

Madrid before the hosting of the Budapest meeting was settled, and, at the time, Hungary undertook to allow the same full range of activities for nongovernmental organizations in Budapest as had taken place in Madrid. The authorities in Hungary warned that the parallel forum could "disturb the atmosphere and the work of the official forum." This statement was incomprehensible. The purpose of the parallel forum was not to disturb or provoke or hinder, but rather to enhance. An essential part of the Helsinki process is contact among citizens of participating states.

Finally, the Hungarians said that the government representatives at the official forum could express their opinions freely. There was, therefore, no need for the private forum. However all government representatives are government-designated. In Eastern Europe that means that those ideologically hostile to the governments are excluded from official delegations. A private forum would involve exchanges that could not take place in the official forum.

The real reasons

If the stated reasons for prohibition were not the real reasons, what were the real reasons? Western delegates to the official forum reported that the Hungarians were under heavy pressure from the Czechs and the Soviets to cancel the alternative forum. Tolerance in any Eastern European country is a threat to the regimes in all of those countries, because of the risk of demands for imitation. The Soviets have a special interest, because Communist dominance means Russian dominance, something the Soviets want to maintain. The Hungarians yielded to that pressure, but only in a perfunctory way. They acted as surrogate repressors for the Soviets, but did the minimum possible. By prohibiting the meeting publicly, they gave the appearance of succumbing to the Soviets. By waiting until the last moment, after everyone had arrived, and then allowing the meeting to take place in private residences, they, in effect, circumvented the Soviet demands.

What happened, nonetheless, did have a repressing effect. By declaring the parallel forum prohibited, the Hungarians delegitimized it in the eyes of their own citizens. For those cultural figures in Hungary already black-listed and denied all work because of their cultural activities, or for those under arrest who were released at the beginning of the official forum, that sort of delegitimization did not really matter. However, for the Hungarian cultural figures not totally alienated from the regime, the prohibition had to have an intimidating effect. The absence of permission was an implicit threat against those Hungarians who participated. Still, the whole incident was very Hungarian. Gyorgy Bence in a report to the Helsinki Federation titled: "Censorship and Alternative Modes of Cultural Expression in Hungary," delivered at the Federation meetings held in conjunction with the parallel forum, wrote that censorship in Hungary was "bashful."

Hungary prides itself on being the most liberal of the Eastern European countries. It does not wish to appear overtly oppressive. Instead, it operates wherever possible, by pressure and suggestion, behind closed doors. Its main weapon is discrimination against those who do not go along, a substantial weapon, indeed, in a country where the state controls everything. Although Westerners found

the Hungarian government's behavior puzzling, Hungarians considered it predictable.

Canadian response

What should the Canadian response have been to this incident? Once the Soviets and Czechs started pressuring for cancellation, and before the Hungarian government



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decided what to do, Canada joined with other Western nations in asking the Hungarians to allow the parallel forum to take place. In a sense what happened was a compromise, allowing the Hungarians to accede, in some way, to the pressures from both sides. After the Hungarian government decision had been reached, a number of Western governments commented on it. The US made a strong statement, deploring the decision of the government of Hungary, calling it a violation of Hungarian commitments, and delivered an official protest to the Hungarian authorities. The Common Market made a statement on the matter. So did a number of individual European countries. Canada, however, said nothing. The time for Canada's