



The Hungarian October Party against the Round Table Talks: Comparison with the Contemporary Critics of the Polish Transition

Partia Węgierskiego Października wobec Okrągłego Stołu w porównaniu z ówczesnymi krytykami polskiej transformacji ustrojowej


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Abstract

The Round Table Talks in Hungary and Poland were widely criticized by opposition forces not participating in the negotiations. One of them was the Hungarian October Party, which considered this form of transformation to have been flawed and against the interests of society. The formation, which also had Polish connections and was led by György Krassó, became known primarily through its street happenings. Its criticisms of the participants in the Round Table Talks bear a strong resemblance to the opinion of the so-called non-constructive Polish opposition forces.

Abstrakt

Rozmowy Okrągłego Stołu odbywające się pod koniec lat 80. ubiegłego wieku na Węgrzech i w Polsce były szeroko krytykowane przez siły ówczesnej opozycji nieuczestniczące w negocjacjach. Na Węgrzech do krytykujących należała Partia Węgierskiego Października, która uznała tę formę transformacji za wadliwą i sprzeczną z interesami społeczeństwa. Formacja, której przewodził György Krassó, mająca powiązania z Polską, zaszynęła przede wszystkim dzięki ulicznym happenin-gom. Krytyka Partii pod adresem uczestników obrad węgierskiego Okrągłego Stołu przypomina „niekonstruktywną” ocenę polskiego Okrągłego Stołu sformułowaną przez przedstawicieli ówczesnych polskich sił opozycyjnych.

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Introduction

This article analyzes the Hungarian October Party's (Hungarian: Magyar Október Párt) theoretical critique regarding the Round Table Talks in Hungary. The rather short-lived party rose to prominence and has been remembered mainly due to its political performances. Instead of a biographical approach focusing on the charismatic leader of the organization, György Krassó, I would like to place the party on the rapidly changing map of the 1989 transformation. Applying a political history perspective, my goal is to emphasize the most important differences between the "constructive" and the "radical" opposition in the era of the regime change, using the Hungarian October Party as a model. At the same time, the positions of the political minority, which also aimed at the regime change but, at the same time, oppose the manner in which it was carried out, are also placed in context.

To broaden the perspective of my article, I follow the methodology of comparative historiography, as I compare the activity of the Hungarian October Party with those Polish organizations which were not included in the negotiations that defined the transformation. Was the idea of a consensual regime change itself criticized, or could they simply have not accepted the way in which it was conducted? Were compromise-ready forces excluded from the Round Table Talks, or did they voluntarily stayed away from them? Which points in the discussions and final agreements were the most problematic? Finally, the most important question is: Why could not they address the society by offering any alternative to the transition?

For understandable reasons, history scholars first and foremost focus on the custodians of the regime change, as opposed to entities that were ultimately unable to exert a meaningful impact on the process of transformation. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate how little these organizations have been depicted by the Hungarian researchers so far. The situation of the Hungarian October Party is a bit favourable in this respect that its leader, György Krassó, inspired some authors, if not for the impact of the party he created than due to his actions in 1956 or later opposition activities and personal fate. Back in 2006, Ádám Modor edited a volume of writings by and dealing with him (*Célkeresztben Krassó*), while most recently Gabriella Kinda devoted several studies ("A Nádor-utcai akció, or K. Gy. 1956-os pere") and a doctoral dissertation in German (*György Krassó*

und der Systemwechsel) to Krassó. Krassó's interest in the developments in Poland in the 1980s gives a particular importance to our topic. Krassó's "Polish orientation" was analyzed in Miklós Mitrovits's monograph published in 2020 (*Tiltott kapcsolat*).

In terms of the sources, the most important ones include Krassó's own writings, interviews with him (both types are published by Mónika Hafner and Zoltán Zsille in 1991 in the book *Maradj velünk!*), and contemporary press reports on his party's activities.

The Hungarian October Party and the Round Table Talks

Considering the 1956 Revolution as its theoretical starting point, the aim of the Hungarian October Party,¹ as it is described in its founding statement, was "to keep in check and criticize the authorities, in order to reveal secret and unprincipled agreements" (Bozóki, 1991, p. 377). On 9 July 1989² the party's assembly accepted its programme, in which they spoke out for worker self-government through various forms of ownership, such as workers' councils³ and producer cooperatives (Vida, 2011, p. 426).

The party worked closely with numerous smaller groups⁴ and samizdat editorials (Kinda, 2017, p. 1). One of these publishers was the Hungarian October Publishing House (Magyar Október Kiadó) led by Krassó, which was, for instance, the first to publish Wiktor Woroszyłski's *Hungarian diary* (orig. *Dziennik węgierski*) in Hungarian, translated by Grácia Kerényi (Mitrovits, 2020, p. 127). Krassó, who lived in England between 1985 and 1989 also operated the Hungarian October Information Service (Magyar Október Tájékoztató Szolgálat) between 1986 and 1989, which aimed to provide the misinformed Hungarian emigration with information on the latest events in Hungary (Bozóki, 1991, pp. 373–374). In addition, the Hungarian October Party, which was officially

¹ There was a question of functioning as a movement or alliance, but in Krassó's view, it would have been hypocrisy not to call the organization a party (Bozóki, 1991, p. 376).

² Thus, the organization was established very late compared to the fact that multi-party competition in Hungary had already developed from the one-party system (Bihari, 1992, p. 304), so the Hungarian October Party started with a serious disadvantage in terms of impact on the events of transition.

³ In 1989 in Hungary the revival of the 1956 workers' councils proved to be the most decisive of the "third way" ideas. Defined as temporary organizations performing political and advocacy tasks, they were also included in the resolution issued at the 1st National Assembly of the MDF (Marschal, 2020, p. 114).

⁴ Such as the Inconnu Art Group, which made a parody of the late Kádár era with its satirical happenings. The group elected György Krassó as an honorary member.

registered only in January 1990 (Kinda, 2017, p. 1), worked particularly closely with the liberal-minded Hungarian Radical Party, led by Mihály Rózsa. They were connected by their strong anti-communism derived from the retaliation after 1956 and by the desire for Hungary's neutrality based on the withdrawal of Soviet troops (Vida, 2011, pp. 428–429).

In Hungary, in addition to the peaceful change of regime, the negotiations of the ruling party (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party – Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP) and the opposition also facilitated the redistribution of political and economic power and the mapping of positions in the new system to be established. Furthermore, the discussions set strict boundaries for the political sphere. Most of the political factions within it had a good chance to operate in the new, pluralistic system, while most of the groups that were left out of the substantive decisions seemed irreversibly disadvantaged in the upcoming political competition. However, it is also important to keep in mind that the Round Table Talks in Hungary had to create the framework for democratic transformation in a state which, in the absence of a substantive tradition of democracy, had serious historical limitations. As the change of regime itself could not have been conducted on a democratic basis for this reason, the *a posteriori* integration of the transformation into Hungarian history is also difficult, especially with regard to the Round Table Talks.

Negotiations with the state were preceded not by pressure from the society⁵ but by the work of the Opposition Round Table (Ellenzéki Kerekasztal, EKA) initiated and coordinated by the Independent Lawyers' Forum and carried out since 22 March 1989. In order to coordinate the activities of each opposition group the following organizations joined the talks: Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Fórum, MDF),⁶ Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SZDSZ), Alliance of Young Democrats (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége, FIDESZ), Social Democratic Party of Hungary (Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt, MSZDP), Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party (Független Kisgazda-, Földmunkás- és Polgári Párt, FKgP), Hungarian People's Party (Magyar Néppárt, MNP), Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Society (Bajcsy Zsilinszky Társaság), and the Christian Democratic People's Party (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, KDNP), which joined a bit later.⁷ The condition for inviting the MSZMP was to make a commitment to bring the conventions concluded during the negotiations into force (Melia, 1994, pp. 62–63). After the ruling party gave its consent and committed to constitu-

⁵ Neither the state leadership nor the opposition has embraced any specific bottom-up initiative (Krausz, 2010, p. 15).

⁶ Although it feared for its leadership role during the Round Table Talks, and wished a constituent assembly rather than following the Polish model (Ripp, 2006, 315).

⁷ The Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions (Független Szakszervezetek Demokratikus Ligája, LIGA) was present as an observer.

tionalism and pluralist democracy (Ripp, 2006, p. 366), the groundwork for the National Round Table (Nemzeti Kerekasztal, NEKA) based on the broadening of the EKA was laid down in a basic agreement on 10 June 1989 (Tütő, 2019, p. 73). On the one side of it was the opposition, on the other the representatives of the MSZMP, and the “Third Side” included the organizations such as the Patriotic People’s Front (Hazafias Népfront, HNF), the National Council of Trade Unions (Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa, SZOT) or the Association of the Left Alternative (Baloldali Alternatíva Egyesülés, BAL) (Bozóki, 1999–2000, vol. IV, p. 605). There was also some room for observers, such as representatives of Churches (Melia, 1994, pp. 62–63).

Thus, the EKA, and later on the NEKA, involved a rather wide range of different organizations in the negotiations defining the framework for the regime change, so groups that were left out from the discussions were trapped in a peripheral situation.⁸ In addition, representation of social groups appeared in Hungary during the round table discussions: the MSZMP embraced the goals of the late communist elite, the MDF represented the Hungarian middle class, the FKgP supported the rural intelligentsia, the SZDSZ spoke up for the interests of the liberal intellectuals, and the KDNP embraced the Churches of the most dominant Christian denominations. Thus, the so-called non-constructive opposition organizations did not really have interest groups that they could exclusively address. The Hungarian October Party was also struggling with a lack of social base, moving in a political vacuum. It tried to counterbalance this by building international relations: they maintained a close cooperation with Freedom and Peace (Wolność i Pokój, WiP) in Poland, whose representative was also present at the party’s inaugural meeting in Budapest. At the same time, despite the joint work of the Hungarian October Party with other organizations on specific issues, no platform similar to the Congress of the Anti-System Opposition (Kongres Opozycji Antyustrojowej, KOA) in Poland was established in Hungary.

The Hungarian October Party expressed the willingness to negotiate only a new electoral law: it considered regime change discussions to be illegitimate because they perceived it as the “bargaining over the head of society.” In Hungary, the lack of social impetus in the process of transition is prominent⁹; however, the “constructive” opposition organizations could not gain political authority in the one-party system. At the same time, they had programmes and memberships, and their activity as a whole enjoyed the support from the Western

⁸ Nevertheless, as the negotiations progressed, the legitimacy of the EKA was increasingly questioned, as the representatives of the entire opposition were by no means seated at the table (Ripp, 2006, p. 419).

⁹ This is illustrated by Elemér Hankiss’s argument on 24 August 1989 in favour of the Round Table Talks’ regular broadcasting: “If we don’t have a mandate from the society – because we don’t have it – then at least let’s not decide in the way that they don’t even know what we’re deciding on” (Tütő, 2019, p. 72)

world.¹⁰ Thus, the criticism of the lack of social support and legitimacy of the negotiating parties cannot be completely justified.

In connection with the Round Table Talks, György Krassó spoke about the “sharing of elites” (Bozóki, 1991, p. 378), which meant the elites redistributed the leading economic and political positions among themselves. It is a fact that seeing the unreformability of planned economy and the inevitable fall of centralized state, the communist elites expected the multi-party system to ensure that they remained in power, but successful and unsuccessful examples of this did not take any shape mainly during the Round Table Talks. A real phenomenon of regime change in Central and Eastern Europe – meaning: the transformation of the party nomenclatures into capitalists – has nevertheless, out of context, turned dialogue with the government into a symbol of fraternizing with the enemy rather than an attempt at democratization. According to Krassó, “communists can lose power, but the elite cannot” (Bozóki, 1991, p. 381).

Thus, the Hungarian October Party was simultaneously opposed by the MSZ-MP, the opposition and the said Third Side, proclaiming the need for a “fourth side”. Krassó intended his party to have played the part of the conscience of the opposition, however, they were soon labelled by the “opposition of the opposition” (Bozóki, 1991, p. 379). The Hungarian October Party’s activities, due to its severely limited capabilities, were largely limited to street happenings. The most iconic of these is the renaming of Ferenc Münnich¹¹ Street (where Krassó’s flat – the seat of the party – was situated) to Nádor Street. The first change of street signage was carried out on 14 July 1989, the day of the funeral of János Kádár, but due to the official reorganization it was repeated again and again (Kinda, 2017, p. 4). Thanks to its actions, the party was able to make itself heard among samizdat readers, through the state media reporting on these performances (Kinda, 2017, p. 1), which also published the organization’s announcements sometime (Kinda, 2017, p. 14). This was due not only to the expanding possibilities of the press, but also to the fact that this way the Hungarian October Party could be well separated in the readers’ eyes from the reliable opposition negotiators at the Round Table.

Thus, the above-mentioned political and economic ideas of the Hungarian October Party, that were also included in their programme, were less notable than the party’s anti-communism. It is true that, in the space outside the negotiations between the authorities and the opposition, it was difficult to stand out by representing some form of *tertium datur*, as these also appeared at the Round Tables. For example, the MNP wanted to protect the poorer social classes from

¹⁰ In the case of Poland, the West clearly saw the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) and personally Lech Wałęsa as legitimate negotiating partners.

¹¹ Along with János Kádár, he was a key figure in the repressions following the 1956 Revolution.

the sudden appearance of market economy by creating self-governments of production, while the BAL focused on the idea of collective worker ownership and the issue of workers' councils (Éber et al., 2014, pp. 50–51).

The Round Table Talks took place in two working committees, one dealing with political issues and the other with economic ones. The work was not facilitated by the internal conflicts of the opposition. The main fault lines were developed in three cases, firstly, between the newly formed organizations and those with roots going back to before the communist takeover, secondly, between the national-conservative MDF and the Budapest-focused, liberal, more open to foreign SZDSZ and FIDESZ, and thirdly, between the MNP, which were not considered completely independent of the MSZMP, and the other factions. Although an agreement was reached on 18 September 1989, the SZDSZ and the FIDESZ refused to ratify it,¹² claiming it would have offered too many concessions to the ruling party (Melia, 1994, pp. 64–65). The LIGA took a reluctant position, and the MSZDP refused to sign the passage for the election of the President of Hungary (Bozóki, 2012, pp. 229–230). Moreover, economic negotiations, proved to have been absolutely fruitless. Despite the fact that the six bills¹³ included in the political agreement had already been adopted by the National Assembly on 21 September 1989 (Tütő, 2019, pp. 67–69), a number of open questions remained.¹⁴ Some of these were to be answered by the referendum held on 26 November 1989, in the newly-born Republic of Hungary proclaimed on 23 October. As a result, the MSZMP had to account for the assets it owned or managed, its organizations were no longer present in the workplaces, the Workers' Militia (Munkásőrség) was disbanded, and the date of the presidential election was postponed until after the inauguration of the new parliament. This practically meant that the said election would be indirect. This was the most important issue of the referendum, as the Polish case – namely, the election of Wojciech Jaruzelski as the President of Poland – was both a cautionary and instructive example for the SZDSZ,¹⁵ which was at the forefront of its campaign for the indirect election of the first president of Hungary. They saw a greater chance that the new head of state would not have been related to the MSZMP if he or she had been elected by a freely and democratically elected parliament instead of direct citizens' vote (Melia, 1994, pp. 65–68).

¹² György Krassó assessed all this as hypocrisy and a political theatre, as the two parties did not veto the agreement, passing on its contents (Bozóki, 1991, pp. 379–380).

¹³ On the amendment of the Constitution, the Constitutional Court, the operation and management of parties, the election of members of parliament, the amendment of the Penal Code, and the amendment of the Criminal Procedure Act.

¹⁴ Thus, the Round Table Talks did not end on 18 September: the commissions met until November of 1989 and the EKA until the end of April 1990, while their possibility of having a meaningful influence on the processes gradually diminished (Ripp, 2006, pp. 458–459).

¹⁵ Until that moment, however, the party has considered the Polish regime change to be exemplary (Csizmadia, 1992, p. 23).

The MDF, in turn, campaigned for the boycott of the referendum, which meant recognizing what had been recorded in the Round Table agreement. This stance by the MDF only fueled the accusations from the party's opponents of conspiring with the communists,¹⁶ which showed a remarkable resemblance to the attacks against the “constructive” Polish oppositionists (Ripp, 2006, pp. 435–436).¹⁷

Due to the mentioned scenario of the regime change, several opposition parties competed for the votes in the parliamentary elections held on 25 March and 8 April 1990; there was no umbrella organization similar to the Citizens' Committee (Komitet Obywatelski, KO) established in Poland. The election was won by the MDF, which then formed a coalition government with the FKgP and the KDNP. Meanwhile, the Hungarian October Party was gradually deprived of its political prospects by the ongoing regime change, so the organization ceased to exist in December of 1991. György Krassó did not live to see this, as he died in February 1991. His plans included relaunching a samizdat, expressing that he did not consider the new administration to be different from the old one, but only one number of *The Voice of the Street* (*Az utca hangja*) was published, during the Taxi Blockade which took place on 25–28 October 1990 (Hafner & Zsille, 1991, p. 387).

The Hungarian October Party and the contemporary critics of the Polish Round Table Talks

György Krassó was keenly interested in the events that transpired in Poland. In September of 1980, he joined a call in which the Fund for Supporting the Poor (Szegényeket Támogató Alap, SZETA) asked individuals to contribute to providing aid, in the capacity of accommodation and care, to children of the Polish workers who were then on strike (Mitrovits, 2020, p. 99).¹⁸ In the late autumn of 1980 he visited Krakow and Warsaw. As the only Hungarian traveller on the train going to Poland he asked the question in his article entitled “Let's travel to

¹⁶ György Krassó simply referred to the MDF as a coalition partner of the MSZMP (Bozóki, 1991, p. 380).

¹⁷ Interestingly, the accusation of collusion with the communists has hit the democratic opposition at least as strongly as the MDF, which was really seeking its own deal with the MSZMP.

¹⁸ After the introduction of martial law in Poland (13 December 1981) they wanted to organize a camp similar to the one that finally took place in June 1981 – one of the main instigators of this initiative was Krassó – but this was finally thwarted by the Polish and Hungarian authorities (Mitrovits, 2020, pp. 129–131).

Poland!” (“Utazzunk Lengyelországba!”) published in the samizdat newspaper/journal named *Diary* (“Napló”): “Are the people of a country with a similar structure to us – who are struggling for radical social and economic change – less interesting than the Tatra ski slopes?” (Hafner & Zsille, 1991, p. 90).

He reported on his travel experiences at a Free University lecture on 24 November. He was captivated by the extensive operation of Solidarity and the fact that “everyone is politicizing” which prompted the memories of years 1945 and 1956 in him. He saw the meeting of workers and intellectuals embodied in the birth of Solidarity, and their camaraderie became, to his mind, an example to be followed (Mitrovits, 2020, pp. 53–54). In Hungary, however, some of the many reflections of the democratic opposition regarding the events in Poland were approached directly from the point of view of the clash of interests with Hungarian workers. It was not a new phenomenon: one may say that the inability of the intelligentsia to connect with the masses as a whole was traditional in the Central and Eastern European region.¹⁹ This was already seen by many besides Krassó, but with the enthusiastic participation of the Hungarian party-state leadership, the workers were practically absent from the Hungarian regime change.²⁰

However, beyond the Polish effect on Krassó’s thoughts and on his party’s acts, it is instructive to compare the main points of their criticism with the opinion of the Polish Round Table Talks’ contemporary critics.

The discussions between Lech Wałęsa and Czesław Kiszczak, which began on 31 August 1988, polarized the opposition forces in the most spectacular way possible. Kornel Morawiecki, the leader of the Fighting Solidarity (*Solidarność Walcząca*) was the first to state that the dialogue with the government manifested in the Kiszczak-Wałęsa talks is a mistake in both a political and moral sense (Ligarski, 2019, p. 93). A similar stance, yet from a different starting point, was expressed by the Working Group of National Commission of Solidarity (*Grupa Robocza Komisji Krajowej NSZZ „Solidarność”*). As in March of 1981, their criticism was again aimed at ending the strikes, by which Wałęsa fulfilled Kiszczak’s precondition for the start of formal negotiations (Dudek, 2004, pp. 21–22).

In Poland, by the end of 1988, through the Citizens’ Committee an exclusive opposition was formed, a special elite whose attribute had become the Round Table itself. Groups outside the narrow circle of Lech Wałęsa could not become negotiating partners of the ruling group, and thus neither the shapers of regime change. However, the selection of specific participants in the negotiations raised

¹⁹ One of the most interesting examples of this was *The Social Contract* (*Társadalmi szerződés*), a key pamphlet of the democratic opposition from 1987, which, contrary to its name, was addressed directly to the authorities (Thoma, 1998, pp. 248–249).

²⁰ Since the end of the 1988 summer strikes, Solidarity itself began to count less and less on them.

questions on both sides. On the part of the state, Kiszczak²¹ and the Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa, SB) were in charge of the “casting” of the opposition and the selection process was plagued by failures.²² Although they proved to be successful in continuing to divide the opposition. They also received help from Solidarity itself, whose membership was already polarized by the mere fact of negotiations (Opulski, 2019, pp. 49–50). The division of potential participants into “constructive” and “obstructive” ones – which, moreover, was carried out by Wałęsa himself and his closest confidants – only deepened the internal front lines (Tálas, 1993, pp. 50–51).

In addition to the authorities, the “constructive” opposition also emerged in the crosshairs of the organizations criticizing the negotiated regime change. Self-determination towards the Citizens’ Committee became one of the starting points for anti-system forces. At the first meeting of the Congress of the Anti-System Opposition on 25 February 1989, the participants declared that Wałęsa and his circle do not represent the whole opposition or the entire Solidarity in the negotiations (Terlecki, 2010, p. 154). A similar situation did not take place in Hungary, where such a monopolistic organization never appeared on the opposition side, and a wide spectrum of opposition organizations took part in the Round Table Talks.

Among the groups not participating in the negotiations, those who were seeking for compromise with the ruling group were criticized on the moral grounds for negotiating with the regime responsible for the bloodshed of the Poznań June of 1956, for the salvos of 1970 and 1981, and for the administrative oppression of 1968 and 1976. However, those who were negotiating with the regime were partly motivated by the view of avoiding similar incidents in the years to come,²³ which were foreseen as ramifications of a non-consensual regime change. In Hungary, the memory of the 1956 Revolution came to forefront in 1989 in different forms. In a radio interview on 27 January, Imre Pozsgay, a prominent politician of the MSZMP called the events of October–November 1956, that had been officially treated as a counter-revolution, a popular uprising. On 16 June, the executed prime minister of the revolution, Imre Nagy was reburied. Nevertheless, due to the historical character of the revolution and the resultant retaliation, the Hungarian October Party was unable to criticize the negotiating authorities in this direction. At the same time, in Poland there was a significant personal overlap between those who ordered the introduction of the martial law in 1981 and those sitting at the negotiating table in 1989.

²¹ According to Jan Olszewski, the interior minister decided as the sole authority on the persons who could sit at the negotiating table (Błażejowska, 2019, pp. 10–12).

²² For instance, Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik were in no way excluded from the negotiations, despite their names being blacklisted as extremists (Tischler, 1999, p. 142).

²³ As early as 1976, Adam Michnik made it clear in his essay, “A New Evolutionism”, that changing the system cannot require more human lives.

In addition, to avoid violence, Solidarity's leadership was driven by the fact that the system did not provide any legal guarantee for their operation – so they had to become indispensable for it. The radical right-wing groups in the opposition also inadvertently played into the hands of Wałęsa by constantly referring to the system as totalitarian, ignoring the anti-totalitarian process that had already begun much earlier, and ignoring the original meaning of the term. In doing so, they contributed to the legitimacy of the “constructive” opposition which were able to indulge in the role of forcing a huge, totalitarian administration to its knees instead of the reality of the late Jaruzelski regime (Walicki, 1996, p. 525).²⁴

Regarding the legitimacy of the negotiating parties, Karol Modzelewski made a remark similar to that of Krassó: “[...] the Round Table was the agreement of the elites, a compromise of the generals of non-existent armies.”²⁵ At the same time, this approach is problematic in several aspects. On the one hand, without official recognition the Solidarity could not have had legal or political legitimacy, yet it had significant social support.²⁶ On the other hand, in Modzelewski's words, it should not be forgotten that there were very real armies behind the PZPR: the Soviet, which was still stationed in the country, and the Polish People's Army. At the same time, dissatisfaction was further heightened by conspiracy theories, which were rapidly gathering momentum and were also fueled by the increasingly marginalized members of the right wing of Solidarity (Vetter, 2013, p. 285). They proclaimed that real agreements under which the Solidarity's elite would transfer the PZPR nomenclature to the new system in exchange for certain leadership positions would have been reached at the minister of interior's villa in Magdalenka (Tischler, 1999, pp. 142–143).

Unlike in Hungary, the Polish Round Table was accompanied by continuous demonstrations and strikes, the topics of which, however, were not limited to criticism of the discussions. The withdrawal of Soviet troops, the prevention of the construction of the Żarnowiec and Klempice nuclear power plants, the demand for free elections, and many other cases ranged from changing the education law to the release of Václav Havel called the protesters to the streets. Demonstrations have also been regularly covered by the state media, confirm-

²⁴ This phenomenon is by no means to be observed only in Poland, moreover, in Central and Eastern Europe only Romania can really be considered a state in which the change of regime was the success of de-Stalinization and terminating personality cult.

²⁵ However, the historian also emphasizes in the same article that he sees the negotiations as a success as a whole, as they have ensured a peaceful regime change (Modzelewski, 2014, p. 162).

²⁶ It was also important for the government to have some level of social support behind its negotiating partner, as this was what it expected to legitimize the compromise to be reached.

ing the official position already held on several fronts that the only competent opposition was sitting at the negotiating table (Pietrzyk-Dąbrowska, 2019, p. 25). The demonstration in Krakow on 17 February 1989, organized by the Independent Students' Association (Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów, NZZS) and dispersed by military police units, was particularly vividly described in the state media: "W Warszawie toczą się rozmowy, a w Krakowie toczą się kamienie", namely 'In Warsaw the arguments are flying, in Krakow – the stones' (Pietrzyk-Dąbrowska, 2019, pp. 26–27).

The attitude of the Churches to the Round Table Talks was very similar in the Polish and the Hungarian case, namely, that the representatives of the clergy had a kind of observer-moderator role in the negotiations. In Poland, however, the role of the Roman Catholic Church was far more important. In the campaign leading up to the compromise elections, the Citizens' Committee received significant help "from the pulpits", especially in rural areas where Solidarity was not strong and its candidates were barely known (Vetter, 2013, p. 309). For this reason, organizations that refused negotiations would also have been in need of support from the clergy, primarily to reach a wider audience. However, the Polish Catholic Church, which had extensive social organizations, did not extend its mediating role at the Round Table to radicals who could potentially endanger the peaceful transition. According to state security reports, at a conference on 22 March 1989, the Archbishop of Krakow, Franciszek Macharski expressed concern about the possible disruption of the Round Table Talks by the continuous protests. He said that the young people protesting in the streets of Krakow were being manipulated, and the city was pushed to have potentially repeated the role of Bydgoszcz in 1981 by forces that had found supporters especially in university circles (Łatka, 2020, p. 308).

In particular, the impact of the Round Table agreement on the compromise (semi-free) parliamentary elections provoked further anger and dissatisfaction among the opposition groups left out of the negotiations, which culminated in further street upheavals, but was overwhelmed by the Citizens' Committee's success in the elections.

Conclusions

Like Polish organizations that also criticized the Round Table Talks from the outside, the Hungarian October Party failed to have channeled social tensions that had arisen from the discrepancy between reality and state socialist promises (Zimmermann, 1998, p. 67), partly because it misjudged its extent. By 1989, neither Hungarian nor Polish society was open to radical solutions to

achieve the change (Przeperski, 2019). However, it was a very important factor in the marginalization of the Hungarian October Party's activities that they could have not communicated their alternative ideas about regime change to the wider public. As an early forerunner of anti-elite populism, the party's message was a repository of internal contradictions. It presented its ideas on worker self-management on an undifferentiated anti-communist basis, while it had no clear position on privatization or on the nature of private property in general. The lack of a clear political self-definition was also reflected in the party's almost non-existent social support.

At the same time, in Poland, although the simultaneity and inseparability of the political and economic aspects of regime change were already recognized by many (Offe, 1996), the majority of radical opposition groups²⁷ became disinterested in the second field, offering no economic alternative to society.²⁸ It is also worth mentioning that almost all of these organizations were active in particular nation states, so their opportunities for international cooperation with similar groups were severely limited (Radice, 1998, p. 213).

The Hungarian October Party could not have become the representative of a specific social group from which it might have received support, while it did not find a promoter at the institutional level either. Cooperation with similar Hungarian organizations and embracing international – especially Polish-oriented – paths could not compensate for this shortcoming. Furthermore, since the single-party systems opposite to the concepts of social self-government had been shaken, the proponents of a liberal market economy had already emerged as new, invincible rivals.²⁹ The anti-stateism of the young generation, primarily sought by the so-called non-constructive opposition organizations, was successfully channelled this time by capitalism, as it had already happened in 1968. Meanwhile, workers who later suffered the loss of social status with the change of regime became so individualized by 1989 – especially in Hungary where the private sector was extended – that addressing them at the community level proved to be a completely fruitless effort. The Hungarian case is particularly instructive in this respect, where although the third constitutional amendment of 1989 introduced the concept of “producer self-government,” one of the first measures of the National Assembly in 1990 was the deletion of this passage (Tütő, 2019, pp. 75–76).

²⁷ It was understandable in the case of the GR KK, since its members in 1980–1981 had already had a first-hand experience of the hopelessness of the Polish path of worker self-government.

²⁸ This proved to be a serious mistake, especially in the light of the fact that the most common social demand related to the change of regime was to change the economic system (Bartha, 2010, p. 28).

²⁹ Among them were party nomenclatures whose privileged positions of power would have been lost in self-governing, democratic socialist systems.

However, the doom of the Hungarian October Party was first and foremost spelled by the Round Table Talks that had previously played a key role in bringing it to life. The unstoppable regime change finally suppressed the voice of simultaneous political criticism. It was replaced by the criticisms of the effects of economic transformation, especially its social cost, although they were made by new organizations in both Hungary and Poland. Kornel Morawiecki, the leader of the Fighting Solidarity³⁰ said in a documentary³¹ about the organization that “Fighting Solidarity survived many blows, except one: the Round Table Talks.”

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³⁰ The organization ceased to exist in 1992, and was revived in the form of an association by its former members in 2007.

³¹ *Głowa mur przebijesz. Solidarność Walcząca*, a documentary filmwritten and directed by Grażyna Ogródowska and Leszek Furman, presented in 2007.

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