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Chronology of Political Developments in Hungary: May 1988–December 1989

This chronology was compiled by Timothy Goodman, who is a research assistant at the American Enterprise Institute and a doctoral candidate at Georgetown University.

20–22 May 1988: A special conference of the (Communist) Hungarian Socialist Worker's party (the first national conference held since 1957) approves major changes in personnel and policy. Janos Kadar is replaced as party general secretary by Premier Karoly Grosz. Kadar is promoted to the new but largely ceremonial presidency and loses his Politburo membership. About 40 percent of the Central Committee members (mainly elderly Kadar supporters) are removed and replaced with younger, more liberal members. Grosz declares support for radical economic and political reforms but dismisses the immediate possibility of a multi-party system.

30 June 1988: Imre Poszgay, a leading reformist within the ruling party, is confirmed as a minister of state with special responsibility for political development.

3 September 1988: The opposition Hungarian Democratic Forum, which advocates political reform leading to a multi-party system, is formally established.

24 November 1988: Miklos Nemeth, a leading advocate of free-market reforms, replaces Grosz as premier.

7 December 1988: Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev promises in a United Nations speech to withdraw 10,000 Soviet tanks, 8,500 artillery pieces, and 800 combat aircraft from Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia by 1991.

11 January 1989: The Hungarian parliament approves legislation guaranteeing the rights to demonstrate freely and to form associations and political parties independent of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' party (HSWP). Independent political groups must follow certain organizational procedures, have lawful aims, and register with the government.

8 February 1989: Gorbachev adviser Oleg Bogomolov affirms that Moscow could ac-

cept a neutral Hungary modelled after Austria or Sweden.

11 February 1989: Meeting in emergency session, the HSWP Central Committee approves the creation of independent political parties and agrees to support the transition to a multi-party system. It also issues a compromise judgment on the 1956 Hungarian uprising against Soviet domination, asserting that it began as a popular revolt but degenerated into a counterrevolution.

14 February 1989: It is reported that the party has decided to remove the Communist red star symbol from the Hungarian flag and replace it with the crown of Saint Stephen and, perhaps, a coat of arms.

9 March 1989: Hungary joins Western nations in co-sponsoring a United Nations resolution to investigate Romania for grave human rights abuses. This is believed to be the first time one Soviet-bloc country had urged such an investigation of another.

15 March 1989: An estimated 75–80,000 Hungarians march through Budapest to celebrate a new national holiday commemorating Hungary's 1848 revolution against Austrian rule. Unhindered by the authorities, opposition speakers at the rally urge free elections and a withdrawal of Soviet troops.

29 March 1989: Upon returning from Moscow, party chief Grosz announces that Gorbachev has effectively pledged not to interfere with sweeping political reforms in Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

31 March 1989: The Central Committee loosens restrictions on media ownership. The new guidelines would effectively end the state's media monopoly.

3 April 1989: It is reported that seven opposition groups, including the Democratic Forum, have accepted the ruling party's offer to participate in "round-table talks" on power-sharing.

12 April 1989: The party central committee removes four Politburo members, including one-time hard-liner Janos Berecz.

25 April 1989: The Soviet Union begins the formal withdrawal of its military forces from Hungary.

2 May 1989: Hungary begins dismantling the barbed wire and other fortifications along its border with neutral Austria.

8 May 1989: The Central Committee agrees to relinquish to the government its control of the 60,000-member paramilitary Workers' Militia.

21 May 1989: Reformist members of the HSWP issue a manifesto calling for Hungarian neutrality, immediate talks between the regime and opposition groups about a transition to a multi-party system, a radical transformation of the economy, a reappraisal of the 1956 uprising, and an official apology to the family of Imre Nagy, deposed from the premiership in 1956 and subsequently executed for treason.

13 June 1989: The regime and leading opposition groups begin formal talks on a transition to multi-party politics. The People's Patriotic Front, a coalition of conservative communist organizations, also participates in the three-way talks.

16 June 1989: The remains of Imre Nagy (exhumed on 29 March) and four of his closest aides are reburied in a solemn memorial ceremony in Budapest. On 30 May the HSWP Central Committee had announced that Nagy's trial was "judicially unlawful."

24 June 1989: The Central Committee establishes a party collective presidency, or Presidium. Of its four members, all except Grosz are from the party's reformist wing.

6 July 1989: Hungary's Supreme Court posthumously declares the innocence of Imre Nagy and eight associates.

6 July 1989: In a speech to the Council of Europe at Strasbourg, Gorbachev pledges that the Soviet Union will not interfere in political liberalizations underway in Poland and Hungary, but he also warns the West against trying to "overcome socialism" in the East bloc.

11-13 July 1989: President Bush visits Hungary and offers an aid package including a \$25 million fund for investment in Hungarian private enterprise. He also pledges to ease the way for Hungarian "most-favored-nation" status if that country eases its emigration policy.

22 July/5 August 1989: Three opposition candidates win parliamentary by-elections, becoming Hungary's first non-Communist deputies since 1947.

26 September 1989: Parliament enacts legislation that formalizes by statute the right of Hungarians to possess a passport, to travel abroad, and to leave the country permanently. The new law is intended to satisfy President Bush's requirement for a more liberal emigration policy before the United States can grant "most-favored-nation" status.

6 October 1989: The HSWP congress opens. On 7 October an overwhelming majority of the delegates vote to dissolve the HSWP and create a new party, the Hungarian Socialist party (HSP), committed to a market economy and parliamentary democracy.

9 October 1989: After several days of infighting, "reformers" triumph over "conservatives" within the ruling party, as a new 24-member Presidium is voted into power, of which at least 14 members are radical reformers allied with Pozsgay.

18 October 1989: The Hungarian parliament abolishes the Hungarian People's Republic, founded in 1949, and approves by an overwhelming majority the constitution of the new Republic of Hungary. The new charter contains no reference to the Communists' leading role or to any commitment to maintain socialism, and it establishes a powerful new presidency.

19 October 1989: The ruling party condemns the Soviet Union for crushing the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and it approves multi-party parliamentary elections to be held by June 1990.

23 October 1989: Speaking from the balcony of parliament, acting President Matyas Szuros formally declares Hungary an independent democratic republic.

2 November 1989: Bush assures HSP presidential candidate Pozsgay at the White House that he would make no deals with Gorbachev at the December Malta shipboard summit that might disadvantage East European nations.

3 November 1989: Hungary and Belgium sign a three-year military cooperation agreement, the first such accord between member states of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

17 November 1989: Hungary asks membership in the twenty-three-nation Council of Europe, the first Warsaw Pact member to do

so. The Council replies that Hungary cannot join until after it holds multi-party elections scheduled to be held by June 1990.

26 November 1989: In a free referendum, Hungarians vote to postpone the election of a

new president until after the 1990 parliamentary elections (expected to be held on 18 March), in order to allow the fledgling opposition more time to prepare.

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