The Origins of Tusványos: Seeding Democracy in the Wake of Communism

David Campanale

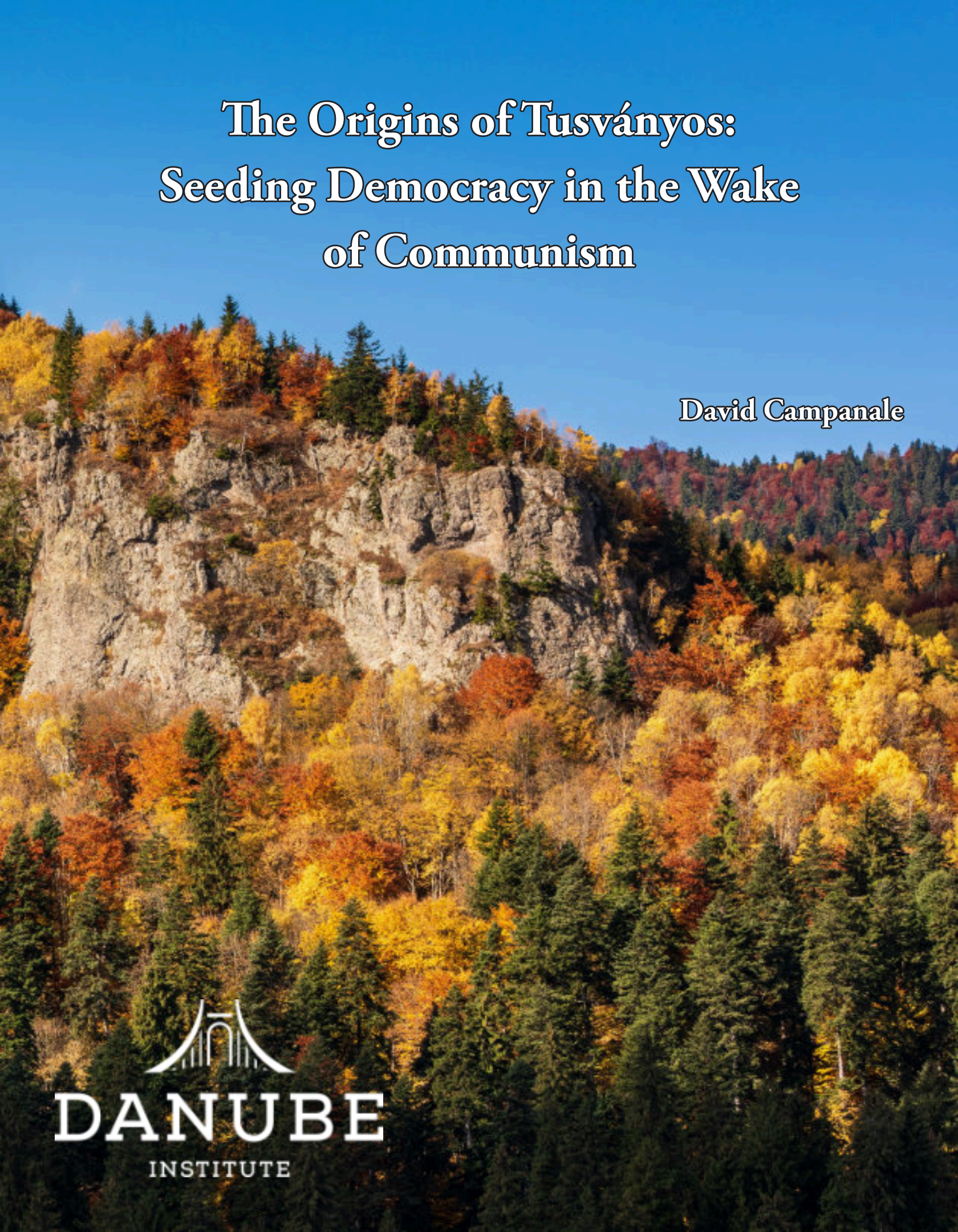

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Image: Panoramic View of Piatra Soimului Nature Reserve, near the resort town of Tușnad, South Harghita volcanic chain, from Shutterstock.

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About the Danube Institute

The Danube Institute, established in 2013 by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation in Budapest, serves as a hub for the exchange of ideas and individuals within Central Europe and between Central Europe, other parts of Europe, and the English-speaking world. Rooted in a commitment to respectful conservatism in cultural, religious, and social life, the Institute also upholds the broad classical liberal tradition in economics and a realistic Atlanticism in national security policy. These guiding principles are complemented by a dedication to exploring the interplay between democracy and patriotism, emphasizing the nation-state as the cornerstone of democratic governance and international cooperation.

Through research, analysis, publication, debate, and scholarly exchanges, the Danube Institute engages with centre-right intellectuals, political leaders, and public-spirited citizens, while also fostering dialogue with counterparts on the democratic centre-left. Its activities include establishing and supporting research groups, facilitating international conferences and fellowships, and encouraging youth participation in scholarly and political discourse. By drawing upon the expertise of leading minds across national boundaries, the Institute aims to contribute to the development of democratic societies grounded in national identity and civic engagement.

About the Author

David Campanale is a journalist and politician. He has had a thirty-year, award-winning career in BBC News as a broadcast journalist, reporting global events for BBC World News and proceedings from Parliament in Westminster. David has also been active in public life, standing for Parliament in 2019 for Britain's centre-party, the Liberal Democrats. A former director of one of Britain's biggest Christian charities, Tearfund, he was also leader in London of the National Union of Journalists in BBC News. David is now a Visiting Fellow at the Danube Institute and religious liberty advocate. He is British and a citizen of the Italian Republic.

Foreword

David Campanale has been there from the bold beginning, when we took a deep breath and entered Romania, which was full of weapons that the dictatorial leadership of a dying regime did not hesitate to turn against its people. These moments were blessed with strategic clarity, which is funny. This is because I am pretty sure that we drank pálinka (plum brandy) the night the idea of the summer camp and university was born. And we drank some more the following day, during the wording of our proclamation! Still, the light of such historical moments can shine through even the most blurred minds. The triumph of truth over lies intoxicated us. The reality of the Romanian Revolution, of those days starting in Timisoara, was filthy and disgusting, yet uplifting at the same time.

David has been a dear friend since then, but more than that—he is a brother, a Christian brother, too. This is important to me. My father was a Calvinist minister who rebelled against the unjust system in communist Hungary. He and my Szekler mum were the ones who started to take us, as kids, to the Hungarian cities and villages of Transylvania. And my father had a strong sight and faith soaked with God. This approach infiltrated every area of our lives. That is why it is so important to me that David understands and amplifies this dimension in politics as well. This element is always present in the Tusványos summer camp—and not in a small portion.

The yeast in this dough, David, is our 'home prophet' in Tusványos, and we know well what the fate of prophets is. In his case, political trouble in Britain, where he was replaced as a Liberal Democrat party candidate for Parliament in 2024, over concerns about his Christianity. The fact that he is still alive and well shows that the Republic of Tusványos is tolerant and born in Christian assumptions. Actually, we start each camp in the name of God.

Tusványos is the place where Viktor Orbán declared that we will not follow the path of liberal democracies—we will go illiberal. Though his words were somewhat misunderstood and misinterpreted, there was no way back. And so our political community decided to join the branch of Christian Democrats.

The fact that David is still there—every year—at the summer camp shows that he is tolerant (truly liberal) and Christian. He has always been open about his Christianity. Everyone knows that in Central Europe—it is hard to believe that his close party mates in Britain missed this fact.

How did we get here?

I am asking this because we ended up at the starting square of our board game: when Nicolae Ceaușescu had Hungarian Bibles ground and turned into toilet paper. We all remember how the procedure was incomplete, and one could recognise words, verses, and names from the Bible.

David reveals that historical European liberalism is not incompatible with Christianity, just this contemporary form of liberalism, which made him pay a price. I am even more sorry for our European, Western, Christian civilisation, where this could actually happen.

Good old Europe, however, seems to live on in Tusványos, our summer camp in Transylvania, born in the light of truth, and in a moment of grace. When and where will Europe wake up, open her eyes, and return to Liberty?

Zsolt Németh, MP
Chairman, Hungarian Foreign Affairs Committee
Co-founder, The Tusványos Summer University


BÁLVÁNYOS


BÁNFFY TÁRSALGÓ

The Origins of Tusványos: Seeding Democracy In the Wake of Communism

David Campanale

Abstract

This paper recounts how a network of young democrats from Hungary, Great Britain and Romania helped shape the political awakening of East Central Europe in the late 1980s and how, during the heady but chaotic days following the Romanian Revolution of 1989, they conceived the Bálványos (now the Tusványos) Summer University—now a vast and significant cultural and political festival, which held its 34th edition in 2025.

Drawing on David Campanale's personal archive and his collaboration with Fidesz activist Zsolt Németh and doctor, Miklós Szabó, this paper traces how clandestine exchanges, youth declarations, and revolutionary encounters with Transylvanian students led to the first edition in 1990.

Beautiful snow in Băile Tușnad, Transylvania. (Ioana Andra Popovici/Shutterstock)

Prologue

Since 1990, every July, across the Carpathian basin, from Sopron to Szeged, from Kaposvár to Kolozsvár, Hungarians pile into friends' cars, or slow trains, and set out on a long journey East. From Budapest itself, the Hungarian capital, they will travel more than eight hundred kilometres.

The journey takes them "across the forest"—Trans-Sylvania—and deep into the wooded, winding, and rather uncanny valleys of the Eastern Carpathians in Romania. But for Hungarians, while this is to enter another state, it is also to enter a world by a different name: *Nagy Magyarország*—greater or historic Hungary.

It is less a journey, and more like a pilgrimage. They go to take part in Tusványos. Or to give it its full title: the *Bálványosi Summer Free University and Student Camp*.

Having seen its 34th edition in 2025, the Tusványos festival blends political speeches and conference-style panels on culture and geopolitics with concerts, debates, dancing, and late-night, often well-lubricated conversations. Tusványos is where a cross-border Hungarian community renews itself year after year.

Yet the confidence and scale of today's Tusványos obscure its improbable beginnings. The idea arose during the chaos of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, when Zsolt Németh, a young Fidesz founder, travelled through Transylvania with two close friends and allies: Miklós Szabó, a Hungarian scholar and medic whose regional knowledge and moral authority shaped many of the discussions that followed, and David Campanale, a local Social Democrat politician from London with deep ties to Hungarian dissidents.

Moving from Cluj to Sepsiszentgyörgy to Kézdivásárhely, the trio encountered a traumatised landscape of collapsing institutions, frightened families, and newly forming youth groups such as MADISZ, who were struggling to define democratic life after decades of dictatorship. In torch-lit marches, impromptu assemblies, and tense street gatherings, they sensed both the exhilaration of freedom and the danger that it might dissipate without structure, memory, and civic formation.

It was in this atmosphere—during late-night conversations with Transylvanian students, led by Attila Sántha and László Deme in the final days of 1989—that Németh, Szabó, and Campanale helped articulate the idea that would become the Bálványos Summer Free University, the precursor of today's Tusványos. They proposed an annual gathering where Hungarian and Transylvanian youth could meet freely, learn the habits of democratic life, and renew the moral and civic energy released by the fall of Ceaușescu. The festival that now attracts tens of thousands began as an improvised solution born of revolutionary urgency: a commitment to ensure that the fleeting spirit of 1989 would not be forgotten, but cultivated, year after year, in a community capable of carrying it forward.

What follows recounts this story through the eyes of David Campanale. His earliest efforts in politics began while studying for his A-levels in Kingston upon Thames, canvassing for the SDP in 1982. That same year he became an Oxford PPE undergraduate. In 1985 he joined the Liberal Party Chief Whip, David Alton, as a parliamentary researcher.

In May 1986, as a local council candidate for the Social Democrats, Campanale trialled some of fellow youth activist Mike Harskin's campaign ideas and materials in Kingston, west London. These helped secure his election for the Alliance in the Hook ward of Kingston Council at the age of twenty-two. The seat was deep in Conservative territory, and his victory produced the largest swing against the government anywhere in the country that night.

From 1986 onwards—through clandestine visits, the smuggling or sending of printers, and freelance journalism—Campanale returned repeatedly to Hungary and Transylvania to observe the early steps in the transition to democracy.

Drawing on an unmatched personal archive of letters, articles, political declarations, revolutionary artefacts, and photographs of his connections with Fidesz, what follows is a personal history of the origins of Tusványos, as seen from Campanale's perspective. It is a surprising story: of a revolution, of three young activists, and of the strange afterlife of youthful idealism.

Calum Nicholson & Eric Hendriks
Budapest, 11 December 2025

First Borscht, Then Goulash

The early eighties in Britain were grim. It wasn't just that the lights risked going off at the height of the miners' strike. The country also seemed to be going through a dark moment of despair, as factories closed, lines of the unemployed grew longer and the 'gospel' of privatisation and monetarist financialism became the unanswered, Thatcherite response to British decline.

Christianity in Britain—as with the rest of the Community members—seemed far away from anyone's thinking as a source of national hope and priorities. The light, however, was clear in Europe and was shining bright through the holes in the rust and tarnished iron veneer of Soviet communism.

My attention was on events in Moscow, Leningrad and Lviv, which I made visits to. But soon it became obvious that something was happening across the whole Soviet bloc.

During the parliamentary recess of summer 1986, I decided to find out more and joined a small group of graduate friends on a drive through central Europe to Budapest. These were the first political links with Hungarian dissidents in that period from activists in the parties of the SDP Liberal Alliance. At the request of Revd Geza Németh of the Budapest Community of Reconciliation, we managed to smuggle across the border an illicit photocopier, unregistered typewriters, Bibles, food, cash and audio equipment.

In what was the first of a series of such journeys, we thought hard and prayed too on how to take material over that risked confiscation at the border between Austria and Hungary. Every vehicle was stopped and every person potentially subject to questioning by the border police. At best we could have lost everything and at worst, put Revd Németh at risk of even closer scrutiny by the authorities.

At that time, the typefaces of all typewriters had to be declared by owners and registered with the police, as each unique key press meant the Communists could track and identify authors of 'wrong thought'. Any publication that could be shared that had an unregistered typeface was valuable. By a small act of God, we had a baby's chair strapped on top of the copier on the back seat of the van and the border guard didn't search where the child was sleeping. We got the material through.

Revd Németh was a Reformed Church pastor who'd lost his licence to preach for offending the Communist authorities. He made a living to support his family and ministry by gathering and selling-on the work of Christian Transylvanian artists, a historic part of Hungary that now lay within the borders of Romania. With the support of two members of his community who knew their way around, we drove the van on and smuggled more material across the border. Visits were made to both churches and the homes of pastors. It was remarkable just how strong and vibrant the Christian community seemed to be, despite the repressive measures of the Communists.

It was during this first visit to the region that I forged what was to become a life-long friendship with Revd Németh's son, Zsolt, who like me was also aged 22. His hair was cropped short and mine long. The summer of 1986 was hot, so we were both dressed down, in a similar languid style. It wasn't just that we shared a similar outlook as Christians. Our conversation was full of laughter at the absurdity of meeting and it expressed a hunger for life. The word "cool" was of the moment and peppered our conversation. We shared an unspoken conviction that life had to be seized and lived in all its fullness, whilst being determined to change God's world.

Zsolt had just finished studying economics at Karl Marx University in Budapest. He began to talk about the student circle that was looking for real political change behind the Iron Curtain and asked if I would stay in touch, as they campaigned to achieve it.

Although not yet a journalist, when I returned to London in the Autumn of 1986, I was interviewed at Bush House for the Hungarian Section of the BBC World Service about the minority rights situation in Romania, an issue that Zsolt and his father had talked about in great detail.


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Liberal Activists Meet at the Beginnings of Fidesz

On return visits to Budapest over the next few years, I would visit or stay with the Németh family in the Budafok district of the city. Their modest apartment was a springboard not just for illicit smuggling into Transylvania but also for political networking intended to bring change. As Calvinists, their reading of the Bible didn't permit the belief that religion has no place in politics.

Revd Németh was nationally known and respected in oppositionist intellectual and Christian circles, which for much of East Central Europe in the Communist era amounted to the same thing. He took inspiration from the 1950s and '60s civil rights movement in America that resisted corruption within the church, and oppression in society beyond it.

As part of the leadership team of the Reformed congregation in the village of Erd, not far from Budapest, Németh's decision to construct two church buildings without approval by the authorities got him into trouble. As part of an effort not to demolish it, he named one of the buildings after Martin Luther King and received a letter of congratulations in 1972 from King's widow. The ruse was successful, but this action and his international connections prompted the Communist-controlled Reformed Church to sack him.

Inside this milieu of intellectual and spiritual curiosity, matched by a bold and sacrificial willingness to put faith into action, Zsolt was forging his own outlook in life. Inspired by his mother and father—young revolutionaries themselves in the 1956 Uprising—Zsolt carried their torch forwards. I felt inspired by the fire of it too and became determined to back his political efforts however I could.

A student activist friend who lived on the Buda hills hosted a party in June 1988 for some of the emergent leadership of the circle. Gathered around a garden fire, toasting cuts of pig fat pierced on sticks, knocking back shots of plum pálinka brandy, there was one subject under discussion, their formation a few months earlier, on 30 March, of a new political party, Fidesz (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége), the Alliance of Young Democrats.

Most present I found out were still students, some had just finished their national service in the army, while others were workers. All had been harassed by the Communist Party and saw themselves as natural liberals. Fidesz was a party that expressed their hopes and aspirations. A few weeks before, on 14 May 1988, an assembly of 500 members had met at the Jurta Theatre in Budapest, where a committee was elected to produce a political programme that would be the foundation of the movement.

The fireside discussions in that Buda garden and those I joined in subsequently with members of the Fidesz leadership, focused on the constitutional reforms needed to restore democracy and pluralism to Hungary. Many in the nascent Party were law students, including one young man named Viktor Orbán. It was a bold step for them to register a new political party, and they were the first in the former Soviet bloc to succeed in doing so. But their actions were semi-illegal at the time, and they risked their future employability if the effort failed.

It didn't come as a surprise to me that the membership age limit had been set at 35, which seemed unimaginably old to us at the time. But success did follow, and the rules were amended at the 1993 Fidesz Congress when they realized their growth had taken them further than they thought possible.

As a two-year London borough councillor, I was politically inexperienced. But I had also defeated the sitting Conservatives to win my seat in an unexpected and largely unaided campaign. I felt that ways my small SDP Liberal Alliance team helped secure victory could also work for Fidesz. As we were trained in 1986 by Liberal national party organiser—the now Lord Rennard, these included identifying issues to campaign on, delivering as many leaflets to voters setting out my goals and policies as possible, and meeting and talking to the public.

Chatting to Fidesz members through 1988 at their party offices and then joining a meeting of the Fidesz leadership at someone's home, I suggested they might take a similar approach. It turned out they already had issues in hand and were campaigning to oppose the environmentally damaging Gabcikovo Nagymaros hydroelectric dam, which would have diverted the Danube.

But offering election advice to topple an entrenched Communist regime wasn't entirely straightforward. It wasn't just an implausible scenario. As the offices of Fidesz were likely bugged at the time, one staff worker said speaking openly wasn't wise and that we needed to be more discreet. He took me into the garden to continue our conversation.

By chance, Fidesz went on to adopt party colours–orange–that were identical to the colours used by the English Liberals. It explains the bizarre phenomenon that Day-Glo orange diamond-shaped election posters that are seen across Britain to this day during election campaigns, started popping up in Budapest in 1994. After Mike Harskin and I arranged the delivery of two offset litho printing presses from London to Hungary, there were also 'Fidesz Fokusz' leaflets delivered through doors when elections were called in the new, democratic Hungary.

Instinctively, Zsolt and I knew that individual campaigns, making fine speeches and advocating new liberal institutions were never going to be enough to shift the Soviet system. On their own, they weren't going to inspire the people to believe change was possible, or that it was deliverable. In the garden in Buda and at subsequent beer-soaked gatherings in bars, clubs, dance houses and party meetings, I felt that whatever was going to be the answer in East Central Europe might also speak to the spiritual void in the West. I was already seeing the emptiness that emerged from the collapse under Thatcherism of prevailing collectivist assumptions inherent in the politics of post-War Britain.

At the same time in 1988, one of Thatcher's foreign policy advisors and speech writers was also feeling the vibe in Budapest. Professor Norman Stone held the chair in Modern History at Oxford and was unlike any academic I had come across. Well known for his weekly column in the Sunday Times. I thought he would have a good sense of what was going on. Keen to swap stories, we met one morning that week for what I thought would be a chat over cake and a coffee with Zsolt in the art nouveau Gerbeaud coffee house, off of Vorsomarty Square in the heart of Pest. But Norman insisted the day couldn't kick off properly without at least brandy with the coffee, and he also insisted that no conversation could end anywhere serious without chasing a shot of Zwack unicum.

Stone's erudition, humour and outrageous but truthful reflections on politics, pompous English manners (he was Glaswegian) and how tedious his professorship at Oxford had become, were captivating. I put to the back of my mind the consequences of the inevitable suggestion: that another brandy was required. His only caveat was that it should be pear pálinka.

Norman confirmed my instinct that events underway in Hungary were of great significance. And these were to be celebrated the Hungarian way. His grasp of the grand sweep of European history, demonstrated by his acclaimed history of the First World War, told me his advice was right. Here was a moment in Central Europe to get behind.

Stone had once spent time in a Bratislava prison in the 1970s for trying to help a Hungarian dissident to escape. He had used jail to broaden his language skills. Stone conversed with staff in the Gerbeaud in Hungarian, but by late morning, I was barely coherent. We met again the next day with Zsolt, this time visiting the aspiring and soon to be hugely successful novelist, Tibor Fischer.

The subversive approach Professor Stone took to academia and politics went well with the fun Fidesz was having as they confronted the Hungarian communists. Stone shared and encouraged their youthful spirit of resistance to tyranny and set ways of thinking, including in academia. It was not hard to imagine Stone, like Socrates, ending up one day in Oxford being handed a draught of hemlock. (Norman chose exile instead, first to Turkey, then to Hungary in later years, where he died in 2019). It was the laughter and defiant confidence in his own way of seeing the world that meant more time in Norman's company beckoned. We went on to continue these conversations with Zsolt, Norman, and his wife Christine, at their home in north Oxford.

Stone underlined that schooling from university must be tested in the real world and put at the practical service of the people of our generation. Fidesz activists at that time were either all students or had recently been so. Unlike Stone but perhaps closer to Roger Scruton[1] who also met Fidesz leaders in Budapest in 1989, I was convinced change must be anchored in more enduring and transcendent values, if it was to be deeply transformational. I knocked some of these ideas around with Norman, who was generous in taking me seriously. He helped place these thoughts about this epochal moment in some kind of historical context.

Within liberalism in Britain there were fears of nationalism. It was felt in some political quarters that the answer to re-emerging sentiments was to build strong institutions that gave primacy to individual rights. The closest parallel we spoke about to the risk for Fidesz of imitating this values-free approach were the Narodniki of late nineteenth-century Russia. Also made up of a young aristocracy of intellectuals, the Narodniks were a populist initiative to engage the rural classes of Russia in a political debate that would overthrow the ruling regime of that era, the monarchist system of Tsarism.

The Narodniks believed that in order for the people to be led towards revolution, there needed to be a mass of outstanding personalities to take them forward. But the group didn't account for the innate conservatism of the peasantry, who thought the Czar and Russian Christian Orthodoxy best aligned with their identity and hopes. Was there a way Fidesz could pursue change whilst connecting with similar instincts

among ordinary Hungarians? Was there a way Fidesz could 'be with' instead of 'doing for' as they campaigned for the mass of the people? What if the British people were also instinctively protective of these human instincts of faith and nation?

A hopeful sign was that regardless of highbrow thinking, Fidesz members put a lot of serious effort into having fun and that the moment would last. At the same time–and perhaps intrinsically linked as a necessary part of the re-emergence of civil society, pride in the Hungarian nation and a means to celebrate the thrill of being young and being in the middle of a gentle political revolution—was folk dancing.

The 'táncház' folk dance movement was an essential part of the transition to freedom. It was a rediscovery by young people of an old cultural tradition. Through 1988, whenever we could, Zsolt would take us to learn the art of Transylvanian and Balkan dance at the famous Álmásy tér Táncház, located at 6 Álmásy tér in Budapest. This cultural expression, along with painting, poetry and samizdat publications, were also revolutionary acts of personal expression the regime could not control. This moment of change was spent all Brahms and Liszt.

Katalin Kriszovansky was a freelance photographer for the Kurir magazine, who had come as a refugee from Transylvania to live in Budapest. She photographed many of the key moments of the transitionary period to democracy, including the formation of Fidesz. Kata took my hand as we went onto the floor and danced to the stunning music of Márta Sebestyén and her folk band, Muzsikás.

Despite both couples and circling groups all looking very impressive and co-ordinated on the dance floor, Kata showed me that swaying to the mood of the moment wasn't all that difficult. It just required abandoning fear, a close embrace, and surrender to the collective mania of whirling, twisting, slapping and stamping. In táncház, it helps to have someone to hold onto, especially after serial shots of *high proof* courage.


ştiinţă


CONSILIUL
MUNICIPIUL
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ROMÂNIA LIBERĂ!


PE CE FIDEȘTI

Come Over to Transylvania and Help Us: Young Democrats in Romania

Returning to London, I was determined to alert my circle of political friends to the significance of what I was seeing. I urged fellow Liberals and Social Democrats to rise to the moment by giving support and taking-up causes emerging at the time in Hungary, not least persecution of Christians by President Nicolae Ceaușescu of Romania, the marginalisation of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania and the complete lack of civil rights.

This was an issue that the Social and Liberal Democrats were keen to get behind, given not just their support for political devolution in Scotland and Wales, but also the stance of Liberal Prime Minister Sir William Gladstone in 1876, when he published his pamphlet on the Balkans, *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, denouncing Ottoman atrocities against Christians.

A successor of Gladstone as Leader of the Liberal Party, Sir David Steel MP, shared these concerns about Romania. His meeting with President Nicolae Ceaușescu in August 1978 was part of broader efforts to engage with leaders from Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Their discussions in Bucharest were aimed at promoting dialogue and human rights, though it drew some criticism in London, given Ceaușescu's authoritarian rule.

Through working in the Liberal Whips Office and then as a researcher for David Alton MP in his private office in 1987, I knew that Steel was following events developing in East Central Europe. He heard about the contacts I was making and heard more details from Liberal General Secretary, Andy Ellis, who had also been travelling to Budapest. Word seemed to get around.

That year, another former Liberal leader, Jeremy Thorpe, rang to ask my thoughts on the idea of a restoration of the Romanian monarchy, given King Michael was still alive and living in exile. I told him I thought it would be a good thing. After joining the television arm of the BBC World Service in 1996, I later had the opportunity to sit down and interview the former Romanian monarch and then meet Queen Anne over a private dinner.

The Hungarian soft revolution was growing in confidence. It saw huge rallies demanding civil rights from the Communist regime. These featured the 'Transylvanian question' as one of their demands for action. I met many refugees at Revd Németh's Budapest centre who had crossed from Transylvania into Hungary to either find work, or health care or a better chance of freedom. Crossing again into Romania to find out more about life under Communism seemed the next thing for me to do.

In response to personal invitations, in July 1988 I returned briefly to Budapest before driving into Yugoslavia to cross the border into Romania through the Gates of Iron. A circle of us had joined the British Romanian Friendship Association in London, which was linked during the Communist era to the Romanian Embassy. The Association seemed to include a lot of former, or possibly even current, fellow travellers of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Whether true or not, the Brits involved were glad that a group of Oxford graduates had signed up to their cause. They didn't ask too many questions about our involvement.

After attending a few drinks evenings and receptions, several of our circle were voted into officer positions on the organising committee. The Association proved to be valuable cover for illicit activities whilst in Romania, as personal cards and letters we had designed and printed could be shown at the border. It also provided a pretext to fix meetings with government officials in Bucharest. One of us somehow even took possession of President Ceaușescu's personal call card. It was to come in handy.

Before we crossed into Romania, we hid a lot of material around the vehicle, from behind seats to in the boot and behind side panels. But it was vulnerable to proper examination at the border, as it would not have taken much time to reveal what we were taking in. Worse, a full interrogation might have given away details of where we were going and who we were meeting.

It wasn't that we lacked caution.

After waiting a few hours as was standard in the queue to enter, we ended up crossing very late in the evening. Our hope was to be processed by tired police at the end of their shift. But our standard strategy of leaving cartons of duty-free Marlboro Light on the car floor, alongside half bottles of Johnnie Walker Black Label, wasn't working. I began to get agitated.

When our turn came, our hearts sank when the Romanian border guards coming to inspect the car were women. Neither of them fell for what their male colleagues tended to

see as part of the perks of running customs. They didn't wave us through. At this moment we produced letters of invitation, organised for us by officers of the British Romanian Friendship Association in London, ready in our jackets for the moment. The letters showed fixed meetings in Bucharest with two government ministers, pre-arranged ahead of the journey.

The letters we hoped would be enough to deter the peroxide blonde border guards from rummaging too far. These too were not enough. Our driver at this point resorted to waving President Ceaușescu's personal card around and speaking loudly, insisting that the captain of the guard ring Bucharest and account for their uncomradely conduct with 'British friends' from the Association. That did it. The border unit chose not to make that call.

Driving through the night, as the light of dawn arrived, I was startled by how early the working day started in Romania. At six in the morning, or maybe earlier, the streets and roads were busy with people on their bicycles, or more typically walking, or in long queues for buses to their factory jobs or workplace. Everywhere I looked, heads were down, there was little or no eye-contact or conversation that I could observe. The mood was as drab as their clothes and the public buildings were grey. Seeing families travelling on the back of a working cart, drawn by horses, was not unusual. As beautiful as the Carpathians are, the sight around us was depressing. This really was another world. The hidden world of the Ceaușescu dictatorship.

Our meetings with the government ministers in Bucharest, then church leaders in Tirgu Mures, Cluj Napoca and Brasov went off with little trouble. Travelling through Transylvania, we also made an effort to call on a Hungarian artist living in internal exile, Imre Antal. We entered his village very early one morning after putting the car into a field and waiting through the night until we were sure there was a route that avoided the police. They didn't see us.

Imre was glad we had come. He was a devout Christian whose work is extraordinary. It portrays the hills, churches and villages of the region as if Christ, or Mary and the Christ child, are walking among them. (As indeed many Christians believe they are). Antal didn't get many chances to sell his work and I wasn't flush with cash either. But he sold a work that still hangs on my wall. Called 'The Axe', it features a scene from a village with a house and tree, a wooden block and, well, an axe struck hard into it.

When back in Hungary, Zsolt explained what he thought the painting symbolised. He said Antal was expressing both the determination of his people to stay and their rootedness in the land that had been ethnically Hungarian for centuries. But it also shows the strength and anger of the axe man, frustrated that his people could not live authentically and freely as Hungarians, according to the tenets of their faith and ethnic traditions.

Over dinner with the Romanian Ambassador on our return to London, we shared pleasantries. But I had little expectation that he was in a position to do much about civil rights. It was clear that unless the Ceaușescu regime was removed, individual and collective freedoms would never be a priority. After all, Romanians were still in jail for their faith, or persecuted and marginalised for their ethnic identity. Or worse.

Instead, with my political friends, I resolved to do what I could about the plight of the ethnic minorities of this region. One way was to push it up the political agenda, starting with the imminent party conference of the Social and Liberal Democrats, to be held in Blackpool.

Zsolt was among the first of his generation of Hungarian young democrats to be awarded a scholarship to Oxford University by Hungarian investor and philanthropist, George Soros. (Other founders of Fidesz including Viktor Orbán were to soon follow.) Zsolt arrived in Britain on 27 September 1988 and went straightaway by train to the Lancashire coast to attend the party's annual conference. With Chair of the youth wing, Mike Harskin, I organised a Young Social and Liberal Democrat (YSLD) fringe in the Imperial Hotel where Zsolt was billed as a star-speaker on the subject, "*Transylvania and the Crisis in Central European Nationalism*".

The subject matter was so esoteric, it was possible no one would come. Harskin and I bought two cases of Hungarian and Romanian wine so every participant could get into the spirit of change, Norman Stone-style. To my surprise, the room was packed as word had got around. In the news release promoting the fringe meeting, I reflected, "As Gorbachev struggles to contain emerging nationalism across his Empire. No satellite is closer to upsetting the internal unity of the Warsaw Pact than Hungary."

History demonstrated this little country did just that. When Hungary opened its border with Austria a year later, a process was started that saw all the Communist regimes of the Warsaw Pact toppled from power.

In Blackpool, Zsolt became the first opposition party politician from East Central Europe to speak from a public platform in Britain and possibly any western country. Alongside him were Alex Carlile QC MP, the Solidarnosc

spokesman in Britain, Marek Garztecki, who spoke on developments in Poland and Gabriel Ronay who was a reporter on East Central Europe for The Times. But Zsolt almost didn't make it. He didn't know about the speech he was expected to make and disappeared just as the event was about to kick-off. As chair of the event, I needed to find our star speaker. He wasn't far away. Sat in the adjacent toilets, he was in a cubicle scribbling down his thoughts.

Carlile told the meeting that Britain at this vital moment should "not jealously guard our own position", but instead "As Liberals we should see this as part of our duty to help foster human rights everywhere in the world. But we should also be clear that it is in the strategic, security interests of western Europe to see Central Europe prosperous, free and bound closely to Western Europe through economic links."[2]

A dispatch by BBC Political correspondent Andrew Whitehead at Blackpool delivered the message Mike and I wanted underlined from the conference fringe event. The meeting received coverage on the BBC's "24 Hours" programme on the World Service. Whitehead reported Zsolt "as a prominent critic of the Hungarian government" who had urged the "authorities in Budapest to take action at the United Nations in support of the two-million or more ethnic Hungarians living in Romania." He went on to report that Zsolt "accused Hungarian governments over the years of betraying the interests of the Hungarian minority in Romania."

In a warning on just how precarious Fidesz members felt their position to be under the Communists, the BBC also reported Zsolt explaining that "in recent weeks several members of the movement had been refused jobs because of their political activity and expressed concern that there could be increasing repression in Hungary and that toleration of groups such as Fidesz might not last long."[3]

Events in Budapest didn't turn out so bad. Writing in the October 1988 edition of the news magazine for the Young SLD, I noted that "In Hungary, a little bit of official scrutiny has done the political opposition wonders," with Fidesz facing criticism from official news outlet *Magyar Hirlap*. Such condemnation only demonstrated how significant a threat the Communists took this group of students to be. It also earned them global accolades, with the BBC External Services calling their movement in Hungary the "most significant to have come into existence in the past twenty years."[4]

With Zsolt studying in Britain, there was the opportunity to build solidarity and also raise the profile of Fidesz. My report for the youth wing of the party in '*Young SLuDgE News*' explained, "The leaders of the movement recognize that it is in a tenuous existence. They are looking for friends abroad, particularly from within other youth groups."

In the magazine article I stated that with similar priorities to the Young SLD, "Fidesz wants to discuss the possibility of joint declarations of policy", which should focus on "decentralization of power and regionalization", the "threat to the future of Europe's environment and the goal of a demilitarized Europe". I also reported Zsolt's commitment to "the philosophy of equal citizenship" that lies at the heart of the "community politics" of the Social and Liberal Democrats.

Fidesz in Britain and the Young Democrats in Budapest

The executive of the newly merged party youth wing, the Young Social and Liberal Democrats, met on 8 October 1988. It was resolved that given there was a Fidesz founder in Britain who given an impactful Blackpool conference speech no less, it would deepen links with Fidesz by sending Mike Harskin and I back to Hungary.

Zsolt focused on requesting that we build solidarity through 'joint declarations' and the executive did this by also adopting a "*Draft Agreement between English and Hungarian Young Democrats*". It was a unique document in Europe. The Agreement was signed by the three of us, but with the understanding that the statement would be ratified and extended by the Fidesz executive in Budapest when we arrived at their party congress.

As a consequence of Zsolt's proposal, these documents became the first joint political declarations made between a party in the democratic West and a new political party in the totalitarian East, as the Communist era ended. Before the Berlin Wall had come down, as young people, we had decided to act as if it no longer existed.

The draft Declaration made in London expressed a commitment "to challenging those who restrict…fundamental human rights" and said that "young people have a unique contribution to make in leading the process of peaceful change across the world". It added that "the greatest contribution we can make" in bridging "national and ideological divides" would be to "work together in the common pursuit of our shared ideals". The Declaration also noted "the historic interest and support given by British Liberals to central European nationalities and communities which seek the right to self-determination". It also claimed that in following Gladstone and others in backing these nationalist claims, as young liberals and social democrats, we were "the inheritors of this tradition."

In the accompanying news release, Zsolt said, "Fidesz welcome this opportunity to forge a united and radical front of European youth against the anti-democratic powers of our continent." This alliance wasn't just the expression of warm words. It became the basis of further joint political action.

In April 1988, Fidesz had held a 400-strong rally in a Budapest cinema and agreed to an autumn conference for their new party. It was to be convened over two sessions, one in October and one in November. As Young Liberal Democrat visitors from Britain, we had accepted a formal invitation from Fidesz to attend the 'second part' of what was the first congress of Fidesz. This was held at the Jurta Színház (Jurta Theatre) in Budapest, inside the City Park (Városliget) and was a popular venue for cultural and political events. Delegates from the numerous Fidesz local groups that had sprung up around Hungary were in attendance. Zsolt wasn't there as he was engaged in his studies in Oxford. Viktor Orbán wasn't present either, as he was in the army. But Mike and I were welcomed as friends and political allies and conference organisers found digs for us in a student dormitory.

As visitors, we observed proceedings and expressed greetings. The meeting saw the adoption of Fidesz's statutes, a declaration of its political agenda and the establishment of its operative bodies, including the election of a provisional executive. The congress elected Sándor Rácz, president of the Budapest Workers Council during the 1956 revolution, to be an honorary Fidesz member. Aside from events inside the hall, the work of engagement around ideas and proposals for political formation happened over sausage and sauerkraut, or bowls of goulash, in basement beer halls in the centre of the city. Mike and I brought out the draft declaration penned with Zsolt back in Britain. We started to revise it along with members of the interim Fidesz leadership, Peter Molnar and Gabor Fodor. The document was presented for approval and signed on 7 November 1988, although it was linked for the British press to the anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, on 23 October.[5]

This new agreement between the Young Democrats of Hungary and the Young Democrats of England (as our group were known, before taking back the name, Liberal) included a commitment to help each other "in the struggles being undertaken by young people". It "reaffirmed" the declaration of 8 October, made in London and announced a "*Revolution of Ideas*" that it said was being "led by young people, who we believe have a special responsibility in taking up the challenges of ignorance, poverty and conformity".

The Declaration called on Democrats everywhere to back the emerging democratic revolution in East Central Europe. It focused on the "rights of ethnic minorities in Transylvania", opposition to the "Nagymaros dam" and issued a demand to "the Hungarian government to move towards the democratization of the economic and political structure, and the creation of a mixed economy."

Returning to London, Mike used his role as Editor of the weekly newspaper of the party, '*Social and Liberal Democrats*


ALLIANCE
NEXT

News', to highlight the changes we saw underway in Hungary. Noting the mood that the opposition didn't "believe that a newly publicity conscious Kremlin would risk everything on a repeat of 1956", Mike said the joke was that "the dwindling Soviet forces based in Hungary" as they were confined to quarters, were now "the prisoners and the Hungarians the warders."

Harskin also told Liberal Democrat readers that Hungary had "a healthy political tradition where Liberal, social democratic and Christian or non-conformist values sit large" and argued that "the pace of change in Hungary makes it, now, probably unstoppable." In a side-box to the double-page spread in the paper, I had drafted my summary of our visit and on those talks in the beer cellar, that were "hung with wild boar skins". In a reference to the difficulties of finding a name for the newly merged SDP with the Liberals, I joked that the "First discussion was, inevitably, on the group's name and although the suggestion of Social and Liberal Democrats was rejected, the choice of League of Young Democrats took just a few hours."

In line with Mike's own observations, I also observed that within Fidesz, "the group includes some who will probably emerge as a right-of-centre Christian Democrat party in a reformed democracy." Given the prominence of Fidesz in contemporary European politics, under the leadership of Viktor Orbán, this insight from 1988 sheds light on current moments. Historical revisionists today, even in right of centre circles in Hungary, suggest that the decision of the party to join the Christian Democratic European Peoples Party in 1994 was a hard, hand-brake turn in a right-wing direction. But this isn't the whole story, as in Britain at least, Christianity and liberalism have been inseparable.

The influence of Christian assumptions inside Social Democracy and Liberalism in Britain may have been waning by the mid-eighties, as it was in many centre parties in Europe. Fidesz might also say that they saw the ideological fork emerging in the road and were choosing the path to national renewal in a Christian direction. We may ask, did Fidesz go 'right', or did collapsing confidence in the centre of British politics in the Gospel's power, abandon ground to a secularist, left liberal take-over?

As it turned out, the Christian Democrats inside Fidesz had the majority. Under the leadership of Viktor Orbán, they began to abandon their vestiges of secular liberalism and forge what they now call a 'national, Christian and conservative' direction for the party. It was the social liberals, led by Gabor Fodor, Zsuzsanna Szelényi, Peter Molnar and Istvan Hegedus, who left Fidesz and became allied with the liberal Free Democrats. These Free Democrats entered government themselves, in alliance with the former Communists. But Fidesz grew in strength and influence without them, until dominating the whole of Hungary's political landscape.

With the second part of the first Fidesz Congress happening on the 19th and 20th November 1988, Mike and I were determined to keep attention among friends in Britain on this growing depth of organisation of the party and its ambition. We did this by announcing the formation of a partner body which would help engage backing for Fidesz, if needed. With Zsolt, we launched 'UK Friends of Fidesz', with the comment that "Events in Hungary have been moving faster and further than anywhere else in the Soviet bloc."

Over party gatherings and dinners, there were moments to reflect on what we could see were momentous changes going on around the world. 'Friends of Fidesz' was run from my home in Chessington in west London, which thereafter became known as 'Fidesz House', even though it was a modest, upstairs maisonette. This part of Surrey in west London thereafter saw a steady flow during the late nineteen eighties and early nineties of Fidesz visiting activists, either to stay overnight, or for gatherings of the like-minded. After his arrival on 27 October 1989 to study in Britain, Viktor Orbán also came to the Royal Borough for a short period, holding the fort as a janitor in a block of flats in Surbiton, as a favour to Hungarian émigrés who needed a break from the job.

Getting Ready for Hungary's First Free Elections

The Foundation of the Round Table of the Opposition in Hungary invited Fidesz to join it in March 1989, so the youth party could take part in the national debate on plans for a new constitution. The national board of Fidesz resolved that it would recommend to the congress due later that year that the party should enter the race for the general and local elections to be held in 1990.

Some weeks before, I had again gone back to Budapest to pick-up on some of the conversations we had been having. I had also been asked to act as a 'tour guide' to a group of American Hutterite students from Tabor College, Kansas, interested in political events developing in central Europe, where many of their ancestors had emigrated from. News of the youth movement behind Fidesz was rolling around the world.

In a hand-written note on 3 March 1989, Fidesz board member Zsuzsanna Szelényi said she was glad about the connections between the Liberal Democrats and Fidesz. She said plans were underway to meet a senior delegation from the Liberal International in Budapest, who would discuss plans for the elections. The Hungarian Democratic Forum, the MDF, was a significant part of the Round Table of the Opposition. There were cordial links between members of Fidesz and their seniors in the Forum, not least as there were some 'teacher, pupil' relationships already in existence. In October 1988 I went with Zsolt and Tamas Tirts of the Fidesz board to the MDF conference, as part of a fraternal delegation. It would not be too long before the MDF government that won the first free elections in Hungary made way for their student heirs and political successors.

The Liberal International (LI) delegation led by President Giovanni Malagodi visited Hungary in May 1989. It included Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Sir Russell Johnston MP. Neither Mike Harskin nor I were invited to join the delegation. Perhaps the LI could not imagine half of what the Young SLD had already done. The delegation to Budapest met the full spectrum of emerging opposition parties. After talks with Orbán, Fodor and Szelényi, their subsequent report described Fidesz as a "fertile resource for future democratic party-building" and a "major opposition player".[6]

The thirty-first anniversary of the execution of former Prime Minister Imre Nagy at the close of the 1956 Revolution fell on 16 June 1989. A memorial rally was held in Heroes' square in Budapest, where Viktor Orbán's address to the crowd caught attention in both the domestic and the foreign press. His demand for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops sent his political profile global. Shortly after, a Fidesz delegation came to London and met Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in July.

I had already written to a junior Foreign Office minister, William Waldegrave MP, asking that the government not forget Fidesz, among all its contacts with the emergent anti-communists. He replied on 15 June 1989 writing that he was "very interested in your ideas for helping Fidesz in their preparations for the forthcoming elections in Hungary. We are of course aware that opposition groups in Hungary are seriously lacking in political experience and in the techniques of democracy." He set out some of the actions the government proposed to take, including a personal visit he would make to Budapest.

Early in the summer of 1989, as the Soviet bloc showed signs of imminent collapse, I headed out to Omaha Nebraska, then to Kansas, to see my American student friends again. In what was a mini-speaking tour, I travelled on to churches in Chicago and New York to communicate the significance of the evident crumbling of communism in East Central Europe. I urged them to pray.

More needed to be done to turn the spotlight on Ceaușescu's Romania, which lagged behind the changes happening in other communist countries. From my position as a London borough councillor, I was able to persuade Liberal Democrat colleagues to act on the campaign requests of Jessica Douglas-Home against the destruction of Romanian villages through her Mihai Eminescu Trust. Jessica was a personal friend of the then Prince of Wales, now King Charles III. She had asked that local councils 'adopt' a Transylvanian village identified for destruction under Ceaușescu's ludicrous 'systemisation' scheme. As I was elected for one of the few Royal Boroughs in England, where ancient Saxon kings had once been crowned in the tenth century by the River Thames in Kingston, I was pleased that Liberal councillors and the Conservatives in Kingston united behind the idea.

From this initiative, a terrific campaign opportunity came. The main competitor to BBC News in Britain, ITN News, produced bulletins for commercial television. Correspondent Sue Lloyd-Roberts and her producer Vivien Morgan asked if I would accompany them and a film crew inside Transylvania to take them around. They said we would also visit and film in Kingston's 'adopted' village, Glodeanu Silistia. I said yes to being 'a fixer' and agreed to carry a spare portable, hand-held video camera, as back-up.

In a series of unexpected events, the ITN team were arrested as they tried driving into Romania through the Iron Gates, then detained in a Romanian police cell, after they had attempted to try entering by train. I had gone instead by plane to Bucharest. Despite no experience of camerawork, I filmed scenes discreetly from my car as I travelled through Transylvania. I then got the story out with the help of a retired British colonel, who ITN had arranged for me to meet in a Bucharest hotel, at a pre-set time and date. The colonel took the tapes for me through the airport on the way out, while I was stopped and interrogated about what I had been up to.

The smuggled film was used in a series of news reports Lloyd-Roberts produced in July 1989 that ran prominently across British television. On the ITN lunchtime news, I was invited to speak in a live interview about Ceaușescu's repressive regime and how the film was among the first to be obtained from inside the country under the Communist dictatorship. Despite the curious resistance from the newsreader, Tim Ewart, I told viewers that God had been listening to the cries of the Romanian people, who believed God would deliver their country from the oppressive regime of the Ceaușescus. I didn't have to wait too many more months to see this for myself.[7]

Fidesz shifted gear into election mode at its second congress, which met in Budapest over 3-15 October 1989, I accepted an invitation to return and speak to the conference, where my address attacking the scourge of socialism seemed to hit the right spot. Other visiting youth politicians to the conference from the wider liberal family included the Norwegian Vice President of the International Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth, IFLRY, a Swiss Young Liberal, a West German Free Democrat and seventy student Young Liberals from Denmark.

The overwhelming majority of Fidesz delegates decided that the party should participate in the first free parliamentary elections in forty years, to be held in 1990. At the offices of Fidesz, I discussed with board member, Zsuzsanna Szelényi, the support the Young Liberal Democrats might offer from the UK. I picked up the conversation with Viktor Orbán over drinks.

The party's philosophy was summed up at the Congress as "liberal", "radical" and "alternative". But in remarks I made in interviews on Hungarian television and media present at the congress and then later again for the BBC World Service, I didn't just speak about links between young democrats in the two countries. I also explained how a moral and spiritual compass would be essential for change to endure.

The three-day congress saw the adoption of a "liberal educational programme", a commitment to a "neutral Hungary", the expansion of private industry and Budapest's tiny stock exchange and an unequivocal commitment to the highest environmental standards, particularly in air and water.

I remained in the city for the rally for the anniversary of the 1956 Revolution on 23 October 1989, which was a moving demonstration of national unity. One feature of the approach taken by Fidesz at that time was to ensure that open disagreement about political priorities during the transition to democracy had to wait until after the elections. It was more important for the opposition circle to secure the end of Communist autocracy.

Although interested in the efforts Fidesz were making to get ready for the elections, I also recognised the reality that at best, the Young Lib Dems could encourage from afar, but not make any real difference. Even in a post-Communist election, the likelihood that Fidesz had a chance of significant breakthrough was small. What mattered was a clear set of values and priorities. And also that Fidesz had friends to rely upon. In any case, Fidesz were doing things on their own, regardless of the cheer-leading from afar.

The new British Ambassador to Hungary, John Birch, invited me to meet him during this visit to Budapest. I gave him an account of the links that had been established between the Liberal Democrats and Fidesz and my conviction that this nascent party would play a significant role in the future of the country. I hoped that he would pass back some of my reflections to the Foreign Office in London, so that the Thatcher government would not be surprised if Fidesz one day took power.

Halda Aliz, a widow of one of four heroes from the 1956 uprising executed alongside Prime Minister Imre Nagy, expressed the hopefulness of this moment. Commenting during the Fidesz conference in the leading daily, Magyar Nemzet, she said, "Fidesz made it possible to believe in morality and politics once again in Hungary." "Looking at those boys and girls at their Congress", she continued, "I wonder why I love them so much. They are not just clever; they know their history better than we did. Not only do they speak clearly, but they do so without demagoguery. Fidesz are brave", she said.


DESZ


FIDESZ


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AKARUNK ÉLNI,
AHOL
A TÖRVÉNY
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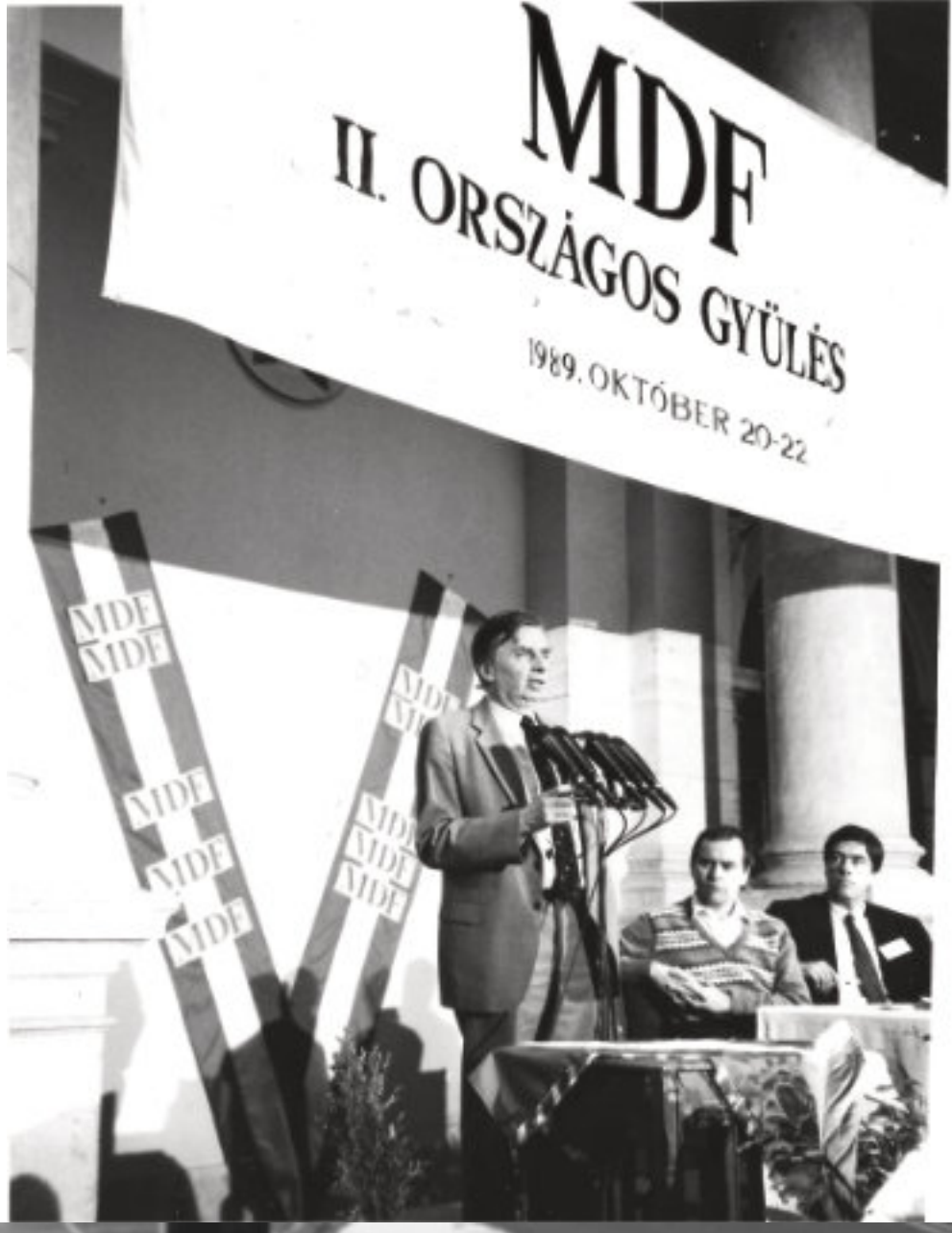
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FIDESZ
SAJTÓ TÁJÉKOZTATÓ

Spotlight on Ukraine and Ceaușescu's Romania

The advantage of a precarious living in freelance journalism, or dependence on a small allowance paid to elected councillors for attending Kingston borough committee meetings, was that I was free to connect with events in East Central Europe. Flights from London were not as cheap or accessible as they are now, but I was glad to 'monetise' my political activity by journalism. And I even made a career out of it.

On 18 September 1989, one of the Soviet Union's biggest ever demonstrations was staged in Lviv in western Ukraine, which was at that time still part of an unreformed Soviet Union. I had heard in advance it was going to be held and crossed over from Poland with David Alton MP and Bill Hampson to observe and film it. I again smuggled a portable Hi-8 video camera for ITN and filmed 80,000 Greek Catholics protesting for the return of their cathedral from the Orthodox Church. My film ended up being bought by the BBC for broadcast on their daily Newsnight programme.

Returning to London after the Fidesz Congress and based on the filming in Romania and Ukraine, I was offered my first formal news production role. It was as a broadcast journalist with Channel 4's 'Week in Politics' programme, presented by Andrew Rawnsley of the Observer newspaper and veteran ex-BBC political journalist, Vincent Hanna. Contacts I had made working in Parliament for the Liberals were of value and there was also interest in the offices of Brook Productions in events going on in East Central Europe, including Hungary.

With Viktor Orbán in the country, and fellow board member, József Szájer, joining him as a Soros scholar at Oxford, one first step I took was to get them onto the programme to explain the role of students and young people in Fidesz in securing political change. This was the first 'as live' television interview they had given in Britain. Both boldly stated that Fidesz were aiming to play a significant part in the coming Hungarian elections. Inevitably, the issue of Hungarian minority rights in Romania came up as one of their campaign themes.

Just before Christmas 1989, Zsolt shared with me his decision to stand for Parliament, asking in a letter that I might take time out to go and work with him on the election campaign the coming March. Dated 23 December, he explained that he had "made up his mind to stand as a candidate" after consideration and prayer. His first decision was to run in a constituency seat in the district where he lived, even though other parties were in a stronger position. "Still, I try, why not?" he wrote.

But it may not have happened at all, as some friends had tried to convince him "not to stand", saying he was "too young", with "no experience". They also judged the time was not right, because the "coming Parliament will be a temporary, transitional one because of the catastrophic situation of the national economy." However, Zsolt's mind was made up.

"As far as I can see", he wrote, "I rather have to answer to God, can I serve the people, or not? Am I able to disregard the bias of 'political power' on my personality, or not?" These kinds of questions told me that here was a budding politician with exactly the right motivations. It was soon to turn out that we would both be taking these same reflections to neighbouring Romania, where the regime was unravelling.

Zsolt ended his letter by asking if I had heard about the Revolution underway, describing the events as "horrifying and splendid at the same time. Hundreds of deaths and still a revolution of human dignity." He said that in Heroes Square in Budapest, forty thousand people had turned out in support of the Revolution and that he had addressed the gathering. "It was a moving evening, really!" He said his father, Revd Geza Németh, had issued a call on the "workers of Romania for a national strike" and that his mother, (knowing how Zsolt and friends would respond) was "praying for our souls." I was keen to join them as quickly as I could. Unknown to Zsolt, I had already made plans to get to the city and was already on my way.

By the time of his letter, television news in Britain had been broadcasting news of an uprising in Timisoara against the Communist persecution of a Reformed priest, Revd László Tőkés. ITN asked if I was free to take a camera and film what I could by crossing the border from Hungary. The Times newspaper and Daily Mail also expressed interest in what I might get them. Events moved quickly after 16 December 1989. I sensed very quickly that this beautiful and terrible country, with its fabled territory of Transylvania would draw me away from a quiet family Christmas.

With someone from the Friendship Association, and before reading Zsolt's letter, I drove from London through Germany and Austria to get to Hungary. But we had three car incidents on the way, including coming off the motorway at speed in Germany and two crashes in Budapest, one head-

on. I judged that maybe I wasn't meant to be working as a journalist but should swap hats and enter as a politician. My colleague went on without me, though I did later help secure a double-page centre spread in the Mail on Sunday of a British woman's tale of those early days living through the Romanian Revolution, as the wife of a local.

In Budapest, Zsolt had just returned from his first visit to Romania in many years because of a state ban placed against him in 1985 by the Ceaușescu regime. With Fidesz press officer and journalist Zoltán Lovas, Zsolt had been sent by the Fidesz leadership on 22nd and 23rd December to establish whether the trigger of the Revolution, Revd László Tőkés, was alive. They were the first to meet him. He had been exiled in Mineu (Szilágymenyő) and was safe. He agreed to record a short message for broadcast back in Hungary, which made national and global headlines.

On Christmas Eve 1989, I joined Zsolt at the offices of Fidesz in the centre of Budapest. Hungarian taxi drivers had decided to use their vehicles to ferry medicines and food across the borders that had opened up. With fellow Young Democrats, Zsolt and I helped them out by loading our arms with loaves of bread and cramming them into the back of their cars. We hoped we might soon follow them into Transylvania, but also carrying the bread of life, a word for the moment.

That night, in freezing temperatures, we joined 80,000 people at a midnight rally in Budapest's Heroes Square to remember those killed in the Romanian Revolution and to pray for peace. Given that this Revolution had begun with ethnic Romanian and Hungarian Christians from across the denominations in Timisoara protecting Revd László Tőkés from the Securitate, it was appropriate that Fidesz had organised a prayer vigil. Zsolt's father, Revd Németh led the nation in prayer, in what was another unique moment for Hungary and the Communist bloc.

Christmas Day and the Németh household gathered me up as an honorary member for family festivities around the tree and at church. What came next wasn't what anyone had prayed for the night before. But Christmas saw the public execution of President Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena, gunned down by firing squad in a yard in Târgoviște, after sentencing by military tribunal. It seemed this could mark the end of the Revolution.

We considered whether there was now some work of service for us to do, especially in urging that ethnic Hungarians and Romanians should be reconciled. Making contact with groups of young Hungarian revolutionaries in Transylvania to bring encouragement from Fidesz was something we could certainly do. Zsolt and I talked about being available to these new groups to share ideas on how they might organise as effective political cells, regardless of whether the Revolution succeeded or not.

We resolved to use the moment to cross the border into Romania, make new friends, visit old ones and share a vision of a liberated nation, under Christ. The next few days we took to make plans and prepare the family Lada for the journey, putting tins of food, medicines and bread ready as gifts into the back. The car rocked on its axles with material, a lot of which had come from local authority employees in Kingston upon Thames as part of our town 'twinning' initiative.

Underneath these, we stored packets of the new political programme printed by Fidesz at their Second Congress. Despite an order from the Fidesz Executive that none of their leadership should again risk travel into Romania–they were after all just 9 weeks from national elections–Zsolt threw me a bag to start packing my stuff.

In the early hours of 28th December 1989, Geza Németh took us to one side for a few words of encouragement, instruction and rebuke: "Nins Kata". There was to be no Fidesz photographer, or any other girls. He then blessed us in prayer. Despite the executions, sporadic violence and clashes were continuing between the Romanian army and remaining Securitate (secret police) forces loyal to the Communist party. Our trip wasn't without risk.

On Boxing Day, a group calling itself the National Salvation Front said it was taking control in Bucharest. But fighting continued even as we were to make our way across the winter landscape. I was glad that Miklós Szabó,[8] a medical doctor, was joining us for the journey. We set off from Budapest at three thirty in the morning. Unknown to me, Andy Ellis from Liberal Party HQ had come to Budapest and also set off for Transylvania, heading to Temesvár, (Timișoara) where the Revolution had kicked off.

Travelling across the border at Bors into Romania was the easiest I had experienced. Four hours of normal delay had been translated into a few moments, time enough for the Romanian guards to embrace us and wave us forwards. On every road we travelled down, the flags of the Revolution were out on lampposts. People gathered in number to see who was passing by.

Peering through the car window, I observed conversations that seemed animated, perhaps about what was going to happen next and who might take control of national and local government. It was easy to imagine this was a citizenry

making its own democracy out on the streets. Up to then, public meetings had been forbidden; nothing of common interest to a community could be meaningfully discussed.

Everywhere the small Red Cross symbol on our car windscreen was greeted with a wave and fingers raised with a 'V' sign. This was Romanians greeting Hungarians in solidarity over their newfound liberty. Arriving in Cluj-Napoca, the third city of Romania—known as Kolozsvár in Hungarian and Klausenberg in German—we could see evidence of the price some of the newly liberated had to pay.

Army vehicles were out in strength and key buildings were guarded by soldiers behind sandbag defences. Protestors had been shot dead there just a few days before. Candles remained alongside small Christmas trees as memorials to where they fell in the city's historic central square. Unlike anywhere else in the fall of Communism in East Central Europe, there was significant violence during Romania's transition to democracy, with over one thousand people killed. It was no comfort that in this revolution, the blood shed to achieve freedom and national unity was the same, both Romanian and ethnic Hungarian.

Between Christmas and New Year, it is usual for a blanket of snow to cover the country, but 1989 was one of the mildest winters in years with only light snow in most places we drove through. Just the mountain roads were dangerous. Without stopping for long in Kolozsvár we carried on over high hills as fast as we could drive in case we were targeted by unknown gunmen. We narrowly avoided slipping into a river as we crossed an icy wooden bridge and headed to the predominantly ethnically Hungarian city of Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe in Romanian).

But we couldn't avoid the wheels spinning on ice as we came out of bright sunshine at the top of one low mountain and down into freezing fog in the valley. I called out to Zsolt to slow down, but it was too late, and the Lada came off the road at a steep bend. We stepped out unhurt, and Miki and I pushed the car out of the ditch and back onto the road.

Every village we passed through was guarded by roadblocks, sometimes soldiers but mostly armed civilians. As night drew in, men stood by open braziers in defence of their homes and families. Speculation that the remnants of the regime were sending paid Arab paratroopers to lead the fight back had spread far. Shepherds used to long days guarding their sheep in the cold, joining their compatriots from the factories. At one spot, we came to a checkpoint and the men raised their rifles towards our car. Wrapped for the warmth in long sheepskin coats and wearing dark caps, these characters scared me.

A slim, older peasant in a waistcoat and overcoat, speaking despite a cigarette hanging from his mouth, directed his gun through the car window at Zsolt, who was behind the wheel. The man demanded to know who we were and where we were going. Whether from nerves or surprise, Zsolt laughed and explained we were a Fidesz delegation. The men waved us through.

These thickly moustached, proud makers of revolution were Szeklers, a Hungarian tribe historically in the region as independent-minded warriors entrusted with guarding the eastern approaches to Europe. They seemed to me an irrepressible force against any threat of counter-revolutionary Securitate forces that might be sent to take them on.

In this region close to Brasov-Brassó—which is up to five hundred kilometres from the Hungarian border—live an estimated six hundred thousand ethnic Hungarians. It was from towns and villages from this area that Fidesz had received appeals from small groups of young people calling themselves MADISZ, the League of Young Hungarian Democrats of Romania. We arrived at the home of one member, Zsuzsa, aged 17, who with her cousin Csilla, also 17, insisted we dump our stuff with them and return later to stay over. With their friend Rita, these students showed us around.

On 21 December 1989 Brassó saw violent insurrection, with locals joining the anti-Ceaușescu movement and engaging with Securitate forces. But in Sepsiszentgyörgy (meaning St George) the revolutionaries took control of the city by December 22. The Romanian flag with the communist emblem cut out became a symbol of the protests. I stuffed one of these emblems into my bag. During these days, we saw a parade for the funeral corteges of those killed, accompanied by a full military escort.

That night as news of our arrival spread, MADISZ members turned up to talk to us in the small flat of an activist in Sepsiszentgyörgy. We took three packs of the Fidesz manifesto we'd hidden under the boxes of Sainsbury's supermarket corned beef and toiletries and passed them around. On this cold night, out came bottles of pálinka, locally made peach and plum brandy, and we settled down to a bout of serious politics and equally serious partying. I couldn't have been happier as songs from The Doors played on the turntable.

Our new student friends said they had witnessed an estimated 15,000 people on the snowy streets of the city, on news of the Christmas Day execution of the Ceaușescus. The main Securitate office in the city had already been ransacked, and they said that a bonfire of papers, informer reports and

books carried outside took two days to burn. But they also expressed sadness that the decision to open-up the armouries' to the teenage revolutionaries had led to four young people dying in gunfire, some of it likely 'friendly fire' exchanges. In Covasna county, there were two deaths recorded, Liviu Soos and Constantin Brinza. In Sepsiszentgyörgy, Gheorghe Șuiu and Sándor Papp were killed.

We listened to their concerns, which seemed focused on what would happen to them as ethnic Hungarians in the new, free Romania. Rita, aged 20, explained how she had been prevented from studying literature at university because of her Hungarian origin. She hoped books could be sent to her from England for the pursuit of her studies. With her friends Zsuzsa and Csilla, Rita explained that MADISZ members didn't just lack experience of the practise of democracy, they had little idea on how to prevent crypto-Communists, in the continuing bureaucracies and army units, from maintaining their positions of power. This was a challenge that set us thinking.

As three Christians informed by Calvinist teaching, Miki, Zsolt and I knew that every sphere of life and culture could be transformed by means of Christ's suffering on the Cross and the power of his resurrection. The peoples of East Central Europe and especially Romania had lived for decades under the repression of Soviet occupation, or Communist dictatorship and knew what suffering meant, especially those who remained faithful to Christ.

It came as no surprise that sudden revolution and the death of the dictators had been received by our friends as a kind of miracle, a shock to individuals used to imagining nothing might ever change. I pondered whether, in this moment, a bold challenge to have faith in God's continued providence would be enough to inspire trust in the future. Or whether something more practical needed proposing, as a constant reminder of this moment of political miracles.

The party that night was particularly good. There was a pause as our new friends stopped, leaned against the wall and made space first for Zsolt, then for me to step up and say a few words. We aimed to capture this moment of hope and celebrate with them. But with the students packed into the small flat, it was also a moment to make sense of it.

As a well-known but youthful Fidesz politician, the MADISZ activists were keen to hear Zsolt. He spoke on the theme of realising individual rights by first ensuring that the communal rights of ethnic Hungarians and Romanians were equally respected. Individuals would be free when the whole community was, he said. Zsolt also reported on his journeys around the other Communist bloc states, going into detail about his visit to Czechoslovakia and meetings there with fellow oppositionists.

I took a different tack. As everyone likely knew the Lord's Prayer, I challenged them to think that at this moment, God's Kingdom of peace and justice really had come as an answer to prayer. What if, I asked, the changes we were seeing were His will being done on earth, just as it is done in heaven? If so, future actions had to be pursued prayerfully, with expectation that physical violence wasn't required to guarantee a successful transition to democracy.

We need politics; I am a politician, I said. But I argued that spiritual confidence requires that we take hold of the Kingdom with boldness, but in a spirit of gentleness and peace. Being a Revolution in the season of Christmas, citing the words of Jesus to the gathering didn't seem odd at all. For the epoch-changing moment of the revolutions of East Central Europe carried with them a sense of divine mercy. A window in heaven had opened and it was right to expect that more would come forth.

I noted that if they were to go on and shape the new politics of Romania, they must be wary, as I tried to be, of the risks that come to all politicians: of power, arrogance and pride. With these aspiring politicians, I pointed out that the word 'minister' had entered the lectionary of government positions in Westminster, the 'mother of parliaments', because it is the same word we find in the Gospel of Matthew, 'servant':

> *"But it shall not be so among you;*
> *but whosoever will be great among you,*
> *let him be your minister."*
>
> *Matthew 20:26 KJV*

I urged them to hold onto hope; to believe they were alive at this moment to serve their generation and to continue as the Revolution had begun, with expectation that deeper change would follow.

At this time, there were several new revolutionary newspapers being published and an editor present, either Alpár Horváth, or more likely Walter Willmann wrote up our remarks. A report of our presence appeared a few weeks later in the 27 January 1990 edition of Európai Idő.

Their Európai Idő Ido correspondent reported my extemporary words in full:

> *"We young Western people, even deep in our souls, are thoroughly accustomed to comfort—the kind of material well-being that only prosperity can give. The prosperity of the West, the liberal democracy of the West, has separated us*

from you here in the East with brutal clarity. You have lived through a different path — through suffering and trials. Yet, your problems are the same as ours: the economic crisis, environmental devastation, the questions of health and everyday survival.

Now here you stand—from nothing, at the very beginning—and you must undertake tasks that demand enormous sacrifices even in Western democracies. The end of Ceaușescu's era must be followed by the breaking of the materialist ideology that he and the Soviets forced upon you. This is also a question of political culture—how to keep alive the human spirit, the non-material dimension. This is the key to all things. You have to free yourselves from the fear, the habit of waiting for orders, the passivity. The Bible says to young people: do not despise the days of your youth, for you have the ability to bring transformation.

Do not be afraid to step forward. Do not be afraid to trust yourselves. Do not wait for someone else to say what the future will be. Because the future belongs to those who dare to speak. Though I am a Christian, I must tell you that the Christian message also contains this: take your own lives in your hands, take responsibility for yourselves.

At this moment, only those things can come true which your people truly believe in. If you want to overthrow the old political order, you must now find those common denominators that unite you, which you can mobilise total trust around. Karl Marx once wrote about the Tőkebírálat (Critique of Political Economy) that the bourgeoisie fights not only with weapons but with ideology, and the stronger ideology wins. To this we can add: much more depends on the mindsets of your people than on the decisions of functionaries in the nomenklatura.

Ask yourselves why nothing happened earlier in this country, why the decades passed in paralysis — and why, all at once, everything accelerated in these last few weeks. "Wait a few days, wait a few weeks, wait a few months…" —this is what the old system always told you. But now it is you who must say: we cannot wait

The challenge now is enormous: self-organisation, devotion, and honest work for the common good. These are the tools we must rely upon. Unify behind clearly defined goals, choose leaders whom you trust, and build the foundations of your future.

Do not think that economic chaos will automatically disappear. The factories will not run themselves. You must take responsibility for them. You must demand honest work and contribute honest work yourselves. If necessary, you must sit up through sleepless nights, but you must listen for the voice that speaks truth to you—the voice that says: 'you must go on'.

And this voice is the most precious treasure—the voice of conscience.

For me, the main question now is the following: will the Romanian people be able to prepare themselves for a life of service? For a new public morality? Because every people must learn that freedom cannot be sustained without responsibility. And responsibility cannot be sustained without service.

Your revolution is now in your hands. Adults cannot tell you what to do; you must decide. But know one thing: in this struggle, you have no enemies except fear itself."

Európai Idő, pg. 1 and 3
27 January 1990

It was just a few words at a party. But it seemed to bring encouragement and honoured the courage of our new, young friends. As I ended, I thought that I might never make a more heartfelt speech. It summed up all the things I was striving to stand for and believed in my own political journey. The partying could have gone on far later into the night. But with the curfew drawing-in, which in the city was still set at 10pm, the gathering ended. The cowboy boots I had been given by some Anabaptist farmers that summer in Kansas to help bring-in their harvest weren't great in the snow and ice. I was a little worse for wear and couldn't walk straight. Csilla and Zsuzsa resolved the problem by offering support on each arm, as we headed as a group past questioning soldiers back to the block of flats for the night.

Before the evening ended, we sat down to eat schnitzels and sauerkraut. On the television, normal programming had been suspended. We were delighted that national broadcasters had scrapped their regime-approved Christmas schedule. Showing instead was Charlie Chaplin's wonderful film of the foolishness of oppressive ideology–The Dictator.

On the morning of 29 December 1989, we set out to explore the city and wander about to see what might be going on. The sense of revolutionary fervour and expectation among the people was hard to ignore. Somehow, news of our arrival had got around. It was probably because we were speaking English that a woman felt prompted to stop us on the pavement, exclaim her welcome in words I couldn't understand but felt deeply, and offered us her embrace. I'm sure someone suggested another pálinka to celebrate the moment.

That afternoon, the three of us strode through streets still marked by bloodied snow towards the trade union conference building, which sits at the southern end of Sfântu Gheorghe's main square. We'd gone to check out news that a large gathering of young people had been convened. There must have been five hundred packed into the main hall of the cultural centre. It was here that we grasped a little of what the young people of the town, both Romanians and MADISZ members, had to face.

This was just the second meeting that had been organised for young people in the city, and we were keen to hear what was being planned. We took seats in a middle row, as the meeting commenced. But it soon became clear that the subject of debate had been steered away from anything controversial towards what the platform team felt comfortable with—including whether the town's youth should have more discotheques or not.

I wasn't the only one to become agitated.

The meeting was conducted in both Hungarian and Romanian. But discussion of the position of the region's ethnic minorities was deliberately avoided. The tension was evident. The crowd of students, young workers and soldiers became increasingly restless and frustrated. I sensed they wanted to cry out in unison with their demands for freedom. But it was fair enough that they lacked both the language of political expression and the confidence to make their demands known.

Together, Zsolt and I agreed the moment required decisive action. I pulled him by the sleeve and asked why we couldn't just take over the platform and give voice to the mood of the meeting. Without waiting for permission, we strode forwards, climbed up onto the stage and took control of the microphone.

With a student translating into Romanian, Zsolt spoke passionately. Picking up once more his theme from the night before, he argued that the Hungarians present should join in a united front with their young Romanian associates to compel a real movement towards liberal reform. He said socialism was the enemy, not their separate cultural identities. He presented the choices as he saw them. Should Hungarians retrench behind a national platform in defence of their own ethnic group? Or should they seek the guarantees of the law for the political and ethnic rights of all citizens, in coalition with other young democrats?

This was an idea I developed in a speech that was likely the first—and possibly only—one given by a western elected politician from a public platform during the Romanian Revolution. Whether true or not, I risked a political joke with the audience, at the expense of the Communist Party, and they were pleased to hear it. After all, nobody was going to get arrested—or worse—for that anymore.

The self-appointed leaders behind us on the stage seemed as if they wanted to establish a top-down organisation along the lines of the Young Communists. A MADISZ member later told me the Romanian young organisers hoped to create a party of young people. As it turned out, they succeeded in running candidates in the elections of 1990.

But at this meeting, it was our alternative vision that threw things into turmoil.

This message of solidarity also picked up from sentiments shared with MADISZ members at the party the night before, on the call to serve. The inspiration of St George, namesake of the city and patron saint of England, seemed the right political metaphor to draw.

Scholars believe Georgios was born to a noble family in Lydda, Syria-Palaestina, during the late third century. He was a formidable soldier in the Roman army and by his late twenties, he was promoted to the rank of "tribunus"–above centurion but below general–and stationed as an imperial guard of the Emperor Diocletian in modern day Turkey. Like his parents, Georgios was a Christian. But in 303AD, Diocletian issued an edict that every Christian soldier in the army should be arrested. Georgios refused to renounce his faith-so he was tortured and executed.

From the stage, I appealed to the audience to draw inspiration from his example. Building new political institutions and parties would not be enough on their own, without a civic culture on which these could rest. There were deeper values that young people must also stand for, and personal virtues they must strive to live by. For the new Romania, and with change coming towards an open and democratic East Central Europe, I said the Christian faith and the radical path of following Jesus must be the source both of hope and these public virtues. I argued the power of the Gospel could also transform society in ways that the point of the gun could never achieve.

When I handed the microphone back, neither Zsolt nor I were expecting the response we got. The event ended dramatically with streams of young people leaving their seats to come onto the stage with us. Demands were made for the city's first free newspapers to report our call for decentralisation of power, regional government for Romania and the guarantees of the rule of law.

The picture I drew of the youth of St George City taking the sword of God's word, non-violent action and the strength of their convictions to slay the dragon of socialism seemed to reveal and confirm a hidden strength of purpose among the MADISZ members. Plans were made to pick up the conversation with them at another party, later that night.

Our presence at the rally was reported the next day in one of the revolutionary newspapers. The report in *Háromszék* said:

> *"Youth meeting On Friday, the democratic youth of our county held its first meeting in the large hall of the Cultural House of the Trade Unions of Sepsiszentgyörgy. The more than five hundred participants, representatives of our companies, economic units and institutions, academics, students, talked about the revolution, the problems of the period that has passed since then, the main tasks to be done in the future, and democracy; freely, openly. Zsolt Németh, the representative of FIDESZ in Hungary, and David Campanale, the delegate of the Liberal Democrats in England, spoke at the meeting."*
>
> *Háromszék, 31th December 1989*

That night, dozens of MADISZ members gathered once again in another cold flat to hear us explain in more detail our thoughts of developing a political strategy for winning democratic power. László Fülöp, a Professor of Physics who'd been in the Culture Centre, took me to one side. "We have no politicians, it wasn't organised opposition that brought the Revolution", he told me. "The facts are well known. You must help us. I beg you to help us, to send political frameworks for us to study, so we have a complete idea of what must be immediately done."

The Battle is in the Mind: Founding the Tusványos Summer Festival

On Saturday 30 December we left Sepsiszentgyörgy, the main city of the region, and continued our journey through magnificent scenes of flat, snow-covered fields and pretty Hungarian villages. With their tiled terracotta roofs, ancient barns and fortified churches, at the edge of the Carpathian Mountains, these mainly Hungarian-speaking habitations are both where Western Christianity meets Eastern Orthodoxy, and where Reformed Europe itself is defended.

As we travelled, a church spire was always just behind us, or on the horizon, marking out the source of a gospel message that had never ceased to pulse through the region.

Through the centuries, Transylvania lived under the threat of Ottoman invasion, enjoying semi-independence, then Austrian and Russian repression of their identity, German interference, Soviet occupation, and finally the oppression of Communist dictatorship. It had survived. Once again, the region was throwing-off its shackles and returning full circle to freedoms rooted in Christianity.

We were but young witnesses of enduring, more ancient flames of humanity that were re-emerging from a harsh, bitter winter. In a Lada with a Red Cross prominent on our windscreen as the sign under which we travelled, we may just have been passing through. But wherever invited, we sought to fan embers which had refused to die, despite repeated attempts to snuff out the Spirit of life and His church.

The Apostle Paul had words in his letter to the church in Rome that expressed our emotions at this moment of deep connection to this place and its people,

> *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."*
>
> *Romans 8v16*

As Zsolt drove us on, I was already pondering how as 'joint heirs', we might then work alongside those who had suffered, to inherit better promises and lay again the foundation of a renewed, Christian Europe. How often in an epoch must a nation, or a continent, or a civilisation build itself from scratch? Yet here we were.

The deeply horrific, totalitarian experiment of communism had been trialled and found wanting in Central Europe. We hoped this was the moment when our generation would dig out the blocked, ancient wells and see the water of life flow once more; that East and West would be 'glorified together'.

I felt this challenge wasn't going to be the action of one moment. It required us to accept a lifetime of vigilance, service and solidarity that transcended place or tribe, so that the liberty for which we had been set free would not be easily surrendered again.

I felt we lived through these days of the revolution in a dissociative, fugue state where we surrendered to something deep within us. At no moment in this journey had we prepared anything that we said at even one moment, and spoke little if anything at all about ourselves. But whether in someone's home, on a stage, on the street or in a small gathering, it seemed as if the Spirit was welling up within us all the hopes of this moment through our words.

Our destination Kézdivásárhely (Tirgu Secuiesc in Romanian) was an hour away, where another MADISZ group had formed. Off the main street, its members, including writer and aspiring poet Attila Sántha (21) had gathered in the youth club (in the building of today's Vigadó Cultural House). The group had claimed the club as their office and we were expected. I didn't know about the plan, but we had kept them waiting for two hours. We arrived at 12.30pm to a full room and a gathering pregnant with expectation and curiosity. They in turn kept us speaking long into the afternoon.

Zsolt spoke on whether MADISZ should develop as an ethnic Hungarian group, or whether it should identify as a youth organization for all Romanians. He said it was vital that what he called "old divisions" should be avoided. Some of those present pushed back, saying that because of the past, they had grounds to fear for the future, especially discrimination over university admissions. But they resolved not to hold back from playing their part in the changes to come. Tereza Deme spoke up saying, "We have been silent for twenty-five years. It is now the duty of young people to make democracy."

These young people of Kézdivásárhely explained how they had defended their streets without guns during the first days

of the uprising. They said that on 23 December, their elders had marched on the town's main factory to demand access to weapons from the militia armoury, due to "panic" that "Arab terrorists" might come into the town. But they had been turned back by Csaba Jakabos, the factory manager, who had been made chair of the town's revolutionary committee. Jakabos had said he could never look the mothers and wives of the town in the face if he had issued arms that had led to unnecessary deaths.

Just before Christmas on 23 December, in what was described as "three hours of anarchy", the workers of the town had broken into the Securitate building and taken thirty automatic weapons from the secret police, who had fled. The feared enforcers had all then been rounded up by the army, bar one who was killed on the street and set on fire. The students said that papers and books from the building were burned all night and that the people "danced".

On that day, young people came out to guard the shops against looting. A day later in the town's uprising, factory workers had taken control of the streets. In what was described as a "half-democratic election", twenty-four representatives were then chosen to form their local "Committee for National Salvation" and send delegates to Bucharest.

Attila Sántha and two other students, Vince Fekete (24) and László Deme (24) from the Cluj Napoca University of Economics, had also visited the factory on the same day. But their demand, they told us, was access to the printing presses. While their young friends stood guard in the town square, Csaba Jakabos arranged for the three to write and publish the town's first free Hungarian language newspaper, Székely Újság. These three young people became joint editors.

During a previous revolution, in mid-November 1848, all of Transylvania had been occupied by Austrian troops, except the Háromszék region. It was the only county whose Székely people resisted the Imperial Habsburg forces. As one of the bigger towns, Kézdivásárhely had become a centre of military industry. In May 1849, General of Defence Jozsef Bem donated his camp printing press to the people. It was put immediately to use in producing materials for education.[9]

Whether providence, serendipity or choice, it was neat that in this same town nearly a century and a half later, the young revolutionaries of 1989 were also working to establish and deepen change by means of print, not through the barrel of the gun. As the afternoon went by and darkness drew in, Jakabos ordered a restaurant to open, with us as its sole guests. It was dark inside as there were few working light-bulbs in the ceiling. But we sat together on a long table and reflected on what had been going on.

One issue was whether to continue our journey that night to the next city, Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş in Romanian), where we were expected for more meetings. Over a few boiled sausages and mustard, Mr Jakabos advised that as he could not be sure the roads were entirely safe at night, he had organised an armed escort of soldiers to travel the two-hundred-kilometre journey with us.

I only took the risks seriously when four militiamen arrived at the restaurant with long bayonets slung from their waists and sub-machine guns taken from the town's burnt out Securitate building. There was a curfew still in place for a reason. One of the soldiers, a burly-faced farmer, attempted to explain to me how the setting on the gun's safety-catch could be flipped from safe, to single-fire, and to automatic and that we would be well looked after. But I didn't want to know. In any case, I was more worried about Zsolt's driving than being shot at by 'Libyan bandits'.

I pressed my companions the great urgency of finding somewhere to sleep that night. With another student party on offer from our new MADISZ friends, we elected to remain with them in Kézdivásárhely.

Attila Sántha threw open his flat to local MADISZ members to discuss the development of a political programme. Armed soldiers were positioned outside.[10] We circulated more copies of the Fidesz pamphlet to the thirty-one people that had packed into just one room. I counted a further twenty-five young people in the adjacent room. As jazz tunes played on a record-player in the background, we began at 6.30pm discussing and then drafting together on Saturday 30th December 1989, perhaps the first international, political declaration published by anyone in newly liberated Romania.

Speaking to the party, Zsolt said that socialism had to be defeated by a pluralist, democratic and constitutional approach that brought together all people of goodwill, regardless of their ethnic identity. Once more, I emphasised my views on the importance of character and service for any budding young politician. A few hours later, we walked through the snow to a student accommodation block, where a young woman had surrendered her bedroom to us. I climbed into the slim bed with Zsolt and Miki, the three of us sleeping head to toe like sardines.

The following morning, New Year's Eve 1989, we signed the joint declarations, with Laszlo and Attila adding their names


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on behalf of MADISZ, Miklós and Zsolt for FIDESZ and myself for the Young Liberal Democrats. The declaration to *"The Youth of Europe!"* called for the end of the "iron curtain" and the unity of all Europe; the formation of parliamentary democracy and a market-based economy; the assurance of the collective rights of religious and minority groups; and for "the nations, governments and political organisations of the West to contribute to the success of the revolutions of East Central Europe and for their peaceful and democratic transition."

A news release was also agreed and dated for when I returned to London and would be able to share it with the press and broadcast media. In it, Zsolt urged that, "Western governments and political parties must immediately support the liberal opposition in Romania in order to avoid the re-emergence of quasi-communist forces". His warning was prescient.

Among everyone we met, the topic of discussion was not the fighting of just a few days before, but what help the revolutionaries needed from the West to construct a new political system. This was central to our declaration.

During those talks in Attila's studio flat in Kézdivásárhely, we knocked around ideas about how our discussions might be kept going. Christianity, like Judaism, is a 'memory religion' where the covenants of blessing, our commitment to Christ and recognition of God's favour are remembered and renewed through sacramental acts, whether piles of stones as the Israelites made, or regular celebration of the eucharist. Generational learning springs from this and inspired my thoughts.

At the meeting I mentioned that in Britain, the churches organised every year a week-long, campsite event for young Christians, called the Greenbelt Festival, where the faith would be taught and passed on between generations. Bible studies on topical and vocational themes happened in different speaker tents in the morning, and concerts in the evening. It was just a few years before, at Greenbelt 1982 I had heard a new and relatively unknown Christian rock band from Ireland play their early hits, called U2.

I thought this a model to consider, as such an event if held in Romania would be a way to avoid forgetting the price paid by some for liberty. It would also be a way of "passing on the baton" from one generation to the next of what God had done, in toppling Communist regimes across all East Central Europe.

As our conversation continued, it was clear we were all thinking on similar lines. Zsolt for Fidesz, Attila Sántha, Laszlo Deme and others present for MADISZ proposed that an "open university camp" should be organised for the end of the following July 1990. The weekend would coincide with the feast day of St Anne, namesake of the nearby famous volcanic lake. I suggested that British academics might come and lead discussions on democracy. On hearing my description of how the Liberal Democrats as a party are organised and where it stood on the political spectrum, they also held out an invitation to British centre-ground politicians to attend.[11]

So was the idea of the Bálványos, then Tusványos, Summer Camp born.

As Sántha Attila told the publication, Művelődés, "Barely a week after the outbreak of the revolution, while armed men guarded the studio apartment in Târgu Secuiesc (Kézdivásárhely), where representatives of youth organizations from three countries were crammed together, such an idea was conceived which would have seemed absurd not only earlier, but even a few months later.'"[12]

The concept of a 'Summer University' for students was already known at this time. Recently, a social scientist with the Institute and Archives for the History of the Regime Change, Barnabás Pálinkás, has argued that,

> *"From the beginning of the 1980s, the Hungarian club movement and the network of specialised colleges also held various events and programmes which were later to serve as models for the organizers of Bálványos."*
>
> *Rendszerváltó Szemle (The Regime Change Review)*

Pálinkás cites the impact on young Hungarians of "The local history and self-organising groups of the Hungarian youth in Czechoslovakia and their summer meetings" and points out that Zsolt participated in a summer youth camp in Czechoslovakia after his final exams.[13]

The idea of the summer university was first outlined a week later, on 6 January 1990 in *Székely Újság*, which published the appeal agreed in Kézdivásárhely by our three organisations. As Pálinkás identifies from the news report, Attila Kovács, organizer of MADISZ explained,

> *"In the course of July we are going to organize a political camp, where English, Hungarian, and Romanian speakers will give talks. From England for example, David Steel and György Schöpflin, professors at Oxford University, will come. In the evenings dance groups from the Hungarian-speaking area would provide entertainment. But for the time being, the most important thing is not to let the revolution fade away."*[14]

The following week on 13 January, Attila Sántha of MADISZ and founding editor of Székely Újság published my remarks to the gathering in Kézdivásárhely. He wrote:

THE WHEEL OF HISTORY IS IRREVERSIBLE

The greetings of the Western world and of the Liberal Democratic Party of Great Britain, sent to the Hungarian community of Romania, will strengthen the railway line between East and West, and will help ensure that Western states do not return to the practice of abandoning the peoples of the East.

This is my third visit to Romania this year, with most of my time spent in Brassó (Braşov), filming. I am fortunate to be able to witness—and to record—how one of the world's most terrible dictatorships is being dismantled, and how a people full of miraculous strength and courage is stepping forward. The safest place in the world is now Romania, because assistance flows in from everywhere, and the fear that once ruled has disappeared entirely.

Imagine that already in 1987 I received countless letters from Hungarians in Romania—among others from the Hungarian Liberals Democratic Party—and among them I received László Tőkés's ppeal as well. At that time I could do nothing to alleviate the momentary fate of the writers.

Now a new era is beginning in Romania's history. What matters most is that the rule of law should begin in the country, under the control of experienced, law-abiding and reliable citizens. It is not enough to overthrow one dictatorship if nationalism and chauvinism take its place. These forces are emerging in ever-stronger forms, and we in Europe are watching them with concern.

Hungary must stay on the path of democracy. I say this because here in Romania, and not only here but in other socialist countries undergoing transition as well, there is a tendency for the intelligentsia to wrest power from the politicians.

A Hungarian woman once asked a politician: "Who invented communism—the politicians or the intellectuals?" The answer: "Naturally the politicians." To which the woman replied: "I thought the intellectuals would have worked it out in the laboratory sooner."

And therefore, so that irresponsible politicians may never again govern but only leaders trained in the sciences, it is necessary to change universities, to establish colleges, and to free teacher-training institutes from all ideological constraints. Only through this can a true governing class emerge —one responsible to the people and able to account for its actions—and one which can remove the blacklists and the radical elements from public life.

Some may say: "These are empty words." But it is not mere talk. One must hear the cries of those who, during the dictatorship, dared to clench their fists in their coat pockets; the cries of those who now have a voice.

God bless Szent-György, and all those who courageously stood by their rights and liberties, and who have clearly written on the great wheel of history: Let there be change! Let there be freedom!

(These are excerpts from the speech of David Campanale, the British Liberal Democratic Party's representative, delivered at the Hungarian Youth Club on New Year's Eve 1989.)

Sántha Attila
Székely Újság 13 Jan 1990

The Struggle of Memory Against Forgetting

The open plains, hidden villages and surrounding hills of Transylvania must be some of the most beautiful in Europe. It was hard to imagine the killings and brutal torture that could have happened just a few days before our visit. As we continued our journey from Kézdivásárhely, we met people who described some of these incidents.

In one town, we were told that the Securitate chief had been pulled from his headquarters, while his men slipped away into the night. He was taken to the centre of a market square and beaten to death in front of a crowd. A box of surveillance equipment that was their stock in trade was laid out for all to see. Two young Hungarian hitchhikers explained to us that a Hungarian car with Red Cross poster similar to ours had passed through their village and had been riddled with bullets. Zsolt commented that if true, this was the same village and same day that we had passed through several days before.

On the eve of a new decade, we stopped late in the afternoon in Nyárádremete Eremitu, a village twenty kilometres from Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș). Seventy-five young Hungarians, mostly students from the university at Kolozsvár, were meeting in session in the House of Culture. They were hoping to learn what all this 'democracy' was about. Their first act was to vote for their leaders. In the large draughty hall, under the guidance of the village foreman, we watched as they raised their hands to vote for the first time in their lives.

Committing this previously forbidden act was accompanied by a little bewilderment, as they chose friends to form a small committee. Giggling, they cupped their hands to whisper to each other "Well, we've done it. That's what all the fuss was about!" The act of democracy took just a few minutes, though it was preceded by thirty minutes of discussion during which the village leader attempted to help with the techniques they could use.

Eremitu is a small group of tiny villages. Set out on medieval lines, in 1989 its roads were still dirt tracks. There was no public lighting. The houses were small, long wood and stone-built homes laid out either side of the street. It was here with young villagers, where we huddled around an open stove in the kitchen of a small farmhouse to welcome in the new year. We shared our hopes for the future and spoke for the final time about the dawn of a new era in the region, but also for all the citizens of Europe.
Eighteen students—one a reporter for the new Kolozsvár student press—looked on as I tried to answer questions on the strategy of winning power. Zsolt spoke to another group in the rear bedroom on the question of taking a liberal view on nationalism. And it was liberalism, under-pinned by Christianity—a belief in self-directing and caring communities and devolution of power to independent social and civic institutions—that seemed to make the most sense. It was also a message that struck a chord with their desire for entrenched political reforms as the starting point for broader economic changes.

But we also stuck to our continual theme that constitutional democracy can neither be built nor grow by mobilising otherwise self-directing, autonomous individuals. I underlined once more that an ethical polity is required, anchored in the virtues. I said individuals must come together not as self-contained egos, only aware of themselves and their wants, but as people engaged in common pursuits rooted in social obligation and custom, directed and shaped by law.

As three Christians as well as democrats, Miki, Zsolt and I anchored everything we said back in the one law that counts, the law of love. I talked to the gathering about how this is expressed in the model of Christ's servanthood and gentleness in the Bible, which is the greatest source of inspiration for political leadership. It was not enough—as the last hours of the decade slipped away—to rehearse ideas of political renewal and the birth of a liberal democratic movement by talk of elections alone.

This was a moment instead for everyone called to political service across Europe to take stock of the future we wanted for our common home. It was the spirit of the people—each made to know dignity and strength as individual children of God—that would be the basis of national renewal.

From these responsibilities to build and serve, we agreed that freedom would be established in virtue so it could be said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

With midnight past and the national anthem of Hungary and the Szekler hymn sung, we left Nyárádremete Eremitu early in the morning of New Year's Day 1990. Our journey ended in Marosvásárhely and the home of one of Zsolt's cousins. Sofas with people already on them were vacated to make room for us.

In the morning, as I needed to get back to London, I stepped out onto the snowy street with a friend in the hope of hitching a lift to Budapest. A van came along pretty quickly, and we climbed into the back and then under blankets, but with an open bottle of pálinka to numb the cold.

I'd missed the flight I had booked with Air Malev from Budapest's airport back to London. But seeing the Romanian flag and pole I was carrying, with a hole in the centre, the young staff behind the ticket desk issued a new ticket with smiles, no questions and nothing more to pay.

From my seat on the flight, I thought back about the places we'd been to, the blood in the snow, the soldiers and the armoured vehicles commanding the city streets. Although Csaba Jakobos feared the old regime would find its way back and would manipulate events to keep power, I was encouraged that the young people we had met were serious and had time on their side. They wanted to play their part in forming their renewed nation, where individuals could find both dignity and community.

Avoiding a return to authoritarianism, the risk of bloodshed to then overcome it, or a breakdown in relations between Romanians and ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania would require dialogue and peace-making. What better than an annual summer university for students and young people? A quote came to mind:

> *"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."*
>
> *Milan Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

All Europe has to choose to remember and work hard not to forget. We would do that from now on.

Leaving Budapest, I sensed the choices that now needed to be made were by the prosperous, but spiritually poor young people of the West, if Christian civilisation was to be renewed in Europe.

Saint Anna Lake, Transylvania, Romania. (Calin Stan/Shutterstock)

The First Bálványos Summer Festival

My priority back in London was to support the efforts of Zsolt and the MADISZ leaders to prepare for the first Summer University camp, especially when it came to finding finance and inviting guests. Our new student friends in Transylvania soon began to reach out, urging me to do whatever I could to turn their plans into something concrete. They also described the first weeks that followed their revolution.

On 24 January 1990, a letter arrived from Attila Sántha, expressing how thrilled he was that the '*Proclamation of the Youth of Europe*' had made a "great impact and had a great role in radicalising (the) MADISZ." He urged, "help us in organising that political camp in July", including "teachers from Oxford" so that "there will be something extraordinary."

A few days later, another of the young students present at the meeting in the Kézdivásárhely cultural centre, Patricia Otvós, aged 15, wrote saying they had taken their first steps in elaborating the "Temporary Statutes of the MADISZ". She said these included the creation of a "free, democratic and independent Romania" and the "rights of Hungarians." Recollecting our visit and what she called, "a memorable lesson in democracy", she said "everybody was glad to meet you; you were fantastic, both you and Zsolt Németh".

I was impressed by her description of what MADISZ opposed,"we are against all manifestations which are nationalist or chauvinistic", and for, "denominational schools", preparing young people "on matters of right" including, "politics, economics and sociology" and supporting "old people and unmarried mothers". She said people were saying Romania was going through a "sort of renaissance", but that her observation was they were "still living in darkness". She appealed for support.

On 26 February 1990, I met Norman Stone at the Groucho Club in London's Soho to hear his ideas for the coming camp. He agreed to attend. But it was clear that to obtain finance for the first event, I would need to ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of Margaret Thatcher's third government, among other possible funders. Would the British understand the moment underway and get behind it?

A few weeks later, Patricia Otvós wrote again, describing how word of our December visit continued to go around the school students in the town. She said she had to explain that even as speakers, we were almost students ourselves, "I told about you to one my class mates", she wrote, "and he thought you were an old man with a big beard, like Engels"!

Otvos described just how "radicalised" MADISZ members had become, following our visit. In a letter Patricia said that on 14 March 1990, MADISZ had organised "big demonstrations in high schools" and that she had become involved in her own school's first protest action. She wrote, "The pupils sat down in the corridors and made a lot of dirt (by dropping sandwiches on the floor) while singing the beautiful Székely anthem." She added, delightfully, "they were quite undisciplined."

This brought to mind something I must have described at the cultural centre in December, how at near her age in 1981, I had led a student occupation of my college against the Thatcher government's education cuts. This had first blocked the administration centre of Kingston College of Further Education, with speeches following in the car park, a protest march on the town hall and then a trip to the pub.

Patricia described how in Kézdivásárhely on 15 March 1990, all the MADISZ members had come into the centre of the town, where they "sang marching songs, recited the "Psalmus hungaricus", flourished the flags of Hungary and Romania", then "said the Lord's prayer". This protest was followed up a few days later, when she said the school students "went out on strike". "We claimed our Hungarian schools which were turned into Romanian ones, the Bolyai University, I mean our rights." For Patricia, they were prepared to "stop everything: learning, working in the factories, and we shall block up the main roads of the town." We are by no means chauvinists", this teenager continued, "this is our country and we want to live and enjoy our rights here." All magnificent sentiments.

From Sepsiszentgyörgy, more reflections on the impact of our visit came by post from Rita Gyorfi, who was one of the circle of friends of Csilla and Zsuzsa, who we had stayed with. Writing in March 1990, she said, "The Young Democrats Organisation is working. It has proved to be what you said it should be: 'the servant of all'." Describing their links with the national organisation for Hungarians, she said MADISZ had provided "serious influence" on the adult association, the RMDSZ. Her letter closed with her hopes for the "open university in July", saying she hoped it would be "successfully organised."

László Koesis, aged 28 and a professor of physics, also wrote from Sepsiszentgyörgy, saying "Our society is in the stone age by the point of view of political, common thought" and added, "In my name and in the name of my fellows, we want to have a strong organisation and it is hard work to teach our youth in basic political knowledge." He asked for help in the summer, saying "I beg you to help us" with "political frameworks and organising systems" so that they could take action "immediately".

These letters seemed an indication that our friends wanted the connection to deepen. When Attila Sántha wrote with a further update, it was clear that our fellow twenty-something allies for liberal reform were pushing on. Given the elections in Hungary and Zsolt's role in the Fidesz leadership, this was just as well.

Staged over two rounds, March 25 and April 8, 1990, Fidesz won 21 seats and secured 8.95% of the vote, with Zsolt getting elected through his place on the party list. A Christian Democrat in outlook, he has since enjoyed a long and distinguished career in public service, including roles in government.

On behalf of the 'Presidium of the Hungarian Democratic Forum', Professor Geza Jeszenszky wrote to me welcoming the idea of a further visiting delegation from London. In his letter of 27 March 1990, he commented, "These are stirring times in Hungary, and I am sure you and your friends' visit will contribute to the advancement of liberal values in this country."

However, as I had my own election campaign to focus on at that time in Kingston upon Thames, I couldn't go. But I did get re-elected in Hook ward, no longer as a Social Democrat, but for the newly merged party, the Liberal Democrats. I also took a role as a broadcast journalist in BBC Westminster, which limited what I could do. Even so, plans were advancing well for the first summer university camp.

Dated 19 May 1990, the letter from Attila Sántha expressed fears that "after ethnic problems, everything was uncertain" and delays might be "fatal to our youth camp", but added that after the first elections, "stability would come." He confirmed that "the place, the hotel and everything is confirmed" and that invitations had already gone out to "Romanian and Hungarian political leaders." Attila said the campsite could take "western young people" and he was keen that I should "bring a British rock band".

On a positive note, Attila confirmed that he had received a lot of help from Fidesz and the MADISZ group in Sepsiszentgyörgy on practical arrangements. He said the camp would be "sponsored by MISZSZ (Union of Hungarian Youth Organisations), Hungarian Democratic Union, the Bolyai Society and the Cultural Council of Covasna County." But he raised the issue of the lack of "convertible money" which "today is indispensable" and wondered whether the British would step up to help with cash.

Under Zsolt's direction, I produced a draft programme for the event, which was then faxed to different groups in London with the hope of securing financial support, both to cover the camp costs facing MADISZ and Fidesz but also to pay for the flights and accommodation of visiting speakers.

The original draft underlined the wide-ranging scope of the proposed seminar-style talks, from literature to religion and identity, principles of the rule of law and demographic change. But there were no 'takers' for the proposal and I could identify no sources of funding for the camp from within the UK. As it turned out, this meant I couldn't attend. The sponsorship available went instead to pay for English academics to fly out.

Tibor Toró as the president of MISZSZ and his vice-president, Zsolt Szilagyi MP, played key roles in supporting the first summer camp. He had been recently elected as the youngest Member of the Romanian Parliament, aged 21. At that time, as young MPs, a group of them went to the headquarters of *Grupul pentru Dialog Social* and invited guests from their circle.

Meeting in Bálványosfürdő on St. Anne's Day, under the motto *Transition from Dictatorship to Democracy* there were both Hungarian and Romanian lecturers. From Britain, Professor Norman Stone made the journey and Professor György Schöpflin of the London School of Economics also played a part. Toró described the camp's activities in the paper, Temesvári Új Szó:

> *"The lectures were held in Hungarian, Romanian, and English, for six days, 3–4 hours a day, and the discussions often continued into the afternoon. Of course, we still had time to visit Saint Anne Lake, Bálványosvár, Büdös cave, or the mineral water beach, and in the evenings dance houses and rock music alternated. A special highlight of the days was the broadcast of the camp radio (Bálványosi Büdös). It was blasted especially in the mornings when it tried to wake up the participants who stayed up late until dawn talking and singing.""*[15]
>
> *Tibor Toró*
> *President, Union of Hungarian Youth Organisations*

So began the long history of Bálványos Summer University. A few years later, in 1997, when the camping site at Bálványos became too small for all the speaker programmes and the number of participants, the organisers moved the event to a fresh, larger site at Baile Tusnad, close to St Anne's lake. With up to eighty-thousand people attending in recent years, it is now known as the Tusványos summer university camp, after the words, Tusnád and Bálványos, were combined.

In this change of name and site, there was a certain symbolism that also speaks prophetically. The word 'Bal' in Hungarian means 'idol'. Under Communism, the spirit of Baal, the middle eastern idol who had once led ancient Israel astray, was at work through the Soviets. Meaning 'master' or "possessor", Baal was seen as a god that people believed served them. But in reality, the people ended up being mastered, just as Communism took power and oppressed the people it claimed to be acting for. We can say that anything that is prioritised over God, whether its success, power, pleasure, or money, becomes our "Baal," controlling us.

Happily, the festival has been described as an "idol breaker", with article *Bálványosi bálványdöntögetés*, "we can now state that in Bálványosfürdő we are currently witnessing probably the most significant democratic intellectual self-coherence. How much we were worried about the generations to come after us, that they would be repressed, squeezed out, eliminated, written off [...] In Bálványosfürdő the breaking of idols and social taboos is underway, with such preparedness and willingness and let us believe with such an effect that, before long, will elevate the events that took place here to the heights of the lasting tales and legends of this famous venue.'"[16]

The new venue, Tusnádfürdő, is a town built around a spring of water. It is possible for festival-goers to enjoy the spa adjacent to the campsite. Just as physical springs provide water, they also symbolise the spiritual sustenance that God offers everyone. In the Gospel of John, Jesus invites believers to come to Him for living water, stating,

> *"Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."*
>
> *John 7:37-38*

Whatever the summer university has become today and whether or not it reflects the founding vision and purpose, this symbolism of going from captivity to springs of life remains. It is a kind of sign not to be captured by new idols, to confront deception when it appears and to always look to the One who calls himself the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Conclusion

When Zsolt and I spoke—in that culture centre of the trade union hall in Sepsiszentgyörgy in December 1989—about the importance of courageous ideas, diverse musical influences, and a student spirit of peace and love, we invoked the spirit of St George. In doing so, we were hoping, in a small way, to mobilise, equip and envision a movement of young dragon-slayers. Tusványos was founded as an effort to allow such a movement to develop.

The shape and dimension of the Tusványos festival and its subsequent growth is, of course, entirely down to the organisers who have put the work in every year. Nevertheless, the energy and stories of that week in December 1989 remain relevant to the future of Europe now: courage, vision, virtue and the vitality of youth.

This remains true today: original attendees—the 1989 generation—have been joined by their children, and in some cases, their grandchildren. What began as the spirit of democracy waking up after the long nightmare of communism in Eastern and Central Europe, became a living tradition, ever-reconnecting, once every high summer, the Hungarian nation not only with its friends and neighbours, but also with itself. Long may it remain so.

Festival attendees relaxing at Tusványos 2025, Tusnádfürdő. (Source: Tusványos)

Landscape view picturing a large valley covered by scattered clouds on a blue sky, Transylvania

(Bogdan Zamfir/Shutterstock)

Epilogue: Political Immanence

The Hungarians have managed to surprise the world of politics. A country of barely ten million people, many might struggle to find Hungary on a map. Nevertheless, it's the one nation in Europe that President Donald Trump singles out for praise. This isn't because Hungary's transition to democracy has come by following a programme imported from the western democracies of 'Old Europe', or from a Republican-friendly Washington think-tank. Viktor Orbán's Fidesz governments have set out instead to impress no-one other than their own electorate.

Any proponent of a transcendent ideology, whether free market capitalism, or human rights agendas that prioritise limitless individual autonomy above all else, has failed to get a look-in. Under Orbán, nation-building out of the ruins of Communism was done the Hungarian way. For right or wrong, Fidesz says it draws upon Hungary's own tradition and history, including Christian Democratic ideas inspired by Catholic Social Thought. This approach explains how Hungary has resisted outside demands, including repeated 'rule of law' concerns coming from the European Commission. It may also account for Orbán's unprecedented series of super-majority election wins.

Fidesz did not stake their place among the leading reformists of the Communist era by being immune to geo-political events going on during the journey to democracy. As its leaders were attending Hungarian universities in 1983, the first Pershing II missiles meant to counter the Soviet Union's SS-20 intermediate-range systems were being deployed in West Germany. In order to demonstrate that NATO's deterrent was credible, US President Reagan placed missiles in the Netherlands, Belgium and Great Britain. His actions, backed by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, pressured the Soviets into arms-reduction talks.

The threat of possible nuclear exchange over mainland Europe was an ever-present concern for the youth activists of Fidesz, as well as their contemporaries in Britain. But this also co-existed with a sense of hope. The reason I engaged with my friends with so much hope was a conviction that these pressures could also kickstart deeper, irreversible political change. At that time, I imagined that the whole Soviet system might be vulnerable to not just Russian President Gorbachev's agenda of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, but to complete regime collapse. And I asked, if this was true, how would democratic institutions be rebuilt? Which generation would the task fall to? The old or the new? And if it fell to a bunch of students, could the stories of liberal reform, constantly circulating among Fidesz members in the late eighties, have the power to reshape the arc of Hungarian history? Or did the route to national re-enchantment require the rediscovery of more ancient, Biblical, paths?

The urgency of political re-imagination wasn't just felt in the Soviet bloc. The post-War political consensus in western Europe was also being tested and we see even at this moment, a revolt underway against the implicit impersonal assumption of liberal, free market economics: that a citizen's stake in society rests on their contract with the state, not by membership of a covenanted community.

My motivations in entering politics after university became centred on a different tradition that defines politics as covenantal, not contractual. It rests on the importance of relationships. I became convinced that Pope John Paul II in the eighties was right to draw upon biblical narratives, when he criticised the ruling political orthodoxies of the free-market capitalist West, at the same time as the Communist East. Could it be that he was right that overruling the dynamics of this moment in the late twentieth century was another kind of immanence, one that spoke to both East and West?

My actions rested on a choice I made, to act as if the Pope was right; Christ is not a passive observer but active and alive in history. And I surrendered everything to the journey, of which Tusványos is but one legacy. The Prophet Daniel sets the scene on God's sovereign interventions in human history, and we must all continue to follow the light as Christ exposes the heart of darkness in Europe:

> *"He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him."*
>
> *Daniel 2: 21-22*

Inside the Europe Union (EU) of this current moment, a political divide is portrayed that sets 'sovereigntist, patriotic and popular forces' against a hostile 'liberal, left and green consensus'. This portrayal carries with it an assumption that the European Union represents the culmination of liberalism, an 'end of history' institution, with abandoned borders, collapsed communities of autonomous, roaming selves and a secularist mindset. Inside this understanding, the only transcendent narrative that might connect people, or which binds one generation to the next is contractual, around

shared citizenship of the EU and the sovereignty of the self. In this ruling paradigm, Christianity and Catholic Social Thought never had, and must never have, any definitive role in under-pinning the continent's political and social institutions, whether national or supra-national. The national, Christian, conservative movement coming at this moment from East Central Europe is seen as ahistorical and therefore hostile to secular, EU, 'progress'. For the left consensus, it must be defeated.

In the politics of the 1980s when the transition to democracy in East Central Europe happened, there was no such divide. In Britain and much of the Anglo-Saxon world, Christianity and the existence of pluralist, open societies were not disconnected ideas. The whole constitutional order in Britain and the Commonwealth is built upon biblical ideas of covenant, the rule of law, the dignity of the person, the accountability of rulers to God and the people who put them there. It is covenantal, not contractual. It has a quality of giveness.

For liberal democracy to endure, the 'given' assumptions in which it is embedded must not be swept aside. Britain always was, is, and must remain, a constitutional, Christian monarchical democracy, for true liberalism to be gifted to the coming generation. More than that, the further Britain departs from its Christian, confessional, parliamentary order, the more that the institutions of liberal, constitutional democracy are at risk from forces they alone cannot contain, nor defeat.

Alexis de Tocqueville saw this in his seminal work *Democracy in America* (1835), when he observed that Christianity in America wasn't just a set of beliefs but a cultural force that promoted values like equality, restraint, and community involvement, which he identified as key for a functioning democracy. He famously said, "Liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith." From his visit to America he noted how Christianity influenced public life without being tied to the state, fostering a kind of "self-interest rightly understood" that encouraged civic participation.

Another narrative of this moment is that when Viktor Orbán took Fidesz at its Congress in 1993 from 'liberal' to civic-centrist ("polgári centrumpárt"), he was abandoning 'true liberalism' and taking the party in a completely new, conservative, direction. The evidence in this paper suggests this analysis is too simplistic. Fidesz could equally be said to be pursuing a Hungarian 'middle way'. It would trace steps the English had undertaken one millennia before.

In putting the classic 'virtues' first, rather than relying on neat institutions framed by the language of 'rights' to sustain a political culture, Fidesz could also be said to have imitated the historic, Anglo Saxon approach to liberal nation-building, observed by de Tocqueville. The aim of Fidesz, albeit flawed in numerous ways, has been to build authentic, traditional, liberal institutions in Hungary on an immovable rock of Christian doctrine and social thought. We see evidence of this today in the Christian, confessional aspects of the modern Hungarian constitution, championed by Orbán.

Over the period of this paper, the Social Democrats (SDP) and Liberals in Great Britain were strong advocates for the European Community with connections in the 1980s with sister parties in the member states. But there was little if any engagement with samizdat or oppositionist circles in the countries of the Warsaw Pact. When first working for the two parties in Westminster in 1985, I made the effort to make new connections and friendships with activists in East Central Europe of my own generation. These remain today. The approach I took then was to argue for British forms of constitutional democracy, built on covenantal ideas rooted in Christianity and its foundation in Old Testament Israel. In doing so, I was only part of a long tradition of politicians associated with British liberalism and social democracy.

Finding similar followers of the middle way, in Hungary, confirmed the direction of my politics and the focus on what I still want to achieve. This was the application of 'wisdom' when it came to forging a new kind of politics in Britain. It started by seeking out where "the light dwells" as I could see it behind the Iron Curtain. In the darkness of East Central Europe were sparks of flame that could inspire renewal of the Christian foundations of not just 'New' but 'Old' Europe too.

Under Communism, the enemies of the Open Society were in plain sight. But the means to overcome them in the Soviet bloc also revealed a path to their defeat in western Europe too. It is these dragons of illiberalism and despair that our focus must now turn, to see the path more clearly and to take bold steps along it.

David Campanale, London, December 2025


TUSVÁNYOS


HYÁRI
SZABAD-
EGYETEM
2009
JÚLIUS 16

Appendix

This appendix contains primary source materials relating to the history of Tusványos, Fidesz, and the Romanian Revolution.

UK Friends of FIDESZ

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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE USE: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1988

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LAUNCH OF 'FRIENDS OF FIDESZ' IN LONDON TO COINCIDE WITH FIRST CONFERENCE OF HUNGARIAN YOUNG DEMOCRATS

A support group for FIDESZ - the Hungarian League of Young Democrats - will be launched in London tomorrow (Saturday) to coincide with FIDESZ's first national conference, taking place this weekend in Budapest.

FIDESZ is the foremost group amongst Hungary's democratic opposition, which are demanding political and economic reforms that would give Hungary more in common with EEC countries than the Soviet bloc. Last week, the Hungarian Government promised changes to the constitution that would allow political parties to be formed to contest elections planned for 1990. FIDESZ includes members who are likely to be prominent in new Liberal, Social Democratic, Green and other parties which already exist in all but name.

FRIENDS OF FIDESZ will monitor events in Hungary, act as a pressure group on the UK and Hungarian Governments and seek practical ways of helping the democratic opposition and Hungarian population here.

Launching the group are: Zsolt Nemeth, one of the leaders of FIDESZ who is studying in Oxford; Mike Harskin, Chair of the Young Social and Liberal Democrats of England; and David Campanale, a human rights campaigner and local councillor in the London Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

In their launch statement, **FRIENDS OF FIDESZ** say: "Events in Hungary have been moving faster and further than anywhere else in the Soviet bloc. The young people in FIDESZ have led this 'revolution of ideas' and we have a responsibility to help and support their struggle for basic freedoms."

ENDS

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HOW has Nicholas Ridley managed to get away with it? If Sir Keith Bright and Dr Tony Ridley recognise their duty to resign over the King's Cross Inquiry findings, why doesn't the man whose directions they were slavishly following?

What were those directions? What did Ridley say at the time of the takeover of London Transport from the GLC? He said they must make the system break even if possible. In other words, they should defy the experience of public transport worldwide and make commercial considerations the top priority.

Both Keith Bright and Nick Ridley had been given a good head start by the GLC's own insistence on the introduction of a flat fare zonal system. Usage of public transport was rising as dramatically as road usage was falling, but the level of subsidy was not acceptable to the Secretary of State, so LRT's management set about cutting costs in a major way. And it was not just staff and unprofitable bus services that took the brunt of these cuts.

Safety measures that might be desirable but were not seen as absolutely necessary were given a low priority, so often the fate of safety concerns until a disaster occurs.

The important priority for Sir Keith in particular was to meet the Minister's target and Nick Ridley no doubt continued to encourage him to do so knowing full well the consequences.

Nicholas Ridley's silence over the whole issue of the King's Cross disaster and his refusal to accept any measure of responsibility does nothing for public confidence in the integrity of Government. It is a sham for Paul Channon, Transport Secretary, to take refuge in the Fennel Report's suggestion that political direction was not a factor in the disaster.

Even if that is true, the overall direction to LRT management has been abundantly clear and Nicholas Ridley, as the chief architect of the direction, never questioned and has now sidestepped the inevitable consequences.

NOTEPAD

Paddy Ashdown's recent tour of Britain, outlining the wasted opportunities of the Thatcher years, was a great success. Here we reprint his background policy briefing — prepared by the Policy Unit at Party HQ — for use by local activists and campaigners, particularly in the run up to next year's county and European elections. We start this week with Health.

HEALTH

Funding

★ Tory claims for increased spending ignores rates of increase in NHS pay and prices (higher than inflation) *and* need for spending to rise to meet growing demand — chiefly rising numbers of elderly — estimated need for 2% real growth each year;
★ Real increase in hospital sector (England) funding is 4.9% 1981-88 — less than 1% per year;
★ Select Committee estimate that if 2% target had been met been since 1980, hospital sector would have had £1.9 billion more than has had;
★ District health authorities now running on accumulated deficit — 1987 survey showed many reduced reserves, cutting capital spending, freezing staff recruitment, cutting staff numbers, reducing service provision.
★ Chancellor's recent boost to NHS funding in autumn statement only just hits 2% target, after allowing for health service inflation;

Staffing

★ Staffing levels have consistently undershot targets since 1984 (and targets have been reduced) — now (1987) 30,000 below;
★ Pay levels have not kept up with general rise in wages — ancillary staff pay fell almost 20% behind 1980-85;
★ Staff increasingly difficult to recruit, especially to nursing (given fall in numbers of school leavers) — 25% fall in entrants 1980-85. Predicted shortfall of 3,000 a year by 1990;
★ Biggest area of cuts have been in ancillary staff, with introduction of competitive tendering — fall of 53,000 (30%) since 1981.

Charges

★ Prescription charges rose by 1,200% 1979-88. Total amount paid + £140m (1986-7);
★ Maximum dental charge up by 400% over same period, to £150;
★ Imminent introduction of £5 dental examination fee and £10 sight test charge will have major implications for preventive health — something this Government claims to support!

Quality of Care

★ Waiting lists show general upward trend since 1980, up each year since 1985; now (March '87) at 690,000 (2% increase on previous year);
★ 2/3 of all urgent cases now wait more than one month for admission (30,000); 1/4 of non-urgent cases wait more than one year;
★ Fall in daily available bed numbers by 40,000 1980-86 — now fewer in UK than in any other West European country. Not always bad, but throws increasing strain on community services.

Hungary's Demo

Mike Harskin reports on his trip last leaders of its democratic opposition, Democratic and Green agenda for freedoms. It is a fight every British

SOME Hungarians say their Government will allow them just so much democracy, just so much freedom because it believes they will know when to stop. The Governing theory is that 1956, and its Soviet invasion, is sufficiently strong in the community memory to prevent anyone overstepping 'the mark'.

The theory has already broken down, and the mark moves closer to real, multi-party, all-voting, all-singing democracy with every week. Even the pessimistic members of Hungary's democratic opposition don't believe that a newly publicity conscious Kremlin would risk everything on a repeat of 1956. The joke is that even the dwindling Soviet forces based in Hungary — as in every other Eastern bloc country — are so permanently confined to quarters, that *they* are the prisoners and the Hungarians the warders.

And there is a clear difference between Hungary's aspirations for democracy, and its closeness to gaining some or all of these aims and the emerging nationalism elsewhere in the Soviet empire. Hungary has a more recent history of democracy to call upon than the Baltic states, and a healthy political tradition where Liberal, social democratic and Christian or non-conformist values sit large.

For two years, Hungarians have moved rapidly towards the first substantial political and economic challenge to Eastern bloc orthodoxy that has a real prospect of success. Multi-party elections had already been promised (though it could have just meant *two* communist parties: a sham choice of men in *dark* or *light* grey suits), but last week the Government of Hungary bowed to the inevitable and announced that the country's Constitution may change to allow new political parties to be formed, *so long as they enjoin the 'spirit' of the socialist revolution.*

At least three movements are already poised to become political parties as soon as they legally can: the Greens, Liberals and the Social Democrats. They are all preparing to stand candidates in the 1990 elections, if possible, and have all the trappings we would recognise in a political party, albeit in an ersatz form.

The British Embassy confirmed that acting within diplomatic constraints, it was actively watching the process of democratisation in Hungary as a possible blueprint for other Soviet satellites. But where Poland saw a trade union using economic hardship as a platform to argue for political change, Hungary is witnessing a political sea-change that may sweep in economic reforms and a mixed economy as part of the new revolution of ideas. Even the Baltic states want more independence but have so far held back from the kind of political challenges that Hungarians now regularly talk about.

Events in Transylvania, where the Romanians are persecuting a two million strong ethnic Hungarian population have only served to strengthen the resolve for reform, as have the environmentally disastrous changes now underway on the Danube bend, with the building of the Nagymaros dam. This will supply electricity for Austria and hard currency for Hungary at the real cost of ecological carnage.

The pace of change in Hungary makes it, now, probably unstoppable. And as more attention is brought to focus on the groups in the democratic opposition, the Hungarians and Soviets will find it increasingly difficult *not* to accommodate them. Meetings have already taken place between leaders of some of the opposition groups and Government Ministers, and the new youth organisation for the country will include representatives of both the communist's official youth wing and FIDESZ from the opposition.

Nowhere have I seen the pace, variety and confidence of change so distilled into an effective force. Nowhere is the process of democratic change so watchable and so intriguing, as in Hungary, where a cocktail of invention and reinvention is brewing. Nowhere are Liberal, Green and social democratic values of democratic reform so centrally placed as a challenge to Eastern bloc orthodoxy and nowhere deserves our support and encouragement more than Hungary.

All Europeans, all Democrats, should watch and learn from the struggles for freedom there, not with a view to scoring political points against the Soviets or trading gain — as Mrs Thatcher performed in Poland — but with a keen interest in sharing basic human rights. *'No man is an island,'* and it is our common responsibility to contribute wherever oppressed people are building lifeboats for liberals and their allies.

● **Refugees from Transylvania queue up to receive money, homes, work and support from Budapest's Council of Reconciliation, a Christian grouping working independently of Hungary's Government, who have been accused of trying to ignore the refugee problem.**

Pictures by: Katazin Krizsovànszky

CLLR David Campanale and Mike Harskin visited Hungary last week to cement ties between Young Democrats in England and the Hungarian League of Young Democrats, who had jointly signed a draft declaration on shared ideals last month.

FIDESZ — which in Hungarian means 'faith' — is leading the democratic opposition in Hungary, and has already brought together 2000 young people, across the traditional political spectrum, who agree on the need for political and economic reform.

Hungary has always had a reputation as one of the more 'liberal' of the Eastern bloc countries, and the Liberal, Green and social democratic traditions are perhaps the strongest forces behind the opposition: both in FIDESZ and other groups which act as catalysts for change.

Next year, Liberal International will send a high-level delegation to Hungary to discuss these changes, and the environmental and ethnic questions provoked by two of central Europe's hottest political issues.

Development of the Nagymaros dam on the Danube bend, with a host of hydro-

Cllr Bill Le Br

THE difference between successful and unsuccessful politicians lies in the quality of the issues they find to campaign on. To win this May your effort must now be directed at digging out the issues that matter to your community and campaigning for action on them.

But where do you find them? The best way to start is to walk *round every road or village in the ward* making notes on what needs attention. Look for anything that needs cleaning up or repairing, like derelict land, or dangerously cracked pavements.

You need plenty of small issues that you can get action on. Some successes to report in your next *Focus*. But you will also need to find slightly bigger issues for longer term campaigns such as dangerous children's play facilities or a bid to 'Save our Sub-Post Office'.

To help you unearth these, *start talk-*

cratic Revolution

week to Hungary, to meet the young who are fighting on a Liberal, Social greater economic and political Democrat should be supporting.

● Thousands of Hungarians demonstrate outside the Romanian Embassy in Budapest against what has been called 'the policies of ethnic genocide'.

electric and other industrial plants, has caused dismay amongst European environmentalists and is a principal factor behind the formation of a strong Green network in Hungary.

And persecution of two million ethnic Hungarians and thousands of Germanic Saxons in Transylvania — formerly part of Hungary and now in Romania — by President Ceausescu has caused diplomatic and political earthquakes in east and west. Although officially there are no such things as political refugees in the Eastern bloc, and the Hungarian Government does as little as possible for those who leave Romania, the problem of displaced people may become immense and painfully obvious if Ceausescu carries through his threat to demolish 7000 Transylvanian villages.

The latest news from Transylvania is that young, ethnic Hungarians are being picked up and detained by Romanian police while their identity cards are overprinted with a new home town, which they must by law then move to to avoid prosecution. This policy of 'assimilation' splits up families and has led to even greater pressure on the Hungarians — and Soviets — to recognise the extent of the problem.

FIDESZ ranks the problems of Nagymaros and Transylvania high on its list of examples of why rapid political reform is necessary. Most of its leaders would sit happily in the Social and Liberal Democrats here, though the group includes some who will probably emerge as a right-of-centre Christian Democrat party in a reformed democracy.

During the visit of the English Young Democrats, three groups moved as close as the Constitution currently allows them to becoming political parties, and the trend is for individuals in the democratic opposition to move towards rediscovering their own personal political values.

Campanale, who was one of London's youngest councillors in 1986, on his election in Kingston, and Harskin, who was the first Chair of the English Young Democrats, were present at the formation of the social democrats in Hungary — in a bier kellar hung with wild boar skins!

First discussion was, inevitably, on the group's name and although the suggestion of Social and Liberal Democrats was rejected, the choice of League of Democrats took just a few hours!

Campanale and Harskin have now announced the formation in Britain of a 'Friends of FIDESZ' for anyone interested in the changes underway in Hungary.

Campanale said: "We were determined that links between FIDESZ — and particularly those within FIDESZ and other movements who share our values as social democrats and liberals — and groups in Britain would be real and effective. We held talks with the leaders on how we can help the battle to make Hungary more free and more democratic.

"The main form of help is simply to make sure that the Hungarian and Soviet Governments know we are watching. The American protest phrase *'the whole world is watching'* is not inappropriate to the kind of support that ensures FIDESZ and others can operate with a little more security and safety — gained from being in the public eye.

"Hungary is changing in a fascinating way. I was amazed at the level of expertise and confidence of the young people leading their nation towards democracy, and young people here could do a lot worse than watch and learn."

eton continues his series by taking a look at Local Issues

ing to people. You will be surprised how ready even complete strangers will be to tell you just what needs doing in their neighbourhood. They have probably been bottling it up inside for months and your questions will break the dam.

If you are one of the sitting councillors, don't be too sensitive to ask people what still needs to be done. There are plenty of issues even in Tony Greaves' ward. You are not part of the establishment. You are still there to *campaign for action on behalf of the community.*

Get down to the library and *read the council minutes.* You will find them a mine of information on what the council is and is not doing in your patch. Sitting in the gallery of the council and watching the sitting councillors at work may give you plenty of inspiration.

Scan the local press. Visit the newspaper offices and read through some back issues. Are there any promises outstanding? Any issues which have gone cold but which you could rekindle?

Probably the best way to dig out what really matters to local folk is to conduct *a door to door survey.* The ASLDC are about to publish some election artwork for next May which will include an outline for a *Focus Survey.*

Deliver your survey to an area and then call back within a few days when people have had the chance to read it and to think about what needs to be done.

As you have more successful with 'Grumble Sheets', take up more issues and report more successes, you will soon gain a local reputation. It is people's confidence in you that will win you the title of 'the one who gets things done around here', which is your passport to success.

Councillors should be *holding regular surgeries* or advice centres for people to see you about their problems. Remember, 'old campaigners', it's essential to get back to basics — starting from scratch is the best attitude.

People move so often that no one can afford to rest on a reputation. *It's action on issues today that counts* not campaigns won but forgotten from the past.

Choose one night a week, select a road and knock on doors for a couple of hours. Richard Wainwright calls this 'informal canvassing' and he'll tell it's worth ten visits in April.

How the creaky mechanisms of capitalism affect Western defence

By Sandy Macklem

The defence of Europe is inexorably tied to the United States for years to come. Those who have been anxious about the future of Europe's defence should be reassured that the recent election of George Bush to President of the US is not necessarily the worst possible outcome though it clearly isn't the best!

Longer-term considerations make the possibilities for the future vague, if not yet frightening. But one basic rule applies: power these days is tied to money and, one would hope, Bush understands that. In fact, there is almost no way he can *avoid* knowing it.

George Bush has held a number of posts that give him great experience in foreign policy, although he does not seem extremely interested in foreign affairs at the moment. His "experience", especially as Director of the CIA, has been avowedly conservative and anti-communist. For a human rights activist his actions might be depressing: Intervening in Third World nations, making deals with terrorists and drug dealers. But for many world leaders, his past is reassuring. If a country is depending on the US for its ultimate defence, a "strong" leader of the US is not a bad thing.

Unfortunately, strength now may mean weakness later. While other countries recognise that the deficit is America's number one problem, it appears Bush is still undecided on what he will do about it, if anything. America's economic power has been at the centre to its foreign affairs since World War II, but this policy has almost worked *too* well, and the US no longer goes unchallenged. Economic considerations are tied to military ones; there has been recent pressure put on Japan and West Germany to pick up military costs, and this naturally refers to *overseas* military costs.

With economic goals as important as military goals in today's world, and political allies also being commercial competitors, one would assume the US would be concerned about the deficit and therefore defence spending would be reduced. The entire way the US looks at international relations is changing because of the new global economy. The question must be asked: will the US keep money in its vast military commitment in Europe? More precisely, *where* will Bush put his priorities?

It can be predicted that despite his post-campaigning "kinder and gentler" theme, Bush will continue to invest in defence as Reagan did, but his main concerns will be in sensitive areas like Central America, (places he undoubtably had to deal with as director of the CIA), places that hold debtors as well as revolutionaries. Europe will not be first on the list of his concerns. After all, aren't we trusting the Russians now?

Some, clearly, are not. In a recent piece from *The Straits Times* of Singapore, the editors supported Bush out of fear that Dukakis would shut down Philippine bases rather than give in to Filipino demands. "We should never tempt Mikhail Gorbachev," they warn, hoping the US will "keep faith in its friends and allies." Many in Europe share this view.

Another warning might come from the recent stall in the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan. The presidential candidates in the US have been busy worrying about the campaign, and Soviet leaders know it.

But things aren't exactly all conquer and prosper for the Russians either. Gorbachev has confessed to a *Russian* budget deficit, and clearly no grand economy exists to act as a solvent. The Soviets need a break from their own heavy military spending and expensive foreign policies. Mutual shrinkage of defence has been suggested.

But there are Americans who want to take advantage of this vulnerable position of the Soviets and not give in on arms reductions, keeping the money going into defence at a high (or higher) level. Robert Gates, deputy director of the CIA, recently said: "We should ask ourselves if we want the political, social and economic revitalisation of the historical and current Soviet system. I think not."

Surely George Bush does not have easy decisions ahead of him. A London share trader explained in the *Times*, the current shakiness of UK investors by pointing to the lack of clear US economic policy. Judging from the importance of this issue, Bush will hopefully take on the economy straight away. To exploit the Russians' problems, now would get his country nowhere: the deficit alone should deter him from trying to do so.

Hopefully, Europe will not suffer because of all this. The US must realise it cannot withdraw from world affairs when things are difficult as it has in the past. What happens in the world today ultimately affects the US whether it has to do with economic repercussions or the defence of allied states.

Those who support disarmament may see their visions take on reality as necessity forces them to be considered. For those who don't trust the Russians, well, put your faith in the very concrete American and Russian deficits. They can only be ignored for so long.

Europe has every right to be anxious, yes, but the creaky, self-correcting mechanism of capitalism may turn out to apply to the global view as well.

● *Sandy Macklem is from Boston, Massachusetts and will be working at* Social and Liberal Democrats News *until December.*

HOOK FOCUS

From David Campanale & IAN REID

WORKING FOR YOU ALL-YEAR ROUND

No.38 ACTION SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS...

Ian Reid and Cllr David Campanale have been chosen as Liberal Democrat FOCUS candidates for Hook. In this Focus, the record speaks for itself!

On Thursday May 3rd local residents of HOOK have their say on who they wish to elect on to Kingston Council. In 1986, the Liberal Democrat FOCUS Team were elected to represent Hook by a massive vote of confidence from local residents. FOCUS promised then to fight for Hook, and to keep in touch *all-year-round*. WE ASK YOU TO JUDGE US ON OUR RECORD OF ACTION, and vote for another FOUR YEARS of FOCUS CAMPAIGNING. Ian Reid and David Campanale renew the promise to you. Read our record inside ....

JOIN our Campaign for HOOK, ring David on 391-5386

Ian Reid & David Campanale

- Ian Reid is Vice-Chairman of Governors at St Paul's School, and a lay-reader at St Paul's Church. He is a long-standing campaigner *against heavy traffic* in Hook. Living in Clayton Road and a local resident for 18 years, Ian pledges to fight to put Hook "back on the map".

- David Campanale was elected with Ben Young in 1986, and has worked hard all-year-round for Hook on the Council. David lives locally in Selwood Road, serves as a Governor of St Paul's School and on the Hook Youth Club Committee. He also helped found the successful campaign against the *Elmbridge Mall*.

PEOPLE · FIRST

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Support Your Local Team

FIDESZ FÓKUSZ

A FIDESZ XXII. Kerületi Szervezetének választási tájékoztatója 1994. III. szám

Tisztelt kerületi lakos!

Talán már lassan elege van a választási kampányból. De kérem, higgye el, hogy a XXII. kerület és az Ön személyes szempontjából egyáltalán nem mellékes esemény lesz. Az Ön szavazata sorsdöntő.

Mint XXII. kerület lakója, naponta sok helybeli ember problémájával szembesülök. Napnál világosabb mindenkinek, hogy a jelenlegi kormánykoalíció pártjai eltékozolták a bizalmat és alkalmatlanok az ország vezetésére. De sokan mondják azt is, hogy nem tudnak hinni a szocialistáknak sem. Megértem őket! Magyarország nem térhet vissza a múlthoz, előre kell haladnia. Olyan politikára van szükség, amely beindítja a gazdasági növekedést, munkahelyeket teremt, védi a nyugdíjakat az inflációtól, segíti a lakáshoz jutást. Márpedig a FIDESZ programja pontosan ezeket a célokat tűzi ki. Olyan politikusokra van szükség, akik törődnek az emberekkel.

Az Ön kerületi képviselőjeként elérhető leszek. Meghallgatom Önt és segítségére sietek. Nem kenyerem az ígérgetés. Tudom, sok munkám lesz, de meg fogom találni az egyensúlyt az országos politika és a polgárok gondjaira figyelés között.

Kérem, jöjjön el és támogasson szavazatával május 8-án! Segítsen, hogy segíthessek Önnek!

Üdvözlettel, Németh Zsolt

U.I.: Az Ön segítségével a FIDESZ az MDF-et és az MSZP-t is le tudja győzni. **Ne fecsérelje el szavazatát!** Ne feledje: Sem ezek, sem azok, a FIDESZ-re szavazok!

Németh Zsolt

KÖZÜLÜNK VALÓ

Harmincegy éves, közgazdász-szociológus. Édesapja református lelkész. Tizenhárom éve él a XXII.kerületben. A FIDESZ alapítója, majd alelnöke. 1990-től listás parlamenti képviselő, az Emberjogi, Vallásügyi, Kisebbségi Bizottság elnöke, az Európa Tanács tagja.

HÚSVÉTI NARANCS-TOJÁSOK

Köszönjük jókívánságaikat! Ünnepek alkalmával az ember szeret ajándékozni. Örömmel festettük és adtuk Önöknek a narancstojásokat és a lufikat Nagyszombat napján, a kerületi piacon. Reméljük, hogy május 8-án betetőzik örömünk!

AZ ESÉLYES JELÖLT

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Mike Harskin — YSLDE Chair

DRAFT AGREEMENT BETWEEN ENGLISH AND
HUNGARIAN YOUNG DEMOCRATS ISSUED IN LONDON

On behalf of the League of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) of Hungary and the Young Social and Liberal Democrats of England, Zsolt Nemeth, a FIDESZ spokesman, David Campanale, a DEMOCRAT COUNCILLOR in LONDON and Mike Harskin, Chairman of the Young DEMOCRATS issued a draft agreement on common political values and for future cooperation, following an Executive meeting of the Young Social and Liberal Democrats in London, on October 8th.

The draft agreement is to be ratified, together with an agenda of joint policy declarations at the November conferences of the youth organizations where guests representing both youth organizations will be present.

David Campanale said,

"This is a significant first step in building bridges between the Democrats of England and the emergent independent democratic movement in Hungary".

Zsolt Nemeth added,

"FIDESZ welcome this opportunity to forge a united and radical front of European youth against the anti democratic powers of our continent."

ENDS

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Mike Harskin — YSLDE Chair

A DRAFT AGREEMENT BETWEEN
ENGLISH AND HUNGARIAN YOUNG DEMOCRATS

ONE WE RECNOGNISE THAT FREEDOM CANNOT BE PROPERLY ENJOYED UNLESS ALL PEOPLE ARE EQUALLY FREE. AS DEMOCRATS, WE ARE COMMITTED TO EXTENDING INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY, INCLUDING REAL FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND SPEECH AND DEED AND THE RIGHT TO ASSEMBLY. WE ARE COMMITTED TO CHALLENGING THOSE WHO RESTRICT THESE FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS. AS INTERNATIONALISTS, WE RECOGNISE NO ARTIFICIAL BOUNDARIES OR POLITICAL OR GEOGRAPHICAL CONSTRAINTS TO FREEDOM.

TWO WE RECOGNISE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE IN LEADING THE PROCESS OF PEACEFUL CHANGE ACROSS THE WORLD AND, IN PARTICULAR, A UNIQUE RESPONSIBILITY IN TAKING UP THE CHALLENGES TO LIBERTY AND FREEDOM ON BEHALF OF THEIR COMMUNITIES AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

THREE WE RECOGNISE THAT THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION WE CAN MAKE AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS ORGANISATIONS OF YOUNG DEMOCRATS TO BRIDGE NATIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDES IS TO WORK TOGETHER IN THE COMMON PURSUIT OF OUR SHARED IDEALS. WE ARE COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENTS IN EVERY NATION WHO SHARE OUR CONCERNS FOR FREEDOM AND LIBERTY.

FOUR WE RECOGNISE, IN PARTICULAR, THE HISTORIC INTEREST AND SUPPORT GIVEN BY BRITISH LIBERALS TO CENTRAL EUROPEAN NATIONALITIES AND COMMUNITIES WHICH SEEK THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION, AND - AS INHERITORS OF THIS TRADITION - THE YOUNG DEMOCRATS IN ENGLAND ARE COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING THEIR SISTERS AND BROTHERS AMONGST THE YOUNG DEMOCRATS OF HUNGARY, IN TAKING UP THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY.

FIVE WE RECOGNISE, THEREFORE, OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO EXCHANGE VIEWS, IDEAS, EXPERIENCES AND SUPPORT AND TO SEEK A FORMAL AGREEMENT OF MUTUAL SUPPORT BETWEEN THE YOUNG SOCIAL AND LIBERAL DEMOCRATS OF ENGLAND AND FIDESZ OF HUNGARY SO THAT YOUNG DEMOCRATS IN BOTH COUNTRIES MAY SHARE THEIR EFFORTS IN FIGHTING FOR SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE ENABLEMENT OF ALL YOUNG PEOPLE TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AND TO MAKE ALL THE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR OWN LIVES.

SIGNED, 8th OCTOBER, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY EIGHT

MIKE HARSKIN DAVID CAMPANALE ZSOLT NÉMETH

Support us today and you will be supporting the Party of tomorrow

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https://www.scruton.org/stories/2020/12/10/thoughts-from-a-life-scruton-in-eastern-europe

[2] Zsolt Németh (1963–): economist and politician and co-founder of the Tusványos festival. He graduated from the University of Economics in Budapest (then Karl Marx University of Economic Sciences). During his academic years he was the member of the Rajk László College for Advanced Studies and the founder of Széchenyi István College for Advanced Studies. Between 1988 and 1989 he studied at Oxford on the Soros scholarship. Between 1987 and 1990 he worked in the Research Institute for Hungarian Studies. He was a founder of FIDESZ, and since 1990 he has been a member of Parliament for the party. Between 1998–2002, then 2010 and 2014 he was under-secretary of state of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of the founders of the Bálványos Summer Free University, honorary chief steward of the Transylvanian Assembly, and vice chairman of the Rákóczi Association.
Source: Pálinkás, Barnabás: 'The Precursors of the Tusványos Camp', Retörki - A Rendszerváltó Szemle, 2025, pg 51 footnote 3.
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[4] Newscopy print out from Andrew Whitehead, 27 September 1988 for BBC Hungarian and Romanian Sections. Held in personal archive.

[5] Young SLuDgE News, YSLD of England, October 1988 held in personal archive.

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[8] Szabó, Miklós (1964-): neonatologist. He graduated from Semmelweis University in 1988 with a degree in general medicine. He worked in the Municipal Hospital in Sopron, and at the Ambulance Service of the Peter Cerny Foundation. At present he is the Head of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Semmelweis University's First Department of Paediatrics, a professor at Semmelweis Medical University, and the Head of the Neonatology Department. Ibid Pálinkás, Barnabás: 'The Precursors of the Tusványos Camp', Retörki - A Rendszerváltó Szemle, 2025, pg 51 footnote 4.

[9] Source: Exhibit 'Paris of Haromszek in Székelys - Patterns of Heritage, at the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest July 2025
https://www.neprajz.hu/en/hirek/2025/the-exhibition-szekelys-nominated-for-the-exhibition-of-the-year-2025-award.html

[10] Ibid Pálinkás 2025, Pálinkás, Barnabás: 'The Precursors of the Tusványos Camp', Retörki - A Rendszerváltó Szemle, 2025, pg 51 footnote 3. Sántha, Attila: 'Európai horizontok felé. Jegyzetek egy nyári szabadegyetemről'. Művelődés, No. 8. 1990, 13–15., and see: Nagymihály – Pálinkás, Szárszó '88 volt… 2022, 165.

[11] Ibid Pálinkás 2025, pg 57 footnote 50. "See: Sántha, Attila: A történelem kereke visszafordíthatatlan ('Részletek David Campanale, az Angol Liberális Demokrata Párt képviselőjének beszédéből, amelyet 1989. december 30-án a kézdivásárhelyi Ifjúsági Klubban tartott'). Székely Újság, 13 January 1990, 3."

[12] Ibid Pálinkás 2025, pg 57 footnote 55: Sántha, Attila: 'Európai horizontok felé. Jegyzetek egy nyári szabadegyetemről'. Művelődés, No. 8. 1990, 13–15., and see: Nagymihály – Pálinkás, Szárszó '88 volt… 2022, 165.

[13] Ibid Pálinkás 2025, pg 54 footnote 30, "In an interview, Zsolt Németh spoke about this quite specifically: '(…) the idea of the Bálványos Camp came up on the night of 29 and 30 December, which evidently cannot be separated from the camp culture that had already existed in Czechoslovakia. The idea that the dialogue and future-building between Hungarian and Romanian youth could be initiated in Transylvania within such a framework is related to the traditions of the Hungarian Minority Community in Czechoslovakia'". See: Nagymihály – Pálinkás, Szárszó '88 volt… 2022, 165.

[14] Ibid Pálinkás 2025, pg 58 footnote 56 Sántha, Attila: 'Ki kell ejtenünk: antikommunizmus'. Beszélgetés MADISZ-képviselőkkel. Székely Újság, 6 January 1990, 3.

[15] Ibid Pálinkás 2025, pg 58, footnote 62. Toró T., Tibor: Átmenet a diktatúrából a demokráciába... Temesvári Új Szó. [Included: Vétó. (A Temesvári Magyar Ifjúsági Szervezet Lapja)]. 18 August 1990.

[16] Report to Executive Committee of the Liberal International on Hungary delegation visit, 8 – 11 May 1989, held in personal archive.

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Appendix - Assorted primary source materials from David Campanale's private archive