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The Soviet Presence in Hungary from the Second World War to the Change of Regime

During the course of the negotiations among the Allied powers between 1943 and 1945, it was determined that following the war, Hungary and the entire East-Central European region would fall within the Soviet sphere of influence. It was also foreseeable that this would have profound economic, social, and political consequences. Stalin, indeed, proceeded from a modern interpretation of the principle "cuius regio, eius religio", which he invoked by right of victory.[1] He simultaneously regarded the region as a security buffer for the Soviet Union, as spoils of war, and as part of the socialist world system. Initially, for tactical reasons, Stalin did not rush the Sovietisation of the region (which is not to say that he did not have such intentions from the outset), temporarily subordinating it to relations with his (former) allies. As soon as he had to choose between the two, however, he broke with the West without hesitation and orchestrated the establishment of Soviet-type totalitarian regimes in the countries of East-Central Europe with raw ruthlessness.[2]

From the moment the front reached Hungary, the Soviet military and political leadership sought to pursue parallel short- and medium-term objectives in its policy towards the country. Preparations had to be made for the country's integration into the emerging new Soviet security zone, which presupposed the creation of at least a minimal level of functionality in

1 Fisher 1996, 36. In this context, Stalin's statement made to Milovan Đilas is often quoted: "this war is unlike all past wars; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach." Đilas 1989, 105.

2 Borhi 2015, 92.

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public administration and the economy. At the same time, in a contradictory process, the Soviet Union, under the title of war reparations, began the dismantling of factories and the removal of their equipment and other material assets. In parallel with all this, the Hungarian communists had to be placed in a position where, when the opportunity arose, they would be ready and able to seize full power. The divergent goals and priorities often required the use of different, mutually contradictory means.

The passage of the front and the subsequent occupation were experienced by the Hungarian population as a veritable hell, a kind of modern Mongol invasion, with the barbaric destruction of material goods far exceeding the needs of military operations, accompanied by robbery, looting, mass rape of women, and the deportation of the civilian population for „málenkij robot" in Hungarian (from the Russian expression „malenkaya rabota" – „a little work").[3] In addition to the soldiers who became prisoners of war, the Soviets interned and deported approximately 310,000–365,000 civilians from the country's 1941 territory for forced labour in the Soviet Union. In some areas (for example, in Subcarpathia, which was annexed to the Soviet Union), the action also had the character of ethnic cleansing. According to estimated data, 30–40 per cent of those deported did not survive the ordeal.[4]

In post-war Soviet conceptions, Hungary was placed at the bottom of the order of importance compared to other Eastern European countries. Ivan Maisky, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, in a memorandum addressed to Foreign Affairs Commissar Molotov entitled „On the Desirable Principles of the Future World," stressed that the Soviet Union was not interested in the creation of a strong Hungary. He wished to preserve the Hungarian state within a reduced ethnic territory, „on the basis of the ethnographic principle," but in such a way that contentious issues would always be decided to Hungary's detriment. „Hungary must be kept in international isolation, at least in the first few years after the war."[5]

3 On the horrors and tribulations experienced by the population, see L. Balogh 2015, 49–59, 249–411, and Bank–Mihályi–Tóth 2021.

4 Bognár 2017, 92–93.

5 Majszkij 1944.

Soviet rule and the enforcement of its will in Hungary were secured by several factors. Until September 1947, the Allied Control Commission (ACC), headed by Marshal Kliment Voroshilov and his deputy, Lieutenant General Vladimir Sviridov, exercised what was essentially absolute power in Hungary. They interfered in the country's economic and political life on a daily basis, and their decrees were binding on the Hungarian government of the day.[6] When their interests so required, the Soviets did not hesitate to go far beyond the ACC's remit and resort to open pressure and blackmail, as they did, for example, in the formation of the government following the November 1945 elections.[7] After the ACC was dissolved following the ratification of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, the task of informing the centre and conveying Moscow's decrees and wishes was partly taken over by the Soviet Union's legation (raised to the rank of embassy in 1948) in Budapest. This was facilitated by the fact that the minister (from 1948, ambassador), Georgy Pushkin, had previously been the political advisor to the ACC.

Throughout the entire period, the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary was also a factor that had to be constantly reckoned with. In 1944–1945, the atrocities committed by Soviet soldiers kept the population in terror and complicated the position of the Hungarian Communist Party (HCP). Until 1947, the signing of the peace treaty, the obligation to supply the one and a half, and later half a million, troops stationed in the country also burdened the Hungarian economy. Meanwhile, the Soviet town and village command posts provided effective assistance to the cadres of the Communist Party, securing vehicles, fuel, paper, and so on.[8] In addition to the above, the SMERSH and NKVD units attached to the Soviet occupying forces played an active role in the arrest and abduction of persons inconvenient to the communists. The most flagrant example of this was the abduction of Béla

6 On the operation of the ACC in Hungary, see Baráth–Feitl 2003.

7 Based on the election results, the Smallholders' Party could have formed a government on its own, but Voroshilov, threatening them with the occupying Soviet troops, forced the Hungarian politicians into a coalition government with the communists and to concede the Ministry of the Interior portfolio to the Hungarian Communist Party (HCP). See Czettler 2002.

8 Gyarmati 2013, 71, 92–95.

Kovács, the general secretary of the Smallholders' Party, on 25 February 1947.[9]

The stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary was the "sine qua non" for the maintenance of communist rule. Following the signing of the peace treaty in 1947, the units of the Central Group of Forces remained in Hungary on the „legal grounds" of maintaining contact with the Soviet forces stationed in Austria. In June 1955, the personnel and command staff of this group of forces in the territories of the two countries numbered approximately 40,000. When the Soviets withdrew their troops from Austria in accordance with the Austrian State Treaty, they created the so-called Special Corps from their units stationed in Hungary „under the aegis" of the newly concluded Warsaw Pact; this corps was directly subordinate to the Ministry of Defence of the Soviet Union and the General Staff.[10]

The third channel for the enforcement of Soviet interests in Hungary was the high command of the Communist Party, first and foremost its so-called 'Muscovite' faction, which had been socialised in the Soviet Union. It was they who had direct, on-the-spot experience of the workings of the Stalinist totalitarian dictatorship, who had an established network of contacts in the Soviet Union, and several of whom also held Soviet citizenship. The 'Muscovites' were present not only in the top leadership quartet known as Rákosi, Gerő, Farkas, and Révai, but also in the political and economic spheres, in the apparatus of coercion, and in the scientific sphere.[11] However, this „manual control" from Moscow via the communists also had a very serious element of uncertainty built into it. Stalin – with one or two exceptions – only in the rarest of cases gave direct, immediate instructions to his proconsuls. The latter had to guess the Master's

9 Gyarmati 2013, 99–100.

10 The corps comprised 2 mechanised guards divisions, one fighter and one bomber division, as well as engineering and air defence units. Malashenko 1993, 22–23.

11 Without claiming to be exhaustive, a few names from the 'cohort' of those who returned after 1945: László Háy held important positions in the National Bank and in the Ministry of Domestic and Foreign Trade. Rudolf Garasin used the experience he had gained in the service of the Cheka and the NKVD in the establishment of Hungarian forced labour camps and the operation of the penal system. Erzsébet Andics, a teacher at the International Lenin School, was promoted to the position of the 'unquestionable coryphaeus' of Hungarian historiography upon her return, playing a key role in the purges within the historical profession.

intentions; the communist leaders of the satellite states were moved by a general fear of him. All this created constant tension in the system, and for the Soviet leadership it was a convenient situation, since in the event of failure, the proconsuls could be held to account afterwards, with the responsibility shifted onto them. The case of Mátyás Rákosi is symptomatic in this respect. „Stalin's best Hungarian pupil" knew the Soviet system, the leaders, and the techniques of exercising power precisely, and he sought almost obsessively to prove that Hungary was at the forefront of Sovietisation, ahead of the other socialist countries.[12]

Rákosi sought to completely monopolise contact with the Soviet political leadership and with Stalin. He met with Stalin in person once or twice a year. These included protocol events, but also operational consultations. On 20 August 1949, for example, they reviewed the indictment of the Rajk trial together in Stalin's study.[13] In addition, he regularly bombarded the „father of nations" with telegrams, in which he requested, asked, and informed. Stalin, however, answered these personally only in the rarest of cases. In time, a direct telephone line, the so-called „VCS" line, was also established between the Kremlin and the top leaders of the satellite states.[14] Experience shows that several senior leaders – mostly at the same level of the hierarchy or based on previous acquaintance or working relationships – had their own „patron" abroad to whom they could turn: Gerő had Manuilsky, Mihály Farkas had Nikolai Bulganin, and Gábor Péter had Lavrenty Beria.[15] Moreover, what Rákosi disliked least of all was that the Soviets had built up their own agent network in Hungary, independent of him, through which they obtained information without the knowledge of the Hungarian leadership, in many cases about the leaders themselves. Ernő Szűcs, Gábor Péter's deputy at the State Protection Authority (ÁVH), was an NKVD agent under the codename 'Gerendás' from 1942; he operated a separate network of informants in Hungary and diligently prepared his reports for his Soviet superiors on prominent Hungarian communist

12 A good example of this is when, in January 1951, Rákosi not only accepted the unrealistic army development plan demanded by Stalin, but also sought to over-fulfil it. Rainer 1998, 98–100.

13 Rákosi 1997, 769.

14 Rainer 1998, 91–92.

15 Feitl 2020, 146–147.

politicians.[16] Lieutenant General György Pálffy, the head of Hungarian military counter-intelligence and later Deputy Minister of Defence, worked for Soviet military intelligence. During a search of his office following his arrest, a Soviet radio transmitter and a cipher key were found.[17]

Alongside the ACC (and later the embassy), the Soviet troops stationed in the country, and the Hungarian communists brought to power, the fourth, but no less important, pillar of Hungary's Sovietisation and the maintenance of Soviet rule was the system of Soviet advisors, instructors, and experts.[18] The role and scope of the advisors were rather complex; they were simultaneously Moscow's informants and mediators of its will, they supervised the operation of the area or institution entrusted to them, and they ensured the transfer and adoption of Soviet experiences and methods. The very first Soviet advisors appeared in Hungary as early as 1945 to „provide assistance" in the establishment of the communist-controlled political police, the state security and border guard bodies. After the Ministry of the Interior, the next area was the army; the first group of Soviet advisors arrived there in the autumn of 1948, soon to be followed by others. In time, there were liaison officers, trainers, and instructors not only in the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff, but also at individual military units and military educational institutions, as well as at armaments factories. According to a 1956 document, their total number reached 82.[19] This was followed – in strategic order of importance – by heavy industry, uranium mining, and then practically every part of the economic, financial, health, educational, and cultural spheres; there was even a film director, an archivist, and a ballet master among the experts. All this meant that Sovietisation was not merely a political, military, and economic colonisation, but a scientific and cultural one as well.

16 Baráth 1999, 50–56. Rákosi finally succeeded in settling scores with Szűcs in the autumn of 1950.

17 Rákosi reportedly raised the matter with indignation in the Kremlin. As a consequence of the affair, Ambassador Arseny Tishkov and the Soviet military attaché, M. A. Malevsky, were recalled from Hungary, and Moscow officially dismantled intelligence activities against the „people's democratic" countries and their leaders, creating instead intelligence and counter-intelligence offices integrated into the embassies. Baráth 2014, 108.

18 The most complete overview of the role of advisors and experts is given by Magdolna Baráth. Baráth 2014, 102–136.

19 Germuska 2008, 1469.

The status, powers, and benefits of the advisors were regulated by intergovernmental agreements and internal instructions. The chief advisors generally maintained direct contact with ministers and deputy ministers; advisors were assigned to the departments of various ministries and authorities, while experts and instructors worked at a lower level, at companies and institutions, to introduce Soviet experiences, licences, and technologies.[20] The system was in many respects counterproductive; in several industries, it represented a step backwards compared to the previous technical standard, as the Soviet Union exported obsolete technology. Furthermore, due to the size and characteristics of the country's economy, it was not capable of adopting Soviet standards on a one-to-one basis.[21] István Friss, a department head at the HWP Central Committee and a hard-line economic politician of the era, blamed the backwardness or even hostile attitude of Hungarian experts for the anomalies and demanded the punishment of those responsible for the omissions.[22] After 1956, the advisor system was gradually dismantled and transformed. At the level of official rhetoric, the mutual exchange of experience, and the exchange of patents, inventions, and technologies came to the fore. There were three areas where the advisor system remained: defence, the interior, and uranium mining. In the first two of these especially, Moscow wished to maintain the possibility of direct intervention.

Stalin's death in March 1953 was an important caesura in the system of relations between the Soviet Union and its vassal states. From then on, the task of the local communist leaders was no longer the most perfect possible adoption of the Stalinist model, but rather to discern the „alignment of the stars" in the power struggle among the successors. The ripples of the struggle between the rival members of the „collective leadership" that replaced Stalin were also felt in the satellite states. In Hungary, this was coupled with the deep economic crisis and the atmosphere of terror and fear (and in its wake, the increasingly palpable social discontent) into which the Rákosist elite, who had introduced Soviet practice, had plunged the country. Based on the reports of Yevgeny Kiselyov, the ambassador in

20 Baráth 2014, 102, 111–112, 126–133.
21 Germuska 2008, 1065, 1076–1077.
22 Baráth 2014, 124–125.

Budapest, the Kremlin was precisely aware of the gravity of the situation.[23] Similar signs of crisis were evident in other countries of the region.

The events of June 1953 clearly show the actual room for manoeuvre of the satellite countries. At that time, virtually the entire Hungarian leadership was summoned to Moscow for a dressing-down. In the Kremlin, the members of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU, most notably Malenkov, Khrushchev, Beria, and Molotov, subjected the activities of Rákosi and his associates to severe criticism. They criticised the pursuit of economic autarky, the forced industrialisation, the state of agriculture, the violent organisation of collective farms, the low standard of public supply, the arbitrariness of the state security and interior ministries, and Rákosi's „chieftainship" – in short, everything that they themselves had recently demanded of their proconsuls in Hungary, and for which they themselves had provided the recipe. They substantiated their claims with concrete figures, which indicates that they had a rather accurate picture of the situation in Hungary. At the same time, they also delivered their verdict to the Hungarians: Rákosi could remain at the head of the party, but he had to hand over the prime ministerial position to Imre Nagy, and furthermore, they had to work out a concrete programme there in Moscow to „correct the mistakes." Beria attacked Rákosi with particular vehemence, calling him the 'Jewish king ruling over the Hungarians'; it was even alleged that Beria had threatened to 'break his spine'.[24] The members of the Hungarian leadership were forced into a long and humiliating mea culpa wrapped in characteristic communist casuistry and could not thank the Soviets enough for drawing their attention to the negative phenomena.[25]

From then on, the outcome of the struggle between Rákosi and Imre Nagy depended on the momentary state of the power struggles in Moscow. Initially, Imre Nagy's position was strengthened by the fact that his supporter, Prime Minister Georgy Malenkov, appeared to be the most influential politician within the Soviet leadership. Rákosi, however,

23 Baráth 2002. Kiselyov did not particularly like Rákosi. He was not privy to the details of the Stalin-Rákosi relationship, so he never knew when Rákosi was acting independently and when he was acting in accordance with Stalin's intentions. Ungváry–Meruk 2018, 82.

24 Gyarmati 2013, 336.; Feitl 2020, 179.

25 The minutes of the Moscow meetings of 13–16 June 1953 are published in: T. Varga 1992, 234–269.

immediately „made up for his disadvantage" a few days after the Moscow trip, as on 26 June his main opponent, Lavrenty Beria, was arrested and subsequently executed. In the autumn of 1954, Rákosi spent two months on „medical treatment" in Moscow, where he successfully intrigued against Imre Nagy. At the „consultation" in early January 1955, it was now the Hungarian prime minister who received stern criticism, tantamount to a threat, from the Soviet leaders for his „anti-party," „right-wing deviationist" views.[26] This time, they chanted practically the exact opposite of what they had demanded of the Hungarian leadership a year and a half earlier: the policy before June 1953 had been correct, great successes had been achieved before then, it was a mistake to have rashly cut back on heavy industry investments, it was a mistake to allow withdrawals from the collective farms, individual peasant farms were hotbeds of capitalism, they firmly supported Rákosi against Imre Nagy, and so on. Reading between the lines, it is clear that Moscow was also aware that their system had no real social base in Hungary and would collapse without Soviet bayonets. As Molotov remarked, if the Soviet Union and the friendly socialist countries did not provide economic assistance to Hungary, „the people's democracy in Hungary would not last long," and he added that the majority of people in Hungary were not communists.[27]

Imre Nagy's fate was sealed when Malenkov was forced to leave the head of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union in February 1955. With this, Rákosi felt he had a free hand, and in April 1955, Imre Nagy was dismissed from the post of prime minister and excluded from the leading bodies of the HWP (and at the end of the year, from the party itself). Rákosi, however, achieved a Pyrrhic victory with all this, as the power struggles in Moscow were far from over. Indeed, the events of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, especially Khrushchev's speech delivered in a closed session criticising the Stalinist personality cult, forced Rákosi completely onto the defensive. Stalin's best Hungarian pupil defended himself tenaciously, but was finally ousted from power only in July 1956.

The months-long tug-of-war was also influenced by the fact that hard-line members of the Soviet leadership, Kliment Voroshilov, Mikhail Suslov

26 Rainer–Urbán 1992, 147.
27 Ibid., 141–148.

who arrived in Hungary as a Kremlin emissary in June 1956, and even the ambassador, Yuri Andropov, argued for keeping Rákosi. In the end, Rákosi was dropped for two reasons. Firstly, they were forced to face the fact that Rákosi was actually part of the problem, not the solution. Secondly, for his opening towards the non-aligned countries, Khrushchev greatly needed Tito's support and the settlement of Soviet-Yugoslav relations. The Yugoslav leader, however, had clearly made Rákosi's dismissal a condition for this.[28] The action in July 1956 was orchestrated by another member of the CPSU Presidium sent from Moscow, Anastas Mikoyan, who was considered a „liberal" and who travelled straight from Budapest to Belgrade with the news. „He is taking my head to Tito on a platter," Rákosi later wrote of the incident in his memoirs.[29] For the Soviet (and Hungarian) leadership, the Rákosi case was not resolved, but merely shifted to another dimension. The fallen party leader formally left for the Soviet Union for medical treatment – which, however, turned into a lifelong exile – and with his activity, his intrigues, and his very existence, he caused a constant headache for the Hungarian and Soviet authorities.

However, since Rákosi's replacement, Gerő, and with him the old-new guard, were incapable of dealing with the problems and represented continuity rather than a break with the hated Stalinist-Rákosist regime, social discontent led to an explosion in Hungary in the autumn of 1956. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was not the first and not the last in the series of uprisings against Soviet imperial oppression and the „people-blessing" communist ideology and practice (1953 – Plzeň, East Berlin; 1956 – Poznań). In its scale, intensity, and the desperation of the resistance, however, it perhaps surpassed them all. To crush it, Moscow had to mobilise serious forces and deploy the full arsenal of imperial-great power politics: blackmail, threats, demonstration of force, cynical lying, the creation of a puppet government, open intervention, and reprisals.

The events did not take the Soviet leadership completely by surprise. Based on Andropov's reports, the Soviet decision-makers had formed the

28 Gyarmati 2014, 378, 383–384. On the development of Hungarian-Yugoslav relations, see the study by Miklós Iványi and Viktor Attila Soós, 'The Foreign Policy of Hungary in the Shadows of the Red Star, 1945–1956', in the present volume.

29 Rákosi 1997, 1022.

impression as early as September that the advance of „right-wing, anti-party elements" was directly „threatening the unity of the socialist camp." Thus, it is not surprising that when the first news of the events in Budapest arrived on 23 October, the majority of those present at the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU took a stand in favour of immediate military intervention. The only exception was Mikoyan, who for the time being proposed the use of political means with the involvement of Imre Nagy, and would have entrusted the „restoration of order" to the Hungarians. A decision was also made to immediately send Suslov and Mikoyan (the two members of the Presidium who had already exposed themselves in Hungarian affairs), as well as Ivan Serov, the chairman of the KGB, and Mikhail Malinin, the deputy chief of the General Staff, to Hungary. This weighty delegation was entrusted with organising the restoration of order and informing the Moscow decision-makers about the situation.

As for the military side of things, the command of the Special Corps stationed in Hungary had already been instructed in July 1956 to prepare an operational plan for the suppression of possible riots in cooperation with the Hungarian army and state security. The plan was codenamed „Compass."[30] The Presidium's decision meant the activation of this plan, and so in the early morning of 24 October, Soviet tanks appeared on the streets of Budapest. The hybrid application of political and military methods proved to be the worst decision from a Soviet perspective as well. In a situation where the often heterogeneous fighting groups with differing ideas were united above all by the slogan „Russians go home!", all this was only oil on the fire, further radicalising the insurgents and turning the movement into a widespread anti-Soviet freedom fight. In addition to the demand for the withdrawal of troops, the idea of leaving the Warsaw Pact and of Hungarian neutrality also gradually gained ground.

Moscow was truly shocked by the rapid collapse of the Hungarian version of the Stalinist-type totalitarian regime and its high degree of social rejection. The minutes of the Presidium meetings clearly show the confusion that reigned in the Kremlin at that time: „The situation has worsened, things are slowly-slowly moving towards capitulation" (Molotov); „Our losses are 600 dead. The attitude towards our troops is now bad (worsened)"

30 Malashenko 1993, 24–25.

(Suslov); „The people's democratic power in the country has collapsed. The leadership of the HWP does not exist" (Bulganin); „There is no one to rely on" (Voroshilov).[31]

By 30 October, the position had formed within the Presidium that they should try to resolve the Hungarian crisis by supporting Imre Nagy's government and withdrawing Soviet troops from Budapest. It was in this spirit that they issued the government declaration on relations between socialist countries. In the document, written in characteristic communist jargon and with Delphic ambiguity, there is talk of the Leninist principle of the equal rights of peoples, the condemnation and elimination of past mistakes in this area, respect for the sovereignty of socialist countries, and that the Soviet government is ready to discuss the question of the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary. They added, however, that it was the „sacred duty" of the Hungarian people to protect the people's democratic and socialist achievements.[32] This latter comment clearly shows that the decision was by no means aimed at „letting Hungary out of the fold." It was merely a matter of being willing to consider the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary if Imre Nagy's government was capable and willing to restore the Soviet system.[33]

By the next day, however, Khrushchev and his associates had radically changed their position on handling the Hungarian question. Now they firmly opted for military intervention: „let us act proactively to restore order." Marshal Georgy Zhukov, the Minister of Defence, was instructed to work out the related plans. At the same time, they began preparations for the establishment of a Hungarian puppet government. It is an interesting detail that for a while the Soviets hesitated as to whether this should be led by Ferenc Münnich or János Kádár; the scales initially tipped more towards the former Moscow ambassador, Münnich, who was previously presumed to have also been an NKVD agent. „Münnich asks for our help, we provide help and restore order," Khrushchev summed up the essence of the scenario with block-like simplicity.[34] Subsequently, Khrushchev and

31 Békés 2006, 160–167.
32 Békés 2006, 178–181.
33 Békés 2004, 162–170.
34 Szereda–Rainer 1996, 63.

Malenkov embarked on a whirlwind tour of the socialist bloc countries to persuade their leaders of the necessity of the intervention.

In another action, with the help of Münnich and Andropov, they organised the transport of the chosen potential proconsul, János Kádár, to Moscow and his 'processing'. As far as the events of 2 and 3 November in Moscow can be reconstructed from the available sources, on the 2nd, Kádár was still behaving more like a member of the Nagy government, stressing the difficulties but still arguing more for a political resolution (neutrality, a new party, a multi-party system, troop withdrawal, a fair fight for „socialist ideals and achievements"). In his opinion, a military solution would mean bloodshed, after which the moral authority of the communists would be zero. With this, he incurred the wrath of the hard-line Stalinists of the Presidium. Molotov attacked him with particular vehemence. At the meeting the next day, on the 3rd, however, he „caved in" and accepted the role assigned to him, raising his concerns (the entire nation has moved, the government should not be a puppet government, the withdrawal of Soviet troops is important) more as a timid attempt to make his own conditions known to the Soviets.[35]

At dawn on 4 November 1956, Soviet troops under the command of Marshal Ivan Konev launched Operation 'Whirlwind'. Units from 17 Soviet divisions, a force of some 60,000 men, descended upon the country.[36] In the unequal struggle, resistance in some places lasted for days, and even weeks. In the initial period, János Kádár's room for manoeuvre was nil. The members of the CPSU Central Committee Presidium dispatched to Hungary, Suslov and Malenkov, monitored his every move; they were present at the meetings of the HSWP's provisional leading bodies and the cabinet, and their word was decisive on all matters. The true masters of the situation in Hungary were the Soviet army and the KGB. The latter's chief, Ivan Serov, was continuously present in Hungary. The Soviet state security organs carried out arrests and interrogations, and some of those taken into custody were transported to the Soviet Union. Malenkov and Suslov pushed Kádár, whom they considered „a little soft-hearted by nature," towards

35 For notes on the presidium meetings of 2–3 November 1956, see for example: Békés 2006, 188–196; Szereda–Rainer 1996, 75–95.

36 Horváth 2021, 14.

taking a harder line against the „reaction and the counter-revolutionaries" (in their view, Kádár understood the necessity of this). It was also the Soviets who organised the abduction of Imre Nagy and his associates, and they were also the initiators of the first deterrent executions.[37]

The control over the Hungarian leadership and the person of Kádár was only gradually relaxed. The Budapest conference of the 'five' in early January 1957, with the participation of the Soviet, Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Bulgarian party delegations, sought to create the impression of collective guardianship, where the „smaller allies" seconded Moscow.[38] One episode from the Hungarian party and government delegation's Moscow meeting in March 1957 is instructive in several respects. At the beginning of the talks, Voroshilov showed Kádár a letter from Rákosi to Khrushchev, to which the Hungarian party leader responded with indignation that if the Soviets wanted Rákosi, they should do as they pleased, as he was not clinging to power. At this, Khrushchev angrily rebuked Voroshilov for his tactlessness.[39] The moment may have reflected the contradictions within the Soviet party leadership, but it is also possible that the Soviets, in the classic 'good cop, bad cop' routine, wished to make Kádár aware that they were keeping Rákosi in reserve in case he did not obey.

Hungary was thus kept within the camp by brutal means. After 1956, some fine-tuning occurred in the system of relations between Moscow and the socialist countries, while the fundamentals remained unchanged. The satellite states moved from the status of vassals to a position of subordinate allies. The essence of this is summarised by Csaba Békés as follows: „On fundamental strategic issues, the Soviets continued to have the final say, but with regard to tactics [...] the allies were given considerably more autonomy than before [...] the previous 'manual control' was replaced by 'remote control'."[40]

37 Huszár 2003, 7–10.; Baráth 2014, 186–190.

38 Similarly, the attitude of the Chinese may also have instilled in Kádár a sense of subordination and secondary status. The Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai first summoned Kádár to Moscow 'for the purpose of getting acquainted', and then a few days later arrived in Budapest himself at the head of a government delegation. Földes 2015/II, 22–33.

39 Huszár 2003, 37–38.

40 Békés 2004, 240–241.

The relationship, however, remained asymmetrical. The Soviets continued to obtain comprehensive information about the country's economic, social, and political life and foreign relations through various channels, and their expectations were conveyed to the Hungarian side packaged as „friendly advice" or „requests," while they communicated as much of their own affairs to the Hungarian leadership as they saw fit. Occasionally, in less important matters, they would yield to the Hungarians. A good example of this is the recall of Ambassador Andropov. Khrushchev's circle had confidentially consulted Kádár beforehand, who replied that he considered Andropov a well-prepared, excellent diplomat, but given his relationship with Rákosi, he would prefer to see someone else in the ambassadorial post.[41] Compared to the Stalinist period, the role of ambassadors and diplomats stationed in the satellite countries had also changed. According to a 1954 resolution of the CPSU Central Committee, they could only give advice and recommendations at their posts on the express instructions of the CPSU Central Committee, and had to refrain from their own interpretations of these. To do otherwise could have serious consequences for the individual concerned. Kádár, for example, in 1960 secured the recall of Ambassador Terenty Shtykov, who had been in office for little more than a year, because the latter had criticised the three-year plan and urged for more drastic steps in the collectivisation of agriculture.[42] An unfavourable impression of Shtykov had already formed in the Hungarian leadership because, during his introductory visit, he had told Kádár that he had only accepted the ambassadorial post on party orders. He then definitively overstepped his authority when he asked Kádár for „friendly advice" on how he could make trips around Hungary bypassing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[43]

The Soviets – particularly in the Khrushchev era – were scrupulous in maintaining the appearance of 'non-intervention in internal affairs': „In matters of domestic policy, we do not force anything on anyone, and if we do advise something, we [say] it directly. You decide on everything."[44] In April 1958, a year and a half after the crushing of the revolution, Khrushchev's

41 Ungváry–Meruk 2018, 47–48.
42 Baráth 2014, 250, 260.
43 Baráth 2012, 21.
44 Baráth, 2014, 224. The words of Khrushchev quoted here were spoken in 1958 during Soviet-Polish negotiations.

words in Cegléd sounded rather cynical: „We have always said and we say that it is the internal affair of the peoples of individual countries what social system they wish to establish in their homeland. We do not and do not intend to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries."[45] All this, of course, was no more than a cheap propaganda slogan, but the model, undoubtedly milder than the Stalinist edition, nevertheless gave Kádár the opportunity to constantly test the limits of the appearance of autonomy. Critical remarks, well- or ill-packaged, continued to arrive from the Soviet side. The members of the party delegation that visited Hungary in August 1959 under the leadership of Vladimir Semichastny complained that the Hungarians talked too often about how much better things were now than before 1956, which „seemed to praise the events of 1956." In this context, they objected to the overly frequent comparison of socialism and capitalism in ideological and propaganda work.[46] In response to this, Kádár cautiously tried to explain that in this respect, the situation in Hungary was different from that in the Soviet Union, as „our people do not know enough about the advantages of socialism over capitalism; in our country, even party members need to be told about this."[47] Kádár explained countless times and in various contexts that Hungary did not have to mechanically copy the Soviet Union, and that the uncritical acceptance of bad advice had been the source of many troubles in the past.

The Hungarian-Soviet system of relations was greatly influenced by the fact that over the years, a relationship developed between Kádár and Khrushchev that went beyond the usual level between the top leaders of two countries. „[…] while Rákosi only wanted to be Stalin's best pupil – among the leaders of the Soviet bloc, Kádár was truly the one most able to identify with Khrushchev's policies."[48] It is customary to call this a friendship, but it also had elements of mutual dependence. Khrushchev needed Kádár in his struggle with the hard-liners of the CPSU, and with him, he could demonstrate the success of his de-Stalinisation policy within the socialist community. Kádár, for his part, regarded the Soviet leader as his mentor,

45 RGASPI F. 52. Op. 1. D. 475, 81–91. Nikita Khrushchev's speech in Cegléd, 7 April 1958. For the speech, see also *Népszabadság*, 9 April 1958, 1–2.
46 Baráth 2012, 166.
47 Ibid., 188.
48 Békés 2004, 243.

in his own words his „fatherly friend" and „elder brother,"[49] and not least, Khrushchev's support was useful to him in the „de-Rákosisation" and in his struggle against his own left-wingers. The Kádár-Khrushchev relationship is made all the more interesting by the fact that they were two men of completely different temperaments. Khrushchev, with his adventurous, restless nature and extroverted pronouncements, was the sharp opposite of the reserved, withdrawn Kádár, who was prone to internal conflict.

Although the welcoming speeches and statements made during bilateral meetings spoke in superlatives of Hungarian-Soviet friendship, in the field of economic relations, divergent interests sometimes clashed spectacularly. Behind these lay a rather complex set of problems. Its elements included the policy of raising living standards, which served as the basis of the Kádár regime's legitimacy, the Hungarian economy's need for raw materials and energy (the provision of which was largely expected from the Soviet Union within the given framework), and Moscow's willingness to make certain economic sacrifices in order to maintain political stability within the camp. According to Mikoyan, „Khrushchev consistently supported the policy of 'compensating' the workers of Eastern Europe, which meant providing them with a higher standard of living even at the expense of the Soviet standard of living, in order to prevent a repetition of the Hungarian rebellion."[50]

One of the constant points of debate was precisely how far the Soviet Union was willing to go in making sacrifices. During economic negotiations, the Soviets regularly described Hungarian demands as excessive. They criticised them for trying to solve their economic problems by requesting more and more Soviet currency and commodity credits, and for wanting to raise the standard of living to a level „exceeding the country's possibilities": „the Hungarians are still in the grip of a parasitic disposition, which is incompatible with the internationalist obligations of socialist countries."[51]

Characterising the situation, Khrushchev ironised in 1959 as follows: „Indeed, it is our opinion that our relations are the best possible. [...] There are no contentious issues between us; if any do arise, it is Comrade Apró's fault. We think there is a dialectical contradiction here: the stronger our

49 Földes 2015/I, 59.
50 Zubok 1997, 65.
51 Baráth 2014, 228.

relations become, the stronger our disagreements with Comrade Apró."[52] At that time, Antal Apró was the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers responsible for economic affairs, so economic relations with the Soviet Union also fell within his purview. In economic negotiations, the Soviet strategy was to accept some of the Hungarian additional demands, but for many types of products, they were willing to supply significantly less than the quantity requested by the Hungarians, and they regularly drew attention to the need for more efficient exploitation of their own resources and raw material reserves. For example, in the case of the additional crude oil quantity of between 650,000 and 1 million tonnes per year requested for the period 1962–1965, they found these demands to be excessive and only undertook to supply 200,000 tonnes per year.[53] In addition to the above, the determination of the forint-rouble exchange rate, the Soviet assistance requested for the repayment of Hungarian credit and interest debt to capitalist countries, and the question of increasing Hungarian military spending, urged by the Soviets, were subjects of constant debate. In June 1962, at a meeting of the communist and workers' parties of the Comecon member states, Khrushchev particularly emphasised to those concerned that Soviet assistance also had its limits, and that the Soviet Union was no longer willing to play the role of the „benevolent uncle" and make up for the 20–30% deficits that he believed were deliberately built into the national economic plans.[54] The message was, among others, also directed at the Hungarian side.

All this, of course, did not mean that the Soviets were not receptive to certain Hungarian requests. In 1962, for example, they agreed that Hungary could repay the remaining part of the currency loan granted in 1958, 8 million roubles, with commodity deliveries between 1962 and 1965 (meat, textile and leather industry products, furniture, etc.) instead of freely convertible currency, as they saw no chance for currency repayment. The Hungarian side's additional demand for certain raw materials (such as mercury,

52 RGASPI. F. 52. Op. 1. D. 476, 2–13. Nikita Khrushchev's speech at the dinner hosted by the HSWP Central Committee, 5 June 1959.

53 RGASPI F. 3. Op. 12. D. 935, 111–118. Memorandum of Aleksandr Zasyadko and Vladimir Novikov to the CPSU Central Committee, dated 12 July 1961, on the results of the consultation with the Hungarian side regarding the second Hungarian five-year plan for 1961–1965.

54 Baráth 2014, 267–269.

bismuth, and aluminium fluoride, etc.) was met from the Soviet state reserve fund or by reducing the reserve stocks of the supplying companies.[55] The academic literature generally judges the 1962 Hungarian-Soviet aluminium agreement favourably from a Hungarian perspective, in which Hungary supplied alumina to the Soviet Union and received aluminium in return, with the difference in value being settled by commodity deliveries.[56] True, this is somewhat contradicted by the note made of the discussion between Deputy Prime Minister Lajos Fehér and Soviet Ambassador Georgy Denisov in October 1963, where the Hungarian politician complained that the Soviet price received for uranium ore did not cover the extraction costs, and he also mentioned aluminium among the „deficit raw material types," adding that the subsidy system should be agreed upon at the Comecon level.[57]

Khrushchev's fall in October 1964 came as a surprise to the Hungarian leadership, and for Kádár personally, it presented a serious challenge. He particularly resented – and gave voice to this in several forums – that the communiqué about the dismissal made no mention of Khrushchev's merits, above all his fight against the Stalinist personality cult and the preservation of peace. In a broader context, he was concerned about the possibility of a change in the political line, a harder course with its own consequences. He was not reassured by Leonid Brezhnev's first, brief telephone call, in which the new Soviet leader stated that there would be no change in Hungarian-Soviet relations and personal friendship. This was followed by an intensive series of consultative and clarifying discussions between the Hungarian and Soviet sides. Viktor Grishin, a member of the CPSU Presidium, arrived in Hungary to inform the Hungarian party leadership. Kádár discussed the matter several times with Soviet Ambassador Georgy Denisov. Béla Biszku and Dezső Nemes flew to Moscow, where, in discussions with Mikhail Suslov and Nikolai Podgorny among others, they reported in detail on the Hungarian side's concerns and dilemmas. Beyond the mandatory courtesies, they were rather sharp in their wording. Biszku said that the Hungarian public had received the news of the dismissal with shock and

55 RGASPI F. 3. Op. 16. D. 174, 128–129. Memorandum of Mikhail Lesechko to the CPSU Central Committee on the results of the negotiations with the Hungarian side, 24 October 1962.

56 Sillinger 2010, 6–7.

57 Baráth 2012, 368–369.

incomprehension. He disputed the justification of the term „personality cult" in relation to Khrushchev, saying that the concept was a synonym for Stalinist illegalities. Such a qualification would make it difficult to fight against Mao Zedong's personality cult and against the remnants of the personality cult in general. According to Dezső Nemes, Khrushchev's „name is a symbol before the peoples of the world. We have deprived them of this symbol." He then added that the Soviets had treated even Voroshilov more fairly than Khrushchev, and that it would be good if Khrushchev did not disappear from political life.[58]

Overall, the Kádár leadership, beyond its private „incomprehension", provoked Brezhnev's displeasure in three respects: the restrained mention of Khrushchev's merits to the public (Kádár's speech at the Western Railway Station on 18 October), the absence of „congratulatory elements" in communication with the new Soviet leadership, and the fact that Kádár continued to try to maintain a private relationship with Khrushchev.[59] In Vladimir Kryuchkov's opinion, a truly intimate relationship could never develop between Kádár and Brezhnev; there was always some tension between them. Brezhnev disliked Kádár's small gestures of attention towards Khrushchev (gifts, greetings), and Kádár, particularly in the early period, was wary of holding private one-on-one meetings with the Soviet party leader.[60]

Although Kádár's Moscow trip in November 1964 and the acceptance of the invitation for Brezhnev and Podgorny to hunt in Hungary seemed to smooth over the differences on a personal level, noticeably cooler winds began to blow from Moscow. 'Re-Stalinisation' did not entail a return to Stalinist methods, but it did involve the partial rehabilitation of Stalin.

58 The document is published in: Baráth 1997, 199–209.

59 Huszár 2003, 191, 193.; Baráth 2014, 272–273.

60 Kryuchkov 2003, 23 (page number of the online version), https://libking.ru/books/sci-/sci-history/577952-vladimir-kryuchkov-lichnoe-delo.html#book, text beginning 'Леонида Ильича Брежнева продолжало волновать...'. In the Brezhnev era, Kryuchkov's career followed that of Andropov. He first headed the section dealing with Hungary and Romania in the Central Committee department responsible for relations with communist and workers' parties, which was directed by Andropov. He then followed his boss to the KGB, where he was soon appointed head of foreign intelligence. Between 1955 and 1959, Kryuchkov was the third secretary at the Soviet embassy in Budapest, and subsequently the desk officer for Hungarian affairs in the Central Committee apparatus; he spoke Hungarian well.

The castigation of the personality cult ceased; in his speech on the 20th anniversary of the victory, Brezhnev praised Stalin's merits; in 1969, on the 90th anniversary of his birth, Pravda commemorated him in an editorial; and in 1970, a bust was placed on his grave behind the mausoleum.[61]

In January 1965, at the Warsaw meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact, Brezhnev spoke of the need to „close ranks" against the subversive activities of Western states. In 1967, the questions of establishing diplomatic relations with West Germany and of joining the World Bank and the IMF ruffled feathers in Hungarian-Soviet relations. After the increasingly maverick Romania established diplomatic relations with West Germany in January 1967, Moscow, partly under pressure from the Poles and partly from the East German leadership, hardened its stance on the German question and practically forbade Hungary from normalising relations with Bonn.

In a broader context, the fate of the Hungarian reforms, known as the New Economic Mechanism, was at stake. The Soviets did not hide their reservations about the Hungarian ideas; their main concern was that by opening up and joining international organisations, Hungary would essentially turn away from the socialist market. But they also had serious objections to the transformation of economic management. As Mikhail Lesechko, Deputy Prime Minister and the Soviet Union's permanent representative to Comecon, tried to persuade Antal Apró, „what is needed is not reform, but the further development of the planned economy system, which is more difficult than reforms."[62] At the end of November, Jenő Fock held tense discussions in Moscow with Alexei Kosygin. He raised the issue of the lack of Soviet trust in the Hungarian leadership, and in connection with joining international financial organisations, he informed Kosygin that there was no joint resolution on this (meaning the Hungarians were not bound by any joint position on the matter). Despite this, the Soviets scuttled the Hungarian accession, as they saw these organisations as an instrument of American economic (and thus political) expansion.[63]

61 Huszár 2003, 195, 233.
62 Quoted in Földes 2015/I, 83.
63 Baráth 2014, 276.

The Hungarian and Soviet positions also differed on the question of Comecon integration. The main dilemma was in which direction the large-scale economic model, originally created on a bilateral basis, should be developed, and what the priorities should be. The Soviets argued for specialisation, production cooperation, and plan coordination (even the preparation of joint national economic plans), while the Hungarians wanted to place the emphasis on the reform of commodity and monetary relations, credit, the creation of opportunities for direct enterprise-level relations, and economic opening.[64]

The year 1968 brought one of the most serious tests for the Kádár-Brezhnev relationship and for Hungarian-Soviet relations: the Prague Spring and the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact countries. The Soviet and Hungarian leaderships' positions on the events in Czechoslovakia (the reform experiment of Alexander Dubček and his associates) differed sharply. Kádár – with his characteristic tactics – waged a two-front struggle: on the one hand, he tried to restrain the Soviets from a direct intervention similar to that of 1956, and on the other, he warned the Czechoslovak leadership not to go too far with the reforms and lose control over events. By the spring of 1968, the practice of deciding „about the Czechoslovaks, without the Czechoslovaks" had developed. After Brezhnev had already described the Prague developments as a counter-revolution at the Dresden meeting in March 1968, the Czechoslovaks stayed away from further consultations. The so-called 'five' (the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland, the GDR, and Bulgaria), however, continued to consult regularly with each other. The absence of the Czechoslovaks also meant that Kádár was left alone with his balancing, wait-and-see position against the united front of those urging military intervention.

The Hungarian leadership was ultimately unable to resist the pressure placed upon it and gave the green light for military intervention. All they managed to achieve was to give a final, token chance to a political settlement (the six-party talks in Bratislava and the bilateral Czechoslovak-Soviet talks in Čierna nad Tisou, however, yielded no results), and to limit the Hungarian participation to a single, reduced-strength division instead

64 Földes 2013, 1368–1369.

of the three requested by the Soviets.[65] This, however, did not change the substance of the matter.

The most important consequence of 1968 within the socialist camp was the proclamation of the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine (the doctrine of limited sovereignty). In its essential element, the doctrine codified the practice previously applied by Moscow, that the satellite states could and should be kept within the camp, even by force. In this respect, there was continuity between the Stalinist, Khrushchevite, and Brezhnevite leaderships. The germs of the doctrine already appear in the joint declaration signed during the six-party meeting in Bratislava. The document called the preservation and development of socialist achievements the common internationalist duty of the socialist countries. The leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party would have liked to omit this sentence from the text, but Brezhnev insisted on it.[66] Its ideological foundation was provided by an article in the 26 September 1968 issue of Pravda under the name of Sergei Kovalev, a member of the paper's editorial board, entitled „The Sovereignty and Internationalist Obligations of Socialist Countries." Its official, top-level declaration came in Leonid Brezhnev's speech at the 5th Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party on 12 November 1968. The basic tenet of the doctrine is that when the cause of socialism is endangered in a socialist country due to an attempt at capitalist restoration supported by external or internal forces, then „the security of the socialist community as a whole is endangered – this is no longer just a problem of the people of the given country, but a common problem, the concern of all socialist countries."[67]

What, then, did the Brezhnev Doctrine, which determined the room for manoeuvre of the satellite countries for the next two decades, bring that was new compared to previous practice? In contrast to the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, when the Soviets were content with the passive consent of the leadership of the socialist countries and explicitly dissuaded the Czechoslovaks and Romanians, who had offered their services, from active participation in the „restoration of order," now, on the contrary, they sought to „distribute the responsibility" and to make

65 Pataky 1997, 355–356.
66 Mlynář 1989, 106–107.
67 Stikalin 2019, 67.

the other socialist states „complicit" in the military action. [68] The wording tried to wrap Moscow's dominance and hegemony (which was ultimately based on its military strength even within the camp) in new clothes, presenting the building and defence of socialism as some kind of common cause. At the same time, the emphasis clearly shifted from local specifics to the „general laws of building socialism," from which there could be no deviation and which, of course, meant the Soviet model. The formula also provided a solution to the problem that the intervening countries faced in August 1968. Namely, that – again in contrast to the events in Hungary in 1956 – following the occupation, it was not possible to create a counter-government in the shadow of Soviet (and also Polish, Hungarian, and Bulgarian) arms that could have replaced Dubček's circle and, even if only retrospectively, legitimised the intervention. Even the so-called leftists (Vasil Bil'ak, Alois Indra, etc.) were not willing to engage in such a degree of collaboration. By declaring the defence of socialist achievements a common cause, it was no longer absolutely necessary to create a government that would invite the interventionist forces.

The possibility of joint intervention was an ultima ratio in the system, which was not actually applied in later years. The case of Afghanistan is a different matter; during the 1980–1981 Polish crisis, although the entry of Soviet troops into Poland was raised several times at meetings of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, it was only considered as a possible last and least desirable solution, which it would be good to avoid. At the same time, however, serious pressure was exerted on Stanisław Kania, and later on Wojciech Jaruzelski, to introduce martial law and a hard-line policy.[69] The option of Soviet intervention, however, hung like a

68 At the same time, it is worth noting that in connection with the intervention, Moscow did not treat all Warsaw Pact member states equally. The East Germans, who offered their services of their own accord, were assigned a limited role; the GDR was a staging area, and the mobilised East German divisions carried out security tasks on their own territory. In contrast, the direct participation forced upon the Hungarian side was probably a way of disciplining Kádár for voicing his dissenting opinion, and at the same time a warning that the Hungarian reforms also had their limits. The situation with Romania was different. Here – according to Stefano Bottoni – a tense situation, aggravated by border incidents, developed on the Soviet-Romanian border due to Nicolae Ceaușescu's condemnation of the intervention. Bottoni 2014, 171.

69 On the details of this, see: Polinov 2022, 781–783.

sword of Damocles over the heads of the leaders of the socialist countries throughout. This also played a role in the fact that the stray lambs could be herded back into the fold by more subtle means. This at the same time, of course – in the words of György Földes – also meant an extension of the Brezhnev Doctrine. That is, instead of crisis management, the prevention of crises came to the fore, which brought „providing assistance" and direct intervention to a much earlier stage, before the situation became truly critical.[70]

A good example of the above case is the torpedoing of the Hungarian reforms by Moscow in 1972. At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, Hungary, on account of its reform experiment, its foreign economic orientation, and a certain degree of liberalisation in domestic and cultural policy, was already a thorn in Moscow's side. In January 1972, at a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact, Brezhnev proposed an informal, friendly exchange of views with Kádár on international issues and Hungarian-Soviet relations. Anyone versed in the power techniques of the Kremlin knew that this did not bode well. Nevertheless, at the Zavidovo hunting lodge, Kádár was taken by surprise by Brezhnev's tirades – voiced as a personal opinion – about the negative phenomena in the Hungarian economy, the decline in the rate of growth, the growing debt stock in relation to capitalist countries, and the growth of the cooperative and private sectors, in contrast to the state sector.[71]

The conversation unleashed a veritable avalanche. Although at the meeting of the HSWP Central Committee's Politburo, the reformers (Jenő Fock, Rezső Nyers, György Aczél) disputed the validity of Brezhnev's findings, since the Soviet leader's information was – in their view – in many cases erroneous and based on misinformation, Kádár was precisely aware that this constituted an unambiguous Soviet prohibition. Like the left-wing opponents of the reforms (Zoltán Komócsin, Sándor Gáspár, and others), he interpreted Brezhnev's words as an ukase to be implemented, and he also saw clearly that the Soviets were „demanding heads," and that this was not a one-off intervention, but an intention to place the Hungarian leadership under continuous pressure. There is also evidence to suggest that the

70 Földes 2015/I, 120–121.

71 Földes 2015/II, 399–408.

Soviets were prepared to carry out such a restorative turn even at the cost of Kádár's removal, and indeed made serious preparations for this. Tibor Huszár speculates that the „chosen successor" would have been one of the leading figures of the hard-liners, Zoltán Komócsin.[72] The pretext for the change would have been János Kádár's 60th birthday, the attainment of the then-retirement age. As to whether Kádár himself initiated his retirement or whether it was suggested by the Soviets, whether he was serious about withdrawing or was merely making a pre-emptive move to test his fellow leaders, the opinions of researchers are divided. In the end, it was decided in Moscow that Kádár should remain in his post (Brezhnev presumably did not want to set a precedent for the retirement of top leaders), but that he should work less, rid himself of the reformers undesirable to the Soviets, and surround himself with „reliable cadres" with a „new way of thinking."[73] The changes between 1972 and 1974 all took place in the spirit of the directives (comradely advice) received from Moscow.[74] In August 1974, during his discussions with János Kádár in the Crimea, Brezhnev formulated his criticisms and expectations of the Hungarian leadership even more sharply than before. Above all, he objected that despite the progress made in the building of socialism in Hungary, the role of the private sector was still too strong. Furthermore, there were many in the party and state leadership who thought incorrectly about the private sector. The danger in the latter was that it was very viable and difficult to keep under control. Some elements of Brezhnev's not particularly lofty discourse, wrapped in characteristic communist jargon, were almost reminiscent of the Stalinist era. In connection with the 11th Congress of the HSWP, he remarked that it would be good if the programme declaration were adopted by the participants to the accompaniment of enthusiastic applause, and that no debate should arise about Hungary's future development. He considered the personnel changes that occurred at the same time as the halting of the reform process in the leadership to be insufficient, and urged the complete ousting of the reformers from political life: „However, the comrades concerned have not

72 Huszár 2003, 236–238.

73 Ibid.; also Kryuchkov 2003, 19, text beginning „В течение первой половины своего пребывания на посту лидера…".

74 On the personnel changes and their background, see: Hajdu 1998.

renounced their principles, about which they can speak freely. This worries me. I consider this the most important question." He even „gave advice" on the compilation of the Central Committee's planned report to the congress, primarily recommending the propagation of the achievements attained, which would predetermine the further direction of development and thereby ensure party unity.[75]

From the second half of the 1970s, Kádár (and with him the entire Hungarian leadership) balanced, according to a contemporary *bon mot*, between 'banks and tanks'. The country's economy, upon which the policy of raising living standards – one of the most important pillars of the regime's legitimacy – was built, was increasingly reliant on Western technology, export opportunities, and credits (including short-term ones to finance the national debt). This presupposed orderly relations with the capitalist countries most important from a Hungarian perspective, and the practical implementation of the principle of peaceful coexistence and the process of détente could provide a favourable context for this. In its relations with the West, Hungarian diplomacy tried to manoeuvre within this force field, while the „tanks" could not be ignored either, since the country had been part of the Soviet Union's European sphere of influence for three decades.

After the 1975 Helsinki Conference, the policy of détente ran aground. During the 1973 oil crisis and those that followed, it seemed to the West that the Soviet Union was attempting to disrupt the strategic balance, trying to convert its advantage in raw material supply and reserves into a geopolitical and strategic advantage through large-scale fleet development and missile deployment programmes, and increased involvement in Third World countries. In connection with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which began in December 1979, the West judged that Moscow had overstepped the boundaries of the security zone recognised after 1945 and had come dangerously close to the vital Middle Eastern oil sources.

The nadir in American-Soviet relations – which is also sometimes called the 'Second Cold War' – presented a serious challenge to the socialist countries, including Hungary. Moscow did not consult with the Warsaw Pact member states before the invasion of Afghanistan; Soviet Ambassador Vladimir Pavlov only presented his government's informational note

75 Földes 2015/II, 418–419.

on the decision in Budapest *post factum*, on 28 December.[76] The lack of consultation was attributed to a shortage of time, although there was an established tradition within the bloc for consultations on important foreign policy issues. The leaders of the socialist camp not only resented the lack of consultation, but also took umbrage at the fact that, faced with Western reactions, the Soviets increasingly demanded that their satellites close ranks and freeze or scale back their Western contacts. The 'compulsion of banks and tanks' came to a head most spectacularly at the Politburo meeting of 29 January 1980. On this occasion, Kádár, who wished to conform to Moscow's expectations, lost the debate to those who, in order to avoid financial collapse, argued for maintaining the already scheduled programmes and meetings. Kádár's subsequent outburst clearly shows how the Hungarian party leader saw his country's place and room for manoeuvre in the shadow of the Soviet Union. After explaining that allied commitment should not be abandoned for any „token advantages," he remarked indignantly about the Soviets: „How long do you think they will be so courteous? Why with us... pardon the expression, with our pissant lives, and our country, and everything... how long will they be so courteous with us?" With this desperate outburst, Kádár ultimately pushed through his point.[77] Hungarian foreign policy, however, successfully adapted to the changed circumstances; during 1980, it succeeded in getting the Soviets to accept the necessity of maintaining relations with Western countries, arguing that this was a way to counterbalance the foreign policy line of the United States. Between 1980 and 1985, numerous high-level meetings took place between Kádár and leading West German, French, British, and Italian heads of state and government.[78] In 1979, the Soviet Union had still firmly forbidden Hungary from joining the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; by 1981, they could not, and perhaps did not want to, prevent Hungary's accession.

The election of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary, albeit not immediately, radically transformed Soviet foreign policy priorities and,

76 Békés 2004, 257.

77 Quoted in Békés 2004, 267–270.

78 János Kádár visited Bonn in 1982 and London in 1985; François Mitterrand in 1982, and Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl, and Bettino Craxi in 1984 visited Budapest. Békés 2004, 273–274.

along with them, the content and forms of the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe. Whereas previously the region, and Hungary within it, had been considered the Soviet Union's primary security zone (a spoil of the Second World War) and an unquestionable part of the socialist world system, from the mid-1980s its fate became subordinate to the development of the direct Soviet-American dialogue. The Soviet leadership was then faced with the fact that a huge chasm yawned between its world power ambitions and its possibilities, and that the system was incapable of bearing the costs of the arms race and the maintenance of pro-Soviet regimes in the Third World. By 1987–1988, it also became clear that neither curbing the arms race nor abandoning the „irrationally oversized external imperial periphery" was sufficient to overcome the crisis.[79] Issues that had previously been taboo had to be addressed (above all, the Soviet presence in Central and Eastern Europe).

In the initial period, the changes were most evident in the rhetoric about placing relations between the „fraternal socialist countries" on a new basis, in the spirit of „full equality and mutual respect."[80] In time, the idea emerged that different paths to building socialism were possible, that individual parties could independently decide on the issues before them, and that Moscow's tutelage should be replaced by a mutual exchange of experience. This was coupled with the buzzwords Gorbachev was fond of using: perestroika, glasnost, uskoreniye (acceleration), reform, new thinking, and the rejuvenation of the leadership. All these also appeared as a kind of expectation towards the aged leadership of the socialist countries. According to some opinions, Gorbachev felt that dealing with the Eastern European countries was a nuisance from the very beginning. He imagined that if these states were led by reformer „little Gorbachevs" like himself, he would be freed from the burden of constantly dealing with them and could concentrate on more important matters.[81]

Although at the June 1988 party conference Gorbachev declared that every nation had the right to choose its own social system, until 1989 the Soviet leadership envisioned some kind of renewed edition of the socialist

79 Békés 2004, 276–281.
80 Baráth 2014, 283–284.
81 Musatov 2009, 138.; Baráth 2014, 283.

model and the alliance system.[82] As for Hungary's place in this equation, it was characterised by a peculiar duality. On the one hand, previous Hungarian reform experiments could serve as an example for the Soviet reformers as well; on the other, alongside Poland, it was Hungary that caused the most headaches for the Soviets with its economic and political crisis symptoms (while, for example, the significantly more rigid Bulgarian, GDR, etc. regimes seemed stable). The relationship between Gorbachev and Kádár also developed in a rather contradictory manner. Kádár was sceptical about the success of perestroika, and on one occasion even asked Gorbachev if he was not afraid of suffering Khrushchev's fate.[83] For the ageing Hungarian party leader, who was increasingly perceiving reality unrealistically, the election of the then 54-year-old, energetic Gorbachev carried the ominous message that, following the Soviet example, the search for his own successor could also begin in Hungary. It was no coincidence that he declared to Andrei Gromyko at the beginning of 1988 that he intended to remain at the head of the party until the 14th Congress of the HSWP, scheduled for 1990. As the question of succession had by then become acute, the old reflexes were activated in Moscow – despite the winds of new times. Vadim Medvedev, Secretary of the Central Committee and head of the department responsible for relations with the communist and workers' parties of the socialist countries, explained in a memorandum to Gorbachev that Kádár was no longer capable of renewing the party's policy and did not really want to, and therefore the Soviet leadership should provide political support to Károly Grósz in opposition to Kádár. To prepare for Kádár's departure, Vladimir Kryuchkov, Deputy Chairman of the KGB and head of the First Chief Directorate responsible for foreign intelligence, arrived in Hungary.[84] The change of leadership finally took place at the party conference in May 1988.

82 Békés 2004, 286–288. Gorbachev very clearly demarcated the boundaries in his discussion with Károly Grósz in March 1989: the preservation of socialism and the ensuring of stability.
83 Musatov 2009, 136.
84 Ibid. In Valery Musatov's opinion, within the Soviet leadership Medvedev and Kryuchkov were responsible for carrying out the leadership changes within the fraternal parties. In addition, Kryuchkov's diplomatic past and language skills certainly played a role in his being sent to Hungary.

By 1988–1989, Moscow had to face the challenge that the processes taking place in the Eastern European countries were overstepping the bounds of the „renewed model" of socialism. Analyses prepared for internal use at the time outlined several scenarios, from the establishment of Western-style parliamentary democracy and market economy to the possibility of collapse and chaos engulfing the region. The prognoses differ in some of their details, but on the whole, they agree that the possibility of Soviet armed intervention must be ruled out. They refrained from declaring this publicly, however. Most researchers agree that by this time, the „dangling" of the Brezhnev Doctrine was the only tool in the Soviets' hands to maintain their influence over the region. The uncertainty caused by leaving the expected Soviet behaviour „in the dark" had a braking, stabilising effect, contributing to ensuring the peaceful nature of the transition in the countries of the region (restraining both the emerging opposition and the hard-line communist leaders from radical steps). However, some of these analyses did not dispense with all illusions. Under favourable circumstances, they believed Soviet influence in the region could be preserved through the „Finlandisation" of the region and the maintenance of the Warsaw Pact Organisation (though no concrete, developed programme was worked out for this proposal).[85]

The Soviet leadership also tried unsuccessfully to reform Comecon. On paper, ambitious plans were made for the modernisation of national economies, the introduction of new technologies, energy efficiency, the doubling of the member countries' productivity by the year 2000, and the creation of a Comecon „common market," but in the meantime, the operation of the existing integration was also bordering on the impossible. In Hungarian-Soviet relations, for example, the composition of the bilateral trade exchange, the quality of Soviet goods, the rescheduling of the Hungarian debt, and the significant Hungarian surplus accumulated in foreign trade were subjects of constant debate.[86] Károly Grósz in July 1988 and Miklós Németh in March 1989 mentioned a Hungarian surplus of 200 million and 170 million roubles, respectively, in their discussions with Gorbachev and Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov. The latter

85 For a detailed analysis of this issue, see: Békés 2004, 286–296.

86 On this, see: Germuska 2021, 177; Baráth 2021, 104.

meeting, in particular, vividly demonstrated the increasingly unbridgeable difference between the Hungarian and Soviet positions. Ryzhkov, who was considered a conservative within the Soviet leadership, continued to push for the application of obsolete mechanisms, such as plan coordination and the mutual offsetting of so-called „important deliveries," which would increase responsibility for fulfilment. He called it a mistake that the Hungarian government had backed out of the cooperative production of the new Zaporozhets model, which could have ensured the satisfaction of Hungarian passenger car needs. Miklós Németh, in contrast, urged for the creation of a real market, the establishment of price relations reflecting actual costs, and the transition to convertible currency settlement. By 1989, the line of thought that saw the solution to the country's problems in a complete change of economic orientation had strengthened within the Hungarian leadership.[87]

The official renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine before the public took place in October 1989. In a statement, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze declared that the Soviet Union had no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of the Warsaw Pact member countries. Subsequently, when asked about the validity of the Brezhnev Doctrine, Soviet foreign affairs spokesman Gennady Gerasimov, commenting on his superior's words, half-jokingly replied that the Soviet Union had a new doctrine, the Sinatra Doctrine, referring to the singer's famous song, '*I Did It My Way*', thus indicating freedom of choice for the former vassal states.

Between 1988 and 1990, after it became clear that Moscow was not able and did not want to maintain its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the state socialist systems in the individual countries collapsed like a house of cards in a historically short period of time. Along with them, the forms of integration (the Warsaw Pact Organisation and Comecon) that the Soviets had used to maintain their own rule and influence in the region,

87 Baráth–Rainer 2000, 140, 172–177. We may note that by this time, a pro-market line of thought had also appeared in the Soviet (Russian) search for an economic path, which considered the situation of Comecon to be hopeless and sought to reduce trade with member countries to an „optimal level," eliminating distorting factors such as clearing account settlement. This is formulated most strikingly in the 500 Days Programme, associated with the names of Stanislav Shatalin and Grigory Yavlinsky, which was developed as a scenario for the transition to a market economy. Shatalin–Yavlinsky 1990, 135–136.

but which by then had been essentially hollowed out, also soon perished. On 28 June 1991, at the last meeting of the Comecon delegations held in Budapest at the Gellért Hotel, the Minister for Foreign Economic Relations of the democratically elected Antall government, Béla Kádár, essentially announced the dissolution of the organisation in his opening speech, which those present noted without comment.[88] Also in 1991 – in two stages – the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist. First, on 25 February in Budapest, an agreement was signed on the dismantling of the organisation's military structure, and then on 1 July in Prague, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee and of the organisation itself was declared.[89]

These processes took place in a historically short period of time, yet not without friction. The mechanisms that had been in operation for decades had an inertia of their own. In connection with the Soviet advisors and liaison officers assigned to the Ministry of the Interior, as late as September 1989 (10 days after the conclusion of the National Roundtable Talks), a decision was made not to dismantle the system, but to make the relationships clandestine, transferring them under diplomatic cover. This was decided at a meeting on the matter, where the Soviet side was represented by Major General Rostislav Yushchuk. The KGB advisors were still in Hungary in early 1990.[90] In October 1990, Army General Pyotr Lushev, Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact's United Armed Forces, and Army General Vladimir Lobov, Chief of Staff of the UAF, subjected Minister of Defence Lajos Für to a veritable crossfire, asking how Hungary envisioned its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, why it was not participating in joint exercises, and why it was not allowing Soviet Warsaw Pact representatives access to Hungarian troops. They stressed that until its withdrawal, Hungary must comply with the provisions of the treaty and carry out the plans in force. According to Lajos Für's memoirs, the two Soviet generals acted as if they had not even heard that a decision had already been made at the highest political level to dismantle the military structures of the Warsaw Pact and to withdraw troops from the countries of the region.[91]

88 Balogh 2021.
89 Békés 2022, 21–22.
90 Baráth 2017, 206–207.
91 Horváth 2021, 28–29.

On 19 June 1991, at Záhony, the last Soviet soldier, in the person of Lieutenant General Viktor Shilov, commander of the Soviet Southern Group of Forces, also left Hungary. This symbolically brought to an end Hungary's almost half-century of Soviet occupation.

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