Chapter VII

Intellectuals as Legislators

In the Roundtable talks of 1989, hundreds of people participated, altogether in three delegations. We have a great deal of data about the social and political background of the 573 former participants. In the following, I analyze the political motivation, early life, and social background of the negotiators. As mentioned above, by using the term “legislators,” I refer to Bauman’s theory of intellectuals. He claimed that the role of public intellectuals was transforming. While they used to be in the center of policy making, thus they were “legislators,” by now their role is more limited in modern societies. Instead of drafting laws, literally or symbolically, their role is restrained to translation or interpretation between different social groups. Intellectuals today are functioning as interpreters, who help different segments of modern, multicultural societies to communicate with each other.

The difference of opinion between the so-called “historical parties” and the grassroots movements of the 1980s formed a long-lasting cleavage among the member organizations of EKA. This appeared in political attitudes, different social and generational experiences, as well as the forming political strategies. Hence in the following I discuss separately the new organizations that grew out of the anti-system opposition movements and the historical organizations of the older generation. Since this book concentrates on the anti-system initiatives that emerged from the circle of dissident intellectuals, first the role of that group is going to be analyzed in more detail. Then I will analyze the historical parties, the members of which were characterized by broken lifeways. Finally, I briefly assess the representatives of MSZMP.

1 Elbert and Bozóki, Portrék és életrajzok.
2 Bauman, Legislators and Interpreters.
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For I believe that seeing the role of the other side is indispensable in terms of comparison.3

1. Who were they and what did they want?

The political behavior of the agents that emerged in that situation of political vacuum were strongly determined by the historically influenced cultural patterns brought from home. Naturally, the analysis of youth socialization and the early life cannot provide on its own satisfactory explanation of political behavior performed under certain circumstances. It can be presumed that the more routine-like democratic politics is, the lesser role innovations based on experiences from home or youth socialization play. However, the case in 1989 was not that some people had to adapt to an already functioning democracy, on the contrary, they had to create the new regime and its traditions as well. The competition for owning traditions and making others accept them, that is, the development of the identity of the new democracy was just as much a part of constitutional revolution as the task of institutional change.

More than one-third of the participants were born between 1944 and 1953. The regime-changing generation was mainly composed of the generation of 1968. This generation was deeply affected by the reform period of 1967–1972 in general and the Kádárian new economic mechanism in 1968 which also coincided with international changes. The cultural and political movements of the late 1960s had a profound effect on many of them.

The second most populous group was comprised of the youngest ones. One-fourth of the participants was born after 1954, meaning that they were below 35 in 1989. They grew more and more unsatisfied with the reforms which had always fallen into ashes. In total, 64 percent of the negotiators were under the age of 45. This is remarkable, because up until the second half of the 1980s the old system had been led by an aging group, the first generation of communists, who even saw 50 years old politicians as “youngsters.” On the other hand, the more compromising members of the state party, who participated in the Roundtable talks, belonged to the less ideologically bound and more pragmatic second generation. Although the dele-

3 In this book, I do not discuss the organizations and actors of the Third Side.
gates of MSZMP were a bit older than the others on average, they were much younger than the first generation of communists.

One of the reasons for the smoothness of democratic transition was that a generation change had already happened in the lower and middle ranks of MSZMP. This was particularly observable on the lower levels of the negotiations, which were attended not so much by party bureaucrats but rather young experts from the ministries. By various gestures indicating the distance between their title and actual position, these experts tried to convince the opposition that they were there not because of their own volition but because the party had sent them there, the party which they really had little to with ideologically by then.

The newly formed opposition parties struggled with a constant lack of cadres. Therefore, if anyone drew attention to himself or herself by professional performance, no matter if they represented the MSZMP, they could ensure their future position in the state administration. This aspect was important mainly during the political negotiations, because the economic negotiations were indeed meetings of people who had known each other well and debated these questions in scholarly institutions already. Only the scenes were different.

Within the Opposition Roundtable, several generations were represented. The oldest ones, by the members of BZSBT, FKGP, KDNP, and MNP; the youngest ones, by Fidesz. These generations brought a variety of historical experiences to the Roundtable. The generation which had been socialized in the Horthy era, between the two World Wars; the post–World War II generation; the fifty-sixers; the generation of 1968; the generation of the late Kádár regime and the transition. The oldest participants were the most politically cautious during the negotiations, while the younger participants represented more radical positions. The Third Side was not characterized by a certain age group.

While the elite of the negotiations was more highly educated and a great deal more innovative than the last rulers of the Kádár era, they remained traditional in terms of gender representation. As many as 87 percent of the participants were male, and only 13 percent were women. Among the representatives of EKA, the share of women was only 8 percent, whereas among the negotiators of the Third Side their ratio reached 21 percent. This is mainly explained by the fact that the National Council of Hungarian Women was
among the organizations of the Third Side. On the other hand, the Third
Side played the smallest role in the negotiations, which indicates negative
correlation between the importance of political organizations and the par-
ticipation of women in the respective organization. Generally, the more “his-
torical” an organization was, the fewer women appeared among their ranks,
and the closer a party was to the state, the smaller chance it offered to women
for upward mobility within the respective party.

Analyzing the education and former career of the participants, the data
show that almost every participant had a university degree. If we regard peo-
ple with university degree intellectuals, at least in a formal sense, then we can
say that 90 percent of the negotiators were comprised of intellectuals. One-
third of the total number of participants—the relative majority—was clas-
sic “freelance” intellectual, while the others came from the legal and admin-
istrative sectors and the state-owned enterprises. Seventy-five percent of
the delegates of MSZMP were professionals working in the government or
public administration. Most of the MSZMP delegates identified as experts
rather than party cadres.

Among the organizations of EKA, independent intellectuals had a deci-
sive majority: their share reached 70 percent. Courtesy of the participation
of Fidesz, there were more than a dozen university students among the nego-
tiators. The parents of 50 percent of the intellectual participants were also
intellectuals. Among the members of MDF, SZDSZ, and Liga one could eas-
ily find second- and third-generation intellectuals as well. First-generation
intellectuals made up the majority of MSZMP representatives. Such cohort
appeared in the FKGP and in Fidesz as well.

Regarding the members of the 12 working committees, it should not
come as a surprise that the working committees dedicated to economic
issues were dominated by people with economic degree. In the political
working committees, the major role was given to lawyers, in line with cen-
turies of Hungarian tradition. They had majority in every political commit-
tee except one: in the working committee dealing with the reform of public
media, there were more people with degrees in liberal arts.

While 50 percent of all participants of the negotiations were born in
Budapest, the others were born in the small and large cities and villages in
rather equal distribution. During the talks, though, they usually lived in
Budapest. The overrepresentation of Budapesters had a reason, namely that
the negotiations took place in the Parliament building. Those who lived far from the capital could not afford to travel multiple times every week. However, more importantly, at the time of the transition, Budapest was the only place where opposition parties and organizations had already taken roots.

Several participants knew each other from civilian or scholarly life. According to a participant, “at the other side of the table sat my official boss, the president of the Central Statistical Office [KSH]. And I sat here, on this side. Of course, we knew each other. I was a deputy head of a department at KSH.”4 Another participant said: “There the whole atmosphere was like, these people had negotiated before, in the HNF, on the forums of social debates, in speech or writing, but EKA was the organizational form where it was suddenly revealed who was standing where, things just straight off explained, that what flag under which one goes to the negotiation. This was a very new thing.”5

By their political past, those who had memories of the short-lived democratic turn after 1945 were clearly distinguishable from those who gathered experiences in the movement period or lacked even such experiences. This is related to the relationship of EKA delegates and the old system: their loyalty moved on a wide scale from prosecutor of the party state6 to opposition members fired for political reasons. Only 10 percent of the participants had such experience that can be called at least moderate dissidence or active opposition participation. I regard as active opposition participation the signing of numerous petitions, spreading samizdat journals, attending lectures at the underground flying university, and participation in opposition gatherings or movements. Ninety percent of the participants were passive in the Kádár era: presumably, this ratio reflected the proportion of dissidence in the society. As far as the negotiators’ post-negotiation activity in party politics is concerned: one-third ran in the first free elections in the spring of 1990, and only one-fifth did in the second elections in 1994.

The opposition negotiators were divided over tactical and strategic concerns. Three types of standpoints could be distinguished within the opposition. As mentioned above, I follow Schiemann’s typology by calling those as

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5 Interview with Péter Győri, 1997.
6 Tibor Füzessy, one of the chief negotiators of KDNP, had been a prosecutor until the spring of 1989.
“ultra-moderate,” “moderate,” and “self-limiting radical” groups. Members of the ultra-moderate group could have imagined a model change that would have been even more modest than the Polish model, where power was shared between the communist president and the opposition prime minister (BZSBT, KDNP, MNP). In contrast, the opposition representatives of the moderate standpoint insisted on free elections but to achieve this they temporarily agreed to a Polish-type construction (MDF, and initially FKGP). Finally, the third group of “self-limiting radicals” did not question the results of the negotiations and would not want to endanger their codification either. However, they initiated a referendum in the questions which were still open (Fidesz, SZDSZ, MSZDP, and later FKGP).

The first standpoint allowed for strategic, while the second, for tactical concessions. Those who took the third standpoint were worried that even tactical concessions give such opportunities to the other side which can be turned into strategic advantages. Thus, the representatives of the third position were somewhat mistrustful toward the tactical concessions offered by the moderate opposition circles. Nevertheless, in the end the different shades of opposition groups did not have to make a compromise on the result, only on the method, of the negotiations. The organizations of EKA which could have accepted strategic concessions as well were under the control of organizations which had their differences, less in strategic but in tactical questions. The moderates successfully controlled the ultra-moderates so they could not make too early and far-reaching compromises. The task of the radicals was, on the one hand, to behave in a self-limiting way, but also on the other hand to warn the moderates about the limits of their tactical concessions. The EKA was characterized by the careful balance of internal conflicts, and, despite its fragility, it managed to maintain its unity for a long time.

The participants of the negotiated revolution of 1989 came from many different directions; their early lives showed remarkable variance. In a historical moment, they found themselves at the negotiating table, sitting next to each other, and they discussed the questions of democratic transition. Most of those who participated in the negotiations were intellectuals, from academics to university students and from an internationally renowned movie director to a museum director. There were people in whose lives the negoti-
ations turned out to be a genuine turning point, whereas others made only a short visit to politics without any more permanent consequences. Some joined the newly formed parties and became the crème de la crème of the new political class. Others either entered the economic or business sphere or returned to their original profession. For the youngest generation, it was a pilot game, the first political challenge, a chance to try their claws. For the oldest generation, it was a bonus game, a chance to realize their decade-old dreams and to conclude their career before they went off the stage. For the losers of the Kádár regime, like those who were displaced or humiliated, the whole process was political retribution. For the winners, that is, the leading economic and political layer of the communist system it offered the chance of freely walking away. Some of the negotiators changed their lives fundamentally as new and hitherto unknown opportunities opened to them in political participation and elite belonging.

Interest in politics was a driving force for several participants, who nevertheless saw their role as incidental and adventitious. One of them recollected as follows: “Actually it was quite by chance that I got involved. Suddenly one step just followed the other, we were drifting with the thing, the events themselves formed us and we, too, formed the events, but after a while this was completely mixed up that we make our roles, or the roles make us or both at the same time.” Another activist remembered as follows: “There was neither time nor chance or opportunity for coordination, the whole thing was done by improvisation. Almost everyone represented himself, albeit in the cloak of a certain party.” A fellow saw it similarly: “At that time there were ten thousand active people, everyone visited everything, so there was a huge cadre bustle. There were some who were inside this and that and there. It could be that one was in the MDF and then joined SZDSZ, so everyone was looking for their place. Looking back, I do not see this as a bad thing. Everything was so diffuse, people were constantly moving, a lot of ‘crazies’ appeared as well, they also joined and left everything. It was that kind of good anarchist period.”

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8 Interview with Csaba Óry, 1997.
9 Interview with János Sík, 1997.
10 Interview with Mihály Laki, 1997.
was a team back then: there were political debates, but emotionally nobody was against the other.\(^{11}\)

The opposition elite of the negotiations was younger and better educated than the members of the old elite. Most of them had a degree in economics, law, or liberal arts. The majority came from the circle of freelance intellectuals, a part came from the government bureaucracy. Their political behavior clearly indicated that they did not want a revolution: in many respects they simply wanted a better-functioning, more honest, democratic political system where there is more freedom and no oppression. Ideological and political pluralization accelerated and became visible during the formation of movements and parties. However, organizational pluralization was combined with close political cooperation only during the Roundtable talks which had a decisive effect on elite formation. The exceptional historical moment of the regime change brought to light several new rival groups and a new political class. This is what Dahrendorf called the period of “constitutional politics,”\(^{12}\) which he contrasted with the period of normal politics.

2. The opposition parties which grew out of dissident subcultures

Contemporary writings and later recollections claim that the two leading parties of the Opposition Roundtable were the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ).\(^ {13}\) These were the two parties which—alongside Liga union, which was also intellectual-based, and Fidesz, which had a partially different social composition but took similarly sharp positions—had grown out of the social movements of the 1980s. These movement initiatives first turned into a “forum,” “network,” or “alliance” so that they can integrate as parties of decisive strength into the nascent Hungarian democracy.

The two parties were different from each other culturally, particularly in their differing answers to the modernization dilemma which had occupied Hungarian political culture for many decades. MDF regarded the movement

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11 Interview with Tamás Deutsch, 1997.
12 Dahrendorf, Reflections on the Revolution in Europe.
13 Kiss, “Többpártrendszер Magyarországon”; Ripp, Rendszerváltás Magyarországon; B. Tamás, From Dissident to Party Politics; Elek, Rendszerváltoztatások ház év után; Bába, Rendszerváltoztatás.
of populist writers as its most important intellectual predecessor, whereas SZDSZ—which had emerged from the democratic opposition of the 1980s—carried the legacy of Western-oriented, radical, liberal, and social democratic trends. The populist grouping argued that the problems of the Hungarian society can be solved by developing a genuine Hungarian way, building on our preexisting characteristics. The urban grouping argued the best solution was to introduction of the patterns of modern, liberal democracy that had developed in the West. While both groupings had to face a common enemy, this made them tactical rather than strategic allies for a long time.

In both groupings, we could find the cultural structures and intellectual currents of the Hungarian intellectuals. Moreover, they were the first to elevate these cultural differences on the level of politics during 1988–1990. An early founded party, MDF attracted the best and most active members of change-seeking rural intellectuals who soon made it the strongest and most famous movement of the new opposition. Members of the democratic opposition had spent a decade together in underground cooperation, and while it was more radical and had a more organized leadership, it could “open up” much more slowly. Nevertheless, it was able—first by forming the Network of Free Initiatives and, later, SZDSZ—to attract most of the Budapest-based elite intellectuals, the best of the free intellectual careers, and also those radical rural groups which were not satisfied with the moderate politics of MDF.

Both groupings were strong: MDF had a broader membership and widespread support, while SZDSZ had a developed and coherent program for the regime change. It was key to the birth of Hungarian democracy that the opposition’s two strongest “tribes” were ready to negotiate in 1989 and reached an agreement not just in tactical but now also in strategical issues. The Opposition Roundtable was the only proper framework to develop a joint strategy—the strategy of peaceful and democratic transition.

2.1 The Hungarian Democratic Forum

The MDF was created in September 1987 as an intellectual movement carrying the legacy of populist writers. After one year of functioning, the loosely

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14 Csizmadia, “Utak a pártosodáshoz.”
organized association of intellectuals was turned into a political organization in September 1988. The founding document of MDF acknowledged that the multiparty system was inevitable, but the founders did not propose to transform the MDF into a party yet. In the beginning, the dominant voice within the party was anti-capitalist, advocated a leftist third way, and shared a plebeian and protestant ethos.\(^16\) It urged cooperation with the populist wing of the reform communists, and to facilitate this MDF was defined as a moderate, centrist political organization.\(^17\)

The “founding fathers” of MDF were intellectuals who wanted to revive the populist ideology of the interwar period.\(^18\) While it was shaken by the radical social changes after World War II, the populist idea survived in cultural, literary form. The “elders” of the populist writers had an ambivalent relationship to the Kádár regime.\(^19\) Unintendedly, their romantic criticism of Western modernization and consumerism played into the hands of the anti-reformist forces of the regime. On the other hand, by reviving national traditions and putting the long-time taboo of the issue of Hungarians abroad on the agenda they also undermined the bases of the system’s stability.

The older members of the group that founded MDF—such as poet Sándor Csoóri, writer István Csurka, and historian Lajos Für, all of whom belonged to the second generation of populist intellectuals—had personal acquaintance with greats of the populist writers.\(^20\) They were born on the turn of the 1920s and 1930s and brought up in the era when the old Hungary collapsed and the post–World War II Hungary, albeit it initially embraced the social reformist ideas of the populists, eventually developed into a totalitarian dictatorship. Although some of them flirted with the communist party in their youth, they had become supporters of the revolution by 1956. In the 1960s, they joined the critics of consumer socialism, and later they had an ambivalent relationship to the organizing democratic opposition.

Another group of founders belonged to the third and more and more fragmented generation of populists. Most of them were first-generation intellectuals who discovered the works of the populist authors as univer-
sity students. The leader of this younger group was Zoltán Bíró, who career was different from other members. While the others were mostly outside the communist party and often employed in an intellectual status below their education, Bíró was a member of MSZMP and represented the case of the populist idea from a position of power. He worked in the apparatus of the Ministry of Culture from 1971, and later when Imre Pozsgay was appointed a minister, he became one of his closest colleagues. Initially, Bíró was more like an ambassador to Pozsgay than what he really became by 1988: someone who politically repositions the populist tradition. Yet, their relationship was later elevated to the level of political alliance when the populist camp decided to form an independent intellectual movement, the MDF.

After the efforts of the populists to lobby for an own journal and for the official recognition of the problems of Hungarians abroad proved unsuccessful, they sought contact with the democratic opposition. They attended the Monor opposition conference, organized under conspiratorial circumstances. However, the opportunities for opposition cooperation seemed to slip away when the populists refused to go to the conference the democratic opposition organized on the 30th anniversary of the revolution of 1956. Moreover, when the 1987 program of the democratic opposition was published, the populists opined that the Beszélő circle created a fait accompli, putting the emphasis on opposition rivalry rather than cooperation. As a response, the populists decided to organize their own conference, one that was organized more openly and among the invitees was, beyond the broader circle of populists, Imre Pozsgay as well. The Lakitelek meeting in September 1987 represented a new political strategy: the populists renounce their opposition stance in exchange for publicity and the support of Pozsgay. Nevertheless, the mere fact of the meeting was a polit-

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22 The cooperation was based on the old personal relationship between Imre Pozsgay and Zoltán Bíró, who had been expelled from MSZMP in April 1988. When Pozsgay was a Minister of Culture and Education (1976–1982) Bíró worked with him as a head of department. Had the glasnost of Gorbachev stabilized on its 1987–1988 level, there would have been no obstacle before the co-optation policy of the reform communists. Bíró who left MDF in the autumn of 1990 and Pozsgay who left MSZP once again reunited in 1991, when they founded the National Democratic Alliance (NDSZ). However, the party remained unsuccessful, and was dissolved in 1995.
23 Bíró, Elhevadt forradalom, 11.
24 Hegedűs, Ötvenhatról nyolcvanhatban.
ical act that accelerated the political processes of the regime change. Even though MDF always followed more careful tactics than the SZDSZ, in the two years following the Lakitelek meeting liberals wanted to catch up on the bigger and more influential MDF. But this could only happen when the international political environment changed and the processes of radicalization in domestic politics synchronized the sentiments of citizens with the radical politics of SZDSZ.

The group that founded MDF mainly consisted of writers, historians, and other people educated in humanities. They were later joined by some of the practicing lawyers of the Independent Lawyers’ Forum, as well as members of a previously lesser-known circle of the reform economists. “We are not the kind of guerilla-type fighters who want to protest the past system like the mayor of Budapest [i.e., Gábor Demszky—A.B.] who was beaten up by the police […] We had nothing whatsoever, only our extremely poor family background. Then, let me ask, on what grounds would someone have rioted?” a representative of the MDF said.

From the beginning of 1988, the “forum” character of the MDF mainly appeared in the more and more widely attended debates organized in the Jurta Theater about constitutionalism, political reform, or the status of Hungarians abroad. The reputation of the party was further enhanced by the great protest in Budapest in June 1988 against the leveling of villages in Romania. Supported by the Pozsgay led reformists, MDF became the most important “alternative” organization. In this moment, MDF was positioned to strike the balance between reform communists and the radical opposition.

The real force of MDF was in organizing in the rural areas. In the first half of 1988, many teachers, public educators, poets, physicians, club leaders, and local community organizers joined MDF as a (then) only opposition grouping, which also followed the traditions of the populist intellectuals. As Imre Furmann, an influential organizer of MDF, remembers:

> Like many others, I went to the politics from literature. We founded the first Forum of the countryside in our apartment. After this, he involved

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26 Zoltán Bíró, Dénes Csengey, Sándor Csóóri, István Csurka, Lajos Für, Gyula Fekete, Imre Furmann, Géza Jeszenszky, Rudolf Joó, Csaba Kiss Gy, and Sándor Lészák.
27 István Balsai, Balázs Horváth, Imre Kónya, Katalin Kutucz, and László Salamon.
28 Péter Ákos Bod, Katalin Botos, Béla Kádár, Mihály Kupa, Tamás Szabó, and others.
29 Interview with Katalin Botos, 1997.
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me more and more intensely in the organizer network of the Forum. […] Maybe that is why the later membership elected me to a very prestigious position in the national leadership.10

The party leadership was dominated by “creative chaos” for a long time. As another activist remembers:

I met Sándor Lezsák in the city, and he asked me why I never went to leadership meetings, they have no economist. I said, “because I’m not a member of the leadership.” “No problem, we’ll co-opt you’, he said. It turned out that they co-opted a large leadership, all kinds of people, anyone who went there became a member of the leadership. This was when Antall started to show up in the MDF.11

In the parties which had a higher number of critical intellectuals the question of “party or movement” was a serious problem. In the beginning, MDF under the leadership of Zoltán Bíró did not want to become a party, because the founders did not want the party to degenerate from the comprehensive representation of the “cause of the Hungarian people” into the representation of partisan interests. As Sándor Csoóri later admitted: “In the beginning, I imagined the MDF as a movement which, even if carrying the germs of a party, will remain a spirit- and thought-maturing movement for a long time.”32 In the beginning of 1989, MDF was already looking for the possibilities of reconciling party operation and operation as a movement, and its political identity changed accordingly. After long debates, the March 1989 conference of MDF tried to resolve the conflict by declaring that MDF was both a party and a movement. While its 1988 founding document stated that it did not want to accept “government or opposition labels, nor the compulsion to choose,”33 the 1989 program of the party already defined the MDF as an independent, ideological-political movement. “A social organization,

30 Interview with Imre Furmann, 1997.
31 Interview with Zoltán Krasznai, 1997.
32 Csoóri, Nappali hold, 299.
33 MDF, “Alapítólevel.”
which is built upon the voluntary activity of individuals and communities who feel responsible for the future of the Hungarian people.”

From the side of the rival opposition, this was interpreted as follows:

Csoóri and Csurka had a concept of legal operation. The structure that Csurka later created: “Hungarian Way”—the movement, “Life and Justice”—the party. Way, life, and justice, these three were unified in what they originally imagined as MDF, that is, the mother organization does not become a party, it won’t go to battle, but will send out electoral parties which are tasked with acquiring foundations, rightful shares for the mother movement, which itself is the mosaic nation. And when these parties necessarily get worn out in politics, then this movement would send out a new one. [...] They could achieve something, the foundation empire of Csoóri practically reflected this, but they lost the battle to Antall in the issue of transforming into a modern party, a party that represents Christian democratic values. One cannot live this “movement-party” double life, modern democracy doesn’t tolerate this. Antall won in this regard, and by this movement he, in political terms, took the power from them within the party which they had founded.35

The formation of EKA in March 1989 practically decided the question of party or movement. But the process was not devoid of conflicts. A participant of the Roundtable talks, later minister, remembered as follows:

What I said about the negotiations continually buttressed the intent within the MDF to transform the movement into a party, which the MDF managed to do with tremendous wounds and amazingly high blood loss. But it had to be done, for otherwise it wouldn’t have been able to articulate its political will in the parliament. As a lawyer, I was always there at leadership meetings. [...] There were sharp disagreements about this within the leadership. With József Antall, we consistently argued that we must do it.36

34 Kurtán, Sándor, and Vass, Magyarország politikai évkönyve, 520.
36 Interview with Balázs Horváth, 1997.
The leadership of MDF experienced the formation of EKA as a loss of prestige, but they did not want MDF to stay out of it either. Thus, they sent the new politicians from the second line of the party there. They did not know that by this step they renounced the opportunity of leading the political transition as well as their own organization. In the spring of 1989, the MDF still envisioned a long transition, its leaders believed the free elections would be won by the reform communists. Their initial strategic aim was to gather a constituent assembly, either immediately or—for the sake of democratic legitimacy—after the elections. They also believed that in the first parliamentary term MDF would only be a strong opposition party, and it would come to power only later in a more mature state. That is why the leaders of MDF regarded the negotiations of EKA only of limited and temporary importance.

Initially the delegates of MDF included several prominent members of the populist intellectuals. From the spring of 1989, however, lawyer László Sólyom and historian György Szabad started to assume a leading role. They were only loosely tied to MDF back then, and their early life and political ideas significantly differed from those of the founders, too. True, Szabad belonged to the generation of Sándor Csóri but he was never enchanted by “world-changing” ideologies. The fact that he was openly Jewish also distinguished him from the populists, who were often accused of anti-Semitism. László Sólyom, who attended the first meeting of EKA still in the name of the Independent Lawyers’ Forum, was born to a Catholic, middle-class family declassing in the 1950s. As professor of law, he participated in the formation of a series of nongovernmental organizations of great variety, among them the liberal-spirited Publicity Club, the environmentalist Danube Circle, and the Christian democratic Márton Áron Society. He fulfilled his most important role in the initial phase of EKA, during the preparatory talks of EKA and the MSZMP.37

The internal dividedness of MDF over strategy was later commented on by one of the negotiators as follows:

Bíró and Csurka saw EKA as a secondary battlefield. The primary battlefield was the crisis of the MSZMP. Until July they believed, very

wrongfully, that Pozsgay will come to the front as a sure victor, and they thought that they would support from the various competing wings of the party the relatively most favorable one, that of Pozsgay. Had they considered a historical perspective they could’ve realized that that had not been the case for a long time, because that was still the tactical world of reform communism. At that time, we, together with Sólyom and Antall, had completely different goals: parliamentary democracy. Thus, the roundtable to us [...] was the main battlefield. They saw it as a tactical side game.38

However, these views were invalidated by the changes in the international environment which also appreciated the role of EKA. In June 1989, the Roundtable talks were undeniably the center of politics.

The leading representative of MDF in the Roundtable talks was József Antall, who, like Sólyom and Szabad, came from a middle-class family of public officials in the interwar period. Yet for him the communist turn meant not only social declassing but the break of a starting political career. Antall wanted to a politician his whole life: to him, the transition also meant an opportunity to continue his previously interrupted political career. His father was politically active in the FKGP in the 1940s, and during World War II he earned timeless merits by organizing aid for the POWs fleeing to Hungary. Immediately after the war, he became Minister of Reconstruction. The young Antall participated in the relaunch of FKGP in 1956, but later he completely distanced himself from public life. He taught at high school and got through the Kádár regime on the periphery of scholarly life. While he consciously spent this time with networking, he kept a distance from the dissident intellectuals, and therefore he was almost completely unknown in opposition circles until 1988.39

Because of his family traditions and respective political contacts, Antall was close to the old smallholders trying to revive FKGP. They also had great confidence in him, partially because of his father and partially because of his outstanding—compared to them—political knowledge. Although he was active in the Kovács Béla Society which prepared the relaunch of the FKGP,

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38 Interview with György Szabad, 1997.
39 Révész, Antall József távolról, 29.
he did not enter the party itself. He was aware of the flaws of the attempt, and by this time he already imagined his political career in the MDF. But for the sake of organizing the right-wing political camp, he maintained contact with the veteran smallholders who had great confidence in him. This could be seen in the Roundtable talks as well: “Vince Vörös always inspired me to follow what Jóska Antall says,” remembered one of the chief negotiators of the Smallholders’ Party. However, FKGP saw not only a potential ally but a rival as well, and therefore it encouraged the old smallholders not to let intellectual groups coming from the outside lead the party. This is shown by the fact that in the beginning of 1989 Antall—who at that time was openly in the MDF but still enjoyed high respect as the advisor of the president of the party—strongly supported the expulsion of those intellectuals who revolted against the old smallholder leaders.

Antall was also a member of BZSBT and the Márton Áron Society. After KDNP was formed, Antall was asked to be its operative leader. Yet, although he knew only Sándor Csoóri and György Szabad from the leaders of the Forum, he considered the MDF to be the best opportunity to create a future right-wing camp as well as his own political career. Participating in the Roundtable talks was the real springboard for him, the opportunity he captured and which sent him to the peak of his career, in the prime minister’s chair. In the negotiations, Antall’s negotiating partners were truly amazed by his historical knowledge, meaning not only the history of Hungary but that of 20th century Western Europe. He often presented his arguments as natural consequences of the politics of the past, whereas the way he embedded contemporary events in the European past made him a unique character among the actors of EKA. While half of the negotiators had deficient knowledge of these subjects, to say the least, the other half of them often showed outstanding erudition in legal and constitutional theory, philosophy, history, sociology, and literature. Yet it was not in all cases that they were able to combine this knowledge and put it in such perspective that would have coherently buttressed their political arguments. This was something Antall could do.

An opposition actor saw the later prime minister this way:

40 Interview with Imre Boross, 1997.
41 Debreczeni, A miniszterelnök.
42 Szűcs, Az antalli pillanat; “Napok romjai.”
Antall entered a negotiation. I sat down, there was a man completely unknown to me, and in minutes I noticed two things: first, that how skillful he was in manipulating these historical parties, especially the smallholders, and second, how well he played table tennis with Tölgyessy, indeed how much they understood each other and spoke the same language, and how adept he was in presenting the jointly achieved result as his own success.  

Another participant emphasized the important role Antall played in the domestication of historical parties.

The MSZMP involved all kinds of phantom parties, like fake Smallholders, fake Christian democrats, and fake Social democrats. I saw this as a communist trick back then. [...] In the negotiations, József Antall pacified these parties in an excellent way, so there was no problem with them. [...] Nevertheless, it was these buffers settled into the Kádár system who had, well, completely hair-raising acts during these negotiations. I think we owe a great debt of gratitude to Antall who disciplined these people and particularly, well, convinced them to shut up, and to utter not a single word.

Another participants, an academic negotiator of MDF, also clearly referred to the historical parties by saying this: “EKA debated its position under very hard circumstances, because there was a tremendous difference in the quality of the different party delegates, so we weren’t always able to speak the same language.” A fellow, lawyer member of MDF who was also a regular attendee of the leadership meetings of MDF until June 1990, regarded Antall as the greatest politician of the second 50 years of the 20th century. According to a “considering progressive” participant, “if we take that the whole change of power took place without a hitch, that was thanks to two people: one was Antall, and the other was Pozsgay. Both showed ability to compromise and political maturity.”

43 Interview with Ferenc Kőszeg, 1997.
44 Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 1997.
46 Interview with Dániel Dobozy, 1997.
Besides Antall, the Roundtable talks also brought to fore the “new boys” who belonged to the professional background of MDF. This is where they founded their career and fortified their party identity. To them, it was a great opportunity to leap forward that during the negotiations the leadership of MDF did not control the delegates of the party, they had no duty to report regularly. “Antall dominated these processes, so it was clearly his job, with full authority. The leadership rarely considered this issue, but not because they were not interested in it. [. . .] The leadership outsourced this task.”

Other participants corroborated that the participants of the Roundtable talks negotiated with a practically free mandate. “I must tell, there was never a debate within the leadership on whether I represented correctly or well the position of MDF. Frankly, the leadership had absolute and unconditional confidence in me—which also meant unlimited liability, of course.”

In their social characteristics, the members of this group were more similar to the FKGP and the particularly the middle generation of KDNP than to their own populist contemporaries in the MDF. Almost without exception, they came from middle-class families of public officials which were decaying in the interwar period when they were born. Those who were born in the 1940s additionally experienced wartime collapse and their parents losing their jobs. As they were no longer considered as class aliens during their university admission in the mid-1960s, they managed to secure an intellectual career. Their family background excluded political involvement in the Kádár regime, but they avoided even the slightest political resistance as well. They remained intact vis-à-vis the system, not only politically but also culturally, in their lifestyle and values, in which the religious stance had a central role. It is not a coincidence that many of them worked as lawyers, many of them came from old lawyer families. This traditional profession secured good livelihood and relative freedom even under the decades of the Kádár era. While earlier they did not voice their concerns, when legal ways to do this appeared they tried to find ways of political participation. Beyond their values, it was because of their political flair and sometimes pure chance that they ended up in MDF.

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48 Interview with István Balsai, 1997.
49 Interview with Balázs Horváth, 1997.
50 Interview with István Balás, 1997; with István Balsai, 1997; with Balázs Horváth, with László Salamon, 1997.
For the second half of 1989 it became obvious that MDF can run in the elections only if the party cannot be charged with cooperation with the reform communists. Sensing the amplifying anti-communism of the public, the Lakitelek founders had to make a pragmatic turn: the Forum became a party in October 1989, a new president was elected, and its movement wing became one of the party’s currents. In the position of party president, a political intellectual (Bíró) was replaced by an intellectual politician (Antall). The choice was vindicated by results. Starting from a beaten position at the end of the November 1989 referendum, Antall’s tactics proved to be successful vis-à-vis both the SZDSZ and the MSZMP. The party became the winner of the first free elections with its slogan of a “calm force” and its program which promised more painless economic transition.

It was József Antall who made MDF a modern political party. While the populist critical intellectuals found their home in the MDF, they saw Antall as an outsider politician who took power out of their hands. Antall kept the populist group away from the government, and he tried to neutralize them in a way that he divided MDF into three ideological currents. He defined his own position as the center of MDF, whereas he tried to neutralize the liberals and the populist-nationalist group in opposition to each other. He followed an essentially similar strategy toward the economists with various economic-policy views who had been invited to the government by him.

The kind of improvisation based on intellectual conviction which had been present in the Roundtable talks did not disappear automatically after the formation of the Antall government either. This is exemplified by the history of the law on local governments, which is recalled by the former Minister of the Interior as follows:

The creation of local governance was a key element of the program of MDF from the first moment. […] It was accepted by everybody that the alpha and omega of the creation of democratic public life and civil society was local governance as a way of thinking. […] This requires a frame-

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51 Kolosi et al. “The making of political fields.”
52 The status of Antall and Tölgyessy within their respective parties show several similarities. Both came relatively late and had to get in from the outside. Both tried to behave primarily as politicians. They understood each other very well. Their names hallmark the MDF–SZDSZ pact after the elections.
53 Lengyel, Újfélén.
work, because if local governance doesn’t get a legal frame, it won’t have any weight, then you can’t organize the citizens’ will. Ever since I was a lawyer, I was interested in this. [...] We did it with five or six people, without any practical experience, building on our theoretical knowledge and the blind faith that there will be strong local governance in Hungary. [...] We thought that there was a self-conscious and disciplined, civic core who liked our messages. Now I know that there was not, because such way of thinking that displayed and accepted civic values could not exist. That was our wrongful estimate of the situation; maybe we put the emphases in the wrong place.54

The new politicians brought into the party by Antall worked with ambition, but in terms of the leading ideologies they were not competitive with the Lakitelek founders. Moreover, the mistakes of the government the party started losing popularity. The poet and ideologue Sándor Csoóri formulated his sense of loss as follows: “...the intellectuals became party-organizer and power-grabbing technicians rather than putting the weakened body of the Hungarian people on the medical drip of the great ideas of humanity.”55 Antall was able to pacify Csoóri by putting the World Federation of Hungarians under his wings, which the poet was free to form into a “movement” at his whim as president. By this step, the prime minister let some portion of the movement spirit of MDF slip away. But the others were not satisfied with this solution. Even without saying it, the formerly populist intellectual politicians believed that an outsider politician who represents a partially different, conservative-Christian democratic value system may stay in his position only until he is clearly successful. However, the economic transition of the regime change caused serious social traumas which politically hit the governing party as well. In the eyes of several populist intellectuals, politics was not a task but a mission and service, whereas they say their role not as the facilitators of daily political consensuses but as the ones who solve the “issues of national fate.” Many of them were unable or unwilling to follows the mechanical operation of parliamentary politics.56 Thus,

54 Interview with Balázs Horváth, 1997.
55 Csoóri, Nappali hold, 365.
56 Interview with Gyula Fekete, Jr., 1997.
they once again found an opportunity to voice comprehensive critique in the name of the people.

There was no time for the members of MDF to shake together, although the need for this was articulated by several people: “After the victory of the 1990 elections I always said that that was when MDF really needed to be organized, for it to have a base, because we had been just swept together by the wind, the whirlwind of history. I read it in an interview with Lech Wałęsa that getting out of communism is going to be a long march. That was my opinion, too.”

The internal critics of the government were dissatisfied with the results of the transition, and to bring about the change they wanted to change MDF to their image. István Csurka and his circle used this moment to launch an attack against the politicians of the government in August 1992, which induced deep crisis of the MDF. The essay Csurka published, summarizing radical right-wing views can be seen not only as a document between populist and centrist politicians but also as the endeavor of “taking power back” of the ideological intellectual group that could not and did not want to integrate into official politics. However, Antall crowded Csurka out of the MDF in 1993, who responded by founding the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja, MIÉP). For a single term, the radical right-wing party won parliamentary seats in 1998, but it disappeared after 2006, giving way to the emerging new right-wing radical party Jobbik.

After the transition, MDF was a parliamentary party for 20 years, with eight years in government. The MDF participants of the Roundtable talks benefitted from the regime change because many of them attained high political positions. József Antall became Prime Minister (1990–1993); László Sólyom became the first Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court (1990–1998), and later President of the Republic (2005–2010); György Szabad became Speaker of the National Assembly (1990–1994). In addition, the party delegated several former EKA-participant ministers to the Antall and Boross governments.

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57 Interview with Csaba Kiss Gy, 1997.
58 Csurka, “Néhány gondolat.”
59 The following MDF negotiators became ministers: István Balsai (Minister of Justice, 1990–1994); Péter Ákos Bod (Minister of Industry and Trade, 1990–1991, later Governor of the Hungarian National Bank, 1991–1994); Lajos Für (Minister of Defense, 1990–1994); Balázs Horváth (Minister of the Interior, 1990–1993); Géza Jeszenszky (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1990–1994); Béla Kádár (Minister of In-
Intellectuals as Legislators

2.2 The Alliance of Free Democrats

The SZDSZ was created in November 1988 as the political party carrying the intellectual legacy of the democratic opposition of the 1980s. Radicalizing intellectual groups mainly turned to the liberal party which put forth a radical program of regime change. This party combined the previous democratic opposition and its supporters on the one hand and a larger group of the liberal reform economists, members of smaller religious congregations, and the fifty-sixers of Imre Nagy circle on the other hand. Following their similar goals and modernist, Western attitude, these Budapest-based groups understood each other. The more heterogeneous society of reform economists and the seemingly more homogeneous opposition did not see each other as opponents but as strategic allies.

The intellectual members of the democratic opposition were young rebels of the 1960s, whereas many of their parents had worked on the realization of an opposite kind of regime change 20–25 years before in the second half of the 1940s. Many of them were petty bourgeoisie families of Jewish origin, who survived the Nazi persecutions—in some cases, returned from death camps—and after World War II did not want to become potential victims of either Nazism or anti-Semitic prejudices ever again. The only kind of capitalism they knew was the “neo-baroque” system of interwar Hungary, and they found liberal ideas weak and incapable of self-defense. In 1944, having survived a racist regime sensing its military defeat they joined the supporters of class struggle and “people’s democracy,” thereby becoming the volunteers of the dictatorship and class-based oppression that replaced race-based oppression. The generation of the parents had not been able to integrate in an ultimate sense due to the racist ethnopolitics of the 1930s, therefore it tried to find its identity in the universalist ideas of socialism that offered a radically new humanism. When their eyes finally opened, they realized that they

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60 Such as Tamás Bauer, István Csillag, Károly Attila Soós, and Márton Tardos.
61 Such as András Hegedűs B., György Litván, Imre Mécs, Miklós Szabó, and Miklós Vásárhelyi.
62 See the description of “neo-baroque society” at Gyula Szekfű: Három nemzedék (Three generations) Budapest, 1910.
could not even trust each other anymore and had also become the soldiers or toys of tyranny by the 1950s.

The youngsters coming from this environment rebelled, first, against the integration of their parents into the establishment and, second, against the “petty bourgeoisie” practice of the system of the 1960s which was based on lies and petty complicity with the power. They felt that, while Mátyás Rákosi, the dictator of the 1950s had not been able to break the backbone of the Hungarian people, János Kádár and his “soft dictatorship” did it. The youngsters adopted patterns of rebellion from the West via the New Left, the cult of spontaneity, beat music, Marxist renaissance, participatory democracy, counterculture, sexual revolution, anti-colonialist protests, and the movements expressing solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the Third World.

The turning point for this generation was the 1968 Prague Spring. This was when they realized that the Soviet Union was ready to repress not only the armed revolution of 1956 in Hungary but also the peaceful, idealistic reform movement of Czechoslovakia that advocated the humanization of socialism. From this point, there was no turning back to reformism in terms of ideas: the process of becoming anti-systemic opposition began. Many people defected, but those who stayed in Hungary found themselves in a familiar position: in the role of being members of the “opposition-enemy” grouping as defined by the establishment.

The most important representative of this group was philosopher János Kis, who originates from a middle-class Jewish family. Members of his family were killed in the Holocaust. His mother, the only survivor became a devout communist, and Kis could start his studies in a special school for the children of the apparatchiks. Studying philosophy at the university, he became a pupil of György Márkus and tried to reconcile Marx’s writings in political economy and (especially early) writings in philosophy. Eventually, this endeavor let to the rejection of Marxism. By the mid-1970s, the “derived Marxism” of Kis and his co-author, György Bence had become the generally accepted position of the left-wing Hungarian reform intellectuals. Although Kis became a member of MSZMP in 1966 he, along with other intellectuals, was

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63 Csizmadia, A magyar demokratikus ellenzék; Heller, A bicikliző majom,
64 Tőkés, Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution, 189.
expelled due to his renitent views in 1973, after which he lost his job. Forced into internal emigration, Kis soon turned from being an esoteric philosopher of humanistic socialism (as opposed to “existing socialism”) into the leader of an influential opposition group based on human rights.

After the introduction of the state of emergency in Poland, the publication of the samizdat Beszélő and the dialogue with other intellectual groups made up the democratic opposition of the system. Members of this closely knit group knew each other very well but they were isolated from the outer world for a long time. They had to be open to communicate the ideas of human rights, radical democracy, and later liberalism in an articulate, popular way to a wider audience. The leading role of János Kis in the 1980s manifested in two ways. On the one hand, his influence was significant in terms of strategy for the democratic opposition, particularly through his orienting articles in Beszélő. On the other hand, Kis participated in the organization of dissident circles, signature campaigns, the underground free university, and the street demonstrations like anybody else, meaning his leading role prevailed in a direct way as well. In the 1980s he parted ways with his friend and collaborator, György Bence. The reason of their break was their different interpretation of the Jaruzelski putsch, that is the installation of martial law in Poland in 1981.65

In the beginning of 1988, the circle of the democratic opposition had to realize that they can achieve success in democratic politics only if they transform from political avant-garde to a wider and looser social-political alliance. The first attempt at this was the Network of Free Initiatives (SZKH), which was created in May 1988 with the fifty-sixers, environmentalists, members of religious discipleship groups, radical economic reformers, university students, and other groups. The aim of the Network was to join up the already existing but individually weak civil social groups and initiatives for the realization of democratic transformation. This provided an opportunity for the sympathizers of the democratic opposition to “catch up” with their leaders in terms of anti-system radicalism, to join them in a somewhat looser framework, and therefore to integrate in a broader organization by sharing simi-

65 Kis was optimistic about the chances of a potential transition, because he interpreted the non-intervention of the Red Army as positive sign, that is the weakness of the Soviet Union. However, Bence did not share his friend’s optimistic approach and saw a dark future to come to Central Europe.
Chapter VII

lar principles. The Network was created to fulfill this purpose. Usually, it is easier for civilians interested in politics to join peaceful movements with broad platforms than to more devoted and closed, “revolutionary” groupings because they have to take fewer risks. That is why peaceful movements and campaigns are more successful than initiatives accepting violence in international comparison as well. On the other hand, the Network was new political ground for the leaders of the democratic opposition as well, who had to be credible and convincing among people who might not have known them or their previous deeds.

By the time the operating principles of the Network were established Kádár fell and political processes quickly accelerated in Hungary. The informal leader of the democratic opposition, János Kis was awarded scholarship and spent the academic year of 1988–1989 at the New School in the United States. For some of the opposition founders of the Network it became obvious that the time-consuming, participative but also uncoordinated operation based on a broad consensus of member organizations did not allow the organization to set the direction of the events. They saw that the time was ripe for party formation. They believed that if they fail to do this they might be marginalized in the following period.

Among these intellectuals, it was primarily the energetic organizer, sociologist Bálint Magyar who played a key role in the life of the movement and, later, forming party. Magyar took the initiative, because he was among those who were most impatient with the grassroots democratic but not so productive meetings of the Network’s council. Members of the Network who had joined primarily to increase their political influence urged party formation more explicitly. They were afraid that they would be left out of the stream of democratic politics—they, who were the most determined to reject the Kádár regime. Magyar represented their opinion, and the majority eventually agreed to party formation. Delegates from smaller denominations, who had joined the movement through the Network, also played a significant role in founding and naming the party. Later, from them “the group of Evangelic Christians was formed, which was joined mainly by those who had come

66 Kasza, Metamorphosis Hungariae.
67 Chenoweth and Stephan, Why Civil Resistance Works.
to SZDSZ from the Faith Church [Hit Gyülekezete] [...]. This group was formed with around 300 members, and it operated for a while.\textsuperscript{68}

It was their initiative to form the Alliance of Free Democrats in November 1988. In its Statement of Principles, the new party clearly accepted an anti-system stance, rejecting the idea of a third way.\textsuperscript{69} The anti-system message of the party spread and soon brought significant radical groups to SZDSZ, including ones that judged the moderate politics of MDF—which also became a political organization in September 1988—too careful or “double-hearted.” While SZDSZ became the successor of the democratic opposition in intellectual and political sense, party formation in November 1988 was carried out not by the so-called “hard core” of the democratic opposition but the intellectuals close to the opposition.\textsuperscript{70} Nevertheless, some intellectuals regarded the formation of SZDSZ as a putsch, and thus for a shorter period the Network of Free Initiatives based on its previous decentralization principles continued to exist. According to historian Miklós Szabó, who later served as an MP of the party:

SZDSZ was formed by firm political decision, I was an initiator and executor of this in the leadership. We left behind those movement partner organizations which really would have federalized the leadership of SZDSZ, and because of whom every leadership meeting was like a meeting of the orders of Poland’s Republic of Nobles in the 16th century. For it to operate as a political organization, a political party, we had to break with them. [...]. This was not a substantial, big deal for me, but it was for some people, and they are heavily wounded, emotionally they have never really recovered from this.\textsuperscript{71}

Among them, there was the circle of samizdat journal Demokrata (led by Jenő Nagy), the Inconnu Artist Group and the Bokor discipleship. On

\textsuperscript{68} Interview with Péter Hack, 1997.
\textsuperscript{69} E. Szalai, “Az értelemiség útja a semmibe?” 217.
\textsuperscript{70} For a long time, opposition members did not get passports, and when they occasionally did, they were often denied the right to travel abroad after they returned home. Maybe wanting to keep them away from the country, the Ministry of Internal Affairs allowed traveling upon scholarship to several opposition members in 1988. Therefore, Gábor Demszky, Miklós Haraszt, Jenő Kis, and Gáspár Miklós Tamás were not in Hungary when SZDSZ was founded.
\textsuperscript{71} Interview with Miklós Szabó, 1997.
the other hand, Bálint Magyar and Ferenc Kőszeg played important roles in organizing the professional intellectuals of the party in the beginning of 1989. In the predecessors of SZDSZ, the main roles were assumed by sociologists and philosophers, they were later joined by economists and social researchers who were regarded as radical reformers by the public, and many of whom later participated in the economic working committees of the National Roundtable. Many of them were members of the Democratic Union of Scientific Workers (TDDSZ), and later they were related to the sociologist layer that represented Liga. It was Magyar who bridged the representatives of the previous democratic opposition and the various newly arriving intellectual groups. As the gray eminence of the democratic opposition, he had played a key role in the distribution of the illegal Beszélő, therefore members of the old opposition could trust him unconditionally. On the other hand, his dynamism, as compared to the leading figures of civil society, had a deep impression on the newly arriving, who could feel that they integrate into an ascending party. Magyar did not lose his job in the Kádár system, and he maintained regular contact with various layers of the society as an agrarian sociologist, documentarist, and journal editor. This gave him opportunity to put his network in the public sphere to the service of the party organization.

In the beginning, SZDSZ was an actionist party. This led to successes in the first period, but later it also led to strategic problems in the formation of the party’s identity. The board of SZDSZ elected at the temporary and spring 1989 general meetings was based on the principle of collective leadership, which lead to the increasing influence of the most active, organizer-type leaders. From November 1988 to June 1989, Magyar was perhaps the most active member of SZDSZ. However, János Kis returned at this point and soon took over the leadership of the party. As he remembers:

By the time I got home, the board of SZDSZ did not work, it had no meetings, then I, as I had been away at the time of the election, and I was not a formal member of the board, I organized it and put it at regular motion. Which of course meant that I wasn’t the only one who could afford, while not being a member of the board to attend the meetings of the board, and in a decisive way, but there were others as well, so there was total chaos in the beginning in terms of who really leads the party.
In real, this was completely finalized only at the November 1990 congress of delegates.\textsuperscript{72}

Intellectuals with a background in humanities and social sciences were overrepresented within the core of SZDSZ, therefore the lawyers who joined the party later and participated in writing \textit{A rendszerváltás programja} (Program for a Regime Change) had a chance to make a fast career in the party.\textsuperscript{73} During the Roundtable talks, the young constitutional lawyer Péter Tölgyessy—who joined first as an expert and entered the party only months later—became the frontline representative of SZDSZ. At first, those who joined this venture were more motivated by professional than political challenge. Yet in a matter of few months, Tölgyessy became not simply the delegate of the party but the political and legal strategist of almost the entire opposition.

Tölgyessy’s burst into politics came from practically nothing, he laid the foundations of his political career by his performance in the Roundtable talks. Not only was he unknown to many people, he himself had been in contact with only a few. He had participated in the development of \textit{Fordulat és reform} (Turn and reform)\textsuperscript{74} and sometimes he had also appeared as an expert in the events of local MDF organizations. But his political background was more insignificant than any of the more important actors at the Roundtable. Nevertheless, he started the negotiations with a mature concept of the constitution, and he soon managed to amaze his party and negotiating partners with his preparedness and vitality.

The dynamic performance of Tölgyessy radicalized the politics of SZDSZ. Even for the leaders of the party who had come back from abroad it took some time to take up the speed. Tölgyessy believed that Hungary must surpass the Polish model\textsuperscript{75} and SZDSZ must sharply differentiate itself from moderate, centrist forces. While he was formally under the control of the board of SZDSZ, no one was more competent than him in the constitutional issues at hand, and therefore he—due to his expertise, stam-

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\textsuperscript{72} Interview with János Kis, 1997.
\textsuperscript{73} Like Péter Hack and Péter Tölgyessy.
\textsuperscript{74} Antal et al., “Fordulat és reform.”
\textsuperscript{75} In the summer of 1989, the Polish model meant that the opposition forms the government but the president is delegated by the state party.
\end{flushleft}
ina, and zest—became one of the informal leaders of SZDSZ in months. Using his sudden prestige, he also started his own political acts, which meant a *fait accompli* for his allies as well.\(^76\) It did not take much time for him to appear not only as an expert but as a liberal politician who was ready to take a public stance in confrontational situations as well. By September 1989, he was just as much a representative of the views of the radical-liberal opposition as was József Antall for the conservative opposition. One of his fellow party members saw him like this: “Tőlgyessy grew this big, not really in the Roundtable talks but by the Four Yes referendum.” In the Sopron meeting of the party, which had to make a decision about the start of the petition campaign for the referendum, “he totally caught the people, everyone was electrified, and at once it seemed that there was a task, so everyone jumped into the petition campaign with impressive enthusiasm.”\(^77\) SZDSZ was built up in an organizational sense by the referendum campaign, but this was possible only because the radicalizing public opinion had accepted the principle of consistent transition. In August 1989, the party had only 40 organizations in the country, but until the March 1990 elections this number grew to 600.\(^78\)

After the free elections, SZDSZ became an opposition party in the parliament. The governing coalition that came to power consisted of people who were not actively against the Kádár regime in 1956–1989 but often also such whose main strategy had been survival. In several points, their values were close to interwar Hungary, that is its traditional, paternalist politics which aimed at preserving state intervention. Very soon, it was formulated in the intellectual leadership of the liberal party that perhaps the party should become, once again, the opposition of the system rather than the opposition of the government.\(^79\) They believed that the centralization attempts of the MDF-led government, as well as the rhetoric of the radicals of MDF may lead to a new “nomenclature,” the takeover of economic power, and the justification of consolidating a formally democratic but *de facto* semi-authoritarian regime.

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\(^76\) In issues such as the law on the constitutional court, or the introduction of the institution of ombudsman.

\(^77\) Interview with Ferenc Kőszeg, 1997.

\(^78\) Interview with Péter Tőlgyessy, 1997.

\(^79\) Kőszeg, *Lehetőségek kényszere*, 82–83.
The newly emerging idea of an anti-system stance also meant that the intellectual group that had been strikingly successful in 1989–1990 had a hard time finding its place, both in the new system and the suddenly formed political elite. The party membership and some of the public did not understand why the party, which had been successful previously with trenchant anti-communist rhetoric, focused only on institutional changes. Contradictory lines of criticism of the leadership of SZDSZ emerged. Some believed it to be too radical, while others accused it of turning away from its regime-changing radicalism, for the party opposed the initiatives aiming at retrospective justice. It was also debated whether regime change was possible without elite change. Fehér and Heller even stated that it was the peculiar feature of the “glorious revolutions” of Central Europe that “in this region, fundamental regime change happened without elite change.”80 Yet the lack of elite change remains one of the most often cited reasons of social dissatisfaction after the regime change, and right-wing populists have tried to build a program around this.81 In 1991, formerly supportive intellectuals turned away from SZDSZ, and the party started losing popularity.82

The internal life of the party was characterized by intellectual political activity, which benefitted informal procedures rather than strengthening formal, bureaucratic structures. Significant members of the democratic opposition were generally respected by the membership. For example, the influence of János Kis prevailed and after he returned to Hungary, he immediately joined the National Roundtable talks. He assumed a formal role in 1990–1991, when he was the first president of SZDSZ, but he remained outside of the parliament. From late 1991, he gradually withdrew from the first line of politics, although he still had significant informal influence in the years to come. According to a former dissident and one of the most significant politicians of SZDSZ,

Horrible disorganization is an old mistake of the party. While the right-wing media always claimed that this had been a phalanx, centrally led, firm, well-organized, centralized organization, it was a bunch of people organized higgledy-piggledy by a totally chaotic structure with no per-

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80 Fehér and Heller, Kelet-Európa dicsőséges forradalma, 96.
81 Csurka, “Keserű hátország.”
82 Gyekiczki, Hol tart a szabad gondolat?
sonnel policy. The leading body of SZDSZ was like the editorial staff of Beszélő, where everybody had an idea. [...] And when it is no longer carried by passion, then all this become conspicuous.\textsuperscript{83}

While arriving later, Tölgyessy’s opinion was similar:

The board of SZDSZ—I don’t want to use an offensive term—was not very effective, it was a low-efficiency, chattering group, and what I saw was that I simply had no time for that. I can tell with all certainty that [in the summer of 1989] two months passed that I attended one single board meeting of SZDSZ while the negotiations were going on with full force. [...] I think that substantially the board had no influence whatsoever on the flow of the negotiations.\textsuperscript{84}

After the 1990 elections, Tölgyessy was elected parliamentary leader of SZDSZ, but after just a few months, in the autumn of 1990 he was unexpectedly removed from his position. A fellow MP of his remembered the activity of the former constitutional lawyer politician:

He was a star of this group, and simply the whole community loved him. He was a terribly intelligent boy, extremely successful in doing what he was doing [...] but still his mistakes were noticed immediately. He is a secretive, lonely man who does not communicate well, and from this point of view he is bad at cooperation, not because he has different plans but he’s simply like that. His parliamentary leadership was like he pressed documents to his chest, and he was running through the corridor, and the party was running after him, asking him what was in those documents. Because he never told us.\textsuperscript{85}

When Tölgyessy, who came from the outside, wanted to attain significant political role in the party, he found himself against the representatives of the old democratic opposition who were against him almost without exception. However, his removal was not well received by party members,

\textsuperscript{83} Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 1997.
\textsuperscript{84} Interview with Péter Tölgyessy, 1997.
\textsuperscript{85} Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 1997.
thus the intellectual party leadership—with its movement past—found itself against precisely the actionist membership it had strongly supported before. Paradoxically, Tölgyessy, who was not a movement politician, could later use this “movement wave,” when in the autumn of 1991 he was elected president of the party over the candidate of the former dissidents. To the disappointment of the membership hoping for party unity, the majority of the old anti-system opposition refused to cooperate with the new president, and they withdrew uniformly from the board. After a year of presidency, Tölgyessy was finally removed by the old party elite not by movement but, via the creation of platforms or organizational means.

Why was there aversion to Tölgyessy? Because SZDSZ had still been founded by the democratic opposition, and this had its own accustomed style, internal hierarchy, and Tölgyessy came from the outside. […] The democratic opposition was a human-rights movement with civic radical mentality, which was between liberalism and social-democracy by ideology. […] Tölgyessy was outside of this, and he really had more to do with the Hungarian legal traditions, which was somewhat suspicious to the civic radical mentality. […] Finally, not every leader of SZDSZ was happy with Tölgyessy being in a good relationship with Antall; they couldn’t really accept this.

The experience of leadership crisis had serious lessons for the traditional elite of SZDSZ, the key circle of which retained, in spite of dropouts, its dominant position until the millennium. After the regime change, SZDSZ was a parliamentary party for 20 years, with 10 years in government. From the Free Democrat participants of the Roundtable talks, Bálint Magyar became Minister of Culture and Education, later party president, and Minister of Education, whereas János Kis, Péter Tölgyessy, and Iván Pető became presidents of the party.

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86 He was Alajos Dornbach, who had also been active as the lawyer of the democratic opposition.
87 From this circle, it was only Otrtilia Solt who was a trustee during the presidency of Tölgyessy.
88 Interview with Ferenc Kőszeg, 1997.
89 Bálint Magyar was the Minister of Culture of Education of SZDSZ in the Horn government (1996–1998), then he became party president (1998–2000); later he was Minister of Education in the Medgyessy government and the first Gyurcsány government (2002–2006).
Chapter VII

2.3 Parallel Tendencies

The two largest opposition parties, MDF and SZDSZ were built on intellectuals coming from different directions. The core of SZDSZ was comprised of the intellectuals working in and around the democratic opposition, while in the core of MDF there were populist intellectuals—who had been balancing between the opposition and the government—and intellectuals who had spent the Kádár era in work isolation, away from politics due to various family traumas (related to the post-1945 years or 1956). At the birth of their respective political parties, the two groups went through similar phases but not at the same time. As far as their competition is concerned, MDF took the lead for a long time, but the liberals also managed to come to the fore several times in 1989. MDF was larger and less confrontational; SZDSZ was smaller and more radical. While the 1990 campaign slogan of MDF was “calm force,” the slogan of SZDSZ was: “We can, we dare, we do!”

These parties needed ideologies and values to be able to shake at least a part of the population out of its passivity. Both camps needed credible leaders, that is, moral authorities whose person guaranteed the program as well. This was the ideological-movement phase, the leading figure of which in the yet-to-be-formed MDF was Sándor Csoóri, whereas in the democratic opposition which would later form SZDSZ it was philosopher János Kis.

After this and now having a firm worldview and political program, the two groupings needed to stabilize their position. They had to become open in an organizational sense for those who would join the opposition. In this second phase of organization building, essayist and public official Zoltán Bíró in the MDF and sociologist Bálint Magyar in the SZDSZ fulfilled indispensable roles.

Finally, when the ideology and organizational character of the parties had developed, they had to participate in the negotiations about the regime change. Here, the question was no longer the future of their own organization but the future of the country’s institutional system. This period may be called the negotiating, public law phase of constitution-making. It was this period when MDF found the historian József Antall and SZDSZ, the lawyer Péter Tőgyessy. The former became the first prime minister of the democratic period, whereas the latter became the parliamentary leader of the largest opposition party.
Both rival regime-changing parties managed to solve the challenges posed by the various phases of party development: both had a firm identity, an operational organization, and a well-developed program for regime change. All they had to do is to make an agreement—with each other, and with their opponents as well. The story of MDF and SZDSZ in the late 1980s was an example of cooperation and competition which was indispensable to the success of democratic transition. An SZDSZ participant described the electoral competition of the two parties as follows: “In the referendum about the presidential election, we won by crazy luck, by six thousand votes. […] After that, we took a radical regime-changing momentum, and we didn’t realize that we should’ve slowed down a little bit. We had no electoral experience. […] They were a little afraid of us, too, that we would make some huge reckoning.”

During the 1990 elections, it seemed that SZDSZ was the radical party of regime change, while MDF was the moderate, “calm force.” The peaceful nature of the regime change is further demonstrated by the fact that the latter won.

Both grouping had to go through three different phases of party formation, this process is summarized in Table 11.

The leading groups of SZDSZ and MDF were basically composed of democrats who advocated the program of convergence to Europe. But they differed in that SZDSZ saw Europe as a desirable goal in terms of program and culture, whereas for MDF it was a geographical and historical given. In addition, MDF also featured more critical views toward the form of European integration, objecting to its elitism. There were debates about the economic transition as well: some argued that, instead of a parallel transformation of politics and the economy the market economy should be created first, because only that may be appropriate ground for stable democracy. Yet the majority view was that the creation of political freedom must not be postponed because the aim was not a Chilean-type long transition building on reform dictatorship but an unhampered transformation to Western-type pluralist democracy.

The leaders of these parties supported a plural political structure and a mixed economy which is dominated by the market. However, it was not their pro-market views per se that distinguished them from the liberal social-

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91 Interview with Imre Mécs, 1997.
92 Csengey, Mezitlakas szabadság.
ists—who flirted with the idea of “market socialism”—but that they believed in the primacy of private property vis-à-vis public property.\textsuperscript{93} Their starting point was that a society may work well only if its subsystems function according to their own logic, that is, if politics is dominated by the logic of democracy and the economy, by the logic of the market. In their view, the functioning of these does not need to be hampered by integrating an alien logic into them \textit{ex ante}; rather, their dysfunctional effects need to be compensated \textit{ex post} by the creation of a separate institutional system (i.e., good social policy).

\textbf{Table 11.} The phases of pluralization and the key leaders of the two most important opposition groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>The phases of political development</th>
<th>Key leaders and their civilian occupation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985–1987</td>
<td>dissidence, protesting</td>
<td>Sándor Csoóri (poet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>networking, party formation</td>
<td>Zoltán Biró (public official)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>negotiations, constitution-making</td>
<td>József Antall (historian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 onward</td>
<td>parliamentary politics</td>
<td>prime minister: József Antall</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>parliamentary leader: Imre Kónya</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(lawyer)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bozóki and Karácsony 2002: 91

Their position was that the modernization of Hungarian society should follow this way as well, which was interpreted as the way for the convergence

\textsuperscript{93} Faragó, \textit{Nyugati liberális szemmel}. 
to Europe. Accordingly, a consensus was developed among them which held that, fitting to the neoconservative trends of the era, the best social policy is pro-market economic policy. At the same time, their basic values included individual freedom and the emerging grassroots practices of community politics: the entrepreneurial individual and the civil society. In this worldview, property appeared not as the limit but as the guarantee of freedom. In principle, they wanted the institutions of society to develop out of processes of self-organization, instead of being directed from above. Yet eventually they, fired by the regime change, indeed created these institutions quickly in a top-down fashion.

Their views on reform were positive at first but it later became ambivalent due to the quick deterioration of the concept of reform. In this circle, there were many people even in the second half of the 1980s who believed that, while reform does not aim at changing the regime, it can eventually start processes which can act as catalyzers to a possible regime change. However, the others in the circle saw the system eo ipso irreformable, and stayed away from the reform debates. For quite a few members of this generation, this system of values was less a political ideology and more a legally conscious way of life. In the first half of the 1980s, formulating views in support of liberal democracy was possible only in the second public sphere but they were not dominant there either. Yet, implicitly these views could be found in several economic studies and studies about social theory. The demand for market economy appeared more and more strongly in these writings, although the term capitalism was usually avoided. By 1989, however, this standpoint had become dominant in both parties.

The leadership of both intellectual parties observed each other with great suspicion. Although they were able to cooperate in an exemplary way in key moments, such as the summer 1989 Roundtable talks, their differences continued to deepen during the years. As I discussed above, this suspicion had its history dating back at least to the beginning of the 1980s. While the two intellectual groups had successful joint acts already then, their mutual griev-

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94 Urbán, “Társadalomreformerség és politikai tagoltság.”
95 The term “regime change” was first used in Spring 1989. The reformers of MSZMP thought about model change. The term “regime change” was introduced by SZDSZ in the book titled as A rendszerváltás programja (Program for a Regime Change) in April 1989 (Magyar et al., A rendszerváltás programja).
ances did not cease to exist. The spiral of suspicion was strengthened as the dissidents interpreted the Lakitelek meeting almost as a pact between the populists and the reform communists. On the other hand, the democratic opposition created the Network of Free Initiatives, and invited MDF to be member organization. But this was seen in the MDF as an attempt to overcome the Forum, making it only a member organization of the Network. Indeed, the founding of SZDSZ was motivated by the fear from falling behind MDF as much as the frustration they felt because of the inefficient operation of the Network. Zoltán Bíró, the president of MDF disliked the idea of the MDF participating in EKA—his aim was still to make a side deal with Pozsgay—but the leaders of the party realized that they cannot stay out of the nascent cooperation of the opposition.

Despite all their conflicts, MDF and SZDSZ could cooperate successfully during the negotiations. One of the reasons for this was that in both parties the leading role was taken by pragmatic politicians vis-à-vis the former intellectual core. Yet, the rhetoric of sharp confrontation did not turn out to be expedient with respect to the political culture of democracy, because it mainly happened on the level of the political and culture elite. It did not meet the everyday experience of the wide layers of society, who were mainly concerned about losing their jobs, unemployment, and high inflation. The debate of intellectual groups overlooked this. The loudening elitist political discourse during the regime change contributed unwittingly to the fast alienation of society from the democratically elected political elite.

2.4 The Federation of Young Democrats

Fidesz was formed on March 30, 1988, from the members of various autonomous university clubs and student fraternities as a youth political organization. The youngsters who called the inaugural meeting wanted to have a letter of intent signed about starting an organization called Democratic Socialist Youth Society. Viktor Orbán and his lawyer fraternity supporters, how-

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96 The communist cultural policy hallmarked by the name of György Aczél was interested in dividing the potential groups of the opposition. In spite of the successful opposition cooperation in the Bibó Festschrift and the Monor meeting, Aczél managed to maintain and even amplify the mutual suspicion between the “urban” and “populist” groups.

97 Interview with Bertalan Diczházi, 1997.
ever, urged the immediate formation of the organization, with a name that does not include the word “socialist.” This latter proposal got the majority vote, and the youth organization—called Federation of Young Democrats—was formed that day.

According to an initiator of the meeting, it was still “hard Kádárism” back then:

I didn’t want those guys I brought there to be expelled from the university. Essentially, proclaiming a new party could’ve also meant that the whole group would be put in jail, and there were some ideas like that. [. . .] But the Kádár system tipped and it was never carried out. Because of this I represented a more moderate line, out of my character I guess. But essentially it was me who thought the construction up. Otherwise maybe everyone would’ve gone to other directions.

The founding document of Fidesz not only contained comprehensive democratic goals but also named the political opponent, the Young Communist League. Fidesz aimed at breaking KISZ’s power monopoly among the youth. The university students and young intellectuals who created the organization never tried to hide it that they came together in hope of a new Hungary drastically different from the prevailing system.

The members of the organization met in the movement of student fraternities, and they were active in creating circles and clubs in the mid-1980s. It was at the 1985 Szarvas meeting of university clubs that those people who would later form Fidesz first met. Later, these activists consciously prepared to replace the generations before them, not only in professional fields but also in politics. At first, becoming a politician overshadowed professional studies. The collectivist world of university clubs only transparent from the inside was favorable to the verbally skillful, fervent, talented future politicians whose radical appearance helped them exert considerable influence on their contemporaries.

98 Interview with Bertalan Diczházi, 1997.
99 Bozóki, Tiszta lappal, 23–25.
100 Interview with László Kövé, 1997.
The appearance of the radical-liberal party of the youth was that of an intellectual or semi-intellectual group. This group, representing the radical generation of young critical intellectuals and composed of university fraternity students coming mainly from rural cities\textsuperscript{102} was the first one in the democratic transition to become an openly political organization. When I say “semi-intellectual,” I am referring to the fact that, while those in the core of Fidesz had university degrees and many of them worked in sociological research groups\textsuperscript{103} and had the opportunity to study abroad,\textsuperscript{104} the bulk of the community had no time to prepare for the intellectual role. They were novice lawyers, economists, scholars, educators, people trying to find a job in the beginning of their career. Many of them were also drafted after graduation.\textsuperscript{105} These people stood up from university benches and went almost straight to politics. They were somewhat different from those Fidesz members who were a few years older and had had an intellectual career before Fidesz was formed. That group participated in the Roundtable talks with an intellectual identity.

The hard core—hallmarked by the names of Viktor Orbán, Gábor Fodor, János Áder, József Szájer, and László Kövér—began developing their organizations and participating in the Roundtable talks by the rules they had learnt in the movement of student fraternities. Most of them only partially developed the intellectual ethos that characterized and influenced the political behavior of the dissidents. At the time of the slow dissolution of the system, the members of Fidesz did not feel the strong resistance of the bureaucracy or the insurmountable taboos, and therefore their regime criticism was dominated by pragmatic behavior from the beginning. Apart from the threat of expulsion from the university, these young people had nothing to lose. Fidesz preferred doing actions which were fast, surprising civil society,

\textsuperscript{102} Particularly young lawyers and economists from Bibó, Rajk, and Széchenyi student fraternities.

\textsuperscript{103} János Áder and István Hegedûs worked in the Sociology Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the research group of Mihály Bihari, whereas László Kövér, Péter Molnár, Zsolt Németh, and Viktor Orbán studied in the Central Europe research group, funded by the Soros Foundation, led by Iván Bába and Ferenc Miszlivetz. Cf. Interview with János Áder, 1997; with László Kövér, 1997; with Péter Molnár, 1997.

\textsuperscript{104} They could visit foreign universities with the support of the Soros Foundation, for example, Iván Csaba, Viktor Orbán, József Szájer, László Urbán, and Monika Vig.

\textsuperscript{105} The drafting of Fodor in 1987 and Orbán in 1988 had political reasons as well. Interview with Gábor Fodor, 1997.
and presented the communists with a *fait accompli*. In the beginning, the chief enemy of Fidesz was KISZ but later it was the whole system. The more and more crystallized aim of the circle of friends forming since the mid-1980s became the liquidation of late Kádárian structures.

Fidesz was mainly comprised of first or second generation of young intellectuals who had a strong demand for upward social mobility. This was their primary criterion of success. They staked almost their all upon a single cast, political success. Their closest counterpart was the post–World War II generation of “bright winds” the exception that their achievements were not due to “pulling out” from above but partially historical circumstances of vacuum and partially their own right. This grouping had no chance to take roots in the Kádár regime. During their university years, the most influential actors of Fidesz were close to the democratic opposition, invited their members to university clubs, and some of them even joined opposition activities. One of their leaders, Viktor Orbán, said the following:

What I saw from the beginning 1983 was that this political system was in constant retreat. I had never seen the communist system at full strength, in its brutality. Not even when they beat me and took me in for twelve hours on 16 June 1988, because the point was not that they took me in but that they had to release me.\(^{107}\)

It took many Fidesz-founders a decade to walk the path of social and geographical mobility and join the elite, something which took generations for others. The circle of young rural intellectuals was a significant group of Fidesz. As their parents belonged to the local elite and they had been raised in that environment, moving to Budapest was new to them only in terms of metropolitanism and university lifestyle.

The core of the group was composed of lawyers and economists. Inside the not-yet-party Fidesz, power aspirations were not intellectual but political in kind which had been formed in terms of political socialization by family,

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106 One of the most successful actions of early Fidesz was the recalling of unpopular communist members of parliament. It was because of this action that the summer 1989 by-elections resulted in opposition politicians joining the parliament for the first time in 42 years. Bozóki, *Tiszta lappal*, 150–53.

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Sociologically, this can be explained by the dual mobility—fast intragenerational mobility from rural city to the capital and from nonintellectual family to intellectualism—of the core of the party. This was the typical path of mobility for the decision makers of early Fidesz, they had the strongest aspiration for power.

While one half of the community easily assimilated to the subculture of the Budapest-based opposition, the young university students who came from more disadvantaged status were more suspicious of both the official establishment of the party state and the university leadership, and even of the Budapest-based opposition elite. The latter did not want to assimilate into but surpass and overmatch the Budapest elite—which is a partial explanation of their later conflicts.

This group with the leadership of college students was further joined by groups who were preferred to be called “lumpen elements” by the propaganda of the state socialist system. The Workers’ Group of Fidesz was composed of young people from vocational training or schools whose demands leaned toward radical direct democracy and even populism—against not only the system and the communist leadership but the leadership of Fidesz as well. Yet at most protests this group was a natural ally of the multilingual children of the Budapest middle-class who made up the “downtown” Fidesz and found it sympathetic because of its fresh voice and alternative character. The cosmopolitan character of early Fidesz came from that latter group.

In a dictatorship that was dissolving, ideologically more and more void, and pervaded by the intellectual culture of skepticism and cynicism, the radical and rational appearance of Fidesz leaders was refreshing. An important reason for this was that education in universities was much freer in the 1980s than the previous decades. As a result, the members of the young generation studied not only rational argumentation but the democratic, constitutional reference points which had been laid out in the constitution but never enforced in practice. The leaders of Fidesz referred not to ideologies vis-à-vis the already disintegrating state ideology but to rights vis-à-vis the existing law. Early Fidesz was radical and anti-ideological at the same time. This might seem like a paradox because radical movements in the world are usu-

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108 Róna-Tas, “Fidesz – Mi Desz?”
ally ideological. In this case, however, radicalism meant the radicalism of action.

The radicalism of Fidesz defined the behavior of the organization at the Roundtable talks as well as the various political events influencing them. Fidesz supported the unity of the opposition, but it was against premature negotiations with MSZMP and the politics of “national reconciliation,” which was dictated by the state party and supported by the moderate opposition. They argued that there was no reconciliation without breakup, and as there had been no breakup the first task is to make it happen, at least symbolically. That is why Viktor Orbán said in his speech at the reburial of Imre Nagy that youngsters respected Nagy because he had been able to break with his communist convictions for his people. At first, Orbán had a hard time having him accepted in the more moderate environment of the trilateral negotiations, because after his speech of June 16, 1989, he had the reputation of an extremist radical. While Orbán was backed by the enthusiastic membership of Fidesz, this membership initially was taken more seriously by the police than the negotiating partners.

Compared to the pushing attitude of the core of Fidesz, their representatives adopted a more moderate attitude in the Roundtable talks. Although the relatively “moderate” representatives of Fidesz participated in the various levels of meetings, their more restrained style did not mean rejection of the radical program of the organization or its strategic plan of transition emphasizing the notion of breakup. According to a Fidesz negotiator, “everyone found themselves in this story as complete amateurs. How to negotiate, which political issues are important, how to moderate a negotiation [. . .] this was all learnt by the parties as we negotiated. The negotiating situation spurred us to think in a more rational, systematic way, theorizing was not very common.” The committee negotiators of Fidesz reported to the party’s committee about the status of the negotiations every week, which meant regular change of information between the party leadership and the negotiating representatives. Those negotiating in each working committee were aware of the general directives of the party and the parallel processes of the negotiations. The meetings of the party’s committee were open, dis-

109 Interview with Viktor Orbán, 1990.
110 Petőcz, Csak a narancs volt.
111 Interview with János Áder, 1997.
cussions were friendly, there were no orders, and any Fidesz member could attend these meetings.\textsuperscript{112}

The goal to be reached in the negotiations was the same for every delegate of Fidesz: to create guarantees for free elections and lay the foundations of a stable, democratic constitutional state. This was related to the criteria of the country’s operability and peaceful transition, which was an important basic principle for the nonviolence advocate Fidesz as well. In some issues, the party played the role of a “battering ram,” even more so as it was the least convinced among the opposition organizations about the inevitability of the negotiations. According to one recollection, “consultations of Fidesz and SZDSZ mainly manifested in a form that the SZDSZ tried to convince us to renounce table-upsetting radical solutions. They were in a kind of dilemma, we had nothing to lose, we were a youth organization, for a long time we hadn’t even considered whether we would necessarily run if there were elections. [...] But they measured their positions to the MDF.”\textsuperscript{113}

The radicalism of Fidesz was formed by the demand, not only for regime change but also elite change. As Fidesz-negotiator put it years later: “I saw the role of Fidesz in a very positive light. I believe that Hungary needs a complete generational change within the elite. Fidesz was the beginning of this generational change, they said it radically that we must break with the past. [...] The role of Fidesz was to show an alternative.”\textsuperscript{114} This sentiment was shared by many. This generational pathos also suggests that Fidesz was both an intellectual and an anti-intellectual party. Respect for the knowledge they could learn at the university on the one hand and demand for radical elite change on the other hand were both shared by the young politicians. The leaders of the organization made it clear many times that Fidesz does not want to be the youth supply of any political grouping.

During the Roundtable talks, Fidesz was a strategic ally of SZDSZ; in most fields and the most important issues, representatives of the two parties agreed. There was no substantial difference between the position of Fidesz and that of the other liberal party, thus its primary role in the regime change was to accelerate the process of transformation. As an interviewee put it, “Fidesz was the light cavalry of the opposition, who could be sent forth in

\textsuperscript{112} Interview with Tamás Deutsch, 1997.
\textsuperscript{113} Interview with László Kövér, 1997.
\textsuperscript{114} Interview with István Harmati, 1997.
both the debates inside EKA and debates with the MSZMP. We were always ready to represent the most radical position, which was later the reference point for making a compromise.” 115 However, this was not a mere tactical issue but stemmed from the deeply engrained anti-communist attitude of the politicians of Fidesz as well.

This did not apply to the economic negotiations, because the leadership of Fidesz did not regard those as important, the core of the party was not even represented. The negotiators of Fidesz were selected by economist László Urbán, a former member of the Rajk fraternity, after he was given a completely free mandate to do so by the leaders of the organization. Beyond his expertise, it was his student fraternity past which made him a credible actor for this role. A participant remembered as follows: “Urbán gave us the key word, ‘liberal economy’ we had talked, debated this over in the fraternity, the professional background was there. That is why he asked us, because from this respect we knew what we were doing.” 116 They looked at the MSZMP negotiators sitting against them with a different eye than the Fidesz representatives at the political negotiations. According to an economist:

It was quite clear to me that this was no longer that MSZMP. We were very much into 1989, the Németh government was a technocratic group. There were these guys who graduated a few years before us in the university, and they tried to be professional. Say, György Surányi was the president of the Planning Office. These were kids who had been teaching assistants, and they had explained the two-tier banking system to us. This wasn’t like “here come the old Bolsheviks.” […] They were apologizing that they were in government. 117

The composition of the economic delegation was also formed by coincidences. As a participant recalled: “One of my colleagues at the Central Statistical Office as commissioned to write an article about financial regulation. This wasn’t really his cup of tea back then, we were sitting in front of each other, and he asked me to write it instead of him. I said, ‘I’d be happy to, finally I can write down what I think’. And I wrote it down, and then he

115 Interview with László Kövér, 1997.
116 Interview with Tamás Winkler, 1997.
117 Interview with Klára Ungár, 1997.
added as an ex-post remark that I should write to the end that I wrote this in the name of Fidesz. I said, ‘this is really interesting, if Fidesz accepts what I write here, then naturally I’ll write it to the end.’ Whereas earlier, in fact, I’d heard about Fidesz only from the media.”

Later, this became the financial program of Fidesz, and its author became an economic negotiator of EKA.

The leaders of Fidesz claimed to have learnt much from the Roundtable talks. According to the recollections of one of their leaders, Viktor Orbán one year after the talks, “if those months weren’t behind me now, I would be in great trouble as a parliamentary leader. I’d be in very great trouble. There, I needed refined political senses and instincts. […] Compared to that, the parliament is a piece of cake, I’m telling you. Because the parliament has every kind of people, including politically weightless ones, while back there one would meet large calibers everywhere.”

But who were these people of large caliber, and how did the attitude of Fidesz differ from them? In retrospect, Orbán pointed out Tölgyessy with his broad constitutional knowledge and Antall with his historical knowledge, political shrewdness, and sense to informal politics. He added that these people of large caliber were not always able to translate their words into political action. As for the ideas formulated at the Roundtable, Orbán explained this process in the following way:

It was mainly us who could translate them to the level of concrete political action. What follows from this? Understanding the position of the opponent, how can we use this argument? If the argument is great and brilliant, how can we use it so the result will be what we want? In short, I immediately realized that almost nobody had this ability except me. There I never had any kind of inferiority complex. There I was sitting among people of great knowledge, but somehow I know how to do this branch of politics.

The 1989 Fidesz negotiating delegation was balanced in terms of participants from Budapest and the country (14–14 people). However, as far as gender distribution is concerned, males were extremely overrepresented: only 2

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118 Interview with Antal Gyulavári, 1997.
119 Interview with Viktor Orbán, 1990.
120 Interview with Viktor Orbán, 1990.
females were present alongside 26 males. From the 26 males, 22 had finished their compulsory military duties before university. Fourteen belonged to student fraternities in their university years. Moreover, 7 of the latter stayed at their fraternity even after graduation, where they took on the role of educator. From the seven educators, five were employed in the new Central Europe research group. Among the negotiators of Fidesz, 16 further people were in scholarly positions (in a university or research institute) whereas the others pursued free intellectual careers at the time of the Roundtable negotiations. Six negotiators had the opportunity to study in Western universities with Soros scholarship.

The oldest Fidesz delegate was born in 1952 and the youngest, in 1966. Two-thirds of them was composed of the 1959–1964 generation. Considering that one-fourth of Fidesz negotiators is still in the party elite, 32 years later, this shows extreme cohesion of the party leadership. While the circle surrounding Fidesz changed significantly in the decade following the transition—five negotiators were not party members at all, and 15 people left the party until 1995—the innermost core of Fidesz remained unchanged.

This core was forged so strong by common origin from rural cities, masculinity, respect for social hierarchy, and the desire to successfully get to the top of the hierarchy, as well as the years they spent together in closed organizations (military, fraternity). By the time of their emergence, their social conservatism coming from home had given way to following the liberal Zeitgeist—this is how Fidesz could be a liberal party in the years of the regime change. Having achieved fast and successful social ascendance, however, the party became part of the new political elite, and therefore in the 1990s it was easier for it to drop its liberal ideas and return to its traditionalist roots. From the 28-member delegation of Fidesz to the Roundtable, today 7 people—that is, almost one-fourth of the negotiators—are still party members, and they also remained influential politicians of the party. Those who come from intellectual families from Budapest and started an intellectual career were a mite farther from the decision-making center. The Fidesz supporting members of

121 From the females, one of them left Fidesz in 1990 and the other, in 1993. Interview with Andrea Pelle, 1997; with Klára Ungár; 1997.
122 Six of them come from rural cities: János Áder, Lajos Kósa, László Kövér, József Szájer, Viktor Orbán, and Tamás Tirts. The only exception is Tamás Deutsch, who was born in Budapest.
the former democratic opposition fulfilled the role of consultant or mentor in the organization.\textsuperscript{123}

Since the regime change, Fidesz has continuously been a political party, spent 13 years in government, and is in government at the time of writing. From among the Fidesz participants of the Roundtable talks, Viktor Orbán has been prime minister multiple times; János Áder became Speaker of the National Assembly and, later, President of the Republic; and László Kövér became minister first and, later, Speaker of the National Assembly. Gábor Fodor became a minister of another party.\textsuperscript{124} Since 2010, the leadership of Fidesz has identified itself vis-à-vis the regime change.

2.5 \textit{The Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions}

The Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions, or, in brief, Liga, was formed as the loose alliance of alternative union movements in the end of 1988.\textsuperscript{125} Among the trade unions forming Liga, the most important one was the Democratic Union of Scientific Workers (TDDSZ) which was created in protest to the politically motivated intimidation of scientific research institutes.\textsuperscript{126} As such pressure was targeted primarily toward scholars of the social sciences, the founders of the organization were also primarily social scientists.

The sociocultural background and early life of the members of this group was similar to the dissidents in several respects, and they were not unlike in generational terms either: most of them were born in the second half of the 1940s or the first half of the 1950s. While almost all of them came from intellectual families from Budapest, many of them chose intellectual careers

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{123} Like Péter Balassa, György Bence, András Kovács, and András Lányi.
\textsuperscript{124} From the EKA-negotiators of Fidesz, Viktor Orbán became prime minister (1998–2002, and 2010 on) and party president (1993–2000, and 2002 on), whereas János Áder became President of the Republic (2011–2012). László Kövér was Minister of Civilian Intelligence Services (1998–2002), Lajos Kósa was Minister for the development of towns (2017–2018), and Zoltán Rockenbauer was Minister of Culture (2000–2002). Gábor Fodor was Minister of Culture and Education in the Horn government (1994–1995), later he was Minister of Environmental Protection (2007–2008) and party president (2008–2009) as well. The present author was nonparty Minister of Culture in the first Gyurcsány government (2005–2006).
\textsuperscript{125} Tóth, “Semmi sem dőlt el és mégis minden eldőlt”; Vásárhelyi, \textit{Az ártalanság kora}.
\textsuperscript{126} János Dávid, Csaba Őry, and Júlia Szalai were among the most active members of TDDSZ. The three other trade unions comprising Liga were Modesz, PDSZ, and Humanitás. The first president of the organization was Pál Forgách.
\end{flushleft}
only after detours. The cultural capital they brought from home and the experience of the years they spent as laborers or journalist trainee inspired them both to understand social problems intellectually and to solve them. As reformist economists or sociologists, they often concluded their analyses with proposals about what was to be done: they were familiar with the discourse based on the merging of the viewpoints of scholarship, charity, and politics. They wanted to remain within the boundaries of the scholarly institutional setup, but they tried to support the existentially “free-floating” members of the democratic opposition with job opportunities as much as they could.¹²⁷ In retrospect, a participant said the following:

We created TDDSZ [. . .] in a few minutes, everyone who lived or died appeared there. [. . .] Its novelty was that it wasn’t founded by the hard opposition but that circle of dissidents who remained on the legal side in its operation in the 1980s. They had a peculiar dual thinking, they were dissidents, but didn’t really want to leave the ground of legality. Indeed, the trade union meant an opportunity for this community existing by, and much broader than, the hard opposition.¹²⁸

Their political activism was inspired precisely by political attacks against the scholarly institutional system. The roots of the newly emerging conflict between social scientists and the political decision makers date back to the late 1960s. That was when the aim at a new legitimacy of the party state was proclaimed, trying to justify itself—breaking away from the previously existing propagandistic picture of reality—by a “scientifically confirmed” program of modernization. However, it soon became obvious that the demands of the power are only partially fulfilled by Hungarian social scientists: more than once their conclusions questioned the most important goals of the system. It is no wonder at all that the emergence of the pluralism of trade unions in Hungary started with a scholars’ union. While there were strikes at several points of the country in 1988, the Hungarian society was not susceptible to the forms of collective interest advocacy. Thus, the formulation and repre-

¹²⁷ Csízmadia, A magyar demokratikus ellenzék.
¹²⁸ Interview with János Dávid, 1997.
sentation of collective interests became a pronouncedly intellectual task, and it was also blurred with the advocacy of the interests of intellectuals.

All this changed only when scientific workers were joined by the organizations of teachers, special needs teachers, cinematographic workers, and others. It became obvious that the new trade unions may be strong actors of the regime change only if they form a confederation. This eventually happened in the end of 1988. One of the founders of Liga defined the character of the confederation, in retrospect, as follows:

The most important principle of Liga was that free trade unions are imaginable only in a democracy, and [. . .] that an alternative confederation of trade unions has to be created which would represent another kind of model for trade unions in Hungary, building from the bottom-up. [. . .] On a national level, we believed that economic regime change will have such casualties and burdens that it can be done well—and that was our illusion—if great social agreements are made about the distribution of the burdens of crisis and transformation. [. . .] We represented a middle-of-the-way, social democratic position, the essence of which was the presence of civil contractual relations on the micro- as well as the macro-level.129

Concerning the dynamics of the transition, the Liga aimed at mobilizing politically passive social groups by widening civil society, employing an evolutionist strategy. Involving pedagogues as well as artists and journalists who tried to expand the spaces of public sphere, Liga could not become an effective organization for a long time, rather it remained an intellectual interest group. True, its representatives were able to prevent the adoption of the government’s antidemocratic bill on strikes, their appearance was more like the operation of a well-functioning think tank and not like a trade union: it was not its social weight but the arguments of its experts which forced the government to retreat.

Formally, Liga retained an observer status in EKA, but its representatives participated in practically every internal voting. They played an important

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129 Interview with László Bruszt, 1997.
role in paving the road to the negotiations. A participant sees the role of the strategists of Liga with a critical eye:

In the history of Liga, there is an intellectual circle in whose lives this was partially scientific research and partially a small detour, that “how interesting, here is a regime change”, and “now we look around, we look at the workers now, what they do in a situation like this”. […] I toured around the country as a “workers’ leader”. […] I felt terribly bad in this role, but I greatly enjoyed that I could see things I wouldn’t have seen otherwise. I was somewhat an outsider in this whole thing.\textsuperscript{130}

There was someone at EKA who joined Liga in short of better options, only to be allowed to participate in the negotiations. “We [from the Independent Lawyers’ Forum] weren’t members of Liga, for some mysterious reason we had to choose some star. As I was sure that I didn’t want to join any party, Liga was the most obvious choice. It’s a party neutral community, so let’s choose that.”\textsuperscript{131}

The activity of Liga at the negotiations of the National Roundtable was too only partially reminiscent of the operation of a trade union. Although it emphasized the importance of economic negotiations, it soon realized that the first item on the agenda was the change of the political institutional system, and it adapted to a political strategy accordingly. The negotiators of Liga participated in the talks with practically free mandate, but that was the usual case because of the parties’ low level of organization and lack of experts.

As several delegates of Liga were also members of the SZDSZ, the organization stood closer to SZDSZ at the time of the internal polarization of EKA.\textsuperscript{132} “The Liga didn’t have enough people to be sent to the various working committees, so it offered this place to the SZDSZ. So practically I was delegated by SZDSZ, by my name tag had Liga written on it. Because of this, I had no real connection to Liga, it exercised no control whatsoever. […] Here it was absolutely entrusted to me—they knew me who I was, and they had some idea about my opinion about the issues—and in these heroic times

\textsuperscript{130} Interview with Gábor Horn, 1997.
\textsuperscript{131} Interview with Pál Bárrfai, 1997.
\textsuperscript{132} Szalai E., Úteldgazdás.
it happened that whatever the appointed person said was the position of the organization.”

The Liga lost its war against the National Alliance of Hungarian Trade Unions (MSZOSZ), the successor of the state socialist trade union during the 1993 trade union elections, and although it continued to exist it was relegated to a secondary role in the movement of trade unions. From the EKA-negotiators of Liga, István Csillag and Zoltán Pokorni became ministers, and the latter even assumed party presidency.

3. The historical parties

The “historical parties” were characteristic participants of the Opposition Roundtable. These parties were formed before the communist rule, and when the system started to breakdown they first operated as civil organizations and later they reorganized upon the revival of their parties. Unlike the other opposition groups, these organizations defined themselves as parties. They often referred to the principle of legal continuity, that they were not legally disbanded and therefore have every right to restart the functioning of the party. Four historical parties—FKGP, MSZDP, KDNP, and MNP—participated in the National Roundtable talks. The Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society (BZSFT) defined itself not as a party but as a friendship community, but I analyze it alongside the historical parties because of generational similarities and the political cooperation that was formed between them.

The historical perspective played an important role in the entire political transition. In terms of ideas and visions, the Hungarian regime change brought movement not only toward the future but also the past, for emphasizing historical roots was a powerful element of the legitimacy of the nascent system. For the older generation, the new democracy also meant the late justification of Hungarian political culture and the democratic traditions of Hungarian history, as well as the “fixing” of the democratic development of Central Europe which had been started decades earlier and arrested by the

133 Interview with Gyula Gaál, 1997.
134 István Csillag was the Minister of Economy and Transportation of SZDSZ in the Medgyessy government (2002–2004). Zoltán Pokorni was Minister of Education of Fidesz in the first Orbán government (1998–2001), and later he became party president (2001–2002). Later, Gábor Horn became a state secretary and an influential politician of SZDSZ.
communists. For the older generation, the new beginning was the late fulfillment of an “old beginning.”

The historical parties bridged two distant periods of democratization, not only in ideological and historical terms but also organizationally and through personal lives. Yet the carrying capacity of this bridge was far from clear, as it had to bridge radical social changes of long decades. The answer is already suggested by the internally conflicted and often unsuccessful attempts at creating a modern identity.

By the core of these parties, there were perhaps only two historical parties in 1989 which could say that they were not intellectual formations: the Independent Smallholders’ Party and the Social Democratic Party. Intellectuals were “sent away” from both parties through debates, scandals, and party splits. Although some critical intellectuals appeared, together with the intellectuals coming from MSZMP, in the Social Democratic Party but they soon failed, the sympathizer advisory candidates left, and eventually the party itself failed, too, in the 1990 elections. The elite of the Smallholders’ Party was recruited mainly from rural farmers and the surviving former Smallholder politicians of the pre-communist era. The small number of intellectuals who later joined them had not belonged to the active anti-system intellectuals. Those who were dedicated to make the intellectual wing of the party strong, soon found themselves outside the party, which in the 1990s turned in a populist direction. In the case of the Christian Democratic People’s Party, which was organized relatively late, the party’s core already included some intellectuals bound to the church. First, they were the old, mainly Catholic intellectuals who had not fought against the collaborative politics of the church during the communist era, and second there were the younger intellectuals who were closer to the lower clergy and voiced critical views in smaller circles. However, the party leadership was composed of members of the older generation.

3.1 The Independent Smallholders’ Party

Representing the interests of the landed peasantry, the history of FGKP dates back to the period before World War I. However, it assumed a significant political role after World War II when it received, with the support of the Hungarian people who feared a communist takeover, the most votes
in the first free parliamentary elections in 1945. The party united a variety of political branches already then, from clerical right to the patriotic left. The communists exploited the internal divisions of the party to neutralize it, becoming the victim of the infamous “salami tactics” by 1947. Its leaders emigrated or were arrested, the others were pushed to the background, and some of them who worked for the communist takeover later fulfilled representative but politically insignificant positions for decades. Among other things, they participated in the operation of the most important satellite organization of MSZMP, the Patriotic People’s Front, which provided an opportunity for the former smallholders to stay in contact with each other.¹³⁵

The re-founding of FGKP was done mainly by the third liners of the former party who lived through the forcibly apolitical decades in middle-level positions and without any significant conflict. They joined the party apparatus at a young age, and a few years later they had to experience its dissolution and the break in their own political career. As being a smallholder became the key element of their identity, their political strategy was mainly motivated by the restoration of the party as an organization. The members of this group came mainly from bourgeois intellectual families which declassed in the 1950s and had to endure further grievances after 1956. Through long byways, they developed average careers which they always felt as being restrained because of their class alien origin and outsider standing. Their interests pointed toward changing the system, and their values were also radically different from the already decaying dominant ideology. From the mid-1980s, they took part in the operation of various opposition and semi-opposition organizations with increasing intensity. They were noted primarily because of their organizational capacity rather than theoretical prowess.

*De jure*, the Smallholders’ Party was not disbanded during the decades of state socialism, and the idea of relaunching it was brought up as early as 1986. However, accepting the proposal of József Bognár, who was an academic, Member of Parliament, and a former smallholder politician, it was not revived as a party. Instead, the Béla Kovács Society was established within the HNF. This was a part of the co-optation strategy of Imre Pozsgay, who wanted to expand his base and room for maneuver vis-à-vis the hardliners of the communist party. The leadership of the Society, which included both

¹³⁵ Ravasz, "A Független Kisgazdapárt újjáalakítása."
the historian József Antall and the writer Árpád Göncz, wanted to establish good relations with both the HNF and the circle of reform communist Rezső Nyers.

Political transformation for the old smallholders meant not only the creation of political rules but, through the relaunching of their party, the continuation of their broken political career as well. They were not radicals in this sense, although they set out to represent the interests of the rural party membership whose property had been expropriated. After some initiatives in the country, the cautious veterans were convinced by a group of middle-aged expert intellectuals to form a party in the end of 1988. As the old smallholders were more and more crowded out of the new organizations which had started forming earlier, they ventured to create an opposition organization which, ahead of everyone, defines itself as a political party.

The formation of FGKP in November 1988 was mainly the result of the decisive action of Tivadar Pártay, who also became party president. The relaunch of the Smallholders’ Party contributed to the development of the multiparty system because this was the moment when society realized that the emergence of parties other than the MSZMP was possible. For among the organizations which had been formed in autumn, 1988, neither MDF nor SZDSZ called itself a party. Its members were particularly averse toward this term because they believed that the word “party” had been discredited. They did not think politics based on civil society was reconcilable with party politics, even though they recognized that the movement must turn into a party at some point. There were some smallholders who criticized the behavior of opposition parties precisely on the ground of their firm opposition to party formation. “I was always on the barricades. I was there everywhere in the front line. I was happy with all kinds of movements. I was just fed up with them. I wanted to be a party member. […] The member of a patriotic party, which cares about this country and starts the multi-party system.”

Those who came from the outside recognized the modest intellectual prowess of the party and criticized the fact that the elders of the party vindicated party leadership. According to a critical position: “Unfortunately, the public image of the party was negative due to the many awkward, otherwise well-meaning, nice, but in terms of politics and general knowledge quite

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136 Interview with Pál Dragon, 1997.
uncouth elderly. With a mentality that ‘you have no clue about politics.’ This was their whole attitude. They were basically nostalgic and unfortunately they did it up the whole transition and the first parliamentary period.”

The members of the younger generation of the Smallholders’ Party knew that MSZMP can be forced into negotiations only by a unified opposition, therefore they argued for active participation in EKA. Thus, they were more radical than the older members in the tactical sense, although their policy standpoints were more moderate. The confrontations of the two groups defined the first years of the party. This was somewhat dimmed by the fact that the anti-communist members of the former veterans supported the political goals of the middle-aged group, and many of the latter realized that they must be loyal to the older generation, which has the trust of the membership, to pave the way for their advancement in the party.

The bridge between the older and the middle-aged generations was the lawyer, Imre Boross. For he belonged to the old smallholders, but his political attitude shared many traits with that of the young. He sensed the weakening of the arguments of legal continuity, but he also acknowledged that that was still the party’s most powerful resource. It was primarily his achievement that the FKGP joined the Roundtable negotiations. He realized the growing strength of EKA and focused his efforts within the party in this field. The position of the Smallholders’ Party was significantly different from that of MDF, MNP, and KDNP, and it was similarly to that of the Social Democrats, insofar as they rejected the election of Imre Pozsgay as president. Although the party had signed the agreement of September 1989, they later joined the “Four Yes” referendum initiative. Imre Boross explained the turn as follows:

I went to a gathering in Csongrád. To the people there, Pozsgay was a communist. There was no room for explaining that this was different. That he had shed his skin. We couldn’t explain such things to the masses. On this gathering, I firmly stated: We will elect the President of the Republic before the parliamentary elections! And the masses said: But he cannot be a communist! And cannot be Imre Pozsgay! The next day, An-

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137 Interview with Zoltán Pungor, 1997.
tall called me up: “Imre, why don’t you like Pozsgay?” “Because the membership doesn’t like him,” I said.\footnote{18}

Boross had serious political ambitions, but his competitors eventually forced him out of the party by the end of 1989.\footnote{139} In spite of the internal grievances and expulsions, the older leaders of the party—who shared a broken life—had enough inhesion so that the party could represent a uniform identity. It was not in the interest of MSZMP or its successor to weaken FKGP, because the smallholders mainly took voters from the other opposition parties.

The lawyer József Torgyán entered first on the side of Boross, and later, replacing him. Torgyán played a minor role in the Roundtable talks, but he soon became popular with the rural membership of the party. Giving passionate anti-communist speeches during the 1990 election campaign, Torgyán managed to attract tens of thousands of new sympathizers to the party. As a result of the successful campaign, FGKP became the third strongest parliamentary party with 12 percent of the votes on party list. The party delegated four members to the Antall government, but only the Minister of Agriculture, Ferenc József Nagy—who was also the president of FKGP for a short period—had participated in the Roundtable talks as well. József Torgyán was party leader for 10 years after 1991, and he became the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in the first Orbán government.

\subsection*{3.2 The Hungarian Social Democratic Party}

With a similar historical background and a long history even more rugged than that of the smallholders, MSZDP became a significant political actor when Hungary was regaining consciousness over the ruins of World War II. Already then, MSZDP was divided between classical social democratic and communist platforms. The representatives of the latter had a serious role in the disillusionment and the communist takeover that soon followed regaining consciousness.\footnote{140} After the party merged with the Communist Party in

138 Interview with Imre Boross, 1997.
139 Boross, 	extit{Visszaemlékezés a változó világba}.
1948, to create the totalitarian Hungarian Workers Party (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, MDP) the paths of the former social democrats radically diverged. Some of those who went on to build a career in the state party became unconditional apologists of the communist system. But there were others who became heavily compromised in the 1950s and still later they were crucial figures in starting the reforms of the party state. On the other hand, the “right wing” of the MSZDP—the ones who rejected the party’s defeatism—was even more in the way of the system than the civic parties. Most of them were forced into emigration, and many of those who stayed were incarcerated.

MSZDP was relaunched in January 1989 upon the initiative of four former members. All of them were old men with an eventful history and a political and professional career that had been broken by the communist system. The eldest of them, András Révész became party president. He and the other reorganizers of the party were former officials of the MSZDP, whose life saw its main turning point in 1948. They were all born in working-class families and joined MSZDP in their adolescence. However, the party merger was a tragic break in their career. They became political class aliens in an era when the popular social policy resulted in the enrollment of tens of thousands of young people from the working class to universities. Their marginalization was further enhanced by renewed persecution after 1956. Several of them worked as skilled laborers and could attain low-level administrative positions only later. Others were forced into temporary emigration.

However, the political changes of the 1980s compelled them to act as well. This was facilitated by Rezső Nyers, who turned from social democrat to communist and reform communist, and whose aim was to build bridges between the state party on the one hand and left-wing reform intellectuals and other left-wing groups on the other hand. The old, formerly persecuted social democratic leaders first created the Social Democratic Movement, which was then followed by founding the party. This happened, in part, upon the urging of middle-aged actors who appeared around the great elders. Many of the former had left MSZMP in 1988 and had an ambiv-

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141 Particularly Rezső Nyers.
142 Sándor Bácskai, Tibor Baranyai, András Révész, and Imre Takács.
143 Interview with Tibor Baranyai; 1997.
144 Márkus, Forog a hinta.
Intellectuals as Legislators

talent relationship to it: they knew that the state party was unable to renew in a social democratic direction, and therefore MSZDP (and personally themselves) had a good opportunity to catch on the democratic left. While the social democratic elders with working-class origins became class aliens in the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” members of the middle-aged generation emerged after 1956 in the period of moderation. Their left-wing views were strongly influenced by the social democratic politics of Western Europe. Yet as they were far from being the losers of the old system, their opposition identity was formed relatively late and only gradually.

Opinion polls conducted in the summer of 1989 showed that the Social Democratic Party had a high level of support. No wonder the state party recognized them as its chief rival, for they were situated on the left. The worry was mutual: the leadership of MSZDP was concerned about MSZMP because the leaders of the state party also claimed to be the heirs of old Hungarian social democracy. They pretended as if the party merger of 1948 had been voluntary on both sides. The communists believed that, while other parties only represent the inevitability of pluralism, MSZDP poses an existential threat to MSZMP.

The “historical wing” of the party which was composed of the older members of the party was concerned about the incoming former MSZMP-members. They were mistrustful toward them because they suspected that they could be undercover agents of the state party.145 For example, three of the four intellectuals who had been expelled from MSZMP were in the party.146 A prominent representative of the expelled was seen as a potential chief secretary by several social democrats, and he was also invited to speak at a party conference. According to an older attendee: “The problem was not that he came but the way he came. He said that this party—or rather this germ of a party—had no face yet, but in case he comes he would bring 40 of his friends, the crème de la crème of the intellectuals of Pest, and together they would make the party. Then Uncle András Révész stood up, and said ‘Please tell me then, should I put on a morning coat?’”147

145 The founders were suspicious of the activity of unionist Sándor Csintalan, legal historian Tamás Mihály Révész (the son of the party president), and lawyer György Ruttner.
146 Political scientist Mihály Bíhari as a candidate for chief secretary, László Lengyel as a simple party member, and Zoltán Király who had come from MDF as party president. The only exception was Zoltán Bíró, who was the president of MDF until October 1989.
147 Interview with Pál Benyó, 1997.
Chapter VII

This conversation clearly revealed the anti-intellectual stance of the older generation of the party, which became ideological through their anti-communism. In their eyes, the overconfidence of the joining outsider intellectuals meant the intensifying peril of reform communism. Originally, MSZDP was the party of the simple working man who were suspicious of every outsider, that is, not “organic” intellectual. The anecdote also tells us how much the reform communist intellectuals despised and condescended to the old members of the MSZDP.

Members of the older generation vindicated party leadership to themselves on “historical grounds.” They devoted their whole life to social democracy and felt that the result of all their suffering in the previous decades cannot be that the party is now taken over by MSZMP members. More than once, their fear poisoned the party’s atmosphere: they tended to see every ardent youngster ready to help as a communist agent. This does not mean that MSZMP (and later its successor) was not interested in weakening the social democrats, for “the opposition leftism of the social democrats was quite a confounding factor in everyone’s eye.” But it did not mean that either that many of the younger generation were not just as anti-communist.

Yet even some representatives of the historical wing of MSZDP had informal connections to certain communist politicians. This was the case for one of the founders, András Révész, who maintained good relations to certain leaders of the communist party through his family. This raised some eyebrows in the party. Internal conflicts and generational differences led to the formation of the Renewal Platform. Speaking about the older leaders of the party, one of the members of the platform opined that “their intellectual capacity did not allow them to actively participate in the Roundtable talks.”

The social democrats could not send representatives to every working committee. The chief negotiator of the party was one of the younger members, István Gaskó, who said that “our idea was a social market economy, which was later adopted by Antall as well.” The escalating debates within the party were later followed by the formation of the Independent Social Democratic Party, which split from MSZDP and was inclined toward reform communism. “Révész once called me up, ‘look,’ he said, ‘I was pre-

148 Interview with Iván Kaszás, 1997.
149 Interview with György Fischer, 1997.
150 Interview with István Gaskó, 1997.
sent with *a fait accompli*, I cannot do anything. I am already old, who should I hand down this party to? He didn’t really believe that the inflow of reform communists was what Anna Kéthly had asked him to do back then.”

The breaking of the unity of MSZDP was beneficial to MSZP, which entered the parliament as the only left-wing party. Deepening debates, the lack of coordination, and an unsuccessful campaign eventually led to the electoral failure of MSZP in 1990.151 As a result of the failure, the leaders and negotiators of MSZDP left the party in 1990–1992. A retiring party founder said that “it ended when the elder gifted the party away, gave it to Zoltán Király.”153 Later the party was “bought up” by the former state-party minister, a rich capitalist László Kapolyi, who represented the social democrats alone in the parliament, as a member of the MSZP group.

### 3.3 The Hungarian People’s Party

The Roundtable talks were also attended by the Hungarian People’s Party (MNP), which was composed of intellectuals partially occupied with agriculture and partially, with the populist literature. It was reorganized as the legal successor of the National Peasants’ Party which had been founded in 1938. That party was created by the middle-class intellectual group of the populist writers of the interwar period154 with the aim of representing the destitute layers of peasants. The ideologues of the Peasants’ Party believed that, instead of the dominance of the state and the market, the key to future Hungarian social development was cooperatives. Although the movement had a profound cultural impact on the public life of Hungary, its intellectual character prevented it from becoming truly influential in the political sphere. Its popular ideology was looking for a third way between the overly superficial and individualist societies of Western Europe and the overly collectivist Soviet Union. The communist collaborator wing of the party interpreted the latter in a way that, accepting the obligate axiom of dictatorship,

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151 Interview with Pál Benyó, 1997.
152 In 1990, MSZDP got 3.55 percent of the votes which was below the electoral threshold. In 1994, it received only 1 percent.
153 Interview with Sándor Bácskai, 1997.
154 The left-wing of the Peasants’ Party was represented by József Darvas and Ferenc Erdei (who made a compromise with the communists), its center was represented by Péter Veres, and its right-wing was represented by Imre Kovács. They were all writers and sociologists.
those points should be found far from politics which could put a human face on the system and make it more habitable.

Representatives of this view ran, albeit with some kinks, high-profile careers from the beginning of the 1960s. They attained positions at the helm of cooperatives and state farms, in ministry apparatuses and the leadership of the HNF. The function of these was precisely to satisfy the need for public activity of some people without granting any opportunity of genuine political action. While the party members who resisted the communists acquired experience of the discriminatory methods of the latter, the collaborators were taught by their own example that it is worth taking the odium of being “fellow travelers” for progress in smaller issues.\textsuperscript{155} Thus, members of the Peasants’ Party in the HNF did not disrupt the system from the inside—as did the reform communists—but rather they build it from the outside. However, when the system did start to disintegrate, they saw the time was ripe to act as an independent political force. The first step was the formation of Veres Péter Society with the help of the HNF and its general secretary, Imre Pozsgay. One of their important institutional basis was the Research Institute of Agricultural Economics, formerly founded by Ferenc Erdei. The Institute was led by agricultural economist János Marton, who became the first president of the relaunched party in 1989.

In 1989, the leadership of the MNP was comprised of the elderly members of the Peasants’ Party and a small circle of middle-aged intellectuals who also belonged to the broader circle of Imre Pozsgay. Most of them were born in Budapest and they were first-generation intellectuals. In the 1970s, they became members of the communist party as young professionals in their twenties. Their relationship to the power was conciliatory. They formulated their criticism not in the language of politics but rather as cultural criticism, which was paternally soothed by this or that more emphatic representative of the political leadership. As public educators, sociologists, and journalists they were primarily interested in the analysis and organization of local communities, edited related journals\textsuperscript{156} (from here came the secretary general of the party, Csaba Varga). Accordingly, their criticism concerned local social relations instead of the whole political system.

\textsuperscript{155} Benkő, \textit{A magyar népi mozgalom almanachja.}

\textsuperscript{156} Interview with Csaba Varga, 1997.
The National Peasants’ Party was relaunched in 1989 as the Hungarian People’s Party to drop its historical ballast, that is, the charge of collaboration with the communists. Regarding the decision, party president János Márton argued that “let this be a party which genuinely represents true civic values. What’s first for a true citizen is to have existential security. [. . .] So they have no boss. They cannot be ordered, fired, they don’t need to bow or be afraid for their job. [. . .] The other sign of a citizen, which is very important, that they think in several generations. Thus, they serve the longevity of the nation. Such thinking is manifested in the fact that they always subordinate consumption to growth. [. . .] In my interpretation, the People’s Party would have been the political venue of the real Hungarian national citizens. [. . .] The layer I was expecting the most was the agricultural intellectuals.”

Instead, the party was divided over internal conflicts: first, the cleavage between the former collaborators and the persecuted; second, the political disagreement of leftists and rightists; and third, the generational gap between the older and younger members (the former had no political ambitions anymore, but the latter had).

The party had a relatively unimportant role during the Roundtable talks, and politically it appeared as the sister party of MDF. The negotiators of the MNP received no instructions from the party leadership: “What they say was ‘go’ and ‘do it.’ ‘You are an expert anyway, let’s not waste time.’”

“Party discipline, we never even uttered this word. There was no party discipline whatsoever. Everyone said what they wanted, every time, and no one was ever held accountable.”

During the economic negotiations, the party tried to represent a third-way policy, which would have meant giving the lands to the peasants while running the agricultural cooperatives as professional centers. With regard to agrarian transformation, the party represented the interests of the peasants of the cooperatives because they found that “national poverty appeared

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157 Interview with János Márton, 1997.
158 In the EKA, MNP was represented by László Kónya and the secretary general of the party, Csaba Varga.
159 This perception is further enforced by the fact that, when János Márton resigned the party presidency at the end of 1989, the new president of MNP became the writer Gyula Fekete, who had left the MDF for the MNP.
161 Interview with János Marton, 1997.
162 Interview with László S. Hegedűs, 1997.
primarily in the rural area, where the people drifted below subsistence level.”
They wanted to give state property to the primary owners and then privatize
the decentralized wealth, preferring owners from the “civil society” in the
process. However, other political actors rejected this slow method of privatiza-
tion. Accordingly, the third-way ideas were swept off the negotiating table
by the organizations of EKA, in agreement with the MSZMP.

The appearance of MNP was just a passing moment in the history of
the regime change. The party could not attain one percent of the votes in
the first free elections. After the failure, the members and leaders of the
party scattered, some of their experts joined MDF, and the party ceased its
activities.

3.4 The Christian Democratic People’s Party

Among the historical parties, the Christian Democratic People’s Party
(KDNP) was the last one to be relaunched, even though it is only this party
where we can actually speak about historical continuity. This ap-
parent discrepancy stemmed from the party’s peculiar, subcultural character.
Those who relaunched KDNP were inspired by their family background,
and therefore they aimed not simply at the reanimation and representation
of the party but of the institutionally independent catholic world as well.

That world existed in Hungary before 1948. It included student unions,
folk high schools, the Hungarian Social People’s Movement, and the
Christian Democratic (later: Democratic) People’s Party, which had grown
out of movement. The system that these organizations comprised was almost
completely dissolved by the state socialist dictatorship after the year of turn-
ing (for example, the many church schools were brought under state supervi-
sion). However, the Catholic Church could retain its the institutional inde-
dependence, even though they had to pay for this with questionable gestures
to the regime. And while the representatives of the Catholic Church stayed
away from the starting opposition initiatives of the 1980s, they were able to
broadcast a worldview that was markedly different from the official ideolo-

163 Interview with Gyula Fábián, 1997.
164 KDNP regarded itself as a successor of the Democratic People’s Party which had existed as an active
parliamentary party in the 1940s, featuring people such as István Barankovics, Ferenc Matheovics, and
The political moderation of the 1980s allowed them to relaunch their church organizations, which was also helped by the Patriotic People’s Front led by Pozsgay. Yet, despite the blossoming of Christian-spirited public life, its organizers stayed away from the more and more active opposition movements. They operated in the nonpolitical segments of civil society, such as the Association of Large Families, the Association of Pensioners, the St. Stephen Association, and around the legal catholic journal called Új Ember (New Man). With the leadership of Imre Pozsgay, the HNF put a roof above these organizations, and therefore Pozsgay both co-opted them into the system and broadened the boundaries of the system.

The turning point was the creation of Márton Áron Society in 1988. It involved not only some extremely cautious former party officials but also middle-aged intellectuals who leaned toward Christian democratic ideology. The Society had an interconfessional basis. Among its members there were several Calvinists and future members of the MDF. Afterward, the younger members who sensed the acceleration of political changes convinced the hesitant veterans to start relaunching the party, which took place in March 1989. This way, two generations were represented in the relaunched KDNP. Members of the older generation had participated in the short period of livening political life after World War II. Their whole life was devoted to the Church and the Christian socialist organizations that appeared around it. Many of them found refuge here when the communist turn pushed them to the margins of society. Members of the younger generation were born after the World War; they could only know the meaning of Christian democracy from history books. All of them attended Catholic high school and being in a symbolically repressed position, developed strong bonds of solidarity.

Seemingly, a worldview that was able to encompass various generations provided firm foundations to the renaissance of Christian democracy. By 1989, however, it turned out that ideological unity had covered different political ambitions. By the late relaunch of KDNP, the Opposition Roundtable (EKA) had already existed, and for many people within the party it seemed natural to join. But the older members opposed this: they argued that the party had not been organized enough, and therefore it should focus on itself. They believed that their party does not have to apply terms like “opposition.”

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165 Enyedi, *Politika a kereszt jegyében*, 74.
“right,” or “left,” but instead they can create a broad social unity on Christian worldview and pragmatic political activity. And to create such a party, it is much more important (theoretically) to develop the party organization and its pillar organizations than forming the political arena. “Within KDNP, it was a question of serious debate whether we should or shouldn’t join EKA. There were some groups of mainly older members who were afraid for the purity of the party or the movement, so to speak, should it get involved in politics. Which is quite ridiculous, that a political party should live by not getting involved in politics.”

Eventually, representatives of the younger generation were able to make joining to the EKA happen. Yet the party was represented in the negotiations by members of the older generation (Tibor Füzessy, lawyer and György Szakolczai, economist), and thus it still took a rather moderate position. The lack of cadres of the party was palpable in the working committees, it was difficult to fill up the positions given to them. “It was very typical to the whole thing that almost everyone was unprepared. Like drowning people, we were gasping for air.” Probably one of the reasons for the moderate position of KDNP was that too fast transformation was just as unfavorable to the reorganization of catholic-Christian political subculture as political backlash. Another reason was that KDNP was afraid of backlash within the state party and regarded the reform communist Pozsgay as the key to the success of peaceful transition. “The way we—and not only we—saw the near future was that the first elections are going to be won by the socialists. This is proved by the lot of two-thirds rules which were included in the version of the constitution which was proclaimed on October 23, 1989. [. . .] The whole of EKA wanted to tie the hands of MSZP.” The leaders of KDNP opined that “the reform would be only half-finished until the elections, but it has to be continued. And with a basically socialist parliament only Pozsgay could provide some guarantee for the continuation of the reforms.”

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166 Interview with György Szakolczai, 1997.
167 At the beginning of the talks, Füzessy worked at the Chief Prosecutor’s Office of Budapest, where his appearance was criticized. He decided to quit and take on a political role. Interview with Tibor Füzessy, 1997.
168 Interview with László Pallós, 1997.
169 Interview with Tibor Füzessy, 1997.
170 Interview with Tibor Füzessy, 1997.
An opposition participant said: “I noticed that KDNP, the MNP and in some cases the BZSBT practically relayed the Pozsgay-type MSZMP position within EKA. Be it the question of whether the word socialism should be included in the constitution, or the question of whether there should be direct presidential elections,” which would have been favorable to Pozsgay at that time.

In terms of the economy, KDNP argued for transition to social market economy on an anti-monetarist basis. Some of its representatives also opined that the country should not repay its national debt. “As far as the economic and financial processes are concerned, we basically continued what had been started under Kádár. In the spirit of monetarism, based on the proposals and often the orders of the World Bank and the IMF. Practically, the regime change was a regime change only to the extent of the reorganization of ownership relations, but as far as the macroeconomic system goes, we continued what had been started.”

Joining the Roundtable talks was favorable to KDNP because this way the party achieved countrywide recognition even before its official relaunch. Officially, KDNP had never been disbanded, but practically at the time of the Roundtable talks it was just an organizing society of intellectuals. Its political existence hinged on the fact that the member organizations of EKA took it in. According to one of the organizers, “there were few of us, and there was little energy for organizing the party. […] We were very late, and somehow we had to make that up.” It is telling that one of the negotiators of MSZMP was honestly surprised when one of his old colleagues introduced himself as a representative of the Christian Democratic People’s Party. In the end, KDNP was relaunched in September 1989, and Sándor Keresztes was elected party president. Starting at a disadvantage, the party managed to get into the parliament in the 1990 elections—as the smallest party—and it was included in the coalition government as well.

The success had several reasons. As opposed to the smallholders and the social democrats, the party was not divided over serious internal conflicts. They were more-or-less able to manage generational conflicts, and the historical name of the party alone was enough to attract hundreds of thousands.

171 Interview with László Kövér, 1997.
172 Interview with Ernő Rozgonyi, 1997.
173 Interview with Tibor Füzessy, 1997.
Another important factor was the decision of the party leadership not to make KDNP a denominational party, keeping it open to Calvinists as well as seculars.\textsuperscript{174} Finally, the support of the Catholic Church and the direct external political environment of the party was important, too, because—as opposed to the case of the social democrats—parties with similar ideologies were not interested in weakening the KDNP.

Out of the 1989 negotiators of KDNP, Tibor Füzessy became a minister,\textsuperscript{175} while the other participant later became party president.\textsuperscript{176}

### 3.5 The Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society

The Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society (BZSBT) was founded by people born between the two World Wars, who first entered the political scene in the middle of the 1940s. They represented mainly national and leftist ideas, mainly as smallholders, social democrats, or communists. Most of them were born to bourgeois middle-class families, many of them abroad. As a result of their different family background from the mainstream of their generation, they were soon disillusioned about the new system.

The Society was founded in the beginning of 1986, by intellectuals who belonged to the older generation and whose career was broken after 1956.\textsuperscript{177} BZSBT became politically active with the support of the HNF as an organization for culture, preserving folk traditions, and protecting minorities. Its main aim was to contribute to the resuscitation of national political traditions, and to call attention to the problems of Hungarians abroad. In the view of BZSBT, the constitutive element of the civil society to be organized was national identity. Its activities were supported by the Soros Foundation.\textsuperscript{178} The Society organized several events with success. At first, the People’s Front provided venue for their events,\textsuperscript{179} but later they organized their meetings at the Institution for the Blind, the Petőfi Hall, and the Jurta Theater. The

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\textsuperscript{174} Interview with Sándor Keresztes, 1997.
\textsuperscript{175} Tibor Füzessy was Minister of Civilian Intelligence Services in 1992–1994 in the Antall and Boross governments.
\textsuperscript{176} György Giczy was the president of KDNP in 1995–2001.
\textsuperscript{177} The most famous ones were the engineer István Domonkos, the librarian László Morvay, and historian Károly Vigh, and the lawyer Zsolt Zétényi. Interview with István Domonkos, 1997.
\textsuperscript{178} Bossányi, Szólampróba, 13.
\textsuperscript{179} Interview with István Echter, 1997.
peak of the BZSBT’s activity was its leading role in organizing and conducting the June 1988 demonstration against the leveling of villages in Romania, where it was helped by its civil connections\(^\text{180}\) as well as the good relations it had maintained with Imre Pozsgay.

In this group we could find the president of the Society, Károly Vígh. Already in the beginning of the 1980s, he got in contact with Pozsgay and the populist intellectual circle that supported him. He had a long-standing friendship with József Antall as well. In the beginning, BZSBT was an extremely open group, its members included MSZMP members as well as people who would later become smallholders, Fidesz or SZDSZ members. However, the Society’s strongest tie which eventually developed into an alliance was with the MDF. It tried to fulfill a bridging role between the reform communists and the MDF.

During the economic negotiations, BZSBT argued that privatization should be public and conducted in a transparent procedure.\(^\text{181}\) In the issue of agriculture, “by our proposal, we reached a consensus that the cooperatives do not have to be broken up, anyone can quit if they want, but the wealth must be specified, and the land must have value. […] Back then, EKA looked at cooperatives as Stalinist rudiments which need to be reorganized by Western principles.”\(^\text{182}\) Finally, in social policy BZSBT tried to put the long-term issues of family supporting, child rearing, and educational policy\(^\text{183}\) on the agenda.

BZSBT had no ambitions to become an independent party. In December 1989 the general meeting of the members decided, upon the president’s proposal that BZSBT would not turn into a party because it had fulfilled its political role. Later they made an agreement with MDF about political cooperation.\(^\text{184}\) After the Roundtable talks, the members of the Society scattered; only one of their negotiators\(^\text{185}\) made it to the parliament on the party list of the MDF.

\(^{180}\) Here we must mention the Petőfi Cultural and Traditionalist Association of Szentendre and the Széchenyi Casino. Bossányi, Szilámpóra, 15–17.

\(^{181}\) Interview with Ferenc Kováts, 1997.

\(^{182}\) Interview with Dezső Pálffy, 1997.

\(^{183}\) Interview with Ákos Haraszti, 1997.

\(^{184}\) Interview with Károly Vígh, 1997.

\(^{185}\) Zsolt Zétényi.
4. The “mass party of professionals”: The MSZMP

On one side, there was the Opposition Roundtable composed of the dissident movements of the 1980s, the democratic opposition, and the representatives of the various groups of the short-lived semi-democracy of post–World War II Hungary. On the other side, there was the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSZMP). According to the given political division, this party in the summer of 1989—as the communist state party, formally still in a monopoly position—represented the declining system vis-à-vis the more and more popular forces of the opposition.

The MSZMP fulfilled the function of a state party for decades in the Kádár regime. Despite its name it was not really the party of the workers. It was more the mass party of professionals with university degrees and the elite party of the workers, creating an unusual conglomerate of professional intellectual politicians. One of the most important cleavages within the MSZMP was generational, dividing the party into old cadres and “Young Turks.” The old cadres were not intellectuals, albeit some of their representatives of a newer vintage followed the expectations of the era and called themselves economists or historians. Those who got a degree among them typically acquired it at party institutions (such as the Lenin Institute, or later the MSZMP’s Political College) or in the Soviet Union.

The inflow of intellectuals in the party started in the second half of the 1960s, which was related to the new economic mechanism introduced in 1968. Most of them wanted to be enrolled not to become politicians themselves but to have a smoother way in career, but to some younger intellectuals the KISZ was a springboard and offered an opportunity to enter the higher echelons of power as well. The communist party leadership preferred the ideologically less sophisticated technical intellectuals, and that was how young engineers could ascend to the first line of the ruling elite. Those who could not get that high belonged to the techno-bureaucracy, which was obviously more qualified than the old cadre apparatus. As politicians, they showed absolutely no sign of critical attitude and they supported the Kádár system until May 1988.

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186 György Fejő, Csaba Hámori, and László Maróthy.
187 Nyíró et al., Segédkönyv a Politikai Bizottság tanulmányozásához.
At this time, however, the communist party was no longer the party of the generation of János Kádár. Those who—as young, uneducated, or party-educated cadres—flowed into the Hungarian Working People’s Party (MDP) on the turn of the 1940s and 1950s had become aged by the mid-1980s. Their places were taken, both in the central and the local levels, by the generation of the 1960s and 1970s, or the “second generation.” This generation was fundamentally different from the first one. Particularly, it was ideologically less and less communist; its “communist” position became a simple prerequisite of ascendance or upward mobility in an organizational sense. But it also happened that some of them received their diploma earlier than their party membership card. Simply put, the first generation was puritan, uneducated, and ideological, whereas the second one was careerist, educated, and pragmatic. The first generation saw itself (in the beginning) as revolutionary of everyday life as well, while the second generation valued professional expertise alongside political loyalty. The first generation hated capitalism, bourgeois democracy, and the West; the second generation looked at these with envy. Their lifestyles also differed: in its free time, the first generation hunted, the second generation played tennis.

In May 1988, Kádár was overthrown by a Károly Grósz-led coalition of occasion, which involved both the old-style communists who nevertheless were willing to sacrifice some old taboos on the altar of getting power; former party bureaucrats from KISZ who felt danger and wanted to leave the sinking ship as soon as possible; marginalized reform communists; as well as younger pragmatic careerists who mainly had degrees in economists and represented the values of economic efficiency. Leadership change happened under the banner of “reform” of obscure content.  

Imre Pozsgay played a key role in gradual liberalization. He achieved significant political breakthrough when he cited the conclusion of the committee, he had tasked with investigating 1956 and called the revolution a popular revolt. By this, he created such a situation within the state party in February 1989 that the party leadership accepted the introduction of multiparty system. The technocratic and ideological reformers who had been emerging within the MSZMP needed Károly Grósz as a head of government.

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188 Schöpflin et al. “Leadership Change and Reform in Hungary.”
189 Berend, A történelem – ahogyan megéltem.
and general party secretary only until he neutralized the supporters of the old system within the party.

Miklós Németh, who followed Grósz in the position of prime minister, justified his competence not only by having a group of good professional intellectuals but also by that he himself turned from a professional intellectual into a politician. For an outside observer, Németh was not as unlike his intellectual experts as Grósz was, who was proud that “we did the fifties” and during an American trip on July 1988 called the opposition members who had protested for democracy and the proper burial of Imre Nagy a month before “fascists.” In November 1988, he threatened with the danger of coming “white terror,” and a few months later he threatened to introduce an economic state of emergency. Contrary to him, Miklós Németh wanted to detach his “expert” government from MSZMP and therefore to save the professional intellectuals turned politicians from the stigma of cooperating with old-style communists.

The emergence of ideological critical intellectuals in the MSZMP was related to the organization of reform circles. The reform circles were formed on the turn of 1988–1989 and involved mainly rural professional intellectuals who felt betrayed by, and turned against, the politics of the party leadership, realizing they had been on the losing side. Their only option was the radical renewal of the party, as well as the “liquidation of the structures of the Stalinist model” in the spirit of democratic socialism. An early statement presents the ideas of the initiators of the movement faithfully: “The reform circle would be a political debate forum strengthening horizontal relations within and the movement character of the party. It would operate unprompted, independently from the party hierarchy, so not as a commit-

190 The interview with Károly Grósz was published in the July 11, 1988, issue of Newsweek. According to Grósz, the protest on June 16 was “incitement toward fascist propaganda, chauvinism, and irredentism.” The representatives of the Network of Free Initiatives called attention to the untrue statements of Grósz and added: “It is not a new phenomenon that a communist general party secretary calls the proponents of democracy fascist inciters. However, now that general party secretary did it who had called himself a devout supporter of economic and political reforms for a year.” (Statement by János Dénes, János Kis, György Litván, Imre Mécs, Sándor Rácz, and Jenő Rónay.)


192 Ágh, Géczi, and Sipos, Rendszerváltók a baloldalon, 55.
Its aim is to collect and amplify reform ideas and influence decisions, as well as to join the vibrant political processes which started in the society.”

We may take two typical actors from the starting group. One of them, Imre Keserű was a high school teacher in Szentes. He voiced radical criticism of the party, by which he marginalized himself so much that he did not even enter the Hungarian Socialist Party in October 1989. Later, from December 1991 he was among the speakers of the Democratic Charta. He was the representative of the radical, non-compromising, “pure” movement standpoint. The other actor, József Géczi, was the adjunct of scientific socialism at the University of Szeged. He advocated more moderate, more realizable, reformist “people’s democratic” socialism. From this standpoint, he became a member of parliament of MSZP in Spring 1990.

The group echoed the views those reform political scientists had held a few years earlier who had oriented toward democratic socialism and social democracy. However, the reform circles quickly radicalized politically, and in the April 1989 reform meeting in Kecskemét they saw little chance for the internal democratization of the party and most of them would have preferred a party split. But as Pozsgay had been convinced not to do this by then, the disappointed intellectuals of the reform circles focused their efforts on gathering an extraordinary party congress. By the summer of 1989, the events had accelerated to such a degree that the victory of the reform circle movement seemed probable, causing the inflow of more and more conformist party members to their ranks. Finally, by the reform circle movement—under the name of Reform Alliance—achieved a breakthrough on the October party congress, the group had already been so diluted that many reform circle intellectuals became disillusioned precisely by that victory.

MSZMP was represented in the Roundtable talks by its second generation. Moreover, the reason the negotiations could happen in the first place was that the party was dominated by this pragmatic, relatively reformist, more skeptic generation. Members of the second generation needed party membership for social mobility because they also came from below, from poor circumstances, and their cultural capital was not enough for attain-
ing an intellectual elite status. However, party membership was a way to cut the long road to political or economic elite. By social roots, they were not unlike the first generation; the difference was that they could already have university education, and their expertise was valued by the party as well. The top-down manipulated regime-changing reformers of the 1950s gave way to modernizing reformers who were supported only halfheartedly and with mixed feelings by the Kádárian establishment. The decay of the regime further facilitated their career because the leadership believed that it would be the expertise of the second generation that would save the system.

The negotiating delegation of MSZMP was recruited mainly from three places: the party center; ministry apparatuses; the secretariat of the Council of Ministers and Minister of State Imre Pozsgay. Accordingly, the members of the political working committees were selected György Fejti, a member of MSZMP’s Central Committee who represented the party center; Imre Pozsgay, who represented the government; and the leaders of the Ministry of Justice. First, delegates of the party center could be found in every working committee. Their role was to supervise ministerial delegates and enforce the political strategy approved by the party leadership and defined by Fejti within the MSZMP delegation. Their role was similar to that of political commissars in the military. True, the party was already in such a condition then that even the majority of these “heelers” did not identify completely with the role assigned to them, and often they favored professional debates over political ones. When it came to debates, the delegates Fejti selected from the party apparatus usually advocated harder positions than other members of the MSZMP delegation. Nevertheless, there were no delegates, not even among those of Fejti who represented the position of the party’s hardliners, because those circles were against even the fact that negotiations were started with the opposition.

The apparatchiks mainly played the role of herald, controller, or messenger between the party center and the participants of the negotiations. As one of them later said: “Here I had, to be honest, the least favorable position because here I was the only ‘political commissar’, but as that couldn’t really be maintained in those circumstances, we sort of slipped through the fingers of the political leaders in the sense that reports were usually reports after the fact.”197 But one could find even among the people of the party center some

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197 Interview with István György, 1997.
who accepted the task of negotiations as a professional task, and they realized only during the talks that he had been sent to the front line of politics. This speaks volumes about the decades of the party state, where MSZMP in its monopolistic position acted, unsurprisingly, not as a political but as a directing-ruling organization. It gathered its political apparatus accordingly, consisting of loyal people with worker or peasant origins, coming from first generation intellectual families, knowing public administration, and having never gone abroad. “Had I not been so naïve as I was, I could’ve suspected that this wouldn’t be just professional. Suddenly my mandate slipped to an entirely different road. […] I just found myself in the middle of the negotiations. I’m not saying I regret it—just I wouldn’t have wanted to do such things.”

The negotiators from the party center accepted the idea of free elections, too, which ultimately guaranteed the success of the negotiations. However, they didn’t think that they would lose the elections. “Rather, their aim with these negotiations was that, ‘okay, let’s blow off some steam, and somehow we would come to an agreement’, but it was implicitly added that, ‘but an agreement where we don’t lose power in the process.’” They grossly overestimated the power of the state party in the summer of 1989, many of them believing that MSZMP could remain in government with around 40 percent of the votes. But at that time not even the parties of EKA thought that MSZMP or its successor would end up below 15 percent. They thought that increasing the number of laws requiring two-thirds majority would be the way to rein the future government.

The negotiating delegation of the state party was composed, secondly, of the bureaucrats and experts coming from the ministries. They were the numerical majority. Paradoxically, the party apparatus was underrepresented within the MSZMP delegation. The leadership of the Ministry of Justice complained that as an independent actor it was crowded out of the process of constitution-making. Eventually, the ministerial delegates of the MSZMP delegation were selected by deputy minister Géza Kilényi, who remembered the situation as follows: “[…] it was like a slap in our face that, from one

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198 Interview with István György, 1997.
199 Interview with Máté Budzsákia, 1997.
200 The number of laws requiring two-thirds majority was diminished by the MDF-SZDSZ agreement, but it did not eliminate the inbuilt system of breaks. Later, this made governing the country more difficult.
moment to the other, the government as such would disappear [. . .], that the government would be there in the negotiations as an independent party, because *de facto* the government was already an independent politics-forming factor at that time. [. . .] This was humiliating to us on the one hand, and on the other hand it was regression compared to the earlier situation.”201

As opposed to the volunteers of the Opposition Roundtable, the ministerial delegates were told to attend the Roundtable talks basically as part of their job: their minister ordered them to sit behind the name tag saying MSZMP. Their presence, therefore, was the indirect presence of the government as well. The attitude of these delegates was usually apolitical, they had been socialized to be executors, and as a result, they found the politicization of their professional role unpleasant. “I had never dreamt of a political career, and didn’t really feel like it, I’ve always wanted to be a professional, an expert.”202 Another participant said the same: “. . . I’m not a political animal. At least I’ve never wanted to be a politician, I’ve always behaved and done my job in a way that I am a professional. We did discuss this, and we were guaranteed that we wouldn’t make statements there in political issues, only represent a professional position.”203 Later, many of them complained that the members of the opposition simply called them “communists,” lumping them together with the others. One of them remembered this as follows: “I joined not the MSZMP, I joined the government; what am I doing in the negotiating delegation of MSZMP? [. . .] I was sitting there at the table, but I basically felt like a cactus that had simply been put there. [. . .] From the first moment I asked myself the question what I was doing there.”204

The third and smallest group was composed of individuals who had ties to the circles of Miklós Németh, the head of the government or Imre Pozsgay, the Minister of State: that is, who belonged to the secretariat of the Council of Ministers or the Minister of State, respectively. These people were the loudest to claim that they had not been ordered to the negotiations but they were “commissioned” to represent MSZMP, so participation was not mandatory for them. It was typical of them to be younger than average, and they followed the pragmatist-reformist political line. Later, they

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201 Interview with Géza Kilényi, 1997.
202 Interview with Ádám Forgács, 1997.
203 Interview with Edit Fluckné Papácsy, 1997.
204 Interview with Géza Kilényi, 1997.
were able to interpret their role from the outside, with irony. As one of them recollected: “Without a doubt it was problematic for me, because sometimes that funny situation occurred that people who had been my colleagues yesterday were now explaining to me from the other end of the table the hideous effects of Bolshevism.”

From the negotiators of economic issues, many of them had professional relationship to the economists delegated by Liga, MDF, and SZDSZ. Both groups originated from the reform economists of the generation of 1968. The people who sat at opposite sides of the table were those who had abandoned the state party in time and those who had not. According to the recollections of an MSZMP delegate, the opposition “sometimes blustered that we dispose over pieces of information. I felt that this was a make-believe because those who were sitting in front of us were at least as informed as we were. Let me just say that one or two people from the opposition were simply involved in the work of the advisory bodies of MSZMP, and if they couldn’t acquire some hot data otherwise, there they could’ve acquired them.” However, this was true only of the reform economists who negotiated under the banner of the opposition, because the economic participants of the historical parties of EKA had not been let in the circles of late Kádárian technocracy.

At the political negotiations, the delegates of MSZMP were the closest to the organizations of the Third Side and the farthest from the radical wing of the opposition. However, the situation in the economic negotiations was reversed: in economic questions, MSZMP was closer to the delegation of EKA than to the representatives of the Third Side. Several MSZMP delegates we interviewed underlined that MSZMP and the opposition fundamentally agreed in economic issues, which was partially true but also contained a bit of ex post self-justification from the negotiators of the state party: “The basic position was that were no substantial differences between the opposition and our side. [. . .] As the Hungarian economy requires a great deal of capital, there is no other way than privatization. However, this was almost unacceptable to the Third Side.” While the MSZMP and the dominant par-

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205 Interview with István Tömpe, 1997.
206 Bozóki, “Intellectuals and Democratization in Hungary.”
207 Interview with Tamás Draviczky, 1997.
208 Interview with Sándor Czirják, 1997.
ties of EKA wanted market economy, the delegates of the Third Side argued for various reformed “people’s democratic” or third-way model of socialism.

The MSZMP delegates to the political and the economic negotiations saw their own roles in a different way, and they also had different opinions about the historical significance of the negotiations. The ministerial delegates of the political negotiations, who were mainly young lawyers and “legal technicians” working on legislative preparations, experienced the talks as the great opportunity of their life, and they are glad to recall it. One of them said:

It really was a sublime experience, that these Roundtable talks took place within the walls of the Parliament. Experiencing this at the age of 31 was a truly great experience, both personally and professionally. [. . .] Simply the fact that one can actively participate in the preparation of those momentous laws that indeed created the machinery of the rule of law—this is something that to me as a professional, a lawyer, will always be unforgettable. 209

In the view of another participant, “it was totally clear that what needed to be prepared was not a revolutionary process, and every extremism had to be excluded from this process. This was guaranteed. [. . .] It was obvious that civil rights must be granted to everyone, regardless of their earlier political behavior, and not only now but also later. [. . .] These were changes of world historical magnitudes, after all.” 210

Other ministerial delegates tried to distance themselves from the state party in their recollections. One of them said, “it was quite a surprise that the government-appointed delegation was put in the delegation of MSZMP. This created a conflictual situation for two reasons. First, it created a problem a conscience, that now who is who and how represents what. Second, that previously there had been no coordination between the delegates of the government and the MSZMP.” 211 As the negotiations proceeded, the role of the delegates of the party center continually declined, and the influence of ministerial delegates increased. “We consistently identified as govern-

209 Interview with József Kajdi, 1997.
210 Interview with József Fehér, 1997.
211 Interview with Zoltán Tóth, 1997.
mental experts, still they called us MSZMP. It didn’t feel well. […] What I thought was not that I want to preserve this power structure to the MSZMP, not being an MSZMP member.” The growing importance of professional aspects was not surprising, considering that the last phase of the negotiations required making bills that can be submitted to the parliament. The dominance of the professional element in the delegation of MSZMP also meant that the working committees focused mainly on professional, and not ideological, issues, which also facilitated the emergence of an atmosphere of mutual trust among the parties. The officials saw the political situation more clearly than the politicians of the party state.

It was absolutely clear to us that at the end of the transition we would definitely leave our position because our worldview, basic principles, and the resentment against us meant there wouldn’t be a place for us. […] So we weren’t led by any motivation like paving the way for our own future, therefore we didn’t have to give up our views.

However, the role of the ministerial experts delegated by the MSZMP looked different through the glasses of the party center. György Fejti remembered, “we had full mandate to determine the composition of the expert delegation, this depended exclusively on our own decision. Several excellent experts from public administration were involved in the work, in a lot of working committees. Later, this had the amazing ‘advantage’ that these people cooperated with EKA, as it soon turned out.” By the passage of time, professional connections and the need to survive proved to be more important than party loyalty. All those public administration experts who were not “paving the way for their own future” and only expressed their professional opinion eventually found their place in the new system as well.

The political negotiations had serious importance. For the new constitution, electoral and party law were formulated at the Roundtable negotiations, and that is where political agreement was made about them. We cannot say

212 Interview with Péter Szalay, 1997.
213 Interview with József Fehér, 1997.
214 Interview with György Fejti, 1997.
215 József Antall selected many of his colleagues from those who had sat at the other side of the table during the negotiations (József Kajdi, György Szilvézy, Tibor Bogdán, Edit Fluckné Papácsy, and others).
the same about the economic negotiations, where the two main negotiating parties preferred stalling to decisions. The MSZMP participants who came from public administration felt their presence a nuisance, unnecessary at the economic negotiations; many of them had a bad opinion of the knowledge of their opposition negotiating partners, sometimes they looked down on them. They were those who were called the “Dimitrov Street boys” or the late Kádárian technocracy. Some of them made gestures that distanced them from the role of representing the MSZMP.

According to a participant of the economic negotiations, “the less significant representatives of the opposition achieved that there would be economic negotiations, the MSZMP government which had lost ground politically but really pulled off some economic decisions that can be seen important wanted to emphasize how much more important that was, so people would focus on that. So they found each other [. . .] but I felt that this was an insignificant place of history. The character of the negotiations was akin to those discussions we had had for two hours every day at the Financial Research Institute and with friends.”

Another participant said, “all of knew the personal circle of reform economists. Only earlier it wasn’t the case that I sit at one side and you at the other, but it was a debate in the circle of economists.”

A third recollection opines,

Now it is an historical fact that the economic dimension of the whole trilateral negotiation was secondary. Reform economists were somewhat characterized by regulatory illusionism. This gave way, after the regime change, to a legal illusion that good laws need to be created, the rule of law must be created, we need a law for this, for that, for sports, for non-profit etc. And if we have the law, then okay, because things will work just fine.

Members of the technocracy of the late Kádár era accepted party membership as an indispensable prerequisite of career but they did not think it was particularly important. Some of them assessed their role at the time with self-irony. “I joined MSZMP in 1987. [. . .] It really shows some good sense of

216 Interview with István Csillag, 1997.
218 Interview with Jenő Kolrai, 1997.
rhythm, doesn’t it? The truth is, I attached no importance to being inside or outside. [. . .] I went to membership meeting twice when I was enrolled, for the first and last time. I never thought, I wouldn’t have thought even in 1988 that the system would change in my lifetime.”

There was one who realized only then that his membership in the party signaled something to his broader environment, and therefore he later—as one who had already burnt his hands with fire—adopted an anti-party sentiment. Finally, another interviewee summarized the dilemma as follows:

... Being in a party, that’s not something I could do. I’m not a good politician. I’m a politically active guy, but not a politician. [. . .] In ’89, I found a solution that was appropriate for me. I joined MSZP, because I said that I owed this much to my friends. Then I soon quitted because I said that I owed this much to myself.\

An exceptional fact about the delegation of MSZMP is that it included ministerial delegates who were not party members as well. According to a recollection,

Given the party state at the time, an expert of public administration had no other choice but to sit on the side of the party state. One wasn’t given an order like that, of course, but it would’ve been hard to refuse it. To me, it caused a serious problem of conscience for days, for I had never been a party member in my life. [. . .] They caught me at professional vanity, I tell you honestly. This had two reasons: on the one hand, taking part in something like this is a lifetime experience, and on the other hand, there was no one else who specialized in what I did, and what was one of the key topics of the delegation. Finally I managed to persuade myself, and I was quite ashamed of myself when those on the other side called us communists, and we couldn’t protest that, obviously, which sometimes was a rather unpleasant situation.

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220 Interview with István Tömpe, 1997.
221 Moreover, there was even a negotiator on the side of MSZMP who was a member of MDF. Interview with Eszter Sinkó, 1997.
222 Interview with József Kajdi, 1997.
Besides constitution-making and the more important political decisions there was little or no coordination between the leadership and the negotiating groups of MSZMP. The party center did not require regular cooperation with its delegation, either: they substituted that for the one-sided declarations read out by the delegates of the party center at the negotiations. The majority of MSZMP delegates heard that position right there for the first time. This weakened the cohesion of the MSZMP delegation. “There was no plan, I mean it was partially thought out on the spot, so there was no single plan but various concepts. […] This was an organic development.”

The strategy of the negotiating delegation of MSZMP was primarily devised by Imre Pozsgay and György Fejti. Earlier, Rezső Nyers also tried to find connections to the opposition organizations and he seemed to be interested in the economic negotiations, but this interested soon dispersed after he became party president. Prime Minister Miklós Németh did not regret that he could stay away from the negotiations, and as a head of government did not have to represent the “sinking ship” of MSZMP. Minister of Justice Kálmán Kulcsár, who had concrete ideas about the reform of the institutional system and even accepted the presidential nomination of the HNF adopted a similar strategy. He tried to influence the lawyer expert delegates of MSZMP from the background, while he kept his person away from the negotiations. His influence prevailed only until his deputy minister, Géza Kilényi was present at the negotiations. General Party Secretary Károly Grósz made a speech at the opening plenary session in June, but later he did not attend the negotiations. Visiting party organizations and preparing for the congress, he must have felt the gradual dissolution of his hinterland.

In the end, there remained Pozsgay and Fejti as two opposing, complementary characters. Pozsgay was born in 1933 in a small village to a religious agrarian, craftsman family. He wanted to be a priest in his teens, which was a typical way of mobility for the sons of modest families. However, completely different ways of mobility emerged after the communist takeover. After his political “awakening,” Pozsgay refused to attend religious education (he was the only one to do so among his peers) and he was a member of the communist party at the age of 18. The diligent student went on to study at

223 Interview with György Fejti, 1997.
the Lenin Institute, an elite institution of the time, and after he finished it, he became the headmaster of a rural town’s evening school of Marxism-Leninism. Organizing the cultural life of the town, Pozsgay realized it for the first time how far he can get in the politically detached field of culture, and he can easily acquire intellectual supporters by introducing measures that favor the local social elite. In the 1980s, Pozsgay tried all this on the national level, first as Minister of Culture and later as the general secretary of the Patriotic People’s Front, the largest mass organization with an own daily paper and hundreds of local organizations. In the years before the regime change, he was already backed by a large body of supporters. He changed role in 1988: abandoning the HNF, he became politically active in the politburo of the state party and the government of Károly Grósz, contributing to the removal of János Kádár.

When the negotiations of the National Roundtable began, Pozsgay was justified in believing that he could control the opposition, the “historical” wing of which started under the aegis of his People’s Front. Previously, Pozsgay had acquired great experience in negotiating with intellectuals with critical views. He spoke their language, many of them looked up on him, there were some who even saw him as a new Imre Nagy in the second half of the 1980s. It is little exaggeration to say that most organizations and their representatives at the negotiations of the National Roundtable—from MDF through the People’s Party and BZSBT to the populist-reformist branch of MSZMP—originated from Imre Pozsgay. At one point of the negotiations, Pozsgay even dared to go on vacation for several weeks and let György Fejti represent MSZMP in his absence. According to a recollection, “Pozsgay deliberately withdrew from the negotiations, and he wanted to return as some kind of peace angel, because his completely obvious aim was to become president of the republic in some way.”

The interviewees remember Pozsgay as keeping distance from his own party of which he was the formal chief negotiator. Yet it could not be said with certainty either that he represented the interests of the government vis-à-vis the party. Many of them saw him as a politically independent figure, to whom his position as Minister of State in the Németh government and the

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225 Interview with Tibor Bogdán, 1997.
226 Interview with Géza Kilényi, 1997.
good connections he maintained with some opposition circles were equally important. Growing independent from the party was something Pozsgay himself acknowledged, too: “I was given mandate by the political committee of the party, which meant I was formally accountable, but I had a large room for maneuver [...] although in some issues they required preliminary consultation. I usually tried to avoid such consultations, and I tried to enforce the politics of faits accomplis.”

In contrast to him, his rival, György Fejti—who came from the Budapest University of Technology and had a regular cadre career—made the impression of a grayer, more pedantic, and sometimes actually fearsome party soldier. Fejti had logical and rational thinking in his own framework of interpretation, but he was not flexible enough to break with his original premises. Fejti was an outstanding colleague of Károly Grósz in the 1980s and later a leader of MSZMP in Borsod county. Unsurprisingly, it was harder for him to communicate with the writers, historians, philosophers, and sociologists who had just stepped into politics than his well-known party apparatus. Accordingly, Pozsgay could use his situational advantage in his side-games with Fejti and the apparatus, which temporarily increased his prestige in the media as well as among his opposition negotiating partners.

Indeed, the difference in the program of Fejti and Pozsgay was smaller than it seemed from their difference in style and tactics. Both accepted peaceful transition to multiparty democracy and the idea of free elections. However, Fejti could not think but within the given frame of the party, and in the process of transition he also accepted he wanted to ensure the best possible positions for MSZMP. Assuming that both wanted democracy, Fejti imagined that with the state party while Pozsgay, without it. And as the survival of the state party and democracy were clearly irreconcilable, many people feared that Fejti would be willing to jeopardize the success of democratic transition for the survival of MSZMP. Later, he himself denied this:

227 Interview with Imre Pozsgay, 1997.
228 Fejti agreed with neither the banning of MSZMP from workplaces, nor that the party state should account for its properties as part of the democratic transition. As he wanted to negotiate about the controversial issues in a package deal, he disapproved of the fact that the agreement was signed on September 18 despite some issues being unresolved. He believed that MSZMP should not sign anything until there is an agreement in every issue because an early agreement would later narrow the negotiating position of the party.
If we wanted to deal with things in a coup-like fashion—there were scenarios for this—then we could’ve run through that couple of important laws, announced presidential elections, we could’ve won that, too, we didn’t have bad chances for winning that, this is how we were thinking. […] But it was obvious that there must be competitive elections, so we rejected the Polish example out of hand.\textsuperscript{229}

Pozsgay rather sacrificed the state party, which was explained by his critics citing his presidential ambitions. After he became the presidential nominee of MSZMP in June, he remained much less loyal to his party. According to his insider opponents, the party had become a burden for Pozsgay by that time and he wanted to get rid of it as soon as possible, this is why he supported acts of internal deconstruction. In the logic of the party center, Fejti was decent and Pozsgay, indecent because Fejti did represent the party at the negotiating table while Pozsgay represented only himself. But the state party was a burden not only to Pozsgay it was irreconcilable with democracy, too. Whatever personal political ambitions Imre Pozsgay had for acquiring the position of presidency, in the issue of reforming MSZMP the changes justified him. Fejti became more and more insignificant in the last weeks of the negotiations, for the leadership of MSZMP broke up: Nyers, Németh, and Pozsgay broke with Károly Grósz.

At the end of the negotiations, MSZMP had at least three different visions of the future, all three related to the possible coalition government of the party after the elections. Miklós Németh and his circle of advisors mainly saw opportunity for cooperation toward urban liberal intellectuals; Pozsgay preferred the populist-national line. Rezső Nyers believed that the future coalition partner of MSZMP would be the Social Democrats.\textsuperscript{230}

The successor Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) eliminated the word “worker” from its name.\textsuperscript{231} With its new name, the party got rid of not only certain reminiscences of the party state but also the contradiction that existed between the declared goal of the party and the sociologically describable intellectual composition of its membership. It is a result of the experi-

\textsuperscript{229} Interview with György Fejti, 1997.  
\textsuperscript{230} Interview with András Tóth, 1997.  
\textsuperscript{231} That is why its abbreviation changed from MSZMP to MSZP.
ence of the Roundtable talks that the government apparatus, that is, a significant body of the top level of the party state did not enter the new party. “We took it seriously what Miklós Németh said, that the government had basically no other responsibilities but one job, [...] to lead the country until the elections. It was an historical mission of Németh to do his, and he did it. It followed from this that we wouldn’t enter the successor party, because we couldn’t take on that role in that moment.”

Later, intellectuals in the MSZP led by Gyula Horn were needed only as diligent professional politicians or advisors. Those from the reform circles who stayed became party politicians, while Pozsgay left the party in autumn 1990. However, the initial legitimacy problems of the new party made it necessary to include some established intellectuals who represented the MSZP in its parliamentary group. To some of them, it was allowed to realize their intellectual identity in extra-party initiatives while not putting the internal stability of the party in danger.

Ironically, the sudden vacuum on the political left made MSZP, the former party of cadre intellectuals the main political beneficiary of the protest votes against social pauperization and increasing unemployment. In 1993, MSZOSZ, which was close to the socialist party, won the trade union elections in 1993, and MSZP won three of the five by-elections between 1990 and 1994. It took only two years to leave the political quarantine it had been relegated to at the time of the regime change and scored a landslide victory in the 1994 elections. Paradoxically, the party in power had to carry out economic transition on the one hand and become the left-wing, “blue-collar” party of workers and employees on the other hand. After 1994, it became the task of Prime Minister Gyula Horn to balance between the two traditions of the left: modernization and solidarity.

Altogether MSZP spent 12 years in government (1994–1998, 2002–2010), 10 years as the leading party of a coalition government and two years (2008–2010) in minority government with external support. MSZP did not disappear after its electoral defeat in 2010 but continued to exist as a mid-sized party. From the 1989 negotiating delegation of MSZMP, four participants became ministers of MSZP, while another one became a minister of

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232 Interview with László Varga Sabján, 1997.
233 From the 1989 negotiators of MSZMP, Judit Csehák became Minister of Health and Social Affairs in the Medgyessy government (2002–2003); Tibor Draskovics served as Minister of Finance in the first, and
MDF. But even some people from the Third Side found their way to the socialist-liberal government: the later Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány and two later ministers, arrived from there.\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{234} Mihály Kupa, who negotiated under the banner of MSZMP at the roundtable in 1989, was Minister of Finance of the Antall government in 1990–1991.