

**"Hungary and the World  
at the Dawn of 2007"  
Report of a Listening Post  
held on 10th January**



**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

**Part 1. SHARING 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. Participants were mainly preoccupied with the political situation in Hungary, the street demonstrations and aggression and its consequences for collegial relationships at the workplace, in religious communities and friendship relations. At a deeper level, questions were raised about the nature of truth and justice and the possibility or impossibility to realise them.

**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. The major experience we had from last year and even during the Christmas holidays was the feeling of "being divided" vertically and horizontally as a society. (A short background: Fierce elections in spring, socialist won by a minimum of PM seats - conservative party members had more nominal votes; minister president admitted /on a "leaked out" - or "stolen" voice recording from a party meeting speech/ that government was "telling lies"; currency and state budget problems followed by a "stabilisation" program; street protests, right extremists demonstrating before the house of parliament for months; violent attack of the public television's head office (weak police?); mass demonstrations organised by conservative party (violent police); conservative PMs do not participate in normal legislative work etc.). As a consequence, colleagues at workplaces do not talk about politics, because it seems to be "too sensitive", so feelings (lack of safety, confusion etc.) about the situation get even more repressed, which easily can lead to aggression again.
2. The most difficult is to face the situation when - depending on our family, social, or political background - we see completely different realities. Only very strong personal relationships can stand this division. There were frequent references to "truth", the impossibility of finding it (even at the factual level) leading to the search for an "inner truth", the possibility of defining one's own values and convictions in spite of an intensive experience of not being able to find the "true external story". The theme of "being manipulated" by the media, by the political elite - be it on either side - has also emerged here. There were multi-party committees set up to find out what happened and their results are "top secret for the next 60 years". The need for some kind of "civil minimum" was expressed what

could be created by the dialogue, currently missing. The difficulty of telling what is true or false (in concurrently living the history) on a personal level creates the feelings of lack of identity: there are certain parts of the present/past that are not understood, so how can we build it into our personality, how can we "stand on our past"?

3. Regarding the issue of "lies" (as the opposite of "truth") we started to talk about "sins", whether we define sin as an "evil" act (defined by whom?), the role of intention, the role of reprehension etc. We can only forgive to those who have admitted their sins and asked for forgiveness. The "lies" of the government are still seen in the face of the sins of the past regime, the lack of forgiveness still refers to the past 40 years. Others would like to look forward, try to understand the past but without consequences for the present. The question has been raised which is more difficult: to ask for forgiveness for something one personally has not committed or not to forgive to someone whom you feel personally responsible. The theme of avoiding taking responsibility and "avoiding" naming responsible public figures (among those who are in power) also seemed to be related. We also have to take into account our own "sins", how have we contributed to the current situation (e.g. avoiding taxation and other rules) - similarly to the pay-offs for being collaborators for the political elite of the past regime.

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

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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 two interrelated hypotheses:

#### **Analysis and hypothesis 1**

##### ***Analysis:***

It was striking to realise how much the "lying" issue has polarized the Hungarian society. Work-teams, families, friendships, religious communities are "falling apart", everyone is concentrating on own goals and does not contribute to the community, conflict handling and dialogue is rare, feelings of aggression and fear are common when thinking on police reactions during the 50th anniversary of 1956 and when expecting the spring period (national holidays with "rebellious Hungarian traditions").

##### ***Hypothesis:***

As the former regime (especially the 3 decades after 1956) was based on repression, on not talking (and not asking about) who is on power and how they got there, and even after the changes of 1989, when a multi party democratic system has taken over the former forcefully homogenised one-party system, the collective and individual level analysis of the past years did not happen. As there are families with very different past affected very differently by the changes of the past 50 years` history, the current

situation has touched upon very deep emotional issues, leading to the break-down of the "political" discourse (at both the political and the civic level).

## **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

### ***Analysis:***

There was a strange feeling that we are slowly losing the opportunity to understand the past (because people living in this period are slowly but surely dying), but at the same time this could also be a possibility to open up files etc, but seemingly we are creating new taboos by not publicizing the results of state investigations. The media is so polarised that even those who have sympathies with one party are concerned about the effects of certain statements ("lies") on the opposite readers. This leads to a feeling of lack of control over the situation.

### ***Hypothesis:***

Because the lack of a well developed independent institutional system (without the informal influence of the actual government, either any political parties) - jurisdiction, central bank, statistical information systems, research institutes etc. (what might be the basis of civic society) - with the effect of complementing the basic democratic framework, social facts and the "truth" gets relativistic, leading to a feeling of losing moral and ethical values: those who have power might do anything they want (they are omnipotent) and there is a lack control over the situation.

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