

RÓBERT TAKÁCS

Hungarian Foreign Policy and Basket III in the Cold War Confrontation from Helsinki to Madrid*

Introduction

According to widespread belief, the so-called Basket III of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act was the price that state socialist countries had to pay for the mutual acknowledgement of the post-1945 territorial integrity of participating states.¹ In other words, in order to maintain the geopolitical status quo, state socialist countries had to sacrifice their ideological integrity, which in turn contributed to their decay after 1975. It is not only ‘public memory’ that sees the question of human rights as the most effective ideological weapon of the West against the ‘communist world’, but historical works also stress that the Final Act provided an important tool to exercise pressure on Soviet bloc countries and support dissent groups from the outside.²

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¹ See László Borhi, *Nagyhatalmi érdekek hálójában. Az Egyesült Államok és Magyarország kapcsolata a második világháborútól a rendszerváltásig* [In the Net of the Great Powers’ Interests. US-Hungarian Relations from World War II to the Regime Change] (Budapest: MTA BTK TTI–Osiris, 2015), 328.; György Földes, *Kádár János külpolitikája és nemzetközi tárgyalásai* [The Foreign Policy and Negotiations of János Kádár], vol. 1 (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2015), 189.

² See Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War:*

Indeed, NATO member states as well as European Common Market countries could utilize the acknowledgement of human rights for their own ends; however, this question formally belonged to Basket I, namely the Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States. While Western diplomacy kept pushing the issue of human rights (Principle VII), the Soviet bloc repeatedly answered with emphasizing Principle VI, namely non-intervention in internal affairs, and, furthermore, attempted to redefine the notion of human rights. Beyond doubt, this was the central ideological struggle between the opposing world systems in these years. In addition, ideological confrontation and “information war” between the superpowers intensified after 1975.³ Basket III could also be interpreted similarly to human rights: Western culture and ideas—thanks especially to radio broadcasts—became more widespread behind the so-called Iron Curtain, which significantly contributed to the fermentation of these societies.⁴ Furthermore, Basket III also touched upon the principle of human rights by concentrating on rights to travel, changing one’s country, keeping familial, friendly and professional contacts, unobstructed access to information of all kinds, and the practice of one’s faith. However, Basket III itself was a broader selection of issues ranging from family (re)unification questions, free travel, and consular affairs,

A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); “Unlocking New Histories of Human Rights in State Socialist Europe: The Role of the COURAGE Collections,” in *The Handbook of Courage: Cultural Opposition and its Heritage in Eastern Europe*, edited by Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, Sándor Horváth (Budapest: Institute of History HAS, 2018), 493–522. Also, the first Hungarian volume on the history of the Helsinki process—based on Western literature—highlights the importance of human rights and interprets the frames created in Helsinki as tools to raise the standards of human rights in Eastern Europe. See Gábor Kardos, “A harmadik kosár: a humanitárius együttműködés [The Third Basket: Humanitarian Cooperation],” in *A Helsinki folyamat: az első húsz év* [The Helsinki Process: the First Twenty Years], edited by Pál Dunay and Ferenc Gazdag (Budapest, Zrínyi Kiadó, 2005), 149–168.

³ Melinda Kalmár, *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában. Magyarország és a szovjetrendszer 1945–1990*, [In the Pull of Historical Galaxies: Hungary and the Soviet System 1945–1990] (Budapest: Osiris, 2014), 431–432.

⁴ See Nicholas J. Cull, “Reading, viewing, and tuning in to the Cold War,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge), 438–459.

through the problem of the free flow of information to matters of cultural and educational exchange. In such questions, state socialist countries also had their specific interests and cards to play. In addition, and in spite of the fact that ideological debates centred on such problems, Csaba Békés argues that Basket III in its real effect on the general Cold War process is overvalued and actually can be regarded as marginal on the whole, while economic issues—which belonged to Basket II—were more significant.⁵

This study aims to follow and analyse the diplomatic struggles between state socialist and capitalist countries regarding questions that related to the ominous Basket III, reflected through the glasses of Hungarian diplomacy. What kinds of efforts could a state socialist country make in such a field? Were Soviet bloc countries condemned to a defensive position, or could they find questions that encouraged successful action? Was the situation and policy of Hungary different from its allies regarding issues of openness in Basket III? And if yes, could non-Soviet interests be pursued by a state socialist country? We examine these questions by displaying Hungarian diplomatic efforts before and during the CSCE follow-up meetings in Belgrade (1977–1978) and Madrid (1980–1983).

I will argue that the Hungarian Foreign Ministry ran an innovative and offensive campaign after 1975 that surprised Western governments. However, it was not a genuinely “post-1975” policy, since it had its roots from the reform agenda of the Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, MSzMP), already in place since 1968, and its external economic policy. The Hungarian economy was under the compulsion of capital investments, and was therefore interested in the advantages of opening. Thus, the Hungarian government laid emphasis on complying with the Helsinki recommendations, but also could find fields where Western countries underperformed compared to the Helsinki

⁵ Csaba Békés, “Détente and the Soviet bloc,” in *The ‘Long 1970s’. Human Rights, East–West Détente, and Transnational Relations*, edited by Rasmus Mariager, Helle Porsdam, and Poul Villaume (London: Routledge, 2016), 165–183.

recommendations. At the same time, Hungary was less vulnerable to typical Western argumentation than some of the other states from the Soviet bloc due to its relatively liberal cultural, information, passport, and travel policies.

Nevertheless, Western thematization proved more effective, and capitalist countries could take up more flexible and permissive tactics on Hungarian topics than Soviet bloc countries in general could on Western topics. Also, changing Western tactics after the Belgrade follow-up meeting—and the mutual Eastern and Western European interest in preserving the East-West dialogue despite deteriorating Soviet-American relations—resulted in a more fruitful meeting in Madrid with important compromises. Regarding Basket III, Soviet bloc countries were forced into concessions. However, this scarcely influenced Hungarian practice.

The Way to Belgrade—A Hungarian Initiative (1975–1977)

The Helsinki Final Act was in fact a great success of Hungarian diplomacy. János Kádár drew international attention to Hungary by mentioning Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring socialist countries, but reaching the zenith of détente also justified the efforts of the Hungarian reform agenda pursued from the mid-1960s.⁶ As part of this strategy, in 1971 the MSzMP decided to finance the enormous needs of the country's economy from foreign credits.⁷ In the early 1970s, Hungary tried to spill the reforms over the borders within the socialist Comecon community, albeit with little success.⁸ At the meeting of the

⁶ About the entangled relation of reforms and opening see the study of György Földes in this volume. György Földes, *Economic Reform, Ideology, and Opening, 1965–1985*, *Múltunk* 2019 Special Issue, 4–27.

⁷ See György Földes, *Az eladósodás politikatörténete, 1957–1986* [The Political History of Indebtedness, 1956–1987], (Budapest: Maecenas, 1995), 64–66.

⁸ István Feitl, *Talányos játszmák. Magyarország a KGST erőterében 1949–1974*, [Mysterious Games. Hungary in the Force Field of Comecon, 1949–1974], (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2016)

leaders of the Warsaw Pact member states in Prague in January 1972—and three and a half years before the Helsinki Final Act—János Kádár argued for a real and comprehensive concept of détente. He stated that widening and diverse relations—including questions on the exchange of ideas and information, tourism, cultural contacts, environment protection, etc., that is, what became “hardcore” Basket III topics—were beneficial for the socialist world. Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership were of a different opinion, and rather saw the achievements of the Hungarian reform and the Hungarian efforts within the Soviet bloc as a danger and not as a desirable common direction.⁹ Soon the Hungarian party had to make a partial reversal of its 1968 reforms and, in 1974, a more definite break followed. Thus, ironically, by the time the treaty was signed, the MSzMP had left the reform path that had motivated its pre-Helsinki commitment to openness in a broader sense.

The Helsinki Final Act enumerated several recommendations in “humanitarian and other” fields. Despite general assumptions, compliance with these did not demand a radical shift in Hungarian internal politics (practically all Soviet bloc countries were somewhat shielded by “escaping clauses” inserted in the text) and therefore in foreign policy and cultural diplomacy as well, due in part to a process that was even older than the economic reforms. After the death of Stalin, the new Soviet leadership initiated a different foreign and internal policy—the modernization of the Soviet galaxy switched to a new strategy that required more openness, more exchange, more contacts, more understanding and more debates.¹⁰ This new policy received the label “peaceful coexistence”—while communist politicians were striving most of all for economic inputs, they hoped, however, that the ideological battle could be won on cultural and humanitarian ground as well. Soon it rearranged the structure of cultural imports to Hungary¹¹

⁹ György Földes, *Kádár János külpolitikája*, vol. 2, 129–132.

¹⁰ Melinda Kalmár, op. cit., 89–105.

¹¹ Róbert Takács, “Szovjet és magyar nyitás a kultúrában Nyugat felé 1953–1964, [Soviet and Hungarian Cultural Openings to the West, 1953–1964],”

and—to a different extent in each state—other Soviet bloc countries. Opening the borders were seen as means of promising country and socialism propaganda—and it proved more or less right. “It became clear that tightening contacts unveiled a deliberately biased picture spread by Western propaganda, and life itself refutes it. There is nothing we should feel ashamed of about our social development, social atmosphere, the level of our qualifications, scientific or cultural life and many other. In capitalist countries the practice of peaceful coexistence overthrows decade-old idols carved from lies and distortion.”¹²

What had started as a cautious opening of borders, demonstration of cultural achievements, a return to cultural imports (though preserving ideological filters), and the restoration of contacts between artists and scientists from the 1950s¹³ had resulted in a significant level of physical and cultural openness in Hungary by the 1970s. To some extent, all countries of the bloc became more receptive and permeable after 1953. In that regard, Helsinki was not a “threat” to the integrity of socialist Hungarian culture, travel or information policies, as it had already been threatened for a long time.

Based on analyses made by the General Department for Press at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the MSzMP Agitation and Propaganda Department, Hungarian foreign official bodies first perceived that Western propaganda was trying to “silence” Helsinki and degrade its significance after August 1975. This reflected the notion that the Soviet bloc benefited more from the multilateral forum and made successful headway into Europe.¹⁴ However, by late autumn, Western countries seemed to have defined Basket III as a weak point and pursued questions about the free traffic of people and ideas, and condemned the ideological struggle of the Marxist-Leninist parties as violation of the Final Act. These tactics also appeared during

Múltunk 3 (2015): 30–68.

¹² Draft of the speech of the minister of foreign affairs at the conference about Hungarian foreign propaganda, 1976. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j, box 13.

¹³ See Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1997), 87–119.

¹⁴ Melinda Kalmár, op. cit., 429.

the negotiations of bilateral cultural work plans in 1975. For example, the British Foreign Office emphasized the importance of personal contacts without state control and demanded that every student and teacher in Hungary receive unrestricted access to the library of the British Embassy and commit in writing that the British cultural attaché can make contacts without any limitations.¹⁵ The Italian partner asked for special fellowships to Italy designed for the teachers and students at the Italian Cultural Institute in Budapest.¹⁶

In the spring and summer of 1976, Hungarian officials registered that the Western press had graded the countries of the Soviet bloc negatively for their (lack of) compliance with the Helsinki Accords.¹⁷ This was the period when the first “Helsinki Watch Groups” appeared east of the Elbe—and by the end of the year, the issue of human rights had become more promising than free traffic for Western governments.

On the other hand, after Helsinki, the Political Committee of the MSzMP saw Hungarian positions favourable enough for offensive foreign policies.¹⁸ As part of this more comprehensive strategy from the MSzMP, Hungary took an effort to take the initiative on the way to Belgrade. Between June and December 1976, ambassadors and Foreign Ministry officials handed over written proposals for the realization of the recommendations of the Final Act to governments of nineteen participating Western states.¹⁹ The Department of International Security of the Ministry was in charge of policy related to the Helsinki Final Act, they coordinated the work between the different ministries, departments and national governmental organizations. As such, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the

¹⁵ Information on Hungarian-British cultural and scientific relations, October 11, 1976. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j, box 21.

¹⁶ Summary of the cultural negotiations with Western partners after the Helsinki conference, January 12, 1976. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j, box 12.

¹⁷ Quarterly reports on Western imperialist propaganda. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j, box 13.

¹⁸ György Földes, *Kádár János külpolitikája*, vol. 1., op. cit. 191.

¹⁹ See also Csaba Békés, *Enyhülés és emancipáció* [Détente and Emancipation] (Budapest: Osiris, 2019), 291–292.

Institute of Foreign Cultural Relations, the Information Office of the Cabinet, and the General Department of Press of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were the relevant bodies that worked on Basket III proposals. The proposals followed the structure of the Helsinki Final Act and the lengthy documents listed several concrete suggestions for all baskets. This was a unique action of Hungarian foreign policy; no other countries “bombed” their partners with such comprehensive materials, and there is no sign of any reconciliation between the Hungarian and Soviet leadership on these points, either.

The Hungarian Foreign Ministry could prove its commitment to fulfil the Helsinki pledges in all possible fields and, in addition, could govern the dialogue reflecting attention to those fields where Hungarian interests were deeper and the achievements and advantages were clearer. This was also true for Basket III, where each partner received at least a dozen proposals. As a typical example, the memorandum presented to Knut Frydenlund, Norwegian minister of foreign affairs, listed fourteen separate proposals in the “humanitarian and other” field during his visit to Budapest in September 1976. Three points dealt with visas and travelling: Hungary proposed a consular agreement (C1), visa waivers for tourists (C2), and the cancellation of visas for diplomats and official passports (C3). Only one touched upon family (re)unification cases, suggesting that both governments help solving repatriation claims (C4). The Hungarian document proposed bilateral agreements for the commerce of artefacts (C5) and mutual recognition of degrees and diplomas (C6). Five proposals targeted information and journalism. Newspapers and media were involved in two of them: Hungary suggested that the accreditation of correspondents working in nearby countries should be extended (C7), and promoted bilateral agreements between radio and television channels. The three remaining approached information about each other’s countries: an offer of mutual exchange of texts in publications for tourists (C8), schoolbooks (C10), and lexicons and encyclopaedias (C11). In addition, three proposals touched upon cultural exchange—travels of writers’ delegations (C12),

promotion of literary translations (C9), and agreements on theatrical cooperation (C14).²⁰

The tendencies were clear. In general, Budapest underlined its commitment to the Helsinki recommendations by offering talks and bilateral agreements in several fields, from consular affairs through customs to exchanges in culture. Aside from securing written proof of advancement, it would have strengthened the role of the states and official bodies in cultural and humanitarian fields, which had been the long game between East and West. State socialist countries had been trying to preserve control over any movement since the early de-Stalinization period, while Western efforts concentrated on bypassing such limitations—for example, by organizing events at embassies or giving personal invitations to intellectuals. Hungary listed several topics that had already had their official frame—for example, the annual cultural work plans covered exchanges of artists, writers, and scientists, exchanges of schoolbooks, cooperation between television and radio channels, and existing joint committees could discuss several additional topics. Furthermore, the proposals concentrated on questions where Hungary could demonstrate its openness—like visas, where the Hungarian practice was seemingly more liberal. Nevertheless, it could offer further easing visa requirements because they were more concerned about people travelling from than travelling to Hungary. It is tangible that the Hungarian proposals also tried to utilize recommendations on the flow of information, better understanding of nations for “positive country-propaganda” by expunging written materials (schoolbooks, travelogues, lexicons) and promoting Hungarian cultural products (through media exchange, translations and theatre plays).

There was one more intention that did not show itself in the Norwegian relation: and it was the question of disproportionality in cultural exchanges. Regarding countries of the same size, this was not an appropriate argument, but in the case of large countries with significant cultural influence—like France,

²⁰ The proposals of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry to Norway. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 142.

Britain, Italy, West Germany, and the USA—the Hungarian partnerships showed that the flow along the cultural slope is much steeper than would be justifiable by its size.

In the Hungarian-British relation, it literally meant that 175 books from British authors were published in Hungary between 1973 and 1975, compared to 13 Hungarian books in Britain over the same period. From these 13, only 4 books represented literature. Western politicians and publicists often criticised the Hungarian practice of using ideological criteria in selecting Western cultural goods, but we can hardly admit that the 4 Hungarian volumes represented contemporary Hungarian “socialist” culture. Besides two classics (Géza Gárdonyi’s *Invisible Man* and the *Selected Poems and Texts* of Attila József), English publishers picked *Confrontation* from the Gulag-survivor József Lengyel in 1973 and *Visitor* from György Konrád. The former was played in 1948 in the Stalinist period in Moscow and Alexandrov, and could only be published in restricted copies in manuscript form in Hungary,²¹ while the latter was written by a sociologist and revealed deep contradictions in Hungarian society from the perspective of a youth welfare worker. By the time it was printed in English, the author had already been put on a black list and monitored by secret police in Hungary as the subsequent author of the “adversarial” *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, written with sociologist Iván Szelényi.

In addition, in three years, 44 British theatre plays were staged in Hungary contrary to 3 Hungarian in Britain. Actually, a late drama of an entertainer-classic, Jenő Heltai (*One Penny*) was not shown, only the rights were purchased. The other two belonged to the not easily tamed genre of grotesque theatre and was written by István Örkény (*Catsplay, Welcoming the Major*). In the 1970s, Örkény was the most successful export item of Hungarian theatre, something that rather reflected Western

²¹ Tamás Szőnyei, *Titkos írás. Állambiztonsági szolgálat és irodalmi élet 1956–1990* [Secret Writing. State Security Services and Literary Life, 1956–1990], vol. 1 (Budapest: Noran Könyvsház, 2012), 268–272.

tendencies and not ingenious socialist theatre.²² The data on movies are not surprising in spite of the fact that from the mid-1960s Hungarian cinema was highly acknowledged: this was one of the most commercialized cultural domains, where films from the Soviet bloc offered no profitability and were usually only shown in artistic cinemas, film clubs, and other special facilities. Therefore, while Hungarian cinemagoers could see 29 new British releases between 1973 and 1975, only one Hungarian children's film (*Hi, Junior*) and 3 short films were purchased.²³

The Norwegian answers to the Hungarian proposals showed general Western attitudes as well. The Hungarian proposals could not be left without any response; however, in several cases it took months until Western partners could compile answers—in some cases in written form, in some others during bilateral meetings of foreign ministers, deputy ministers or heads of departments. Nevertheless, these 19 Western governments—among them 14 NATO states—had to play the game of the Hungarian foreign politics this time, and receive the proposals positively. No doubt that de facto they tried to decline the most important Hungarian efforts. Firstly, they almost universally fenced off Hungarian initiatives for the extension of the net of bilateral agreements. The reactions referred to existing multilateral forums. For example, they held consular agreements unnecessary and irreconcilable with the 1961 Vienna Convention, or in the case of textbooks, pointed at UNESCO.

In visa affairs, Western reactions were preventive. Here Hungary could find an aspect in which numbers were on its side. They issued visas in 48 hours and offered immediate visas at border crossings, including at the Ferihegy International

²² Róbert Takács, "Az abszurd dráma Magyarországon az 1960-as és az 1970-es években [Absurd Drama in Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s]," in *Homoklapátolás nemesércért* [Shoveling Sand for Precious Metals], edited by Eszter Balázs, Gábor Koltai, and Róbert Takács (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2018), 224.

²³ Information on Hungarian-British cultural and scientific relations, October 11, 1976. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j, box 21.

Airport and Danube harbours, while Western partners usually answered visa claims only in one—even two—weeks (some, like Norway, in 96 hours) and offered no visas at border checkpoints. Regarding this point, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry achieved what it wanted: discussions went around consular affairs and visas, where Western governments were not willing to make significant changes to decrease the waiting periods. At least the questions of travel restrictions and passport policy was not on the agenda. Nevertheless, Hungary was judged as “liberal” in travelling. Its passport regulations had been public since 1970 and in spite of the fact that 4–5% of passport claims were still refused, millions of Hungarians crossed the borders in the 1970s every year (in 1975, 3.5 million; in 1978, 1979 and 1980, more than 5 million each year), still only a minority of them (7–9%, 252,000 to 470,000) visited the West. Still it meant border traffic almost doubled towards Austria in the five years after Helsinki.²⁴

When it came to the topic of exchanges of textual materials about and from Hungary, urged by Budapest in the first round before the Belgrade follow-up, Western reactions were defensive, denying even the competence of their governments. Practically all of them pronounced a lack of competence in the fields of translation, lexicons, tourist guides and even schoolbooks and early electronic media. When it was about printed materials, they emphasized the inviolability of private enterprise in publishing, declining any action to affect content or promote the reception of literary volumes. When it was about topics where national institutions—radios, televisions, tourist boards, academies—were operating, they insisted on not violating their independence. The American reaction meant another lesson: the State Department did not bother answering Hungarian proposals point-by-point: they handed over a counter-proposal that mostly neglected the cultural topics of Basket III. During bilateral negotiations, the American press and cultural attaché,

²⁴ Péter Bencsik and György Nagy, *A magyar úti okmányok története 1945–1989* [The History of Hungarian Travel Documents, 1945–1989] (Budapest: Tipico Design, 2005), 70–72; 238.

S. F. Dachi, emphasized the responsibility of Hungarian agents: “Hungarian corporations have to diffuse Hungarian culture with American methods in the USA.” He referred to the Individual Visitors Program of the State Department and underlined the necessity of intensive marketing research in the cultural field.²⁵ This attitude was different from the concept sketched by Leonard Marx, who visited several Eastern European countries directly after signing the Helsinki Final Act. At that time, the chairperson of the International Advisory Committee on Education and Culture—noticing that all Soviet bloc partners complained about the disproportionality of cultural exchange with detailed data—found that raising the attention of American private corporations to this question would not curtail freedom of enterprise. He also stressed that NATO countries should be able to prove their superiority in all topics of Basket III including cultural aspects.²⁶

Hungary did surprise the Western participants of the Helsinki process, but did not achieve many decisive outcomes with the written proposals at that point. “The best defence is a good offense”—Hungarian foreign policy makers followed the old rule, and Western negotiators had to admit their diplomatic creativity. As Albert Weitnauer, Secretary General of the Swiss Federal Political Department, put it about his Hungarian partners: “Your consistency in foreign policy is compelling ... The witty method, how you can always distil some positive elements from the international situation is part of this consistency. It makes it possible to draw attention to all that is important not only for a small state, but for the whole of European and world politics.”²⁷ To a limited scope, some Western countries tried to “copy” the Hungarian method: for example, French diplomats

²⁵ Memorandum on the Hungarian-American CSCE-consultation, April 1, 1977. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1977, box 77.

²⁶ The extract of the report of Leonard Marx. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1977, box 77.

²⁷ Records of the February 22–25, 1977, consultation in Switzerland. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 142.

handed over a memorandum to Poland, limited to the crucial issues of information and human relations.²⁸

But all participants were aware that there were three different stages to fulfil in the Helsinki recommendations, and a bilateral agreement was only one of them: the medium range one between multilateral forums and individual efforts. The Hungarian government also put emphasis on making palpable advancement on its own terms. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs compiled a list of positive measures taken by Hungarian official bodies in the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act.²⁹ In the field of personal contacts and movement, the following achievements—although in reality minor modifications—were listed: a new border crossing point was opened with Austria (at Bucsu), and the existing ones had been improved; customs regulations were eased (raising custom-free limits, decreasing control and administrative burdens), and foreign currency limits were raised. The necessary modifications were on the agenda of the Political Committee in November 1976,³⁰ but new statutory rules were only brought in 1978 after the Belgrade Meeting. As for family reunification, which was one of the issues where Western governments—first of all the United States—could attack Soviet bloc countries with exact data, Hungary performed fair enough. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that 92% of emigration applications ended positively and mentioned 20 pending cases, suggesting to solve as many as possible before Belgrade. In the question of visa affairs, the ministry could refer to its written proposals for consular and legal aid agreements and for the abolishment of visas for diplomatic and ministerial passports. There was one significant breakthrough, though: Hungary and Austria were on the way to abolish visa duties, which encouraged the Hungarian side to make similar proposals— independently from its actual chances—to other participants.

²⁸ Memorandum on the appointment of attaché Zielinski, March 25, 1977. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1977, box 77.

²⁹ Report on the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act and the Directives for the Hungarian Delegation in Belgrade, May 9, 1977, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 142.

³⁰ MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 5/704. ő. e.

Another neutral country that could serve as good example for cooperation between countries of different social systems was Finland. Hungary and Finland signed state protocols on cooperation in youth tourism and contacts, as youth mobility was also enlisted in the Helsinki recommendations.

In the field of press relations and the exchange of information, the ministry highlighted the quick visa administration for foreign correspondents and the technical help provided for radio and television crews. Actually—though not only in relation to Hungary—such measures as obligatory drivers and translators were seen as restrictions on the free movement of journalists. Hungary also emphasized its efforts to promote radio and television contacts and the exchange of programmes—to demonstrate openness toward exchanges of this kind, the Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs urged exchanges of data on programs and broadcast minutes. Hungarian bodies in charge of press administration also tried to demonstrate Hungarian commitments to the free flow of information by pointing out that Western periodicals were available at 44 newsstands (though mostly in hotels visited by Western tourists) and that some libraries had several Western magazines in public reading rooms. Furthermore, the Information Office examined the circle of Western periodicals allowed for subscription by individuals and cautiously broadened the opportunities.³¹

The Hungarian material also mentioned that Hungary had welcomed prominent church leaders after 1975. The largest news coverage followed the trip of Baptist evangelist Billy Graham, who arrived to Hungary soon before the Belgrade meeting in September 1977³²—and next year also visited Poland, but that event was overshadowed by the visit of the newly elected pope of Polish origin John Paul II.

Culture and education were favoured fields in state socialist countries. Hungarian readiness for cultural exchange was

³¹ Letter from János Regős to Rezső Bányász, March 12, 1977. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1977, box 77.

³² Imperialist propaganda about Hungary from the third quarter of 1977, October 4, 1977. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 14.

therefore easy to document. Not only by numbers of publications, foreign plays, released movies, etc., but since these sectors were all either national institutes or nationalized branches, state contributions for the translation, promotion, and publication of Western cultural products were incommensurable with Western efforts going the other direction. Among the achievements, textbook exchanges, steps for the harmonization of diplomas, and inserting references to Helsinki in cultural work plans were also mentioned.

Different attitudes of Hungarian policy regarding Basket III on the way to Belgrade could also be sensed within Soviet bloc relations. The Soviet Union used the CSCE process to build a tighter system of political consultations to handle centripetal interests of bloc members. As one of these, Eastern countries held a conference—organized by the Institute for the Present Problems of Capitalism—in Warsaw in April 1977. On the program of the conference dedicated to the questions of Basket III, the first three presentations by the Polish hosts dealt with Western human rights campaigns, violations and narrowing of individuals' rights and freedoms in the USA, Britain, and Italy, and the institutional and tactical features of Western propaganda. The Soviet presenter, N. Keyzerov from the Soviet Academy of Sciences, outlined the reasons for the sharpening ideological struggle, while the Czechoslovak experts talked about the activity of 1968 emigrants.³³ The Hungarian participant, Tamás Mikecz, researcher at the Social Scientific Institute of the MSzMP Central Committee, represented a different approach with a different topic. He was the only one who examined the ideological consequences of cultural exchange. He evaluated cultural contacts and exchange as a basically positive and inevitable phenomenon—in line with the official cultural and foreign policy of the MSzMP. However, he also added a defensive moment: “The exchange of cultural products must be accompanied by the formation of a selective, critical public opinion that creates the opportunity for the critical analysis of

³³ Report on the visit of the Polish cultural attaché at the Institute of Cultural Relations, April 20, 1977. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 142.

the ideological content in the given cultural products. We must implement a cultural critical practice that makes the recipient able to form a critical attitude to such works on the basis of Marxist values with the tools of Marxism.”³⁴

We must add that before the Belgrade meeting the MSzMP approved a shift in Hungarian foreign policy based on the new external economic strategy accepted in October 1977 by the Central Committee. This meant a crucial step towards opening to the West in the economic sphere; Hungarian leadership undertook the challenge of meeting the requirements of the world market.³⁵ The intensifying negotiations at the highest levels of Hungarian party and state leaders also served this aim.

Sharp Confrontation and Minimal Compromise: Basket III in Belgrade

Hungarian foreign policy prepared for Belgrade actively, and worked to forego any possible attacks relating to Basket III. The preliminary conference held also in Belgrade in the summer of 1977 clearly showed that sharp political and ideological confrontation was to be expected. This meeting had to agree upon the organizational structure and the exact schedule of the conference. The Soviet Union and the state socialist countries favoured a forum for parallel monologues: where all countries could report their achievements in two years and point out further opportunities, without examining or even criticizing other countries' practice. Furthermore, they strived to minimize publicity and restrict it to fundamentally ceremonial opening speeches. They refused any reinterpretation or enhancement of the Helsinki Final Act, so they insisted

³⁴ Tamás Mikecz, “A helsinki záróokmány harmadik fejezetének végrehajtásáról (Nemzetközi elméleti konferencia) [On the Implementation of Basket III of the Helsinki Final Act],” *Társadalomtudományi Közlemények* 4 (1977): 134–136.

³⁵ Földes, *Kádár János külpolitikája*, vol. 1, op. cit. 228–231.

strictly on its words. Western efforts were the opposite: securing the greatest possible publicity with fora for evaluation and debate over the fulfilment of the recommendations of the Final Act. This effort was perceived by the Soviet bloc as the USA and its allies trying to create a forum for the impeachment of the “socialist world,” using the catchphrase “human rights”. Finally, after an unexpectedly long debate, a compromise was born: the Belgrade Meeting should consist of two phases: the public plenary session with opening speeches and debate, and a non-public committee session with four working committees—one for each basket plus the Mediterranean cooperation.³⁶

In August, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe of the US Congress, led by Dante B. Fascell, published its report, which also adumbrated that human rights issues would be targeted by NATO countries in Belgrade.³⁷ As predictable, the Belgrade Meeting became the scene of an intensifying Cold War confrontation. The USA—with the new Carter administration—lead a confrontative strategy with a human rights campaign at the centre. The USA and some other NATO countries—especially the United Kingdom, Belgium, and the Netherlands—enumerated several examples of violations of Principle VII both during the plenary session and in the working committees. Western governments had prepared with exact cases, and repeatedly mentioned concrete examples. This was an effective argument to push the Soviet bloc into defence stances and determine the schedule of the meeting, but also because this topic enabled them to embrace Helsinki watch groups in the Soviet Union and support other dissident or opposition campaigns in Eastern Europe. It was more than bad timing that the trial of the Czechoslovak Charter 77 leaders in Prague coincided with the plenary session. Aside from this core topic, Western participants also disapproved of cases that prevented family reunifications, thwarted wedding permissions,

³⁶ Reports from the Belgrade preliminary meeting. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 143.

³⁷ Record on the visit of the first secretary of the US Embassy in Budapest, August 8, 1977. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 143.

travel restrictions, and non-public travel and passport regulations, dual passport systems, refused emigration claims and retaliations (like loss of jobs) against claimants, obstacles for the dissemination of Western journals, censorship of information (including jamming Western radio broadcasts), and the distortion of youth contacts (for example sending groomed youth leaders instead of ordinary students and youngsters).

The state socialist delegations could not have entered into this detailed debate with the hope of success: the cases were documented and even though they had also collected incriminatory facts from Western countries (e.g., a leftist person losing his job due to his political opinion), it was not their interest to let this debate expand. They rather universally rejected interventions in internal affairs, contrasting Principle VI to Principle VII—so a more general debate went on about the application of these principles. The Soviet bloc countries emphasized that the 10 principles must be interpreted as a whole, no single principle can be heightened. The Western participants led by the USA exactly did this: appointed Principle VII as the core feature of the Final Act and insisted that several state socialist countries violated the Final Act. They added that performance in human rights must be the criterion of détente and any advancement in other fields crucially important for the Soviet Union and state socialist countries, namely disarmament and the development of trade contacts.

So, state socialist countries opted for a different, less confrontative strategy and filed several proposals that offered a different interpretation of human rights. These ranged from including economic rights with right to work on the first place to the codification of gender equality. The first one was submitted by the Hungarian delegation. However, these were only tactical proposals to be withdrawn for recanting Western proposals.

Proposals could be submitted for the working committees in the second phase of the Meeting. The distribution of proposals between the four working committees reveals that the sharpest ideological confrontation concentrated in working committee H (humanitarian and other), which was competent regarding

Basket III. There were around one hundred proposals—and most of them (79) had been submitted by November 23, 1977. By that time, working committee S (security) received 16 (10 state socialist, 2 NATO, 4 neutral) proposals which reveals the interest of the Soviet Union in disarmament and partly the efforts of neutral countries in confidence building measures. To the E (economy) working committee, 25 proposals were submitted, and quite balanced in ratio (9 state socialist, 9 NATO, 7 neutral). Here, state socialist countries pursued the question of trade discrimination, industrial cooperation and scientific-technological exchange, while Western efforts were concentrated around problems similar to Basket III: flow of statistical and trade information, free travel of scientific experts, etc. The M (Mediterranean) working committee received only 1 proposal—this field was of special interest of Malta.

The H working committee had to deal with the most proposals, 37, according to the Hungarian summary in late November, and a few others were added later. 15 from the 37 were drafted by state socialist countries, 17 by NATO countries, and 5 by neutral countries.³⁸ Among the proposals of the NATO countries, the following were the most characteristic:

- A. Regarding relations between people, Western countries proposed the reduction of obligatory currency exchange quotas and the abolishment of preliminary hotel reservations in case of family visits; cutting down the administrative waiting period in family reunification matters and marriages, including guarantees against disadvantages for claimants; limiting the costs of travel documents (should not be higher than average weekly wages); clearer and quicker passport administration (all procedures and rules should be public and claims should be answered within 1–3 weeks); easier exit visa administration (passports should be issued for 5 years without limitation on the number of entries or exits).

³⁸ Report by André Erdős on the distribution of the proposals to the Belgrade Meeting, November 23, 1977. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 143.

- B. Plenty of proposals touched upon the question of information. Five proposals promoted the availability of (Western) press in the Soviet bloc (cancelling limitations on the import and sale of foreign press; assuring newspaper sales at larger newsstands in an agreement; expansion of dissemination channels, reducing shipping time and fees, harmonizing home and foreign prices; promoting subscription opportunities; wording basic principles for public reading rooms with the newspapers of all 35 participants). Three proposals emphasized improvement for the working conditions of journalists (guarantees for journalists to carry their personal documentation and necessary equipment across borders; ban on expulsion of journalists because of their reports; and one for an all-European convention on any relating questions); one further proposal promoted the exchange of articles and commentaries between publishing houses.
- C. Limited interest could be registered in cultural exchange—this topic was embraced by neutral Austria: they proposed wider dissemination of books by establishing bookstores in larger cities where books from participating countries are available both in original languages and translated. In addition, Austria recommended the extension of cultural agreements between participating states. In the field of education, a Western proposal about the availability of educational materials stressed that libraries and research institutes should offer catalogues for students, teachers, and researchers.³⁹ France also raised the issue of competitions for foreign language learners combined with travels and the promotion of reconciliation of textbooks under the frames of UNESCO.⁴⁰

³⁹ Memorandum about the proposals submitted in Humanitarian and other fields to the Belgrade Meeting, November 9, 1977. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1977, box 143.

⁴⁰ Summary report on the Belgrade Meeting, March 9, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 145.

Western participants concentrated on issues to which they deemed the Soviet bloc vulnerable. These fields were connected to the free flow of information (primarily newspapers and books) and people. Western countries could be sure that such recommendations were not acceptable for the Soviet Union and its allies. The only field where state socialist countries submitted more proposals than capitalist delegations was culture. Poland proposed compiling a European cultural databank, the Soviet Union raised the idea of an international seminar for restaurateurs, Romania envisioned an all-European cooperation relating to festivals and other events. The formally neutral Yugoslavia suggested a year of cultural cooperation. So contrary to the ideologically loaded Western proposals that targeted the access of Western experience and interpretation of matters in Soviet bloc countries, these proposals favoured multilateral events with national institutions responsible for organizational affairs and limited numbers of participants.

The Hungarian proposal followed the “socialist recipe,” in the sense that it relied on the activity of states. However, it was consistent with the Hungarian efforts after 1975, and pursued real Hungarian national interests as it promoted extra efforts for small languages and less studied languages (according to the Soviet interpretation, Russian belonged to the latter category and asked the Hungarian delegation to change the emphasis to less studied from small languages). Besides the positive reception and readiness for discussion, Denmark submitted a modifier to make it more “meaningful,” which meant a substantive setting on the Helsinki material. The Hungarian and the Danish delegations worked out a compromise text,⁴¹ but finally the Hungarian proposal was dropped due to tactical reasons. It could have been understood as “improvement” on the Final Act, and the Soviet Union wanted to impede any precedent for that so that they could block Western proposals by sticking to the letter of the Helsinki document and avoid any

⁴¹ Report on the edition of the Hungarian proposal relating to small languages, February 2, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 145.

redefinition that would have shifted the accents of the original document.⁴²

By the time the Belgrade Meeting reached its second phase, the period of proposals, it had become clear that the event could not contribute to the relief of international political tension, and therefore a new compromise similar to Helsinki was unconceivable. Therefore, the delegations from the Soviet bloc agreed that their prime goal should be limited to the preservation of the chance for further dialogue and the prevention of Western efforts regarding human rights and the free flow of information and people. According to that, numerous proposals were submitted only for tactical reasons to balance Western proposals. For example, the state socialist delegations submitted proposals about gender equality (Bulgaria and the GDR) and the right to work (Hungary). They were *ab ovo* seen as tactical manoeuvres, but Western delegations repelled them without sacrificing any of their earlier cards: they filed modificatory proposals claiming the right to choose ones job (FRG, Norway, Sweden), the right to resign from work (UK, USA, Liechtenstein), and the lawlessness of dismissal as a reaction to emigration claims (USA).⁴³

The Belgrade Meeting ended with the minimum of compromise. Most proposals were dropped, and a generally positive message was worded about the continuation of the détente process. About the sharp conflicts over the six months, only a blurred reference was made about different opinions voiced, relating to the extent of the implementation of the Final Act. It also underlined that the realization of the Final Act was essential to promote the process of détente. The Final Document of Belgrade determined the next steps of this process: three expert meetings and the next follow-up meeting. Among the expert meetings, the Scientific Forum was related to Basket III.

⁴² Report by André Erdős on the advancement of the editing group for political questions, February 2, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 145.

⁴³ Report by Pál Berényi on the advancement of the editing group for humanitarian and other questions, January 25, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 145.

The other topics were peaceful settlement of disputes and Mediterranean cooperation. The participants also consented to hold the next CSCE meeting in Madrid.

The Soviet Union and its allies could still evaluate it as a partial success to preserve the continuity of the Helsinki process and to decline all American and Western efforts to modify the original compromise.⁴⁴ They—especially the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia—had to stand harsh criticism of their practice, but the storm of profoundly documented cases was not reflected in the Final Document. On the other hand, Western states were also divided by this result. The USA had to reconsider if these belligerent tactics could be remunerative in the future, while several European capitalist countries were doubtful if such an offensive manner was worth it and would not endanger the positive aspects of détente. Such considerations had their mark on the way to Madrid.

From Belgrade to Madrid—Hungarian Offensive Reloaded (1978–1980)

Evaluation of the situation after Belgrade

The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not see the limited results of the Belgrade Meeting in too dark a hue. As its main achievements, they concluded that the US-led human rights campaign ended without actual success, and the attempts to reinterpret and reword the Helsinki Final Act had failed. However, the analysis registered that the political efforts to turn back the détente process—the so called “imperialist forces”—had amplified. Therefore, the Ministry set the preservation and reinforcement of détente—in cooperation with moderate political actors in the West—as the main goal of Hungarian foreign policy. Within this, in line with Soviet policy, they gave top priority to restraining the arms race and engaging in further disarmament talks. Besides that, Hungarian priorities included

⁴⁴ See the Hungarian evaluation on the Belgrade Meeting, March 17, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 145.

the continuation of the CSCE dialogue, the reinforcement of the 10 principles guiding the relationships between states, the development of economic and trade cooperation with Western partners (especially breaking down trade discrimination measures), and repelling human rights campaigns and intervention of internal affairs. Basket III was only mentioned in negative content as a potential threat: all efforts to overstate the importance of human contacts as a precondition of détente and for widening the scope of Basket III must be rebutted.

The field of humanitarian and other questions also highlighted the strategical struggle about the question of who the actors should be. While Western governments pushed the direct contacts of people in all possible fields of Basket III, from travelling through science to culture and education, the state socialist participants opposed that to the role of the state. As the Hungarian evaluation described: “The Final Act prevails in the relation between states, and the implementation of the recommendations is primarily the duty of the signatory states. The development of the already existing cooperation of the states in the political, economic, cultural, and other fields brings along—thanks to deepening trust—the development and fulfilment of relations and contacts among individuals and people.”⁴⁵ Therefore, in the Hungarian interpretation, the logical line is the opposite, and so are the priorities between the baskets: Budapest could only accept advancement in Basket III if it consorted with advancement in Basket I (disarmament) and Basket II (trade discrimination), while the emphasis on the role of the state reflected the insistence on controlling human contacts.

The document also outlined the Hungarian strategy for the period before the Madrid meeting. The foreign policy makers decided to continue their offensive strategy that had relied on the 19 written proposals of 1976. However—having lost the advantage of surprise—the leaders of the Ministry presumed that the new proposals should be more specialized by partner

⁴⁵Evaluation of the Belgrade Meeting and further tasks in the CSCE process, October 30, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 146.

states, which demanded the analysis of achievements, advancements, and hopeless issues in each relation. They also deemed it remunerative to put the Hungarian initiatives down in writing again.⁴⁶ In bilateral negotiations, the Hungarian priorities were corresponding with the goals of the Soviet bloc: however, Hungary put progress in economic cooperation and trade (Basket II) ahead of disarmament and the three all-European conference proposals (environment protection, transport and traffic, energetics) of the Warsaw Pact. As Hungary received minimal criticism in Belgrade, moreover, it was rather mentioned as good example; Budapest assessed that they could lead an offensive campaign even in Basket III before Madrid. Of course, the main issue was cultural exchange: “we should strive to improve and correct the picture of the socialist countries in Western states, among other things by reducing the existing imbalance of the exchange of cultural values.”⁴⁷ As part of the offensive attitude, the document recommended self-confidence in propaganda to foreign countries, promoting existing and planned measures, like the reform of the penal code, the modification of passport regulations, the abolition of visas to Austria, and of course data on cultural imports.

In the last months of 1978, Hungarian embassies sent their reports on the advancement in bilateral relations in the light of the Final Act and the earlier Hungarian proposals. Of course, the balance sheets were diverse. In several relations, medium range success could be registered. For example, France accepted or made steps in 23 points out of 46. Germany, Austria and some Nordic countries were among the more open; Hungarian–American relations were on the rise, while Italy and the United Kingdom proved more rigid. Belgium, Greece, Spain,

⁴⁶ The Hungarian ambassador to London pointed at a possible drawback of the Hungarian written proposals: the British partner used some of its points with some modifications in their talks with other Soviet bloc countries and grasped initiative. Report of the Hungarian Embassy in London, November 23, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 146.

⁴⁷ Evaluation of the Belgrade Meeting and further tasks in the CSCE process, October 30, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 146.

and Canada could have performed better, and little progress was found with Portugal.⁴⁸

Actually, the least progress happened in the two fields that Hungarian foreign policy held its strengths. The argument of the formally more generous Hungarian visa issuance met odd returns: some countries did or promised to shorten waiting times, but even the most flexible could only offer twice as long wait times (96 hours) as Hungary offered. In American-Hungarian relations, the Hungarian embassy stressed that “we might cause the most unpleasant moments for the American partner in the topic of the ominous Basket III.” The ambassador pre-eminently referred to the “flexible and humane” Hungarian visa practice and reminded that “even those who come for commercial visits with longer stays [to the USA] sometimes have to take a road to Canossa for a so-called L-1 visa.”⁴⁹ On the French relation, the ambassador emphasized discrimination at border crosses, limitations at the extension of residence permits, and even rigidity at mixed marriages (permission bound to one-year residence in France). Besides such practice, the Hungarian proposals for consular agreements were usually repelled.

Cultural exchange was the second chief project of Hungarian foreign policy. One of the most positive receptions arrived from Bonn, where János Kádár took a visit in July 1977.⁵⁰ The ambassador reported that several German cities sought contacts to organize cultural events and the number of cultural programs outside diplomatic channels had grown. They underlined that such Hungarian show-up opportunities do not require any reciprocation or anything that would be ideologically risky (like choir visits, painting exhibitions).⁵¹ While the Belgian examples showed another—more typical—Western attitude in this field: concentrating one-sidedly on individual travels and letting the larger scale programs (like exhibitions,

⁴⁸ MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 146.

⁴⁹ Report of the Hungarian Embassy in Washington, December 18, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 146.

⁵⁰ See Földes, *Kádár János külpolitikája*, vol. 2, op. cit. 467–498.

⁵¹ Report of the Hungarian Embassy in Cologne, December 14, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 146.

theatre groups, etc.) slip.⁵² The Viennese ambassador stressed that even the question of the availability of newspapers—which had been a usual Western point of criticism—could be raised by Hungary: Hungary imported 9 Austrian journals in 1975 in 2750 copies, while Austria only brought in 10 different journals in 348 copies.⁵³ The reports repeatedly stated that little progress is expected in literary translations or any other matters of publishing houses, because capitalist countries avert from all efforts referring to private ownership and free enterprise.

The Expert Meetings—Bonn, Montreux, La Valetta and Hamburg

The importance of the expert meetings agreed upon in Belgrade lay in the fact that these were palpable signs of the continuation of the Helsinki dialogue. Two of the three multilateral forums had little to do with Basket III. From late October to December in Montreux, Switzerland, participants discussed the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Since the Soviet bloc and Western countries pursued directly opposite goals—promoting bilateral diplomatic talks, voluntary consultation and good office of mediators versus institutionalized arbitrary courts—there was little chance for any advancement. The concept of neutral countries was also far from both camps.⁵⁴ La Valetta was of little interest for either Hungarian diplomacy or the Soviet bloc. The main consideration was that the Final Act should not be modified in the Maltese capital to offer precedent for Madrid.⁵⁵ However, both Western and Eastern states were disinterested in Maltese efforts and the meeting ended up without significant achievements.⁵⁶

⁵² Report of the Hungarian Embassy in Brussels, November 23, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 146.

⁵³ Report of the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna, November 17, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 147.

⁵⁴ Report on the Montreux Expert Meeting, December 19, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 146.

⁵⁵ The question of the Mediterranean security and cooperation, September 7, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 147.

⁵⁶ Report on the La Valetta Expert Meeting, April 7, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 140.

The Scientific Forum had direct ideological content. Its significance was reflected not only in the more comprehensive preparation in the responsible national ministries, committees and institutes, the bi- and multilateral Soviet bloc coordinating talks, but also in the fact that similarly to the CSCE follow-up meeting in Belgrade, a preliminary meeting was held to determine the procedures and the schedule. The agreed-upon socialist concept promoted one-time (not institutionalized) conference of state delegations with non-ideological topics. Sticking to the letter of the Final Act, it indicated that the schedule should be composed of scientific issues already mentioned in the 1975 document. State socialist elites were not only interested in tranquil dialogue to ease international tensions, but also to promote East-West scientific cooperation and possible technological transfers. This was also a prime priority of Hungarian cultural foreign policy.⁵⁷ Western countries favoured a meeting of independent scientists or a separate political and a more informal scientific circle of discussion with human relations, free travel and contacts of scientists in the spotlight.

In Bonn, the Soviet Union and its allies successfully enforced their interests; however, at the opening phase, bad timing again gave an opportunity for severe criticism of the Moscow trials against Helsinki Watch Group activists. In the consensual document, there was satisfactory reference to states, the procedure was similar to Belgrade with opening and closing speeches and non-public working committees. The topics were set—all from the Helsinki recommendations, and two out of three reflected state socialist interests. Exact and natural sciences—more concretely the field of alternative energy sources—was in line with the Warsaw Pact efforts of an all-European conference in the field of energy. The other assigned topic was food production. Medical research—namely in cardiovascular, tumour and virus diseases—was of prominent Hungarian interest, too. Humanities and social

⁵⁷ Report on the consultation of socialist countries about the Bonn Meeting, June 12, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 145.

sciences are usually seen as weak points in state socialist countries; however, the chosen topic of human environment and urban development was ideologically less disputed.⁵⁸

The Scientific Forum was held between February 18 and March 3, 1980, in Hamburg. The conference proceeded in a calm atmosphere and its final document welcomed the growing international cooperation in research and training after 1975. State socialist countries could show a peaceful exchange of views in different scientific fields, which demonstrated their readiness for international dialogue and cooperation. Western countries could mention imbalanced advancement in research, communication, and travels for scientific reasons, and even more importantly include a reference to the importance of human rights and basic rights and freedoms in the final document.⁵⁹

Written Proposals Reloaded

After Belgrade, the NATO members made a significant tactical shift: they emphasized the importance of bilateral negotiations and urged such occasions. However, they still regarded human rights as a prior question, and they followed—and promised for Madrid—a less confrontative attitude. The Spanish organizers themselves stressed that they wished to avoid hosting a forum of harsh confrontation, and rather strived for a more concrete and clear schedule.⁶⁰ The neutral countries favoured the question of confidence building from Basket I instead of the topic of human rights—which also could soften tension.⁶¹ The Swiss partner even suggested that they could harmonize their efforts within

⁵⁸ Report on the preliminary expert meeting in Bonn, August 8, 1978. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1978, box 145.

⁵⁹ Report on the Scientific Forum of CSCE, April 2, 1980. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1980, box 145.

⁶⁰ Report on the meeting of the Hungarian and Spanish heads of departments, April 6, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141.

⁶¹ Encrypted telegram of the Hungarian Ambassador in Belgrade, October 19, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141.

their bloc of countries to reach consent: they might successfully form proposals in a way no one would find it “too square.”⁶²

Western negotiators also repeatedly emphasized that they were interested in showing results, and the bilateral talks might serve to find topics that offered chances for consent. In addition, the efforts for a higher level of delegations served this aim: NATO countries suggested that ministers should lead the delegations. The British partner also underlined that fewer proposals would be more fruitful, but balance must be found between the baskets. However, this included warming up the Western proposals in Basket III in Belgrade.⁶³ American diplomats mentioned two Eastern proposals that might be accepted: the Hungarian proposal relating to small languages and the Bulgarian proposal about the protection of historical monuments.⁶⁴

The Hungarian opinion was that these Western efforts did not promise sincere cooperation, but should be welcomed as opportunities to shepherd Western countries towards a more consensual path in Madrid and avoid direct ideological confrontation. As possible consensual topics, the material mentioned the problems of less-known cultures, teaching of foreign languages, norms of journalists’ work, multilateral cultural initiatives like databanks, film catalogues, book exhibitions, and registers of television films, and in general mutual information on cultural imports.⁶⁵ However, the emphasis of Hungarian—and state socialist—foreign politics was the opposite: Basket III was rather the field of concessions, while economic cooperation and disarmament were the priorities. Thus, Deputy Minister János Nagy stated that “We must mention all baskets and recommendations of the Final Act

⁶² Swiss proposal on the preparation for Madrid, February 22, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141.

⁶³ Memorandum on the English stand about the preparation for Madrid, February 8, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141.

⁶⁴ Information on the consultation of the American foreign affairs delegation in Bulgaria, March 1, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141.

⁶⁵ Memorandum for the conference of ministers, June 4, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141.

together, and we can only proceed in the humanitarian field, if we can step forward in strict observance of the principles guiding the relations of states and concrete measures are taken to unfold easing in military affairs and to broaden economic cooperation.”⁶⁶

As Hungarian foreign policy makers saw the written proposals at some points useful, but “on no accounts politically disadvantageous,”⁶⁷ in 1979 the ministry prepared the bilateral proposals for the capitalist participants of the CSCE process and conveyed them in the summer and autumn months.⁶⁸ Or, as a memorandum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs put it: “The greater part of these proposals are such that Western partners cannot meet them, but our proposals correspond to the recommendations of the Final Act, therefore they cannot reject them, so they are doomed to explain themselves.”⁶⁹

The bilateral written proposals did not reserve much surprise. The Hungarian documents followed a well-trying scheme. Their main emphasis was on cultural exchange. In most relations, they repeated the Hungarian will to reconcile information of national character in lexicons, schoolbooks, and tourist guides—despite earlier Western seclusion. Proposals were made in different cultural spheres for promoting contacts and exchange—like academies, theatre, film, literature, radio, and television. Differently by country, the documents mentioned possible partner institutes or associations. Hungary was also interested in foreign scholarship opportunities and in several cases the proposals mentioned this issue. Such frames were determined in the cultural agreements and work plans; however, by the second half of the 1970s it had become

⁶⁶ The lecture of Deputy Minister János Nagy at the session of the CSCE Hungarian National Committee, March 22, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1979, box 24.

⁶⁷ Deputy Minister János Nagy on the session of the CSCE inter-ministerial committee, February 7, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 140.

⁶⁸ A letter from Istvánné Papp to the members of the inter-ministerial committee. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1979, box 24.

⁶⁹ Memorandum on the preparation for the Madrid Meeting, March 24, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141.

a pressing issue due to inflation and the narrowing of domestic funding opportunities.⁷⁰ Furthermore, a general point of the proposals suggested that cultural work plans—where they existed—should be more concrete and enrich bilateral relations.

The main Hungarian project was balancing the disproportionality in cultural exchange and promoting the culture of small languages. The Hungarian phrasing reacted to earlier Western claims, and carefully sought ways in which governments could be included into the implementation without offending private ownership. First, they referred to an existing international cooperation: the initiative of the UNESCO-affiliated International Association of Literary Critics (AICL). AICL compiled the Gold Library of European Literature, where novels and poetic works could be found from all participants: so, Hungarian cultural diplomacy suggested publishing volumes in that collection. In addition, this new concept avoided referring to publishing houses, but rather implied subventions for libraries. Writers' associations and PEN Clubs were also seen as channels to promote literary translations. The papers always added that the Hungarian partner appreciated receiving information on measures taken for the translation and publication of Hungarian literary and theatrical works and reports on books translated, films purchased or screened, music broadcast on radio stations, etc. Since Hungarian cultural institutes and ministries kept detailed statistics on such matters, it was not an extra task for the Hungarians to present their data.

The proposals also enumerated earlier questions. They proposed consular conventions (or when it had met, with a check in the “first round”), a narrower scope of cooperation, and also the pursuit of agreements on legal assistance in civil, commercial, and criminal cases. They kept facilitating visa affairs: both in the case of maintaining low processing times and the exemption of diplomatic and service passports. By this time, the visa duty between Hungary and Austria had been abolished. Hungarian foreign policy approached the question

⁷⁰ Minutes of the Council of Cultural Relations, March 22, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 11.

of information through journalists' working conditions and not through the flow of information and periodicals. Visa administration for journalists, the realistic presentation of each other's countries, and radio-television contacts were the key Hungarian catchphrases. Another general reference was usually made to the enhancement of sport and youth contacts.⁷¹

Approaching Madrid, a new phenomenon unfolded in bilateral negotiations: Western countries raised the opportunity of joint proposals. Being joint-authors of proposals could demonstrate readiness for compromise and ease the way for proposals that could evidence advancement and the détente process itself. Hungary was also involved in two such topics. As a response to Hungarian proposals, the Danish outlined a proposal to enhance youth travel via the Interrail system. Since most East European countries—including the Soviet Union—were not members of Interrail (with the exception of Hungary), Hungary proposed promoting youth tourism with reduced fares after Soviet consultation. Nevertheless, the Hungarian answer took almost a year and came already at the Madrid conference.⁷² French and the Polish diplomats also discussed the question of a joint proposal regarding youth travel.⁷³

Hungarian foreign policy took its own "child" more seriously. They received a positive answer from Finland in September 1979 to submit a joint proposal, which the Hungarian delegation noted with the demand that it should not be narrower than the original Hungarian proposal. By the next round—in May 1980—it became clear that the Finnish partner would step back on two questions: engagement in the establishment of new university departments and securing state funds for the promotion of the culture of small languages. The diplomatic

⁷¹ See bilateral proposals: MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141; MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1980, box 144; MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1979, box 24.

⁷² Memorandum on the joint Danish-Hungarian proposal, September 18, 1980; Memorandum on the Soviet opinion, November 6, 1980; Report on the Danish-Hungarian joint proposal, December 5, 1980. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1980, box 145.

⁷³ Encrypted telegram from Paris, October 18, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1979, box 141.

conciliation remained contiguous and Hungary was able to endorse its priorities in a more detailed version.⁷⁴

Hard Bargain in Madrid (1980–1983)

The Madrid Meeting began with a strained atmosphere. Despite the clear intention of the participants to avoid an escalation in tensions, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979—which also forced the Hungarian leadership into a very unpleasant situation⁷⁵—provided the NATO countries with a trump card for to qualify Soviet action as a violation of the Helsinki Final Act. General and concrete criticism regarding human rights was also pervasive throughout the conference. In the debate regarding Basket III, human contacts and information remained the highlighted topics of Western countries; however, Hungarian reports noticed that to some extent they extended their criticism to cultural, educational, and scientific relations as well.⁷⁶ For example, the American opening speech addressed the Soviet Union (jamming Radio Liberty, preventing Jewish emigration, prosecution against Helsinki Watch Group activists), Czechoslovakia (harassment of Charter 77 members), and the GDR (raising obligatory currency exchange limits to hold back visitors). If they mentioned Hungary at all, it was usually as a good example. Griffin B. Bell, for example, referred to relative freedom of churches in Hungary, Poland, and also in the GDR.⁷⁷

The US government prepared semi-annual reports on the fulfilment of Helsinki recommendations after 1975. They provided exact statistics on controversial issues in Basket III—like family reunification cases, emigrant visas, travel opportunities, and passport regulations. They also thoroughly surveyed the availability of Western journals and complaints

⁷⁴ Reports on the joint Hungarian-Finnish proposal on small and less-studied languages. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1980, box 145.

⁷⁵ Békés, *Enyhülés és emancipáció*, op. cit. 295–303.

⁷⁶ Report on the first phase of the Madrid Meeting, December 19, 1980. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1980, box 144.

⁷⁷ The opening speech of Griffin B. Bell. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1980, box 102.

of journalists, while the evaluation of cultural and educational exchanges only reviewed the most significant events like film weeks, exhibitions, visits of orchestras, scholarly delegations, etc. Hungary also qualified well in these reports. In the second part of 1979, the American government reported 1720 pending family reunification cases: 7 of which were Hungarian compared to 1229 Polish, 340 Romanian, and 105 Soviet cases. None of the 88 pending binational marriage claims were waiting for administrative decisions in Hungary, while in Romania there were 69 unresolved claims. Regarding personal travel, Hungary was called a “major exception”: the US Embassy in Budapest issued 5869 private visitor visas and 1077 for other reasons (above the 47 immigrant visas and 4876 visas for temporary family visits). The report also noted that the Hungarian government promoted travel to the USA by allowing payment in forints and the possibility to obtain medical travel insurance as well. Church contacts were applied as gauges of religious freedom: the Appeal of Conscience Foundation (ACF) was active in organizing the visits of religious leaders to and from socialist countries. In 1979, the founder rabbi Arthur Schneier visited Hungary and gave the ACF Man of the Year Award to Cardinal Laszló Lékai.

Further, the free flow of information in Hungary was not an outstanding exception in terms of the availability of Western newspapers—rather, they only formally checked off this duty, maintaining limitations and control—but the country was one of the most liberal when it came to the release of television films and movies. The US report highlighted that Hungarian cinemas also screened the science fiction classic *Star Wars* and the crime story *Julia*.⁷⁸ They also acknowledged that Hungary

⁷⁸ Actually by 1979/80, Hollywood became the second-largest film exporter to Hungary after the Soviet Union (more than 20 films annually), and Hollywood movies well outnumbered French and Italian films. About American movies in Hungary, see Róbert Takács, “Hollywood Ascendant: American Films in Hungary in the 1970s,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 1 (2018): 191–218; on the work of the Hungarian Film Admission Committee, see Mihály Gál, “A vetítést vita követte”: *A Filmátvételi Bizottság jegyzőkönyvei*

does not jam Radio Free Europe⁷⁹ and Western television broadcasts, furthermore Hungarian television news coverages, sometimes show unadulterated Western views: like 18-minute segment interviews with leading American politicians and experts on SALT and US-Soviet relations.⁸⁰ Among cultural exchange projects with Hungary, the USICA-sponsored America Now exhibition was the most important, held in a temporary exhibition hall in Népliget in Budapest. According to *Magyar Nemzet*, it reflected the sentiment of individuals closed into small communities.⁸¹

Since Hungary was not the target of sharp attacks, the Hungarian delegation pursued moderate tactics in Madrid. In his opening speech, however, Deputy Minister János Nagy disapproved of the Western approach to Basket III: “From time to time it seems as if ‘Basket III’ consisted of nothing more than human contacts and the flow of information,” he noted, adding that it was time to give more attention to cultural, educational, and artistic issues. Hungary stood for more balanced cultural exchange between nations and the study of small and less-studied languages.⁸² This attitude was more or less typical among all Warsaw Pact countries in the Spanish capital: almost all of them were able to present respective statistics on Western cultural imports and the promotion of cultural and educational exchange through state-controlled channels.

As in Belgrade, the state socialist—and in particular, as part of the joint efforts, the Hungarian—delegations concentrated on even small achievements, and tried to repulse Western criticism,

1968–1989 [“The Screening Was Followed by a Debate.” The Minutes of the Film Admission Committee, 1968–1989] (Budapest: Gondolat, 2015).

⁷⁹ Hungary finished regular jamming by 1963. Report on the termination of jamming Western radio broadcasts, December 14, 1963. MOL XIX-J-1-k 1945-1964 USA, box 39.

⁸⁰ Seventh Semiannual Report by the President to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, June 1–November 30, 1979. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1980, box 101.

⁸¹ -th, “Amerika ma [America Now],” *Magyar Nemzet*, June 25, 1980.

⁸² The opening speech of the Hungarian delegation in Madrid. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1980, box 102.

emphasizing the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs. Most statistics that were aired related to personal contacts, but information—more precisely the availability of Western press and media and limitations on journalistic work in the Soviet bloc—was also a crucial issue. Since hardly any objection was voiced against the Hungarian practice, the Hungarian delegation could be more resolute in its contribution. Besides enumerating positive measures, they also raised the imbalance in taking over media coverage and programs, and of course in cultural exchange.

At the end of the first phase of the Madrid meeting, 87 proposals were submitted, 31 of which (35.6% of the total) targeted Basket III issues and were delegated to the H (humanitarian) working group. Hungary was also active, signing four of these proposals, however it submitted only one independently: the one promoting the contribution of mass media to the mutual recognition of each participants' culture. The most authentic proposal from Hungary also targeted cultural affairs, promoting the culture of small and less-studied languages. It was also the only joint East-West proposal (with Finland and Iceland) with good chances to be included into the final document in Madrid. The other two proposals were joint actions of Soviet bloc countries: the one submitted with the Soviet Union, promoting youth tourism and contacts between youth organizations, was worded to challenge the Danish proposal on the same subject.⁸³ The other one, submitted by Poland and Hungary on the mutual protection of participants' citizens, belonged under the headline "Personal Contacts," and revealed a different approach from state socialist countries to consular affairs.

Other Warsaw Pact countries submitted 11 proposals to Basket III. Almost all of them targeted general goals in ideologically less strained fields. Regarding personal contacts, there was a Romanian proposal to promote youth contacts, and a Bulgarian one on cultural cooperation of younger generations.

⁸³ This could have been another joint East-West proposal if Hungarian representatives would have entered into negotiations with its Danish partners more intensely.

In the field of cultural cooperation, two further proposals were submitted aside from the Polish-Hungarian one: Bulgaria submitted a proposal on the provision of information on cultural cooperation, the mutual exposition of the participants' historical memories, and anniversaries; Poland added one on the development of cultural cooperation. Poland also proposed better cooperation in the field of education; the GDR and the Soviet Union both promoted the issue of textbook reconciliation in separate proposals. Contrary to these generally worded proposals without verifiable data, the Warsaw Pact proposals on information were set against Western proposals. To counter claims for import liberalizations on Western press, the Soviet Union and GDR submitted a proposal on the responsible distribution of information. According to their arguments, Western media did not meet these criteria. Nevertheless, it could not be applied in Western countries in any case, since most publications and media channels were private enterprises. Romania had a separate proposal to ban war propaganda. The Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia proposed suspending Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, reacting to the Western proposal to stop jamming these broadcasts.

NATO and European Economic Community (EEC) countries proved more confrontational in their proposals as well. They altogether submitted 17 proposals relating to Basket III. Many of these were well-adjusted joint proposals, and eight—half of the proposals—were dedicated to personal contacts. The Danish were the least challenging with their proposal on the promotion of youth tourism, and another common Nordic one on the training of young scientists, and a proposal on the promotion of historical and artistic heritage. Others targeted the core of East-West confrontations. Two proposals dealt with family reunification and three of them directly with human rights. As a new element in Western tactics, they proposed multilateral conferences similar to the Scientific Forum in these debated topics. France also proposed one such meeting, a Cultural Forum—as did Yugoslavia. One further EEC proposal revived the claim of Western embassies for unimpeded

contacts with citizens in Warsaw Pact states, and the Vatican strived to strengthen the rights of religious communities and church leaders for contacts and religious information. Two joint EEC proposals pursued the free flow of information. The free movement of people and information was also present in the proposal to establish cultural institutes in participating countries and in educational exchanges. The main Western effort in the cultural field was also dedicated to the free flow of people and information: like opening new cultural institutes and bookstores in participating countries, or promoting personal contacts and exchange in education, or issuing public catalogues on archival materials.⁸⁴

In January 1981, Hungarian foreign policy sought out the chance for a possibly quick compromise, and saw the settlement of interests moderately positively. They found a third of the Western proposals easily reconcilable (youth tourism, the Cultural Forum, conservation of national and artistic heritage, exchanges in education, implementation of the recommendations of the Scientific Forum, and the training of young scientists). These were ideologically less loaded topics, and in some of these cases there was an alternative socialist proposal to be matched. Another third of the proposals were assessed as the “price of compromise,” that is, the issues in which the Soviet bloc might offer some concessions. These proposals related to human rights (about the vindication of human rights, and a roundtable conference on human rights), and freedom of information and personal exchange (unrestricted distribution of newspapers, improving journalists’ working conditions, radio jamming, opening new cultural institutes and reading rooms, access to archival material and compiling archival catalogues). The Hungarian analysis suggested that these issues might be included in the final document if the most objectionable claims were dropped. For example, human rights might be mentioned among the ten principles, but their equal importance must be emphasized. Human rights conferences could only be

⁸⁴ Report on the work of the third working committee of the Madrid Meeting, January 6, 1981. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1981, box 153.

reconsidered as a scientific conference. Claims on the flow of information should not transcend the level of the Helsinki Accords, and state socialist countries cannot give legal status to an advocacy body for foreign correspondents. They were also reluctant to promote access to foreign cultural institutes and embassies and compile public archival catalogues. Although the Hungarian practice was more or less in accordance with these proposals, Hungarian analysts could be sure that other Warsaw Pact states would show greater resistance on these topics, and thus Hungary usually fell in line with its allies on such questions.

In addition, there were a few proposals that Hungarian foreign policy saw as unacceptable, and therefore thought that those should be given up in parallel with similar Eastern proposals. Soviet bloc countries steadily opposed incorporating concrete obligations for family reunification and visits, and furthermore the organization of an expert meeting on such issues. They were equally determined to resist a human rights experts' meeting. In addition, the Hungarian material classified contacts with religious organizations, the distribution of religious information, and access to foreign embassies as undesirable developments out of the Helsinki Accords, and therefore stated that these should be remitted to bilateral relations.⁸⁵

In the second phase of the Madrid meeting, when plenary sessions and editing groups convened in each working committee, it quickly became clear that easy compromise would be an illusion. Compromise was within reach in cultural and education proposals rather simply, but the fronts froze relating to information and personal contacts. Western countries rejected the counterproposals of Soviet bloc countries as an offset for their most important claims.⁸⁶ Basket II proved to be the least problematic set of issues, with important Hungarian

⁸⁵ Recommendation for the position of the Hungarian delegation relating to Basket III proposals in Madrid, January 13, 1981. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1981, box 153.

⁸⁶ Summary of the debates of the H working committee, February 20, 1981. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1981, box 153.

interests and well-attended Hungarian proposals,⁸⁷ but Basket I seemed shipwrecked similarly to Basket III. In this situation—in April 1981—neutral and non-aligned countries stepped up as advocates of compromise and worded an overall proposal for the final document of the Madrid Meeting—the so-called RM-39—which became the negotiating basis from May 1981 onward.

This post-Easter period seemed fruitful in Madrid. The Soviet bloc countries changed their strategy, seeing the neutral draft, which they perceived as a possible basis for a hard compromise, but also as a text absorbing too many of the Western ambitions. Therefore, they concentrated on weeding out unacceptable formulas and inserting escaping clauses—like reference to participants' inner legislation—that would neutralize sensitive passages. Their strength was in the less debated topics of culture and education, and compromise could be built on these issues relatively quickly. The two Hungarian proposals were incorporated in the draft final document. However, the Hungarian delegation re-opened its proposal on small languages successfully, because in bilateral talks they felt that even more could be achieved in the education of small languages—more precisely the promotion of new opportunities for learning, like the encouragement of summer universities, fellowships for translators, and establishing new faculties. The participants could agree even on the proposal for archival research—as the Soviet Union accepted promoting the compilation of archival catalogues instead of prescribing their publication. The question of cultural institutes and public reading rooms remained here the most important pending issues.

⁸⁷ Hungary was highly interested in Basket II, where the Hungarian delegation submitted four proposals: on the promotion of exchange of information on marketing techniques, on eliminating the technical obstacles of trade by mutual acceptance of quality certificates, on the promotion of industrial cooperation, and on the inclusion of small- and medium-sized businesses into East-West economic cooperation. Report on the reception of Hungarian proposals to Basket II, February 13, 1981. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1981, box 99.

On the other hand, regarding personal contacts and information, both Eastern and Western countries strived to modify the text to their favour, while most neutral countries rather conformed to the language of the NATO states. In proposals about free flow of information, the Swiss positions were even sharper. The Soviet Union and its allies had to accept that the document should incorporate principles for the administration of family reunification and passport procedures. Here the Hungarian efforts regarding legal, consular, and medical assistance proved more or less successful, however the United States still severely opposed declaring duties for the host countries. The consensus was much easier in the other “Hungarian topic,” youth travel. There was no real progress in some ideologically loaded questions: free access to foreign embassies, the experts meeting on family reunification, and the Vatican proposal on religious contacts. However, it was even harder to make ends meet in the field of information: the delegations devoted 40 sessions to the related 12–15 possible paragraphs, and could only agree on five of them. These five related to journalists’ travel, accreditation, and working conditions (like press centres⁸⁸), and the distribution of foreign journals. On some points, interests could not be matched: media access of churches, free encounter between foreign journalists and local citizens, free transportation of journalists’ documentation, and the institutionalization of foreign correspondents. While in these questions the opposing sides were trying to find a mutually acceptable formula, the ban on radio jamming and on the expulsion of journalists (for their publications) were categorically repudiated by state socialist countries.⁸⁹

After a longer break, the delegates met in Madrid in late October, but in almost two months they could not find a compromise in any of the remaining proposals of Basket III.

⁸⁸ Budapest, as a media service for articles, already existed in the early 1970s as part of the Hungarian Press Agency (MTI). It operated as part of the foreign Hungarian propaganda system.

⁸⁹ Report on the drafting work of the Madrid Meeting on humanitarian and other questions, July 30, 1981. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1981, box 153.

The US-led NATO delegations adopted more combative tactics, and pushed their sensitive issues more vehemently. In spite of the fierce clash of interests, the Hungarian delegation deemed it possible to reach a future compromise on several questions with greater or fewer concessions from the side of the Warsaw Pact countries. Among such issues were contacts among religious communities and institutions, access to embassies, the carrying of journalists' documentation,⁹⁰ and advocacy bodies of foreign correspondents. However, concessions could only be reached if several Western demands were withdrawn (expert meetings on family reunification, media distribution of religious information, bans on the expulsion of journalists, radio jamming and public reading rooms). Nevertheless, they feared that two points might cripple the whole process: the recognition of an individuals' right to subscribe to foreign journals and the declaration of journalists' right to contact any citizen in their host countries.⁹¹

The Madrid negotiation deadlocked in autumn 1981. Basket III bargains were in a "bundle deal," with the most important goal of the Soviet Union, the organization of a European disarmament conference, for which the United States wanted to poach a huge price in Basket III. This "static warfare" was reinforced by the proclamation of martial law in Poland by Wojciech Jaruzelski.⁹² The suppression of the Solidarity movement thematised the session of early 1982. Western countries interpreted the Polish events as the brutal violation of the Helsinki Final Act—just like the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan at the beginning of the meeting. Therefore, they adhered to the improvement of the Polish situation as a precondition for any substantive dialogue

⁹⁰ Here the debated part was if journalists were also allowed to take printed materials with them, as these could have been otherwise forbidden periodicals or publications.

⁹¹ Report on the negotiations about Humanitarian and other questions, December 19, 1981. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1981, box 153.

⁹² See Miklós Mitrovits, *A remény hónapjai: a lengyel Szolidaritás és a szovjet politika, 1980–1981* [Months of Hope: Polish Solidarity and Soviet Politics, 1980–1981] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó. 2010).

over the final document of the Madrid Meeting.⁹³ Hungarian foreign policy evaluated the situation as a potential danger of a failed compromise in Madrid, and strived to preserve it as the only wide and operable multilateral forum for East-West dialogue. In addition, in spite of perceived US efforts to conclude the meeting with a short final communique, the report suggested that time—and the interest of Western European and neutral states—might bring an agreement.⁹⁴

In April, the participants agreed to a longer intermission of the conference as the debates over the introduction of the martial law in Poland pervaded the spring sessions.⁹⁵ From late November, the meeting continued, and in the H working group, delegations discussed pending issues. Soviet bloc countries submitted corrective proposals to Western text variants to evirate them. However, the USA and the Soviet Union were both reluctant to make concessions first,⁹⁶ and weeks passed without a chance of breakthrough.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the atmosphere was dispassionate enough to negotiate over text variants, sometimes words. Like in the passage referring to citizens' access to foreign embassies, where the Soviet Union accepted to declare an endeavour to ease admission, but then insisted on deleting the term "public" from the text. On several other points, the Warsaw Pact members resisted inserting the phrase "accordance with internal legislation", while on some remaining points (e.g., radio jamming, expert meeting on family

⁹³ Weekly reports on the proceedings of the Madrid Meeting, February/March 1982. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1982, box 143.

⁹⁴ The evaluation of the foregoing stages of the Madrid Meeting, January 13, 1982. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1982, box 144.

⁹⁵ Hungarian standpoint about the Madrid Meeting, April 20 1982. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1982, box 143.

⁹⁶ The Hungarian representatives in Madrid noted in late November that some symbolic steps from the Soviet Union regarding Basket III—gestures toward Jewish emigrants and prosecuted intellectuals like Andrei Sakharov (and Natan Scharansky), or later toward the members of the Pentecostal congregation—could help to stimulate progress. Encrypted telegram from Madrid, November 25, 1982. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1982, box 143.

⁹⁷ Weekly reports of the Hungarian delegation in Madrid. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1982, box 109.

reunification and emigration, expulsion of journalists) Eastern delegations were not willing to give ground.⁹⁸

The time for breakthrough came in 1983. In March, after a few uneasy weeks, the neutral and non-aligned countries compiled a modified proposal for the final document. It still contained the points related to Basket III that the Soviet bloc countries turned down cold, but the US State Department held the organization of the disarmament conference as a major Soviet success, therefore it adhered to major American achievements in Basket III—including the experts' meetings in this field. Still, development only came in June–July after a Spanish effort to reconcile open questions: on one hand, the Soviet delegation finally approved of the expert meeting on human contacts and human rights; on the other hand, this was not published as part of the final document, but rather as a statement of the president of the meeting.⁹⁹

The new neutral proposal also provided the Hungarians with an opportunity to show off a significant diplomatic success, as Budapest emerged as a possible venue for one of the conferences scheduled in the final document, the Cultural Forum, which had already been accepted by all participants based on the French and Yugoslav proposals. However, it caused tension within the Warsaw Pact countries, since Romania had aspired to host the next follow-up meeting, and stuck to its demand.¹⁰⁰ The Cultural Forum—to be held in Budapest in 1985—became one of the 11 all-European multilateral events to which the participants consented. It was the first meeting within the Helsinki process that was held in a state socialist country.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Humanitarian and information issues in Madrid, December 20, 1982. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-1982, box 109.

⁹⁹ Encrypted telegram from Madrid, July 11, 1983. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1983, box 129.

¹⁰⁰ Encrypted telegram from Madrid, May 5, 1983; June 3, 1983. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1983, box 129.

¹⁰¹ Report on the Madrid Meeting, 1980–1983, August 9, 1983. MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1983, box 129.

Summary

The Madrid meeting concluded with the acceptance of a final document the participants used to call “meaningful.” Contrary to the “minimalist” final document of Belgrade that was almost confined to the enumeration of future stages of the Helsinki process, the Madrid Meeting survived inimical conflicts to reach compromise in the most controversial fields as well. This also revealed that the European allies of the two superpowers—and neutral states—were heavily concerned in preserving the achievements of détente even if Soviet-American relations bottomed out. As part of the thick fabric of compromises, the multilateral possibilities for East-West dialogue significantly broadened.

Budapest was among those who were solidly committed to the preservation of the Helsinki process, as it corresponded to its more open nature and foreign policy strategy. It paid attention—in internal and foreign politics—to prove its (even if small, but) clear progress in all issues relating to the Final Act, and also targeted Western participants with foreign policy actions to be able to define the agenda in its favour. Hungarian foreign policy was among those that strived for compromise, however as a disciplined ally of the Soviet Union it went by Soviet policy—as opposed to Romanian foreign policy, which frequently challenged Warsaw Pact coordination. Nevertheless, Budapest pursued its own priorities successfully. The Madrid meeting lasted for almost three years, and by the time it ended, Hungary had already become a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The long deadlock was a consequence of the freezing relations between the Soviet Union and the USA, and as such it did not depend on Hungary. All Hungarian proposals had chances for approval and—sometimes with some correction—were incorporated into the drafts by mid-1981. Hungary was the “good pupil” in Western speeches—and remained alone from late 1981 due to the Polish crisis—but stuck by the side of those state socialist countries

that were severely criticized and were less ready for concessions (i.e., the Soviet Union, GDR, and Czechoslovakia).

Yet, Hungary's main interests lay in Basket II—in accordance with its economic reform, need for technological inputs, and export opportunities—and it was where Hungarian foreign policy could have its most meaningful proposals passed. However, it also pursued active policy regarding Basket III, where its strength lay in cultural and educational affairs, and where it was less vulnerable in the “hot fields” of human contacts and information. It can be regarded as a major diplomatic success that the efforts of Hungarian foreign policy to strengthen the position of (socialist) Hungarian culture in the world could find its appropriate form in the promotion of small languages that could win the support of several Western states. The Hungarian proposal—also incorporated in the final document—in the field of information pursued the same goal by promoting the recognition of participants' culture in the press and media. These were fields where Hungarian diplomacy could rely on a two-decade-long process of relatively open cultural policy that eventuated an imbalance in Hungarian and Western cultural exchange.

In addition, in terms of human contacts, Hungary could prove its commitment to the Helsinki process with two ideologically less loaded proposals (relating to consular, legal, and medical assistance, and youth travel). This engagement was also acknowledged by the fact that Budapest was selected as the venue for the multilateral Cultural Forum. Ironically, by the time it was organized, dissident groups staking their claims based on the provisions in the Helsinki Final Act became visible in Hungary as well.¹⁰²

¹⁰² See Rolf Müller, ed., *Európai Kulturális Fórum és ellenfórum: Budapest, 1985* [European Cultural Forum and Counter Forum: Budapest, 1985] (Budapest: ÁBTL, 2005).