

VISEGRAD SCHOLARSHIP AT THE OPEN SOCIETY ARCHIVE
FINAL REPORT

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The title of the research project: Does the „third way” lead to liberalism?

Transformation of the Hungarian Democratic Opposition’s ideology

Research Period: March 24–May 26, 2014.

The focus of my research concentrates on the changes of the Hungarian Democratic Opposition’s ideology in the 1980s. It is part of a broader examination conducted by Working Group for Public Sociology ‘Helyzet’ (*Helyzet Műhely*). The aim of the group is to understand the socialist and post-socialist era in the world system framework, and to analyze the particular intellectual groups of Kádár-regime through their semi-peripheral position.

At the beginning of my research I focused primarily on the reception of István Bibó’s legacy, because I thought his work provided a great support for making a moderate alternative to the socialist system. Bibó promoted a strongly democratic system, which was neither a capitalist, nor a socialist system, but was obviously critical with the existing socialism. Therefore I concentrated on three different, but strongly connected topics in the Open Society Archive.

1. István Bibó’s legacy
(mainly the 30-hour video interviews about the book commemorating István Bibó)
2. Ideology and strategy of the Democratic Opposition
(mainly samizdats, the RFE’s situation reports, and its subject files)
3. Transition and afterlife of the oppositional groups of the 80s
(mainly a five-hour long documentary about the negotiations of the Oppositional Round Table, and the subject files of the then contemporary debates on Szárszó Front in 1993.)

1, István Bibó's legacy

In OSA I accessed to the 30-hour long uncut interviews made by Béla Nóvé, who interviewed more than 15 authors of the book that commemorates Bibó. The interviews illuminate not just the history of the book, but also the intellectual field of Kádár era from the late 1960s. In the light of the interviews I changed my original views about István Bibó's legacy. I realized that most authors of the book were not deeply influenced by Bibó, some of them had not known Bibó's work before his death in 1979. However, there was at least one person in every oppositional group who had strong relations to István Bibó or his work (e.g. János Kenedi, Gyula Illyés, Ferenc Donáth). It was at the funeral of Bibó, when Kenedi might have realized that Bibó could be a „great integrator” for the different intellectual groups. All oppositional groups had strong, but different moral disciplines regarding their self-evaluation: the participation in this 'legalist' project was both suitable and obligation for each of them. Nevertheless, it was not a peak of a never-existing Golden Age: the two main oppositional groups were embedded in the society in a very dissimilar way, and it did not give way for a stable unity. There is a debate about the closeness of their mainstays (democracy vs. nation), but the real cause of the conflict lurked behind the ideologies.

2, Ideology and Strategy of the Democratic Opposition

The second focus of my research concentrated on the Democratic Opposition. My aim was to understand their strategy, ideology, embeddedness and the way how they interpreted the then contemporary politics. I mostly relied on samizdat periodicals (mainly *Beszélő* and *Hírmondó*), but I complemented these sources with the RFE's documents. It was highly interesting to see how different groups (such as the RFE, MSZMP and the Democratic Opposition itself) tried to understand the Hungarian oppositional groups. Furthermore, I found information about how the Democratic Opposition and the Party attempted to understand each other, and how they intended to form a strategy which took the other side's potential action into consideration. There was of course an asymmetry of information, but it was surprisingly relatively moderate. Somehow the Democratic Opposition or the RFE always accessed the Party's main analyses about oppositional groups. Meanwhile the samizdat articles tried to explain how the articles of *Népszabadság* or the Party documents must be read in order to understand the „reality”.

3, Transition and Afterlife of the Oppositional Groups of the 80s

In OSA, I accessed Márta Elbert's documentary about the Oppositional Round Table. The five-hour-long cut documentary provided an insight into the way how oppositional groups tried to organize the foundation of the new political system, in which they would take part soon. It was also interesting that the main and strongly decisive economic questions (such as property, privatization) were neglected in the negotiations. To understand the afterlife of the oppositional groups, I read the RFE's collected articles about the debate followed the Szárszó Front.

Finally, I browsed some other boxes of OSA to get a broader picture about the archive. I got an insight – through the correspondences between András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus – how the emmigration kept in touch with each other, and how they got information about the Hungarian scientific life. I gained insight – through Gábor Demszky's personal papers – to the Hungarian samizdat network. Conversations with Gábor Danyi, who conducted his research in OSA at the same time, also helped to understand how the production and distribution of samizdat periodicals and publications happened in Hungary and in Poland.

The materials of OSA have made it possible for me to control, verify, – and where necessary – change my hypotheses about the oppositional groups in Hungary. István Rév's advice was extremely useful for my research, and I got valueable viewpoints on reading materials of the archives from Ioana Macrea-Toma. I am also grateful for Zsuzsa Zádori and Csaba Szilágyi for drawing my attention to some materials that belong to OSA. During my research I had lots of opportunities to have conversation with other reasearchers, among whom I would like to highlight Iván Székely, Gábor Danyi and other Visegrad fellows. I especially would like to thank to Katalin Gádoros, Robert Parnica and Örs Lehel Tari for their kind assistance during these two months. Fortunately, my resarch period coincided with the organizing of the memorial events and programs of Yellow Start Houses, into which I gained a valueable insight.

Appendix

OSA Files accessed during rearch

HU 300–40–1 Records of Radio Free Europe // Hungarian Unit // Subject Files

245–47; 249–250: Charter 77, Opposition, Democratic Opposition

254: Szárszó Front of 1993

HU 300–40–5 Records of Radio Free Europe // Hungarian Unit // Biographical Files

18–19: Bibó István

115: Magyar Bálint

184: Szelényi Iván

HU 302–1–2 Personal Papers of Gábor Demszky // Samizdat Publications // Hungarian samizdat periodicals

4–5: Samizdats, mainly: *Hírmondó*

HU 302–1–6 Personal Papers of Gábor Demszky // Samizdat Publications // Documentation of the opposition movements from the 1980s, 1981–1989

1: Documentation of the opposition movements from the 1980s, 1981-1989

HU 355–0–1 János Kis Collection on Hungarian Samizdat and Documents of the Democratic Opposition // Samizdat Periodicals and Publications

1–3: Samizdats (mainly: *Beszélő* and *Hírmondó*)

HU OSA 361–0–4 Personal Papers of András Hegedüs // Personal files, documents

27–31: correspondents and reminiscences

HU OSA 397–0–2 Samizdat Collection of György Krassó // Books and other publications

2: samizdat publications

Beszélő on CD

Materials from the Video Library

Interviews about the book commemorating István Bibó

Ellenzéki Kerekasztal Tárgyalások (5 DVD) (Márta Elbert)

HU OSA 320-1-4 Art documentaries of Peter Forgacs

16–17: „Bibó breviárium” and „A püspök kertje”