

Géza Herczegh¹:

The 1956 revolution in its international context²

translated by Anikó Raisz³

One of the main consequences of the war of 1939-1945 was the division of Europe in two. As Churchill slid the 9th October 1944 in Moscow at the table to Stalin his famous slip of paper containing the percentage of their respective influence in the different countries of Eastern-Central Europe, he did not follow a rush idea, but a mature consideration. According to this paper Hungary – as well as Yugoslavia – belonged to the 50-50 %, i.e. half Soviet, half Anglo-saxon zone.⁴ But the very next day Eden gave in from this conception during his bargain with the stubborn Molotov, and Hungary was put beside Bulgaria, in the zone where the Soviets will enjoy a three-quarter influence.⁵ What did those numbers mean? It remained no secret in the near future. The Soviet dictator made clear for the Yugoslav delegation visiting Moscow in spring 1945: “This war is not as in the past. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.”⁶

With other words, the Soviet economical, social and political system in the way Stalin has created it during his two-decade dictatorship. The conquered Central-Eastern European countries had to fit in it.

His designated resident for Hungary, Mátyás Rákosi arrived to Debrecen the 30th January 1945, and some days later to Budapest, but with empty hands and an empty pocket. Stalin did not give him anything that could have reduced the general distaste of the communist dictatorship in the population, as he did in respect of the other Central-Eastern European countries that came under his rule. Rákosi had to explain the empty hand and pocket and therefore invented the theory of the “Fascist nation”, the collective responsibility of the Hungarians, which had to entail collective sanctions. “...Not only the country remained the last satellite of Hitler, but

¹ Géza Herczegh is Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and former Member of the International Court of Justice between 1993-2003.

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³ Anikó Raisz is a PhD-student in the Department of international law of the Faculty of Law of the University of Miskolc.

⁴ CHURCHILL, W.S.: *The Second World War*. London, Cassel, 1969, Tome VI, p. 198

⁵ EDEN, A.: *The Reckoning*. London, Cassel, 1965, p. 483

⁶ DJILAS, M.: *Conversations with Stalin*. New York, Harvest, 1962, p. 114

with regard to this, I am also the last to leave Moscow...”⁷ – did he write about his homecoming. Later on he mentioned far and wide the labeling “last satellite”, despite the fact that it was not true! Hitler occupied Hungary in March 1944, just because it was not willing to follow obediently his command.⁸ We should not forget, that in Slovakia Tiso’s regime existed longer than that of Szálasi in Hungary, and that the partisans entered Zagreb only the very day of the German capitulation. But the Slovaks and the Croats were protected by the fiction of the Czechoslovak and respectively the Yugoslav nation and the politics of the victorious powers to put these two allied states forward – just to the detriment of the Hungarians.

Rákosi endeavored at any rate to make Hungary to the most devoted and compliant satellite of the Soviet Union, and in order to do this, he stick at nothing. That is what he wanted to serve with the gigantic “show-process” of Rajk, with the creation of an iron, steel and machines country of primarily agricultural Hungary, the forceful establishment of cooperative farms and the production of gum-dandelion and cotton – the later causing nowadays rather laughter than serious wag. Anyhow, the consequences were disastrous. In spring 1953 one-tenth of the arable land lied waste.

After the death of Stalin, the Soviet leadership made Rákosi responsible for the failures. Nevertheless left him in the position of First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party and Imre Nagy was appointed to the post of the prime minister. (Nothing describes better the conditions of that time than that the decisions were taken at Moscow in the Kreml and the competences of the Hungarian leaders were limited to the acceptance of the decisions taken abroad.)

The country respired after Imre Nagy came to power and a period of redress began, but he was unable to realize much of his program. He had to face the opposition of Rákosi, who – as the unscrupulous master of the intrigue – successfully undermined the position of the prime minister in Moscow. “Comrade Nagy, do not shake your head, – snapped Khroushev at him – because what we say is the opinion of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and you should not shake your head.”⁹ Rákosi commented it in the party-session the 13th January 1955: “...we have received help and advice from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for 37 years. Experience shows that in smaller and irrelevant questions the comrades can be wrong, but the comrades are always right in the decisive questions, there can be no doubt about it. This is what we have to accept...”¹⁰

The “experience” showed of course something else, but the balance of forces supported the position of Rákosi. Neither the help, nor the advice could have been questioned. Imre Nagy held to his point, so the Presidential Council dismissed him from his position as prime minister and the Communist Party excluded him the 3rd December 1955 even from the rank of its members.

Rákosi’s victory did not last long. In a little while came the XXth Congress of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, on the close session of which – the 25th February 1956 –

⁷ RÁKOSI, M.: *Visszaemlékezések (Reminiscences). 1940-1956*. Budapest, Napvilág, Tome I, p.142

⁸ See MONTGOMERY, J. Fl.: *Magyarország, a vonakodó csatlós (Hungary, the unwilling satellite)*. Budapest, Zrínyi, 1993, p. 245

⁹ Quoted by BIHARI, M.: *Magyar politika 1944-2004 (Hungarian politics 1944-2004)*. Budapest, Osiris, 2005, p. 165

¹⁰ VARGA, Gy.: „Igazuk van a szovjet elvtársaknak” („The Soviet comrades are right”) In: *Jalta és Szevez között (Between Jalta and Szevez)*. Budapest, Tudósítások k. 1989, p. 42

Khrouchev delivered his famous secret speech on the crimes of Stalin. While listening to the speech many delegates broke down in tears or became sick, but the text – even in spite of the fact that it became known only partially – shocked the Soviet empire. “The dictatorship of Stalin – said Khrouchev – has not only manifested itself in the politics concerning the inner life of the country, but also in the international relationships of the Soviet Union.” He brought the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict as an example, but there were many who continued his line of thought: “...you can see, where the megalomania of Stalin has brought us: he completely lost his sense of reality, let feel his suspicion and false pride not only with people inside the Soviet Union, but with entire parties and nations as well.”¹¹

Especially with us Hungarians – it has been thought throughout our country.

The mistakes done have to be corrected, taking into consideration the particularities, national traditions, the real needs of the satellite countries of the empire. The real – not openly raised – question was what amount of freedom of action can allow Moscow for the parties, governments of the subjected countries, without endangering the solidity of its zone of exclusive influence. Quite much, said a sane approach, because the ascendancy of the Red Army in the given zone was undeniable, but the narrow-minded, dogmatic Soviet leaders have not shown much flexibility until then, and it seemed problematic that they would be able to do that in the future.

The short chronology of the events is the following:

In Poland, the 13th October 1956, Vladislav Gomulka – who was kept in house custody until then – became First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party. The Soviet divisions present there were put into alert, but Khrouchev – realizing the leaders of the PUWP were united and determined – accepted the decision the 22nd October 1956 and Gomulka reassured him about his commitment to the socialist (communist) system and the Pact of Warsaw. In Hungary a similar solution has been under preparation. The overwhelming majority of the population wanted Imre Nagy as the head of the government, but the dogmatists of the Party, the former henchmen of Rákosi, raised conditions to his return, claiming from him a so-called self-criticism, Imre Nagy refused to do. The 23rd October in the early afternoon started the –first prohibited, later permitted – demonstration of the university students in order to show their solidarity with the Polish people, to which demonstration – it is no exaggeration! – hundreds of thousands of people of the population of Budapest joined. Imre Nagy was urgently asked to come to the Parliament, but he only arrived there in the evening, and he could not any more quieten the crowd gathered together on the Kossuth Place. The radio speech of Ernő Gerő acting First Secretary of the Party, in which he called the demonstrators a “fascist mob”, just added fuel to the fire. A part of the crowd went to the so-called Procession Place, where – after trying for hours – succeeded to hurl down the gigantic statute of Stalin, symbol of the tyranny for the population of Budapest, other groups went to the building of the radio, to achieve the publication of their – quite moderate – demands. It was there that the first shots went off in the late evening hours. The revolution has irrevocably begun. The 24th October in the early hours, the Soviet tanks were already tramping on the streets of Budapest.

¹¹ KHROUSCHEV, N.S.: *A személyi kultuszról és következményeiről (About the personal cult and its consequences)*. Budapest, Kossuth, 1988, p. 64-65

What happened until then, could have been considered as “home affairs”, but got an “international” character with the appearance of the Soviet tanks. Since the entering of the units of the Red Army on Hungarian territory in the last days of September 1944, there have always been Russian soldiers stationed on our soil. Until the ratification of the Paris Peace Treaty in 1947, this could be seen as natural, but the treaty ordered that – for the purpose of maintaining contact with the Soviet units in Austria – the necessary contingents would further stay with us. When the Austrian State-Treaty has been concluded (after the version of the Soviet government: – when the GFR was admitted to the NATO), on the initiative of Moscow the Warsaw Pact was signed the 14th may 1955, which assured him to keep armed forces on the territories of the satellite states.

Consequently in October 1956 it was in accordance with the Warsaw Pact that Soviet units were stationed at us, about whose emplacement and deployment had to be decided together with the Hungarian government. Who asked them to enter Budapest? It is said to be Ernő Gerő on the telephone, but he – alone – did not have the right to do that. According to the unclear phrasing of the last speech of János Kádár, “I know the opinion of comrade Hegedűs, I know. Who, historically regarded, criticized himself, because he signed the letter, the man who died since then (i.e. Imre Nagy), if I remember right, refused to sign for two days... I also had to sign it somewhere, God knows where.”¹²

It means, András Hegedűs signed the letter asking for intervention, but the 27th October, antedated for 24th October, and – based on the above quoted confession of János Kádár – he signed it too... The dates had no relevance in the swirl of the later events. Mikojan and Suslov, members of the Soviet Politbureau, were negotiating the 24th in the central building of the Party at Budapest, in the Academy street. According to their report sent to Moscow “...the earlier reports of the Soviet military command and the command of the Hungarian armed forces slightly exaggerated the danger... Our impression is that especially comrade Gerő, but other comrades as well overestimate the power of the opponents and underestimate theirs... All the centres of the uprising has been eliminated...”, – but they added in contradiction to their above statement – that “...the elimination of the main centre at the radio is just going on...”¹³

“Today, the 25th October, after calmness in the morning – Mikojan and the others report – the situation has become uptight again.” The massacre of the Kossuth Place had about hundred dead and hundred and fifty wounded among the civil population. Who caused it? As nobody could be held for responsible here at home, the most probable is that it was on the order of general Serov that the shots went off – who found the fraternization of the Hungarian demonstrators and the Russian soldiers in the given situation very dangerous.¹⁴ Gerő flunked, instead of him János Kádár became the First Secretary, and Imre Nagy became not only nominally, but in reality prime minister, who could begin to work out his program. The personal changes were accepted by Mikojan and Suslov (if they were even not initiated by them), and according to their reports, by every indication, Moscow also noticed them.

¹² KÁDÁR, J.: *Az 1989. április 12-i „utolsó” beszéd* (The “last” speech of the 12th April 1989). MSzMP KB 1989 évi jegyzőkönyvei (Yearbooks of 1989 of the HSWP CC), Budapest, 1993, p. 788

¹³ *A Jelcin-dosszié* (The Yelcín-dossier). Budapest, Századvég, 1993, p. 48

¹⁴ KŐ, A. – NAGY, J. L.: *Kossuth tér 1956* (Kossuth Place 1956). Budapest, Teleki Alapítvány, 2001, p. 259-260

It turned out shortly afterwards that it is about more: the total reformation of the HDP's leadership, the recognition of the revolution as a national, democratic movement, the respect of human rights, without which the armed rebels are not willing to stop the fights. The present Soviet troops (the Hungarian units disbanded within hours) did not seem to be neither enough, nor capable to defeat them. After four days of debate an arrangement came into existence. Imre Nagy declared in his radio speech the 28th October: "...the government condemns the opinion according to which the present huge movement of the people would be an anti-revolution. Amid the fights the government of the democratic national unity, independence and socialism has born..."

A new government was formed, with the coordination of non-communist politicians, the parties functioning between 1945 and 1949 reorganized themselves. It was a general demand to start negotiations upon the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Budapest, and later from the country. It seemed that in order to stabilize the situation, Mikojan and Suslov – who were still in Budapest –, and even the Soviet leadership accepted the demand (as the declaration of the 30th October attests it – even in an ambiguous formulation). The long procrastination was – according to the report of the 29th November of the American Embassy at Budapest – due to the equal influence of “the Soviet theoreticians supporting the politics of a firm hand and those supporting moderation”.¹⁵

It seems that after the countervailing of the moderated point of view a delicate compromise was born – or at least its silhouettes appeared – between the aims of the Hungarian revolution and the minimum safety demands of the Soviet leadership.

And the Americans? They were very silent all the time, except for the broadcast of the radio “Voice of America”, which attacked Imre Nagy, mostly in an extremist way. J.F.Dulles, secretary of state, who phrased the slogan of the “liberation of the enslaved nations” in 1952, – though in an election campaign – made a very moderated statement now. He said the followings in Dallas the 27th October: “Our most precious wish is that these enslaved nations get their sovereign rights back and can elect their governments freely. We do not regard these nations as potential military allies. We still consider them to be our friends and part of a Europe of a new age which is not divided.”¹⁶ The text of the speech was given to marshal Zhukov at a reception by Bohlen, the Moscow Ambassador of the USA. President Eisenhower stressed as well that there would certainly be no use of force on behalf of them.

Nice! – one could say, but the message incomplete in that form: And why only a message? Messages do not make part of the well-used instruments of the diplomacy. The message did not contain how the government of the USA would appreciate the potential Soviet conduct stretching to the use of force, highly aggressive vis-à-vis the events in Hungary. Nobody else than Henry Kissinger wrote about it: “Moscow was never warned that the threat or the use of force would jeopardize its relations with Washington.”¹⁷ Documents containing such a warning have never been published ever since then.

¹⁵ See the telegram of the US Embassy at Budapest to the Department of State, the 29th October evening. Titkos jelentések. (Secret reports.) Budapest, Hírlapkiadó, 1989, p. 70

¹⁶ KISSINGER, H.: *Diplomacy*. New York, Simon-Schuster, 1994, p. 558

¹⁷ Ibidem KISSINGER, p. 557

Charles Gati says: “Washington and the CIA were taken short by 1956. It is a mistake to declare that if it would not have been Suez, the USA had helped actively. With what? I was astonished to see that there has been no plan, no troops, no guns, nor a diplomatic conception or proposal.”¹⁸

How the American messages have been interpreted in Moscow? With a never changing suspicion, or relaxed? They considered it as the announcement of the disinterest of the USA, so they have nothing to fear of? We cannot be sure – as we have no authentic report –, but it is of no interest any more. No matter which was the real version, the time passed on it. The position of the “moderated” explains that it would have been dangerous for the Soviet propaganda suppressing with the use of guns a countrywide popular movement supported by the most of the workers.

The government of the Soviet Union the 30th October 1956 – among others on the pressing of Mao Zedong – made a declaration from which even more hope was won. We quote from it: “The countries belonging to the socialist nations, which are united by the principles of building a socialist society and of a proletarian internationalism, can only build their mutual relations on the principles of complete equality, the respect of the territorial integrity, the state independence and sovereignty, the non-intervention into the home affairs of each other. It does not exclude, on the contrary, it presumes the close fraternal cooperation, the mutual help of the countries belonging to the socialist community in the field of economics, politics and culture.”

The declaration did not lack a bit of self-criticism:

“In the process of the formation of the new system and of the far-reaching revolutionary change of the social relations there have been not a little difficulties, unsolved tasks and direct mistakes in the mutual relations of the socialist countries. The principle of equality has been underrated in the relation of the socialist nations because of the disorder and the mistakes... The XXth Congress said that all the particularities and historical past of the countries that started building a new life has to be taken into consideration.”

The events of Hungary were separately mentioned in the declaration:

“The Soviet government agreed – for the demand of the Hungarian government – that Soviet troops would march in to Budapest in order to provide help for the Hungarian People’s Army and the Hungarian police forces to re-establish the order in the country. The Soviet government – taking into consideration that the further presence of the Soviet troops in Hungary could give reason to escalation of the situation – ordered the commander of the military troops to file out the Soviet troops from Budapest as soon as the Hungarian government considers it necessary. At the same time, the Soviet government is willing to start negotiations on the presence of the Soviet troops in Hungary with the government of the Hungarian People’s Republic and other governments of states taking part in the Warsaw Pact.”¹⁹

¹⁸ GATI, Ch.: *Mit tett (és mit nem tett) Amerika 1956-ban? (What did (and what did not do) America in 1956?)*. História, 2006/4, Appendix, p. 4

¹⁹ Declaration of Moscow. A Jelcin dosszié. (The Yelzin- dossier.) Budapest, Századvég, 1993, p. 65-66

As the declaration was printed, it was already outworn. Not only because the point of view of the Chinese has changed in the meantime and they also urged a forceful act in order to “protect the socialism”, and not even because the American messages calmed the Soviet leaders, but above all due to the events of the Middle-East. The Suez-war broke out, which put the Hungarian events into a different light and – we must admit – overshadowed them. Due to this, the doubts and hesitations of the Soviet decision-makers disappeared without a trace. In the 31st October séance of the Presidency Khrushchev declared: “We have to reconsider the estimation, the troops should not be filed out from Hungary and Budapest, let us take the lead in order to recreate order in Hungary.”²⁰

The “hard line” has definitely won.

The summary of the debate of the Presidency – if it can be called a debate at all – is highly superficial. It does not provide new information or the re-examination of the old arguments. A report does not have to give account on well-known, common facts if nobody present at the séance contests them. Why do I still consider as a decisive importance the news of the outbreak of the Suez war in the preparation of the decision? Because it is impossible that the members of the Presidency did not obtain knowledge of it well before the beginning of the séance and because – according to the report – Khrushchev mentioned it briefly: The evacuation “would encourage the American, English and French imperialists. They would regard it as our weakness and would start an attack... We would give them besides Egypt Hungary as well.”²¹

The situation was naturally more complex and complicated, and – as we are going to see – provided favourable manoeuvring possibilities for the Soviet foreign policy.

What happened in the meantime in the Middle East?

The Suez channel has been – since its building – the most important pulse of the international shipping and one of the symbols of the reign of Great Britain over the seas, in the zone of which it had significant military forces stationed. The French equally considered the channel to be of their own – as its constructor, Ferdinand Lesseps was a Frenchman.

And the Egyptians as well, of course, as the channel laid in their territories, but the income from its use went to English and French citizens. Colonel Nasser, the president of Egypt decided to build a gigantic water power station on the Nile. The Americans promised to grant a significant credit for this purpose, but as Egypt recognized the Chinese People’s Republic, J.F.Dulles revoked its former offer. As a respond, Nasser declared the 26th July the nationalization of the channel and ordered its soldiers to invade the channel-zone.

Great Britain and France were not willing to accept it and decided to get the control back over the channel – if it is necessary – even with the use of force. The preparations have soon begun. The USA though definitely disagreed with the acts of Great Britain and France, and tried to underplay both of them.

²⁰ RAINER, M. János: *Döntés a Kremlben 1956 (Decision in the Kremlin 1956)*. http://www.rev.hu/history_of_56/szerviz/szakirod/kremls.htm, p. 1

²¹ Ibidem RAINER, p. 1

Key point of the English-French plan was the attack of the Israeli army against the Egyptian army stationed at the Southern borders of the Jewish state. This attack began the 29th October and advanced as quick as lightning. The 30th October Great Britain and France made an ultimatum to the opposite parties to go back from the channel (the Israeli army, despite their rapidity has not yet reached there), their troops are going to provide its safety. These reached the scene though only four days later. President Eisenhower strictly convicted the politics of his Western allies the 31st October.

A situation developed so which the Soviet leadership could not have even dreamed of, concerning the oppression of the Hungarian revolution. Israel, Great Britain and France attack a neutral country. The USA disapproves of this action, the West is deeply divided, which makes it safe for the Soviet Union – at least in words – to act forcefully on behalf of the independence of a former half-colonial country, gaining the sympathy – and what is more, appreciation – of all the other countries having a similar fate, when it is about getting order in a very tough way in his own field of interest.

“Khrushchev thinks – Micunovic, Yugoslav Ambassador wrote about the conversation with him – that the aggressive pressure of Great Britain and France on Egypt provides favourable circumstances for the next Soviet intervention and makes easier the matter of the Russians. In the West and in the UNO there will be a big commotion and tumult, but they are going to become silent as soon as Great Britain, France and Israel start a war against Egypt. They got in trouble there, and we do it in Hungary.”²²

Koca Popovic told the Indian Ambassador that “the English-French action in Egypt inspired the Soviet Union to go for a tougher politics in Hungary”. The declaration of the 30th October let us conclude that the moderated dominated, but according to Popovic the Soviet government decided after the British-French action to effectuate an already ready alternative plan for the later violent intervention in Hungary.”²³ The British Embassy at Moscow considered the background of the decision to be similar: “...I am afraid that the Russians thought that if the United Kingdom and France can make the laws in the Middle East, as they see it, and they can do so without further ado, probably the Soviet Union would not get many critics either if it acts in a similar way in Hungary.”²⁴ This was the argument of István Bibó in his message to the US president: “It is clear that a new period of the Soviet Union’s intentions is attached to the British-French intervention in Egypt...”²⁵

The Soviet leadership made its decision and the new Soviet units started their intrusion to the territory of Hungary the 31st October. The Hungarian government had to answer in any way. The 1st November at 9 o’clock in the morning Imre Nagy called for the Soviet ambassador and asked for explanation why the extraction of the Soviet troops does not continue and why new military units intrude to the territory of the country. Andropov transmitted the answer of the Soviet government at 11 o’clock to Imre Nagy, that only police units arrived, new military units

²² MICUNOVIC, V.: *Tito követe voltam (I was the ambassador of Tito)*. Budapest, Interart, 1990, p. 130

²³ Telegram of the British Embassy in Belgrad. In: Secret reports. Budapest, Hírlapkiadó, 1989, p. 147

²⁴ Telegram of the British Embassy in Moscow to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Secret reports, p. 145

²⁵ Governmental message, phrased by István Bibó. See: The report of the US Embassy in Budapest. Secret reports. p. 142

did not cross the borders. The obvious lying of the answer inspired the Hungarian government to quit the Warsaw Pact – calling for the breach of the treaty from the Soviet part –, and to declare the neutrality of the country. There has been no answer.

The unilateral declaration of the neutrality without previous consultation with the great powers willing to guarantee this neutrality – if there would have been such powers! – was without doubt a desperate, risky step, but we should not forget: it was not what generated the Soviet decision, but the Soviet intervention practically having started the last day of October – the intrusion of new troops – made the government denounce the Warsaw Pact. If the denunciation or the declaration of the neutrality had not have happened, that would not have changed the fate of the Hungarian revolution!

The Soviet leadership has eagerly continued the political preparations of the intervention as well. They needed of course some Hungarian leaders who were willing to play the roles given to them. János Kádár – who equally took a stand on the neutrality²⁶ - negotiated with Ferenc Münnich in the Ministry of Home Affairs, and went with him to the Soviet Embassy, from where Soviet officers took him to Tököl, and from there to the Soviet Union. Kádár has never talked about the grounds for his volte-face later, as he could have given hardly an acceptable explanation for it. He was probably informed that the Soviet invasion would shortly start, and he could accept the role of the Moscow-puppet or would be victim of the repression after the oppression of the revolution. He was compromised enough with the dissolution of the HDP, the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact etc. so that he could have counted with something like that. He travelled alone from Uzgorod (Ungvár) to Moscow on the plane, therefore had enough time to think about it. He saved himself with taking the role and did not prepare some kind of compromise. The conditions of it failed completely. Though Khrouchev called him “molodietz” (gifted youngster), he was not an amateur in the politics. He had to know what he undertook. The 2nd November he explained himself before the Presidency of the SCP, not denying his former point of view concerning the denunciation of the Warsaw Pact and the question of neutrality. The questions, comments of the members of the Presidency were not laid down in the report, but Kádár would have felt from the ambiance of the “hearing” what he should keep himself to.²⁷

In the first period of his governing he quickly held left in order to cancel from his past the elements for which Imre Nagy and his companions were impeached.

In the meantime other members of the Presidency informed the leaders of the satellite states on the decided intervention. They negotiated in Brest with the Polish, who did not make a secret of their reservations, and in Bucarest with the Romanian and Czechoslovakian leaders. The 2nd November late at night Khrouchev fled with Malenkov to Brioni, where they talked with Tito. It was undisputedly the most important, the most delicate negotiation. Tito agreed with the intervention, but on the question who should be the prime minister of the Hungarian anti-government, argued definitely in favour of Kádár – against Münnich. His person was in the end accepted also by Khrouchev. So it happened: - the prime minister of Hungary was chosen by the president of Yugoslavia!

²⁶ HUSZÁR, T.: *Kádár*. Tome I, Szabad tér, 2001, p. 325-326

²⁷ Ibidem RAINER, p. 4-5

They agreed in Brioni to lure Imre Nagy and his colleagues to the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest with offering asylum, where they would be forced to resign or to take second-third line roles in the Kádár-government. The offer of asylum was in reality a trap – as Miklós Vásárhelyi typified it like that as well –²⁸, which the concerned walked into without suspicion. We are going to come back to that later.

The circumstances became much more favourable for the Soviet government as Khrouchev imagined them during the negotiations in Brioni. The Chinese sent a saluting telegram to the Russians. The handling of the Hungarian question has been exhausted in the UNO with some nice speeches. It is typical that the 2nd November the General Assembly of the UN accepted with 64 votes to 5, with 6 abstentions a forceful resolution which called for the opposite parties in the Middle East to agree immediately on the cease-fire and to go back to the (previous) ceasefire lines.

In contrary, the General Assembly resolution of the 4th November concerning Hungary after having repeated the Hungarian people's right to "practice and enjoy its fundamental rights, freedom and independence" and condemned in general the Soviet intervention, "calls for the Hungarian government and the CCCP government to enable the observers appointed by the Secretary General to get to Hungarian territory and report their observations to the Secretary General." Points 7-8 of the resolution were about humanitarian assistance and put so the whole question to this aspect. The resolution was made 50 votes to 8, with 15 abstentions.

The content-based analysis of the resolutions, concerning the different appreciation of the Suez and Hungarian question – including the distribution of the votes as well – is more than informative. Moscow strengthened and confirmed its control over its zone of satellite states, though for the price of a significant loss of prestige. After the Hungarian revolution the illusion could not have been kept that the Soviet Empire would be the best of all the possible worlds. The deception and disappointment of the intellectual circles all around the world was high, but this had no real effect on the political events.

The change of the international situation in favour of the Soviet leaders has showed immediately in their behaviour. According to the notes of Micunovic of the 6th November the Russians were "gentles as a lamb in Brioni. Now all this is hindering them and they do not want to know about it..."²⁹ The 7th November he had a long discussion with Khrouchev. The ambassador declared: "The fact that Imre Nagy and his companions became asylum in our Embassy is a logic consequence of the agreement made up with Khrouchev and Malenkov, in which both parties consider desirable the diminution of the resistance of the Nagy-government... The government of Nagy has essentially stopped to exist as they passed the door-sill of the Yugoslav Embassy, and this was without debate useful for the Russians and helped a lot both them and Kádár... I am aware – continued Micunovic – that the situation changes quickly, and what seemed good on Friday, the night of 2nd-3rd November today, Wednesday, the 7th November does not seem to be that good... It is not so simple now to break the parole and deliver the refugees."³⁰

²⁸ „Csapdába kerültünk” („We were in a trap”). Szemtől-szembe (Face to face). In: Jalta és Szevez között. (Between Jalta and Szevez) p. 32

²⁹ Ibidem MICUNOVIC, p. 141

³⁰ Ibidem MICUNOVIC, p. 144

Khrouchev and the others went so far that one of their tanks fired a squirt on ground floor windows of the Budapest Yugoslav Embassy's building, killing Milovanov, the embassy advisor with the moustache and therefore resembling a little to Imre Nagy. As we know, after the promise of Kádár that they would not get hurt, Imre Nagy and his companions left the embassy, but the Russians drew them to Romania, then brought them home, sentenced them to death and executed the judgment on Imre Nagy, Pál Maléter, Miklós Gimes and József Szilágyi; Géza Losonczy died in prison. This story is rare even in our times full of betray, breach of promise and lies.

The fact is that the Soviet Union confirmed its influence in the states of the third world. Khrouchev went for a visit to the United States in 1959 – just as if nothing had happened. He talked in Camp David with president Eisenhower about the reinforcement of peace not only for themselves, but for their grandchildren as well. Gagarin circled the Earth as first. The Soviet Union seemed to come up in the armaments race of the two world powers.

And the United States? A propos to the Suez action the New York Times wrote the followings: “The result is that the English, the French, the Israeli and the Egyptians consentaneously cursed Washington...”³¹ It is admittedly not easy to follow the logic of the Middle East politics of J.F. Dulles. (It is easier concerning the Hungarian question because there was no politics like that.) Some of the leaders of the great powers seem to believe that God created the world for the picture of and similar to their states, which is not an absolutely correct statement, but there are not that many grave consequences for them.

The years after 1956 were those of Khrouchev, who – overestimating his successes – started a daredevil game. He reached the breaking-point with building the Berlin wall and especially with locating rockets in Cuba. His initiatives to reform the economy became hectic. The other Soviet leaders had enough of his ad hoc ideas and forced him to resign. But this is another story.

Could the Hungarian revolution have won in 1956? – asked *Csaba Békés*. – According to his opinion, the Soviet Union considered Eastern-Central Europe (and Hungary in it) indispensable for its safety, therefore its handing up could not come forward till 1989. Consequently: the revolution could not win and all the opposite opinions belong to the realm of myths, legends and misconceptions,³² Békés's answer is wrong. The Hungarian revolution did not break out with the aim to leave the Warsaw Pact (therefore its success and its failure cannot be measured on this point), but to abolish the tyrannical dictatorship, to assert the national interest on the country, the respect of human rights, to abolish the iron curtain and so on. With other words: a better compromise between the fundamental rights and interests of the Hungarian society and the imperial considerations of the Soviet policy, the chance of which existed till the 31st October 1956.

³¹ Quoted by SZIKLAY, A.: *Az Eisenhower-kormány és a magyar forradalom (The Eisenhower government and the Hungarian revolution)*. In: *Jalta és Szeuez között. Between Jalta and Suez*. p. 91

³² See BÉKÉS, Csaba: *Győzhetett-e volna a magyar forradalom 1956-ban? (Could the Hungarian revolution have won in 1956?)* In: ROMSICS, I. (ed.): *Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek a 20. századi magyar történelemről (Myths, legends, misbeliefs on the XXth century Hungarian history)*. Budapest, Osiris, 2005. pp. 339-360. The scientific literature of the questions is very rich, in a short article it is quite impossible to give even a short survey of the various conceptions. I restrained myself to those facts I considered to be the most important.

What could have done the USA in favour of the Hungarian revolution besides a military intervention having the danger of a nuclear war, which would not have been in any case in the interest of the enslaved nations and among them the Hungarians? Did the Soviet leadership have any other chance besides the oppression of the revolution with the use of force in order to keep its hegemony in Central-Eastern Europe? With a negative answer many tried to justify the passivity of the Americans, others the Soviet armed intervention – in both aspects incorrectly! Even raising the question shows that the person accepted the fanciless American foreign policy or tries to explain the dogmatism of the Soviets and tries to justify these afterwards. The fermentation of the satellite states of the Soviet zone has not begun in October 1956, but much earlier and both of the great powers had the time to work out some alternatives between the passive acceptance of events and the use of force. This is not an *ex post facto* counsel of what they should have done, but a pure statement, nothing more.

The clocks of the various countries do not go with the same speed and the time they show can highly differ from each other and of course can induce different results. The external – international – conditions of the 1848 April laws expressing the sovereignty of Hungary were the Italian and the German unity. If they had been established during the revolutionary year of 1848, the Habsburgs would have been forced to build up their empire on the basis of the Hungarian Kingdom, in close alliance with the Czech, Polish and Croatian Kingdoms. But the 25th July at Custozza, Marshal Radetzky reached a decisive triumph over the Sardinian-Piemontian army, and it was clear until then that the German unity would not be made by the members of the parliament in Frankfort. The Habsburg dynasty found the time ripe to abolish the achievements of the Hungarian revolution and to create a united Austrian Empire by force.

We know how that after the Solferino defeat of the Austrian army (1859), the Italian unity has been established, and after its defeat at Sadowa (1866) the German unity. The conditions for a relative independence of Hungary were born – Franz Josef had no other choice than to conclude the so-called “Settlement”. Not even 18 years have passed between the capitulation of Világos before the Russian army, which rushed to the help of the Austrians, and the coronation in the Hungarian capital in 1867. Between the 4th November 1956 and the 23rd October 1989, 33 years. Historical analogies have no proving effects, but draw attention to the similar or relative elements of long-lasting processes, whose effects meet after a while – sometimes in a curious way.

Even if it was defeated, the aims and principles of the revolution are guiding now as well. It is typical that everybody wants to consider them as of his own. Here and abroad as well. Even by those, who are heirs of the traitors helping the Soviet armies in the oppression of the revolution, and those, whose ancestors did nothing for the protection of the revolution. For us, it is an everlasting experience and attestation that we were not willing to accept the division of Europe and the tyranny imposed on us. “It was enough, it was enough!” We said it with the loudest voice and not only for ourselves. The poem of Gyula Illyés “A sentence about tyranny” concerned all types of dictatorship near and far away. Yes, there were times where we could be more and bigger how we had been before. That there were times when we could be more and bigger than before, and we could act like a nation. It enriches our history and our national heritage.

The oppression of the revolution and the subsequent period – especially how fast it has been forgotten – made us realize how the importance of Eastern-Central Europe and Hungary within diminished since 1914 from the aspects of the world politics. We found us on the periphery, our problems are not known nor understood in the West. This was the fact most difficult for me to accept while my work of a decade in Hague at the ICJ, where the knowledge of the international relations is extremely high. We had to learn after 1956 again to see always what is happening beyond our borders in order not to be surprised by the out-breaking or on the contrary, the calming storms.