

**"Hungary and the World  
at the Dawn of 2011"  
Report of a Listening Post  
held in Budapest on 12th 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. In our case the composition of the group was quite homogenous in that members of a university department and external colleagues (e.g. consultants, who have some courses at the university) were participating.

**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. Power**

In the first part of the meeting (although we agreed, that LP is not about evaluating the changes made by the conservative government elected by the 2/3 majority of votes – after the first half year) we found ourselves discussing the issues of the freedom of the media, the abrupt and dictated changes (also incorporating backward changes for several years) of the tax system, private pension funds and other orders of the new government. As these steps can – at least partly – also be justified by the economic problems and the ineffective operation of the previous governments (state debt financing of private pension funds, scandals about the relationship between public companies management and politics etc.) still there was a bad feeling about the harsh and immediate changes, that are resembling the old one party system's recklessness: lack of analysis, no dialogue, triggering anger and fear – populist measures, favouring middle class families with much higher than average income.

**2. Centrum - Periphery**

The question about the position of the centrum and periphery turned up many times in the different themes and contexts during the first part. In a larger context, Hungary has from January the serial presidency in the EU and based on this presidency some of our LP participants feel that we suddenly became the centrum of the EU. They also expressed their fears about the EU's judgement of our political and economical situation (mentioned above). While other LP participants don't believe that this presidency will lionize Hungary. We agreed that our society pays too much attention to other nations' opinion of us as a general rule and maybe we are overestimating our influence. On the other hand we could also share the opinion that 'independent' financial analyst's (e.g. Standards and Poor's ratings) may also have some biases. These controversial views probably raise anxiety in our society.

The issue of the centrum and periphery has actuality within our society as well. There is a significant ethnic minority (the Gypsies or Roma), who lives in the periphery of our society both in economical, political and cultural ways. The divide between them and the majority group deepens as they adhere to their own rules and not to the larger societies'. Some of the LP participants quoted 'independent' opinions (a Dutch, non-for profit specialist very successful in solving segregation related problems), that this issue is hopeless, triggering apathy and lethargy.

### **3. Dependence - Independence**

The centrum - periphery issue points out another important theme in our discussion. We can observe our own driving rules as persons, families or groups, but there are other outsider guidelines which force us to follow them. Not following them can also displace entities to the periphery of a society. Intellectuals feel that they have been put to the side, political parties are not interested in non-partisan opinion or fact-based dialogues. This triggers both anger and annihilation-fears, as they feel that political decision makers (the authority) and the media is not interested in their professional opinion, although it is an ongoing debate which should be controlling the other. Although there is a strong desire for having an autonomous opinion, the atmosphere of every day life holds the society in suspense whether this desire can still exist in reality or not.

### **4. Ways of Re-generation**

Our society is downtrodden and full with hopelessness. The LP members don't have palatial plans for this year and we started discussing, how the society can regenerate itself. The great leap forward can start with personal, internal reforms, rethinking our internal guidelines and values. It was our fantasy that our major ethnic minorities could preserve their ability to renew themselves (in a spiritual way). We have talked about a Gipsy lady who works with blind children in a wonderful way, mostly white children, so to say, 'she is healing our children'. Because they are on the periphery in our society, it's difficult to imagine them as examples.

## **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**

**Analysis:** The global crisis intensified the demand for a higher centralization that led to a concentrated power practice. The divide between the centre and periphery is deepening while feelings of dependence and defencelessness are strengthened in the society. The reactions are diverse; some members of the society automatically feel negative emotions while others still trust in the good intentions of the power-practisers.

**Hypothesis:** Based on the higher centralization and harsh practice of power by the government, fears of being totally dependent and being put (left) on the side has grown

in the society. The possibility of losing our sovereignty led to a commonly shared fantasy of being destroyed (by the authority). The fantasy of being destroyed exists because of the former 'clean-ups' happening in our history, and may mean nowadays losing one's place in society. The result of these primitive fears is that members of society regress to paranoid reactions as splitting (along the centrum-periphery, along parties and groups) and scapegoating and experience anger towards the perceived 'others'.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

**Analysis:** The society is in suspense whether the independent (non-partisan) professional opinion still exists, or not. There is a strong mistrust against any knowledge and opinion, there is a general suspicions about on who's side he or she is, who's interests are served by and why he or she wants to convince anybody.

**Hypothesis:** Because of the mistrust and doubtfulness in the extended society, there is an idealization of the independent professional opinion and non-partisan judgement. A strong desire exists that a 'perfect' entity (IMF or EU versus our majority government or a strong leader), without any personal investments, shall give advice what the whole society can fully trust and follow.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 3**

**Analysis:** The issue of autonomy versus dependence has emerged as a connecting theme. Are we really ready for self-determination? Who defines our frames of references: what is internal and what comes from the outside? What if our behaviour based on our own identity looks threatening to the outer world? How can these contrasting forces be compromised? Our problems with our minorities can be brought into comparison with our own integration to Western Europe.

The global crisis infers higher centralization and more visible political decision making. The members of the society experience that their freedom is more limited. They get stuck in the issue whether free will or coercive choices are driving their life.

**Hypothesis:** Because of the higher centralization, members of the society experience strong dependence and doubtfulness. The result of this is that they are not able to define the appropriate degree of autonomy for themselves. The primitive fear and anger (based on our first hypothesis) is a significant barrier, so members of the society regress to a lower level of autonomy and they will expect further rules and guidelines to be determined by the government. This leads to unconscious legitimization of centralization.

**Conveners: Dr. Sándor Takács and Alina Láng**