HUNGARY: THE CAUSES OF THE STALEMATE SITUATION IN TELEVISION

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The Past Survives, But It Is Always Being Rewritten

More than five years have passed since the first free elections — the symbolic date of the change of the regime in Hungary. The country has survived the four year period of the first electoral cycle, and the second elections, which resulted in a change of power. The noises of the media war seem to have calmed down, although they have not died away completely, but there are no visible or significant changes in the broadcasting sphere. The status of the Hungarian Radio and Hungarian Television remains the same as it was during the socialist era, and there is not yet normative, legal regulation of broadcasting. This phenomenon is all the more interesting, because in the printed press a really revolutionary change took place around the first elections. The changes that took place immediately before and after those events resulted in an almost total privatisation of the newspaper press, with an overwhelming majority of foreign owners (issuing approximately 80 per cent of the distributed copies). And although there were notable changes in the electronic media sphere as well, the results of which cannot be predicted (for example in cable distribution and the licensing of local radio and television studios), the bulk of the Hungarian electronic media sphere, the macro-structures of radio and television broadcasting, seem to have remained practically unchanged.

Hungarian Radio and Hungarian Television reflected and embodied all the contradictions of the change of regime in Hungary. They were at the cross-roads of unscrupulous power struggle, serving as a battlefield for different political power games, both outside and within. They were in a state of convulsion, trying to introduce changes themselves and also exposed to outsiders' efforts to change them but, like the steps of the Hungarian folk dance, the czardas, two left and two right, these attempts failed to launch the institutions on a definite path of development — whether it was to provide independent public service, independent commercial, state-owned or governmental,

broadcasting, or channels distributed and directed by parties. In this study I try to describe what kind of challenges Hungarian Television had to face and how the different forces counteracted, neutralised and distorted one another's effects. I limit myself only to the first years of the change in Hungary, and to the first attempt radically to transform Hungarian Television. This attempt was associated with the name of the TV president, Elemer Hankiss.

This was the first time in the 40-year life of Hungarian Television that the president had a comprehensive concept about the reorganisation of the institution, and tried to realise it. The time and the circumstances seemed to be extremely favourable for radical changes: all the country seemed to be in a state of turmoil — and most of all the political elite in power. The new political elite seemed to have full confidence in the new presidents of the electronic media, as they themselves had nominated them. It seemed that the institutions themselves wanted to change — not only because of the new political situation, but also because they had been in a permanent crisis for a long time. Nevertheless, the former adaptation to a permanent crisis situation had developed such stable structures, and such methods of problem solving inside Hungarian Television, that any change in the institution was almost impossible. It was hopeless to try to undo the tangled fabric of interests, but any more drastic approach, cutting the Gordian knot, also threatened to upset the balance of the daily production of programs.

For several years, there had been nobody to take this risk. There were two main reasons for that. On the one hand, the politically appointed leader could not know how long he would be in charge. The most secure policy was not to change anything, but only to maintain the daily functioning. On the other hand, the financing of Hungarian Television in the planed economy was based on the maintaining the existing functions and only replacing the most obsolete equipment. Those rare leaders who experimented with structural changes in Hungarian Television took political risks. Usually, they began the changes without the necessary material foundations, relying upon the fact that their political authority, and the threat of unbalancing the institution, would be enough to force assistance from the soft state budget. However, with the growing economic crisis of the eighties, these considerations, one after another, turned out to be ill-founded. The results were failed attempts, distorted realisations of possibly good ideas, or big debts left to the next leaders.

An analysis of the situation that developed in Hungarian Television up to the moment of the change of the regime helps us to understand the difficulties involved in the reshaping and restructuring of the institution after the change of the regime.

Quite independently of the political circumstances, the organisational and financial problems of Hungarian broadcasting, but especially those of Hungarian Television, were acute. This was mainly the consequence of a long-lasting and deepening crisis of state financing and of the confusion between the political and economic regulators — with the priority of the political factors — of the previous system.

In addition to this, the appearance of the new means of communication in the eighties challenged the old structures of communication in Hungary. It was recognised that video, international satellite programs, and the development of cable systems, constituted competition for nation-wide broadcasting which was becoming stronger.

Local cable studios were founded — whether under the leadership of local councils or communist party committees. They challenged the power of the central broadcasting institutions as providers of programs and questioned the information monopoly of the centre, while they included into their programs the programs of neighbouring countries. On the other hand it became clear that the communist party's will would not be enough to stop television program from satellites at the border. The policy-makers hesitated about how to react, how to delay the arrival and spread of information not controllable by them. However, the program-makers and the technicians, who followed carefully developments in their professional area abroad, perceived it as an unavoidable challenge.

Even though the socialist era is generally considered as a state-party system, in which the communist party and the state exist in symbiosis, and the state realises or fulfils the ideas and commands of the party, their relationship was in fact much more complex. For example, from time to time the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party evaluated the activity of Hungarian Television, made recommendations as to the direction of future development, and declared that the material or financing needs arising as a consequence should be met.[1] In reality, these instructions may or may not have been met. The development of Hungarian Television was financed from the state budget, but of course there were other applicants for the state budget allocations, and the Ministry of Finance might have other priorities. As a general rule, the demands of the sphere of material production always were evaluated more highly than that of culture, to which Hungarian Television was considered to belong. The licence fee had the form of a tax. In the second half of the 1980s, the leaders of Hungarian Television realised that commercial activities were the only source of discretionary income because state subsidies continuously decreased.[2] The attempts by Hungarian Television to generate additional resources by its own efforts were not unanimously welcomed by the authorities, because it made television less controllable. Instead of generating additional resources, the authorities preferred that television saved state money, and ended the waste that could be observed at the institution.

The Ministry of Finance regularly audited the financial and economic aspects of Hungarian Television, its system of accounting, its books and its internal control mechanism. Thus, in 1974, 1979, 1982, 1984, and 1988, serious irregularities, misuses, possible corruption, economic offences, irresponsibility and carelessness were detected. At every turn they found that bad management, a lack of organisation and chaotic functioning characterised Hungarian Television.[3]

In 1988, the same types of problems were demonstrated as in 1974, practically without any signs of improvement. The bureaucrats of the Ministry of Finance regularly wrote their reports and demanded a reply or a schedule of remedial measures to be taken by Hungarian Television leadership. They may have received a reply, or they may not. The general atmosphere of an existing, or supposed, political immunity for Hungarian Television did not allow any spectacular actions on the part of the Ministry against the leaders of Hungarian Television, who had all been nominated by the Central Committee of the Party. Such drastic steps could only have been taken in the case of a clear lack or loss of political confidence in the leadership by

the Central Committee, or in a deep crisis. But during the socialist era, all the leaders of Hungarian Television were dismissed "with their services fully appreciated."

It needs to be mentioned here that the politically appointed leaders of Hungarian Television, who felt responsible mainly for the political activities of Hungarian Television, naturally did not pay too much attention to the economic side of the activities of the institution. As a result, the political or content side of the program-making was closely supervised and the production side neglected. Departmental interests were more significant, and often conflicted with the interests of Hungarian Television as a whole. Individual private interests took priority over, or replaced, institutional interests.

It would often be very hard to identify the persons responsible for certain decisions or anomalies, because of the lack of a clear assignment of tasks or demarcation of spheres of competence. This was supplemented by a long bureaucratic decision-making processes, resulting in four or five years passing between the initiation and realisation of certain decisions, for example in the field of technical developments or purchases. During these years, the equipment ordered might have become obsolete, the circumstances of production might have changed, and the decision-makers might have left Hungarian Television or moved to different positions.

During the 40 years of its existence, Hungarian Television did not go through any significant organisational changes — it proliferated but did not develop. The changes in the organisation were not connected to any functional analysis, but to power and personal ambitions. The result was parallel structures, conflict situations and interest clashes between the departments of the institution.

By the eighties, the organisational structure, and consequently the decision-making processes, had become oversized and confused. The situation was further aggravated by the bureaucratic requirements of office work, which were barely tolerated by the creative staff, and the frequent changes in the regulation of the activities of institutions financed by the state budget, which were in no way in harmony with the peculiarities of work in Hungarian Television. That is why it sometimes seemed excusable, or even necessary, to search for loopholes, or to break the rules, so that daily operations could be maintained, or the consequences of decisions made by others under different conditions could be avoided.[4]

In the spring of 1989, when the newly emerging political forces turned their attention to Hungarian Television and attacked it as the main forum of the agitation and propaganda of the communists and because the taxpayers' money had been wasted and misused, the president of Hungarian Television argued in an internal meeting of Hungarian Television:

> *We cannot get out of the situation that developed in three decades all at once. This is because the irregularities, the host of small irregularities, have infiltrated all our operations, they have become law, and to liquidate them all at once would mean collapse... Every single unit might have worked hard, but not for the common interests of Hungarian Television. They were against one another, and practically it was not in their interest to co-operate... Because of the bad human contacts and because they did not talk to one another, it might have happened that two department did not harmonise their purchasing of techniques, the*

systems became incompatible, so a third department had to be created to provide a link between the two systems.[5]

The working conditions, the tasks, the responsibilities, and the efficiency indicators of the employees had not been fixed. No working orders were set in different units. The majority of irregularities were connected with payments, especially those for working practices which crossed between departments. It was widespread to pick up money twice, or even more times, for the same work under different titles. There was no control. The employees of Hungarian Television often worked for their own institution through outside enterprises because they could pay more. They often used the infrastructure, materials and working time of Hungarian Television itself. The spread of market elements and private enterprises in the Hungarian economic system broadened the possibilities of using state property for private profit. Because the relatively low level of wages, the majority of employees who had the chance considered these practices excusable.

The heads of the departments often used their positions to get unfair material gains. The practice of sponsorship was widespread, but not regulated at all. Certain employees earned extremely large amounts of money, whereas the average level of salaries was not at all high in Hungarian Television. This fact naturally produced tensions and envies from those who, for various reasons, could not attain a similar level of income. As a special kind of "public relations," the assets of Hungarian Television — television sets, video recorders, or cars — were "lent out long term" to physical or legal persons, who formally had nothing to do with the activities of Hungarian Television.

While the overwhelming majority of the irregularities detected by the Ministry of Finance were unambiguous, there were cases when Hungarian Television simply tried not only to economise on its very limited resources, but also to manage them well. However, these attempts were not received with understanding by the bureaucrats. They did not recognise the principle that it is allowed what is not prohibited. Rather, they believed that what was not explicitly allowed to the institutions financed by the sate, was prohibited. More than once, the financial leaders of Hungarian Television were called to court for activities that they considered acceptable and, what is more, profitable for the institution. The decisions of the court were divergent.

In 1989, the last communist president of Hungarian Television decided to take determined steps to eliminate at least some of these anomalies and reshuffle Hungarian Television. These plans deserve mentioning, because they show what kinds of organisational changes were considered unavoidable in the political circumstances of the time, which were markedly different from those after the change of the regime, and provide evidence for the relative independence of the professional evaluation of the financial and organisational structures. Mr. Bereczky, the then president, was politically loyal to the existing leadership and state administration, and was careful with the new political forces. Nevertheless, the changes he began to introduce in Hungarian Television were similar to those intended by Mr. Hankiss, the first president of the new era nominated with the consent of the parliamentary parties. He tried to develop an independent, pluralistic and competitive broadcasting. That is to say, Mr. Bereczky wanted to create two independent and competitive television

programs supervised by Intendants, to separate program production and editing, to organise the production of programs on business principles, to establish small and flexible producer groups instead of oversize departments, to fix the prices for the different factors of production, to reduce the staff, and to work out strategies for the development of programs, financial management and technology. There was a very important difference between the two concepts. Bereczky planed changes only inside television: organisational changes, more effective and economical program production. Being the supporter of the previous political elite, he did not aim at political independence or plurality of information.

These attempts at the reorganisation of Hungarian Television failed because of the lack of resources as much as for political reasons. The president could only begin reorganisation. Interestingly, both presidents, Bereczky and Hankiss, resigned with reference to the increasing political control over and involvement in the affairs of Television, although under different political circumstances. Interestingly enough, in both cases the first steps of the new leadership that ousted them were to stop the ongoing changes and to re-establish the old "order." This was understandable: the new leaders were able to attract supporters inside the institution from among those who had been the losers in the previous changes.

In 1989, when the president of Hungarian Television at the time decided to take steps to eliminate the anomalies, he stated maliciously when calling somebody to account: "We must be very careful, because this is a very subtle profession... Somebody here might be called to account because of personal resentment... This is a political workshop, if I might express myself in such a way..."[6]

What does it mean that Hungarian Television was (and still is) a political workshop? Among the different mass media, Hungarian Television was the most important one, that is the most strongly controlled one. It is well known that the communist party reserved the right to appoint the leaders of Hungarian Television. The second form of control was the local party committee's "political evaluation activity" of the events and processes inside Hungarian Television, which in principle involved the political activity of all the communist party members. In practice, the majority of the simple party members were indifferent to "the enforcement of the aims of the communist party in their workplace." There was also a third, no less important, informal aspect to the party's influence on the institution. A job in Hungarian Television was considered to have high prestige. This is why certain employees worked there for very low salaries. This was also the reason why others resorted to the help of prominent political figures to become employed, or to keep their employment, or to receive a more stable or favourable position at Hungarian Television. On the one hand, this overt or covert system of relationships, where the participants were backed by protectors of varying importance, altered the official power structure of the organisation, the latter often being paralysed by the former (Jakab and Nemes 1990). On the other hand, information flowed to and from the political elite through these personal communication channels. That is why there was no need — in addition to editors-in-chief and self-censorship that the journalists exercised on themselves — for any special formal preliminary censorship or control. These informal exchanges of information worked, and the system could flexibly adapt itself to the changing

circumstances in the spirit of mutual benefits. In a politically controlled institution, where political sensitivity at least is a precondition for work, everyone needs to know where the limits of publicly expressible things are, and professional careers are linked to how people are evaluated politically, professional and political criteria are inextricably intermingled.

The Change of the Regime and Hungarian Television

With the pluralisation of the political elite becoming more manifest first inside and later outside the communist party, professionals at Hungarian Television became more differentiated, according to their inclinations or interests. In the spring of 1989, the "circle of reformists" differentiated themselves from the HSWP members at Hungarian Television by supporting the pro-reform wing of the party under Pozsgay. Shortly afterwards, the local group of the Hungarian Democratic Forum made its presence felt. Some other employees of Hungarian Television began to build up connections with the so-called "democratic opposition" and import them into the public sphere of Hungarian Television, first by disguising them as "experts," and later on introducing them as thinkers giving alternative solutions to the existing problems. Political power games linked to the political power struggles outside the institution started in Hungarian Television. They were inseparable from professional and career interests.

Taking sides with political groups on the part of the broadcasting staff or, more exactly, on the part of the creative staff, can be criticised in terms of professional journalistic values, such as objectivity and impartiality. However, is seems that the acknowledgement of these values presupposes a stable society and well-balanced power relationships, rather than a society undergoing rapid changes, where the newly emerging political forces seek public support and try to articulate themselves. In the specific case of East-European countries, where identification with new political forces needed "civic courage," and society itself gave moral justification to its partisan members, impartiality had no real value among journalists either. Actually, the main question was not whether journalists were partial or impartial. Rather, the question was whom they took sides with. The journalists were active participants in the peaceful change of regime. Especially at the time of the interim period, they experienced the power of publicity. In Hungary, there were no real clashes in the streets, but symbolic battles on the screen and in the pages of newspapers. This is why the fight for television and the press was so tough. The peculiarity of this fight was that the emerging political opposition perceived that they did not have an equal chance in the mass media. It was not important whether this was caused by the lack of communicative competence or lack of political integrity, or by unequal treatment by journalists. It was widely believed by parties which felt neglected or maltreated in the media that the journalists preferred the liberal parties, and an unregulated or unbalanced situation would be more favourable for them. Even the reform-socialists were of this opinion. That is why Mr. Pozsgay, the socialist minister responsible for the media, appointed a multi-party board of curators to control the functioning of the electronic media, most importantly Hungarian Television. Naturally, the liberal parties were against this control, and did not take part in the activities of the controlling body.

Another attempt to ensure that the non-liberal parties should have agents in Hungarian Television to support their interests and to manifest the minister's national orientation was that he appointed a new general editor to the News and Current Affairs Department, who was known for his nationalist disposition. The journalists themselves considered the politicians' attempts to control them as a limitation on the freedom of press and resumption of party control, even though in the form of a multi-party dictatorship. During the election campaign, the conflicts between journalists and politicians became even sharper.

The first free elections resulted in the triumph of the nationalist, conservative or Christian parties, with the Hungarian Democratic Forum in the lead. Their suspicious approach to journalists was much more marked than that of politicians in general. They felt as if the journalists had not been happy about their triumph and that they were supporters of their political opponents, the social and liberal parties. This meant to the new government that the media questioned their triumph, the result of the free elections, and their public support. The fact that the printed press was privatised, thus getting out of the control of the new political elite, deepened this suspicion further. The only forums that they still could have at their disposal were Radio and Television.

Nevertheless, it seemed for a while that the question of the media can be resolved peacefully. The biggest party in government and the biggest party in opposition agreed that, given certain guarantees for the stability of the government by the latter, the media would not be allowed to become a terrain of party struggles. The first presidents of Hungarian Radio and Hungarian Television would be appointed with the consent of the various political forces. An impartial supervisory body would control the activity of the media. The new media law would need a two thirds' majority to be passed by parliament. It became clear that the agreement between the party leaders was not enough to bring about agreement between the parties. Some of the winners did not want to let the media out of their hands and pass them to a non-political controlling body. This disagreement between the winners foreshadowed the difficulty in reaching any agreement on the media. It is always hard to harmonise the interests of the different parties, and it is almost impossible if there are serious differences of opinions inside the parties, because the results of negotiations can always be questioned.

Attempts to Reorganise Hungarian Television: External Aspects of Changes

The external and internal aspects of changes in Hungarian Television are very closely related. One of the most important characteristics I would like to emphasise is how external factors became internalised, and how internal problems appeared in external power struggles.

After the change of the regime, one of the political expectations of the new elite was the reorganisation of Hungarian Television. At the beginning, everything seemed to be promising. The two biggest parties agreed that Hungarian Television could not be a subject of political struggles. The freedom of the media had to be guaranteed. The first president of Hungarian Television and the Hungarian Radio were elected by common consent, and charged with total reorganisation of the media institutions.

What were the tasks that Hankiss, the president of Hungarian Television, undertook to accomplish?

Firstly, to reorganise Hungarian Television in such a way that it would be ready to operate in the new situation when commercial television arrived in Hungary;

Secondly, to prepare the outline of a media law that would have the objective of regulating the cohabitation of public service and commercial television.

What were the circumstances he counted on? That the Parliament would support him in fulfilling these tasks, vote for the sort of state subsidy needed for the reorganisation, and quickly pass the media law prepared by him. This would give a legal framework for the functioning of Hungarian Television. Commercial television stations and a media market would spring into existence. This would, on the one hand, create a competitive situation in broadcasting. On the other hand, it would absorb the labour surplus of Hungarian Television, and thus the need for staff reductions could be realised without significant conflicts.

The tasks were scheduled in the following manner: The media presidents, or rather their expert advisors, were to prepare the preliminary conception of the media law. In accordance with this conception, the presidents would work out the regulation of the organisation and operation of the media institutions. And, with full powers, they would start the reorganisation. The initial assumption was: that the presidents had the political support of the new parliament.

However, this schedule collapsed at the very beginning. It became clear that the preparation of the conception of the media law needs much more time than two months. It turned out that it was naive to imagine that the Hungarian media law could be compiled from the media laws of the developed democracies, or that any existing law could be adopted.

The collapse of the schedule meant that the presidents of Television and of Hungarian Radio started the reorganisation of the media institutions before the media law, or even its concept, was passed by the parliament, or even by the government or the competent parliamentary commissions. They worked out the program of organisational changes, chose their co-workers, informed the government and the parliament, and started the changes as all-powerful leaders of two independent institutions. However, they did not take into account that they no longer enjoyed the confidence of the governing coalition.

The political changes during the first months of the government led to a questioning of the social legitimacy of the new power holders. The government accused the media, among others, for their loss of popularity. They became suspicious of any act expressing independence. According to their logic, starting a fundamental internal reorganisation of Television without a new media law meant a challenge to the authority of legislation, because any reorganisation had to be a means of realising the principles and aims of the Law. According to the logic of the president of Hungarian Television, he was the authorised leader of an independent Hungarian Television. He had full rights to carry out changes and to choose his co-workers without governmental intervention.

The means of resolution of the conflict situation on the part of the government was to invoke a governmental resolution of 1974, which gave the government the

possibility to control Hungarian Television and Radio. Secondly, in accordance with the Law on Nomination of the Leaders of Hungarian Television and Hungarian Radio (1994), they enforced their right to nominate deputy presidents to these media institutions. Basing itself on the governmental resolution of 1974, the government refused to approve any version of the regulation of the organisation and operation of the media institutions. In this way, they froze the process of change and contributed to the moral and management crisis arising from the interim situation inside Hungarian Television. At the same time, the governmental majority in the parliament deprived Hungarian Television of the state support needed for both the fundamental reorganisation and normal functioning. By this action, they increased the tensions among the members of the staff of Hungarian Television, and forced the president who, wanted to prove that independent Hungarian Television could not only survive such a crisis but flourish, into some very bad compromises. Hankiss's reaction was to move towards increased commercialisation, and to encourage the cheapest and most profitable program making possible. Later on, parts of these measures were criticised by the government, and it tried to use them as arguments against the president in a disciplinary procedure.

It was very clear to the media leaders that a media law was the indispensable precondition of the normal, predictable functioning of the media. After two years of political bargaining, in December 1992, the Parliament failed to pass a new law. The presidents of the media gave up their reorganising activity and left Hungarian Radio and Hungarian Television. What happened from that time on is not the subject of this study.

What were the causes of the unsuccessful political negotiations around the media law? Although the political parties involved had no elaborate, coherent and public media policies, two incompatible paradigms of the social functions of the media were opposed to each other in these negotiations:

The first paradigm focused on national values considered the mass media a means of realising its aims of the reconstruction of national identity, the preservation of national values, the propagation of Christian values and support for the national culture. As they considered the mass media instruments for the realisation these higher social aims, they laid claim to controlling them. This was the paradigm of the biggest governmental party, to the Hungarian Democratic Forum.

The second, liberal paradigm set as its targets the creation of complete independence and autonomy for the media, and the setting up of a pluralistic media system to assure a free flow of ideas. To achieve these aims, it suggested the following means: a complete withdrawal of the state from the media sphere, and economic independence as a precondition for the political independence of the media. This meant independence from the state budget in the case of the public service media, and the development of commercial media. The aim was to speed up a market-oriented development of the media. Given the lack of domestic capital, it was ready to accept any amount of foreign capital to achieve this aim. This was the paradigm of the biggest party in opposition, the Alliance of Free Democrats.

During the negotiations on the media law, the parties in opposition, headed by the Free Democrats, discovered the possible advantages of co-operation of all opposition

parties in order to enforce their aims. According to the Constitution, the media law needed a two thirds' majority to pass the parliament, in order to design the media system by the widest political consent. If no political consent existed, the law cannot be enforced by legal means. The Constitution specified the questions which needed a two thirds' majority, but the media law under preparation contained so many interrelated questions that, until the last minute, the opposing sides could not agree whether the whole law, or only some parts of it, needed a two thirds' majority to pass.

Another cause of the delay to the media legislation process was that the parties in the parliament submitted the question to their "higher" party bodies. The process of bargaining and the readiness to agree was affected very much by the inter- and intra-party conflicts. On certain questions, representatives of two different parties could more easily agree than members of one party. According to the changes of inter- and intra-party power relationships, standpoints could change. This made partial agreements uncertain, especially on the part of the leading party in two distinct organisations. The roots of the instability and uncertainty of the parties lay in the circumstances of their forced establishment in 1989.

The third cause of the failure of the media legislation was that, during the long process of negotiations, the government discovered the gaps in the legal guarantees of the freedom of the media, the possibilities to wield power and, in the case of "crisis situations," to misuse its power and to enforce its interests in media affairs. Thus, the government attempted to nominate party loyalists as leaders of the media, initiated baseless disciplinary procedures against the media leaders and financial restrictions, and postponed important decisions. Such manoeuvres by the government influenced the legislative process. They decreased the readiness of the opposition to reach agreement, because they wanted to include into the law more and more guarantees of media independence from the government.

The Internal Aspects of Failed Reorganisation of Hungarian Television

What were the circumstances inside Hungarian Television the president counted on at the beginning of reorganisation? He believed that he could unite his expert knowledge with the professional knowledge of best specialists in Hungarian Television (Ferenczy 1994), and that the professionals would consider the planned changes congruent with their own interests, and therefore support him in their realisation.

The aim of the reorganisation was to rebuild the structure and means of functioning of Hungarian Television into an "almost commercial television structure," but at the same time "as much as possible to keep guarantees that Hungarian Television fulfilled its obligations as a public service." Instead of the unified, monolithic organisation of program making and editing, for two more or less complementary programs, Hankiss planned independent, autonomous units in order to ensure both effectiveness and pluralism. It was planned to have two independent, competitive channels, served by an independent program making enterprise, a separate commercial enterprise, and many independent television producers. The separation from Hungarian Television of certain functions traditionally belonging to the institution would fulfil two tasks:

reducing the staff, as Parliament demanded; and forming competition. This would, it was hoped, render programming cheaper and provide free creative professionals to the new commercial stations which were supposed to grow as mushrooms after the media law was passed by Parliament.

The media law did not pass, the commercial or other public service stations did not start, the media market did not develop, but the reorganisation of Hungarian Television started. Very quickly, by the December of 1990, it became clear that the political forces in power did not support the reorganisation either morally or financially. This was partly because they were not content with the role that Hungarian Television played in the public life, partly because the planed organisational changes were not in harmony with their media concept.

The pressure of unfavourable external conditions had a double effect on the changes inside Hungarian Television. The president was an intellectual well trained in social and political sciences. He firmly believed of the rightness of the independence of the media from the government and set this in the centre of his efforts. Last, but not least, he was driven by an ambition to put into practice his own ideas about the freedom of the media and democracy and the proper conduct of an intellectual citizen in crisis situation. He continued the reorganisations he had started. But the number of those who supported his ideas and respected his intellectual abilities, and were ready to follow or support the changes, decreased. The prospect of success for the changes in the given circumstances, with the lack of political and financial support, seemed to most of them hopeless. Hungarian Television was, for them, above all a workplace, where successful professional working needed money, and where they earned their political objectives. For the politicians, having collaborators inside Hungarian Television had a double advantage. On the one hand, they were informed about the processes inside the institution, and could use this information against the president of Hungarian Television. On the other hand, if their allies were from the creative staff, the politicians could assert their interests in Hungarian Television through them, when the president refused to do their bidding in the name of impartiality.

In this way, there was an interweaving of the external and internal aspects, and of the professional and political factors, of the changes in Hungarian Television.

Notes:

1. Incidentally, these evaluations were prepared jointly by the local party committee and the national leaders of Hungarian Television, because they knew the situation better than the members of the Central Committee.

2. For example, Radio Danubius, or the experiences with commercial television during the Budapest Spring Fair in 1988. Their main aim was to experiment and to support the main public (state) channels.

3. Report by Gyula Bereczky, president of the Hungarian Television on the inquires of the Ministry of Finance, published in the internal bulletin of the Hungarian Television, *Telehir*, in June 1989.

4. It was the case that in the middle eighties, Hungarian television had no head book-keeper for several years.

5. Bereczky's report.

6. Bereczky's report.

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