**ZUZANA MÉSZÁROSOVÁ-LAMPL**

Constantine The Philosopher University in Nitra, Nitra, Slovak Republic
Forum Minority Research Institute, Šamorín, Slovak Republic

# The Emergence of the First Post-November System of Hungarian Political Parties in Slovakia[1]

The so-called post-November system of Hungarian parties in what was then Czechoslovakia was established after the change in the political system in November 1989 and in the first months of 1990. It consisted of three political entities: Independent Hungarian Initiative, Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement, and the movement Coexistence. Although they distanced themselves from using the word "party" in their name, they truly were political parties that ran for parliamentary representation in the first free elections in June 1990 at the time representing the Hungarian community of more than 500 000 members in Slovakia. In her study, the author describes many hitherto unknown circumstances of the origin of these parties. In addition to contemporary documents, media appearances and other sources, the study also relies on commemorative interviews with party representatives.

**Keywords**: Independent Hungarian Initiative, Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement, Coexistence

## Introduction

In the last parliamentary elections in the Slovak Republic, which took place on 29 February 2020, for the first time in 31 years, Hungarians do not have their own parliamentary representation in Slovakia, as neither Most-Híd (from the Slovak and Hungarian words for "bridge" – translator's note) nor the Party of the Hungarian Community-Hungarian Community Co-operation exceeded the 5% electoral quorum. This electoral failure was largely due to the quarrels of Hungarian political entities, the origins of which are linked by several analysts to the secession of Béla Bugár, then chairman of the Party of the Hungarian Community, and several other members of the party, and to the subsequent establishment of a new party Most-Híd in 2009. However, the contradiction of some political principles and opinions of Hungarian political representatives in Slovakia was already present in the years 1989-1990.

In this study, we focus on the circumstances, conditions, and background of the emergence of the post-November Hungarian political elite in Slovakia. This is important because they partly shed light on the existing differences in the political identity of Independent Hungarian Initiative, Coexistence, and Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement from the outset. In addition to historical works and chronologies, contemporary and later thematically relevant sociological research and public opinion research, party programs, archival materials, politicians' statements and contemporary press published in the Hungarian language in Slovakia, the study also relies on commemorative interviews with party representatives.

## The circumstances of the foundation of Hungarian political parties in Slovakia

The first representative of the Hungarian political elite in Slovakia – and at the same time the first political movement for a change in the political system in Czechoslovakia – was Independent Hungarian Initiative, in Slovak Maďarská nezávislá iniciatíva (MNI) and in Hungarian Független Magyar Kezdeményezés. It was founded on 18 November 1989. It was thus the first systemic political movement, as the Czech Civic Forum (Občanské fórum OF) and the Slovak Public Against Violence (Verejnosť proti násiliu VPN) were established a day later, on 19 November 1989. The circumstances of the foundation of MNI were also interesting. Lajos Tóth, a well-known Hungarian teacher working in Šala, the founder of the Vörösmarty Klub educational association, celebrated his 50th birthday on 18 November 1989 and on this occasion he organised a scientific conference entitled *The Existential Status of Hungarian Intelligence in Czechoslovakia* with a friendly meeting for 130 invited guests. After this conference, a smaller company gathered in the apartment of Károly Tóth and Eleonóra Sándor, who also spoke at the conference, and together they founded MNI. The founding members of MNI came from the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia, the Rescue Group of Hungarian Schools, Iródia, Erté Studio, the Hungarian Pen Club in Czechoslovakia, and the members also included the leading figures in student movements in the 1960s.[2] As for the name of the movement, the term "independent" did not refer to nationality and did not mean distancing from Czechoslovakia or the Slovaks, but it expressed independence from the authorities and structures (Ildikó Haraszti: Mi nem autonómiára törekszünk! 1989). In its Statutes of 24 February 1990, MNI declared: *"... it wishes to be a continuation of all the political, social, and individual efforts that have represented independent, autonomous thinking and attitudes toward the arbitrariness of power in recent decades"* (A Független Magyar Kezdeményezés Alapszabályzata 20216). The name of Independent Hungarian Initiative is also interesting in that the Slovak name does not match the Hungarian one, as the literal translation in Slovak should be Independent Hungarian Initiative (Nezávislá maďarská iniciatíva) instead of Hungarian Independent Initiative (Maďarská nezávislá iniciatíva), whereas the English variant

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[2]  Ezt tettük – ezt akartuk (We did this – we wanted this), https://leveltar.adatbank.sk/?p=101191. Iródia was a creative workshop for young writers established in 1983 in Nové Zámky. Erté Studio was founded in 1987 as an experimental art association, also in Nové Zámky.

of the name is identical to the Hungarian one. However, we were unable to find out the cause of this etymological curiosity: the addressed protagonists of MNI stated they did not remember why this was the case.[3]

According to Károly Tóth's recollections, it was very important *"that at that time we acted as an organised force, as an independent institution. This also had a decisive influence on the further development of events. The first week determined the distribution of political forces. Without MNI, the whole process would have taken place without the participation of the Hungarians. However, this meant that the Hungarians were not only involved in the whole process, but we were also able to perform with reasonable weight in the demonstrations"* (Popély – Simon 2009, p. 733). MNI was registered by the Slovak Ministry of the Interior and the Environment on 19 February 1990 as a political movement under the Political Parties Act adopted on 23 January 1990 (Popély – Simon 2009, p. 434).

The second entity of the emerging system of Hungarian parties, Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (Maďarské kresťanskodemokratické hnutie MKDH) was founded on 18 January 1990 according to the registration in the application submitted to the Ministry of the Interior (K. Cséfalvay 1995, p. 32),[4] and the Slovak Ministry of the Interior and the Environment registered it as a political movement on 19 March 1990 (K. Cséfalvay 1995, p. 33).

The third Hungarian political entity was the political movement Coexistence (Együttélés-Spolužitie-Wspólnota-Soužití), which was officially registered by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic on 27 February 1990 and the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic on 1 March 1990. However, the unofficial origin of the movement seems to be of an earlier date, as the program statement of the preparatory committee of the political movement Coexistence was published in the daily Új Szó[5] as early as 7 February 1990. The name Coexistence was to emphasise the coexistence of different nationalities, based on *"patience, forgiveness, mutual respect, mutual knowledge of culture and language. Without equality, parity and law, normal*

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[3] One more curiosity: one undated document, probably from 1991, mentions a play on words regarding the party name FMK (MNI), which is translated as follows: *"Our motto is Youth (Fiatalság), Quality (Minőség), Consistency (Következetesség), thus FMK."* Ezt tettük – ezt akartuk (We did this – we wanted this), https://leveltar.adatbank.sk/?p=101191.

[4] Various events (or at least different names) are associated with this date. On 2 November, an appeal entitled *On the Organization of Hungarian Christian Democratic Clubs*, signed by Rudolf Hamerlík and László Rajczy, was published in the daily Nap (which was published by MNI), stating that an organising committee of the Hungarian Christian Democratic Clubs had been set up in Bratislava that day. However, according to one of the founders of MKDH, Gábor Agárdy, (Agárdy, K. Cséfalvay 1995, p. 35, and Új Szó, April 20 1990), the Temporary Regional Organising Committee of Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement was established on that day. But neither Hamerlík and Rajczy nor Agárdy mention the establishment of MKDH. At the same point, Agárdy writes a few lines below that *"on 18 January, we set out to wake up the Hungarian Christian people from their deep sleep..."*, however, it cannot be inferred that this means not only the creation of a temporary committee but also the establishment of MKDH. The first chairman of MKDH, Kálmán Janics, also mentioned 18 January, when at a meeting in Bratislava *"the goal is to establish Hungarian Christian Democratic Clubs"*, but he already emphasised the need to establish an independent Hungarian Christian Democratic movement. *"At the time, I still had the impression that the majority (...) only supported the idea of clubs. However, the situation changed, the supporters of an independent Hungarian organisation founded Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement with the support of a large majority"* (Janics 1995, p. 11). Although he does not state whether it happened on the same day, i.e. 18 January, depending on the context, this can be understood and it also follows from the application for registration submitted to the Ministry of the Interior.

[5] The only existing daily in printed form in Hungarian in the Slovak Republic has been published since December 1948.

*coexistence is not conceivable. Let political and social norms of coexistence be created on the basis of common interests linked to common residence. Let the basis of coexistence be general autonomy."* (Együttélés Politikai Mozgalom a Demokráciáért és a Nemzeti Kisebbségek Jogaiért 1994, p. 4)

### Why movements, why not parties?

It will not be out of place to take a moment and look at these names anxiously circumventing the term "party", as it is contradictory that, although they called themselves movements, they behaved like parties. In this respect, a distinction must be made between MNI on the one hand and Coexistence and MKDH on the other.

Coexistence and MKDH were established after the adoption of Act no. 15/1990 Coll. on political parties, which made it possible to establish not only political parties but also political movements. In § 8 of this Act we can read about political movements that *"political movements (groupings) may be established as legal entities for electoral and other political purposes. They can bring together political parties and social organisations, as well as citizens"* (Law no. 15/1990 Coll.). Coexistence and MKDH were not groups of political parties or social organisations, but of individual citizens, which is also typical of political parties. So in this sense, and according to the wording of the Act, both political entities can be considered both political movements and political parties, so the dilemma persists. The situation is different if we start from the most general political-sociological definition of a political party and a political movement. According to this definition, a political party is a formal organisation of persons whose object is to seize and subsequently maintain power through that party and who use that power alone or in coalition with other parties to promote the collective as well as individual interests and goals of the party and its members, and also to promote the interests of the social groups represented by the party (Sopóci 2002, p. 77). The socio-political movement is one of the forms of collective behaviour, it is a joint organised activity of individuals, groups and/or organisations in order to help or prevent some social change (Sopóci 2004, p. 95).

Coexistence and Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement were thus, although they referred to themselves in their name as movements, in this sense political parties that clearly pursued party goals from the very beginning: they wanted to participate in the first free parliamentary elections and reach the top of the Czechoslovak political institutional system. To this end, less than two weeks after the founding of MKDH, they formed an electoral coalition.

Independent Hungarian Initiative was formed before the adoption of the Political Parties Act, when there was no legal possibility to establish political parties. However, the fact that it originated as a movement was not only due to the lack of a legal possibility to establish a political party. In the beginning, it was truly a movement, its structure and activity was a typical example of a movement with political ambitions. This is evidenced from the statement of MNI representative László Gyurovszky from December 1989 about the structure of MNI: *"The groups created by MNI are not in a hierarchical relationship with the Coordinating Committee. We only want those who support our goals to act in the spirit of declaring our principles. They will not receive*

*instructions from us on what to do. We can only tell them to get involved in the democratisation process."* Regarding the membership in the movement, he stated: *"At present, everything is only temporary. What is now applies only to the transitional period that should last until our first General Assembly. We consider our members to be those who agree with the Declaration on the Principles of MNI, which we published on Wednesday in our information material, and our supporting members to be those who have not signed it but support the activities of the platforms of Civic Forum and Public Against Violence"* (Ildikó Haraszti: Mi nem autonómiára törekszünk! 1989, p. 4).

It did not take long and after the initial "freedom of structures", MNI actually transformed into a political party, not only formally by being registered by the Ministry of the Interior, but also regarding its very nature, since it had similar goals as Coexistence and MKDH. Károly Tóth, a spokesman for MNI, did not explicitly say in his statement for the daily Nap on 9 February 1990 that MNI was a political party, but it was clear from his words as well as the fact that MNI had party ambitions from the very beginning: *"Some grouping, an initiative or movement becomes a political party when it wants to pursue its political goals and to get members to parliament for that purpose. Independent Hungarian Initiative has always admitted to this goal; it has never been disputed! Even now, during the co-optation*[6] *of Members of Parliament, we have made every effort to place new ones in the positions of the resigning Hungarian deputies. (...) We were able to place Hungarians in the positions of deputies of Hungarian nationality"* (Karsay 1990, p. 3).

Thus, as far as Hungarian political entities are concerned, they were parties despite their name, they functioned as parties, yet they avoided being called parties, because at the time the word "party" meant the Communist Party, from which they wanted to distance themselves at all costs. In relation to MNI, this is confirmed by several contemporary witnesses: *"At that time, MNI began to function essentially as a political party. We knew about it, but we did not want to admit it either, because everyone called for a pluralistic system, but the notion of the term 'party' was identified with the notion of the communist party. This play on the movement resulted from this"* (Tóth Károly, Popély – Simon 2009, p. 737). According to one of MNI spokesmen Péter Hunčík, "*the term 'party' had such a pejorative meaning that a normal person could not accept it"* (Hunčík Péter, Popély – Simon 2009, p. 276). Lajos Grendel, another MNI spokesman, recalled this: *"I envisioned ours as a civil rights movement similar to Charter 77*[7]*. By no means as a political party. After all, then everyone seemed to avoid it in some way. (...) The word 'party' had bad acoustics"* (Grendel Lajos, Popély – Simon 2009, p. 136). Another MNI spokesman, László Szigeti, hinted at another important point, namely that, as far as party affiliation was concerned, it was, so to speak, "occupied" in the case of Communist Party members who joined

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[6]   The co-optation meant the exchange of communist members of parliaments – the Federal Assembly and the Slovak National Council – for members of emerging political parties and independent candidates. This process took place on the basis of Act no. 183/1989 of 28 December 1989 and Constitutional Act no. 14/1990 of 23 January 1990. The co-optations took place from December 1989 to February 1990. As a result of the co-optations, the Communist Party lost a majority in the Federal Assembly and also in the national parliaments.

[7]   Charter 77 was an informal civic initiative in Czechoslovakia, which was established in December 1976. The document with the Declaration of Charter 77 drew attention to the violation of civil and political rights in Czechoslovakia.

MNI. *"The fact that there were many partisans there (in Károly Tóth's apartment at the creation of MNI – author's note) played a part in the fact that Karcsi Tóth, with his idea that a party should be founded, remained almost alone, because most did not like it. This is deep psychology. Because – and I would like to remind you that it could have hit a sensitive point at the time – it was inconceivable, even legally insurmountable, that you were suddenly a member of two parties. Moreover, completely unethical. Even today, it is considered unethical to be a member of two parties. And at the time, it was unpredictable, because who could have predicted that a few days later, me and Grendel would join in. When about twenty intellectuals withdrew from the party, both in protest and in order to show some model of how to do it. When they read our names in Bratislava on the square, (...) with many other well-known names, and we were in the top twenty, who passed our party credentials. It could have been on about 20-22 November. There were about a hundred thousand people chanting 'long live' after reading each name"* (Szigeti László, Popély – Simon 2009, p. 646).

Miklós Duray, the founder and chairman of Coexistence, thought the same. When asked why Coexistence is "just" a movement and not a party, he answered: *"We thought that the Hungarians, as well as other nations, lived in the part of Europe where the one-party system ruled, so they could sober up from 'partisanship'. That is why we have decided to set up a political movement in order to organise the lives of national minorities more successfully. Of course, if the majority of the supporting membership wishes, Coexistence can be transformed into a party at any time"* (Miklósi 1990, p. 2).

The founders of MKDH also probably wanted to avoid the term "party" when, in point 8 of their program published in March 1990, they declared with an exclamation mark that *"our movement is not a political party!"*, although the same program stated in point 9 that *"individual movements and political parties organise the participation of people in the administration of the state"*, which practically means acknowledging the party character of MKDH – it pursued exactly the same goal, in terms of Christian understanding of public life, according to which it is the duty of believers to *"unify their civic activities in the interests of the best possible public good"* (point 7 of the agenda).

### The parties were built on different social groups

From the point of view of shaping political identity and future mutual relations, it was crucial that these three political parties were built on the basis of different social groups. MNI was formed in a revolutionary atmosphere mainly from the circles of young members of the intelligentsia (among them several former members of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia[8]) and university students. Its local groups were formed after the establishment of MNI, that is, after November 1989, and were usually founded by those who were in opposition to the communist regime, including its local representatives.

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[8]  On 28 December 1989, the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia issued a statement suspending its activities due to the changed political situation (Popély – Simon 2009, p. 789).

Especially at the beginning (before the establishment of MKDH and Coexistence), many joined MNI, whose number of members was gradually increasing.[9] However, it did not have a ready-made, even pre-existing mass base, such as Coexistence, and partly also MKDH, i.e. it did not have its "predecessor organisations". In the words of Károly Tóth, MNI was built on its own and *"never needed help in organising itself. It did not need to be organised by any other organisation, and it did not have to turn to the pastors to fill the reverent silence of the churches with political agitation"* (Tóth 1990, p. 5). He was alluding to Csemadok[10] and the Church helping the other two Hungarian political entities. But according to the Secretary General of the Csemadok Regional Committee, Sándor Neszméri, *"Csemadok has provided initial assistance to all domestic Hungarian associations and movements so that they can stand on their own two feet. Csemadok's district committees were also among the organisers and supporters of rural groups and MNI cells, but we also helped them centrally"* (Miklósi 1990, p. 2). However, it seems that MNI did not really want to rely on Csemadok: *"As far as Csemadok is concerned, we have drawn a sharp line between culture and politics, because merging them harms both. Therefore, we did not even try to build our movement on the basis of Csemadok or its functioning mechanism, it would be contrary to our above-mentioned principle and we would consider it unfair"* (Szilvássy 1990, p. 4).

In terms of the existence of MKDH's predecessor organisations, it represented a transition between MNI and Coexistence. According to then-MKDH chief adviser Péter Püspöki Nagy, *"the Christian Democratic Movement emerged from a strongly religious background, (...) the previous period of prohibiting religion, the direction of the orientation of a society devoid of a political regime that restricted freedom of religion, were the framework in which MKDH was actually founded"* (Popély – Simon 2009, p. 537). Prior to the founding of MKDH, an appeal was published on 30 December 1989 in the daily Új Szó to the *"Hungarian-speaking Christian population of Czechoslovakia"*, in which, among others, well-known Hungarian intellectuals (e.g. at the time the very popular writer Katalin Ordódy) called for the establishment of Hungarian Christian Democratic clubs (MKDK) based on the model of Slovak Christian Democratic clubs. However, as Gábor Agárdy, one of the founders of MKDH, writes, there were already local Christian-based groups formed by believing citizens before 1989, meaning that *"the No-*

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9   According to a report from the MNI press conference held in Bratislava on 6 December 1989, it had several thousand members at the time, especially in south-western Slovakia (Alapelvek és célok 1989, pp. 1–2). In an interview with the daily Új Szó in February, MNI spokesman Károly Tóth answered a question about the number and composition of MNI membership*: "It is necessary to say goodbye to the idea that the strength of a party or political movement is in the number of members. (...) I do not intend to answer the question of how many members we have, because I think that is the internal matter of our movement. Our movement is very strong in the West and Central Slovakia region. We still have work to do in the east. After all, the fact that our movement in the vicinity of Košice and Medzibodrožie was less successful than elsewhere can be due to the malicious twisting of our discussions with the Csemadok leadership. When we warned Csemadok against political involvement, some people there explained it as saying that we want to liquidate Csemadok."* (Szilvássy 1990, p. 4). According to information in Szabad Kapacitás, in January 1990 MNI had 34 local organisations (Szabad Kapacitás, 1990/1, p. 8).

10  It was a mass organisation in support of cultural activities, founded in 1949. Its name in translation at that time meant Czechoslovak Hungarian Workers' Cultural Association (Csehszlovákiai Magyar Dolgozók Kultúregyesülete in Hungarian). It also exists today under the name Szlovákiai Magyar Társadalmi és Közművelődési Szövetség – Csemadok (Hungarian Social and Cultural Association of Slovakia in translation).

*vember* 1989 change did not reach people who professed Christian ideas completely unprepared. *There were already smaller groups that maintained contacts, albeit not political, but religious, indeed, without any higher organisation"* (Agárdy, K. Cséfalvay 1995, p. 23). Another Christian intellectual, László Gyurgyík, points to the previous existence of these groups, too: *"The background was formed by parish circles, acolytes who think to some extent similar to intellectuals, priests, etc."* (Popély – Simon 2009, p. 154). So they were real existing groups, but they did not have a mass character and were not formally organised, as Péter Püspöki Nagy states *"(...) that they had to be organised, that was because these people were not used to organising themselves, but there was a willingness in them, there was such an intention"* (Popély – Simon 2009, p. 537). The appeal for establishing clubs was successful, and these partly pre-existing, partly emerging clubs associating mostly Catholics[11] later formed the membership base and circle of MKDH supporters (Reformed Christians joined the movement Coexistence more often).[12] The number of basic organisations of the MKDH gradually increased: in 1990 it had 189 basic organisations and in 1994 already 308 (K. Cséfalvay 1995, p. 199). Membership consisted of people of different age, education, and social status.

Unlike MNI and MKDH, the movement Coexistence was built on the basis of the finished, already existing mass organisation Csemadok. In the period between November 1989 and the founding of Coexistence, the Forum of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia (FHCZ) played an important role in terms of the establishment of Coexistence. Its leader, László Dobos – who, in accordance with a program statement (A Csehszlovákiai Magyar Dolgozók Kulturális Szövetségének programnyilatkozata 1989, p. 6). adopted at an extraordinary meeting of the Central Committee of Csemadok on 6 December 1989, was rehabilitated together with other members of the Presidium expelled after 1968 and elected honorary chairman of Csemadok – proclaimed on 11 December 1989: *"We were established a few days later (after MNI – author's note) on the basis of 'thirty-three'. (...) In February of this year, we prepared documentary material on the situation of the Hungarian national minority in Slovakia, together with proposed solutions.[13] There were thirty-three of us who have signed this document, hence the name. At the time, thirty-three signatories testified about their openness, determination, and sense of responsibility, at a time when the signing of such materials was not praised but persecuted. It was the moral basis on which we built when creating the Forum of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. So the start and the*

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[11] This does not mean that Catholics preferred only MKDH. Péter Püspöki Nagy remembers this: *"The other Hungarian parties, of course, set different goals and there were several who had to consider that from the offer of the three parties that existed at the time, which they should prefer"* (Popély – Simon 2009, p. 538).

[12] On 16 February 1990, bishop Jenő Mikó of the Reformed Church met with Csemadok leaders László Dobos, Rezső Szabó and Zoltán Sidó, who *"reported on the resolutions adopted at the special meeting of the Central Committee of Csemadok on 6 December 1989 and said, among other things, that they considered meeting the cultural needs of believers to be one of the important tasks. In the future, representatives of the Reformed Church and the Reformed Christian culture cannot be missing among the leaders of the Csemadok clubs. Both parties agreed on the need for the political movement Coexistence"* (A református egyház és a Csemadok 1990, p. 1). Subsequently, Mikó was included in the ballot list of the Coexistence-MKDH electoral coalition as a candidate for Coexistence in the first free parliamentary elections and won a mandate as a member of the Slovak National Council.

[13] The material was handed over to the highest Slovak party leadership on 6 February 1989, and contained proposals in the areas of politics, law, scientific life, education, and language use (Popély – Simon 2009, s. 784).

*impulse came from the 'thirty-three' and I emphasise once again that this is a moral impulse, a community. (...) No, there is no program link with Csemadok. The temporary administrative committee of our Forum is located here. I am not saying we are against Csemadok, or that we are fighting or we have fought against it. We are based on a different basis, but we will certainly find some points of contact with it. (...) Our intentions naturally and over time consciously follow the year 1968, the experience and lessons learned from it. We want to create such a society, a union in which every humane, democratic mind-set and intention can have its place. It is therefore a movement with a wide-open gate, with a wide bank. It emerged and was formed from the experience of 1968 also because the only union we had in 1968 was Csemadok. It thus represents only a certain point, a one-celled opportunity to organise, to connect. We were established to have an organisation that is flexible, simply a discussion forum, where there is room for diverse views, the creation of a program and, where necessary, the opportunity to organise at a higher level"* (A demokrácia és nemzeti kisebbségünk esélyei 1989, pp. 5–6). At the same time, to the question of whether he means a political party, Dobos answered the following: *"I do not mean a party, I mean a social formation fully on a moral basis, which thinks in the intentions of minority being, of course, within the existing society and democracy, and if elections took place, this organisation could have its candidates, but not as a political party, but as a social organisation, formation. At least that is how we think so far."*

However, a few days later, on 15 December 1989, the published program statement of the Forum of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia testifies that Csemadok and FHCZ practically overlapped: *"The Forum of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia (...) identifies with the program statement of the renewed Central Committee of Csemadok and hereby declares that in the future it will operate as a free stream of ideas, a discussion forum and an expert design group within Csemadok. We want to apply the Public Against Violence program and our own national program to our conditions and put it into practical life in the environment of our people by calling on Csemadok members to establish the Forum of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia within their basic organisations. The local discussion forums are to deliver their proposals to the Central Committee of Csemadok, from which they will be taken over – for the purpose of their processing – by the individual expert groups of the Forum of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia"* (A Csehszlovákiai Magyarok Fórumának programnyilatkozata 1989, p. 4).

Shortly afterwards, on 6 January 1990, the Presidium of the Central Committee of Csemadok met in Senec. According to a report by the daily Új Szó, *"on the second day, Miklós Duray*[14] *attended the Presidium meeting for the first time, returning from a one-year study visit abroad in mid-December. (...) Following an exchange of views, an opinion was adopted to ensure that Csemadok functioned as a cultural, interest, and social organisation in the future.*[15] *(...) There was also agreement that in a radically changed domestic political situation, and especially in view*

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[14]   Miklós Duray was one of the rehabilitated on 6 December, and subsequently became a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee of Csemadok.

[15]   Zoltán Sidó, the chairman of Csemadok, confirmed this on 12 January 1990: *"Csemadok will continue to be a social organisation that will focus on enlightenment and educational activities and will support the various amateur artistic activities of the Hungarians. We would like to cooperate with civic initiatives that set humane, democratic goals."* (Új Szó, 12 January 1990, p. 1).

*of the forthcoming new laws to be adopted in the near future, it will be necessary to establish a party in a pluralistic society to create and defend the equality and collective rights of national minorities living in our society, and the economic and social development of the mixed regions and the creation of conditions for education in the mother tongue will be put at the forefront of the program"* (Kétnapos tanácskozás a Csemadok helyzetéről és jövőjéről 1990, pp. 1–2). They meant Coexistence, as evidenced by the words of László Dobos on the XV. Extraordinary National General Assembly of Csemadok on 9 March 1990 (László Dobos: Mi az, amit számunkra hozott az idő? 1990, p. 7): *"The political movement Együttélés (Hungarian for Coexistence – translator's note) is organised. One of the initiators of the movement is Csemadok, our union also participates in organisational preparation. It is a strange idea for me to force this movement on our union, even with a single gesture. It is the sovereign right of each member of Csemadok to consider which party they will join. Nevertheless, I feel the need to express my support for the organisation of the political movement Együttélés. I am in favour of this movement and I intend to support it. (...) I ask the members and the organisation of Csemadok to support and assist the political movement Együttélés."*[16]

On 7 February, the program statement (Együttélés Politikai Mozgalom a Demokráciáért és a Nemzeti Kisebbségek Jogaiért 1990, p. 4) of the preparatory commission of the political movement Coexistence led by Miklós Duray was published in the daily Új Szó. Two days later, on 9 February, at a meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of Csemadok, *"Miklós Duray, a member of the Presidium, briefed the leadership on the goals of the political movement Együttélés. The Presidium of the Central Committee of Csemadok welcomes the establishment of this movement, as ordinary members have previously spoken out in favour of the need for a political party or movement that aims at the political representation of national minorities. The Presidium assessed positively that the formulation of the program statement of the political movement Együttélés was based on the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference, the final document of the Vienna CSCE follow-up meeting, and other documents of international conferences on human rights. The Presidium of the Central Committee of Csemadok also supports the political movement Együttélés on the basis of its own program statement, and since support for or membership in the political movement is not incompatible with membership in Csemadok, Hungarians in Czechoslovakia can be members of both"* (A Csemadok KB Elnökségének állásfoglalása 1990, p. 1; Együttélés Politikai Mozgalom a Demokráciáért és a Nemzeti Kisebbségek Jogaiért 1990, p. 4). Miklós Duray also confirmed this in an interview in February 1990: *"Our contacts are problem-free, because the political composition of Csemadok members is identical with the political structure of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. Coexistence also works with this political selection. If a Hungarian in Czechoslovakia is a member of Csemadok, he can easily be a member of a political party or even several political movements.*[17] *I emphasise this*

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[16]  Cf. *"Csemadok realised that they could not immediately transform into a political party, because at that moment they would cease to be a cultural organisation and lose state support. So they informally decide to provide massive help to form a Csemadok-based party, and that party was Coexistence"* (Popély – Simon 2009. s. 516).

[17]  The use of the term "party" and then "political movement" was probably not a matter of chance here, as membership in several political movements at the same time is not mutually exclusive, which is not the case for party membership (cf. László Szigeti's statement on this issue). Miklós Duray was concerned in a way that, shortly before on 30 January 1990,

*because we must realize: if the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia do not support those political parties and movements whose goal is their concrete political representation and fight for their collective rights, they will be pushed to the margins of not only political but also social life. Csemadok's promise to support Együttélés in the election campaign is therefore encouraging"* (Péter Miklósi: Interjú Duray Miklóssal 1990, p. 2).

Coexistence was thus built on the finished structures of Csemadok.[18] However, it welcomed anyone who considered it important to defend the rights of national minorities, including those who initially sympathised with MNI but later switched to Coexistence.[19]

### Parties were based also on a really existing need

Several authors emphasise that post-socialist political parties were not built from bottom-up, but were founded by politicians, originated as projects of political elites and began to determine the direction of public discourse together with the media (Szomolányi 1999). As for the Hungarian political entities in Slovakia, MNI as well as Coexistence were built from top-down as elite projects, but at the same time we can register signs of building from bottom-up.

Since at the beginning of the revolutionary events the demand for change in society was very strong – regardless of the fact that people imagined the change differently, or even many did not even have an idea of what it would actually mean (from contemporary research and the press of the time, it can be concluded that people wanted democracy in the first place), the political force that set it first as its goal, was based on a really existing need (which it itself generated considerably) – in this sense, it was built (also) from the bottom. On the Hungarian side, this political force was MNI. Many followed it because it was the first, because it was the "systemic" force that the people joined in to demonstrate their opposition to a regime they considered totalitarian. However, not everyone identified with the liberal aspects of the political values declared by MNI; they were already a project from the top. It is also clear that they often signed up only

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he became a member of the House of Peoples of the Federal Assembly at the suggestion of MNI (Popély – Simon 2009, s. 789), but at that time neither MNI nor Coexistence were officially registered as political parties.

[18] This does not mean that every member of Csemadok also became a member of Coexistence. Some sympathised with Coexistence, others with MNI or MKDH. However, even before the founding of Coexistence, there were reservations about the relationship between Csemadok and MNI, which anticipated later conflicts between the leaders of MNI and Coexistence. For example, on 15 January 1990, the Csemadok district organisation in Nové Zámky and the local MNI organisation issued a joint statement asking what concerns the population of Hungarian nationality in the district and immediately responding to it: saying in the first place that there was a *"lack of creative cooperation between the Csemadok Central Authority and representatives of MNI"* (Új Szó, 15 January 1990, p. 4).

[19] In the mentioned document, the members of Csemadok and MNI in Nové Zámky, referring to the fact that *"Hungarians in Czechoslovakia are often accused of nationalism and irredentism due to legitimate reference to national problems"* and that *"representation of nationalities in the federal government was not realised"*, wanted to convince *"progressive Slovak forces that we do not want to secede from Czechoslovakia"* and declared that *"at present in MNI (as an organic part of VPN) we see the greatest political power and the greatest opportunities to secure democracy and within it national interests"* (Új Szó, 15 January 1990, p. 4). This was before the establishment of Coexistence and MKDH, when there was only one possible alternative from the Hungarian side, i.e. MNI. In addition to the cited statement, however, the first signs of disappointment from MNI and VPN with regard to national issues have already begun to appear.

formally: they took it as a "ticket" to the new system and many just "turned their coats" (which was not only the case for those who joined MNI).

As far as Coexistence was concerned, the political value system presented by it from the beginning, the central idea of which was the defence of minority rights, was more comprehensible and acceptable to most Hungarians. The Slovak-Hungarian contradictions, which appeared as early as December 1989 and fully developed in January 1990, evoked in them an increasingly acute need to defend minority rights and an increasingly intense feeling that Coexistence really builds on real existing needs. This means that both MNI and Coexistence were built in part from the bottom. At the same time, both parties had their own, clear political ideas created from the top, which they tried to spread more or less successfully, depending on how these ideas coincided with the real needs and requirements of the Hungarian population in Slovakia. However, we must not forget that these needs and demands of citizens and their awareness depended not only on social events, but also, to a large extent, on the way in which these events were presented by the political elite and the increasingly pluralistic media.

Of the three Hungarian political entities, the building from the bottom was the most characteristic of MKDH, as it was based on the bottom-up demand for freedom of religion. This need was met in a short time by established Christian clubs, which then became the basis of Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement itself.

**Conclusion**

The above-mentioned post-November Hungarian political parties in Slovakia represented from the beginning in several respects different political value systems and the resulting different political practice. All three respected democratic ideas, but each represented a different type of democracy: in the case of MNI it was liberal democracy, Coexistence thought in the words of Miklós Duray in the categories of national liberalism, and MKDH represented socially oriented Christian democracy, with the goal of strengthening Hungarian national consciousness, too. Especially between MNI and the other two parties, cleavages have been created from the beginning. However, the first free parliamentary elections were to take place in June 1990, and all three parties had the same ambition: they wanted to become the political representative of the Hungarians in Slovakia. Therefore, in a sharp election campaign, their cleavages deepened. Some of them still persist and are partly the cause of the disunity and division of the current political representation of Hungarians in Slovakia, which in 2020 did not reach parliament for the first time after the change of system. Lessons from the genesis and contradictions of the Hungarian political elite 31 years ago are therefore more relevant than ever.

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