

# The Mass Media's Systemic Contribution to Political Transformation: Coverage of the 1956 Uprising in Hungarian Print Media (June 1988–June 1989)

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**ABSTRACT:** The article is aimed at contributing to the discussion of the role of the mass media system in political transformation. For this purpose, reporting on a political issue relevant to the transformation was selected for tracing the theoretical assumption along empirical results: the hitherto taboo topic of Hungarian uprising in 1956. I studied how 1956 was reported in Hungary's main print media, *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Nemzet*, from June 1988 to June 1989. These newspapers, despite still being controlled by the government in the dissolving socialist system of the end 1980s, helped a functional public sphere emerging. The newspapers broadened the interpretive scope by facilitating dissenting opinions and enabled a hitherto suppressed discourse about Kadar's role in the historical events of 1956. The results suggest the newspapers acted as professional mediators and had a systemic stabilising effect on Hungarian society in this smouldering conflict.

**KEYWORDS:** mass media, political transformation, professional journalism, Socialism, 1956.

## INTRODUCTION

On the systemic level, the effects of political and economic functionality in the change of institutions and organisational roles have well been researched, especially concerning the systemic change from socialist systems of soviet type to democracies in Eastern Europe (Merkel, 1996; 2010) as well as the organisational changes of the national media systems in Eastern Europe (O'Neil, 1997; Aumente, 1999; Thomaß & Tzankoff, 2001; 2015). However, effects of mass media functionality in the transformation have been less researched.

With my research, I want to contribute knowledge about the mass media's social functionality as having been an important factor in the political transformation

process in the Hungary of the late 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Based on system theory, I assume a dominance of functional logic in the modern, institutionalised social order that informs journalists and provides room to manoeuvre even in firmly politically controlled work environments. In the political systems in Eastern Europe that developed after World War II within the sphere of power of the Soviet Union, the political and economic freedoms, including the freedom of the press, were restricted. On the other hand, these systems embraced professional excellence in journalism (Huxable, 2018) and – at least officially – self-criticism, among others from mass media, which was also a legitimising basis of the one party rule.<sup>2</sup> Because of the latter, I assume that the mass media in the states of Eastern Europe more or less functionally mediated the current conflicts, in terms of a normatively aspired but differently developed professionalism of journalism, and accordingly were able to assume a more or less stabilizing role in the course of the systemic transformation.<sup>3</sup>

In Hungary, one of these main conflicting issues were the notable political events of 1956 around the Hungarian uprising that was later suppressed with the help of the Soviet military. In 1958, former prime minister Imre Nagy and members of the 1956-government were disgracefully hanged and buried in unmarked graves. In the Hungary of Kádár, the events of 1956 were taboo. Thus, in 1989 the ceremonial re-burial of Nagy and the other victims was the hard-earned success of the relatives and members of the opposition.

In the following, after outlining my theoretical argument, I will present findings from the content analysis of the related reporting from the 30th anniversary of Imre Nagy's death in June 1988 until re-burial with full honours of him and four others in June 1989 in two major newspapers: *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Nemzet*.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to analyse a mass media impact in political transformation, a theoretical definition of mass media as a functional-structural, social system, in which information is processed (Luhmann, 2000) seems to be appropriate, because the theory focusses on communication as the basis of social order in the constant integration process of society (Fehr, 1977; Imhof, 2002). In order to manage

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- 1 The research project from which the results on the reporting of a transformation issue in Hungary are presented here had a comparative approach (see <https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/273811628>).
  - 2 Marx already considered self-criticism a prerequisite for a successful workers' movement, even if it was later cultivated in the real, Marxist-Leninist systems largely only as a ritual in the entrenched one-party system. c.f. Mommsen 1989.
  - 3 Besides the evidence for mass media functionality presented in this article, I found evidence in Poland (c.f. Dupuis, 2020) but not in Romania.

the growing complexity of societies, these have developed divisions of labour and functional systems (*i.e. symbolically generalising communication structures*). The structure of these functional systems surpasses, by inherent force of utility, or functionality, the anachronistic structure of social rule that is based on hereditary hierarchies and the segmentation of social groups (Luhmann, 1987).<sup>4</sup>

Around the function of the successful society-wide exchange of information have developed contingent organisational structures of mass media systems in mainly national regulation systems. The journalistic subsystem of mass media serves the reporting on current affairs following professional programmes within work-sharing editorial organisations (Blöbaum, 1994). However, individual journalists are part of the functional systems that are intertwined in mass media organisations. They are professional journalists in mass media and economically dependent in their role as employees – as well as citizen with political interests in the political realm (Dupuis, 2012, p. 76).

In whatever organisational context, the operative functionality of mass media is important for maintaining stability in modern society (Luhmann, 1970). A functional mass media structure imposes functionality onto the public discourse concerning the relevance of certain issues and their representation (Luhmann, 2000). This explains the institutionalisation of mass media particularly in democratic systems and an according recognition of professional authority that grants a certain systemic autonomy (Scholl, 1997).<sup>5</sup>

Ceasing information exchange as well as the withdrawing of allegiance is the main threat to authoritarian governments that control mass media organisations. Gorbačev correctly detected this problem and addressed it with his *glasnost* programme (1990). Governments that try to control the public are vulnerable to a lack of bottom-up information and more genuine, clandestine or transnational, public discourses within alternative, and more functional, secretly organised media structures that the government cannot access (Asen, 2000).

I assume that in Hungary, in the striving for political autonomy professional journalism stabilised the social order during political transformation. This should be recognizable in main mass media events that were concerned with transformation issues during that time. I assume that we can see a mediating communication developing in mass media, which – *different* from political communication – was not unidirectional and mobilizing, but according to the social function of mass media more striving to represent the different existing relevant conflicting semantic frameworks of political legitimacy (as defined by Klein, 1989, 2016).

4 However, the semantic structure of the older social order, even if it is challenged and dismantled by functional order, remains a reusable structure of social order in the collective memory, c.f. Holl (2003).

5 However, Mobilisation is not a function of mass media but the function of the ad hoc system of public opinion (Luhmann and Hellmann, 2004), even if today it emerges mainly in mass media (Gerhards, 2002)

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the political systems of the Soviet model that were established in Eastern Europe after World War II, the mass media organisations were not supposed to be organisationally independent of the political system. Like all other professional organisations, mass media organisations were a part of the ideological transmission belt system of society (Goban-Klas, 1997) and directed by the governing communist or socialist party respectively in a one-party system. In Hungary, during the Kádár era 1956–1988, the Minister of culture and the representative of cultural affairs György Acél loosened the organisational ties. He had an erratic way of controlling all intellectual life using “manual control” (“kézivezélés”) and favouritism (“kegygazdálkodás”) or “*the policies of the three t’s (tiltás (ban); türes (toleration), támogatás (support)*” (Tőkés, 1996: 16, see also Bajomi-Lázár & Kékesdi-Boldog, 2018). Generally, this meant that cultural organisations and the mass media in Hungary were less rigidly controlled as those in other communist systems ((Havliček & Kende, 1985). But, also that journalism was more determined by informal decision making and personal contacts (Takács, 2012).

During the timespan covered by my analysis at the end of the communist era in Eastern Europe the mass media system changed continuously, becoming more liberal concerning the editorial independence of political actors from civil society and their opportunities to reach the public. In November 1988, the Central Committee voted for the lifting of censorship. Furthermore, a service for the publication of press releases and declarations from the developing proto-parties and groups of the civil society was introduced (c.f. Sükösd 2000): the *Országos Sajtószolgálat* (OS, National Press Service).

At the same time, the communist world was not only economically collapsing and facing enormous and complex systemic difficulties (Goldman, 1997), but was already abandoned when Gorbačev cancelled the Brezhnev doctrine. At the beginning of 1988, Kádár after 30 years of governing had been forced out of the leading positions in the *Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt* (MSZMP, Hungarian Socialist Worker Party) because of the government’s weakness in solving the enormous economic troubles of the declining communist regime (Fowkes, 1995, p. 182). The elites agreed on the necessity of reform but were fragmented when it came to the different concepts of these reforms and their ultimate goals (Bozóki, 2002, p. 3ff.). Thus, the Communist Party dissolved into fractions around the members of the Central Committee.

The leading actors had privileged access to the main print media outlets via office and owing to the political leanings and sympathies of those in charge of them (O’Neil, 1997, p. 16). Károly Grósz, the pragmatic reformer of the economy but staunch communist who disapproved of the pace and direction of reforms

to secure systemic change, in his role as Party leader. Grósz had direct access to the *Népszabadság* until November 24th, 1988, when he was replaced by the reformer Miklós Németh.<sup>6</sup> As the Secretary-General of the Party's mass organization – *Hazaifias Népfront* (HNF, Patriotic People's Front), Imre Pozsgay had control of the daily newspaper that organisation published – *Magyar Nemzet*.

When he became Minister of the State within the cabinet of Grósz in 1988, Pozsgay, pushing for reform, became a central actor of political transformation.<sup>7</sup> In 1987, he participated in the conference *A Magyarság esélyei* in Lakitelek where the proto-party *Magyar Demokrata Fórum* (MDF – *Hungarian Democratic Forum*) was founded by opposing intellectuals and he made sure that the declaration was published in *Magyar Nemzet* on November 14, 1987. He strategically employed the 1956 issue in his public communication, notably in his radio interview on January 28, 1989 (see below), but the “*explosive reactions*” to this strategic step exceeded his expectations (Rainer, 2002, p. 214).

The 30th anniversary year of the secret trials against former Prime Minister Imre Nagy and his associates and their executions took place in 1988. Nagy was a reformer who opted for a liberal and national discourse. Nagy took office for a second time in the autumn of 1956 only to be expelled a few days later when the Soviet invasion crushed the uprising. János Kádár, who ruled the country for the ensuing three decades, was deeply involved in these events. Thus, under his otherwise quite liberal regime, the violent events in 1956 and the later convictions or emigration of thousands of Hungarians were strictly banned from public and were erased from all history books. However, as Gyáni (2006, p. 1200) wrote:

“Awareness of the origins—the original sin—of the regime was not going to be expunged, not even by the compromise that it made with the majority of society in the 1960s, when it relied on systematically depoliticising everyday life and creating a private sphere for economic and cultural activity.”

In 1988, the claims of the relatives of Nagy<sup>8</sup> and his associates for an appropriate burial of the convicted became public in underground circles, fuelled by their

6 The influence they gained from this access was reinforced by the essential Communist Party's separate telecommunication network in the inner circle of nomenclature, the so-called ‘K-system’. Later, Miklos Nemeth, who replaced Grósz as the Prime Minister in November 1988, communicated his views via *Magyar Hírlap* (O’Neil 1997, 16). Because he did not exactly employ the 1956 issue in his political rhetoric, I did not include *Magyar Hírlap* in the content analysis.

7 The second political actor who used this issue for his political profile was Viktor Orbán, but he entered the public discourse only at the moment of the funeral, and the political power he gained from his positioning in this discourse unfolded only later – and could even be considered to still be ongoing until today, c.f. Szilágyi and Bozóki (2015).

8 Notably from Erzsébet Nagy, the daughter of Imre Nagy, whose semi-public speech in a private home of dissidents was later published in the underground magazine *Beszélő* (Nagy, 1987)

international recognition.<sup>9</sup> Historians were the first to object publicly to the restrictions on evaluating the recent past (Nyyssönen, 1999, 2003). As reaction and for keeping control, the MSZMP established a committee of historians and Party members for analysing Hungary's political, economic and social development after World War II. On January 27, 1989, this committee declared that the events in 1956 were a "people's uprising". The next day, Pozsgay, the head of the committee, announced this idea on a morning news programme as well as on the political radio broadcast *168 Óra*. Pozsgay made this announcement single-handedly, while Grósz was out of the country and without any prior consultation with the other leaders of the Central Committee of the MSZMP, which caused a severe crisis within the political leadership.<sup>10</sup>

During 1989 ongoing public reappraisal of the 1956 events and the general liberalisation process, injustices against those convicted for participating in the uprising began to emerge. For example, from January 1988 onward, all Hungarians could apply for a passport for regular travel, but people convicted for their involvement in the 1956 events were denied these documents. Besides the historical grievances, these factual discriminations fuelled the grief in society about the ongoing violation of human rights in the name of communist ideology.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS

### METHOD

This research focusses on the impact by the systemic functionality of mass media. The socio-systemic functionality of information and mediation regarding politics is professionally most strongly institutionalized in the subsystem of news reporting (Jarren & Steininger, 2016). Thus, I conducted content analysis of the two leading Hungarian newspapers in terms of importance to the official political discourse (Gálik & James, 1999, p. 79). The party organ *Népszabadság* (NSZ, Freedom of the People) was published by the MSZMP) and *Magyar Nemzet* (MN, Hungarian Nation) was the organ of Hazafias Népfrent (HNF, the Patriotic People's Front), *Magyar Nemzet*. In January 1989, *Népszabadság* had a circulation of 460,000 and *Magyar Nemzet* a circulation of 132,000 (Bajomi-Lázár, 1999, p. 36).

For the content analysis, I have included all articles (N=367) that mention the 1956 uprising, the events and the people involved, from the 30th anniversary of the execution of Imre Nagy on June 16, 1988, until the national funeral

<sup>9</sup> In Paris, at the cemetery of Pere Lachaise, a symbolical grave was erected and pictures circulated the underground press.

<sup>10</sup> This crisis is documented in the minutes of the Meeting of the HSWP CC Political Committee, [http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/archive/files/hungarian-1956-uprising\\_1705379738.pdf](http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/archive/files/hungarian-1956-uprising_1705379738.pdf)

on June 16, 1989. The *Népszabadság* produced 143 articles spread over 157 pages and *Magyar Nemzet* produced 202 articles spread over 210 pages.

## CONDUCTION OF RESEARCH

In order to analyse the collected newspaper articles,<sup>11</sup> I used a *mixed method* approach (Kuckartz, 2014). First, I conducted a quantitative frequency analysis of the articles. Second, I worked with case summaries that noted the overall message in the articles and the arguments of the cited actors or the author. To evaluate the selection of the 1956 uprising for reporting in the context of the current events I applied news value theory. In the second step, I analysed the width of the journalists' argumentations and their selection of other voices (guest authors, interview partners, etc.). I noted the individual organizational affiliations of the communicators, but I often present these only in broad categories in the findings, such as party officials, experts in central functions, members of the opposition.

## FINDINGS

First, I studied the issue attention cycle over the timespan included in my research concerning the frequency and extent of reporting (see Figure 1). I added important political events in note form as well as the transformation of journalistic practice in the reporting. According to the newsworthiness and career potential of the event, I expected a sudden rise of attention from January 28, 1989, onwards. This was after Imre Pozsgay went public after the historical committee had finished its work on re-evaluating recent history to call the former "counter-revolution" of 1956 a "national uprising". This event proved to be a pivotal point according to the number of articles. However, as we can see in the Figure 1, the newspapers had already paid attention to activities concerning this issue *before* that event.

The studied print media paid attention to the 1956-issue as early as June 1988, irrespective of the minor relevance of the incident: *Népszabadság* published a Budapest police press report about an illegal demonstration on June 16, 1988. The organisers, some of them would have been formerly involved in "subversive activities" in 1956, were accused of trying to influence the around 350 to 400

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, at the beginning we only had access to the printed newspaper holdings of Staatsbibliothek Berlin. We later checked our selection of articles for completeness via the Hungarian digital database Arcanum, which in the meantime had expanded its holdings to include the newspapers we needed. Accordingly, we could not automatically select the articles but had to read the printed copies of the newspaper for selecting all articles dealing with the issue of 1956. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Hungarian assistant Alexandra Bayer for her great help. We coded the page, the newspaper section, the headline and added a case summary, including the authors' as well as the political actors' positions that were reported upon or interviewed.



present people and would face trial. *Magyar Nemzet* did not publish that press release. Rather it reviewed on June 17, 1988, a live-radio broadcast on the same day of *Kossuth Rádió* in cooperation with *Voice of America*, produced by the head of the political department of *Magyar Rádió*, Laszlo Zeley, on the topic of Hungarian history after 1948. The broadcast featured guests from the scientific and intellectual communities in Hungary and the USA.

From then on, the newspapers published articles that touch on the subject of the re-evaluation of the Hungarian past and frame it in different political contexts. Members of the nomenclature were given the opportunity to speak about the recent history: Imre Pozsgay, who claimed the re-evaluation of the Hungarian past already at this early stage (MN 5.7.1988). Rező Nyers, just before was re-elected into the Central Committee of the *MSZMP*, who condemned the Hungarian politics from the 1940s and 1950 (Nsz 9.7.1988).

Otherwise, routine reporting of the official agenda such as: Prime Minister Grosz in the international press who criticised the demonstrators from June 16 for initiating fascist propaganda (a translated article from the US news magazine *Newsweek*, Nsz 12.7.1988); Grósz on a visit in the USA, where he promised the families of the executed for participating in the 1956 events that he would permit a re-burial, but deny the victims any rehabilitation (26.7.1988); Károly Grósz criticising journalists who were on a hunger strike to demonstrate against travel restrictions relating to their 1956 convictions because of the already ongoing legislative procedure of the amnesty law (MN 23.7.1988); In an interview Jenő Laszló, the head of the department of the Ministry of Justice, explained about the current distinct drafts for either an individual or a collective amnesty by the government (MN 29.7.1988).

But already in August 1988, in an op-ed piece in *Magyar Nemzet*, the historian Andras Gerő re-interpreted the events of 1956 as an outcome of the events of 1948 (MN 20.8.1988). The newspaper also published a review about current historical publications on 1956 (24.8.1988). *Népszabadság* followed with interviewing the new director of the *Institute of Party History* of the *MSZMP*, Sandor Balogh, who claimed a “new historiographic approach” that he intended to establish (Nsz 27.8.1988) as well as an op-ed by Ferenc Glatz who called for more autonomy for historians (1.10.1988). At the end of October 1988, *Népszabadság* printed an interview with Gyula Boric, state secretary at the ministry of justice, titled “Where are the files”, i.e. the files of the secret trials of Nagy and his associates. In addition, a press release of the Budapest Police that there were no misdemeanours to report on October 23, 1988, the anniversary of the national uprising in 1956.

Meanwhile, *Magyar Nemzet* published an interview with Pál Demény, a prominent early Communist who suffered political persecution in the 1940s and after 1956 (15.10.1988) as well as an op-ed piece by the sociologist György Csepeli (21.10.1988) and another with Isvan Horany from the Hungarian Institute



of Pedagogy, about the need to teach “historical competencies” (24.10.1988). These broadened the spectrum of voices in public who claimed to be able to judge the events competently.

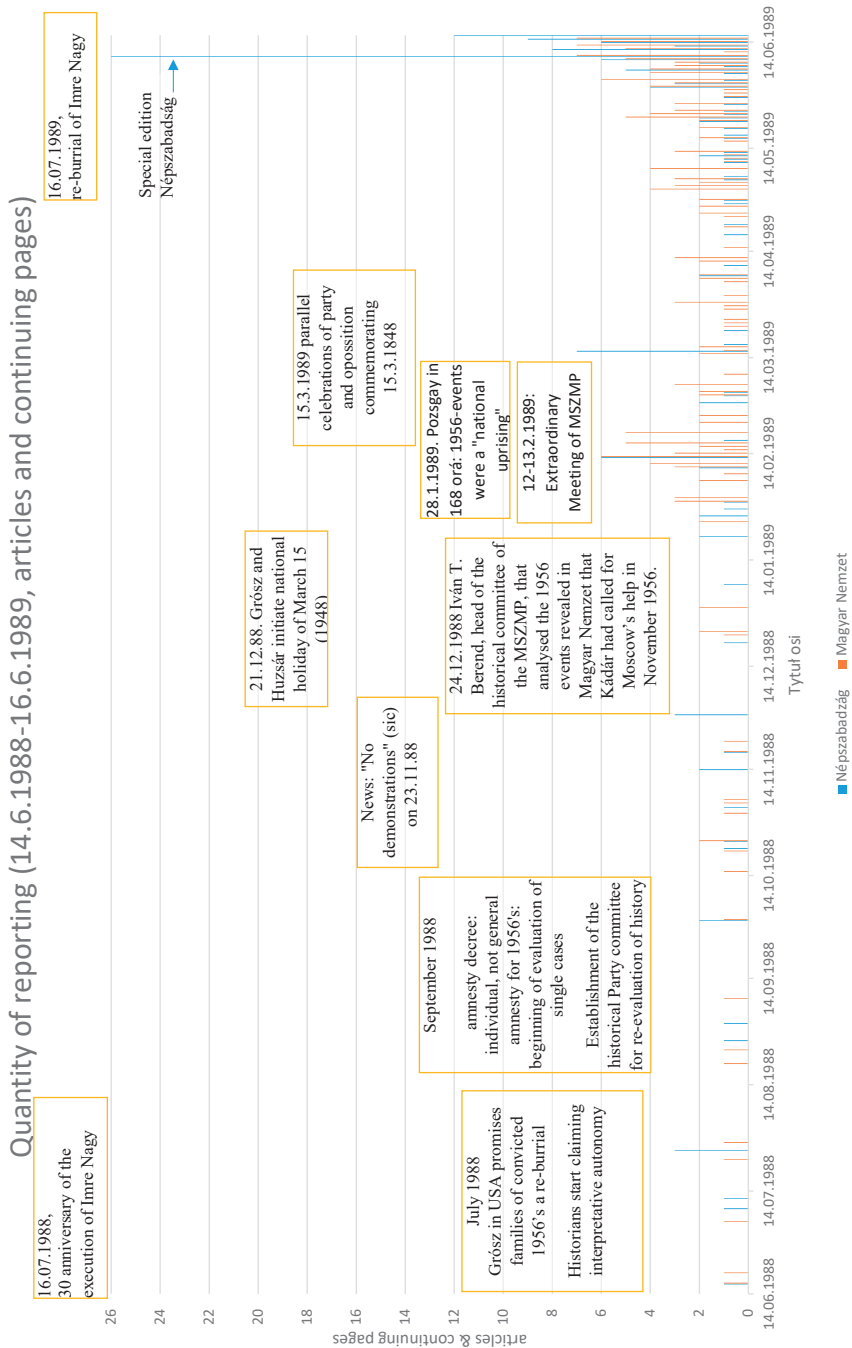
Routinely, the hearings and adoption of the legislative decree on the suspension of convictions between October 23, 1956, and May 1, 1957 were reported in both newspapers (MN 8.9.1988, MN and NSZ 1.10.1988), but only *Magyar Nemzet* reported in December the numbers of people amnestied by then (31.12.1988). This goes as well for reporting Grósz's return from Austria where he had talked to émigrés and a statement by Grósz about Imre Nagy in an interview in the Spanish press (8. and 14.11.1988). Also the fact that the *MSZMP* incidentally stated in a press release announcing that the 1956 events brought a momentum for reform (4.11.1988) and a wreath ceremony took place paying tribute to the soldiers who were killed fighting the counter-revolution in 1956, this was reported in *Magyar Nemzet* only (5.11.1988).

On the other hand, *Népszabadság* routinely published a press release from the Budapest police that no noteworthy protests took place on November 23, the anniversary of the uprising that showed the current issues, and the high potential of political mobilisation (24.11.1988). Furthermore, the speech of Károly Grósz to the Party members in Budapest on November 29 in full, in which he promoted the ongoing reforms within the socialist system and aggressively warned of sliding into counter-revolution (30.11.1988).

From December 1988 onwards, there is a change of tone in both print media's representation of the discourse. *Magyar Nemzet* started publishing longer news features about 1956-related people, places and current events (23. and 24.12.1988). Meanwhile, *Népszabadság* published two very personal comments from prominent journalists (7.1. and 21.1.1989.) and a long article about a meeting of the Council of Ministers that decided on the re-burial in Rákoskeresztúr cemetery (27.1.1989).

After the famous interview, when Imre Posgay, in his competence as chairman of the party's 1956 reappraisal commission, called it a „popular uprising” instead of the hitherto “counter-revolution”, the reporting intensified and opened to a much wider scope of voices than before. In the following, I will qualitatively analyse the content of reporting and style of journalism referring to relevant, but not all articles in the corpus of material, documented in Figure 1, due to space limitations.

Figure 1. Quantity of reporting (June 14, 1988 – June 16, 1989, articles + continuing pages)



Both newspapers published in detail Pozsgay's statement. *Magyar Nemzet* gave broad attention to reactions reported in the international press, especially

in February 1989. Thus, the *Magyar Nemzet* paper broadened into the realm beyond the previous national discourse. Previously, *Népszabadság* only once reported international political reactions in the Soviet Union with citing cuttings from the Soviet press (1.1.1989) and continued to publish some international press reviews; for example, it did so on February 13, 1989, after the special meeting of the Central Committee, but it did so far less frequently in general.

In the course of the events, both newspapers published the important news of the day concerning the 1956 issue. Especially *Népszabadság* followed the activities of the NGO of the relatives of 1956, the *Committee for Historical Justice* that was permitted but also burdened with the preparations for the re-burial ceremonies. *Magyar Nemzet* paid more attention to oppositional claims regarding the events of 1956 and the government's reactions; for example, the announcement of the spokesperson of the government, György Marosan, that all documents from the revision of the Imre Nagy trial will be published. *Népszabadság* printed more newswires from the two Hungarian news agencies, Magyar Távirati Iroda (MTI, Hungarian Telegraphic Office) and Országos Sajtószolgálat (OS, National Press Service), concerning the tough but respectful political negotiations between the Committee for Historical Justice and the MSZMP. Thus, the political positions and strategies that finally enabled the participation of two members of the Hungarian government in the funeral only after the government had publicly acknowledged the illegality of the Nagy trial became public. *Magyar Nemzet* did not cover this in so much detail but instead offered more information about discourses on further issues related to the 1956 events in Hungarian history in local and regional political circles in and outside the Communist Party. The paper also published a range of comments from oppositional political actors.

Generally, *Népszabadság* mainly took a more detached position when covering the events of 1956, reporting on newswires reports or publishing its own news. The paper published fewer opinionated comments from guest authors, and even fewer comments from its own staff, than *Magyar Nemzet*, which developed a more emotional and narrational journalistic style of reporting. From December 1988 onwards, *Magyar Nemzet* regularly published long features. The stories about plot 301 in Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery became famous for their investigative and suspenseful approaches, partly due to their being published in a time of transition when the extent of state control or secret service measures was not clear.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, *Magyar Nemzet* took a more moral position towards the 1956 issue and focussed on the question of guilt and atonement, whereas *Népszabadság*

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in an interview with the former director of the cemetery Attila Balázs the editor Béla Kurcz found out details – which he published – about those buried. Among other things, a register of names was disclosed in this interview, and after Balázs withdrew his statements in a phone call at the editorial office, his complaints were recorded and published as well (source: interview with Béla Kurcz on 31.5.2018).

adopted a position – first aligned with the government, later more independently in argumentation – to seek reconciliation. Furthermore, it published a number of interviews with notable personalities that were directly involved in the events and historical documentation, especially in special sections from June 10 and 15, 1989, dedicated to the 1956 issues. In the course of the events, *Népszabadság* showed that an increasing level of self-reflection was occurring in its editorial office. For example, the newspaper apologised for not publishing the letter to the editor by Antal Gyenes that had been published in *Magyar Nemzet*. On July 10, 1989, the paper, announced the foundation of an in-house think-tank for the analysis and discussion of current affairs.

*Magyar Nemzet* focussed on the radical reformers and paid attention to, but did not grant much reporting space, the perspective of the more cautious reformers of the Central Committee that did not want to touch the communist foundation of the country. Rather, it opened a wide debate to a range of actors from civil society or proto-parties respectively and gave a voice to the people concerned. This was also the focus of *Népszabadság*, which reported on the positions of the involved actors of civil society but less of the proto-party-oppositional forces.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to illustrate an abstract assumption with systematically collected, mainly qualitative empirical findings on print media coverage. However, the decision making in the editorial offices that led to the media coverage studied cannot be factually traced back on the basis of the product of this decision making. The interviews that I conducted with some professional journalists and members of the opposition who were working in media or respectively underground media at that time helped to estimate the situation. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for their willingness to recall detailed information.<sup>13</sup>

Anyway, the results of the content analysis shows the strengthening professional journalistic approach in the late 1980s as reporting went beyond the hitherto effective political interpretation of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 in the selected print media. As early as July 1988, both newspapers already published interviews, which included critical comments on the Party's handling of the 1956 events. By publishing articles by historians that were claiming their professional autonomy and among others access to concealed historical documents, the newspapers helped questioning the discourse hegemony of the party. This

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<sup>13</sup> Erzsébet Békés, Pál Eötvös, Laszlo Faragó, Zoltán Farkas, János Haidú, Miklós Haraszti, János Horvát, Béla Kurcz, Pál Léderer, Gábor Nemes, Péter Pallai.

allowed a broader discourse on negative consequences that had resulted from rendering as taboo undesirable historical knowledge. The deep cleavage around party or respectively fraction affiliation and, more general, the deep split between private and public life in Hungary came into the picture, as well as an awareness of the loss of the ability to judge current events based on knowledge from professional analysis of history.

The print medias' representation of the political discourse surrounding the selected issue changed over the course of the events, significantly in January 1989; the scope for the perception of more deviant voices that made themselves heard in public was continuously widened, and evermore related information (more trials, more details, etc.) entered the public discourse.

Organisational affiliation and the siding of the newspapers with certain public voices became more visible. Especially *Magyar Nemzet* opened the debate to radically critical voices and covered more international reactions. *Népszabadság* gave more attention to the current negotiation among the involved players: between the party and relatives, notably the Committee for Historical Justice that was organising the funeral, thus also publicly revealing the defeat of the MSZMP to this committee by agreeing to an international announcement of the party's failure in history. The newspaper developed a more detached style of political reporting whereas *Magyar Nemzet* implemented a more advocate style of journalism. Finally, on the approaching event of the funeral of Imre Nagy and his peers, the editorial office of *Népszabadság* seemed to traverse a certain catharsis by publishing many pages that contributed to its own self-reflection and by founding a think-tank for future public debate.

Summarising, over the time period of examination, the two studied mass media outlets increased their functionality by delivering more comprehensive information services for an integrating, albeit conflicted, public sphere as I have theoretically considered and, based on the historical context, also thought possible. The Hungarian media system provided a relatively advantageous starting point for transformation. At least theoretically, mass media were assigned professional autonomy. Furthermore, journalists enjoyed leeway within the personalised erratic structure of Hungarian media control during the Kádár era. Thus, mass media could quickly adapt to facilitating the transformation discourse among the elites dissolving into antagonist political currents. The coverage embedded pictorial TV coverage and its effects that we already know about from previous research of the live broadcasting of media events. This is showing a quite functional mass media impulse in the political transformation, the investigated key mass media as having been a systemically preserving structure of social order in times of political crisis.

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