1970s. It was not until the dawn of the Solidarity era that he finally believed in the opposition, however small a group of activists they might have been.

Jakub Świącicki, Borowska's close associate, active mainly in liberal circles, remarked that the sense of KOR's existence lay not in the number of its members, but in openly expressed views shared by the majority of society, that is, a rejection of communism. Disregarding the circumstances at hand, it was a battle for democracy. Another speaker about Maria Borowska's service was Bengt Säre-Söderbergh, a leading social democratic activist, a diplomat, and the leader of Arbetarrörelsens Internationella Centrum [International Working-Class Movement Center], now the Olof Palme International Center. He described Borowska as an “astute and stubborn” person and remarked that the Swedish Social Democratic Party had supported Solidarity from the very beginning through the Swedish Trade Union Confederation. All the people involved were well aware that the meaning of Solidarity was much broader than that of a trade union movement, but these aspects had to be avoided at all costs, or else the authorities in communist Poland would have had a pretext for making accusations of anti-state activities and repressing the Solidarity activists. Generally speaking, in Sweden Poland had been associated with opposition against oppressive and unwanted rule since the nineteenth century and anti-Russian uprisings. Another characteristic feature of the time was the strong position of the Catholic Church, whose cooperation was absolutely necessary in terms of distributing humanitarian aid, which seemed quite an exotic alliance for social democrats.

Sven Hirdman, a professional diplomat, focused on the international safety issues. He reminded the audience that Solidarity was formed in a difficult period, right after the beginning of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and just before Ronald Reagan took office, which were “two events that made us really anxious.” In spite of relatively correct bilateral relations

(Olof Palme visited Poland in 1974 and a year later Edward Gierek made a trip to Stockholm), Hirdman held the conviction that the communists in the Eastern Bloc, deprived of popular legitimization of their authority, would collapse. The only question was when and how they would give up their rule. On the other hand, any changes on the international arena in that phase of the Cold War could have resulted in a nuclear conflict. Considering this context, the Swedish diplomacy feared that Solidarity would eventually destabilize the region, which, in the end, nobody would be able to control. Håkan Holmberg, a journalist connected to the Liberal Party [Folkpartiet], mentioned that the Committee for Solidarity with Eastern Europe [Östeuropeiska Solidaritetskommittén], where he served with Jakub Świącicki, was active in Sweden in the time of KOR's activities in Poland. Their main task was to provide real information about the situation in the Communist Bloc, as a counterweight to the official propaganda of the PRL regime.

Above all, they worked toward making the Swedish public aware that the communist regime in Poland was illegitimate. As a result, Polish democratic activities were unofficially and extremely cautiously supported, while the official Swedish line remained in concert with the Brandt and Kreisky doctrine, that is, curbing the opposition movements as dangerous, not only to the domestic order in Poland, but also from an international perspective. Hirdman admitted that the Swedish politicians, no matter who formed the government, "obeyed the Germans."

Świącicki emphasized that had the Brandt "neutral line" continued, the Soviet Union would still exist. Säre-Söderbergh protested, denying that Palme followed Brandt's policy toward Poland. In his opinion it was just the opposite: support for the Polish and Czechoslovak opposition was evident, as were the Swedish anti-apartheid activities in South Africa. The evidence for the involvement were transports of printing equipment and material aid for Solidarity, which continued even after 13 December, 1981.

A considerable part of the seminar was taken up by Sven Hirdman's address, in which he exposed a government report of December 1980. It showed the consequences of the crisis for Sweden caused by the expected Soviet intervention. As the report had it, for the first time since the conclusion of WWII the Swedish government made a decision to raise the level of combat readiness of the Swedish armed forces. This meant extending the obligatory service period in the navy. The government also considered accepting

a larger number of refugees from Poland, including soldiers and officers. Yet the most serious concern was that, should an armed conflict between the Polish and the Soviet army occur, the combat would unquestionably spread through Swedish territorial waters and airspace.

Hirdman himself did not believe the Soviets would decide to take military action, neither in 1980, nor a year later, as this would have meant “serious consequences for their relationship with Europe and the United States.” Swedish diplomats took every opportunity to explain to their Soviet peers that the Poles should handle their own affairs and that they would undoubtedly do this. Considering this position, it became even more difficult for the participants to express an unequivocal judgment of General Jaruzelski’s decision to declare Martial Law. The disputants agreed that, in order to state beyond doubt if this decision was in fact a lesser evil or not, access to secret, still inaccessible archives would be necessary. Attempts to assess General Jaruzelski’s conduct become even more complex considering his later approval of the elections of June 1989, which led to the eclipse of his rule.

In essence, the seminars on the Swedish perception of the events of 1980s which culminated in the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe show that the collapse of the Berlin Wall still dominates the popular reception of those times. Deeper analysis is needed to realize that in fact it was Poland where “it all began” in 1980, and which was also the country which played the leading role in 1989 in a series of changes that transformed the entire Communist Bloc.

PAWEŁ JAWORSKI

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

“EUROPEAN REMEMBRANCE” EUROPEAN YEAR OF HISTORY. TURNING POINTS IN THE 20TH CENTURY EUROPEAN HISTORY. EUROPE BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE 1914–2004.

Date and place: Prague, April 9–11, 2014

Organizer: European Network Remembrance
and Solidarity, European Commission

Dominik Pick, PhD

The third International Symposium „European Remembrance” was held in Prague in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic on April 9–11, 2014. It was organized in co-operation with European Commission, along with the fourth meeting of institutions involved in activities pertaining to remembrance which are supported by the Europe for Citizens Programme. The main objective of the symposium was to reflect upon the turning points in European history in connection with numerous anniversaries celebrated in 2014: the 100th anniversary of the First World War; the 75th anniversary of the Second World War; the 25th anniversary of the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe; and the 10th anniversary of the accession of Central European countries to the European Union. The theme of the symposium was the question about the common European experience of dictatorships and wars.

Over 200 participants from 29 European countries, the USA and Israel took part in the symposium. They represented almost 150 institutions: museums, universities, scientific institutes, non-profit organizations, international

associations and research groups. The full list of institutions taking part in the symposium is available online: www.europeanremembrance.enrs.eu.

The symposium was organized by European Network Remembrance and Solidarity; Federal Foundation for Reappraisal of the Socialist Unity Party Dictatorship; European Solidarity Centre; and Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences; in co-operation with European Commission.

On the first day participants were greeted by Jan Bondy, Director of the Department of Public Diplomacy, who spoke on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. A speech by Malgorzata Omilanowska, State Secretary in the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland followed. She indicated the importance of the symposium for discussion on memory and remembrance in Europe, as well as for the interest in this subject among the institutions involved in historical research and publishing on history. She most aptly characterized the objective of international discussions on remembrance: „What we need is an open dialogue held with respect for other interpretations of history and different sensitivities and also based on solid grounds of scientific knowledge. A dialogue in which we will not avoid difficult and painful issues.” Omilanowska presented the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity as a model solution to the challenges present in the sphere of discussion on remembrance. The next speaker was Jiří Drahoš, Chairman of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic which had taken patronage over the 2014 Symposium. Drahoš concentrated on showing that this year’s anniversaries celebrate events which were both tragic and positive and opened the way for freedom. Using as an example the history of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Drahoš argued that in the twentieth century scientific investigations had been influenced by, among others, wars; expulsions; concentration camps; Communist regimes; and 1968 revolution. Then the participants were greeted by Sophie Beernaerts, Head of Unit of Europe for Citizens Programme, who spoke on behalf of the European Commission. She stated that the past is never too distant and it keeps having impact on our lives as well as triggering conflicts among different historical narrations. This is the reason why Beernaerts recognizes the series of symposia devoted to remembrance as extremely important. Finally, Jan Rydel, Chair of the Steering Committee of European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, greeted the participants on behalf of the main organizers

of the Symposium. He pointed out how differently the anniversaries which were to be discussed are understood in various countries of the region and how difficult it is to talk together about some of them. He put emphasis on the significance of pluralism in the dialogue about the history of the twentieth century.

In the opening lecture, Marci Shore (Yale University) quoted Tadeusz Borowski who said “The history of Europe in the twentieth century is unbearable” and pointed out how difficult and complicated the Central European history is. While characterizing the Central European debates on remembrance, Shore showed how complicated and ambiguous they are. The question about the guilt and assessment of choices enforced by the totalitarian regimes is raised and discussed again and again; and the nations of Central and Eastern Europe find it difficult to escape from the legacy inherited from Communism. Referring to the first words of the Communist Manifesto Shore said: “The specter of communism is still haunting Europe but it is a specter from the past.” She referred to Milan Kundera, Lesław Maleszka and the Jedwabne pogrom and showed how problematic it is to formulate judgments about the past and to understand the choices made by people living in the times of dictatorships. While asking questions about the causes and assessment of getting entangled in the activities of the totalitarian regimes, collaboration and co-guilt, Shore pointed out that nowadays, 25 years after the collapse of Communism, these issues still divide Central European societies. At the same time these issues constitute the fundamental questions about human nature and as such are subject to constant debate.

A panel discussion “Turning Points of European Remembrance. Different approaches” between James Mark (University of Exeter, UK); Heidemarie Uhl (Austrian Academy of Sciences); and Włodzimierz Borodziej (Warsaw University/University of Jena) followed. Heidemarie Uhl referred to the unique anniversary of the First World War. She put emphasis on the fact that different historical narrations not only cause differences between nations but are also the cause for conflicts within particular nations or social groups. Discussions about how to remember past events and how to look upon history take part not only on a national level. Uhl pointed to the troublesome tendency to exclude the problematic aspects of history from the national discourse. James Mark concentrated on two questions: 1) who creates the turning points in history and 2) who is responsible for placing them in

the historical narration. He also made an attempt at showing European remembrance in a global perspective. Mark stated that remembrance about the turning points in history depends on the point of reference. Giving the example of Polish remembrance about the year 1989 he indicated the lack of consensus on the national level and the existence of contradictory narrations. At the same time there exists, in his opinion, a high consistence in narration about the events of the year 1989 in Poland on the international level. According to Mark, by finding common elements in historical narration we can speak of regionalization of remembrance. Włodzimierz Borodziej, on the other hand, used the example of the remembrance about the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact of August 23 in 1939 to argue that there is no common historical narration in Central European countries. The memory of historical events in the countries of the region is selective and totally diversified. Borodziej referred to Norman Davies, stating that there exists no theory which would prove the existence of a phenomenon such as European remembrance.

At the end of the first day of the symposium Anna Kaminsky, Director of the Federal Foundation for Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship, opened the exhibition “Dictatorship and Democracy in the Age of Extremes: Spotlights on the History of Europe in the Twentieth Century.”

The second day of the symposium began with Basil Kersky’s presentation of the European Solidarity Center and Oldrich Tuma’s presentation of the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. These presentations were followed by a panel discussion entitled “The collapse of Communism and its aftermath. Legacy of the Cold War period in Europe.” Laure Neumayer (University of Sorbonne, Paris) pointed to the existence of diverse interpretations of 1989 and the fact that there is no consensus about the assessment of the Communist past in post-communist countries: “There is a huge diversity of interpretations of 1989 and there is no post-communist country which reached a consensus about the Communist past.” She stated that in the field of remembrance many actors are active and they promote various historical interpretations. At the same time however, paradoxically, this pluralism of opinions and lack of unity may be perceived as an achievement of the 1989 transformation. Neumayer also emphasized the significance of the Cold War for remembrance on the European level and pointed at the still huge difference in the interpretation of the twentieth century in the East and in the West of Europe. Łukasz

Kamiński (Institute of National Remembrance, Warsaw) claimed that the events of 1989 are best described by the phrase “anti-Communist revolution”. In Kamiński’s opinion in 1989 there existed no such phenomenon as a community of Central European countries and the only common element was the rejection of Communism and a wish for freedom and a life that was better in economic terms. There existed no positive transformation program. Kamiński explained that the disappointment with the democratic transformations in Central European countries is so big because in 1989 expectations were too great. Kamiński also emphasized that there is no predominating historical narration in Europe. On the contrary, we can see a sort of victim competition between various countries also in the area of the history of the Communist period. Michal Kopeček (Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Republic) presented a slightly different point of view. He claimed that interpretations of the events of 1989 are a part of identity both on national level and on the level of particular communities. He pointed to the diversity of interpretations and visions that fight each other; and also to the criticism on the part of groups which consider 1989 to be an unfinished revolution. In reference to Łukasz Kamiński’s speech, Kopeček pointed out that even though there is no dominating narration, the narration framework is formed primarily by the liberal-democratic views. However, this framework is constantly attacked by competing narrations. Hence the policy of remembrance gains unusual significance in Central and Eastern Europe. Kopeček emphasized that it is much easier to achieve consensus about remembrance of the 1989 events on the international level than on the national level.

The second panel discussion entitled “The next generation. New interpretations of recent European history” was an exchange of opinions between Zofia Wóycicka (House of European History, Brussels); Irit Dekel (Humboldt University, Germany); Lenka Koprivova (Post Bellum, Czech Republic); and Sandra Vokk (Unitas Foundation, Estonia). Irit Dekel pointed out that there is no one memory but there exist various actors and various roles which have influence on the shape of remembrance of the past. Memory is selective and takes different shapes in different social groups. She criticized the German way of remembering the past and pointed out that it is rather a kind of lament and not an active memory. It does not encourage greater openness to the challenges of the contemporary world. Lenka Koprivova (Post Bellum, Czech Republic), pointed out that teaching history is more than teaching about the facts; it is also teaching skills

such as critical thinking, ability to compare etc. She claimed that we should not focus on seeking one European remembrance but we should discuss various views on history: „European culture of memory is not about one narration but it is mainly the effort to understand different views and perspectives.” Sandra Vokk (Unitas Foundation, Estonia) suggested the use of more innovative and modern ways of teaching history. She pointed out that in teaching history, not only pure knowledge (what one reads and writes about past events) but also the experience of history are important. Today the younger generations use new technologies to experience and learn history and that is why historians should be better prepared to use them as well. Zofia Wóycicka (House of European History, Brussels) pointed out that the younger generations of historians are not so much interested in political issues, nor in the problem of guilt and responsibility, nor in the relationship between the victims and the perpetrators. More and more young historians try to analyze first of all the everyday, deeper social transformations, the dynamics of protests etc. This is why they are less interested in the period of Stalinism or Nazism and more interested in the later years of Communism.

In the afternoon the participants watched a presentation and film about Lidice, a village destroyed by the Germans during the Second World War in retaliation for killing Reinhard Heydrich, Nazi Reich-Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. They also had an opportunity to visit the Libice Memorial.

The third day of the symposium offered five simultaneous workshops: “Europe for Citizens” (European Commission); “Museums and Projects about the Great War” (Imperial War Museum); “Reflecting Remembrance in History Education. Three case studies on Turning Points in Europe’s 20th Century History from Northern Ireland, Slovakia and Ukraine” (Euroclio); “Sound in the Silence. Art and historical education” (Die Motte); and “Legacy of 1989 and the Collapse of Communism. Presentation and discussion about successful international projects” (European Platform Memory and Conscience). Workshops were devoted to various methods of educational work (Euroclio, Imperial War Museum and Die Motte); international projects (European Platform Memory and Conscience); and also postulates and aims of the Europe for Citizens Programme.

The final lecture, entitled “The Gospel of the Superiority of the Present over the Past? Reclaiming the critical potential of history, 25 years after

1989” was given by Pieter Lagrou. Lagrou began with a fundamental question „Why are we interested in history and why do we investigate history?” Then he enumerated several traps we fall into while analyzing history. He pointed out that remembrance is more than the opposite of forgetting. It is important what we remember and what we forget: „We live in a situation of memory competition, in which we pay more or less attention to one or other memory. We have to make choices what memory we find more important, which doesn’t mean forgetting the other events.” In his opinion, another popular mistake is the predominating approach to historiography through the prism of national history. Such an approach precludes analysis of the social transformations in Europe at the end of the twentieth century. Lagrou also pointed out that a simplified attitude which reduces the history of Europe to a clash between democracy and its enemies enables us to see the events of the twentieth century in a wider perspective. At the same time he claimed that European integration cannot be understood as a pursuit of democracy because at its core it has primarily economic and political factors. He also criticized attempts to unify historical narrations. Using the European Parliament, where controversial exhibitions are forbidden as an example, Lagrou stated that this is the way to exclude many important topics. History presented in this way becomes only a lullaby which deprives us of sensitivity.

The symposium was summed up in a panel discussion between Pieter Lagrou, Dušan Kováč (Slovak Academy of Sciences) and Siobhán Kattago (Tallinn University, Estonia). Kováč stated that individual remembrance is connected with the life experience of particular persons. Hence it is not easy to break free from national narrations and political views. In Kováč’s opinion, historians are facing the important task of discovering in what way totalitarian regimes emerged, in order to draw lessons for the future. He also suggested that it is important to remember about the Nazi regime and not concentrate only on the Communist period: „The institutes of national remembrance in Central-Eastern European countries should take up the task of finding out where and how fascism and other right-wing dictatorships were born, not focus only on communism.”

Siobhán Kattago pointed out that there exists a dependence between democracy and the ability to regret one’s deeds: “There is a real link between processes of democratization and the politics of regret: if one is to be a democrat, one needs to deal with the past.” She also claimed that the

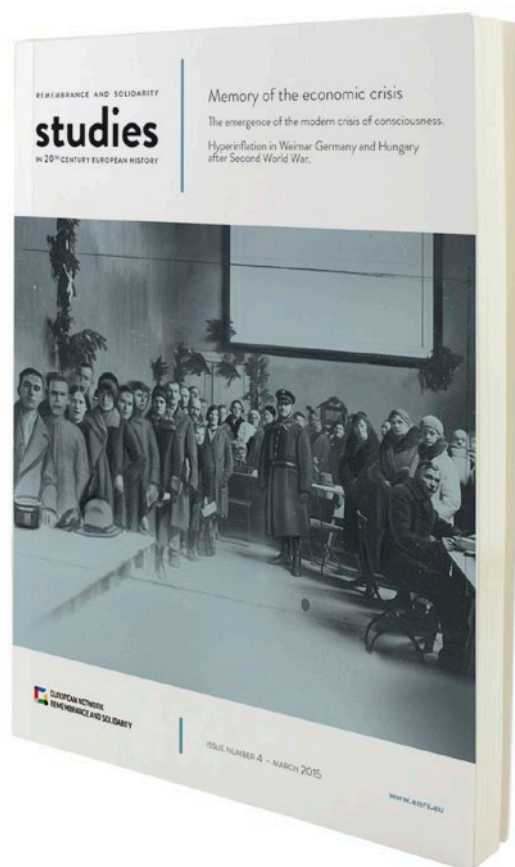
question whether there exists such a phenomenon as Europe, i.e. whether there exists any European specificity, still remains unanswered. It is possible to look at it in a double perspective.

All the lectures and discussions are available online free of charge at www.europeanremembrance.enrs.eu

DOMINIK PICK

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THE MEMORY OF ECONOMIC CRISIS



Modern Consciousness
and the Financial Crisis

Hyperinflation in Weimar
Republic

Hyperinflation in Hungary
after Second World War