

**"Hungary and the World  
at the Dawn of 2010"  
Report of a Listening Post  
held in January**



**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

**Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

**Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. We have identified the following themes:

**1. Hope vs 'Withdrawing Yourself' vs Exodus**

We have a famous mountain climber, who has lost one of his legs, but still, he is preparing for the next expedition with a cork leg. We also lost four other climbers in China last year, they were employees of the world famous Pethő Institute, where a new method have been developed of handling handicapped children. We had associations about bank directors, who also plan to climb high mountains, as a 'proof of manliness' or 'in search of adventure'. According to some opinions, climbing a high mountain is more about reflection, and the 'moments of truth'. You are cut off from external realities of the world, so you have to face your internal realities. Like a monk or hermit. You have to find your own way. Or like in boxing: during the rounds you will experience your own limits: it turns out who you are, how strong you are inside.

**2. Apathy**

We – as Listening Post – are only a few people here, less than planned (this is a second day of a general strike among public transportation workers in Budapest). Even our relation to the media (television, newspapers etc.) is controversial, we try to limit it to the necessary minimum, in order 'not to get confused and overly anxious'. 2010 is year of parliamentary elections. Are we expecting something positive from the new government or a local focus (immediate community, family, children, workplace) will replace our needs for community.

**3. Aggression, Hate**

Sometimes we encounter the 'other Hungary', as if we were living in parallel societies: opposite life-strategies, goals, culture, with a minimum of permeability. It is easy to see the Other as a 'loser', and analyze what might be at depth. But there is a danger, that the Other will move to more extreme ideologies. It would be OK, to see it as different, but it often leads to aggression and hate. In boxing the fighters are hugging each other

at the end and they are waiting for the judges to count. May be it is our task to learn our own aggression and increase our love. It is also hard to teach our children, how to handle their own feelings towards their siblings and control their own emotions without repressing them. Though it is hard to understand how might become acceptable for so many people the extreme right leaders' speech: "...let's go to their houses and shout to them: We hate you!"

How does this relate to their stated Christian values? It is a 'calm before the storm' what we have this year. Probably it will become much more dangerous in 2012, when it will become clear, that the (highly probably elected) new right government won't make a wonder either in spite of its majority vote. The question is, how long should we remain silent, without 'hitting back' and defending our boundaries.

### **3. Responsibility, Forgiveness**

We have a few examples in Christian history, e.g. St. Ignacio of Loyola or some current Hungarian Christian thinkers, who were able to 'let things go' and did not want to take revenge. The mature personalities... According to historical evidence, the next thousands of years will surely not result in massive changes in this respect. But as teachers, consultants, leaders, what is the model we give for others? Are we able to rise above our own immediate interests? For example, are we asking for invoices (for whitening the economy), aren't we looking for exemptions, doing some tricks, for our own advantage etc. It is easy to become part of the system. In order to change the system, many people should start in small steps. Even if we are part of it, what counts, is more our intentions, the tendencies, if we make a mistake, at least do we have a guilty conscience...

Is corruption decreasing? Do we have less public scandals? At least in the traffic system we have some positive signs (e.g. decreasing traffic in bus lanes). But we know a lot of negative examples. Our politicians do not dare to take unpopular measures. Government reforms have halted, opposition used destructive means. Both gives new chances for the extreme rightists. People say that 'why should I care, leave me alone'. 'I live anyway on the imperfect regulations, just like between 1956 and 1990.'

### **4. "Hungarian Visions"**

We lack positive visions, have only segments or fragments of a vision, like '3 rooms and 4 wheels for everyone'. It would be important to value Work again. Instead of being a 'country of shared service centres' or 'Hankook factories', we should invest into high value added industries and education. Without being too ambitious... Like our university: we should not compete with Harvard Business School, but we should compete with other universities, who's vision is to prepare and send students to Harvard. This should be based on a sincere analysis of what are we good at? What is the starting point? Being the EU's garbage can? Or food provider? This would sound much better: the EU's garden of bio-horticulture.

We would need a longer period of time for establishing an inner-directed, intellectually open minded 'civic society', with sound material foundations. More generations need to pass, in order to forget about the feudalistic and 'gentry' mindsets, still present everywhere. Take the example of a small village with one big employer, formerly a socialist company, privatized to a Canadian owner. The current CEO (an enlightened Hungarian) tried to introduce empowerment in the organisation, but people needed more that someone tells them exactly what to do. At the same time they had a mentality that 'the factory belongs to us', we – and our parents – have built it. Partly

they brought it home piece by piece. They even wrote a letter to the Canadian owner when they did not like, what management wanted.

The only positive (the 'good in the bad') part is the complexity and diversity of the society. (Although in the traffic system it may be part of the confusion and frustration: e.g. Northern countries have a regulated system, southern countries (like Greece or Spain) have their own ways, but once the two are mixed, it will be a mess. Still, we may value our semi-colonial past of Turkish, Austrian and Russian empires, surrounded by Slavic countries, ourselves being half Romanian, half Jewish, half Gipsy etc. We are quite OK with tribal as well as Christian cultures. Diversity might be really an important value, once we lose part of it, it will be gone forever.

### **Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them. Again, there was a lack of clear, easily identifiable consensus, but there was, nonetheless, a lively and vigorous struggle to make sense of the Listening Post experience. This analysis has been distilled into the following hypotheses:

#### **Analysis and Hypothesis 1**

##### ***Apathy, lack of forgiveness***

**Analysis:** 20 years after the political changes in the Hungarian society there is a general feeling of frustration towards the economic situation: many people do not experience the transition to a socially sensitive market economy. With the combined effects of the global economic crisis Hungary has almost declared a state bankruptcy in the first months of 2009. Unemployment rates are almost as high as in the 90's, economic activity is almost the lowest in Europe. The logic of the system is very much the same as it was before the 90's: connections, corruption, using or misusing the word of law. There is fall back in the standard of living, compared to a period of relative wellness.

**Hypothesis:** Members of society are either frustrated and feel betrayed, or feel their own responsibility because of the perceived failure of the transition. The result is guilt and an inability to face truth, and to forgive. Members of society (especially with different political preferences) do not believe in each other (that they will forgive) so it is easier not to forgive. A hugely regressive phenomena on a societal level.

#### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

##### ***Hate***

**Analysis:** Politicians are – intentionally or not – misusing this natural split: they divide people through emotional 'double talk'. Some try to create political capital through using ancient extremist ideologies (hate-speech) mobilizing on the street (e.g. the attack of the television building, fascist-like 'Hungarian Guards', Gipsy attacks etc.). This leads to anxieties and fears of others, who would like to live their lives according to democratic

principles, but their own feelings of guilt (because they also failed with the transition) is prohibiting them to protest and defend against these tendencies. Instead of facing reality, it is easier to look for idealized truth and values.

**Hypothesis:** Members of society react to anxiety either with a wish for stronger external boundaries (counter-aggression) or through idealization (creating an even bigger gap between reality and their own ideals) often leading to 'exodus' (a fight or flight reaction), decreasing the chances of a fact based dialogue.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 3**

#### ***Diversity and positive visions***

**Analysis:** Talking about differences, we realised that we were stuck with the negative aspects, without realizing the values in diversity and complexity. The Hungarian society has a great potential of creativity, but the split created by politicians has almost destroyed this potential. In Israeli-Palestinian conflict both parties' constant talk about past discontents can be evidenced of ruining the peace process. The Slovenian, Irish or Norwegian example is more about letting things go and forgive past sins. It also means, that we should not see facts through our own fears: 'What did he/she do? What was his/her intention?' First of all we should start with positive attributions. Being a democrat (and being a Christian) is about not letting fear to be our dominant orientation!

**Convener: Dr. Sándor Takács**