

## THE CRIMES OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN HUNGARY NATIONAL REPORT

### 0. Introduction—the communist regime in Hungary

The expression *communist regime* refers in this report to the *Soviet-type* system of rule installed in Hungary after World War II, which persisted until the democratic transformation of 1989–90. Historians attach various terms to this system and this period, and there are a number of incompatible frames for discussing events associated with them. János Kornai, for example, calls it the *socialist system* and lists as its most general attributes a one-party political system, a monopoly for Marxist-Leninist political ideology, predominance of state or quasi-state ownership, bureaucratic coordination, and a centralized command economy. In the 1950s the Soviet-type system (following Hannah Arendt, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Carl Friedrich) was frequently classed among the *totalitarian systems*, with chiliastic ideology, a single mass party headed by the dictator, state terror, a monopoly of mass communications, and a centralized planned economy as its main attributes. These translate into institutions and/or patterns of conduct. The institutions altered little over the history of the Soviet-type systems, but there was much change in their methods of working, social embeddedness, interactions, approach to the subjugated, social autonomies and individual strategies. But there also exists a concept of the Soviet-type system—particularly that of the post-Stalinist period—as *latent pluralism*, exemplified by the Western revisionism that flourished in the 1960s. Others see continuity with the efforts of the Russians (or the Chinese in an Asian variant) to *build and maintain an empire*. A few claim it to be an alternative to the West European/Atlantic form of *modernity*, or a kind of *catch-up modernization dictatorship* that reflects that.

The Hungarian Party of Communists was founded in December 1918 in Budapest by a few radical left-wing socialists and some prisoners of war returned from Soviet Russia, then undergoing Bolshevization. A few months later the party came to power in conjunction with the Social Democrats and set about the Bolshevik project of changing society. This first Hungarian communist attempt to build a system was clearly and consciously modelled on an outside pattern—Russia since 1917—and seen also as part of a world revolutionary process. An important self-image aspect of the subsequent conservative authoritarian system, which described itself as *counter-revolutionary*, was its efforts to take stock of the crimes of the communist experiment and exact judicial or other revenge for them. Both were focused on the state terror of the Soviet system in Hungary and the victims of it.

Hungary, defeated in the Second World War, came in 1944–5 under Soviet military occupation. The second Soviet-style system was installed in

1947–50 and patterned on the Soviet Union that had developed under Joseph Stalin at the end of the 1920s. This system began to show political strains in 1952 and signs of political crisis in the following year. Attempts were made in Hungary after Stalin’s death in 1953 to relieve the economic and social tensions by corrective means, but with little success, although the state terror was lessened substantially for a couple of years. After the corrective course under Imre Nagy had failed in 1955, the crisis within the system worsened. It seemed for two brief weeks beginning on October 23, 1956 that it would fall to a political revolution or at least alter radically, but the attempt to change the system failed and the Hungarian Revolution was crushed by Soviet military intervention.

Hungary was to remain part of the Soviet empire for more than three further decades. But the feature specific in the region to Hungarian history was that albeit short break of continuity in the Soviet political model. The old institutions were reorganized quite rapidly after 1956. Implementation of the Soviet-type communist project restarted or continued. The social psychological effect of the defeat in 1956 allowed János Kádár to be more successful than Mátyás Rákosi had been in the early 1950s, for he completed the nationalization of the Hungarian economy and society more quickly and with relatively less social upheaval and violence (notably the collectivization of agriculture in 1959–61). The “success” soon precipitated a crisis again, although it was not so deep as the one in 1952–3. The Kádár leadership trusted, as Nagy had done in 1953, to corrections and reforms—with Soviet compliance, if not under direct Soviet orders. The Hungarian economic reform of 1968—better prepared and drawing on the experience of 1953 and 1956—was successfully introduced, although the Soviet support for it had ceased by then. For almost concurrently, the Czechoslovak attempt at reform was ended by Soviet military intervention, as the Hungarian Revolution had been in 1956. The cautious Hungarian reform continued for some years before succumbing to Soviet political intervention.

The Hungarian leadership again set about reforms at the end of the 1970s, but these could not put the country back on a catch-up path. The aim was more to preserve and consolidate the living-standard gains made with great sacrifices in the first two stages of the Kádár period. Nonetheless, Hungary by the mid-1980s showed worsening signs of mainly economic crisis. This Hungarian crisis was part of a general crisis affecting the Soviet Union and its European allies. The late Kádárite leaders again sought change and met with no obstruction from Gorbachev’s Soviet leadership. The experiments failed completely even to alleviate the worsening crisis. Nor did it help when Kádár himself, ageing and increasingly stubborn, was removed. Most post-Kádár Hungarian communist politicians saw no other solution than to accept the proposals of the political opposition that formed in the 1980s, for a peaceful, but radical change of *system*. They did so for their political survival, too. That change of system in 1989–90 ended the

Kádár period and the four-decade history of the Soviet-type system in Hungary.

### **1. Types of illegality committed by Hungary’s communist regime**

#### *a. Depriving Hungarian society of political rights*

As mentioned, Hungary came under Soviet military occupation at the end of World War II. On 9 October, 1944 W. Churchill and J. V. Stalin made an informal agreement on a ‘percentage’ partition of South-Eastern Europe. Hungary was placed in the Soviet sphere of influence under the declared and implicit agreements of the anti-fascist Allies (Tehran, Yalta, Potsdam). The United States, Soviet Union and United Kingdom ostensibly agreed at the end of the war on a new Europe to consist of democratic, independent states. It was also declared ceremonially in Yalta. But concurrently the Western Allies recognized the Soviet Union’s military and security requirements.

The Soviet great-power policy was fashioned by Stalin as the victorious military commander and head of a world power. He was aware presumably of the tensions present and soon apparent in the anti-fascist alliance system. He saw a further clash with the West as inevitable, but feared it as well. The two main factors behind Soviet foreign policy were its border security and world revolutionary mission, but temporarily, priority was given to the first. He sought to install in the neighbouring occupied countries of East Central Europe friendly regimes that would be subservient to him militarily. He did not wish for a full communist takeover for tactical reasons, but he pressed for a share of political power for the local communist parties. Outside pressure was clearly the decisive factor in Hungary’s transformation after 1945. The activity of the minor Communist Party working on the project of Sovietization was also determining. As for the radical transformation of the pre-war regime and society, it came about with the active cooperation of masses from local people. It must clearly be assumed from that cooperation that the postwar system of ‘people’s democracy’ held a measure of legitimacy for numerous groups, at least up to a certain point in its history.

The provisional political system after the war was laid down partly by the armistice, which banned the functioning of fascist, Nazi and other such parties. Best placed in the new system was the Communist Party of Hungary (CPH), with 38 per cent of the seats in the Provisional National Assembly of December 1944, the next strongest being the Independent Smallholders’ Party with 25 per cent. Alongside the two communist ministers there were at least two other clandestine CPH members in the government. The communists held sway over the organization of the police and the political state security departments from the very beginning. They used the means of terror against the alleged enemies of the democratic transition, provided

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with help to the Soviet occupation forces to deportations. Characteristically enough on 1 February 1948 an amnesty was guaranteed for those who ‘committed crimes either in disgust of the anti-humanitarian deeds of the former regime, or thinking so to serve the case of democracy.’

The main political issues of reorganization (land reform, mining, transport, war crimes) were all central to the hyperactive the communists and settled in line with their ideas. As the communists intended, no conservative or Christian democratic party could stand in the first general elections. It was agreed that the parties of the Independent Front would continue their grand coalition, but stand for election separately. The result was an absolute majority for the Independent Smallholders’ Party (ISP, 57 per cent) and a vote of 16.9 per cent for the communists.

Despite its absolute majority, the ISP filled only the premiership and a majority of ministerial portfolios. Soviet intervention ensured that the key post of interior minister (in charge of public administration and the police) went to a communist. The communist leaders saw the elections as a grave defeat. Ignoring the will of the people as expressed in the ballot box, they set to changing the political situation by extra-parliamentary means, notably:

- holding informal inter-party agreements (inter-party meetings) that did not reflect the relative strengths in Parliament;
- planting trusted communists in all the allied parties;
- holding strikes, mass demonstrations and provocations from the spring of 1946, with the support of the Social Democratic and National Peasants’ parties (the “Left-Wing Bloc”), to put pressure on the ISP, several conservative members of which were expelled from it;
- rigidly opposing proposals from the ISP to develop the democratic system further—no local government elections were held, the question of representing peasant rights was shelved, and there was no “proportioning” of central or local administrative appointments in line with the election results;
- paying prime attention to ensuring the HCP dominant positions in interior matters, so that it was possible in the summer of 1946 to issue an order dissolving all civil associations, including most religious associations;
- influencing the “people’s tribunals” introduced under the 1946 act in defence of the republic, turning them into a fearful weapon against any manifestations that were branded as “reactionary”, so outlawing in practice all alternative thinking and paving the way for conspiracy trials on trumped-up evidence to begin in 1946–7.

In December 1946, discovery of a relatively insignificant secret political body, the “Hungarian Community”, gave the communist-led interior apparatus a pretext for delivering a decisive blow to the ISP. Interior Minister László Rajk, György Pálffy, the head of military security, and Gábor Péter, head of the State Security Department, used confessions forced out of arrested politicians and old army officers to arrest several centrist members

of Parliament. Then the Soviet military police arrested Béla Kovács, secretary general of the ISP, and carried him out of the country. On May 30, Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy, then in Switzerland, was forced to resign under threats of being implicated in the ostensible conspiracy should he return to Hungary. Emigration was chosen at the same time by another prominent ISP leader, Béla Varga, who was speaker of Parliament. In practice, the ISP fell apart and the premiership passed to Lajos Dinnyés, who had been cooperating with the communists.

Further general elections took place in August 1947, in which openly opposition parties could also stand against the coalition. The communist leaders set about influencing the elections, flouting several times the valid electoral laws, which had narrowed the franchise on political grounds in any case. Any who had played the smallest part in politics before the war were deprived of the vote. Furthermore:

- Communist-influenced registration committees left off the electoral roll further hundreds of thousands of voters branded as reactionaries.
- Plain electoral fraud occurred (communist voting brigades voted several times in different places using false voting lists).
- The coalition won the elections, with the communists (22 per cent) as its largest component, but the opposition obtained 40 per cent.
- In November 1947, the opposition Hungarian Independence Party led by Zoltán Pfeiffer was dissolved and its seats in Parliament abolished. The communist press and leadership accused them falsely of using false nomination papers in the elections.

The next move by the communist leadership, early in 1948, was to apply “salami tactics” (to use a phrase of Rákosi’s) on the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The CPH issued slogans calling for a merger of the two parties and began a campaign to win over SDP members, with crypto-communists and sympathizers planted in the SDP taking part. A wave of transfers began at branch level. In February 1948, the fellow travellers in the SDP (notably György Marosán) removed from the party the so-called right wingers, who opposed the merger (Anna Kéthly, Gyula Kelemen, Antal Bán and others). They also agreed to a “cleansing” of the membership, so that only 240,000 out of over 700,000 SDP members joined the merged party.

The last significant opposition party, the Democratic People’s Party, announced its dissolution early in 1949, influenced by the Mindszenty trial (discussed later). Its leader, István Barankovics escaped abroad.

The assumption of power by the communist replaced the “fake” 1947–9 coalition, in which the CPH and then the Hungarian Workers’ Party (HWP) had hegemony, by a monolithic political and power structure. The Parliament elected in 1947 met decreasingly often until it was dissolved in the spring of 1949. The ballot papers for the parliamentary elections held on May 15, 1949 no longer showed parties. Voters could vote only for a list, styled the People’s Front. For the first time, the poll was almost complete

(96 per cent) and the People's Front got 96.2 per cent of the votes. The press spoke of “victory”, but the poll showed only that the voters had no stake in the voting, but thought it wiser to join in than to stay away. The new Parliament met only three or four times a year for a few days at a time, to “debate” briefly prospective legislation prepared in the upper echelons of the HWP and pass it unanimously. On August 18, 1949, Parliament adopted a new Constitution, which declared Hungary to be a people's republic in which “all power belongs to the working people.” Though the text proclaimed a string of basic democratic rights (of assembly, freedom of speech, freedom of worship), the institutional safeguards for these were lacking. The same held for the codified welfare rights (e. g. the right to work and to recreation). The post of president of the republic was replaced by a Presidential Council, whose powers remained essentially symbolic, but included the right to issue decrees with the force of legislation. The Constitution said nothing of the controlling role of lawful statehood. This foreshadowed the practice of more than four decades whereby many of the rights enshrined in the law failed to apply in daily life. The transformation of the political structure in 1949–50 concluded with a Soviet-type transformation of public administration. A plain ministerial order was enough to replace the 25 counties that had existed since Trianon by 19, of more uniform size and population. The same applied to incorporating into Budapest several adjacent towns and villages, some of them urban and built up to the boundary, but others still rural and agricultural in character. The Councils Act of May 1950 reorganized local government along Soviet lines, replacing the term local government assembly with “council” (analogous to “soviet”). The council elections that took place in October 1950 were the first since 1945, except in Budapest, where local government elections had been held in October 1945.

As the new state structures were introduced after 1949, so were party organizations at every territorial and industrial level, producing a so-called party-state. For all the major decisions were prepared and discussed in party organizations, while the state bodies were largely confined to carrying them out or to lower-level decision-making. Nor was the party omnipotent only in matters of the state. Formally independent institutions such as local government, the economy, the press, and the whole vertical organization of education and research were brought under party control in the same way.

It was not by chance that restoring free political association and free elections were among the main public demands in 1956. The demand for political association and political debate was also apparent in the period leading up to the revolution. Then active party politics burst out during the few days of freedom, and the government formed on October 30 was a four-party coalition like the one in 1945. The revolutionary conditions spawned spontaneous, directly elected bodies—revolutionary committees (in villages and towns) and workers' councils (in workplaces, typically factories)—in which party delegates appeared ubiquitously. Such party and revolutionary

organizations persisted for several weeks after the military defeat of the revolution, still struggling for the aims of the uprising, above all democratic rights. Significantly, no government statement precluding all forms of multi-party system was issued until early January 1957, when the open political opposition was broken by state terror.

Except in the few days of the 1956 Revolution, Hungarian society had no chance in the forty years that followed the communist takeover to express its political opinion or will. The country had a one-party system up to the democratic transformation of 1989–90, though the former coalition parties were never formally banned. Nor was there any political articulation or control over the party and its associate organizations. The only discernible signs of some latent pluralism related to specific issues on which ad hoc lobbies of leaders might appear. The declarations of political rights in the Constitution remained on paper. The communist system discriminated throughout against those expressing opposition or even critical opinions; strong campaigns of state terror were employed against them in some periods (1947–53, 1955–6, 1957–63—see Points 1.i., 1.j. and 1.k), but terror methods were used against them even in more consolidated periods (1953–5, 1963–89). Only at the end of the 1980s would the authorities become relatively tolerant of political rights being expressed and promoted. However, it was typical that the Hungarian communists should continue to exclude the possibility of a multi-party system until the end of February. Legislation had been passed before the 1985 elections requiring there to be at least two candidates in each constituency, but only those who endorsed the programme of the Patriotic People’s Front (a satellite of the communist party) could be nominated. Trickery was used to impede nominations of opposition candidates. Even after February 1989, there was still talk of retaining the “historically developed leading role” of the communist party.

*b. Denial of freedom of the press and information*

The armistice agreement obliged the new Hungarian government to ban the publication of fascist books, newspapers and periodicals and seize those in circulation. The press was overseen formally by the government (the Prime Minister’s Office). Although freedom of the press was assured under Act II/1946 on the Republic, no private person could obtain a permit or paper to produce a periodical. (The state’s monopolistic distribution of the paper quota was governed by the four-party coalition agreement.) Prior censorship of the Hungarian press was carried out by the Allied Control Commission, but this (and the censorship) ceased formally after ratification of the peace treaty. The issue of permits for press products and the supervision of them soon came under the control of the one ruling party. So many dailies, weeklies and periodicals that ceased to appear in 1948–9 were simply being denied paper. Officially there was no prior censorship in Hungary in the communist period. The press was controlled on one hand by leading party

bodies, notably the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee. In 1954 the government set up an information office with a directing and informing purpose. Book publishing was handled by the cultural section (department) of the party and supervised partly by the minister responsible for culture and his apparatus, by means that included guidelines and staffing policy. Longer-term guidelines consisted of ideological precepts, immediate ones of long, medium and short-term campaign tasks. Editors and publishing executives belonged to the central or middle-ranking *nomenklatura*, personally responsible for seeing that their institutions obeyed the guidelines. In the press this meant everything from news reports to commentaries, even notes and the sports column. The directing system's essence was informality. There were informal rules and oral instructions on what and how much might be written, and what had to and had not to be covered. In the later 1960s came the institution of weekly or fortnightly editor-in-chiefs' meetings, when officials in charge from the party centre would evaluate the press and telecommunications and give instructions for the period ahead.

This relatively workable system sought largely to avoid open conflict and direct prohibitions. There was a list of authors who were not to be published and a system of temporary silencing, but these were not written down, even internally. The virtual bans depended much on the momentary situation. Should taboo subjects or undesirable approaches still appear in the press—through the independence, boldness, ignorance or negligence of certain leaders—the authorities did not hesitate to use force or prohibition. This might in practice affect anything—a published edition of a paper, magazine or book, or the job of an editor-in-chief or a complete editorial staff. There were several examples of this over the forty years. An issue of the *Irodalmi Újság*, weekly paper of the Writers' Union, was seized in the autumn of 1955, sparking a petition to the party leadership by some fifty intellectuals, taking unprecedented action in favour of literary and artistic freedom. At the end of November 1956, after the revolution was crushed, the staff of the central party daily, *Népszabadság*, went on strike when the party leadership banned an article that took issue with *Pravda* in Moscow. In January 1957 the government dissolved the Journalists' Union. Nor were the populist writers allowed a paper of their own in the consolidated Kádár period, let alone the political opposition that began to form in the late 1970s. Publishers held back manuscripts even by such well-known, approved writers as Gyula Illyés. The editors of *Mozgó Világ*, which had given scope to some authors associated with the democratic opposition, were dismissed twice (in 1981 and again in 1983, when the whole staff was purged in an unprecedented manner). Similar treatment was meted out in 1982 and 1986 to *Tiszatáj*, by then seen as the organ of the populists.

So the system of censorship and supervision involved a series of legal infringements in the communist period. The state failed to provide the



public with information—indeed it deliberately withheld some of it. There was no freedom of opinion in the press. News from abroad was screened on political grounds. Foreign radio broadcasts—notably from Radio Free Europe—were jammed. But the informality of the regulation proved paradoxically to be an advantage in the period of loosening. In the last third of the 1980s, notably in 1989, the Hungarian press could regain its freedom without having to confront party-state “regulations” or similar institutions.

*c. Restriction of rights in the civil sphere*

As mentioned in Section 1.a, the communist-led Ministry of the Interior dissolved in summer 1946 most of Hungary’s social, religious, professional and other civil associations (altogether 1500 societies and organizations). Most societies that had their permits restored were then dissolved in 1948–9, after which there was practically no scope for self-organization. On the contrary, the state used unprecedented force in 1949–53 (and again for a few years after 1956) to suppress every form of social cohesion (qualifying them as political—see later.) The remaining cultural, artistic, trade-union, sports and educational associations were transformed in 1948–9, as persons committed to the communist party-state were inserted into their committees. The civil sphere became a system of transmission for the party-state, assisting in conveying to people the aims of the party leadership at the time, in executing them, and monitoring those subjected to them. These social organizations incorporated into the monolithic system also performed—in a limited sense—tasks of reconnection. This can be described summarily as the nationalization of society.

*d. Infringement of freedom of worship*

Integral to communist ideology was a material, anti-religious conviction, combined in Bolshevik political practice with an aggressively anti-clerical policy. On taking power, the Hungarian communist party came into conflict mainly with the Catholic Church, the largest in the country, headed after World War II by the charismatic, politically conservative and rigidly anti-communist primate and archbishop of Esztergom, Cardinal József Mindszenty. All the churches had been relieved of their landholdings without compensation under the 1945 land reform. The next attack was on the church schools, which made up almost half the elementary and secondary schools in the country. With a few exceptions, these were all nationalized in June 1948. That Christmas, Mindszenty was arrested, as the last significant political force to resist the monolith of communist power. The cardinal was placed on trial in February 1949, following the scenario of the Moscow show trials, and sentenced to life imprisonment. In August 1950, all Catholic religious orders but a couple of teaching orders were dissolved. In 1951, József Grósz, archbishop of Kalocsa, was also arrested and given a long prison sentence. A succession of other clerical arrests and

convictions followed. This “struggle against clerical reaction” was a consistent campaign by the Stalinist regime, from 1949 to 1953. The rhetoric decreased under the Imre Nagy government, but there was little change in the anti-church stance of local authorities. Almost 500 priests and members of religious orders were interned or arrested between 1945 and 1956.

In the summer of 1949 religious education ceased or became optional in what was now a state school system. The proportion of school students opting for it was still 20–25 per cent in the early years, but fell to a minimal level by the 1960s. Far more joined in religious instruction in churches, though the authorities tried to restrict it by administrative means.

In 1951, the government set up the State Office for Church Affairs to perform administrative tasks to do with the churches, the most important being supervision and initiation of appointments and dismissals within them. Alongside the office’s informers there was deep penetration by the state security services. Intimidation was used to make the clergy of the various churches swear allegiance to the Constitution by 1951. Some then became involved in the People’s Front or the peace movement. The churches were obliged to refrain from criticizing the communist system, policies or ideology, and to curb their confessional, evangelistic and pastoral activities.

Church activity increased again during the 1956 Revolution. Cardinal Mindszenty was freed and became a key political figure again, if only for a few days, before taking refuge in the US Embassy in Budapest when the revolution was crushed. The Kádár regime launched a new campaign, mainly against the Catholic church, in 1960–61. Over 200 clergy and members of monastic orders were interned or given prison sentences between 1956 and the last group trial of churchmen in 1965. Then came some normalization of state–church relations, or rather relations with the church hierarchy, especially after Mindszenty left Hungary in 1971. This did not mean the authorities were not putting pressure on the clergy, whose activity was notable (especially the pastoral and teaching work done by the younger generation). Church leaders frequently cooperated with state organizations. The hierarchy, for instance, were prompted to criticize some forms of grassroots activity (the basis-community movement, conscientious objectors to military service, etc.) No clergy of the main churches were jailed after 1971, but discrimination against activists in minor churches and custodial sentences for conscientious objectors continued till the mid-1980s.

#### *e. Infringement of employment rights*

One aspect of *class policy* under the communist system was discrimination against members of the so-called former ruling classes. Having deprived them of their property, the system also sought to curb their income and restrict their careers. From 1948–9, attempts were made to oust former members of the aristocracy, haute bourgeoisie and upper middle classes from white-collar jobs, regardless of how they performed. The main area of

removal was education, except where expertise or possibly international reputation made them indispensable. The regime also sought to prevent the old intelligentsia from reproducing itself through its offspring: measures introduced at the beginning of the 1950s restricted access to universities and colleges for those not of worker or poor-peasant origin.

Meanwhile masses of those of worker and peasant origin who were admitted to higher education lacked the necessary previous education, due to the easier, so-called specialist matriculation system introduced. Many students failed to complete even these simplified courses. Meanwhile the offspring of the old middle and upper classes felt most in those years that there was no future for them. Discrimination on grounds of origin officially ceased in 1962. The children of former “class enemies” then had equal access to higher education in principle, but in practice positive discrimination in favour of worker and peasant children went on, joined by preference for the offspring of the *nomenklatura* (holders of various political honours and medals). This meant that equal opportunity and freedom of career choice were still questionable, especially as only 7–8 per cent of the requisite age group were admitted to higher education under the communist system.

It was still the practice in the Kádár period to forbid the employment of political enemies and oppositionists. By then intellectual critics of the system were not usually arrested (the jailing of the writer György Konrád and the sociologist Iván Szelényi for a few days in 1974 over the essay in Marxist historical sociology, *The Intellectual on the Road to Class Power*, caused a great stir), but in some cases they were forced to leave the country. The practice of *Berufsverbot* subsisted in Hungary until the end of the 1980s.

#### *f. Infringement of the right to freedom of movement*

The issue of passports after 1945 passed into the hands of the communist-controlled Ministry of the Interior and its organizations of state protection and security. It was restricted or tied to monetary payments that were illegal in many cases. Up to 1949, about 10,000 persons left Hungary legally, of their own free will (the majority of them Hungarian Jewish survivors). Meanwhile almost ten times as many left illegally over the same period. Almost the only passports for travel abroad issued from the end of the 1940s to the end of the 1950s were for official travel, which translated into a few thousand frontier crossings a year.

The situation did not change essentially after 1953, although a few thousand migrants left legally for Israel in 1954–5. After the defeat of the 1956 Revolution, almost 200,000 Hungarians fled in three months, of whom 90 per cent did not return. The Kádár regime changed its passport policy in the early 1960s. Initially there were no restrictions on applying for a so-called tourist passport for Western countries, but from the end of the decade it could only be once in three years, with a so-called visitor passport

available in alternate years. European socialist countries could be visited without restriction using a separate passport, but visits to the Soviet Union were only possible in state-organized tourist groups, not as individuals.

This relative freedom to travel was not based on a right to freedom of movement. There was no right to a passport in Hungary. Any citizen might *apply* for one. Then the state security authorities would decide according to several criteria. Passports were not issued to the regime’s actual or assumed critics or its actual opponents in general. Passport confiscation was a routine political penalty. The practice remained until the advent of a uniform “world passport” in 1988. Emigration practice was similar. It was only possible to remain abroad for an extended period by state-controlled means (on a work permit negotiated by the state). There were no legal terms for leaving the country for good. An average of 2000 people a year emigrated legally between the end of the 1950s and 1989, most after procedures that could take years, leaving their property behind, and in the economically inactive period of their lives. In the same period, 2000–3000 people a year left illegally, mainly on visitor or tourist passports.

*g. Crimes against privacy and human dignity*

In principle the state security bodies under the communist regime should have been combating (“detering”) alien or domestic persons or groups that endangered state security and social order. In fact the secret-police arsenal was turned, before and during the takeover, on the communists’ political opponents, and the organization, to some extent at least, operated as a party police force. It enjoyed wide independence between the takeover and 1956. Its surveillance extended to almost the whole of society. The secretly gathered information was stored, systemized and utilized in proceedings against the potential and real opponents of the communist system. The operation of the state security organizations was not subject to civil (democratic political) or judicial supervision. Nor was there party control, as there was over other state bodies, for they were largely directed up to 1953 by Mátyás Rákosi, the party general secretary (and prime minister).

The situation did not change after 1956: state security operations were never governed by open, identifiable measures. If there were such, they remained secret. The party’s function of direction and control worked better: the aims of the service were laid down mainly in party resolutions (though not public either) and it could only investigate in certain fields with prior consent from party organizations. Yet the private sphere of citizens was still invaded regularly and on a mass scale up to the end of the period. The data secretly gathered was used to intrude into people’s lives, record and interfere in their careers, and monitor their personal relations.

The number of persons on the secret-service files (on whom data had been gathered by various means) changed as follows:

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1953	1,200,000
1956	550,000
1957	650,000
1963	246,659
c. 1970	up to 200,000
c. 1980	up to 185,000
1989	164,000

These included the number of persons considered to be a threat, on whom data was actively and continually gathered:

1961	6115
1962	5824
1968	6206
1971	3400
1982	2582
1985	2225

All this was done by the official state security staff (whose numbers varied around 5000 in the period) and their network (secret, non-professional assistants). The latter (known inaccurately and colloquially as informers or agents) numbered around 30,000 in the early 1950s and about 10,000 after 1956, fewer in the 1970s and 1980s.

#### *h. Infringements of property and business rights*

The Hungarian state was obliged under the armistice agreement to compensate those who had suffered losses by legislation based on origin (the Jewish Laws). It was also obliged to respect the rights to acquire property and do business. The 1945 land reform (first as a government order and later as legislation, was designed to correct injustices in Hungarian society that had arisen down the ages. All democratic and non-democratic political forces at the time agreed with the redistribution of land. But there were no broad social or professional debate on its principles or how to carry it out. Land ownership was placed in historical and political categories. The property of some (war criminals, the churches, members of Hungary's German community) had their land confiscated, while others (noble or peasant landowners) were promised compensation). However, this compensation had not materialized by the democratic transformation.

Restriction of private property did not end with the land reform. The new National Assembly elected in 1947 passed legislation nationalizing the large banks and introduced central economic planning, although the three-year plan did not yet consist of compulsory performance quotas “disaggregated” to the level of individual firms.

In March 1948 came sudden nationalization, sidestepping Parliament

and the government, of all domestically owned industrial firms employing over 100 people. (Firms in foreign ownership were excluded.) Thereafter the twin constraints of state ownership and state regulation left very little room for private business. The Budapest Stock Exchange was closed. From then Hungary's could be considered a state economy. At the end of 1949, all industrial workshops with over ten employees were nationalized, along with several that were smaller ones. Thereafter the economic and social spheres outside agriculture were wholly under state and one-party control.

Communist General Secretary Mátyás Rákosi announced the start of agricultural collectivization in August 1948. The smallholder peasantry, the country's most populous social group after 1945, bore almost unbearable burdens of taxation and produce levies, causing many to leave their farms and join the ranks of unskilled manual labour in the towns. The richer peasantry were known by the Russian term *kulak*; kulak lists began to be kept after 1948, and Hungary's rural elite was broken and dispersed. The political intention behind the levies on individual farming was to force peasants with small or medium-sized holdings into collective farms, but the campaigns of collectivization that began in 1948 and became tougher in 1951–3 failed to achieve this. For one thing the supply obligations on the collectives were no less burdensome than those on peasant farmers had been. The campaigns had “low efficiency”: by 1953, the cooperative sector still covered only 26 per cent of the farmland and involved rather than less than one-fifth of agricultural earners, while the individual farmers (68 per cent of the earners) still held 56 per cent of the farmland.

The corrective policies of Imre Nagy after 1953 lifted some of the burdens from individual peasant farmers. The kulak lists were abolished and the forcibly organized cooperatives were disbanded or allowed members to withdraw (although the terms for withdrawal were unfavourable, as leavers did not receive all the land or equipment they had put in, but had to take back all the burdens). The majority of the agricultural collectives dissolved themselves spontaneously during the 1956 Revolution.

Prompted partly by the Soviets, the communist leaders opened a new political debate on collectivizing agriculture early in 1958. One camp urged rapid formation of cooperatives in one sweeping campaign, using force if needed and ignoring effects on living standards or production. This would have repeated the practice of the early 1950s, basing collectivization on the agricultural proletariat, the most “conscious” segment of the peasantry. The other camp wanted cooperatives too but sought a different route—a slow, cautious, gradual conversion that eschewed violence and at least held current level of production. The course Kádár put to the Central Committee in December 1958 was an attempt to synthesize the two. Small elements of private ownership (household cultivation) and enterprise (share-cropping) were to be built into the new cooperatives. The intention was to draw in, not shut out the middle peasants and even the formerly rich peasants who had

remained in the villages. The old method of sending in functionaries and “worker activists” was employed, but care was taken to win over the best respected people in the village. The brief hopes of 1956 had vanished and rural society – also under the pressure of the memory of terror – was now resigned to change. Collectivization was completed by spring 1961, with about 95 per cent of the land being farmed by cooperatives or state farms. (The ownership transfer ensued in the mid-1960s.)

The system also limited the *acquisition* of property. It was no longer possible for private persons to buy or sell farmland after the collectivization of agriculture. Nor could other private property of a production nature be acquired. Small-scale industry and retail trading were hardly possible in 1949–53 due to high taxation and political pressure. Although conditions eased somewhat after 1953, it was possible to work only with family members or one to five employees. Much of the urban housing was nationalized in the early 1950s, especially in Budapest, including some family houses, although these were returned to private ownership after 1956. Private persons were confined up to the end of the Kádár period to owning one dwelling and one holiday home (although this was often circumvented by buying property in the name of other family members.) Curbs on the right to acquire property and do business remained until the 1989 change of system. In 1979, some forms of business association were permitted again (economic partnerships, intra-enterprise economic partnerships, small cooperatives, etc.) , but not even these were allowed to amass private production capacities of much value or employ any large amount of outside labour.

#### *i. State terror against society*

The National Assembly passed legislation “in defence of the democratic system of state” in 1946 (Act VII). This threatened grave sanctions, but failed to define accurately the system of state or the actions deemed damaging to it. Interpretation was left to police, prosecution and judicial bodies and services. It has been noted that the political police were from the outset under the direct control of the communist party, which made use of the flexible terms of the act to apply weapons of state terror against its opponents during its assumption of power. One of the prime early examples was the Hungarian Community conspiracy trial held at the turn of 1946 and 1947, in which 300 people were sentenced.

The takeover of power, rather than ending the state terror, increased its intensity. The political police took action against all resistance to the communist system, assumed or real, and all variant political opinion. Any non-official appearance in public or private life counted as suspect and therefore to be persecuted. The Rákosi leadership waged war on Hungarian society. Anyone in the early 1950s might become a target; no one could feel safe. However, there existed some socio-political criteria for identifying

“enemies” and persecuting them particularly hard.

Among these were clergy and religious believers, especially those who did not conceal their outlook (see Section 1.d). The trials of Mindszenty in 1949, Evangelical Bishop Lajos Ordass in 1950 and Grósz in 1951 were the tip of an iceberg. Hundreds of priests and church activists were arrested, interned, or turned out of homes, posts and parishes in the early 1950s.

Also special targets were the pre-war aristocracy, political, business and military elite, and upper middle class. These were still persecuted even though their numbers had fallen sharply through the waves of emigration in 1945 and 1947–8 and they had been deprived of their wealth in the land reform and nationalization. They were also deprived of pension rights. In May 1951, a pre-war Interior Ministry order was used to deport almost 15,000 people from Budapest in a few days, most of them to remote villages, to be billeted on likewise persecuted rich peasants, while over 7000 of them did forced labour on work camps set up at Hortobágy.

The peasantry was still the largest social group in Hungary in the early 1950s. The illegality of the property-right infringements and exorbitant taxes and produce levies on them (see Section 1.h) were compounded by the state terror. Early in 1953 came an obligation to till the soil, with penalties for those who had left for the towns and factories to escape the pressures. But this attempt to tie people to the land, reminiscent of serfdom, failed, as masses of peasants had abandoned their land, which was not assuring them a livelihood. About 180,000 of them offered the state almost 1,800,000 cadastral *hold* (over 1 million hectares) in 1949–52, almost 1,000,000 *hold* of that being so-called kulak land. Those who pressed on with their farming could expect to clash with the state sooner or later. From 1951, the rules on produce deliveries began to include penalties “for the misdemeanour” (later crime) “of endangering public supplies”, for which several hundred thousand peasants were prosecuted: 193,826 people were found guilty in 1948–56, over 120,000 of them in 1951–3.

Terror against peasantry induced several resistance activities in the countryside and small towns. Some local groups tried to organize regional and even nationwide organization (White Guard). Leaflets were distributed and arms were collected. State security organs infiltrated most of the resistance, liquidated them and participants were punished severely. A cautious estimate would be that the number of participants in Hungary in active, conscious resistance between 1945 and 1956 was at most about 4-5,000.

Communist doctrine dubbed the proletariat the new “ruling class”, but this was just propaganda. (The industrial workers deemed most faithful to the party were “raised” and might become factory managers or even ministry officials, but these were a tiny minority, and these functionaries soon came to forget their background.) The working class lost the right to strike. The standard of living fell by 20 per cent 1949 and 1952. This led the



workers to seek other ways to offset the deterioration in their conditions, but the state took draconian measures against these. Absentees or those failing to fulfil their enhanced production norms committed a “plan crime” (a crime against the targets of the state economic plan) if not an act of “sabotage”. In 1951 came penalties for an arbitrary change of work place, effectively robbing workers of the last and oldest opportunity, to change jobs. Although tens of thousands were penalized over these years for “arbitrary termination” of their employment, secret statistics showed that the number of cases was several times higher.

The intelligentsia and the old middle class were suspect in any case under the Stalinist system, if not class enemies. The offspring of the old middle class especially could feel in these years that they had no future (see Sections 1.e and 1.f) They accounted for most of the attempts to defect abroad. They were the most inclined to join in sporadic acts of resistance. So large numbers of them ended up in prison or internment camps.

The communist leadership suffered successive purges from 1949. This internal settling of scores led to almost 100 executions in the political elite alone, some instigated by the Soviets. László Rajk (interior minister in 1946–8) had no disparate political views, but he came into conflict with Gábor Péter, commander of the State Protection Bureau (ÁVH), and Mihály Farkas, the defence minister. Rajk was accused of plotting an armed takeover, an anti-communist coup in Hungary, on behalf of the Americans and Yugoslavs. The indictment, written by Rákosi himself, was finalized with Stalin at the end of August 1949. Rajk admitted to the preposterous charges out of loyalty to his party or because he realized his position was hopeless. He was sentenced to death after a public “show” trial and executed in September 1949. The Rajk Case was a link of the chain of show trials in the Communist countries in 1949-52.

Several hundred communists and leading former social democrats were similarly arrested in the next few years, as were numerous generals and other senior army officers. In 1950, state terror reached the state security service itself, and in the early days of 1953, Lieutenant General Gábor Péter, was arrested too. Meanwhile an anti-Semitic campaign aping the one in the Soviet Union swept through the elite about the turn of 1952 and 1953. Péter’s arrest was just a prelude to a campaign in which many would have shared his fate had Stalin not died of a brain haemorrhage on March 5, 1953. However, the number of victims from the communist elite was dwarfed by the number from Hungarian society at large.

The state terror was much mitigated when the Imre Nagy government came to power in 1953. (On the state terror under Hungary’s communist regime and data on the first mitigating measures, see Section 1.k.)

Even before the Soviet armed intervention that crushed the 1956 Revolution, a rival Hungarian regime under János Kádár had been put together in Moscow. Kádár promised in a statement on November 4 that no

one would be harassed for “for having taken part in the events of recent times,” but later that month KGB units sent to Hungary with the Soviet troops were arresting several thousand, of whom some (about a thousand) were deported to Soviet prisons in Subcarpathia. This move was reminiscent of 1945, and awkward for Kádár himself. So he moved rapidly to halt it. (The deportees were returned and many released as well.) The maintenance of order and the intimidation were taken over in mid-December by the Hungarian special forces and by the state security service, reorganized under the wing of the police.

At the beginning of December, the government declared martial law and introduced accelerated judicial proceedings. The arrests were continual, and protest demonstrations in several places were fired on by the special forces. The shooting incident in Salgótarján on December 8 claimed more than 50 lives and sparked a 48-hour general strike called by the Central Workers’ Council. In response all territorial workers’ councils were banned. The heads of the workers’ councils were summoned to Parliament ostensibly for talks and then arrested. Internment was reintroduced. The first death sentences under the summary courts were carried out in mid-December on people who had been found with arms. On January 12, 1957 summary proceedings were extended to cover the crime of calling a strike.

Mass reprisals for the revolution ensued only when hardly a sign of resistance remained. In mid-February, a big show trial began at the Capital City Court, the accused being Ilona Tóth and accomplices, members of one of the Budapest resistance groups active after November 4. The trial for “counter-revolutionary organization” was “spiced” with false evidence and a hair-raising tale of murder. In March 1957, Kádár agreed with the Soviet leadership on a visit to Moscow to speed up the reprisals. It was decided to continue the trials in closed court, a move in which mounting international protests presumably played a part. In April 1957, people’s courts were instituted, and the mass arrests were extended from post-November 4 resisters to those who had played a part in the revolution itself, or even in “preparations” for it (the party opposition movement). The mass revenge continued right up until spring 1959, when the first partial amnesty was declared.

Targets of state terror in the Rákosi period were drawn from the whole of society. The reprisals after 1956 had relatively precise targets. Three main groups can be distinguished:

- The first consisted of mainly unskilled urban workers, industrial apprentices and enlisted soldiers, aged 18–25 or younger, often on the peripheries of society, who had joined in the armed clashes or joined related rebel units. They received a numerical minority of the sentences, but were the ones most often brought before the martial-law and people’s courts. They were treated the most severely and received the most death sentences.
- The next most numerous group consisted of members of the works

workers' councils and local revolutionary committees. Most were workers, foremen, peasants, or in smaller numbers members of the intelligentsia (teachers), aged 28–35, enjoying local respect. They formed the self-organizing elite of the revolution. They were normally tried before regular courts and received lighter sentences.

- The third and smallest target group consisted of pre-1956 party-opposition intellectuals who identified with the democratic and national aims of the revolution and took part in the resistance after November 4.

The machinery of oppression sought to identify and punish all who belonged to the first group. With the other two (especially the third) there was some “selectiveness”, but not usually on grounds of principle.

The peak of revenge was the execution of Imre Nagy on June 16, 1958. The prime minister during the revolution had taken refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest on November 4, 1956. On November 22, he and others were enticed out by a promise of free passage, but arrested and interned in Romania. On April 14, 1957, Nagy was arrested in Romania and taken to Budapest. Moscow was consulted during his examination and trial. The latter opened at the beginning of February 1958 but was suspended (at Soviet request) until June 9–15, 1958. Imre Nagy denied his guilt and refused to recognize the court. He did not seek a reprieve from his sentence of death. He, former Defence Minister Pál Maléter and the party-opposition journalist Miklós Gimes were executed at dawn on June 16. (Of the others accused, former State Minister Géza Losonczy died in custody in December 1957, and the journalist József Szilágyi executed after a separate trial in April 1958.) Nagy and his associates were buried in unmarked graves, as were the other victims of post-1956 reprisals.

Two further amnesties were declared in 1960 and 1963. Although the latter was dubbed a “general” amnesty, it omitted some of those serving '56-related sentences (recidivists, or those convicted of “undefined numbers of attempted murders”). Political trials continued to occur in Hungary in smaller numbers up to the end of the 1980s, usually for “incitement” (voicing views against the system, or sometimes just for telling a political joke).

After the post-1956 reprisals the state security concentrated on religious and nonconformist youth mainly. Generation subcultures were kept under surveillance. Lots of participants were punished or marginalized by administrative processes. Physical intimidation was used against young people quite frequently, especially during festivals, concerts, football matches etc. In the early sixties ‘Western’ clothing, long hair, beards were enough to be beaten by the police units. Police cooperated with the Party militia (*munkásőrség*, ‘Workers’ Guard’) and the paramilitary organization of the Union of Communist Youth (*ifjú gárda*, ‘Youth Guard’). Several young people were imprisoned for taking part in spontaneous March 15 demonstrations in the 1970s. Custodial sentences were also given to those

who refused military or armed service for reasons of conscience. Experience of the terror especially from the late forties to the early sixties was deeply imprinted in the consciousness of the Hungarian society and had a deterrent effect up to the late seventies.

*j. Crimes against the penal system*

As stated in Section 1.i, the terror inflicted on society and the vast majority of the criminal prosecutions were based on false charges. Most of the accused had not carried out any activity against the system. No one in a democratic lawful state may be victimized for their political opinions. Nor would the prevalent legislation in Hungary have given grounds for instituting such proceedings under normal circumstances.

The proceedings also broke the law in other ways, for the communist regime regularly and frequently broke its own regulations. The investigators in the political police were under no legal or institutional control, and used illegal, inhuman methods wholesale, especially in 1947–53 and 1956–63. There was no maximum duration for police detention. Years would often pass between arrest and sentencing. Suspects—especially in 1947–53—were subject to brutal methods of torture: physical assault, denial of rest or sleep, starvation, etc. There is also evidence of consciousness-altering drugs being used. Further pressure was put on suspects by arresting their relatives and dependents (e. g. the mother of Cardinal Mindszenty). Suspects were denied legal representation. The prosecution stage was generally a formal one confined to repeating “findings” of the police investigation. The charges too were often drawn up by the political police—as happened with Imre Nagy and associates in 1958. When the trial began, prisoners were not allowed to choose a defence lawyer freely, only from a confidential list of lawyers deemed reliable by the regime. The “evidence” usually consisted exclusively of confessions obtained by force. If other evidence were used, most would be forged, as would parts of the confessions. There was no question of judicial independence, except in a few cases. Sentencing was determined on political grounds (sometimes on direct instructions from party leaders) or in line with recommendations of the secret police. Trials were held in closed court, except for the prepared show trials. Nor could political prisoners meet their families even after final sentencing (or at most rarely and irregularly) or enjoy normal prisoner privileges. They were held under inhuman conditions and received inadequate medical or other care. Prisons were controlled by the state security up to 1953, at least those for political prisoners. The harsh political-prisoner regime eased somewhat after 1953 and more noticeably in the early 1960s (the mass regular physical abuse of prisoners, for instance, became rare), but some aspects remained until the change of system.

*k. The dimensions of state terror*

Full statistics of the state terror in Hungary have yet to be compiled. Its scale

can only be conveyed through partial figures and occasional estimates.

- There were 42,679 convictions between 1946 and 1956 under the act on protection of the system of state, i. e. narrowly defined political crimes—accusations of incitement, illegal crossing of the frontier, espionage, disloyalty, treason, and misuse of firearms. (The figure excludes the 28,459 convicted in the same period for war crimes and crimes against the nation.) Breaking these down by periods:

	Criminal courts	Military courts
1946–9	5861	-
1950–53	26,507	-
1953–6	5527	-
<i>1946–56</i>	<i>37,895</i>	<i>4784</i>

- There were 193,826 convictions between 1948 and 1956 for misdemeanours or crimes against public supply:

1948–50	51,965
1951–3	120,200
1954–6	21,661

- Some 22,000 persons were expelled from their place of residence in 1951–3.

- Some 6000 persons were held in custody (or interned) without charges being preferred in 1949–53. Most horrible was the Recsk internment camp in Northern Hungary, Mátra Hills. 300 of approximately 1,300 captives lost their lives here due to malnutrition and mistreatment in 1950-3.

- The scale of repression can be sensed in data on the 1953 package of the alleviating measures. A summary dated November 18, 1953 states, “The pardon measures affected almost 748,000 persons. There were 15,761 persons freed from prison (of almost 40,000 prisoners). Of over 5000 persons held in internment camps (Recsk, Kistarcsa, Kazincbarcika and Tiszalök), 3234 were released at the end of October but criminal charges were made against 659 (for political crimes). Prisoners of war of foreign citizenship held at the Tiszalök camp (about 1200 persons) were mainly handed over to West Germany in late autumn. About 500 persons were released from police internment camps. Of those exiled to Hortobágy, 7281 regained their freedom, and the orders assigning place of residence were lifted for 13,670 persons deported from Budapest and 1194 banned from entering a provincial city. The fines of 427,000 persons were waived. The petty court proceedings against 230,000 persons were ended. The judicial proceedings or police or prosecution investigations against almost 29,000 persons were halted by the amnesty. The police supervision orders on 4500 persons were lifted.” Some estimate that up to 1953 a kind of legal action was taken against approximately 1,5 million Hungarian citizen. (Adult population of the country was about 5 million at that time.)

- After the defeat of the 1956 Revolution (from the end of 1956 to 1959)

at least 35,000 persons were subjected to police/prosecution investigations on suspicion of political “crimes”. A total of 26,621 persons were convicted of participation in the revolution. Another 13,000 were sent to the new internment camps (at Tököl and Kistarcsa) for longer or shorter periods.

- The number of persons convicted of political crimes dropped sharply at the beginning of the 1960s. According to a state security report filed in 1971, the numbers prosecuted for incitement in 1966–70 were:

1966	991
1967	529
1968	614
1969	425
1970	400

A summary of imprisonment in the 1960s for political reasons gives these figures:

	No. starting sentence	No. freed	No. serving sentence
1971	135	130	387
1974	90	163	239
1975	94	148	184
1977	102	109	159

The figures show that a few hundred political prosecutions were initiated each year in the 1960s and 1970s (most for incitement). Over half ended presumably with a conviction, and about a hundred accused a year received a custodial sentence. The figures probably fell further in the 1980s, but civil rights organizations have noted that prosecutions for incitement still occurred in Hungary in 1988.

- As for the number of death sentences and executions for political motives (discounting war crimes and crimes against the people), the data available are as follows:

Sentenced to death by criminal courts and executed, 1946–56	338
Sentenced to death by military courts and executed, 1946–56	147
Sentenced to death and executed for part in '56 Revolution, 1956–61	228

The number who died during criminal proceedings or due to acts of brutality in prison is not known precisely, but reached some hundreds over the whole period. Death sentences and executions still occurred in political cases in Hungary after 1961, mainly for spying. The total for these is in two figures.

### *1. The victims of the 1956 Revolution*

State terror applied during the 1956 Revolution forms a special chapter in the history of illegalities committed by the Hungarian communist regime. On October 23, 1956, the special forces (without specific orders to do so) fired on people in Debrecen and Budapest demonstrating peacefully partly for reforms and partly for a change of system. This led already to fatalities and wounded. In Budapest, armed resistance formed spontaneously. On the night of October 23–4, the fight was joined on the regime’s side by freshly

arrived Soviet troops stationed in Hungary. It is not exactly known what part in Moscow’s decision was played by the appeal from Ernő Gerő and the leaders of the Hungarian communist party and state, but there is no doubt that *such an appeal was made* and passed on to the Soviet leadership.

The Hungarian special forces and Soviet troops opened fire in several places in the days that followed. On October 31, three days after the Budapest ceasefire, the Presidium of the Soviet communist party decided on further military intervention in the Hungarian Revolution. The new power centre in Moscow—the rival government of János Kádár—did not request the intervention, which was already underway when it formed. But it did so publicly and demonstrably when the chance came a couple of hours after the military action had been launched. There were several occasions after November 4, 1957 when Soviet or Hungarian troops fired on peaceful demonstrators.

Here are the main figures for victims of the armed fighting:

	Budapest	Provinces	Total
No. of wounded, Oct. 23–Dec. 31, 1956	16,700	2526	19226
No. of deaths, Oct. 23–Jan. 16, 1957, of which:	c. 2045	c. 150	c. 2652
Registered, exhumed, reported:	1945	c. 557	c. 2502
Other:	c. 100	c. 50	c. 150

The statistics rest on contemporary death registers and cemetery records. In several cases, victims of fighting or volleys of fire were registered as natural deaths, so that the number of victims of firing was greater than recorded. About 350 persons fell victim to the firing of the state security force, Hungarian People’s Army, Soviet Army, and Defence and Interior special forces between October 23 and December 12, 1956.

## **2. Assessment of the legal infringements committed under international law**

The compiler of this report is a historian and the logic and terminology of the discussion is above all historical. Thus the word *crime* appears in the text with two meanings.

It refers on the one hand to the sum of *illegal acts, policies and behaviours* as determined in relation to universal human and civil rights such as those enjoyed under a democratic, lawful European state and the norms of democratic political practice. The illegal acts were committed in pursuit of the communist regime’s ideology and the practical long or shorter-term objectives based on it. The regime developed its own legal (or semi-legal) conditions (legislation, regulations etc.) for this in some contexts and in others simply relied on illegal practices. Thus the illegality of these acts and policies was not always apparent at the time. Those who accepted communist ideology and shared the communist concept of the law held these practices and policies to be lawful in some cases and justifiable in

others as furthering higher ends (even ultimately humane ones). However, there remained throughout the period in Hungary, and under the other Soviet-type regimes, people who condemned the system based on the norms of a democratic lawful state. Some of them who undertook to criticize the system, at considerable risk to themselves.

Secondly, the word *crime* is also used for acts that went against the communist system's own legal provisions and even principles, and yet were committed regularly, due to the system's operating logic. Communist regimes devised state constitutions, which assured the human and civil rights mentioned earlier, such as the right to human dignity, freedom of worship, the right of assembly, or the right to self-expression. But these rights were concurrently suppressed by a range of other legal provisions, institutions and practices. Some state bodies committed during their operation flagrant legal infringements on a mass scale, over an extended period. This involved breaking valid laws and legal provisions. The most obvious example is the political police and the judicial and administrative practices bound up with it.

It would have been correct to distinguish the clearly the two uses of the term *crime (legal infringement)* throughout the report, but it would hardly have been possible. One basic attribute of the communist system was the freedom with which it treated its own legal provisions, its failure to respect them. For instance, the law prescribed what types and scale of private property should be nationalized, and similarly, what levies were to be made on private peasant farmers. Yet the executive organizations intentionally overstepped those limits on a mass scale. So it becomes hardly possible to distinguish the one interpretation from the other when considering infringements of the law.

The oft-mentioned flexibility and capability of revision found in communist regimes was always limited to crime in the second sense. Some regimes, including Hungary's, went as far as rehabilitation and compensation, but not consistently. On the contrary, the remedies were dispensed in a discriminatory manner over a narrow field, which amounted to a further legal infringement. Indeed, admission of the normative legal infringements entailed in the basic goals of the “communist project” and reparation for them remained out of the question until the change of system.

As to how the legal infringements of Hungary's communist regime can be defined in terms of international law, suffice to say this has been the subject of many years' debate in Hungary. (The main stages in the debate are considered in Part 3.) Common sense and healthy moral sensibility suggest that crimes against humanity were committed at least in the state terror against Hungarian society (and in 1956 as a special case of this). Directly responsible for those crimes were the state security staff, prosecutors and judges, indirectly the staff of state organizations overseeing and directing the apparatuses and institutions, and ultimately the political



directors of the regime (members of leading bodies of the state party and the government). Insofar as '56 was (also) a civil war and the Soviet Union intervened in Hungary as a sovereign revolutionary country after November 4, 1956, the events qualify as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Concurrently, common sense and healthy moral sensibility dictate that the peaceable change of system in 1989–90 had many advantages for Hungarian society. The Hungarian change of system was a coordinated transition. Precipitating the transformation was a legitimacy crisis, but the coordination was sustained and the force of law preserved. True, they were not sustained by the authority of institutional power but by cooperation between the forces inside and outside the institutions (the late-Kádárite communist regime and the political opposition). The rules of cooperation and a political script were agreed at a national round-table. The latter concerned the introduction of a new system whose legitimacy precluded the legitimacy of the old. The script for the transition was passed by the old Parliament under the old legal system. These considerations provided strong arguments for preferring legal security over retroactive justice (retrospective compensation) on one hand. It did not even happen, but this situation cast doubt on moral legitimacy of the new democracy, on the other.

### **3. How the legal infringements have presented themselves in post-1989 Hungary**

#### *a. The role of the recent past in the Hungarian transition*

Discourse about the recent past had an important role in Hungary's democratic transition. Society in Hungary had accepted the post-Stalinist system more readily than it had in similar countries. Society felt that Hungary had given it more freedom and scope than the other countries. The mood of society was better, although the indices of modernization could hardly any better than in the neighbouring countries. A turn came at the end of the 1970s. The economy had been growing very fast since the end of the 1950s and the standard of living improving even faster. Thereafter growth was first slowed by the crisis of the 1970s, then followed by stagnation, and by the early 1980s the living standard ceased to improve.

Yet this stagnation and deterioration of living conditions in Hungary did not cause mass discontent. There were no strikes as there were in Poland. There developed a political opposition, mainly among intellectuals, that many were aware of, but its activity was confined to one section of the intelligentsia. Other lines of dissidence were aimed mainly at informal dialogue with the authorities or confined to less politicized gestures (for instance in the arts field).

Two of the three basic factors behind Hungary's transition came from abroad; neither induced much activity in society. First, the exhaustion of Hungary's reform potential coincided world recession. There might have

been a return to the 1968 reform, but Kádár opposed it. Broader-minded colleagues thought the socialist market economy was not the right response in any case. Secondly, Soviet reform produced a remarkable phenomenon: Gorbachev was hard to grasp or follow even for a Hungarian leadership that had led the way under the post-Stalinist system. The two factors produced uncertainty in the Hungarian elite. The doubts, revisionist inclinations and hesitation that set in spread even to the elite's view of the past.

Social dissatisfaction at home was only the third factor behind the transition. It was produced basically by the present, but brought to the surface the undiscussed past. For the inability to discuss the recent past also oppressed Hungary's Kádárite leaders. They were prompted by that and Gorbachev's example to free discussion of the past, but then found to their astonishment that the past consisted only of grievances—social, group and individual. Nobody spoke of the relative advantages of Kádárism, all the more about Stalinism, the crushing of '56 and the ensuing reprisals, and about other, more particular, less emblematic injustices. Hungary's elite may have thought a few appeasing gestures would resolve the question of the past. The party and the government each set up in 1988 a committee of historians and jurists thought loyal to the regime. A kind of retrospective amnesty was planned, with a measure of compensation, such as searches for bodies of political victims executed and placed in unmarked graves, and respectable reburial of them. If that was their idea, the public disillusioned them. It was as if the great dead of '56, the executed Imre Nagy and associates, General Maléter and others, had come to life again. Stifling of the past gave way in the spring and summer of 1989 to ever more strident discourse. Pan-national rehabilitation was coupled with a kind of public trial. In the dock were János Kádár, his accomplices and his system. There was hardly a witness for the defence. Those who spoke up vied condemned them roundly, and most of the public stood around as supernumeraries.

The climax of the discourse came on June 16, 1989 at the solemn reburial of Nagy and associates. This was the psychological turning point of the Hungarian transition. Thereafter it was very hard to talk of “reform of socialism”. Round-table talks on the transition began three days before the funeral. In the autumn the party shed its Kádárite name. Its leaders resigned themselves to defeat, which ensued in the spring of 1990, when the socialist successor party polled 11 per cent and the system-changing forces over 80.

But June 16 did not just see the funeral of a few men, or even of the waning Kádárite system. A reverent farewell was bid to the dead and one of relief to the system. But the past is not digested in a single gesture, however solemn. Hungary did not manage that either. This was seen clearly by one of the speakers, the opposition activist Imre Mécs, who received a death sentence after 1956, commuted to life imprisonment on appeal. He said on June 16, 1989, “This is the day for examining consciences, when all look at themselves: how have they lived for 32 years, how could they have lived like

that? Without a break. Let the murderers, their accessories the passive murderers, the all-forgiving, the incapable, the resigned, the bowers of their heads to the yoke, the easygoing, the faint-hearted, the iniquitous characters, the despoilers of their native land, the traitors, the worthless, let them examine themselves. And let the ‘untainted’ examine themselves! How could we endure all this for decades? What this people failed to do!” It seemed at that cathartic moment as if all understood and agreed with Mécs’s moral imperative. But the moment passed and it soon emerged that the task of remembering would be much longer and more intricate than we thought twenty years ago.

Timothy Garton Ash examined in an essay in 1998 how countries turning from dictatorship to democracy have managed to deal with the past. He placed the procedures in two groups. One gives prime consideration to the sufferers and victims, including matters of rehabilitation, compensation and/or restitution. The other group emphasizes the events, the actors and/or those responsible. Here the procedure affects the whole society, for it examines the social victims and also the question of participation (and responsibility). In this group belong the trials, the lustration proceedings, also the “ritual cleansing of facts”, interrogations, courts, committees, and finally what Garton Ash called the “history lessons”. The last two, apart from their prime importance, can be seen as social group therapy as well. The result is not just to clarify facts—even the truth—but “catharsis itself”. History lessons can be defined as making the files of the old regime accessible for scholarly, journalistic or personal examination, i. e. readable and assessable, allowing them to be written, spoken or heard about. The following adopts this typology to examine the ways people in Hungary have tried in the last twenty years to confront the legal infringements of the communist system.

### *b. Rehabilitation*

Rehabilitations were already being initiated by the last communist government. Parliament in 1989–90 passed four annulment acts:

- Act XXXVI/1989 on the 1956 Revolution (the term “uprising” was still used) annulled tied verdicts and was passed by the old communist-dominated Parliament. §1 annulled sentences for alleged political crimes between October 23, 1956 and April 4, 1963, including those for acts qualified as homicide committed in battle.
- Act XXVI/1990 (the so-called second annulment act) annulled unlawfully reached verdicts between 1945 and 1963; this too was passed by the old Parliament. The preamble stated: “The National Assembly recalls with sorrow that the Stalinist state authority set up in Hungary after the Second World War—by robbing the country of its independence, making a mockery of humanity, justice and law—deprived hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens of their liberty and many of their lives. Those released

from prisons and internment camps lived [thereafter] as outcasts in their own land. The pardons issued to those sentenced unlawfully were unequal to redressing the injuries as they pardoned crimes never committed.”

- Act XI/1992 (the so-called third annulment act) annulling verdicts to do with certain alleged crimes against the state and public order between 1963 and 1989, was passed by the new democratically elected Parliament. The Kádárite amnesty of 1963 still left in force the measures that had allowed the verdicts of 1956–63 to be reached. Terms of such legislation conflicted with “the basic principles contained in the Constitution... they were contrary to the generally recognized principles and regulations on human rights... [and] to the moral system of values of society.” The act annulled, among other things, the verdicts reached in alleged cases of conspiracy, rebellion, incitement, injury to the community, illegal frontier crossing, rumour-mongering, and complicity in such.

- Act CXXX/2000 (the so-called fourth annulment act) annulled the measures providing the procedural basis for condemning the 1956 acts.

The Hungarian courts, through various initiatives, also annulled several post-1945 verdicts on war crimes and crimes against the people, and rehabilitated the former accused. However, there was no general re-examination or annulment of the cases on war crimes.

### *c. Compensation and restitution*

After the first two annulment acts, the last communist government took the first measures for “material compensation” of the formerly accused. The period spent in prison was included in the qualifying years for pension purposes and all pension entitlements were increased by 500 forints, regardless of the period spent in custody. This caused outrage especially among those sentenced to five, ten or more years. An order then appeared in October 1989 granting pension increases graduated according to the time spent in custody.

The more complex questions of compensation remained for the democratic regime to resolve. These focused mainly on injuries to private property. It seemed hardly possible to arrange restitution to the original owners after so many decades (except in the case of some landed property). So the compensation was given not in kind, but in compensation coupons. Another constraint was the state’s ability to pay. The legislature therefore applied a principle of partial compensation. Compensation was due only to individual persons—the property claims of institutions such as the churches were governed by a separate agreement with the state. The acts of property compensation were passed, for two separate periods and subjects.

- Act XXV/1991 allowed for compensation of those whose private property had suffered property damage after May 1, 1949 (after the end of the land registration process concomitant on the 1945 land reform). This act concerned mainly the lands of the peasantry. The damage had to be

supported by public documents, after which values were established on a regressive scale. The amount of compensation was maximized. The compensation coupons awarded could be spent on farmland, shares in state-owned enterprises sold through privatization, dwellings, annuities, etc.

- Act XXIV/1992 likewise concerned damage to property, but for the period from May 1, 1939 (when the property stipulations of the Jewish Laws came into force) until June 8, 1949. The act also provided partial material compensation for those deprived of their freedom for political reasons.

Those entitled to compensation mainly considered all this inadequate. It soon emerged during implementation that the compensation coupons issued were not covered by the fund of farmland or the tranches of privatization shares. The consequent legal wrangles meant that the compensation process took about ten years. Many of those not entitled to compensation felt that the whole of society had a right to some compensation for the drawbacks of communism.

#### *d. Trials*

In 1991, two government members of Parliament introduced a bill that would enable prosecutions for serious crimes committed between 1944 and 1990 not hitherto tried for political reasons. The bill would have enabled charges of treason and homicide for acts under the old regime to be brought without consideration for limitation legislation. It was passed by Parliament but not by the Constitutional Court, which cited infringements of the rule of law, legal security and legality. The basic guarantee of penal law is that the risk of unsuccessful prosecution is borne by the state. Limitation is an objective fact, a stated length of time.

The government drafted a new bill, passed by Parliament in 1993, to cover only crimes after the 1956 Revolution that qualified as war crimes and crimes against humanity and as such were not subject to limitation. The Constitutional Court found some of this unconstitutional (concerning war crimes) and some constitutional (in terms of crimes defined under the 1949 Geneva Conventions). Charges were then brought by the prosecution service against 28 persons concerned in the 1956 firing incidents, most of them army officers who gave orders to fire on unarmed civilians.

The proceedings were very protracted. First, the legal disputes continued over whether the Geneva Conventions were admissible. The act was eventually referred again to the Constitutional Court and annulled in 1996. But the proceedings continued based on international law. Secondly, the accused were mainly very elderly, secondary figures (the higher-ranking officers were dead). Amassing evidence after that length of time proved very difficult. The first final verdicts were not delivered until 1997, when three accused were found guilty and given enforceable custodial sentences of two to five years. Similar or even lighter sentences followed in other cases. In several the charges were dismissed for want of evidence.

The strangest case was concluded not long ago. In 2001, the Supreme Court sentenced the 72-year-old retired Lieutenant Colonel János Korbély (variously Korbely) to five years' imprisonment. Then a captain, he had commanded a detachment of officers that had sought to retake from civilians the police station in the small West Hungarian town of Tata. When a civilian in the station yard reached for his handgun to hand it over, Korbély ordered his unit to fire and began to fire himself. Two men were killed, two others wounded. Korbély's crime was classed by the Supreme Court as multiple deliberate homicide and as such a crime against humanity. The sentence was carried out and Korbély conditionally released in 2005.

The case then came before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The court examined whether a crime against humanity had really occurred, or whether it was a simple case of murder already subject to limitation. The argument focused on whether any of the insurgents shot could be classed as one who had "laid down his weapon." If so, his shooting was not simple homicide but a crime against humanity.

The Strasbourg court did not find it established that the insurgent had reached for his handgun because he wished to hand it over. On the contrary, he had kept the weapon concealed, and when it emerged that the weapon was on him, he did not signify a clear intention of handing it over, but entered into an "animated quarrel" with the applicant and "drew his gun with unknown intentions," according to the Strasbourg judgement. The grand chamber of the Strasbourg court found it had not been shown that Korbély's acts constituted a crime against humanity under international law.

#### *e. Lustration*

It was also proposed in Hungary after 1990 that people who had held functions under the communist regime should be subject to lustration. There were proposals for limitation of their rights (for example, their eligibility to stand for election). But the lustration act finally passed in 1994 did not provide for any real sanctions. A relatively narrow group of the political elite were examined as to whether they had cooperated as informers with the secret police in the communist period, whether they had been members of the Hungarian Nazi party before 1945 or the communist party's so-called Workers' Militia after 1956. The act extended cooperation with the state security services to include former party leaders who had regularly received secret-service reports. However, the documentation required to prove that a subject had acted as an informer was described so scrupulously that it was virtually impossible to establish this from the incomplete archive materials available. If this could be established, the subject was called upon privately to resign, and if he/she did so, the matter in principle remained secret. If not, it was publicized, but no further sanctions were prescribed. The lustration committees that sat between 1997 and 2005 examined over 8000 cases, but hardly more than one per cent were identified as informers,

and still fewer were prepared to resign when confronted with their past. The socialist politician Gyula Horn (prime minister in 1994–8) had received secret-police reports as a leader of the state party. The same applied to Péter Medgyessy (prime minister in 2002–4), but in his case it turned out after his appointment that he had been an officer of the top secret staff of the state security organization in the 1970s. Both remained in office. The lustration act ceased to be in force in 2005.

#### *f. Ritual cleansing*

The model for “ritual cleansing” worldwide is the South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. There were similar initiatives in Hungary. After the first free elections, the government in September 1990 put to Parliament a plan to establish a committee to examine political responsibility, under which 21 members of Parliament would have examined the responsibility borne by the leaders of the previous regime. The proposal was not substantively debated. A similar fate met a proposal in 1991–2 by three members of Parliament to set up various parliamentary fact-finding commissions. The first president of the Hungarian Republic, Árpád Göncz, proposed establishing a Historical Fact-Finding Commission, but this did not ensue either and Parliament never discussed the proposal. Prime Minister József Antall set up a fact-finding commission to examine the firing incidents of 1956, but this set about examining archives without any ritual and presented a written report.

#### *g. Historical lessons*

The more workable way to enumerate the crimes in Hungary and clarify the question of who was responsible for what seems to be historical recognition. Recognition is a prior condition for access to the data and the sources. The want of freedom of speech was not the only reason why it was not possible to discuss the problems and crimes of the communist system before 1989. The most important archives and fonds on the history of the system were closed and the documents were kept secret.

For Hungary also underwent an “archive revolution” in 1989. The breaking of the information monopoly—an integral part of the communist dictatorship—was associated paradoxically with the last communist government, whose minister of culture, Ferenc Glatz, a former historian, issued in the autumn of 1989 a ministerial order freeing documents over 30 years old and making archive research a citizen’s right. The state archives were opened and their example was followed by the party and military archives as well. But the order did not apply to source materials still held at their place of origin and not yet transferred to the archives. Two great bodies of records of this kind were held by the Foreign Ministry and the Interior Ministry. The former had transferred some of its records to the National Archives in previous years, but continued to place research restrictions on

them. These were steadily lifted in the 1990s, although some important documents remain closed today. The Interior Ministry, on the other hand, had released scarcely anything since 1945 and amassed a vast body of records. That was where the records of the state-security organizations were held and some of the records of political trials.

The new Hungarian Parliament passed several acts on archives and research in the early 1990s. First was an act on the protection of personal data in 1992. Availability was naturally limited, including one's political opinion or affiliation. The act referred to the present but it also affected cognition of the past. The data protection rules were amended by the 1995 archive act, so as to make available any personal data in a document available only 30 years after the person's death. This would have meant that practically the whole documentation of an over-politicized period—that of state socialism—would be closed to the public. All the documents concerned people and all the problems had political implications. However, the legislators left a gate open for research. “Professional researchers” were given the right to study even personal data. But what (or who) was a professional researcher? The act's definition was “a person who has a support/recommendation declaration by a professional research institution.” The personal data protection act also made an important difference to research three years earlier. The general rule was that a personal data could be published only with the permission of the person in question. Researchers, however, could now do that without, “if [the publication of personal data] is needed for the presentation of results of research on historical events.” So democratic legislation, not too democratically, created a virtual *order* of professional researchers. (In fact the order did not come into existence as nearly all kind of interested people could obtain a letter of recommendation from some institute.) The archive act” also created a special practice of suspending the 30-year limit on all documents of the communist period up to 1989. (So the 30-year embargo applies only from 1990.)

Also passed in 1995 was a “State Secrecy Act”, one paragraph of which cancelled all classification of archived documents up to 1980. As for documentation of the last ten years of socialism to 1989, the producing institutions—e. g. ministries—were given a right to keep secret certain papers for a certain time, to protect some continuing interests of the state. The deadline for this re-classification process expires this year.

The files of the former state security organs were a very special case. These were partly destroyed in 1989 (or earlier), partly taken over by the new national security organs in early 1990, and partly retained in the Ministry of Interior. The interior minister in 1995 set up a committee of historians and archivists to assess his ministry's records and make recommendations about what should happen to the documents. The committee proposed transferring some to archives, which was done. It also



recommended that a special body should be set up to handle the state-security records, after the pattern of the so-called Gauck Commission for the records of the Stasi in former East Germany. The researchers and specialists envisaged that the new office would at last unite all the state-security documents—those remaining at the Interior Ministry and the historical records transferred to the new services at the beginning of 1990. (The committee viewed the fact that they were held there as illegal and utilization of them as a threat to democracy.) The optimism was enhanced by the archive legislation passed in 1995 mentioned already. The so-called Historical Office (now the Historical Archives of the State Security Services) came into being in 1997, which made scientific research possible. But the legislature still fails to solve the problem of uniting the records or making some groups public (e. g. the list of state-security staff and agents).

At the turn of the millennium, the secret services slowly began to release the pre-1989 documents in their possession to the Historical Office. The problem of accessibility and publicity was exacerbated by successive exposures of secret informers (by historians, but also in the press and media). The Historical Office was reorganized in 2003 as the Historical Archives of the State Security Services and access conditions improved, with those once under surveillance gaining the right to know who had informed on them, and scholars getting relative freedom to study the documents. But no full list of the informant network appeared, despite a prime ministerial promise to publish one. Again the security services intervened to protect the continuity of the state, on grounds of immediate concern and protecting people still on the staff. Though some documents were embargoed for 30, 60 or even 90 years, others continued to arrive at the Archives and lead to further exposures, making further public scandals.

In 2007, the socialist/liberal government again set up a committee, this time expressly to take stock of the documents still held by the secret services. This was headed by János Kenedi, a prominent opposition activist in the Kádár period. The committee members went round all the successor institutions and looked into the documents, naturally after the names had been excised. A list of the *most* secret items (a somewhat circuitously named category created by the law) was seen only by Kenedi. The committee report pressed for further legislation on the documents (a “file act”). It emphasized that the victims of the secret service of a Soviet-style regime consisted not only of those under surveillance, but also of those kept on file. The *network* consisted not only of those formally recruited as agents, but also of those who cooperated occasionally. Their names were data of public interest that should be publicized. The committee found that destruction of documents had continued under democracy, right up to the mid-1990s. What had survived was a register on magnetic tapes, from which the dimensions of the network and its targets could be sensed. The committee recommended that these be printed out and published. So the Kenedi Report became a final

assessment: only a fraction, at most a minority of the documents generated by Hungarian state security since 1945 had survived. Which of the report's recommendations will be implemented still remains to be seen two years after the enquiry was completed.

It lies outside the scope of this report to review the Hungarian historiography in the last twenty years. But it has to be said that the recent past is a subject of particular importance to it. Very many basic documents have appeared in print, on the Internet, and in numerous publications and monographs. To sum up the Hungarian discourse on contemporary history and its institutional framework:

- The system of institutions dealing specially and professionally with Hungarian contemporary history has changed little since 1989. Only a handful of new bodies have emerged (the 1956 Institute, the Twentieth Century Institute, the House of Terror Museum). Although the significance of contemporary history in public discourse is obvious, the number of professionals in the field is far smaller comparatively than in the Czech Republic or Poland. On the other hand, it is still a plural institutional space—there is no single Hungarian Institute of National Memory.
- Hungary has seen plenty of history debates in the last twenty years, but no full-scale historians' debate has taken place either on communism or on its Hungarian version. There have been partial debates on specific questions, and several political and other public debates have been much influenced by historical or historicizing arguments.
- Strong political influence on historical discourse is probably not specific to Hungary, but antagonism between conservatives and socialists-cum-liberals seems to run deeper here. So the image of the recent past divides politically. No new historical canon has emerged, indeed the division extends to historians themselves, in their roles and in their institutions.

#### *h. Information compensation*

Information compensation is the name given in Hungary to a curious blend of compensation with historical lessons. Essentially, those the state security agencies observed may have access to the information collected, and to the names of the informers. Relatively few people have applied since 1997 to see these materials: 24,000 citizens since the end of 2009. Of those who have applied to see the materials held in the Historical Archives of the State Security Services, material has been found on only 40 per cent, 9000. To those 9000 have been handed almost half a million sheets of document. Rather more, about 600,000 photocopied sheets have been requested and received by research historians. Of around 200,000 persons who cooperated with the state security services over four-and-a-half decades, about 1000–1500 agents have been identified for certain. The question of publicizing these names is a fraught matter under Hungary's regulations. Only a few hundred have actually been named publicly by journalists and historians.

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These cases almost always caused a scandal in the press. Many cases were then taken to court, with the named informers suing those who had exposed them and largely winning their cases.

Budapest,  
January 15, 2010

The 1956 Institute  
The Historical Archives of the State Security  
Services  
The House of Terror Museum

Report compiled by János M. Rainer (1956  
Institute)