

Logo

- [Home](#)
- [About »](#)
- [Interviews](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Articles »](#)
- [Books »](#)
- [Eastern Europe »](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Plays](#)
- [Blog](#)

[Home](#) » [Blog](#) » Democracy without Democrats

Democracy without Democrats

Posted by [John](#) on Mar 27, 2014 in [Blog](#), [Eastern Europe](#), [Featured](#), [Uncategorized](#) | [0 comments](#)



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Anybody can claim the mantle of democracy. Russian neo-fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy runs a party called the Liberal Democratic Party. East Germany was called the German Democratic Republic. And even North Korea makes a nod in this direction when it calls itself the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The countries of East-Central Europe are, of course, in a different category. They have received democracy's "Good Housekeeping" seal of approval – membership in the European Union. To gain membership, they had to meet all manner of political and economic benchmarks. But the true test of a democracy is whether people behave democratically, at all levels of society.

Andras Biro has a unique perspective on Hungarian democracy. He left the country after the 1956 uprising and didn't come back until the mid-1980s. In between he worked as a journalist and a UN consultant, much of the time in Latin America. In 1990, he founded the Autonomia Foundation to strengthen democracy in Hungary. One of the primary aims of the organization has been to help Roma improve their own position in society through small grants and loans. For this work, he received the [Right Livelihood award](#) in 1995.

I met Biro in 1993 when Autonomia was already active on many fronts. Twenty years later, as he approaches his tenth decade, Biro remains engaged in a variety of enterprises. Last May, after interviewing him in his apartment in Budapest, we went to the Central European University where he participated in a roundtable discussion on Roma issues. I expected we would take a taxi to the event, but no, we walked down to the bus stop and took public transportation.

To say that he is unhappy with the current political situation in Hungary would be an understatement. "Over the last 23 years, the developments in Hungary and its connection to the global situation can be summed up in one sentence — democracy cannot be established without democrats," he told me. "This society didn't have any democratic experience except for the short orgiastic moments of revolution, which were not conducive to establishing real democratic structures such as laws, a constitution, or the democratic instincts without which there is no democracy."

In place of democracy, Biro sees a country increasingly held together by a culture of corruption. "During the previous so-called democratic liberal governance, corruption started to become a very important part of economic life," he observed. "It was not legitimized. Now, parliament enacts laws that legitimize the structural corruption. People get money from the state in order to recycle it back to the political mafia."

He was no less withering about the lack of democracy from below, particularly in Hungary's so-called civil society, an import from the United States. "U.S. society could handle this, and your democracy was not in danger," he pointed out. "But the export of this idea to Hungary – where there are now more than 60,000 NGOs and foundations – is something else. It has created a kind of business sector, and it has prevented the rise of a real civil society with a real political role. Of course, these NGOs have a social service role too. But if they dominate the game, then they thwart the whole democratic process."

His criticism extends to the work that he has done as well. "Quantitatively, Autonomia was a success," he told me. "The donors kept coming, one after the other, particularly American donors. After only two years, I had a yearly budget of one million dollars. Of course, it's another danger when you have too much money, because it can sometimes thwart the process. But we were careful. We didn't enter the NGO game. And the repayment ratio on the loans we gave was extraordinarily high, higher than any banks these days. But qualitatively, I'm not at all sure if we have done anything worthwhile to mention."

Qualitatively, Roma civil society remains weak. But this is also a reflection of the democratic structures within which it operates. For Biro, the civic engagement of Roma is a more sophisticated test of Hungarian democracy than mere EU membership. "As long as the Roma do not become citizens – they already have passports and IDs but I'm talking *effective* citizens – our democracies won't be able to call themselves democracies," he concluded. "This is the litmus test for democracy, what determines the mental and psychological health of a given society. And nowadays, Hungary is an extremely sick country."

The Interview

Do you remember where you were and what you were thinking when you heard about the fall of the Berlin Wall?

I was here in Hungary. I didn't hear about it because we were living it in a very intense way. Things were happening here in Hungary before the fall of the Wall. In particular, there was the liberal approach of the then-Communist government to open the frontier to the east so that East Germans could go into Austria. It was really a courageous action by the then-Hungarian government. I was here in Hungary, just back three years after being away for 30 years. I left after the 1956 revolution and came back in 1986.

Most of my questions will focus on Roma issues. But I am curious about your experience here in 1956. What led to your leaving the country and what is your perspective on that period?

We don't have the possibility for a more in-depth analysis of what happened here in 1956. But I think it had two fundamental aspects. The first is the "no" given to the totalitarian system, and the second is the "no" given to the Soviet occupation. Both of these are interwoven.

I'll give you a small example. Since 1945 and liberation, more or less because of my interests and my languages, I've dealt with foreign policy. If you asked me during that period about my views on foreign policy, I had only one answer: Russians out. There was an overwhelming societal need for independence, and it was a progressive demand. On the other side, with the "no" to this type of totalitarian state socialism – I never call it "socialism" any more because it wasn't, but let's use this term – there was an extraordinary explosion of civil society potential. In a very short time, it was able to create forms of governance that are characteristic of revolutions in general. The councils movement – workers' councils, peasants' councils, intellectuals' councils – erupted. To use a term Marx liked to use, society was pregnant with this child. It was really amazing, and I was absolutely flabbergasted by it. Of course, because nothing is ever all white and black, there was also a resurgence of anti-Semitism and violence against the representatives of the regime who had "sullied the revolution."

We can make sense of this even more by bringing it up to date. As you know, and the international press is full of it, Hungary nowadays has a newly expressed and violently racist part of society that orients itself against the Roma. More slowly, classical anti-Semitic elements have also emerged.

I don't want to excuse this phenomenon, but I want to understand the why of this phenomenon. There are several components of this anti-Semitic attitude. First of all, the leadership of the 1919 Communist revolution was very often Jewish. The Communists that came back from Moscow – the four guys who led the party from 1935 on – were Jewish. In the meantime, the horror that happened in Hungary, from the summer of 1944 on, involved the deportation and extermination of 400,000 Jews, particularly provincial Jews. The Hungarian state apparatus was obviously involved in this, though many people have tried to say that the Germans, who occupied us, were entirely responsible. But we should not forget that the first anti-Semitic law in Hungary was in 1920 or 1921.

In our modern history, Hungarian society was unable to create an ethnically genuine bourgeoisie. Our feudal structures were very strong. This gap was essentially filled not only by the German minority but by the Jewish community, which was numerous here because of the liberal attitude of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. According to the racist or Nazi discourse, both the Communists and the capitalists were Jews and they were both against us, the "poor and pure" people of Hungary. This deep tradition of anti-Semitism began in the 19th century. It would have been useful if someone had cut out this cancer from our society and put it on the table for discussion. Unfortunately Jewish leaders have had a complex of denying their Jewishness, and many Jews joined the Party as a sure protection from the horrors that happened before. All this is logical and understandable. But one result was that the Nazi crimes, and the Holocaust in particular, were not treated as a topic that could provoke a clarification of societal discourse. The Nazis of course were eliminated physically after 1945 through trials and so on. But the real discourse in the late 1940s and early 1950s on what happened in the Holocaust, even in the West, hardly existed, and in Hungary not at all. After 1956, this topic was so sensitive to the Party leadership of Janos Kadar that there were practically no Jews any more in the leadership of the party, aside from one well known figure who was the cultural tsar of Hungary at the time. Like many other things in Hungarian history, such as the crimes of the regime prior to the Communist takeover, this issue has not really been discussed.

In my opinion this history helps explain the extraordinary success of this new regime and its nationalistic and discriminatory policies. The regime itself – and it's not a government, it's a regime – has a discourse on national pride that considers some Hungarians to be foreigners because they are Jews or left wing or liberals. This creation of a division between the "real" Hungarians and the "soft" Hungarians or the "non-Hungarians" has been because these historical crimes have not been discussed and should have been discussed during the last 23 years. I'm not happy that the Communists didn't start this discussion. But we have the opportunity to do it now. The Holocaust in the last 20-30 years has become an everyday

topic in societies all around the world, particularly Europe and the States. I can add that the assimilation of the Jewish community in Hungary — and its extraordinary role in the social, economic and cultural development of the country over the last century — has created another kind of drama for the Jewish people. They feel Hungarian. By the way, much of the super nationalistic propaganda done in the 1930s was composed by Jews who felt overwhelmingly Hungarian! So, things can't be so easily simplified.

This explains the extraordinary success of this populist — I can't even call it right-wing — regime. It is as much leftist in the sense that it nationalizes everything it can. We are in such a pathological moment that our society is not really responding to it. Still, after all these horrors they've done over the last two or three years, the ruling party is still at the top of the polls. Hungary is really the negative model of Europe, and it hurts me enormously.

Over the last 23 years, the developments in Hungary and its connection to the global situation can be summed up in one sentence — democracy cannot be established without democrats. This society didn't have any democratic experience except for the short orgiastic moments of revolution, which were not conducive to establishing real democratic structures such as laws, a constitution, or the democratic instincts without which there is no democracy.

Our political class was completely incapable of initiating this process. The fathers of democracy in 1989-90 created a perfect structure — with pluralism, checks and balances, an ideal constitution, a constitutional court — and with this they supposed that we would have democracy. But the 40 years of social experience under Communism — and the new political class that emerged — wasn't analyzed self-critically. And a lot of traditional behavior survived from before the Communist system. Let me give you one of my ideas in this regard. The Communist system produced a radical social change in class structure and so on. But gradually, this totalitarian system gained the acceptance of people because they were used to being told what to do under the previous system. They were shocked at the beginning, of course. But after the soft pornography of the Kadar regime came into effect after 1961, the system became totally acceptable. There was a tradeoff. Kadar told them that they would live better — better than the other socialist countries — and more freely. But the price was to shut up. And that's what happened. It prostituted the whole social contract. And now we are experiencing the consequences.

Although the personnel are different, this former Communist party hasn't really changed. It is the biggest oppositional tendency in Hungary. But they play the same paternalistic role they've always played. They can't think any other way. It's quite tragic. Which explains why the opposition is so extraordinarily weak and why we might not be able to change this regime in the next elections in 2014.

Because there was no analysis of the Kadar period and this prostitution of the social contract, we are now witnessing an extraordinarily developed corruption, which did not exist in Hungary before the Communist regime. Of course there was corruption before. But, to put it in simple terms, policemen couldn't be bought. Today, not only can you buy them but you have to! It's really a cancer of society. During the previous so-called democratic liberal governance, corruption started to become a very important part of economic life. It was not legitimized. Now, parliament enacts laws that legitimate the structural corruption. People get money from the state in order to recycle it back to the political mafia.

Then there is the topic of civil society. I am very critical, in this respect, of the cultural imperialism of the United States. In theory and in praxis, civil society in a democracy regulates and reacts to political power. It plays a very important role in political life. This relationship does not exist here in this country or in any of the other countries in this region. The whole concept of the non-profit sector, which came from the States and won the battle very quickly, has been extremely negative for the development of democracy in our country. The nonprofit phenomenon in the States is relatively new historically. In its origins, this do-gooder Protestant ethic had a societal expression in this whole non-profit sector, which in the final analysis socialized the social services. It filled certain gaps that the government didn't care or want to cover.

We can call such NGOs the unwitting agents of neoliberalism. They might consciously oppose neo-liberalism but unconsciously work hand in hand in the privatization of social services.

Exactly. U.S. society could handle this. And your democracy was not in danger. But the export of this idea to Hungary — where there are now more than 60,000 NGOs and foundations — is something else. It has created a kind of business sector, and it has prevented the rise of a real civil society with a real political role. Of course, these NGOs have a social service role too. But if they dominate the game, then they thwart the whole democratic process. This is my analysis of what has happened in these years. If you look at the Roma topic from this point of view, it has classically impeded the creation of citizenship and civic consciousness, and this is why our book is called from *From Victimhood to Citizenship*.

In other words, these NGOs understood Roma as victims who are the recipients of service.

Yes, and the NGOs are playing the corruption game as well. Victimhood is a concept widely spread among the Roma themselves, historically speaking, since they've been at the outskirts of society for centuries and centuries. In this book, we are also saying that we should stop with the do-goodism, PC approach of "Aw, the poor Roma, let's protect them." I start from that good old American saying that "it takes two to tango." Of course, we should be careful with this formula. In the tango couple, there is male dominance, so the two are not equal. But it still takes two to tango, with the man leading.

As you may remember, I launched a foundation with the objective to promote the development of Roma civil society. Quantitatively, Autonomia was a success. The donors kept coming, one after the other, particularly American donors. After only two years, I had a yearly budget of one million dollars. Of course, it's another danger when you have too much money, because it can sometimes thwart the process. But we were careful. We didn't enter the NGO game. And the repayment ratio on the loans we gave was extraordinarily high, higher than any banks these days. But qualitatively, I'm not at all sure if we have done anything worthwhile to mention.

In the audience at the seminar we did at the university yesterday, 60-70 percent of the students were Roma. We spoke of the Roma movement and taking the Black experience in the United States as a model. We didn't introduce the model as something to be imitated, but rather to illustrate how a liberation process can take place inside a democratic structure without civil war. For this reason I think it was a miracle. In this way, we tried to provoke the youngsters into taking social responsibility. But they're not part of the game.

Because they did not see themselves as acting in a collective sense, only in an individual sense?

Exactly. This is for many reasons. I don't want to blame the Roma. If you can speak English and you have a university degree, you can get a good job — either here or in an international organization. There are hundreds maybe even thousands of Roma who have gotten grants to study in universities all over the region. Where are those guys? For a minority, I understand very well that the normal way of getting ahead in life is to learn, to study. But if you are discriminated and attacked as a minority — and there have been racist Ku Klux Klan-type killings — the situation is different. Apparently this doesn't bother many of the Roma.

The topic of Roma is very fashionable now. But it's often framed as: “we have to solve the problem of the Roma.” They are not the actors in the game. And we spend a lot of money, millions of dollars from organizations including the one financing you. This good will and generosity is far from being enough. On the contrary, if you don't follow up on your projects, you can be detrimental.

The real problem, as I see it now, is that this is an extraordinary diverse community, which I didn't know when I started to work with them. I had very simple ideas back then, coming from Latin America where I'd been working with peasants. Since then, I've gotten informed. It's a unique community in the world because its livelihood has never been based on the soil. You don't find a Roma peasantry anywhere, only a few individuals here and there. The community isn't rooted in the soil, to put it poetically. For centuries, the community lived by the trades it was involved in. They were doing their handicrafts for 600 years, and there has been no technological change: the same tools, the same way of selling things. The Roma lived on the outskirts of society, and they were very often persecuted and killed for that. But they never made efforts to join society, because of the internal values of purity and defilement. They also lacked a sense of private property. What they have had is personal property but not private property. They provided services, like the musicians who played for aristocrats and the upper levels of society. And this created a romantic image of the “beautiful savage,” which lasts until today, an image of a people who travel and are free and are to be envied. But this picture leaves out all the misery in which the majority has lived, often on an animal level of subsistence. The social structure continues to be based on clans and big families.

Just yesterday at the seminar we spoke about something that politically correct people never talk of — because it gives arguments to the right wing and Nazis. This is what the Roma call the capacity to trick. It's always looked at in an ethical or moral way. For me, it's a technology. If you are powerless in society and you are really excluded and ghettoized, you don't have weapons. You don't have political power, military power, or economic power. What remains as a technique to survive is to use the interstices, the holes in society, where you can exploit the society — not large-scale capitalist exploitation but man to man. Cheating is not a moral discourse: it's a survival technique. But the surrounding society can't look at it with my “objective, analytical” approach. They have the experience of the chickens disappearing.

The horrible drama of this story is that the so-called socialism integrated the Roma into the production sector. In Hungary, 79 percent of men and 40 percent of the females were employed — for 1.5 generations. An acculturation process began. Imagine a people who never had the same perception of time as that of the majority society. Time for them was time not money. Income was always insecure. And, then under so-called socialism, they got a mediocre but a secure income, along with social security, schooling, housing, health. It was a radical change in their lifestyle and livelihood that lasted for a generation and a half.

And then comes freedom and democracy, and they are expelled from economic life. They become unemployed, and all the old survival tactics come back. Still, after 23 years, 60-80 percent are unemployed. There are some villages where no Roma have a job. And the new phenomenon of the slum culture has taken over. They're not better or worse than others who are excluded. It's not genetic. It's socio-economic and cultural. Of course this applies to only part of the Roma. We cannot generalize or else we fall into the same racist attitudes as everyone else.

If, as we said before, the democratization of Hungarian society has been extremely slow, imagine what happened to the Roma in their excluded and segregated state. The only place where positive change has occurred is education. But even here the progress has been problematic because of the segregation in primary school classes, which only reproduces the exclusion. And the new government is not doing much to change that.

But the political repercussion was the 2010 elections. The neo-Nazi party entered the parliament with 17 percent of the votes and the slogan “let's fight Gypsy criminality.” Years ago, I was interviewed by a weekly magazine here on this topic and I started by saying that I spoke to a lady in a village who had 70 chickens. Now she has 3. With her I could not discuss the integration problem of the Roma. You can't imagine the attacks I received — that I'd become racist. Of course, that was a logical reaction, and I don't give a damn. But the do-gooders, the Left, and the liberals have this built-in guilt complex that doesn't allow them to be frank and change things effectively. With complexes we don't change things.

I would add to this that there are three aspects to the diversity of the Roma. They help to explain the complexity of the topic. You have the classical social stratification as you have everywhere — the powerful and the rich, the poor, and the middle strata. When we say “Roma,” we think poverty. But it's not the case. There are Roma who are millionaires. Second, there is the diverse subculture that we spoke about — the clans, groups. And third, there are Roma who have integrated into society. But those who discriminate against the Roma forget about these diverse elements. For them, the Roma is a bloc of more-or-less brown-skinned people who are all the same.

For me, and perhaps I'm exaggerating but I do believe this, as long as the Roma do not become citizens — they already have passports and IDs but I'm talking *effective* citizens — our democracies won't be able to call themselves democracies. This is the litmus test for democracy, what determines the mental and psychological health of a given society. And nowadays, Hungary is an extremely sick country. Hatred based on political conviction is reaching impossible magnitudes. For instance, the government passed a measure to reduce the price of electricity and gas. This was done in a populist way, ignoring market forces and so on. The government also started a propaganda campaign to collect signatures of people defending the price cuts. In response, the opposition beat up the people who came and asked for those signatures! This is an indication that the tension is absolutely growing.

On the afternoon of October 23, 1956, I was with 400,000 people in front of the parliament. We didn't have the slightest idea that the next day a revolution would start. You just don't know what society's belly is full of or what it lacks. Even with all the studies of sociologists, you never know what will happen. I don't think a civil war will take place in this country, of course. But I'm sure that local explosions will take place. The leadership here is now so atavistic that it lacks the flexibility of a classical political power structure. All it can do is attack certain social strata and buy off other strata. They act like crooks.

Without a proper feedback mechanism, the current regime is somewhat similar to the Communist regime.

Absolutely. I'm always asking this question about Victor Orban, the prime minister: what did he hear during Sunday lunches at home from his father, who had participated in the war against the Soviet Union? What stories was he told? Certainly not the official stories of the political system. It was private stories, a continuation of certain lines of thinking that became his extraordinary outspoken and extreme liberalism. Then he was an atheist. Today, he is in the Church. He has four children, each one in a different Christian religion. It all depended on the political moment.

Like a monarch who has four daughters and marries them off to different kings in different lands for strategic purposes.

I am convinced that there is a serious element of pathology in this man, in his capacity to keep political power and create a certain, nationalist-inclined stratum of Hungarian society. But he is adored, particularly by the older pink-hat ladies.

Recently a very strange idea came to my mind. I think this is one of rare countries in the world where the three ethnic components of society — ethnic Hungarians, Jews, and Roma — all portray themselves as victims. This is not totally false, from a historical point of view. But it's unusual for the majority society to consider itself a victim. Any society that has such a competition for who is the bigger victim is a sick society.

I want to push you on this question of strategy on Roma issues. You've talked about how this do-goodism is ultimately self-defeating, even if it makes people feel good briefly. But you also said that your strategy of providing microloans was successful quantitatively but you had some questions about its qualitative success. Can you explain that?

Our objective was not simply economic. We gave loans to local Roma NGOs in order to provoke a democratic process inside the NGO itself. And it turned out that these organizations were basically family structures. We lost the battle in this respect.

So, what strategies? For me, there is nothing else methodologically possible except to make Roma themselves part of the discourse. If they remain passive objects or subjects of government intentions and societal approval or disapproval, nothing will ever change. For a certain period of time and in certain sectors, affirmative action is needed — but not indefinitely. The crux of the matter is to take into account the demographic weight. This gives us an opportunity to exploit the fact that the Roma are growing, whereas the majority is declining. Stated in political terms, if the Roma could all go in the same direction by voting, they could determine the game between the parties.

Like the ethnic Turks do in Bulgaria.

Precisely.

But unfortunately, as you point out, they are too diverse and don't act as a single voting bloc.

Right, they don't have this power. Without a genuine movement and legitimate leadership — i.e., democratic processes inside the movement — and by this to create a political weight and effective citizenship, I don't see any possible change.

Now this won't be the strategy of any political party or power structure. It's the business of the Roma. They always say, "We don't have a Martin Luther King, Jr." Why don't you have Martin Luther King, Jr.? There was no Martin Luther King, Jr. for centuries for Blacks in the States. But then something started to move. I don't want to compare, because it's too easy, but there's one thing to mention. When Africans arrived in the States, they were immediately proletarianized. Which was horrible for them, of course. But they immediately got close to people because they were the nannies and the servants. In the meantime, they experienced racist discrimination against them — in a country where human rights were in general respected. All these conditions are not here in the case of the Roma.

AFSC more or less promoted [the civil rights approach](#), though sometimes it was more Malcolm X than Martin Luther King, Jr.

You must have this diversity of approaches. We don't have either Malcolm X or Martin Luther King, Jr.

You will meet [Nicolae Gheorghe](#). Between us, he is very sick. And I am very upset about this because we are very close friends. In fact, he is the only Roma with whom I have a real relationship, and not because they are bad and I am good. But because I am a *gadjo*. Whatever I do — this barrier is difficult to overcome. But since the beginning between the two of us, this problem didn't exist — probably because we were both Communists: believers not apparatchiks. Then in different ways we worked ourselves out of this intellectual prison of modern Marxism.

I want to give you some other strategic thoughts of what to do. If we have the organic intellectuals that Gramsci talked about, then something can start to move. Because of the Orban regime, civil society is starting to emerge in Hungary. It's a society like any other. Back in 1989, people received from the top a new system that they didn't have before, and they thought that with this they would soon have the income of the Austrians. Then they saw that this was not the case, and the political path was really corrupt. Now there's 54 percent of the population that very consciously has decided that they don't want to vote. Politics is a dirty word — and dirty work. But this is starting to change with the youngsters, and I'm happy to see that. They are organizing in a new way, like the horizontal organizing of Facebook. They say, "Gentlemen you don't understand. Please try to understand us." They don't say, "You animals, you fascists." It's a totally new discourse, which is a fundamental change from my youth and the concept of class struggle. Even in the trade unions there are new phenomena.

In some ways, Hungary could follow the Slovak example. Meciar was the reason that Slovak civil society emerged: it emerged in opposition to Meciar. So, in opposition to Fidesz and Orban, it could reemerge here as well. On the strategy issue, I talked with [Robert Braun](#), who is running for parliament. He argues that it's a mistake to focus on Roma as Roma rather than focusing on inequality more generally.

Yes, I know this argument by heart. It's the attitude of the majority of the Left here. They believe that economic facts override ethnic belonging. But I don't think there's any way but to combine the two – the economic with the ethnic/cultural. But he too thinks in terms of what “we” should do for “them.” The experience of the last 23 years shows that this attitude didn't accomplish anything. No one wants to think in terms of doing something *with* them.

One question, a banal question, is what do you do with an unskilled labor force in a modern economy with modern technology. The only answer is to give these unskilled workers the means to survive physiologically and go to school. It's a generation-long process. The Roma are basically at the level of Blacks in the South in the 1920s when they started to have universities.

Another difference, however, is religion. The Black churches and clergymen played a major role in the civil rights movement. The Roma, however, are very diverse religiously: Muslims, Catholics, new evangelical Protestants. The Catholic Church is one of our big problems because it is radically nationalistic and racist. There are priests who don't even want to give the last rites to Roma.

When you think back to how you looked at the world in 1989-90, have you had any significant second thoughts: about the process of political change, the nature of social transformation, the development of political economy?

I'm somewhat of an exception in this country because I lived for 30 years abroad. But my critical view of Hungarian society, historically and at present, has not changed. I didn't expect that the undigested historical conflicts would have this renaissance, this wild return, as quickly as they have. It shows once more my original slogan: nobody is ready to die for the growth of the GDP, but they are ready to die for the flag. This is, of course, an exaggeration, but I am trying to say I'd hoped then that rationality would dominate instead of emotions and undigested historical injuries.

I can only quote a very old and brilliant friend of mine who is a philosopher. He says that we all carry the primate within ourselves. He meant it in a biological sense, but I extend it to the cultural aspect as well. I really hoped that because our changes here were in advance of the other socialist countries that we would have a more talented and more honest political class. My reference point was 1956, but there have been so many changes since 1956 that I didn't experience. Perhaps that can excuse my naiveté. But you know how old I am. Twenty years ago I was 68, not 28. So, I've had a long experience in life. And I am hurt emotionally by the level of the ethical behavior of this society, and I'm disappointed that this human material that calls itself Hungarian can't do more than it does.

Essentially what now intrigues me is the question of representative democracy. How is this structure responding to the new times? After the Hungarian revolution, the ideal model for me was direct democracy everywhere. But since then, I've come to understand that representative democracy has its own value. Still, I have the impression that this system has become tired and is no longer sufficiently functional. The strong elements of direct democracy should be combined with representative democracy to create a new system. I see little discourse about this — not only in Hungary but in the world. I used to talk about this 30 years ago, but the problem has become much more obvious now. It has become a historical need.

Budapest, May 10, 2013

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