

Arts policy in Kádár Era in Hungary, 1957–1989

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ABSTRACT

The study presents the development of the art policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party between 1957 and 1985, describing the processes and tendencies supporting it. The art policy of the Kádár era was framed by four documents among the various party resolutions, with different weight and effectiveness: the *The Cultural Policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party* (1958); *The Vocation of Literature and the Arts in Our Society* (1966); *Topical Issues in Our Arts Policy* (1977); and the *On the Current Tasks of the HSWP's arts policy* (1984). György Aczél, the main director of the art policy of the Kádár era, played a decisive role in their creation, albeit with age. The appearance of the documents always marked a change in the era of art policy, in close connection with the consolidation after 1956, the attempts at economic reform in the 1960s and the reversal of the 1970s.

KEYWORDS

arts policy, György Aczél, Kádár-era, art and power

The aim of this paper is to provide an interpretative outline of the policy regarding the arts in Hungary in the Kádár era. Within the scope of this topic, three factors must be examined with particular attention: the question of political continuity and discontinuity, the issue of cultural periodization and the pragmatism of state socialist arts policy. The first question addresses the relationship between the respective arts policies of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (HSWP) and its predecessor, the Hungarian Working People's Party (HWPP), the second concerns the unity of the period of 1957–1989 or its cyclic alteration consisting of reforms and counter-reforms similar to those in economic policy, and the third question is related to the conforming or antagonistic relationship between ideological theory and practice.

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Recalling the words of József Révai might help us to address the first question. As the reigning major cultural theoretician of the communist party, Révai (1951: 117–118, 127, 135) made the following statement at the second party congress of the HWPP in 1951: “What does the revolution of culture mean? [...] It means that we must place all devices at the service of the socialist re-education of our people: the school, agitation and propaganda, arts, film, literature, all the forms of the cultural movement of the masses.” On the leading role of the HWPP in this process, he added: “A few years ago [...] our artistic life was full of all kinds of bourgeois rubbish. It is the merit of our party that [...] it ideologically prepared and inculcated [...] a breakthrough.” Similarly, the speech did not leave unaddressed the question of the monopoly of Marxism-Leninism: “The building of a new, socialist culture is not a peaceful process. It can only be developed [...] through a fight against old, reactionary ideologies, trends and beliefs. We must also fight against silent hostile trends.”

Although the official political line of the HSWP was to proclaim a continuity thesis – and one should note that in the debates on the question of continuity-discontinuity some argue even today that the basic features of post-1956 arts policy were fundamentally the same as those of the period between 1948 and 1956 – I would argue that the arts policy of the HSWP differed in crucial ways from the policy of the Rákosi era. The question of the periodization, however, turned out to be a much debated question even before the regime change of 1989. István Tóth (1983a) detected qualitative differences between various periods of cultural policy between 1956 and 1985, whereas Béla Köpeczi (1986: 62–84) suggested that the same period be considered as an undisturbed and unique process of cultural development.

In addressing the third question that concerns the relationship of the ideological line and the daily practice of arts policy, one could rightly rely – as we shall soon see in detail – on some of the conclusive remarks of the first truly realistic and critical party document published in 1988 at the dawn of the regime change, *Történelmi Utunk* [Our Historical Road]. This document stressed the importance of the “permissive liberalism” of cultural practices: “This cultural and alliance policy, precisely because of the unchanged nature of the political structure, stood on the ground of permissive liberalism. This is precisely what shaped its blurry character triggering a continuous oscillation between narrowmindedness and liberalism. The alliance has been made [...] between the protagonists of a flexible cultural policy within the party (above all György Aczél) and the prominent figures of cultural life [...] which has become an important element in the consensus seeking politics of the government.” I believe this characterization can be accepted as valid even today (Berend T. et al., 1989: 53).

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One would be hard pressed to talk about an autonomous policy of arts in the newly formed HSWP right after the suppression of the 56 revolution. János Kádár and his followers were busy reorganizing government work. In January 1957, in the columns of the party daily *Népszabadság*, they addressed the population in the form of a quasi-government program. This program contained only a set of brief theses on questions relating to the arts, such as the following: “With the help of the best exponents of literature and the arts, we must urgently develop the organizational and economic forms which can contribute to the ever richer and more diverse development of literary and artistic life”. It was also important to affirm that “the Government will [...] abolish the division of cultural affairs into several ministries and headquarters and establish a [...] unified Ministry of Culture which, in place of administrative instructions, considers it to be a crucial task to direct, stimulate, support and coordinate cultural activities.” (Anon, 1957).



The year 1957 reflected a confusion in the sphere of the arts. Resolving the issue of culture and education, as well as attenuating the hostile voices of the intelligentsia appeared as urgent tasks on the agenda. In this context, Kádár found a particularly strong opposition among intellectuals and, by choosing a violent way of consolidation, he broke down resistance in administrative ways. I would like to examine the field of cinema in order to illustrate the manifestation of this demonstrative rigor. Some feature films made during the period of the '56 revolution and later considered as ideologically damaging were banned. That is to say they were "boxed in" by the decision of the HSWP Political Committee. For example, Tamás Bano-vich's *The Empire Gone with A Sneeze* (1956), László Kalmár's *A Remarkable Case* (1957) and Zoltán Várkonyi's *The Bitter Truth* (1956) were not allowed to be screened in public. Márton Keleti's *The Football Star* (1956) was released only after reshooting certain parts (Szilágyi, 1994: 483–519; Varga, 1995: 155–156). This was followed by a wave of prosecution among the actors. In stark contrast to the rather liberal government statement released in January, the Ministry of Culture led by Gyula Kállai intervened administratively: 13 actors were sentenced to 6–12 months of silence for their actions in 1956 such as György Bánffy, Ferenc Bessenyei, János Borvető, István Horváth, Ági Mészáros, László Perényi, Imre Sinkovits, Rudolf Somogyvári, Pál Somogyvári, Lajos Soós, László Szabó, József Tamási, Ilus Vay. Arrests and forced relocation occurred in the case of Iván Darvas, Gábor Földes, Jenő Horváth, Gyula Kárpáthy, Edit Kéri, László Mensáros, Attila Nagy, Miklós Szakáts. They also banned the reprise of the radio recordings of 39 actors who left Hungary illegally which caused significant financial damage. On June 25, 1957, the Youth Department of the Hungarian Radio indicated that 85% of the radio dramas recorded between 1951 and 56 could not be repeated due to interdiction, and new recordings required 3.1 million HUF (Hungarian National Archives MNL OL XIX-I-4-aaa 48. d. 51. d.). The degree of the prevailing confusion can be illustrated by the fact that banning was far from always being carried out, not even in 1957, and by 1958 administrative rigor was definitely loosening. György Aczél was given a note on the matter, and on July 11, 1958 he indignantly wrote to the Theater Department ordering them to put things in order because "right-wing elements were being employed." (Hungarian National Archives MNL OL XIX-I-4-aaa 51. d. 65. d., 57.d. 84. d.).

At the same time, governmental policy was bound by various statements and documents promising development in the arts sphere. It was argued that "the struggle to attract different groups of intellectuals could not [...] consist in simply talking about the interest and importance of this social group. Politics had to make its intentions clear by creating the right opportunities and options." (Németh, 1988: 81–82) The prestigious Kossuth Awards, first donated by the new government on March 15, 1957, clearly met this need. Awarded artists covered quite a wide range of the political platform from the bourgeois tradition to individuals with a communist commitment. This was time when, among others, sculptor Miklós Borsos, writer József Fodor, art historian Lajos Fülep, film director Viktor Gertler, writer Jenő Heltai, actress Manyi Kiss, composer Zoltán Kodály (third time), theater director Endre Marton (second time), musicologist Antal Molnár, writer László Németh, actor István Somló, actress Mária Sulyok and poet Lőrinc Szabó received their Kossuth Prize. But this was also at this time that József Tímár, starring as the tyrant King in the recently banned movie *The Empire Gone with A Sneeze*, became a Kossuth Prize winning actor (Gyuricza et al., 2009: I. 133–140).

György Aczél, who since April 12 1957 had been member of the Provisional Central Committee of the HSWP, played an important role in the reorganization of the arts sphere



as Deputy Minister of Culture. At this time Gyula Kállai was the chief cultural politician of the Party, who from the beginning of 1957 until January 1958 held the position of the Secretary of the Central Committee of the HSWP in charge of human resource affairs and as Minister of Culture. Originally a journalist, Kállai was one of the most retrograde ideologues of the Kádár government and was amongst the most ruthless retaliators of the “counter-revolution”. He was also in charge of taking administrative actions against the intelligentsia. This activity is clearly reflected in his speeches and articles produced at the time. Among these, an article published in *Népszabadság* on the August 4, 1957 (*About the Intellectuals and our Cultural Policy*), his speech given at the National Assembly on April 18, 1958 (*For the Socialist Culture*), and his talk at the Political Academy of the Party announcing the release of the Directives of Cultural Policy of the HSWP on the 5 May, 1958 (*The Cultural Policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party*) must be highlighted (Kállai, 1958: 89–99, 152–170, 183–224).

In the light of these facts, it is hardly surprising that one of the most important tasks of an increasingly self-assured HSWP in this period was to take charge of cultural affairs. As a result of these efforts, a party statement entitled *The Directives of Cultural Policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party* (hereinafter: *Directives*) was released in August 1958. György Aczél had played an important role in the birth of this document. Not only did he contribute substantially to the drafting of the text originally launched as a government program, but as first Deputy Minister of Culture from February 10, 1958, he reported about this matter at the Central Committee meeting on July 25, 1958. In this sense, Aczél influenced the birth of the *Directives* as much as the *Directives* reinforced Aczél’s position in the political and administrative management of the field of arts.

The first phase of the autonomous development of the arts policy of the HSWP begun in 1958. This was the first occasion when the reestablished party formulated its cultural program, and due to the circumstances of its emergence, this resulted in a qualitative change in the artistic life.

In the *Directives* a separate sub-chapter was dedicated to the arts. The party declared that it “attaches great importance to the arts [...] and promotes their development by all means.” The document labelled artists who deviated from the building of socialism as influenced by the “counter-revolution.” The text itself has a declarative, evocative and revelatory tone. Instead of drawing upon arguments it relies on axioms. Its aim is not to convince, but to set the course to be followed. Although it stresses socialist realism as the adequate form of artistic expression, it also reflects significant changes in contrast to József Révai’s cultural-revolutionary and missionary rhetoric. For example, the document makes the following statement: “Disputes about style cannot be resolved by words of power [...], but all realist tendencies can and must be supported, because [...] sooner or later they will reach socialist realism. With moral and financial support, we give the artists who serve the people a great deal of freedom [...] in matters of trend, form, and experimentation.” (Anon, 1964: 257, 259).

This phrasing is undoubtedly new. Chapter VI of the document devoted to the question of party and state control over cultural life also contains some unprecedented phraseology: “The main means of control [...] is influencing through ideas”, although “administrative measures are also appropriate means [...] against artistic works with a destructive potential”. In implementing these measures – as one can read in the text – “one must rely on the best communist and non-party member workers in cultural life.” (Anon, 1964: 259–260) In this sense, it would be quite



justified to argue that this document reflects the emergence of János Kádár's future "alliance policy" in the domain of cultural policy.

In the period that followed the fall of the state socialist regime, opinions varied among scholars concerning the assessment of the Directives of 1958. Some of them argued that "despite the enrichment of the forms of consultation, the Directives of Cultural Policy [...] could not continue the initiative which marked the development of a new government program (and especially the economic program) even in its unfinished form released in the spring of 1957." (Huszár, 1989: 29–30) Others saw the survival of the conception of "struggle on two fronts" in the dual argumentation of the Directives, insofar as "despite its similarity to Marxist-Lukácsian-Zhdanovist phraseology, the text was fundamentally different from Révai's idea of the socialist cultural revolution in 1948, because it stood on a pragmatist platform, rather than on an ideological platform. Although it talked a great deal about socialist realism, cultural partisanship, and populist spirit, [...] in practice [...] it offered the possibility of a more peaceful, conciliatory cultural cohabitation instead of 'banning' hostile ideologies." (Szabó B., 1995).

I would argue for the latter position, and would also emphasize that one should examine the text of the Directives in a larger context. For the main objective of the document was prevention, the purpose of which was to serve as a general framework for cultural management and intellectuals in the field of the arts, and to prevent political extremes from emerging from both right-wing or left-wing directions (Standeisky, 1996: 394). From this angle, one should also recall the evaluation of the document *Our Historical Path* which states: "The conception and avowal in principle of the policy of seeking a compromise with the intellectuals were formulated in the highly significant directives of cultural policy in 1958. However, these ideas [...] were put into action only later and gradually, and they laid the foundations for a sustained cultural upswing in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as for a golden age at turn of those decades." (Berend T. et al., 1989: 51).

One does not need to make a particular effort in order to read between the lines. The expression "golden age at the turn of the decade" refers clearly – or at least this is what the document suggests – to the period of György Aczél's position as Cultural Secretary of the Central Committee between 1967 and 74. But the questions still remain to be answered, how was art policy managed until the mid-sixties; was there any connection between Aczél's appointment as CC secretary and the periodization of art policy?

Before answering this question, it would be justified to take a look at the politicians who were formally and actually above the rank of György Aczél in political decision making, even if Aczél had certainly much more informal influence than his position as Deputy Minister of Culture suggested. First and foremost, we need to consider István Szirmai, who served as the secretary of Ideological Affairs for the CC between 1959 and 66 and was an alternate member of the Political Committee in 1959, and a full member from 1962. Gyula Kállai was also superior to Aczél. He was first Secretary of Cultural Affairs of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, and until 1959 he also served as Secretary of Cultural Affairs of the CC and held the post of Minister of State in 1958–60, and of Deputy Prime Minister in 1960–65. He became Prime Minister in 1965, but his interest for the cultural sphere naturally remained strong. Lajos Cseterki served as the Secretary for Cultural Affairs at the CC in 1963–67, and he was elected in 1962–66 to be an alternate member of the Political Committee. Pál Ilku was head of the Ministry of Culture from 1961 onwards, and his position was reinforced by his alternate membership in the Political Committee in 1962. Finally, mention should be made of Miklós Ajtai.



Although he was an economic policy expert (1961–67, chairman of the National Planning Office, alternate member of the Political Committee from 1962), he also became involved in the artistic sphere. In 1965 he took over the chairmanship of the State Prize and Kossuth Prize Committee due to the election of Gyula Kállai as head of government. I do not claim that the politicians mentioned above had an analogous level of political control, if any, over Aczél. But it remains a fact that up to the mid-1960s Aczél could not act on his own in matters of importance. Film director András Kovács (2016: 149–150) recalled for example that when he asked Aczél for help for with releasing his film *Difficult People* (1964), Aczél could only advise him to invite Kádár to a private screening. Aczél could not formally initiate this because in there were several people above him in the chain of command, even though his relationship with Kádár was otherwise unhindered. Kádár accepted the invitation and permission was granted to screen the film.

One could consider the aspirations of the governmental arts policy from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s as utterly contradictory. Because there was clearly a tension between the pragmatic approach in searching for a compromise on the grounds of the 1958 Directives and the ideas that sought to reinforce ideology. The first trend can be associated with the name of György Aczél, the second with the position of István Szirmai. At this time, Aczél's position was supported by Kádár's efforts to reach a compromise in society expressed in his infamous principle of "anyone who is not against us is with us". Although the detailed justification for this appeal appeared in the closing speech at the 8th Congress of the HSWP in November 1962, Kádár first introduced this principle at a session of the National Council of the Patriotic People's Front on December 8, 1961 (Kádár, 1988: 430, 552). The consequences of this new directive were immediately apparent on the field of arts policy. For example, the paragraph entitled "The Results and Tasks of Our Cultural Development" in the resolution of the 8th Party Congress contained the following statement: "We use all our power and resources to help and support [...] socialist realist literature and art, but we also intend to give space to all other good-faith, non-hostile artistic activities." (Anon, 1964: 583).

This formulation is important, because the text of the Directives of 1958 talked about the support of "every realist trend" in the arts as a direction to follow. By 1962, this had changed to the support of "all other" trends. There is little doubt that these few words of change played an important role in trying to attract the writers and artists in prison or sentenced to silence. Aczél was well aware of the fact that the intellectual legitimization of the Kádár system required success in this field which, in turn, required the implementation of Kádár's alliance policy in the domains of literature and the arts.

But there were other concurrent intentions. István Szirmai's influence on ideological matters was well illustrated by the fact that his collection of articles and speeches on this subject was published in 1963 with a rather ambitious title (*For the victory of communist ideas*) (Szirmai, 1963). His dominance was also apparent in the National Conference on Ideology held in the fall of 1964, followed by the March 1965 release of the Central Committee resolution on "The Current Ideological Tasks of the HSWP." It must be noted that Aczél was not directly involved either in the preparation of the conference, or in drafting the resolution. This is even more surprising since he was a member of the party delegation along with Gyula Kállai, Lajos Cseterki and Miklós Óvári in February 1964 aiming to exchange experiences on these matters with Soviet comrades (Standeisky, 2005: 301–302). The conference was organized by István Szirmai, the keynote speakers were Lajos Cseterki (science policy), János Gosztonyi (education policy),



Béla Köpeczi (literary and art policy) and László Orbán (agitation and propaganda), while Gosztonyi, Köpeczi and Orbán were also commissioned to write the CC statement (Hungarian National Archives MNL OL XIX-I-4-aaa 65. d. 140. d.).

Based on a speech by Szirmai, the CC adopted a resolution on ideological tasks which included a separate chapter on the ideological problems of literature and the arts. The document, while acknowledging the value of the artistic achievements of recent years, was fundamentally one-sided in its critical stance. It talked about the “often unacceptable tolerance” of cultural institutions, the pessimistic writings of certain literary journals (*Kortárs, Új írás*), the prevailing indifference in politics and worldview, and the “distorted” views of some of the artistic productions. The resolution stated: “It is the primary task of the Socialist State to (...) promote the development of the arts (...) and to take administrative measures in order to counteract politically hostile or publicly offensive phenomena.” (Vass, 1978a: 154–158).

The criticism of the institutional system of the arts sphere in the document hardly lacked purposefulness. This domain was under the direct supervision of Deputy Prime Minister György Aczél. However, the triumph of Szirmai’s position did not prove to be long lasting. By this time, the vast majority of the political elite and the national public were ultimately on the pro-reform side, and on the 27 of May 1966 the Central Committee adopted its Resolution on the Reform of the Economic Mechanism (Vass, 1978a: 454–485). In July of the same year, the Cultural Theoretical Committee working next to the CC and chaired by György Aczél released a statement entitled “The Mission of Literature and the Arts in Our Society” (Vass, 1978a: 485–515). This document was not merely a reaction to the ideological offensive launched by Szirmai, but in its spirit it was also perfectly in line with the CC’s decision to implement radical reforms in economic policy. What is more, the phrasing and content of the statement were also novel, which clearly reflects their importance. In my view, the release of this document marks the beginning of the second stage of the arts policy of the Kádár era.

The great merit of this document is that it went beyond the axiomatic-revelatory rhetoric of the 1958 Directives and sought to frame its assertions in a logical manner. As far as ideological questions are concerned, the text was worded as follows:

“The prerequisite for making correct judgements regarding literature and the arts [...] is to apprehend their situation in relation to the ideological condition of the whole of Hungarian society [...] Why aren’t we just paving the way for socialist works [...], why do we need to publish or present productions that have a non-socialist, non-Marxist-Leninist worldview? A question like this [...] overlooks the fact [...] that the country’s overall ideological position [...] shows a contradictory picture. If this unrealistic requirement were to be met, and only socialist or closely socialist related works of art were to be granted the chance to appear in the public domain, this would create undue tension between the country’s general ideological situation and the ideological state of the arts sphere. This would inevitably lead to the overriding of administrative constraints and, in the final analysis, would hinder theoretical debate and a valuable struggle in the field of ideas.” (Vass, 1978a: 487)

To be sure, the authors of this party resolution wentne as far as was possible within the framework of the political system: they defended non-Marxist ideology in order to preserve the supremacy of Marxist critique. I would argue that by doing this, they even went beyond the limits of ideological pragmatism and thus arrived at the threshold of being critical towards the regime itself. At least it was quite similar in spirit to the way in which the implementation of the new economic mechanism implicitly denied the omnipotence of the socialist economy.



Let us make a further step. On the question of party and state governance of literature and the arts, the document reads as follows: “In the sphere of the arts party leadership means primarily ideological persuasion and debate [...] Works that are politically non-hostile and possess humanist values may also be published and presented, even though they are more or less opposed to Marxism-Leninism and socialist realism. The reason for this is not some kind of ideological ‘leniency’, but the fact that [...] they cannot be overcome by means of prohibition, only by open debate.” (Vass, 1978a: 509) The principles of political control over the arts had stemmed from the following line of thought: “Management and administration must [...] choose what is supported [...], what is accepted, and, ultimately, what is rejected.” (Vass, 1978a: 509)

Looking back at the last decades of the cultural policy ruled by the HSWP, it is easy to appreciate the significance of this phrasing. In fact, what they formulated was nothing less than the famous policy of the so called “three T’s” (based on the Hungarian words *támogatás* [support], *tűrés* [tolerance], *tiltás* [prohibition]). From this point onward, and until the last days of the political monopoly of the HSWP in Hungary, most debates on cultural policy and the arts practically centered around a narrower or broader interpretation of the category of “toleration”. In this context, the analysis of the situation given in the document *Our Historical Way* seems appropriate insofar as it argues that “The greatest value of cultural policy was to provide the conditions for a process of development. In comparison with the socialist countries, it provided unique conditions for scientific and artistic creation. [...] Support and tolerance [...] were accompanied by the continuous presence of [...] prohibition. Prohibition was intended both to “keep the control” over cultural processes and, paradoxically, to provide a greater degree of freedom, but also to enforce the endorsement of existing political orthodoxy.” (Berend T. et al., 1989: 52–53) All of this, to be sure, conferred a tremendous amount of personal influence. to György Aczél, the head of cultural policy.

Another part of the 1966 party resolution also deserves a closer look. Indeed, there is a set of statements in this document which were specifically intended to represent the practical (and not merely intellectual) implementation of economic reform. “The democratic and decentralized structure of party and state governance is a direct result of the method of theoretical guidance” – says the text and goes on to assert that, “The forums and institutions [...] of the arts should continue and foster good initiatives and [...] develop a remuneration and price policy that more effectively support artistic objectives, taking into account the principles of the reform of economic management.” (Vass, 1978a: 511, 514) In fact, such economic and financial subsidising of the arts was unprecedented in this period. The cultural policy overseen by Aczél was far from ungenerous in this regard. As a result, by the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the arts and their institutions had gained strength, as well as international prestige, and in some cases (such as film production) even reached world standards (Köpeczi, 1975: 141–169; Köpeczi, 1986: 100–121; Kalmár, 2014: 259–268; Rainer M., 2004: 427–505). In the latter case, the transformation of the institutional system of film production played an important role in this process (Kondor, 1969). In other cases, such as the theater sector, change was implemented through the reform of state administration: a joint decree issued by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Economics in 1968 regulated the system of financial incentives for theaters and stage institutions.

The 9th congress of the HSWP in December 1966 approved a document entitled “On the Mission of Literature and the Arts in our Society” along with the principle of the “three T’s”. Paragraph 31 of the congress resolution stated: “We support socialist and other humanist works



intended to cultivate the masses and endorse politically and ideologically non-hostile endeavors, but exclude from our cultural life politically hostile, anti-humanist manifestations or those fit to damage public moral. The leadership [...] must [...] determine what we support, what we approve of, and what we reject.” (Vass, 1978a: 564) Béla Köpeczi later wrote that the principle of the “three T’s” first appeared in this document, but it is clear that the resolution published earlier in July had already noticeably drawn upon this threefold categorization (Köpeczi, 1986: 72).

The 9th Party Congress brought victory for Aczél’s political line, although his formal position had not changed. At the congress, however, István Szirmai (who remained a member of the Political Committee) resigned from his position as ideological secretary of the CC, and was replaced by Árpád Pullai. In any case, the change in power relations is well illustrated by the fact that Aczél had previously written a text proposal for Szirmai’s speech at the congress (Hungarian National Archives MNL OL XIX-I-4-aaa 66. d. 151. d.). Aczél’s formal advancement in the party rank was predictable, all the more so because Lajos Cseterki, who as secretary oversaw the Joint Department for Science, Public Education and Culture, was left out of the Political Committee during the congress, which made likely his departure from party leadership. Indeed, Pullai could have taken control of the cultural sphere, but in the end this did not turn out to be the case. On April 12, 1967, György Aczél became the Secretary of the Central Committee for Cultural Affairs. The parallels to the economic reform process remained obvious. In fact, when the new Council of Ministers headed by Jenő Fock took office on the 14 April 1967, the person of Aczél represented the same attitude of reform orientation in the cultural field as CC Secretary Rezső Nyers; Deputy Prime Ministers Miklós Ajtai, Lajos Fehér and Mátyás Tímár, Minister of Finance Péter Vályi or Imre Dimény Minister of Agriculture and Food signaled in the economic sphere.

As secretary of the CC, Aczél consistently adhered to the 1966 statement and the congress resolution. In fact, he went even further and improved the principle of “the three T’s” by creating the “principle of socialist freedom in culture.” In his speech in April 1968 given at the Political Academy of the CC, he defined this principle in the following manner: (1) supporting socialist art, (2) accepting any other artistic expression of genuine value, even if it was produced by Western bourgeois culture, (3) as long as it does not attack the legitimate political order (Aczél, 1971: 9–11). He expressed his ideas even more clearly at the 1969 National Conference on Agitation and Propaganda, “Based on the hegemony of Marxism-Leninism, we interpret the freedom of culture as follows. We provide maximum support and complete freedom for socialist tendencies and socialist realist aspirations. [...] We also allow domestic and international non-Marxist, but anti-imperialist and civil-humanistic values to be made public. [...] But there is no freedom for politically neutral, anti-humanist works or products grossly offensive to the public moral.” (Aczél, 1971: 64) One can certainly recognize the same phraseology as that of the congress resolution, even though the tone was different. To be sure, in 1969 Aczél still had superiors in the Political Committee.

Aczél was elected a member of the Political Committee in 1970. At the age of 53 he had reached the peak of his power. At the same time, Árpád Pullai resigned from his position as Ideological Secretary of the CC, and this post was filled by Miklós Óvári (head of the Department of Science, Public Education and Culture overseen by Aczél since 1966). Pál Ilku and Miklós Ajtai were left out of the PC, and Szirmai died in 1969. At that time, Aczél no longer had a superior in the cultural and artistic sphere (his former supervisor, Gyula Kállai, though still a



member of the Political Committee, chaired the National Assembly). In addition, Aczél's devotees occupied the lower posts as well. The first deputy minister of culture has been László Orbán since 1967, and the Science, Public Education and Culture Department of the CC was led by the young Miklós Nagy following Miklós Óvári.

At the turn of the 1960–1970s, policies with regard to the sphere of the arts based on the above mentioned principles seemed to be consolidating. Aczél as secretary of the CC sought to regulate the entire cultural sphere. Accordingly, the resolutions of the Central Commission to ensure the implementation of cultural policy directives in all cultural fields were published almost regularly: in 1969 on science policy, in 1972 on education policy, in 1974 on public education (Vass, 1974: 335–367; Vass, 1978b: 292–313, 677–690). In view of the fact that a statement on the arts and literature was adopted in 1966 – even though this was not issued by Central Committee – the preparation of a resolution concerning this topic was the least urgent. Eventually, no such document was produced. In seeking an explanation to such neglect, one can refer to the decline of the reform forces. The first signs of this process appeared already in the resolution of the so called “bisecting” CC meeting in November 1972. It was a protocol in the HSWP that about halfway through between the Party Congresses held every five years the Central Committee would assess the implementation of the decisions of the previous Congress and approve or modify the policy accordingly. In the early 1970s, the conservative wing of the party leadership (Béla Biszku, Sándor Gáspár, Zoltán Komócsin, Károly Németh, Árpád Pullai) carried out an ideological counterattack with the support of the Soviet party leadership using the phraseology of “protecting the working classes.” As a result, the Central Committee issued a resolution to strengthen planning, break the profit-and-pay relationship in the energy sector, introduce mandatory contractual wages and place a firm management at the head of the largest 40–50 state-owned companies (Vass, 1978b: 376–379). As far as arts policy was concerned, the resolution formulated an unambiguous approach: “The contradictions existing in our society sometimes cause insecurity, and in some works the problems of our lives appear in a magnified and distorted manner, in others they engender [...] indifference.” (Vass, 1978b: 386) These criticisms undoubtedly disturbed Aczél. So much so that in a rather unusual manner he was forced to explain himself. This is what happened at the 1973 National Conference on Agitation and Propaganda, where he argued that although one should use the words “support, tolerance and prohibition” in order to better understand cultural policy, the category of “tolerance” must not be shifted to the detriment of “support”, nor should “tolerance” exclude conceptual debate – that is to say, it cannot mean passivity (Aczél, 1975: 213–214). The conference where Aczél tried to justify the party's recent ideological position was associated with what came to be known as the “philosophers’ trial” (Anon, 1989), leading to harsh criticism of the activities of Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, György Márkus, Mihály Vajda and other philosophers, and placing them from the category of “tolerated” to that of “prohibited.” (Aczél, 1975: 201–203) But Aczél was also forced to explain the “continuity” of politics in an interview given to the Bulgarian literary magazine *Literuren Front* in December 1973 (Aczél, 1975: 349). It should also be noted that Béla Köpeczi (1986: 141–169), wishing to summarize and evaluate the achievements of Hungarian culture since 1945, concluded his book published in 1975 by highlighting the need for an “ideological reinforcement” in 1972.

The reform forces were defeated in 1974, but for tactical reasons Kádár did not carry out personnel exchanges at the same time. In March 1974, Rezső Nyers was released from the post of CC secretary, whereas Deputy Prime Ministers Miklós Ajtai and Lajos Fehér were retired.



In 1975 Jenő Fock and Mátyás Tímár stepped down from their respective positions as Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, and Imre Dimény, who headed the Ministry of Agriculture, also left his post. Fehér and Nyers were also expelled from the Political Committee at the 11th Party Congress in 1975. Although Jenő Fock remained in the PP, since he retired a few months later as a Prime Minister, he held no specific function in the Committee. Kádár, for domestic political reasons, tried to keep up appearances.

The “counter-reform” wave also overthrew György Aczél, although he was less affected than others. In March 1974, he was dismissed from the post of CC secretary, but became deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers. Miklós Óvári, who was elected a member of the Political Committee in 1975, took over the supervision of the post of Ideological Secretary at the CC. Aczél remained in the CC – János Kádár insisted on this despite Soviet pressure – but the composition of this top party body (with the expected vote ratios) was significantly different than in the previous period.

In my view, György Aczél’s complete political dismissal could not happen at the same time as the failure of the reforms for at least three reasons. First, the conservative wing of the party leadership was regarded as the main threat the “capitalization” of economic policy. In this sense, Aczél and the sphere he controlled were of secondary importance. Secondly, Aczél’s personal uniqueness could not be ignored. As a result of the cultural policy of the previous years, Aczél had developed a system of personal relationships which Kádár, facing political challenges on other fronts at the same time, would have found extremely difficult to reconstruct without him, even in part. Last but not least, the lack of cadres in the field of culture also prevented Aczél’s dismissal. In 1973, Minister of Culture Pál Ilku died and Miklós Nagy, who took his place, committed suicide after just one year (at the age of 42). This was soon followed by a reorganization of the Ministry of Culture: in June 1974, independent ministries of culture and education were established, just as Aczél often and successfully applied the principle of “*divide et impera*”, but László Orbán, who was in charge of the former post was already in his retirement age (he indeed retired two years later). As a consequence, Aczél, who in fact now held a lower position than previously as a CC Secretary, but still remained a PC member, was allowed to continue working. This temporary decline is illustrated by the fact that the article published in the journal *Pártélet* (*Life of the Party*) summarizing the tasks of arts policy following the 9th Congress was not written by him, but by Dezső Tóth, Deputy Minister of Culture.

Tóth argued that the basic principles of arts policy remained the same: the main task was to produce for the people, about the people, and in comprehensible ways. He condemned “meaningless form”. However, his account of the means for implementing arts policy reflected the changed priorities. Tóth first mentioned administrative means, followed by the options of theoretical debate, Marxist-Leninist art criticism and the independent responsibility of art institutions. He stressed the importance of a public education approach and of drawing upon the experiences of the Soviet Union. At the end of his article he stated: “In the [...] art sphere, a uniform interpretation (...) of the ideological aspects of decisions and resolutions must be demanded within the party. Party-control must be strengthened. In the field of art, this is [...] indispensable.” (Tóth, 1977) One could consider this quote, and especially its second phrase, as a criticism of the policy created by Aczél. But it is also a fact that around this time new intellectual trends requiring pluralization began to appear in connection with the emergence of a new generation of literary figures and artists (Kalmár, 2014: 411–415).



A selection of theoretical writings on the arts which appeared in print during 1975–76 focusing on the 9th Party Congress and its expectations was eventually published in 1977 under the title *Topical Issues in Our Arts Policy*. The structure of the volume expressed the change in priorities. The first article was written by Aczél, the concluding preface by Imre Pozsgay who became Minister of Culture in 1976, while Dezső Tóth contributed four texts, Aczél and Óvári wrote three pieces each, whereas Béla Köpeczi who was close to Aczél had not been selected at all (Agárdi, 1977). In the light of the events of the mid-1970s it is hardly surprising that Aczél was not in a position to get underway a party resolution on arts policy. In any case, preparing such a policy exceeded the strength of the party apparatus now lacking Aczél, Miklós Nagy and László Orbán. However, the party's top leaders were concerned about the incompleteness of the political configuration. Only this can explain the fact that later on, on December 28, 1977, the Political Committee of the HSWP released a resolution on the arts sphere. In my opinion, this document – which sanctioned the implications of the conservative restoration in arts policy – concluded the second phase of the HSWP's arts policy and ushered in its third phase. This is why I consider it important to give a detailed description of this resolution.

Consisting of three parts, the first section of the PC resolution stated that the 1958 Directives were correct, the principle of “the three T's” was appropriate and that the administrative prohibition was only an “exceptional device”. At the same time, the document stated, “The practical implementation of the principles of arts policy [...] was not free from contradictions, nor was the principle of differentiation according to artistic value consistently applied.” The second section of the document sought to make a list of shortcomings that had remained unresolved due to changes in the previous one and a half decades, such as the default of Marxist elucidative debates; the strong penetration of bourgeois ideology as an outcome of the peaceful coexistence; the emergence of a new generation of artists who were not sufficiently involved in public life; incorrect artistic responses often given to current problems and, finally, the fact that “the [...] conceptual, substantive [...] level of state governance has fallen short of the requirements of the decentralization process, [...] the principles of good arts policy have been repeatedly distorted in practice.” (Vass, 1983: 645–652).

Let us pause for a moment in our analysis of the document in question. Indeed, the latter statement is cynical to such an extent that it calls for an interpretation of its underlying content.

1. By criticizing the “state governance”, the text did not formally raise the question of the responsibility of György Aczél, since he had been a party leader for the previous decade. But properly speaking no one else could take the criticism, since of the members of the government Pál Ilku and Miklós Nagy were already dead, Gyula Kállai had left the Political Committee in 1975, and László Orbán retired in 1976. The decision thus named those responsible by making them immediately unaccountable.
2. The resolution implicitly suggested to Aczél that, as a chief state executive, he was in a position to correct the mistakes of his “predecessors” in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister overseeing the field of the arts.
3. However, precisely because Aczél should know exactly that he was the target of the criticism (since the government's arts policy cannot exist without party direction), the text of the resolution exacerbated the tension between Aczél and Pozsgay, by allowing an interpretation according to which it would in fact be Pozsgay's task to bring corrections to the misguided arts policy. In addition, the text implicitly opposed the decentralization process. After all, one



way to correct the distortions of the principles of arts policy could lead precisely to re-centralization, especially in case of failing to put the existing principles into practice. We must also note that labeling the idea of peaceful coexistence as a negative asset two years after the European Conference on Security and Cooperation in Helsinki can hardly be called a progressive idea. This is so even if the state socialist countries interpreted the principle of peaceful coexistence as a form of class struggle (Gromiko, 1963: 79).

Returning to the text of the resolution, the third section summarized the Political Committee's expectations for the sphere of the arts. The document stated, among other things, that "Based on the [...] legacy of Marxism-Leninism [...], conceptual, theoretical work should be elevated to a higher level. [...]. In cultural institutions [...] the personal political responsibility of the leaders must be increased; state discipline must be consistently enforced. [...]. The (...) conditions for carrying out the tasks in arts policy require a consistent application of the party's leading role in artistic life. To this end, the theoretical, conceptual level of control must be raised." (Vass, 1983: 645–652).

In order to summarize briefly the expectations, one could say that the rights were transferred to the party leadership, and responsibility to the government. In other words, Miklós Óvári's cultural and Imre Győri's ideological KB secretaries had authority when it comes to defining the policy, but György Aczél and Imre Pozsgay were responsible if there was a problem in the implementation. Within these conditions the relationship between Aczél and Pozsgay could not be undisturbed. The two differed significantly in terms of age, attitudes and habits, and although Aczél was involved in Pozsgay's rise, the tension between them was always present (Pozsgay, 1993: 43–57; Sándor L., 2016). Ironically, at the end his life, János Kádár ascribed all of Pozsgay's "sins" to Aczél, because he had approved all of Aczél's proposals concerning Pozsgay (Kimmel, 1990: 131). Aczél was forced to adapt to the changed power relations, although his network of personal relationships in the arts field remained intact. In any case, he tried to turn the situation to his advantage by inventing the idea of the Monday meetings led by Miklós Óvári, to which Imre Pozsgay was also invited. Thus his personal influence continued to prevail, since previously he had brought Óvári into the apparatus of the CC (Pozsgay, 1993: 43–57). Another important fact that emerged from this situation was that Aczél took over the chairmanship of the State Prize and Kossuth Prize Committees as Deputy Prime Minister in 1974.

It may be argued that with the 1977 Party Resolution the arts policy changed from a one-pole to a three-pole structure in terms of political direction. Within this structure, Aczél and Óvári created a special interest alliance which made the ideas represented by the former appear unchanged at least on the level of declarations. This situation can be illustrated by two statements. In 1978 Miklós Óvári (1980: 404–406), giving a speech at the conference of arts associations, insisted on the validity of the principle of "supporting, tolerating, prohibiting." In the same year, György Aczél (1979: 111) published an article in the theoretical journal of the party *Társadalmi Szemle* (Social Review) on the experiences of the twenty years that had passed since the release of the Directives on Cultural Policy, and evaluated the principle of "the three T's" in the following manner, "During these two decades [...] our culture policy has been shaped by "the three T's" [...] to signal a principle of differentiation. [...] We have put into practice prohibition, but it has never become the main tool. [...] We practice tolerance and patience, but by this we do not mean [...] neutrality."



Although in its rhetoric the political leadership suggested no change in cultural policy, the reorganization of the ministry structure clearly suggested institutional and personal reforms (Kalmár, 2014: 418–420). All of this was compounded by further changes affecting the top party leadership. The left-wing party opposition to Kádár, who himself was carrying out a two-front political struggle, was slowly ousted from power, with Árpád Pullai and Béla Biszku resigning in 1976 and 1978 from their posts as KB secretaries. At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s the advocates of cautious reforms once again prevailed, and in 1978 Ferenc Havasi became the secretary of the Economic Policy Committee (as a member of the Political Committee as of 1980).

Mikhail Suslov, the chief ideologist of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who had held one of the secretary posts of the Soviet CC without interruption, died on January 25, 1982. The Soviet politician had never favored Aczél (it is typical that Aczél did not publish any of his books in Russian). Such loosening of Soviet control also opened the door for Kádár: in June 1982 György Aczél was re-elected as Secretary of the Central Committee (Miklós Óvári remained in supervising the field of ideology). However, it was certainly not a coincidence that Imre Pozsgay, Minister of Culture, left his position at the same time as Aczél's advancement, and was replaced by academic Béla Köpeczi. The following year, Mihály Kornidesz, who had been head of the Department of Culture and Education since 1973, resigned, and the new head of department was again an academic close to Aczél, Pál Tétényi.

Immediately after his appointment, Aczél began a political offensive. The first representative sign of this move happened at the National Agitation, Propaganda and Cultural Policy Meeting in January 1983. This was followed by a conference in December 1983 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the release of cultural policy directives. Aczél gave a speech at both forums, but in his talks he only addressed questions of arts policy in general terms (Szigeti, 1983: 9–52; Tóth, 1984b: 87–108). What is more, at the conference “The 25 years of our Education Policy” there were no papers or written submissions devoted specifically to questions of arts policy. However, István Tóth's presentation on the periodization of the cultural policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was a significant talk which merits a detailed examination.

Tóth examined the cultural policy of the HSWP not only from the point of view of the arts, but also from the perspective of the whole cultural sector. He identified the following sections in this periodization: Period 1: 1956–1958.; Period 2: 1958–1963/1965.; Period 3: from 1963/1965 to circa 1974, until the collapse of the economic reform.; Period 4: a “Stressful Searching for Paths” (Tóth, 1984a).

Regarding the first period, Tóth's opinion can be accepted, although in my view the HSWP did not have its own cultural policy at that time. I would therefore argue that the first phase should be counted from 1958 onwards. Concerning the end date of the second period, we may also accept Tóth's argument that “the period limit in our intellectual history generally associated with the end of the first half of the sixties cannot be bound to a single year or party document” (e.g. 1962 as the 8th Party Congress or the release of the Ideological Guidelines in 1965). However, in my view, the 1966 party resolution represents a milestone in arts policy. Concerning the third period, Tóth explained: “One of the [...] negative consequences of the halt is the lack of comprehensive analysis of the arts sphere. In the given situation, the December 1977 party document on that sphere can no longer fulfill this function.” (Tóth, 1984a: 37, 40).

This last statement could be considered as worthy of a political rehabilitation for Aczél. After all, what Tóth (as head of the Department of Cultural Policy at the Political Academy of the



Party) stated was nothing less than claiming that the Political Committee's 1977 resolution had been wrong even when it was adopted. Consequently, the area of cultural policy had to be regarded as still unregulated in 1985. Aczél was most probably deeply in agreement with this appraisal, since the 1977 resolution did not really fit into his political vision. This quarrel with the recent cultural past was manifest in the book *Művészet és politika (Art and Politics)* compiled from articles and documents from 1977 to 83, which contained five texts from Aczél, four from Óvári, three from Köpeczi and Dezső Tóth, and only two from Pozsgay (Agárdi, 1984). Following these developments, no one could be surprised to see the publication of what became the last large-scale document testifying to György Aczél's activity as secretary of the CC. The volume came out in October 1984, entitled "On the Current Tasks of the HSWP's arts policy", as a resolution of the Cultural Policy Working Group existing alongside the CC (led by Aczél). And in order that the 1977 PC resolution should be formally discharged of importance, the following footnote was included in the volume: "This document is released with the consent of the HSWP Political Committee." (Vass, 1988: 737–758) In effect, this resolution was more thorough and comprehensive than any previous party document on arts policy, and didactic considerations in its structure were at least as important as what it had to explicitly.

The introduction declared that the 1958 Directives remained valid, but that the new requirements required re-regulation of certain matters. Part I summarized the changes that had taken place in the conditions of cultural education over the past two decades: The level of cultural attainment of the population had increased, the structure of the cultural sphere and the cultural communication system (television, etc.) had also changed significantly; cultural needs had also increased as lifestyle changed and leisure time became more plentiful; people had developed a qualitative approach to their surroundings and the applied arts had gained ground (Vass, 1988: 738–742). Part II of the resolution summarized the "changing characteristics of the evolution of art and art life." According to the document, an idiosyncratic theoretical-stylistic diversity had gained currency in the country's cultural life, but the arts had not evolved in an even manner. The portrayal of recent history was often distorted. The stagnation of the international political détente process and the deterioration of the domestic economic situation contributed to the stagnation; all of this was compounded by the emergence of "bourgeois crisis trends." Art criticism had not improved. The political atmosphere among artists was worse than average, and arts associations were often becoming politicizing counter-forums. The financial and moral esteem of young artists was far below that of the older generations. Communist arts activists were pushed into the background, and the sense of responsibility shown by artistic ateliers and institutions had not increased in proportion to their independence. The resolution made it clear that "over the past decade the directive activity of the principal arts related bodies of the party and the state had failed to keep pace with ever harsher requirements, [...] the development of the arts in the sixties has caused the central management to become somewhat less focused." This interpretation indirectly rated Aczél's post-1974 CC Secretary period as having been of high quality, while it directly denounced the cultural portfolio under Imre Pozsgay, for example by making the following statement: "In the past decade, the coordination between the central party and state governance has not always been adequate." Part II was concluded with two further verdicts: the decrease in the real value of the budget and subsidies granted by the state has been a hindrance for authors, but significant progress has been made in developing international cultural relations, especially in cultural exports (Vass, 1988: 742–749).



Regarding some of the statements and appraisals in parts I and II of the document, one could certainly accord some validity to the descriptions they offer (except for what regards Pozsgay). The analysis tended to reveal and articulate genuine problems in society and the arts. It remains to be seen what were the answers and solutions to these problems. However, before proposing tasks and solutions, part III of the document summarized the “established principles and new requirements of our arts policy”. The resolution stated: “The fundamental method of the directive activity of the party is theoretical orientation. Persuasion and value-based support are its primary means. In principle and according to the logical order of previous party documents on the same topic, at this point the category of “tolerance” should have been highlighted, at least if the principle of cultural policy developed by Aczél remained valid. But instead, the resolution continued: “The Party [...] attaches great importance to ensuring creative freedom. It supports any artistic endeavor [...] that contributes to the fulfillment of the humane mission of culture, irrespective of style, artistic choice and creative methods [...]. At the same time, [...] it opposes any anti-human endeavor that destroys the ideals, values or community norms of socialism.”

Indeed, one can recognize that there was nothing less at stake in the above mentioned quotation than the abolition of the principle of “the three T’s”! Or at least it was about its transformation: the former category of “tolerance” merged into the “support” category. At the same time, the definition of “prohibition” was also modified – it was no longer related to acts of anti-socialism, but to actions against the ideals of socialism. The resolution also attempted to provide a theoretical basis for the new approach: “The artist, when he agrees to the basic human mission of art, at the same time serves the ideals and ultimate purposes of socialism.” Unexpectedly, the document went even further. It explained that there might be differences of opinion between the political leadership and the artists, and that politics may not always be right: “When a policy is forced to take into account [...] short-term interest, it must also take the risk of committing errors.” (Vass, 1988: 749–751).

If the resolution had ended with this phrase, it would certainly have been remembered as a radically reformist document. But this was not the case. In fact, in accordance with the habitual drafting principles, all party resolutions had to terminate with a section on tasks and their implementation. The tasks to be carried out were listed in part IV of the document. Indeed, there was nothing surprising here. The list of fourteen desired undertakings began with emphasising the improvement of the ideological work of the party, and continued with talking about the strengthening of the party’s role in orientation and influencing the arts organizations. Among these statements crammed with merely conceptual formulations only two merit attention: the one that called attention to social needs and legitimate public demand in culture reflected a certain market outlook; and another which stressed, rather progressively, the urgency of “maintaining public financial support for artistic creation, cultural education and consumption.” (Vass, 1988: 751–758).

In sum, the Cultural Policy Working Group adopted a two-faced resolution. It tried to critically analyze the previous achievements of the HSWP’s arts policy, its current problems, and tried to set the course to follow. However, the document could not bring forth real changes in cultural practice in the absence of sufficient time for its implementation.

Of course, all of this was not foreseeable in 1984. In any case, this party resolution may be considered the beginning of the last – i.e. the fourth – period in the HSWP’s arts policy. Its significance at the time is proven by the fact that in October 1984 Aczél gave a lecture on it at the Political Academy of the Party. He explained that the principles of arts policy have been proved



to be correct by practice and therefore only needed to be updated. “Our arts policy does not seek to [...] regulate [...] artists [...], but [...] seeks to clarify [...] the real needs of social development and the social needs that underlie them”. Aczél also reinforced the validity of the principle of “support and prohibition” that replaced the earlier idea on “supporting, tolerating and prohibiting. “More rigor against producing trash, and more freedom in creating value.” – he stated (Aczél, 1985a: 4–6). Nevertheless, the presentation did not deviate from the structure of the underlying party document. Its peculiar style is reflected in the choice of the section titles of the edited text, such as “Alliance with the Artists”, “Democracy and Art”, “Hegemony and Openness”.

In March 1985, at the 13th Congress of the HSWP, Aczél resigned as CC Secretary and became director of the Institute for Social Sciences working next to the CC. However, his influence did not cease. On the one hand, he remained a member of the Political Committee. On the other hand, the newly elected Cultural Secretary, Lénárd Pál, originally a physicist – as Aczél later put it – “did not even dare to wash his hands” without the consent of Ideological Secretary János Berecz (Simon, 2014: 15). Indeed, it was Berecz who sought to influence the arts. His intervention at the annual conference of the Writers’ Assembly in 1986, for example, created a havoc (Kiss Gy. and Szilcz, 2016: 177–187, 213–219). But at the level of political rhetoric, Aczél’s ideas on arts policy were still prevalent. All this happened as if it had been a steady and continuous development in culture from 1958 up to the 1984 party resolution. It was in this spirit as Lénárd Pál (1987: 50, 245) announced his ideas on several occasions. At the same time, there were opinions expressed in the party that called attention to the emergence of revisionist, oppositional overtones in culture, and complained about the artists’ behavior based on “insolent demagoguery”, and hence demanded reinforcement of conceptual-ideological control (Agárdi, 1985: 145–152).

It must also be pointed out that since the mid-1980s, Aczél had become more and more preoccupied with the issue of the national question, including in the field of the arts. This topic was already raised in his lecture in October 1984, and his efforts made in this direction were also emphasized by the title of his book published in 1985, *Socialism, Nation, Culture* (Aczél, 1985b). Two years later, on July 15, 1987, he held his last major annual talk at the Political Academy, entitled “Socialism and the National Question.” (Aczél, 1987).

However, all this was no longer truly relevant. The Party Assembly held in May 1988 suppressed the principles and persons of the Kádár era, and thus necessarily accelerated the process leading towards political regime change.

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