

Religious Policy and Dissent in Socialist Hungary, 1974-1989.

The Case of the Bokor-movement

By

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Notes on translation

All of my primary sources and much of the secondary literature I use are in Hungarian. All translations were done by me; I only give a few expressions of the original language in the main text.

Abstract

The thesis investigates religious policy, church-state relationships and dissent in late Kádárist Hungary. Firstly, by pointing out the interconnectedness between the ideology of the Catholic grass-root Bokor-movement and the established religious political context of the 1970s and 1980s, the thesis argues that the Bokor can be considered as a religiously expressed form of political dissent.

Secondly, the thesis analyzes the perspective of the party-state regarding the Bokor-movement, and argues that the applied mechanisms of repression served the political cause of keeping the unity of the Catholic Church intact under the authority of the Hungarian episcopacy. The major consideration behind this state policy was to maintain the established status quo in church-state relationships, which had been consolidated in the course of 1970s. The thesis bases its arguments on the available archival material of such state organs of Kádárist Hungary as the Subdivision III/III and the State Office of Church Affairs.

Since the case of the Bokor-movement reveals that the communist party-state no longer regarded the Catholic Church as its political enemy in the examined period, the author argues for a new approach, which synthesizes the theoretical frameworks of secularization/modernity/Communism and religion with the findings of empirical research in order to reach a more profound and comprehensive understanding on religious policy and church-state relationships in late Kádárist Hungary.

To my wife

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Introduction

In 1974 Pope Paul VI declared vacant the Archdiocese of Esztergom. This event is one the major achievements of the religious policy of the Kádárist government, since Cardinal József Mindszenty, the Prince Primate and Archbishop of Esztergom was one of the main ideological antagonists of the communist regime, his dismissal was an essential demand of the Hungarian government toward the Holy See. Mindszenty had been deprived of the possibility to fulfill his duties since his arrest in 1948, yet with his official dismissal a new phase began in the religious policy of the Kádár-Era. On 2nd of February, three days before the official announcement of Mindszenty's dismissal, the pope appointed László Lékai, the former bishop of Veszprém, to "Apostolic Governor of Esztergom". In 1976, one year after Mindszenty's death, Lékai was inaugurated as Archbishop of Esztergom. Until his death in 1986, he served as the official head of the Hungarian Catholic Church. In the same year a rumor started to spread among priests that the new Archbishop had handed over a list to the bishops with the names of those priests who had to be suspended or displaced from their parishes because of pressure from the state. One thing was common to these priests, they were presumed to be members of the Bokor-movement.

Two basic principles of the Kadarist religious policy were to maintain strict control over the churches, and to keep the religious practice out of the public sphere. From the late 1960s on, a new challenge arose within the Catholic Church against these boundaries: a new semi-institutionalized form of religious organization was crystalizing, a form of base-community. Small but active local communities formed loose networks, which with their few thousand members became a sort of unofficial Church within the official Church. The new form attracted young people and intellectuals in great number. One of these networks,

the Bokor-movement stood out with its charismatic leader, Pater Bulányi, who – based on his theological ideas – encouraged his followers to live a radically uncompromising Christianity, “to live the Gospels”. The base-communities in general, but especially the Bokor soon provoked the antagonism of the socialist state.

After 1976, the relationships between the Bokor and the Church hierarchy started to deteriorate spectacularly. In 1982 Pater Bulányi was suspended from his priestly duties by the episcopacy because of his alleged doctrinally problematic teachings. In the following years a bitter controversy developed within the Church that reached the Vatican. The “Bulányists” accused the hierarchy of unprincipled collaboration; the sellout of its faithful to the atheist state. The official Church in turn isolated and stigmatized the Bulányists as heretics and hothead radicals. In 1986, Cardinal Ratzinger as a prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a letter sent to Hungary called for Bulányi’s withdrawal on several doctrinal issues. The letter was published in Hungary with the remarks of the new primate, László Paskai who warned against the “political threats” of Bulányi’s views.¹ Meanwhile, the state security investigated the “Bulányists” under the codename of “Crows” (“*Varjak*”) during the 1980s. After the fall of the regime in 1989, several of the marginalized “Bulányists” successfully stood up for ecclesiastical rehabilitation. Yet the Bokor as a movement had lost its earlier significance and could only live on the margins of the Church.

Research questions

My thesis investigates the case of the Bokor-movement in the context of church-state relationships and religious policy in late socialist Hungary. In doing so, I differentiate

¹ Leslie László, “The Catholic Church in Hungary,” in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, c1990), 168-169.

between three analytical levels. Using this approach I expect to reach a more profound understanding on the examined topic. The first analytical level focuses on the Bokor-movement and its ideology, and seeks an answer to whether it is possible to view at the movement as a form of political dissent in the communist socio-political setting. In order to offer a comprehensive reading on the political aspects of the Bokor's ideology – unlike the other parts of my thesis where I mostly base my arguments on the archival material of different state agencies –, I analyze the writings of György Bulányi, the charismatic founder and leader of the Bokor-movement,² in the conceptual framework of political theology and ecclesiology.

The second analytical level is concerned with the role of the Bokor-movement in the matrix of church-state relationships between 1974 and 1989, with special emphasis on the perspective of the state. Here I seek the answer to the question whether the socialist state indeed instrumentalized the Bokor, as many clerics feared in the given period,³ in order to “divide and rule” the Church, or, on the contrary, whether the state classified it as a threat and therefore attempted to isolate and strangle the movement. In addition, I aim to grasp and represent the interconnectedness of the motivations behind the state's policy regarding the Bokor-movement and the overall religious political objectives of the late Kádárist government.

² György Bulányi (1919-2010) was ordained to the priesthood in 1943 as a piarist monk. He worked as a high school German and literature teacher in Sátoraljaújhely, Tata and Debrecen. Bulányi began to organize a network of small communities in Debrecen in 1945. In 1952, he was arrested and sentenced to life-long prison. During the revolution of 1956 he was released, but imprisoned again in 1958 after long hiding. After his final release in 1960 Bulányi worked as a transport worker for years. He started again his community organizing activity in the late 1960s.

³ Máté-Tóth in his essay deals with the quite common public discourse, according to which Bulányi deliberately or unconsciously became the instrument of State Security in subverting the Catholic Church. András Máté-Tóth, “Bulányi provokatív öröksége” [The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi], *Egyház és Társadalom*, 2012, <http://www.egyhazestarsadalom.hu/kozelmult/bulanyi-provokativ-oroksege/>. Accessed February 24, 2014.

The third analytical level of my research turns toward wider issues, and seeks answer to the question of how the particular case of the Bokor-movement contributes or modifies our understanding on the complex relationship of religion and communism, religious institutions and communist state apparatus. I will argue that the “Bokor case” illuminates the multifaceted relationships of the Catholic Church and party-state in the late Kádárist Hungary, which indeed challenges the dominant image of Communism as an *a priori* anticlerical political practice.

Religious policy in late Kádárist Hungary: historiographical and theoretical overview

The literature on the enormously complex relationships between religion and secularism/secularization, religion and modernity/modernization, religion and communism, is abundant. I would like to highlight here one notion which has relevance from the perspective of my work. In his famous book entitled *Public Religions in the Modern World* Jose Casanova challenged secularization theory both on the polemical and descriptive level.⁴ I regard Casanova’s works as highly significant because it instructively points out that religion indeed had and still has an active role in the “ongoing process of contestation, discursive legitimation and redrawing” the boundaries of modernity.⁵ As a consequence, political endeavors to limit religion to the private sphere have the tendency to turn out with completely different outcomes. The discrepancy between theory, or better to say ideology of secularism, and practice is very much observable in the case of communist societies.⁶ From this respect the late Kádárist Hungary was also not an exception. The constitutional

⁴ Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

⁵ Ibid. 65-66.

⁶ See for instance: Mateja Režek, “Cuius Regio Eius Religio. The Relationship of Communist Authorities with the Catholic Church in Slovenia and Yugoslavia after 1945,” in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives On the Postwar Period*, ed. Balázs Apór, Péter Apór, and E. A. Rees (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 213.

principle of separation of church and state in practice meant strict control over religious denominations imposed by the state.

The dissimilarity of the Hungarian case compared to other Eastern European examples rather manifests in the fact that – in contrast to the Polish Catholic Church or the national Orthodox Church across the Soviet bloc – in Hungary no church, including the predominant Catholic Church, could play the card of nationalism or efficiently fashion herself in the distinguished role of “National Church”. From this point view, Hungary represents a different story of secularization in the transnational perspective compared to other Eastern European countries, since denominations here did not have the capacity to mobilize national feelings in order to legitimize their presence in the public sphere. As a consequence, other discursive channels emerged to serve the participation of religion in the public sphere. In my view, such channels were the Catholic grass-roots – and especially the Bokor – which by their activity attempted to reintegrate religious views and values into the public discourse.

With regards to communist religious policy and state-church relationships in Hungary, in recent years one can witness a significant increase in the number of scholarly works, including but not limited to the books and articles of Gábor Tabajdi, Géza Vörös, Attila Viktor Soós, Margit Balogh, Stefano Bottoni, Krisztián Ungváry and others.⁷

⁷ Tabajdi, Vörös, Soós, Bottoni and Ungváry in their works focus on the role of State Security in implementing religious policy. Gábor Tabajdi, *A III/III. Krónikája* [The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2013); Géza Vörös, “Egyházak az állambiztonsági dokumentumokban” [Churches in the Documents of the State Security], in *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a Katolikus Egyház történetéből, 1945-1989* [Ensnared. Essays from the History of the Catholic Church, 1945-1989], ed. Gábor Bánkúti and György Gyarmati (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2010).; Géza Vörös, “Állambiztonság és egyházak” [State Security and Churches], *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* 10, no. 4 (2009): 3–19.; Géza Vörös, “Hálózatok, hálózatépítés az egyházakon belül a Kádár-korszakban” [State Security Networks, Network-Building within the Churches in the Kádár-Era], in *Egyházüldözés és egyházüldözők a Kádár-korszakban. Tanulmánykötet.* [Persecution and Persecutors of the Churches in the Kádár-Era], ed. Viktor Attila Soós, Csaba Szabó, and László Sziget (Budapest: Szent István

Nevertheless, concerning church-state relationships and religious policy of the 1970s and 1980s, the literature consists of a set of empirical case studies and a few ambitious works whose scope cover the whole communist period with varying degree of success.⁸ In general, this very limited literature struggles with one main preconception, namely that it projects the same image of religious policy on the given period as has been established in the research of the earlier decades of the communist party-state. According to this narrative, the socialist regime aimed to suppress or ultimately destroy the Catholic Church by applying various repressive mechanisms combined with the tactic of divide and rule. A supplementing dimension of this narrative makes a more or less clear distinction between corrupt or intimidated collaborationists and oppositionists within denominations and churches, but this does not really change the conceptual starting point.

This narrative – relying on indeed important ideological premises of communist policy – regards religious institutions as natural enemies of the communist ideology as well as communist political practice. Numerous official and non-official manifestations of the

Társulat – Luther Kiadó, 2010); Réka Kiss, Viktor Attila Soós, and Gábor Tabajdi, *Hogyan üldözzünk egyházakat? Állambiztonsági tankönyv tartótiszteknek*. [How to Persecute Churches? A Textbook for State Security Officers.] (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2012); Stefano Bottoni, "Egy különleges kapcsolat története" [History of a Special Relationship], in *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a Katolikus Egyház történetéből, 1945-1989* [Ensnared. Essays from the History of the Catholic Church, 1945-1989], ed. Gábor Bánkúti and György Gyarmati (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2010), Krisztián Ungváry, "The Kádár Regime and the Subduing of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy," in *Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and Southeastern Europe: Challenges Since 1989*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

In contrast, Balogh in her article is more concerned with the general characteristics of the Kádárist religious policy. The source publishing work of Balogh together with Jenő Gergely also bears great significance. Margit Balogh, "Egyház és egyházpolitika a Kádár rendszerben" [Church and Ecclesiastical Policy under the Kádár-regime], *Eszmélet*, no. 3 (1997), 69-79. Margit Balogh and Jenő Gergely, *Állam, egyházak, vallásgyakorlás Magyarországon, 1790-2005* [State, Churches, Religious Practice in Hungary, 1790-2005], vol. II, 2 vols. (Budapest: História – MTA-TTI, 2005)

⁸ A perfect example is for the latter the valuable book by Szilvia Köbel. Despite her impressive archival research, Köbel does not offer any distinct comprehensive interpretation on the religious policy of the 1970s and 1980s. Instead she emphasizes the continuity between the early and late Kádárist religious policy by pointing out that its "flexible" legal basis did not change in essence in the course of 1970s and 1980s compared to the previous decades. I cannot dispute this; however it is worth mentioning that precisely this flexibility which could provide room for shifts and changes in political objectives and their methods of implementation. Szilvia Köbel, "Oszd meg és uralkodj". *A Pártállam és az egyházak*. ["Divide and Rule". The Party-State and the Churches] (Budapest: Rejtjel, 2005)

ruling Party also support this argument. However, it has to be taken into account that the ruling power in Hungary, just like everywhere, first and foremost was thinking in political and not ideological terms, even if the latter in many cases strongly influenced the political decision-making. The political purposes of political power in turn do change in accordance with new situations and challenges – and the ideological considerations could also be shaped by the needs of policy-making. Socialist religious policy in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s, in my view, could and should be comprehended in this frame. Regardless the ideological antagonism, therefore, in practice I do not consider the communist political arrangement as a political system which by its nature is irreconcilable with religion, or more precisely with religious institutions/churches. On the contrary, as for instance Ramet suggests, in many cases the tendency can be observed according to which the communist state considered churches as state institutions.⁹ This tendency of “cooption” and “cooptation”, as Ramet put it, is clearly graspable in the case of late Kádárist Hungary as well.¹⁰

A situation report of the State Office of Church Affairs in 1982 validates this conceptual frame: “our firm domestic political situation continues to secure the consequent and flexible realization of our religious political aims and the further development of political cooperation between state and churches ... the vast majority of the church leaders and the priesthood are loyal to our system”. What follows, although clumsily phrased, illustrates the practical political considerations behind this “consequent” and “flexible” religious policy: “it is crucial that the ‘reciprocation’ for the cooperation should be realized not in terms of ideology” but in such practical fields as supporting ecclesiastical

⁹ Pedro Ramet, ed., *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Christianity under Stress 1 (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1988), 11.

¹⁰ Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar: The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 67-73.

constructions.¹¹ On the one hand this meant that no ideological relaxation should be displayed as political compensation in return for loyalty. On the other, it also implied that the state's religious policy should follow political practicalities, that is to say instead of alienating otherwise loyal citizens by stressing communist ideological premises, the policy should facilitate the accommodation of religious institutions and practice in the framework of Socialist Hungary. This pragmatism is often highlighted by historical scholarship as a main characteristic of the Kádárist party-state, but – in terms of religious policy – it is usually considered only as a specific “machiavellist” attitude to achieve the unchanged objective, the instrumentalization and repression of churches.¹²

A conceptual framework, which focuses on the mutual accommodation and adaptation on both the part of the state and churches,¹³ provides room for different interpretations than the aforementioned paradigm of divide and rule or collaboration versus resistance. I would like to mention one possible interpretation which plays a significant role in my thesis. Despite the fact that such a claim would not be striking from a transnational perspective considering the similar efforts of communist regimes across Eastern-Europe,¹⁴ the current Hungarian scholarly research does not really take the probability into account that the Kádárist government had such religious political objectives and efforts which were greeted by certain churches or particular layers of certain churches.

¹¹ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0032 – 1/a – 1982 (123.b)

¹² See for instance Balogh, “Church and Ecclesiastical Policy under the Kádár-regime,” 71.

¹³ Anca Maria Sincan, “Of Middlemen and Intermediaries Negotiating the State Church Relationship in Communist Romania the Formative Years.” (PhD diss. Central European University, 2011), 53.

¹⁴ Natalia Schlikhta, “Competing Concepts of Reunification behind the Liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church,” in *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe*, ed. Brian Porter-Szűcs and Bruce R. Berglund (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 159-191.; Lucian Leustean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10-24.; Tatiana Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia. Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 15-87.; Ramet, *Eastern Christianity*, 3-19.

The case of the Catholic base-communities in Hungary, especially the Bokor-movement, provide a fertile ground to rethink the mentioned dominating narrative, and take the option into consideration according to which from the late 1970s the socialist party-state did not want to divide and rule the Catholic Church, on the contrary, it aimed to *keep the unity of the Church* and rule it with the help of a cooperative ecclesiastical hierarchy. The applicability of this principle needs to be tested by empirical research, since it does not appear explicitly in the source material I examine in my thesis. However, as I aim to demonstrate, it underlies the political decisions of the government as well as their implementation by the relevant state agencies.

The Bokor-movement: historiography and specific difficulties of research

Despite of the massive archival work of both Hungarian and international scholars, many phases, aspects and perspectives still remain uncovered. Among these topics is the Bokor-movement. Despite the fact that the movement appears in many works as a reference or example, published systematic historical interpretations focusing on the Bokor, on its role in modern Hungarian Catholicism, on its place in the outstandingly complex matrix of church-state relationship, are still lacking. I would like to highlight one scholar here because of the significance of his work. András Máté-Tóth wrote important studies on the phenomenon of the Bokor, but not from a historical, but rather from a theological point of view supplemented by several socio-religious remarks.¹⁵ In terms of historical studies focusing on the Bokor, what I could access is a mixture of a very few up-to-date scholarly endeavors, earlier publications prior to 1989, and different narratives circulating in the public discourse, which are more apologetic, polemic and/or journalistic in nature – but still

¹⁵ Máté-Tóth, “The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi”; András Máté-Tóth, “Bokorból vadonba? Jegyzetek a Bokor mozgalom gyakorlatáról és teológiájáról” [Reflections on the Theology and Practice of the Bokor-movement], *Távlatok*, no. 26 (1995): 765–772.

fashion themselves as historically based interpretations. In my thesis I do not deal with the latter type.

In the case of the proper historical studies a specific methodological problem emerges. Due to the fact that, apart from the archival material of party-state agencies, the available source-material on illegal Catholic groups and networks is limited to oral history interviews, written testimonies and contemporary official or samizdat journal articles, the research struggles with the problem of distancing itself from the biased narratives present in these sources.¹⁶ With regards to the research on the Bokor-movement, it is particularly visible that scholarly arguments and conclusions heavily rely on such interpretations which come from the members and sympathizers of the movement. A telling example of this phenomenon is the first widely used sourcebook on the Catholic Church under communism compiled by Gyula Havasy.¹⁷ Havasy himself was an active member of the Bokor, and beside his important contribution of publishing documents which did not survive in other form, his sources in many cases go back to unverifiable stories, rumors, and memory recollections. The underlying meta-narrative of his book employs the same tropes (the spiritual struggle of the Bokor against the communist state and the collaborationist hierarchy) as any other polemic writings coming from Bulányi or other Bokor members. This did not prevent Hungarian and also non-Hungarian scholars from using these sources without proper critique.¹⁸

¹⁶ See for instance: András Mezey, “Katolikus kisközösségek és bázisközösségek Csongrád megyében 1946 és 1980 közt, a pártállam és a hivatalos egyház vonatkozási keretében.” [Catholic Small-Communities and Base-Communities in Csongrád County between 1946 and 1980], (PhD Diss. Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 2013)

¹⁷ Gyula Havasy, *A magyar katolikusok szenvedései, 1944-1989* [The Sufferings of the Hungarian Catholics 1944-1989] (Budapest: Private Publishing, 1990)

¹⁸ For instance, J. Luxmoore and J. Babinek in their book uncritically cite stories from Havasy on Cardinal Lékai, which belongs to the category of legends. Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe* (London: Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, 1999), 193. Benyhe (see below) also cites Havasy without critique for a number of times in his works.

This meta-narrative can also be recognized in such valuable works as the essays of Máté-Tóth and Bernát Benyhe.¹⁹ Nonetheless, what is important here is to call attention to the fact that consciously or unconsciously, but in many aspects the *Bokor did write its own history* – a paradigm which served its legitimation during, and after the collapse of the socialist frame of church-state relationships. In my thesis I would like to overcome this paradigm. In order to do so, I exclude such sources from my scope of inquiry which cannot be validated by additional evidence coming from non-Bokor accounts. Where I do otherwise, I sign and explain the cause of my decision. In case of secondary literature, instead of complete exclusion, I use such interpretations by bearing in mind the mentioned meta-narrative.

A specific example of this, I would say, biased historiography is that the literature on the subject usually accepts the assumption that the beginnings of the Bokor-movement go back to the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Pater Bulányi with the encouragement of the mysterious Pater Kolakovic started to organize small communities,²⁰ which would have given the basis of the structure of a catacomb Church.²¹ This first attempt was interrupted when in 1952 Bulányi with eleven other persons was arrested, trialed and sentenced to life-long prison because of “illegal and anti-state activity”. Bulányi was released in 1960 with an

¹⁹ The unpublished essays of Bernát Benyhe represent the only serious source-based historical interpretation on the controversy over the Bokor in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bernát Benyhe, “Bokor – Állam – Egyház” [Bokor-State-Church] (presented at the *Catholicism in Hungary in the era of the Vatican II*, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, December 19, 2013); Bernát Benyhe, “Bokor-Állam-Egyház” [Bokor-State-Church], Forthcoming publication.

²⁰ Benyhe identifies Kolakovic with the Croatian Jesuit Stjepan Tomislav Poglajen, who organized underground Catholic groups in several countries throughout the Eastern Bloc. Benyhe, “Bokor-State-Church” (2013), 1.

²¹ On this first phase of Bulányi’s community organizing activity see: András Mezey, “Az első hazai bázisközösségek: A Bulányi-jelenség és a Katolikus Egyház az 50-es évek elején” [The First Base-Communities in Hungary: The Bulányi-phenomenon and the Catholic Church in the Early 1950s], in *Lelkiségek, lelkiségi mozgalmak Magyarországon és Kelet-Közép-Európában* [Spirituality and Spiritual Movements in Hungary and Eastern Central Europe], ed. Gábor Barna and Kinga Povedák (Szeged: SZTE BTK, 2014), 230-241.

amnesty, and began to organize small communities again from the late 1960s. According to the most common narrative, these new groups represented the natural continuation of the first attempt. The problem with this narrative is that it binds the historical development of the Bokor to the personal life story of Bulányi. It is no coincidence that the narrative goes back to Bulányi himself, who naturally considered the later development of the Bokor as the result of his earlier efforts.²² It is more surprising that the historical research embraced this narrative without critique.

In my view, there is no compelling evidence which would suggest that one should consider the Bokor-movement, as it appears as an increasingly significant factor in church-state relationships from the mid-1970s, continuous with the communities that Bulányi had organized before his arrest. The Bokor-movement of the 1970s and 1980s developed in a distinctively different context compared to the catacomb communities of the early 1950s. The distinctive characteristics of the Bokor – open-ended biblical discussions, encouragement of independent thinking, a great number of intellectuals and a certain Christian elite attitude, radical pacifism, theological progressivism and in a few cases even extremism²³ – all crystallized in the 1970s, when the loose network of newly founded base-communities expanded very quickly throughout the country after the first groups were formed in 1968-1969.²⁴ The leadership of the movement, which consisted of older priests around Bulányi, also emerged in these years and stayed in the center of the movement

²² Havasy, *The Sufferings of the Hungarian Catholics*, 213.

²³ Since I deal with the views of Bulányi in detail in the third chapter, here I would like to mention other examples. Barna Barcza (1931-1999), Catholic priest and one of the closest friends of Bulányi in the 1980s, in his writings – beyond dealing with Christian mysticism – attempted to reconcile Catholicism with such esoteric and non-Christian ideas as reincarnation. András Gromon (1951-), Catholic priest who belonged to the younger and most radical wing of the Bokor, in 1996 was excommunicated due to the fact that he denied the resurrection of Christ in his writings.

²⁴ Benyhe, “Bokor-Állam-Egyház” (Forthcoming), 28-35.; Máté-Tóth, “The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi.”; Máté-Tóth “Reflections on the Theology and Practice of the Bokor”, 765-772.

throughout the examined period.²⁵ Moreover, the quick development of the Bokor should not be separated from the general tendency of the 1970s, when many similar Catholic groups, base-communities and networks proliferated within the gray zone between illegal and legal religious activity.²⁶ The experiences of Bulányi through his personal charisma and divisive prophetic attitude indeed heavily influenced the evolution of the Bokor-movement, and in a few cases the same names appear around Bulányi in the interrogation files from 1952 and in the surveillance reports from the 1980s.²⁷ But by no circumstance would these mean that from a historical point of view one should regard the Bokor-movement as continuous with the community organizing activity of Bulányi prior to the late 1960s.

This chronological issue sheds light on another phenomenon, namely the overrepresentation of Bulányi basically in all scholarly interpretations (and also in the related public discourse), which focus on the Bokor-movement. In this respect my thesis does not represent a real exception. Bulányi seized every opportunity to give voice to his struggles, views and activity – prior to 1989/1990 by writing thousands of pages in samizdat journals and giving interviews to foreign journalists when he had the chance.²⁸ As a result,

²⁵ Although this group (“priest group no.1.” as it was called) was considered as a sort of leadership, in light of what László Szegedi - Catholic priest, member of this group until 1983 - told me in an interview conducted for my thesis, it had quite limited oversight over the movement. The prestige of these older priests rather derived from their religious virtuosity than their position. László Szegedi, interviewed by András Jobbágy, Süllyás, May 13, 2014. It is worth noting that religious virtuosity in the case of several priests of the leadership was combined with conscious oppositionist attitude toward the regime. Beside Bulányi, who spent years in prison for anti-state activity, Endre Halász, Catholic priest and close friend of Bulányi, participated in the activity of National Guard during the revolution of 1956. László Zábori, “Egyházpolitika Pest megyében (1950-1989)” [Ecclesiastical Policy in Pest County 1950-1989], *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* 10, no. 2 (2004): 110. Others, including Szegedi, were fired from the seminary or theological college due to their oppositionist attitude. László Szegedi, interviewed by András Jobbágy, Süllyás, May 13, 2014.

²⁶ It seems that the relationships of the Bokor with other Catholic groups and base-communities were somewhat controversial. Ferenc Tomka, a known figure of the Catholic underground, argued in an interview conducted for my thesis that the different groups and networks strongly cooperated with each other. Ferenc Tomka, interviewed by András Jobbágy, Budapest March 14, 2014. In contrast, Szegedi mentioned that there were no overlaps among the membership of different groups, and the Bokor members often looked down on other groups and communities. László Szegedi, interviewed by András Jobbágy, Süllyás, May 13, 2014.

²⁷ ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 11959/1.

²⁸ As a number of State Security reports implies, the party-state organs were less and less able to prevent Bulányi from contacting journalist from the West in the course of 1980s. See for example ÁBTL – 2.7.1. –

Bulányi, beyond being the founder and leader of the movement, soon became the face of the Bokor in Hungary as well as abroad. Like in the case of many charismatic leaders, his conduct became a fertile ground for proliferating rumors and legends – both negative and positive.²⁹ His views, as I detail in the second chapter, indeed heavily influenced the ideology and narrative of the movement. What is the most important from the viewpoint of my research is that Bulányi and his activity is also very much overrepresented in the related archival material of communist state agencies. Despite the fact that an analysis of the State Office of Church Affairs in 1981 asserted that the Bokor-movement represented a much bigger problem than could be solved by setting Bulányi aside,³⁰ yet the agencies of the party-state paid special attention to Bulányi and attempted to deal with the movement by taking direct operative measures against Bulányi and his inner circle.³¹ Since I base my analysis on such sources, it is somewhat difficult, although not impossible, to avoid the trap of simplifying the Bokor case to the personal conduct of Bulányi as a religious/political dissenter.

Sources and methodological considerations

In my analyses I base my arguments on a rather large source material, which was only partially investigated by historical research. As far as I know, no research focusing on the Bokor-movement dealt with the available sources of the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (hereafter: ÁBTL) so far. Basically it can be said that the large amount of agent reports regarding the Bokor-movement has been completely ignored by

NOIJ – III/III. – 133 – 150/8.; ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/I – 233 – 224/6. This partially explains the relative overrepresentation of the Bokor compared to other Hungarian grass-roots in the international scholar literature.

²⁹ To mention only one I encountered with during my research, László Szegedi, Catholic priest and a characteristic member of the Bokor's leadership until 1983, in an interview conducted for my thesis stated that at one time during a personal conversation Bulányi admitted that he did not believe in Trinity. László Szegedi, interviewed by András Jobbágy, Süllysáp, May 13, 2014. For positive stories and rumors, see the aforementioned sourcebook by Gyula Havasy.

³⁰ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/a – 1981.

³¹ I deal with this issue in detail in the third chapter.

historical research. This is not surprising at all considering the difficulties of such research: the relevant information are scattered among dozens of often hardly available files, the individual motivations behind the reports are mainly unclear, the value of such sources are easily questioned and the State Security officers themselves dealt with these reports with a certain criticism. These contact officers, or “keepers” in the terminology of State Security, did not report everything that their contacts wrote or told them, but selected the information considered to be valuable and only this was delivered to their superiors. Methodologically speaking, this means that in the relevant files it is not necessary the surveillance reports themselves that are important, but the summaries and the remarks of officers under the frequently appearing labels of “evaluation” and “proposed measures”. Bearing in mind these difficulties, I use such reports here only in limited number.

Another significant type of State Security document which I use in great number is the “Daily Operative Information Report” (NOIJ – *Napi Operatív Információs Jelentés*). From 1979, this body of information derived from individual agent reports, which was considered significant by senior officers of the Subdivision III/III, supplemented with information from regional police forces which was submitted in a short form to the higher levels of the Ministry of Interior as Daily Operative Information Reports. These reports provided bases for additional decisions and measures.

In 1979, the State Security opened a new “confidential investigation” under the codename “Crows”, and collected every Daily Operative Information Report on the Bokor-movement within one file of the investigation. The file thus consists of six hundred pages of reports submitted by Subdivision III/III and county police organs across Hungary. The first

report was submitted in January of 1979, the last in turn is from May of 1989.³² This hitherto unresearched body of collected and selected information in many cases forms the basis of my analysis.

Beside the aforementioned sources, I also take into account relevant source material from the National Archive of Hungary (hereafter: MOL). These sources reveal much about the viewpoint of State Security and the State Office of Church Affairs. Some of these sources were already published by other scholars; that is to say from this respect I only offer new interpretations. In other instances I also take into account new sources, which were so far overlooked by historical research.

One epistemological – and in a sense ethical – concern has to be settled here in advance: the following data and information derives from the archival material left by socialist state agencies do not transmit unquestionable and solid historical facts. To put it simply, by researching the sources I present here, one cannot know what *happened*, but only what was *reported*. Beside the fact that wishful thinking is frequent characteristic of these sources, be it analyses of the State Office of Church Affairs or reports of the State Security, these sources from time to time reveal the presence of a genuinely political filter through which the state agencies examined any case under their scope. In other words, they understood the information at their disposal within a conceptual framework, whose terms were genuinely shaped by political (and ideological) interests. These interests did not leave room for sympathetic readings: in this framework all information considered to be worth

³² It is worth noting that the file was opened relatively late considering the fact that the State Office of Church Affairs had a coherent action plan on the Bokor-movement since 1976 (see in chapter 4.). The lack of such schema can be explained by the fact that between 1973 and 1977 the half of the staff in the Subdivision III/III was retired and replaced by younger officers. The rejuvenation caused disturbances in the operative work; at least officers complaint about the problems derived from inexperience among the ranks of the State Security. Vörös, “State Security Networks,” 141.

reporting bore political weight. The inner dynamics of human relationships were no exceptions; on the contrary they were seen as operative fields, where even personal attractions and repulsions were raw-materials for realizing political purposes. Therefore, what can be read and researched in the archival material are products of this particular conceptual framework, and carry relevance – without proper and careful *translation* into other contexts – only in a setting which was profoundly ruled by the political reading of the government. But such translation also has its limits, and I am convinced that these sources are not open to any sort of interpretation, and – considering the mode and purposes of collecting the body of information in question from the part of the state – particularly not to drawing ethical conclusions and making judgments on the deeds and thoughts of the actors of my thesis.

Chapter 1. Religious Policy in Socialist Hungary between 1974 and 1989.

In this chapter I aim to give an overview of the religious policy of the socialist government in Hungary between 1974 and 1989, with special emphasis on the case of the Catholic Church. In doing so, I focus on four layers of religious policy, namely its institutional structure, its means of implementation, its major objectives and achievements. Since the developments of religious policy in the 1970s and 1980s could not be understood properly without taking into account the political efforts of the earlier decades made by the government regarding religion and religious institutions, I apply the evolution of communist/socialist religious policy in Hungary as a general background for my interpretation.

The interpretation I provide here attempts to grasp the main characteristics of religious policy in the examined period, however it has obvious limits. Since no comprehensive research has been done so far on the religious policy of the 1970s and 1980s in Hungary, I cannot rely on either tested hypotheses or any systematic overview. Therefore I would like to emphasize only one notion, which serves as a guideline in my interpretation. Sabrina Ramet in her analysis given on the developmental stages of communist societies argued that since religious policy is embedded into the larger framework of politics, in their last developmental stage – the phase of decay – religious policy and also the church-state relationships could and should be comprehended in the terms of overall system decay.³³ By this Ramet understands that religious policy in the phase of decay shows the signs of “flexibility” and undergoes a certain “liberalization” deriving from “governmental weakness

³³ Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 20-21; 45-48.

and chaos”, which results in “a degree of unpredictability in church-state relationships”.³⁴ I argue here for the opposite possibility, namely that after consolidating a new state-dominated status quo by the mid-1970s, the Kádárist religious policy aimed and successfully achieved the preservation of this status quo, which did not change either in principle or in practice in the course of the 1980s, until the political transition of 1989/1990. What made this status quo new and unique compared to the earlier frameworks of church-state relationships in communist Hungary was that, at least in the case of the Catholic Church, the party-state successfully made the ecclesiastical hierarchy interested in maintaining this status quo, which in return for the granted limited concessions and support against dissidents coming from within the Church, remained loyal to the system even in 1989.

1.1 Institutional structure and means of religious policy in Socialist Hungary

The crystallization of the institutional framework of religious policy under the Kádár-government was basically closed by the early 1960s. Later only smaller modifications were applied, however the basic institutional structures remained the same until the years 1989/1990 when the erosion of the system directly manifested itself in closing the institutional cornerstones of socialist religious policy. It is worth noting that efforts were made in 1987 on the part of the Cabinet in order to review the institutional structure of religious policy. However beyond making obvious statements, such as ascertaining that the State Office of Church Affairs was not under state but party control – a differentiation which did not make much sense in the context of the socialist party-state anyway –, no significant change happened.³⁵

³⁴ Ramet, *Nihil Obstat*, 46.

³⁵ Szilvia Köbel, “*Oszd meg és uralkodj*”. *A Pártállam és az egyházak*. [“Divide and Rule”. The Party-State and the Churches] (Budapest: Rejtjel, 2005), 91-92.

Defining religious policy fell within the highest decision-making boards of the Party (*MSZMP* – Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party), namely the Central Committee (*Központi Bizottság*) and the Political Committee (*Politikai Bizottság*). The decrees issued by these two agencies determined the purposes and means of religious policy.³⁶ The relevant state agencies received the directives of the Central and Political Committees and their competence was to carry them out. The two most important state agencies in terms of implementing religious policy were the State Office of Church Affairs (*ÁEH – Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal*), and the relevant subdivisions and offices of the State Security (*Állambiztonság*) under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior (*Belügyminisztérium*).³⁷ State Security was assigned to deal with the operative (*operatív*) aspects, which in the case of contradiction had to be subordinated to the political viewpoints represented by the *ÁEH*. However, the overlaps of tasks, the different purposes and viewpoints generated tensions between the two institutions.³⁸

The *ÁEH*,³⁹ which was directly subjugated to the Cabinet, from the mid-1960s, when it partially took over the functions of the party organization Department for Agitation and Propaganda (*Agitációs és Propaganda Osztály*), and became a dominant actor in coordinating religious policy, its proposals served as guidelines for the highest decision-making party boards. The *ÁEH*, similarly to the Soviet *Council for Religious Affairs* had

³⁶ Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 33.

³⁷ Other state agencies with competence in different aspects of religious policy were the Presidential Council (NET), which owed the rights of patronage, the Cultural Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³⁸ Zoltán Rajki, “Az állam és egyház kapcsolatának jellemző vonásai a Kádár-korban” [Main Characteristics of Church-State Relationships in the Kádár-Era] *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* Vol. 3. No. 2. (2002), 74-86.

³⁹ The *ÁEH* was founded first in 1951, and then it was closed down in 1956. Three years later, in 1959, it was reopened and functioned until 1989. *Ibid.* 76.

multifaceted functions.⁴⁰ On the one hand, it observed and controlled the activity of Churches, and made sure that the directions of the state religious policy were carried out properly. On the other, it provided an official consultation channel between the party-state and church administrations. The ÁEH beside the internal political and administrative work also carried out diplomatic tasks; its high-ranked officers were active in organizing the diplomatic relations with the Holy See and representing the government at the occasional meetings with the representatives of the Vatican.⁴¹ On the local level, the ÁEH employed County Secretaries of Church Affairs (*megyei egyházügyi titkárok*), who were also subjugated to county party committees. These secretaries coordinated and supervised the policy implementation in the dioceses from the level of bishops down to the level of single parishes. From 1970, beside political tasks, the County Secretaries got administrative power in local issues, such as authorizing ecclesiastical constructions, and local religious media products. With smaller limitations on their administrative power in 1978, the institution of county secretaries remained in function until 1989.⁴²

Subdivision III/III was established in 1962 as the successor of former political polices in struggling against internal reactionary forces.⁴³ From 1966 until the fall of the regime, Office III/1, under the authority of Subdivision III/III, was assigned the task of dealing with the so-called clerical reaction (*klerikális reakció*). The Office III/III-1 was

⁴⁰ The institutional structure of religious policy in Hungary basically followed – with modifications – the soviet example. This is evident in the case of the ÁEH which was broadly in line with the soviet *Counsel for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church*, and *Counsel for Affairs of Religious Cults* established in 1943/44 (the two institutions were combined into one *Council for Religious Affairs* in 1965) in terms of functions, administrative and political authority. Otto Luchterhandt, “The Council for Religious Affairs,” in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Sabrina Petra Ramet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 57–64.

⁴¹ For instance, on the negotiations with the Vatican prior to the Partial Agreement in 1964 and the Agreement of 1971, Hungary was represented by the actual head of the ÁEH. See: Margit Balogh and Jenő Gergely, *Állam, egyházak, vallásgyakorlás Magyarországon, 1790-2005* [State, Churches, Religious Practice in Hungary, 1790-2005], vol. II, 2 vols. (Budapest: História – MTA TTI, 2005), 1027-1029; 1119-1121.

⁴² Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 86-89.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 96.

divided into subsections, from which the III/III-1-a dealt with the Catholic Church. In doing so, it cooperated with Subdivision III/I, which was assigned to external intelligence activity and kept informant networks in the Vatican as well.⁴⁴ The State Security introduced in 1973 a new threefold structure for its informant network. From this time on the members of the network were classified as “Agents” (*ügynök*), “Secret Employees” (*titkos megbízott*), and “Secret Colleagues” (*titkos munkatárs*). Whilst agents were usually enlisted by using compromising information, secret employees and colleagues served State Security because of “patriotic” or “ideological commitment”, at least in theory. The Secret Colleagues under the supervision of officers could coordinate lower-ranked network members.⁴⁵ According to the available sources, the State Security employed a network of approximately five-hundred people against clerical reaction between 1979 and 1988. This number was somewhat higher in 1969, when 611 persons worked for the State Security against reactionary forces within religious denominations.

With regard to the informant network within the Catholic Church, only in twelve cases can it be proved by archival evidence that members of the hierarchy worked for State Security prior to their appointment as ordinaries.⁴⁶ In general, the State Security broke up this form of cooperation after these persons were appointed, and employed them as “social connections” in the future.⁴⁷ Tabajdi notes that in practical terms the aforementioned

⁴⁴ Géza Vörös, “Állambiztonság és egyházak” [State Security and Churches] *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* 10, no. 4 (2009), 3–19.

⁴⁵ Géza Vörös, “Hálózatok, hálózatépítés az egyházakon belül a Kádár-korszakban” [State Security Networks, Network-Building within the Churches in the Kádár-Era], in *Egyházüldözés és egyházüldözők a Kádár-korszakban. Tanulmánykötet*. [Persecution and Persecutors of the Churches in the Kádár-Era], ed. Viktor Attila Soós, Csaba Szabó, and László Sziget (Budapest: Szent István Társulat – Luther Kiadó, 2010), 140-141.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 148. Ungváry attempts to prove the association of Catholic ordinaries with the State Security as recruited informants in twenty-six individual cases, but his arguments are not really convincing. Krisztián Ungváry, “The Kádár Regime and the Subduing of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy,” in *Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and Southeastern Europe: Challenges Since 1989*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 92-93.

⁴⁷ Vörös, “State Security Networks,” 147-149.

number is not really representative; since it seems the Subdivision III/III allowed oral reports to its ecclesiastical connections, a practice which together with the mass shredding of documents during the democratic transition makes the available statistics and numbers dubious. Tabajdi therefore argues that by the early 1970s much of the Catholic hierarchy worked for State Security in one form or another.⁴⁸ However, he also asserts that Catholic ordinaries had many channels to the government, among which the State Security might be just one. That is to say the hierarchy did not collaborate mainly with the party-state by performing agent activity, but by ecclesiastical governmental decisions and measures which pleased the government.⁴⁹ The two arguments partially contradict each other, and thereby well-illustrate the ambiguity of the scholarly literature on the subject. From the perspective of implementing religious policy, however, I would only like to stress the fact that the State Security was an important cornerstone of the institutional framework in imposing control over religious institutions and organizations. From this respect, the State Security closely cooperated with the ÁEH in realizing religious policy, since in many cases its reports were also handed over to the ÁEH, that is to say the findings of the operative work supported the political work of the ÁEH.

It is worth noting that not only state and party agencies (in the narrower sense) were involved in putting religious policies into practice, but also “social organizations” (yet under strict state and party supervision) such as the Patriotic Popular Front (HNF – *Hazafias Népfront*). The task of the HNF was to “unite all for the sake of constructing socialism”, a task which embraced also putting political pressure on church members when it was needed.⁵⁰ The National Peace Council (OBT – *Országos Béketanács*), which provided the

⁴⁸ Gábor Tabajdi, *A III/III. Krónikája* [The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2013), 220.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 223.

⁵⁰ Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 36-37.

framework for the Opus Pacis or “peace priest” movement, beside the ideological indoctrination, had similar functions.⁵¹

For the implementation of religious policy basically four types of means were in practice. The first is the group of direct administrative measures, which as a general tendency became increasingly rare from the early 1970s. According to a textbook written in 1963 for future State Security officers, instead of administrative measures, the government considered “soft” measures (subversion, defamation, and ecclesiastical disciplinary procedures) as more successful in fighting against clerical reaction.⁵² However, even in the 1980s the government did not exclude categorically the legitimacy of using administrative measures if it was considered necessary. The activity of State Security – which as a political police broadly speaking was half-way between administrative and political means – against clerical reaction and inner opposition of the Church did not cease until 1989 either. The second type of means is the political. This includes political pressure through social, political, administrative, official and unofficial channels and support of loyal forces within the religious institutions. The third type signifies the ideological means, primarily atheist and anti-religious propaganda. These served the purpose, beside the ideological indoctrination, of minimizing the impact of religious ideas in society.⁵³ The last group consists of legislative means and includes a great number of laws and edicts, which provided large room to the authorities for interpretation. This body of legal directives, besides providing the bases for state intervention into the inner life of religious institutions,

⁵¹ Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 39.

⁵² Réka Kiss, Viktor Attila Soós, and Gábor Tabajdi, *Hogyan üldözzünk egyházakat? Állambiztonsági tankönyv tartóiszteknek*. [How to Persecute Churches? A Textbook for State Security Officers.] (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2012), 131-136.

⁵³ Géza Vörös, “Egyházak az állambiztonsági dokumentumokban” [Churches in the Documents of the State Security], in *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a Katolikus Egyház történetéből, 1945-1989* [Ensnared. Essays from the History of the Catholic Church, 1945-1989], ed. Gábor Bánkúti and György Gyarmati (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2010), 284.

served the purpose of restricting the living space of religious institutions as well as their activity to a severely limited level. Although the Constitution of 1949 secured the right of religious freedom and the Churches did not lose their legal personality, as for example in the USSR, the mentioned interpretive flexibility and the vast amount of classified regulations and edicts made the legal basis of the religious policy ambiguous, but also easily convertible to the party-state's political objectives.⁵⁴

1.2. Objectives and achievements of religious policy in Socialist Hungary

The research on communist religious policy usually mentions two ways of dealing with religion in communist societies. The first option is to exterminate religion, which in the scholarly literature appears mostly in connection with certain periods of the religious policy in USSR.⁵⁵ The second is to secure control over religious denominations by strict surveillance, infiltration and other means.⁵⁶ It seems that in Hungary the eradication of religion by direct administrative, political or any other means was not considered as a serious option. This does not mean that the communist leadership did not regard religion as an ideological remnant from the past which was disappearing. In this respect they considered the task of the state to help and hurry this process.

The first years of the Hungarian communists in power were spent with attempts to adopt both the interwar achievements of Soviet religious policy and to follow its more recent instructions and trends. Whilst the Rákosi-government used every available measure in order to force the churches into the new paradigm of church-state relations, a purpose

⁵⁴ Köbel, "Divide and Rule", 157.

⁵⁵ Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1-11. Philip Walters, "A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy," in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20-23.

⁵⁶ Anca Maria Sincan, "Mechanism of State Control over Religious Denominations in Romania in the Late 1940s and Early 1950s," in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives On the Postwar Period*, ed. Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, and E. A. Rees (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 203-204.

which it virtually achieved by August of 1950 when the remaining bishops of the Catholic Church signed a treaty with the state, the nature of this purpose – reaching a legally acceptable compromise – implies that the government either did not consider itself strong enough to eradicate religion and churches or such objective was not among its real intentions.⁵⁷ Instead, similarly to the parallel Soviet example of that particular time,⁵⁸ the communist government in Hungary sought to establish as quickly as possible a framework in which the churches were deprived of their former social, political and cultural influence,⁵⁹ but still allowed to operate within strict limits and forced to serve the purposes of the communist state.

In 1958, however, the Decree of the Political Committee acknowledged the fact that religion was not on the way to extinction, therefore the framework of coexistence between Socialism and religion had to be elaborated.⁶⁰ The Decree also declared that religious policy aims “to liquidate the counterrevolutionary attempts of the clerical reaction, and to seek positive cooperation with the Churches”.⁶¹ In other words, it differentiated between Church and the clerical reaction. This pragmatist turn was not without antecedents. Even Mátyás Rákosi made this distinction in his public speeches – although in his case this rather served the political objective of setting the lower clergy against the leadership of the Church.⁶²

⁵⁷ For the treaty see: Balogh and Gergely, *State, Churches, Religious Practice in Hungary*, 944-946.

⁵⁸ Tatiana Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia. Russian Orthodoxy From World War II to the Khrushchev Years* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 15-141.

⁵⁹ For details on the early communist anticlerical measures in Hungary, see: Máté Gárdonyi, “Túlélés–Együttműködés–Ellenállás. A Katolikus Egyház stratégiái a ‘népi demokráciában’” [Survival–Collaboration–Resistance. The Strategies of the Catholic Church in the ‘Peoples’ Democracy’], in *Felekezetek, egyházpolitika, identitás Magyarországon és Szlovákiában 1945 után = Konfessie, Cirkevna Politika, Identita Na Slovensku a v Madársku Po Roku 1945* [Denominations, Church Politics, Identity in Hungary and Slovakia after 1945], ed. Margit Balogh, *Historia Hungaro-Slovaca, Slovaco-Hungarica 2* (Budapest: Kossuth, 2008), 150-151.

⁶⁰ Margit Balogh, “Egyház és egyházpolitika a Kádár rendszerben” [Church and Ecclesiastical Policy under the Kádár-Regime], *Eszmélet*, no. 3 (1997), 70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 70-71.

⁶² See Rákosi’s speech on 12th of June, 1948. In Mátyás Rákosi, *Építjük a nép országát!* [We are constructing the country of the People!] (Budapest: Szikra, 1948), <http://mek.niif.hu/04600/04670/04670.htm>, Accessed

However, in the case of the Kádár-government this was not only a rhetorical device, but a basic foundation of the religious policy, which sought strict control over denominations without systematic persecution. The differentiation itself between loyal or progressive and reactionary forces remained in function in the discourse and practice of the party-state organs until 1989.⁶³

The government sought stabilization after the Revolution in 1956, and stabilization in terms of religious policy meant the normalization of church-state relationships. This could not be achieved without the avoidance of spectacular anti-religious campaigns and anti-clerical measures, which was typical of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Apart from control and stabilization, the third effort of religious policy was to instrumentalize churches for internal and external purposes of the party-state. One can assert that the main consideration behind these orientations – stabilization, control and instrumentalization – was to establish and maintain domination over society and the public sphere both politically and ideologically.⁶⁴

The purposes of the party-state did not change in essence in the next decades in terms of religious policy; however shifts can be recognized in the character and tone of the implemented policies. From the early 1960s, the Warsaw Pact assigned the Kádár-government special intelligence tasks regarding the Vatican and Italy. The tasks included ideological subversion, diplomacy and intelligence activity, which aimed to support the

April 11, 2014. Mátyás Rákosi (1892-1971) as the head of the Hungarian communist party (*MKP* and later *MDP*) led the communist takeover in Hungary in 1946-1949. Rákosi remained in power until 1953. Following the Soviet example, he established a classical Stalinist dictatorship. After his ultimate defeat in the inner party struggles of 1954-1956 he lived in exile in the USSR. On the leader cult of Rákosi see: Balázs Apor, "Spatial Aspects of the Communist Leader Cult: The Case of Mátyás Rákosi in Hungary," in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives On the Postwar Period*, ed. Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, and E. A. Rees (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 151-69.

⁶³ Köbel, "Divide and Rule", 143-145.

⁶⁴ Vörös, "Churches in the Documents of the State Security", 284.

interests of the Soviet bloc in the international Catholic Church.⁶⁵ The Partial Agreement of 1964 between the Vatican and Hungary was part of this policy. The Agreement provided the possibility to restore the institutional framework of the Catholic Church in Hungary, but in return it secured legal bases for the state intervention into the life of the Church by recognizing the Hungarian state as the owner of the right of patronage.

From the early 1970s on, however, the state religious policy increasingly aimed *at consolidating a well-functioning status quo with the Churches*, and the Catholic Church was no exception. This status quo naturally ought to be dominated by the state, and – this is its most important innovation – accepted by the Hungarian Catholic Church and also by the Vatican as a realist, and even a positive compromise. The consolidation of the new status quo began with a new treaty between the party-state and the Hungarian Bishops' Conference in May 1971, which was followed by a new agreement between Hungary and the Holy See in September. The treaty with the bishops referred to the improving relations of the State and Church and declared that as a result of mutual agreement, in the future only in the case of leading (bishop, secretary, president and vice-president of the Bishops' Conference) and higher (chapter president, chapter canon, chancellor, dean, university teacher) ecclesiastical positions would the preliminary approval of the state be mandatory.⁶⁶

The Agreement with the Holy See in turn focused on the issue of Cardinal Mindszenty. According to the agreement, the Vatican decided to release Mindszenty from his office until

⁶⁵ Stefano Bottoni, "Egy különleges kapcsolat története" [History of a Special Relationship], in *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a Katolikus Egyház történetéből, 1945-1989* [Ensnared. Essays from the History of the Catholic Church, 1945-1989], ed. Gábor Bánkúti and György Gyarmati (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2010), 261-289.

⁶⁶ Balogh and Gergely, *State, Churches, Religious Practice in Hungary*, 1111-1112. According to a blueprint elaborated by the Bishops' Conference and acquired operatively by the Ministry of Interior in 1969; basically the bishops proposed this particular differentiation between leading and higher ecclesiastical positions in terms of state approval. The only modification in the final agreement compared to the blueprint was that the bishops originally suggested that the candidates of higher positions should be approved by the Ministry of Culture, but in the final agreement this right came under the authority of the ÁEH. In the case of leading positions, the right of approval belonged to the Presidential Council. (HU – OSA – 357 – 2 – 1 – 8 – 3.)

March of 1972, in return for that the Hungarian state allowed Mindszenty to leave the country with impunity (Mindszenty was earlier sentenced to lifelong prison).⁶⁷ Two years after Pope Paul VI declared vacant the Archdiocese of Esztergom in 1974, László Lékai was inaugurated as the new Archbishop of Esztergom in 1976. In retrospection these events spectacularly mark the symbolic beginning of the new phase in religious policy, in which increasingly voluntary political cooperation characterized the relationships of the Catholic episcopacy and the government.

This development was a result of careful political planning on the part of the Kádár-government. The Decree of the Political Committee in December of 1973 clearly articulated the new ambitions of the government when it emphasized the importance of the political engagement of Church leadership and the further elaboration of the political cooperation between the socialist state and Churches. The Decree provisioned that prominent members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, “clerical allies” as it was put in a number of documents, should be supported against religious dissidents by the state, and supported also in acquiring important positions in the international Church.⁶⁸ On the other hand, exclusively to party publicity, the Decree also stressed that increasing religious activity resulted from the developing church-state relationships required “improvement in the ideological struggle against religious worldview”, including propaganda campaigns against religious party-members.⁶⁹ The process of establishing the status quo was heavily supported by secret police measures. As already mentioned, by the 1970s much of the hierarchy had ties to State

⁶⁷ Balogh and Gergely, *State, Churches, Religious Practice in Hungary*, 1119-1123. For valuable information and otherwise non-accessible sources on the Mindszenty case see: Adriányi Gabriel, *A Vatikán keleti politikája és Magyarország 1939-1978: a Mindszenty-ügy* [The Ostpolitik and Hungary 1939-1978: The Case of Mindszenty] (Budapest: Kairosz, 2004), 222-250.

⁶⁸ Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 219-220.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 220.

Security.⁷⁰ Besides supporting the increasingly loyal ecclesiastical hierarchy, State Security from the 1970s on focused heavily on the activity of the so-called “inner opposition” of the Church, and those clerics and groups which dealt with youth⁷¹ – a tendency which reached its climax in the early 1980s.

The period of consolidation basically was over by 1977, when Imre Miklós, the head of the ÁEH in a meeting argued that the “political commitment of the Churches reached a level, which is sufficient for the constructing of Socialism”.⁷² From the late 1970s until 1989, the main focus of the religious policy became to *maintain the established state-dominated status quo in church-state relationships*. In return for granting limited concessions to the denominations (“policy of small steps” as it was called within the Catholic Church), the leadership of the legally accepted Churches in general, and the Catholic hierarchy in particular, became interested in maintaining this status quo. In 1977 the last imprisoned Catholic cleric was released, and the number of the episcopacy was complete for the first time after the war. In the same year János Kádár met with Pope Paul VI. It seems that in the eyes of the Hungarian hierarchy – and to a certain extent also of the Holy See – these events spectacularly marked the success of the “policy of small steps”.

From the viewpoint of the Vatican the developments in Hungary bore significance exactly because at this time the “liberal”, or better to say pragmatist religious policy of the Kádár-government was seemingly an exception compared to other religious policies which applied more visible restrictions on official ecclesiastical structures and religious activities

⁷⁰ Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 220.

⁷¹ Vörös, “State Security Networks, Network-Building”, 152.

⁷² Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 159.

across the Eastern Bloc.⁷³ To be sure, the party-state had a very different view on the “good relationships” between State and Church. The serious restrictions on public religious activity hardly changed if at all. Although in 1977 the authority over (optional) religious education in schools was transferred to the episcopacy as an act of “trust”, but, as János Kádár warned at the meeting of the Political Committee, in case of bad experiences the “direct state control would come into force again”.⁷⁴ Another example which testifies the limits of free public religious activity is that similarly to the earlier decades, in 1979 the ÁEH still prescribed that the processions of Holy Saturday only could take place between 5 and 7 pm, on the shortest possible way around the churches.⁷⁵ In light of this, it is worth quoting the Political Committee’s stance on religious policy from February 1983, which shed light on what the established status quo really meant from the perspective of the government. The Decree assessed the tendency as the government’s own political success according to which although “in some cases the Churches have increasing impact on personal religiosity”, generally they “do not influence the public sphere anymore”.⁷⁶

The Political Committee not only expressed its desires as facts in the mentioned Decree of 1983. According to the research of the sociologist Miklós Tomka, one of the most important brakes in social mobility under the Kádár-government even in the 1980s was the negative discrimination of believers. The higher positions of society basically were only open to party-members, and being a party-member presumed a “Marxist-Leninist” worldview. This resulted in the dominance of a “non-religious culture”, as Tomka put it, in the ranks of the social elite. In these higher circles of society any religious commitment was

⁷³ Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe* (London: Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, 1999), 193.

⁷⁴ Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 141.

⁷⁵ HU – OSA 357 – 2 – 1 – 5 – 43

⁷⁶ Tabajdi, *The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.*, 344-345.

unacceptable even on the level of personal relationships. The same ideological requirement was decisive in the case of intellectual positions in education and mass-media, or professions related to law enforcement.⁷⁷ Under these circumstances the churches indeed had very limited influence on the public sphere.

The main challenge to this status quo came from the so-called inner opposition of the Catholic Church, which did not fit in the established church-state relationships. In the struggle against its inner opposition, which category included the Bokor-movement, the state granted support and protection for the Church leadership, which was involved into active collaboration with the party-state. This type of religious policy was not without precedents in the Soviet Bloc. One can witness a similar process in the case of the GDR, where in the late mid-1960s the government and also the Catholic hierarchy considered the emerging pluralist post-Vatican II movement as a serious threat. Whilst the leadership of the GDR saw the movement as a hidden attempt to undermine Socialism, the church hierarchy was afraid of that the movement would provide the state an opportunity to divide and rule the Church. In the debate over pluralism vis-à-vis “close ranks” in front of state intervention, the hierarchy presented the threat of emerging currents in political rather than theological terms. As a result, the hierarchy – as Schaefer ascertains – was “quite willing to cooperate with the SED [Socialist Unity Party of Germany] powers to neutralize their own internal dissenters”, which at the end indeed opened the path in front of the “differentiation policy” applied by the government.⁷⁸ With a different outcome, but one can glance at a similar situation in the 1970s and 1980s in Poland, where the emerging new political

⁷⁷ Miklós Tomka, “A vallásosság, mint az elitbe kerülés ellenpólusa a Kádár-korszakban” [Religiosity, as the Counterpole of Getting into the Elite in the Kádár-Era], in *Rendszerváltás és Kádár-korszak* [Regime Change and Kádár-Era], ed. György Majtényi and Csaba Szabó, *Távolodás és közelítések* (Budapest: Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Levéltára - Kossuth Kiadó, 2008), 558-652.

⁷⁸ Bernd Schäfer, *The East German State and the Catholic Church, 1945-1989*, *Studies in German History*, v. 11 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 277-278.

opposition threatened the “bipolar” power-balance between the Catholic Church and the government established during the previous decades. Despite the mutual disagreements and criticism, the Polish Catholic Church led by Cardinal Wyszyński – contrary to the Hungarian episcopacy – recognized that they had more shared interests with these groups than vis-à-vis the government, which at this point was very much interested in preserving the power-balance – an option which from a certain perspective would have been also positive for the Church, at least mid-term.⁷⁹

The main objective of the government’s religious policy towards the Catholic Church, as well as its efficient implementation, did not change in essence over the course of the 1980s. By 1987 a new generation of bishops came to power in the Hungarian Church. Regarding them, an ÁEH report ascertained that “such persons became ... the leaders of the Church, who actively and committedly participated in the formation of the relations between State and Church for a long time”.⁸⁰ In addition, in the document cited by Köbel, the ÁEH also added that the loyalty of the new bishops was tested in the struggle against their inner opposition.⁸¹ In other words, the bishops’ merits in protecting the established status quo by successfully managing the issue of Catholic “dissenters” was seriously considered by the government as an important assurance in terms of future church-state relationships.

The ÁEH indeed was highly optimistic not only regarding the present, but also the future. In 1987 Imre Miklós, the head of the ÁEH, gave an overview on religious policy in front of Parliament for the first time in his long career. In this presentation Miklós asserted that the religious policy of the government was based on “socialist humanism” and praised

⁷⁹ Hanna Diskin, *The Seeds of Triumph: Church and State in Gomulka’s Poland* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2001), 222-226.

⁸⁰ Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 144.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 145.

the harmonious relationship between the Catholic Church and the state by detailing the achievements of this constructive alliance.⁸² Perhaps Miklós highly exaggerated the good relationship on which this alliance of Church and State was based; however some evidence suggest that much of the hierarchy indeed considered the position of the Church positively in the socio-political framework of the late-Kádárist party-state.

When the closing of the ÁEH was seriously raised by the Cabinet for the first time in 1989, the Catholic hierarchy, at least as an ÁEH reports claimed, expressed its fears on the intention which if it came to force, would have meant the increasing “pressure of clerical radicals” – who had “unreal demands” and propagated an “unacceptable political line” – on the Church leadership.⁸³ I am not completely convinced that this report indeed gave voice to the real concerns of the Catholic ordinaries. However, if it did so, a quite stunning conclusion emerges. Then it could be ascertained that the efficiency of the religious policy was so successful in making the hierarchy interested in maintaining the status quo, that the Catholic hierarchy continued to insist on it even when the erosion of the regime for the first time after 1948 provided the possibility of a new framework of church-state relationships, in which the Church was not dependent on, and not subjugated and controlled by the state so decisively as during the previous decades.

1.3. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that by the mid-1970s, the Hungarian government managed to establish a framework of church-state relationships in which the leadership of the Catholic Church increasingly cooperated with the party-state in return for very limited and

⁸² Csaba Fazekas, “Kultúrbéke, 1987” [Cultural Peace, 1987], *ArchivNet* 3, no. 2 (2003), http://www.archivnet.hu/politika/kulturbeke_1987..html Accessed May 11, 2014.

⁸³ Köbel, “*Divide and Rule*”, 93.

slowly realized concessions and for the political support in any debate over the ecclesiastical authority of the hierarchy. From the perspective of the Hungarian hierarchy and the Holy See, this new status quo provided – compared to other communist countries in the Eastern Bloc – a relatively free socio-political framework in which the Church could operate with its complete hierarchical structure. From the perspective of the party-state, however, the main success of this framework was that the government not only neutralized the risk that the Catholic Church would stand up as a serious and unified political threat against the party-state – as for example in Poland –, but also made sure that the hierarchy felt it in its best interests to maintain this particular status quo.

Obviously, the cooperation of the Church leadership was facilitated by constant political pressure and so-called “soft” secret police measures. However, the willingness of important layers in the Church to cooperate with the government should not be underestimated. From the state’s point of view, this self-censoring and voluntary cooperation was a clear sign of the efficiency of its religious policy, whose successful implementation did not cease until 1989. Therefore, as I demonstrated, analyzing the Hungarian religious policy from 1974 to 1989 only in terms of overall system decay offers a severely limited and even biased framework for historical interpretation. In the following chapters, instead of looking for the signs of decay on the level of religious policy, I aim to show how the efforts of the state (and to a certain extent, the efforts of the Hungarian Catholic Church as well as the Holy See) in order to preserve the established status-quo in church-state relationships was reflected in the particular case of the “dissenter” Bokor-movement.

Chapter 2. The ideology of the Bokor: political theology and ecclesiology

In this chapter I aim to highlight the major points and characteristics of the Bokor's ideology, and seek answer to the question whether the movement had a more or less coherent body of ideas which in theory as well in practice can be considered as a certain type of political dissent in the given historical context of the communist ideological and socio-political setting. I use the term "ideology" in order to make it clear that I do not intend to place the set of ideas and concepts cultivated within the Bokor-movement in a wider conceptual frame of post-Vatican II Catholicism and Catholic theology. Máté-Tóth and others have already done that.⁸⁴ Instead, what I would like to attempt is rather to translate the first and foremost theologically expressed concepts into the religious political context, and illuminate the interconnectedness of the Bokor's ideology and this particular religious political background.

In defining the ideology of the Bokor, one serious difficulty emerges. Considering the fact that the Bokor in the 1970s and 1980s did not advance significantly from its un- or semi-institutionalized structure toward institutionalization, it is hard to speak about any *normative* ideology, be it theological, political or any other kind, which can be grasped and brought into the foreground as *the* ideology of the Bokor. Even Bulányi himself often referred to the fact that a large number of formative texts and ideas circulated among the members of the movement beside his writings – however this statement could be also considered as an argument in the course of the Sacred Congregation's investigation, an

⁸⁴ András Máté-Tóth, *Bulányi und die Bokor-Bewegung: eine pastoraltheologische Würdigung* (Wien, Szeged: Ungarisches Kirchensoziologisches Institut, 1996); András Máté-Tóth, "Bulányi provokatív öröksége" [The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi], *Egyház és Társadalom*, 2012, <http://www.egyhazestarsadalom.hu/kozelmult/bulanyi-provokativ-oroksege/>, Accessed February 24, 2014. ; Oto Mádr, "Chiesa Clandestina: partecipazione dei laici o settarismo?" [Illegal Church: the Participation of laity or sectarianism?], *Concilium* 36, no. 3 (2000): 33–42.

argument which implied that it was a rather false procedure to condemn the Bokor by only taking account of his views, which – at least in this interpretation – represented only one voice among many within the movement.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, if one counts the attempt to reconstruct a more or less coherent view of what the ideology of the Bokor was in the 1970s and 1980s as a legitimate approach – which I certainly do –, it would be impossible without taking Bulányi’s views into account. Firstly, because it appears that his ideas are indeed profoundly reflected in other voices coming from within the movement. As Máté-Tóth put it, “if one became – so to speak – a proper Bulányist, he could never get over it in his life”.⁸⁶ Secondly, for my purposes here, it is enough to outline those major points in the ideology of the Bokor, which had relevance in the political sphere and were the focus of the discourse over the Bokor during the examined period. These points are most spectacularly observable in Bulányi’s writings, which before the democratic transition circulated as samizdat texts within and outside the Bokor. Therefore I base my arguments here on such writings, namely the *Seek the Kingdom of God!*,⁸⁷ *Pastoral Marketing*,⁸⁸ and the more polemic *Church Order*⁸⁹ and *Is Obedience a Virtue?*⁹⁰

⁸⁵ “The Letter of Pater Bulányi to Cardinal Ratzinger” (1986), in György Bulányi, *Nagypénteki levél* [Letter on Good Friday] (Budapest: Irotron, 1995), 27.

⁸⁶ Máté-Tóth, “The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi.”

⁸⁷ György Bulányi, *Keressétek Az Isten Országát!* [Seek the Kingdom of God!], vol. I., IV. vols. (Budapest: Irotron, 1990) This volume, according to Bulányi, was written in the late 1960s.

⁸⁸ György Bulányi, “Lelkipásztori Marketing” [Pastoral Marketing], in György Bulányi, *Nagypénteki levél* [Letter on Good Friday] (Budapest: Irotron, 1995). Originally, the text was written by Bulányi in the early 1970s.

⁸⁹ György Bulányi, “Egyházrend” [Church Order], in György Bulányi, *Egyházrend: Erény-e az engedelmisség?* [Church Order: Is Obedience a Virtue?], Egyházfórum Könyvei 3 (Luzern: Teológiai-Pasztorációs Tanulmányok M. Központ, 1989), Originally, the *Church Order* was written by Bulányi in the late 1970s and circulated within the Bokor from 1980 at the latest.

⁹⁰ György Bulányi, “Erény-e az engedelmisség?” [Is Obedience a Virtue?], in György Bulányi, *Egyházrend: Erény-e az engedelmisség?* [Church Order: Is Obedience a Virtue?], Egyházfórum Könyvei 3 (Luzern: Teológiai-Pasztorációs Tanulmányok M. Központ, 1989). The text was originally written in 1980-1981.

I classify the relevant points of the Bokor's ideology into two main categories, namely political theology and ecclesiology. The first category is concerned with the theological relationship between the "Kingdom of God" and the "World", or in other words between the sphere of politics and religion, which also finds its expression in the relationship between church and state. As far as I know, no scholarly interpretation applied the analytical category of political theology in connection with the Bokor and Bulányi so far. The second category in turn consists of a set of rather utopian concepts and views on how the ideal ecclesiastical structure of the Catholic Church would look like. Máté-Tóth in his essay deals with these concepts, and argues that they are results of the internal logic of the community building practice.⁹¹ He is certainly right, but here I would like to put more emphasis on the relations of this ecclesiology with the political context, instead of investigating the relation between theory and practice in Bulányi's theology.

Máté-Tóth in his essay argues that Bulányi elaborated a first and foremost theological, and not a political, response to the changed post-war political, social and cultural context.⁹² Pedro Ramet phrases similarly to Máté-Tóth when he argues that the Catholic grass-roots in Hungary did not have "automatic political aspects".⁹³ Here I would like to approach the issue from a slightly different perspective. In my opinion, Bulányi's ideas, which were cultivated as the most significant – if not normative – views within the Bokor-movement, indeed had very deep roots in the political sphere, even if this "affinity" to the political dimension was genuinely negative. I am convinced that it is possible to speak about profound political aspects, or more precisely about intersections of political and religious aspects. Therefore, I argue that Bulányi's views carried political meanings indeed

⁹¹ Máté-Tóth, "The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi."

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Pedro Ramet, ed., *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, c1990), 19.

at least on two levels, which triggered the genuinely political response of the communist government. The first is his specific political theology in which he categorically refused any form of cooperation between “worldly” political power and believers, that is to say he implicitly questioned the legitimacy of the socialist framework of church-state relationships as it was in the 1970s and 1980s. The second is his sharp critique of the ecclesiastical structure of the Church, that is to say his views which carried the risk of diminishing the authority of the bishops – who were in turn significant cornerstones and maintainers of the mentioned framework of church-state relationships.

2.1. Political Theology

Firstly, I would like to clarify what I understand by political theology. According to Cavanaugh and Scott’s definition, political theology is “the analysis and criticism of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological, social and economic aspects) from the perspective of differing interpretations of God’s ways with the world”.⁹⁴ In addition to this, Tanner emphasizes that “theology is always making a commentary on the political whenever it incorporates social and political imagery for theological purposes.”⁹⁵ To elaborate this approach further, I do not see any reason to not include that political theology also covers those theological arguments which are utilized for political purposes. Therefore political theology embraces every argument, idea and concept which has relevance with regard to the political sphere, but is expressed in theological rather than political terms. In this sense, it is possible to speak about a specific, although not entirely coherent, political theology in the case of the Bokor’s ideology; and comprehend those ideas and concepts

⁹⁴ Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 2.

⁹⁵ Kathryn Tanner, “Trinity”, in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 320.

which either have political repercussions or carry explicit political meaning in the conceptual framework of political theology.

The foundation of the Bokor's political ideology is based on the radical differentiation between "worldly kingdom" and the "Kingdom of God". Although these terms indicate ontological realities rather than analytical categories, considering the conclusions drawn by Bulányi from this dichotomy, in my view, it is apt to speak about distinction between the sphere of politics and religion. Bulányi does not give a consistent description of the relationship between the two spheres. In the first volume of *Seek the Kingdom of God!* he argues that the two kingdoms are not genuinely opposite to each other.⁹⁶ However, in the works compiled around 1980 it is a recurrent element that the "objectives of the worldly kingdom [*evilági ország*] are incompatible in theory as well as in practice with the Gospels".⁹⁷ It seems that the element of genuine conflict between the two spheres became dominant in Bulányi's thinking by the late 1970s. It is not a leap of faith to assume that this development was at least partially the result of the growing tension around the movement within and outside the Church.

The antagonism of the two kingdoms derives from the fact that, according to the rather polemical *Is Obedience a Virtue?*, the worldly power by its nature is based on constant violence. As Bulányi put it, "every power emerges in history as its representatives prove to be successful in bloody and murderous war against their counterparts ... every power survives by having such a great potential to kill people, against which no other murderous power dares stand up".⁹⁸ This profound critique on the "worldly powers", that is

⁹⁶ Bulányi, *Seek the Kingdom of God!*, 3-7.

⁹⁷ Bulányi, "Church Order," 40.

⁹⁸ Bulányi, "Is Obedience a Virtue?," 152.

to say on the sphere of politics attributes a “negative” characteristic to this political theology. It rejects worldly powers ultimately, since it considers them as such entities which cannot act otherwise but exercise power by employing violence. In this conceptual framework there is no place for constructive visions on the ideal cooperation between either the “two “kingdoms” or state and church, elements which otherwise so often characterize political theologies. It can be argued that this rejection at the fundamental level is a critical respond to the contemporary socio-political setting. Indeed, the experience of the repressive communist regime could provide a fertile ground for such notions.

From this anti-political stance two consequences arise in the political theology of the Bokor. The first is the rejection of any entanglement between the sphere of politics and religion, including the ideological opposition against any state intervention in the affairs of believers and their community, the Church. In the examined writings, this opposition culminates in the question of state approval for ecclesiastical positions. Bulányi is clear on this issue: mandatory state approval “is against the Gospels [*evangéliumtalan*] ... persons appointed with state approval do not have the means to represent strongly and firmly those momentums of the evangelical mission, which are uncomfortable for the approving state power”.⁹⁹ Although he brings examples from the interwar period to support his argument, this notion was a hardly hidden criticism of contemporary political practice according to which only those could be appointed to the Catholic hierarchy who were approved by the socialist party-state.

State intervention in the sphere of religion, thus, was fundamentally opposed by the Bokor’s ideology. On the other hand, it also dismissed the involvement of church members

⁹⁹ Bulányi, “Church Order,” 40-41.

in politics or political arrangements. In the eyes of Bulányi, the faithful had nothing to do with worldly authorities who base their power on violence: “Jesus did not look for political allies ... He distanced himself from using force which comes with exercising power ... He was indeed apolitical ... but he was not passive regarding [the issue of] whether the behaviors by which the worldly authorities control our lives disappear, or not”.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the faithful should not be involved in politics, but has responsibility over public affairs. To a certain extent, Bulányi considers the community of the faithful, the Church as a “society-oriented” institution, instead of a state-oriented institution, to use Jose Casanova’s classification.¹⁰¹

What makes this general concept of apolitical attitude an implicit political critique of the communist framework of church-state relationships, including the “policy of small steps” on the part of the Hungarian episcopacy headed by Cardinal Lékai, is that Bulányi emphasizes that the interests of the Kingdom of God cannot intersect with any political purpose. If such intersection seemingly appears, it is no more than mere delusion which derives from the confusion of evangelical, political and personal purposes. Such delusions always result in the denial of real evangelical interests. As he put it: “do not hold a bad opinion of Caiaphas ... who leagues with the political power in order to protect his privileges – and of course the related ‘great and sacred purposes’ –, always does the same. Caiaphas had bad luck. He picked Jesus”.¹⁰² Elsewhere Bulányi diagnoses the bad condition of the Catholic Church as a result of its involvement and cooperation with the state. In his *Pastoral Marketing* he concludes that “the Church, as a result of the historical development,

¹⁰⁰ Bulányi, “Is Obedience a Virtue?,” 150.

¹⁰¹ Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 220.

¹⁰² Bulányi, “Is Obedience a Virtue?,” 112.

is incompetent in managing the political life”,¹⁰³ therefore it has to remain in the framework of its pure evangelical profile.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps it does not necessarily belong to the field of political theology, but it is hard to avoid the impression that Bulányi writes about the situation which developed over his conduct and the Bokor, when making references to Caiaphas and his ambiguous interests. By this Bulányi recontextualizes the discourse over the Bokor and the measures taken against him in the evangelical setting, in which it became undoubtedly clear who plays the role of Caiaphas and who is Jesus. This polemical trope is much more elaborated elsewhere in *Is Obedience a Virtue?*: “There was only one problem with Jesus of Nazareth: He did not abandon his conviction, he remained loyal to it, and he did not hide it ... He knew that the religious leaders would put Him on trial, and they would not take the rules of litigation into consideration ... theology was only a pretense. Politics was what really mattered”.¹⁰⁵ This prophetic self-understanding reveals much about the narrative of the Bokor and Bulányi himself, but also outlines a certain pattern of ideological resistance, which operates with a political theological critique based on – or cloaked in – a specific anti-establishment interpretation of the Gospel.

The second notion which derives from the antagonism of the political and religious sphere is disobedience as an ethical choice. According to Bulányi, when the two spheres intersect, and the faithful faces the coercion of worldly powers, his responsibility is to respond in accordance with his inner commitment.¹⁰⁶ Bulányi’s arguments in connection with this are based on the critique of St. Paul (“Let every soul be subject to the governing

¹⁰³ Bulányi, “Pastoral Marketing,” 314.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 283.

¹⁰⁵ Bulányi, “Is Obedience a Virtue?,” 111.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 102-105.

authorities. For there is no authority except God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” Romans 13:1). Bulányi comments on the Pauline ethic very critically: “since ... the authorities have such legislation and jurisprudence, which is against the laws of God ... this [conduct cultivated by Paul] is alien to Jesus’ stance ... Jesus never taught anything like this”.¹⁰⁷

Under the circumstance of coercive violence, disobedience is the only ethical choice – this is what Bulányi emphasizes. But this form of disobedience has to also be non-violent. “If ... the state power applies physical violence against me, we cannot speak about obedience ... The special case of [resistance] ... when – regardless of whether I have the capacity to defend and revolt, or not – I do not intend to resist. This particular case of non-usage-of-force [*erőnemalkalmazás*] is in the spirit of Jesus’s direction: ‘But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer’ (Mt. 5.39). I consider evil the coercive force [*a kényszerítőt*], and I leave no doubt that my conduct towards it is not obedience. I am against it ideologically. [Therefore] I am not obedient when I also turn my left cheek to it.”¹⁰⁸

The most spectacular practical manifestation of this non-violent disobedience can be observed in the issue of resisting compulsory military service. From 1979 until 1989 twenty-six Bokor members were sentenced to prison for refusing armed service with reference to conscientious objection. To be sure, about a hundred others had conflict with state organs due to their negative attitude to military service.¹⁰⁹ A number of secret police reports deal with the issue from the perspective of the state. Several imply that the rejection

¹⁰⁷ Bulányi, “Is Obedience a Virtue?,” 151.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 105.

¹⁰⁹ Bernát Benyhe, “Bokor-Állam-Egyház” [Bokor-State-Church], Forthcoming publication, 42.

of conscription was highly encouraged within the movement.¹¹⁰ It was a spectacular issue indeed, and many – including Bulányi himself – believed that the state aimed to repress the Bokor because of the commitment its members showed against compulsory military service.¹¹¹ Bernát Benyhe in his unpublished essay points out that in contrast to these narratives, the state agencies did not attach primary significance to the issue, however of course they classified the phenomena among other “dangerous” aspects of the movement.¹¹² My research in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security also supports this argument. Whilst in 1979 the secret police made efforts to prevent individuals from refusing conscription,¹¹³ later no documents testify to such attempts. It seems that in the course of the 1980s this issue did not bear outstanding importance in the eyes of the state.¹¹⁴ What is important here, however, is that the issue of armed service indeed played a crucial role in the self-identification of the Bokor. This identity, as I demonstrated, derived from the main principles of that set of ideas which I call here the political theology of the Bokor.

2.2. Ecclesiology

Beside political theology, ecclesiology was the main field of the Bokor’s ideology which became a central issue in the discourse on the movement. This ecclesiology has three elements which have explicit or implicit political aspects, namely the vision of the Church which is decentralized, democratized, and all of its faithful could judge upon his or her conscience.

¹¹⁰ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 160/2/1979.; ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 57 – 78/6.

¹¹¹ Benyhe, “Bokor-State-Church” (Forthcoming), 46-47.

¹¹² Ibid. 46.

¹¹³ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III – 234 – 255/10.

¹¹⁴ I deal with the considerations behind the state’s repressive policy regarding the Bokor in details in the second part of the thesis.

The principles of the Bokor's ecclesiology are based on the theological concept which considers the Kingdom of God not as a condition or status, but as a project to be realized by active community building. In Bulányi's vision, the Church is the framework of this project, however he made clear that he understood the Church without its institutional basis, as a radically simple but efficient "Movement Church".¹¹⁵ The basic unit, the "microstructure" of this Church as Bulányi put it, in contrast to the established highly institutionalized hierarchical structure, would be the network of active and autonomous small- or base-communities.¹¹⁶ According to Bulányi's vision, only a decentralized Church would secure a well-functioning framework for putting the Kingdom of God into practice. As he phrases in *Pastoral Marketing*, "the job of the Church cannot be done top-down; it can be only done bottom-up".¹¹⁷

This utopian ecclesiastical structure built on small communities would not only be decentralized, but also democratic. The superiors or community-leaders, according to the concept, would be elected by their communities and not appointed by hierarchical superiors. The small-communities on the lowest level would elect delegates from among themselves, and these delegates would constitute the second level of communities.¹¹⁸ The third level of communities would consist of the freely elected delegates of the second-level communities, and so on up to the top of the Church.¹¹⁹ In Bulányi's view, this decentralized and democratic model would come with serious advantages. The most important advantage is, as Bulányi argues, that the freely elected superiors could not be manipulated by worldly authorities. Bulányi unfold this in theological terms:

¹¹⁵ Máté-Tóth, "The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi."

¹¹⁶ Bulányi, "Church Order," 42.

¹¹⁷ Bulányi, "Is Obedience a Virtue?," 296.

¹¹⁸ Bulányi, "Church Order," 64.

¹¹⁹ Máté-Tóth, "The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi."

“This all can be put in terms of pneumatology. If the leader of the community was made to be leader by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that is to say his office is necessarily a charismatic office, then the tension between office and charisma disappears, and the Satan could not seize the Church ... he could not appoint to the ecclesiastical leadership such persons who, instead of taking the risk of becoming martyr, seek to reconcile the interests of the church and the [worldly] authorities.”¹²⁰

It is worth noting that the religious term “Satan” is interchangeable with the “authorities” in this conceptual framework. In other words, this ecclesiological vision is not only embedded in the political theology of Bulányi and the Bokor, but also to the socio-political context of communist Hungary. The state is the Satan itself, state intervention is nothing less than Satan’s attempt to prevent the Church from accomplishing its community-building project.

Bulányi consequently speaks about elected community-leaders, instead of ordained priests. From the perspective of Catholic doctrine, this is the most controversial element in his ecclesiology. Basically Bulányi relativizes the role, privileges and criterions of clergy. As he put it: “in the future church order we wish the priests to be community builders not temple servants ... since the ability [to build communities] can be given to anyone by God, and He does give it to anyone indeed, the criterion of priesthood cannot be either of being celibate man or being educated in theology”.¹²¹ Máté-Tóth considers this view a pragmatic conclusion drawn from the everyday experience of base-communities. According to this experience, in this case if the Church was based on the basic unit of small-communities, then those who are not ordained priests but still proved to be successful community-builders should be assigned the same functions and rights as ordained priests. The ordained priests in turn should prove their ability to community building prior to the ordination.¹²² In my reading, it is not clear whether Bulányi considered the community-leaders as a second order

¹²⁰ Bulányi, “Church Order,” 68.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 41.

¹²² Máté-Tóth, “The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi.”

beside the priesthood, or whether he was convinced that the clergy, as an ecclesiastical order, should be replaced by capable community-leaders, or he might exclusively be thinking of expanding the boundaries of priesthood to anyone who proved his or her capability of being a good community leader. The quote cited above seems to support the latter option; however, other segments of his writings could be easily – and legitimately – interpreted otherwise.

What Bulányi evidently did was challenge the established Catholic ecclesiastical structure by pointing out such “weak points”, which in his views limited the capacity of the Church to fulfill its duty in the context of communism. He proposed an “alternative church structure” in order to secure the efficient conduct of the Church in the given socio-political setting.¹²³ When Bulányi stressed the legitimacy of disobedience and the significance of conscience as the basic guideline in order to reach beatitude, he aimed to eliminate one more weak point, namely the contra-selection observable on the higher levels of the Hungarian Church. This contra-selection was seen by him as a result of the state’s intervention in the life of the Church.¹²⁴ The impact and effects derived from the practice of state approval for higher ecclesiastical positions, which in Bulányi’s views, could be only prevented if individuals insisted on their rights to act upon their inner conviction. The significance of the issue over conscience lay in the fact that it provided a more or less – in theological terms – legitimate escape route from the effects of state intervention, which gladly instrumentalized the inner hierarchical structure of the Church for its own ends.

¹²³ Bulányi, “Church Order,” 27.

¹²⁴ Bulányi, “Is Obedience a Virtue?,” 165-167.

2.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to recapitulate two major points regarding the ideology of the Bokor-movement. The first concerns its political theology, namely its implicit critique of the contemporary church-state relationships which were based on the deep entanglement of the political and religious spheres. In a sense, the examined ideology was a critique of the communist model of secularization, which in theory propagated the ultimate separation of church and state, but de facto imposed strict state control on the churches. From this perspective, the apolitical attitude of this ideology was nothing less than the fundamental rejection of the established religious political framework.

The second point is connected with the ecclesiology of Bulányi. To be sure, it indeed challenged the boundaries and limits of the traditional ecclesiastical structure; however his visions and concepts were shaped by the experience of the communist framework of church-state relationships, in which the state secured the right and elaborated efficient mechanisms of intervening in ecclesiastical affairs. Bulányi in his works offered a theologically expressed response to the ecclesiological challenges and obstacles generated by this particular religious political context. In this sense, the examined conceptual elements of this ecclesiology indeed incorporated significant political meanings.

The two examined fields of the Bokor's ideology have a significant commonality: both represented a more or less explicit critique of the contemporary socialist religious political arrangement. In my view, therefore, the Bokor's ideology can be considered a specific form of political dissent, which was rooted and elaborated in a particular religious conceptual framework, and was first and foremost expressed in religious terms.

Chapter 3. The Bokor-movement and the established church-state relationships

In this chapter I aim to reconstruct the role of the Bokor-movement in the relationships of the Catholic Church and the state through the lens of agencies of the socialist party-state. Therefore I do not intend to give a comprehensive interpretation of the history of the Bokor-movement, which involves all available sources in the field of inquiry. Other scholars have already attempted to do that with varying degrees of success. Instead, I aim to give an interpretation on the viewpoint of the socialist party-state regarding the Bokor by analyzing the source material at my disposal. In integrating the viewpoint of the State regarding the Bokor-movement into the framework of Kádárist religious policy, I divide the chapter into three sections. The first seeks to give an overall picture on how the state perceived the Bokor in terms of its motivation, strength and inner structure. The second focuses on the original action plan elaborated by the state in order to deal with the Bokor, and shows how the tactic outlined by this action plan functioned in practice. The last in turn is concerned with how this original action plan changed over the following years and for what reasons. In elaborating my interpretation, I do not only take into account the political decisions per se, but also the practice of their implementation as it is reflected in the examined sources.

At the beginning of my thesis I have raised the question whether the purpose of the state with its implemented policy on the Bokor was to “divide and rule” the Catholic Church or one should look for an entirely different explanation. As far as I know, only one historical study, which focuses precisely on the Bokor-movement, concluded its findings that the main concern of the party-state was to help the hierarchy in keeping the unity of the Church

intact.¹²⁵ In this chapter I argue that Benyhe is right in assuming that the state did not instrumentalize the debate over the Bokor-movement in order to divide the Church, but classified the Bokor as a threat, and therefore sought to isolate and repress it. The political consideration behind this goal was, as I aim to demonstrate, to preserve the institutional unity of the Catholic Church – even at the cost of ecclesiastical schism.

At this point other issues emerge. Why did the state aim to keep the unity of the Catholic Church in Hungary? What result did the state hope from such effort? What distinguished the Bokor in the eyes of the state from other catholic grass-roots? In my view, the state considered the Bokor as a primary threat not because it propagated non-violence, or because it challenged the strictly limited boundaries of religious practice (however it did play a role). Instead, the main problem with the Bokor was, from the perspective of the state, that it questioned the established state-dominated relationships between the Catholic Church and the government. When the Bokor openly criticized prominent members of the Catholic hierarchy in moral terms, or proposed a new ecclesiastical structure which would have been based on small but active “base-communities” independent of the supervision of the bishops, it attacked the prestige and authority of those high priests who were willing to accept the subjugated role of the Catholic Church in Socialist Hungary, as it pleased the government of the party-state. The unity of the Church from the viewpoint of the state therefore meant a united and obedient Church, which followed the instructions of the hierarchy.

The hierarchy – in line with the government’s expectations and objectives – in return for the support of the state agencies in any debate over its authority, consolidated the

¹²⁵ Bernát Benyhe, “Bokor – Állam – Egyház” [Bokor-State-Church] (presented at the *Catholicism in Hungary in the era of the Vatican II*, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, December 19, 2013), 4.

ecclesiastical discourse and activity accordingly to the frame of the established church-state relationships. An analysis of the ÁEH in 1981 put this as the following: “such sectarian attempts [the activity of the Bokor] to organize independently and uncontrolledly functioning congregations discredit the official church leadership and interfere with our sound religious political conditions”.¹²⁶ This interference into the “sound religious political conditions” or established church-state relationships, as I argue, was the main reason that the state classified the Bokor as a primary threat which arose from catholic grounds.

3.1. The Bokor through the lens of the state: motivation, strength and inner structure

In order to reconstruct the overall picture of the Bokor as established by the state agencies, it is important to give an impression on how the state perceived the Bokor-movement in terms of motivations, strength and inner structure. It should be noted that the state was more interested in dealing with the Bokor than in understanding the causes which stood behind its emergence. Yet in 1981, an analysis of the State Office of Church Affairs asserted that the Bokor “attempted to be an answer to – in the eyes of believers – an insufficiently functioning hierarchical Church”.¹²⁷ In 1982, Szilveszter Harangozó¹²⁸ in a presentation given in front of 186 high-ranked officers of the police and State Security in the Ministry of Interior argued that the essential purpose of the Bulányi-movement was “to return to the ancient catacomb church, which lived its life independently of – or when it was needed, against – the ecclesiastical and secular power ... they reject the established ancient catholic hierarchical structure, and they illegally evolved a new brotherly community

¹²⁶ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/1981 (119.b)

¹²⁷ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/1981 (119.b.)

¹²⁸ Szilveszter Harangozó (1929-1989) was the head of the Subdivision III/III between 1971 and 1984. From 1985 until his retirement in April of 1989, Harangozó served as Deputy Minister of State Security in the Ministry of Interior, which practically meant that State Security operated under his command and supervision.

outside the Church”.¹²⁹ Not surprisingly the analysis did not go deeper, but started to enumerate the politically problematic aspects of the movement.

What was more in the interests of the state was to measure the political threat of the movement, which can be illustrated by the following documents. According to the presentation given by Harangozó in June of 1979, the State Security claimed that “the clerical reaction” had no significant basis or prominent leaders in Hungary. Harangozó mentioned five “target groups” which were in the scope of the anti-clerical efforts of the State Security, namely the “Bulányists”, the Regnum Marianum, two Calvinist pastors (József Éliás and Géza Németh), and a number of neo-protestant groups such as the Methodists, Adventists and the Witnesses of Jehovah. Harangozó estimated the overall number in these groups at about approximately 2500 persons.¹³⁰ Three years later in February of 1982, Harangozó in the same context argued that the anti-hierarchy activity of the “schismatic groups” had increased significantly in the foregoing years. He added that the dangerousness of these groups lay in the fact that they were attractive for young priests and intellectuals. In his estimation, the Bokor consisted of approximately 2000 persons, including 250 who were classified as consciously hostile to the regime.¹³¹ In 1984, Harangozó reported to his superiors in the Ministry of Interior that according to the estimation of State Security, Bokor had 1000-1500 members, and only the one-tenth of them were young.¹³² Benyhe cites an ÁEH report from 1987 which estimated the number of those who belonged to the networks of the Bokor at about 2000-2500 persons.¹³³ It is hard to judge whether these numbers or the change of these numbers had something to do with

¹²⁹ MOL – XIX – B – 1 – x – 10/38/4 – 1982. (38.b)

¹³⁰ Gábor Tabajdi, *A III/III. krónikája* [The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2013), 288.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 328-329.

¹³² *Ibid.* 352.

¹³³ Bernát Benyhe, “Bokor-Állam-Egyház” [Bokor-State-Church], Forthcoming publication., 28.

reality or not – I would argue that the officers themselves could not decide it, since I did not find any document which would indicate these particular (or any other) numbers. Benyhe presumes that after the official condemnation of Bulányi’s views in 1982 many left the Bokor, which is a quiet plausible assumption and is in line with the mentioned numbers provided by State Security, but he does not give any preference to prove or test it.¹³⁴ Máté-Tóth speaks about 5000 members; a number which is much bigger than the estimations of the State Security.¹³⁵ What may be a passable conclusion is that in the 1980s the Bokor had a few thousand members, many of whom had rather loose ties to the leadership of the movement. Nevertheless, the State Security assessed this number as more than enough to initiate organized operative measures.

By the early 1980s, the State Security also made efforts to get information on the inner organization and functioning of the Bokor. According to an individual agent report from September of 1982, the Bulányists elected a “general staff”: Bulányi and Barna Barcza as “bishops”, Endre Halász as “rector” and László Szegedi as “Spiritual Director” would serve the organization. In the evaluation the “keeper” officer dismissed the information as false; however, he noted that the mentioned names might be important.¹³⁶ A more convincing report asserted in 1980 that the Bokor for the sake of enhancing its efficiency would split into several “branches” whose activities would be coordinated by a “Central Committee”. The report claimed that Bulányi brought up the notion that only those could join the Bokor who refused military service.¹³⁷ The term “central committee” or “central management” from this time on appears in many reports, which implies that the State

¹³⁴ Benyhe, “Bokor-State-Church” (Forthcoming), 28.

¹³⁵ András Máté-Tóth, “Bulányi provokatív öröksége” [The Provocative Heritage of Bulányi], *Egyház és Társadalom*, 2012, 2014, <http://www.egyhazestarsadalom.hu/kozelmult/bulanyi-provokativ-oroksege/>. Accessed February 24.

¹³⁶ ÁBTL – 3.1.2 – M – 42086.

¹³⁷ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 57 – 78/6.

Security decided this information convincing enough to use it. The next information regarding the inner structure of the Bokor appears in a report in 1986. It claims that in the Bokor a new organizational structure was put into practice: the members were classified as “grandparents”, “parents” and “grandchildren”. Only “grandparents” could become head of small communities, and only they could be elected to the central management. The report added that Bulányi began to look for his successor and suggested a few names.¹³⁸

In the light of these sources it can be established that the state classified the Bokor among the primary threats in the field of official or unofficial religious groups. The presented sources also imply that State Security made efforts to get a clear picture on how things were decided and organized within the Bokor. In connection with this, the tendency can be grasped that State Security aimed to identify a central decision-making board which could become the main target of operative measures.

3.2. The first action plan on the Bokor and its religious-political context

In 1976, – in line with the Decree of the Political Committee of the MSZMP on religious policy from 1973, which called for increased involvement of “clerical allies” in the “exposure, political and moral defamation and isolation of clerical reaction”¹³⁹ – László Bai, the leader of the Subdivision for Catholic Affairs of the ÁEH, in his report proposed that the issue of the Bulányist movement had to be solved by church disciplinary procedures, and not by direct administrative means. In order to achieve this, Bai suggested that after a personal discussion with Cardinal László Lékai, it should be emphasized to the Conference of Bishops that the Bulányists were not only against the established good relations of Church and State, Vatican and Hungary, but also against the Church herself since they

¹³⁸ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 22 – 37/4.

¹³⁹ Tabajdi, *The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.*, 220.

considered their bishops “unprincipled collaborationist”. Basically the report suggested that the bishops should be threatened with the legal possibility of administrative measures against the “illegal organizations and their leaders”. On the other hand, the opportunity was provided to the bishops that the Church could deal with the issue alone if they would be able to manage the case by disciplinary procedures. In case the bishops were willing to initiate such procedures, the state agencies would have provided the necessary support.¹⁴⁰

In the following years, not without contradictions and hesitation, this schema prevailed in the relations of State, Church and the Bokor. The tactic of the state agencies resulted in an asymmetric situation, which was enormously positive from the perspective of the state. The State Security and the ÁEH applied every means at their disposal to intervene in the inner dynamics and procedures of the Church in order to isolate and subvert the Bokor-movement. The impact of these measures, therefore, in the majority of the cases reached the Bokor through the inner hierarchical channels of the Church, and it seems the Bokor did not have the capacity to overcome this paradigm but understood them and reacted within the conceptual and institutional frame of the Church. In this schema the difference among political, theological or ecclesiological issues or disagreements blurred, and the state agencies deliberately took advantage of this. What originally was meant to be a politically oriented instruction, when it reached the level of the grass-roots through the hierarchical structure of the Church may have been cloaked in an ecclesiological or theological issue. What in turn originally was meant to be indeed a doctrinal, theological or ecclesiological consideration or normative statement on such an issue – regardless of the fact that it had political aspects or not – may have been, and in the case of the Bokor usually was, perceived *only* as a politically fuelled – and therefore morally corrupted – attack coming from the

¹⁴⁰ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 3/1976. (90. b)

agencies of the party-state. The answer that the Bokor could give in the given context was a moral critique not on the state – which at this point did not generate any moral expectations about itself in the eyes of the believers – but on the higher levels of the Church which, according to the narrative of the Bokor, was not bothered about becoming an obedient tool in the hands of the state. Intensifying the tensions derived from the bifurcating viewpoints on the conflict between the Bokor and the rest of the Catholic Church was one of the most important means of the state agencies in order to achieve the isolation and subversion of the movement. For instance, a summary report from 1979 gives us an insight on the fieldwork of State Security, which by using its agent network spread defamatory gossip among the sympathizers of the Bokor-movement, and made efforts to enhance theological, conceptual and personal controversies.¹⁴¹

A specific example of the paradigm in which the state took advantage of blurring boundaries among political, theological, ecclesiological and moral dimensions was when in September of 1979, József Merza, a known figure of the Bokor, was conscripted for nineteen days reserve service. Merza refused his enlistment with reference to conscientious objection and accordingly was sentenced to prison. So far this was a *legal* and a *political issue*: although no archival material suggests that Merza was enlisted deliberately because of his objection to military service as such, the authoritarian regime simply could not allow any spectacular protest against its army. The Bokor as a response sent three of its members to Lékai in order to convince him to support them in protesting against the imprisonment of Merza and against the compulsory armed service.¹⁴² At this point the case became an *ecclesiastical*, and in a way even a *theological issue* since the Bokor based its anti-military

¹⁴¹ Tabajdi, *The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.*, 289-290. It is worth noting that at this time the sympathizers of the Bokor not only meant laymen and rank-and-file priests, but also several bishops. Benyhe, “Bokor-State-Church” (2013), 7.

¹⁴² ÁBTL – 2.7.1. NOIJ – BRFK – 160/2/1979

notions on a certain interpretation of the Gospel. Lékai, who was definitely aware that Bulányi and others constantly accused him of unprincipled collaboration, unsurprisingly refused the request, which would have meant a direct clash with the state anyway – something that the Cardinal could not allow in the given framework of church-state relations. The interesting point is that, according to a report,¹⁴³ Bulányi and the inner circle of the Bokor presumed with reason that the state deliberately intended to instrumentalize the enlistment of Merza in order to disrupt the movement; still they decided to see Lékai, who even if he could do something in the matter, would not have done anything at the urging of the Bokor.¹⁴⁴ The result of the meeting, the mutual disappointment and accusations transformed the case into an *ecclesiological* (from the perspective of the hierarchy) and a *moral* (from the perspective of the Bokor) issue, and made even more contested the role of the Bokor within the Church – a situation that had considerable *political value* for the state.

The confrontation between the Bokor-movement and the bishops began in December of 1976, when shortly after the submission of the aforementioned action plan by the ÁEH, at the Conference of Hungarian Bishops Lékai handed over a list of fifty presumably “Bulányist” priests who had to be punished. The event basically appears in every account that deals with the issue of base-communities; however it lacks proper published archival evidence. Benyhe cites a document dated to 1981 from the archival material of the State Office of Church Affairs, which states that “after surveying the Bulányists base-communities /in 1976/ we demanded from the Catholic bishops to stand up against them”.¹⁴⁵ However, the document does not detail the “demand” therefore it cannot be confirmed that

¹⁴³ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. NOIJ – BRFK – 153 – 235/3.

¹⁴⁴ It seems plausible to me that the members of the Bokor tried to force Lékai to make a clear stand on the issue, and they hoped that the outcome would be positive for the movement regardless of the exact answer: if Lékai refused them, it would have proved again that he was a collaborator, which would have meant that the Bokor was right. In the case Lékai accepted to help, that would have been the success of the Bokor.

¹⁴⁵ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/1981. (119.b.)

by this it meant the aforementioned list. What seems to be sure according to State Security reports is that among clerics a rumor quickly started to spread according to which such a list existed and Lékai wanted the bishops to suspend these priests.¹⁴⁶ Ferenc Tomka in an interview conducted for my thesis also confirmed this information and added – in accordance with other accounts – that the mentioned fifty priests were not all members of the Bokor, but were priests who actively performed pastoral work in small communities. Similarly to “Bulányist” accounts,¹⁴⁷ Tomka stated that the bishops refused to cooperate with Lékai on this. What is important, however, that this event provided a constant reference point to members of the Bokor, which in their viewpoints proved the treason of Cardinal Lékai. Two reports in the file of the investigation “Crows” from January of 1979 deal with this antagonism. According to a Daily Operative Information Report of the Subdivision III/III, Bulányi, through mediators, declared to the General of the Piarist Order, Angel Ruiz, that he was willing to obey instructions of the Church only under the circumstance that these instructions would correspond with his conscience. In addition, at least the report claims, he stated that those who attack the Bokor from within the Church had nothing to do with Christianity and supported atheism instead. Lékai and the majority of bishops were described in this way by him.¹⁴⁸ Another report five days later asserted that Bulányi and his companions planned to notify the pope about the libels emanating from Lékai. The report proposed to intervene “in order to neutralize their actions”.¹⁴⁹ The State Security, immediately after the report, began operatively monitoring of Bulányi’s home.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ ÁBTL - 3.1.2 - M - 42259 /279.

¹⁴⁷ Benyhe, “Bokor-State-Church” (2013), 4.

¹⁴⁸ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – I.5 – 4/5

¹⁴⁹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1 – NOIJ – III/III. – I.10 – 8/6

¹⁵⁰ ÁBTL – 2.7.1 – NOIJ – III/III. – I.10

Two additional cases from these formative years illustrate how the action plan of the *ÁEH* – enhancing the antagonism between the Bokor and the hierarchy, and encouraging the bishops to stress the ecclesiological and theological aspects of the controversy instead of its political side – was realized in practice. In February of 1979 it was reported that Bishop Imre Kisberk publicly called Bulányi and his movement heretical. As a countermove, Bulányi planned to report Kisberk’s accusation to the Vatican. In order to deepen the controversy, State Security decided to operatively inform Kisberk about Bulányi’s intention.¹⁵¹ It was in the same year, when the State Security first intervened in order to achieve the ecclesiastical condemnation of Bulányi’s views. In February the informers of State Security reported that the “the writing entitled ‘Marketing’” which had “politically inappropriate content” was sent to the bishops. This text, whose exact title was “Pastoral Marketing”, had been composed by Bulányi in the early 1970s. The report urged that any steps taken by the bishops in relation with this had to be “supervised operatively”.¹⁵² The “supervision” was not fruitless: in August the Theological Committee of the Conference of Bishops condemned the writing for its “misapprehensions”.¹⁵³ It seems that at this time the state agencies did not see any reason to reshape their policy in relation with the issue of the Bokor; however the *ÁEH* considered the steps taken by the episcopacy as insufficient.¹⁵⁴ The always optimistic State Security in July of 1979 evaluated the operative work on the Bokor (and on other base-communities) as plainly successful. The relevant summary report claimed that “the anti-ecclesiastical and disruptive nature of these groups was successfully proved to the Church leaders”. It added that “it was easy to activate the loyal forces against” the dissident groups, which resulted in “strong disintegration” among their ranks.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ *ÁBTL* – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 36 – 38/5

¹⁵² *ÁBTL* – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Győr-Sopron – 11 – 29/11.

¹⁵³ *ÁBTL* – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 166 – 178/5.

¹⁵⁴ Benyhe, “Bokor-State-Church” (2013), 6.

¹⁵⁵ Tabajdi, *The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.*, 289-290.

Between the two claims from the part of the ÁEH (the episcopacy did not act sufficiently) and the State Security (the bishops were convinced about the anti-ecclesiastical threat represented by the Bokor) one can sense a certain contradiction, which sheds light on the fact that the state did not have an unified viewpoint on the implementation of religious policy in every single case and aspect.

Until 1980/1981 the state agencies did not change the original action plan, according to which the hierarchy – with the support of the state agencies – ought to solve the issue of the Bokor in the conceptual and institutional frame of the Church. The state agencies closely supervised the relationship between the Bokor and the hierarchy, and politically as well as operatively pushed the hierarchy into conflict with the Bokor, which conflict at this time should have been dealt with ecclesiastical disciplinary procedures combined with making normative statements from the part of the hierarchy on several ecclesiological problems present in Bulányi's writings.

3.3. Shift in the action plan: keeping unity by enforcing schism

In the light of the sources, the main concern of the State Office of Church Affairs in connection with the controversy on the Bokor was the unity of the bishops and the “public opinion” of the Church. As it appears in a situation report of the State Office of Church Affairs, “in the struggle against the schismatic Bulányi-movement, the Hungarian bishops act increasingly firmly and uniformly ... Cardinal László Lékai guardedly and successfully convinces the vast majority of the ecclesiastical public opinion”.¹⁵⁶ In another document the

¹⁵⁶ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 4/1982 (124.b)

ÁEH confirmed its policy as successful on the issue: “It can be asserted that our policy proved to be correct in leaving the solution to the bishops”.¹⁵⁷

What I would like to highlight here – besides noting the fact that similarly to State Security, the ÁEH tend to praise its own activity on a regular basis regardless of whether the declared objectives were really achieved or not – is the notion of the “schismatic” Bokor and the objective of a unified Church under the authority of the official hierarchy. Both notions reveal something profound about the main concerns of the implemented policy on the Bokor: the term schismatic (*skizmatikus*), or in other cases sectarian (*szektás*) and dissenter (*szakadár*), on the one hand signifies the effort of the state to interpret the activity and views of the Bokor in the register of ecclesiology rather than political dissent, and thereby keeping the issue within the conceptual framework of the Church. Conceptual but not institutional framework, since as it seems in light of the terminology that at this point the state seriously began to count with the option of choosing to push the Bokor toward a schism over isolating it as inner opposition of the hierarchy. On the other hand, together with the notion of the unified Church, the applied terms on the Bokor also show that in the eyes of the state the *political* threat of the Bokor was that by challenging the moral authority of the ruling church hierarchy, it attacked the established church-state relationships – whose sustainment in the given form was indeed an ultimate goal of the government. This is directly put by an analysis of the ÁEH, in which it is stated that “[The Bokor] propagates unpolitical attitude, but at the same time condemns the hierarchy because of its good relationships with the state”.¹⁵⁸ The way of composition implies that the ÁEH considered the anti-hierarchy polemical discourse of the Bokor as a political challenge, even if the agency acknowledged that the Bokor understood it in another frame. Harangozó from the

¹⁵⁷ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 4/b-1982 (124.b)

¹⁵⁸ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/1981 (119.b)

part of State Security emphasized the same aspect when argued that “they [the Bokor] reject the political cooperation between the official Church and state, and deny any right of the state in connection with the churches’ life”.¹⁵⁹

In light of the sources and events of 1982/1983, a shift in focus occurred in the policy towards the Bokor: the state chose the option of *keeping the unity of the Church by making the Bokor schismatic* over suppressing the movement in the institutional framework of the Church; however this decision was not made before 1981. Although an analysis of the ÁEH in 1981 considered the possible positive outcomes of this option (“The burden on the hierarchy would be eased if the Bokor continued to function as a sect, and in many ways it would also make easier for the state to deal with them”), it preferred to bring them back under the control of the hierarchy.¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, in 1980-1981 Bishop József Cserháti of Pécs, who was also the secretary of the Conference of Bishops, attempted to convince Bulányi to accept the supervision of the hierarchy over the Bokor.¹⁶¹ In February of 1981 Cserháti directly asked Bulányi whether he was willing to accept his authority or not. According to the relevant report, Bulányi did not give a direct answer, but the course of events implies that he refused the offer at the end.¹⁶² This was the last attempt from the part of the Hungarian bishops to avoid open confrontation with the Bokor by securing a place for the movement in the framework of the Hungarian Church.¹⁶³ After Cserháti’s unsuccessful

¹⁵⁹ MOL – XIX – B – 1 – x – 10/38/4 – 1982 (38.b)

¹⁶⁰ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/a – 1981 (119.b)

¹⁶¹ In his personal meetings with Bulányi, Cserháti suggested that he truly supported the activity of the base-communities, but they should change their names from “base-community” to “religious small community” because the state immediately attacks if it hears the former. ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Baranya – 81 – 209/2; ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Baranya – 98 – 282/7.

¹⁶² ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Baranya – 13 – 38/12.

¹⁶³ In 1982, the State Office of Church Affairs asserted that Cserháti, after his unsuccessful attempt to place the Bokor under hierarchical supervision, clearly sided with Lékai in the controversy. MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 4/b – 1982 (124.b) According to a report of the ÁEH, Cserháti in 1983 claimed that the case of the “Bulányism ... is first and foremost an issue of discipline”, by which he argued that the major problem with the Bokor is the denial of the hierarchical structure of the Church. Benyhe, “Bokor-State-Church” (Forthcoming), 63.

move, the state rethought its action plan. It seems that in late 1981 a new decision was made: the state indeed decided to enforce the schism in order to restore the unity and unquestioned authority of the hierarchy. The decision of enforcing a schism was realized in practice by operatively and politically pushing the course of events toward open confrontation between the Bokor and the hierarchy. I would like to cite here one report which underlies this new direction. According to a State Security report, in February of 1984 Bulányi asserted that he would not obey either the Hungarian hierarchy or the Holy See. He also added that “open confrontation has to be undertaken, even if it led to the fall of the movement”. What is really interesting is the remark of the officer in charge who proposed to “enforce operatively the views which drive to radical confrontation”.¹⁶⁴ In other words, State Security considered that a more spectacular clash between the Bokor and the official Church, the more that the state could gain politically from the situation.

I would like to stress the fact that during my research I did not find any source which explicitly confirms that the decision of enforcing a schism was consciously made by the government. However, what the state decided and implemented in order to remove the Bokor out of the way of “sound religious political conditions” fundamentally led the course of events in the direction of schism; and I am convinced that the government was aware of this fact. To be sure, they did not picture the probability that a large group of believers would leave the Church; at least no archival evidence suggests that. Instead, they anticipated that the majority of the movement would come back under the authority of the official Church in case of the stigmatization of Bulányi as a heretic took place from the part of the Bishops’ Conference and the Holy See. As Harangozó put it in 1982, “we need to facilitate

¹⁶⁴ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 32 – 34/8,9

the return of the polarized forces [the Bokor, among other neo-protestant groups] under the influence of the Churches' progressive line".¹⁶⁵

In the light of the state's changing action plan, the condemnation of Bulányi's views from the part of the Hungarian Bishops' Conference in 1982 represents the first step in the path which would have led to the Bokor's tearing away from the Catholic Church. Not later than in fall of 1981, it was settled that Bulányi's views would be investigated and condemned by a three-membered committee from the Hungarian Bishops' Conference. According to a report submitted in late October of 1981 – two months before the first hearing was held –, Lékai expected that Bulányi would not appear in front of the committee or would refuse to answer the questions. The report anticipated that in either case Bulányi would be suspended from every priestly and ecclesiastical duty.¹⁶⁶ The decision of Lékai at least partially was the result of direct political pressure. In June of 1981 "the leadership of the Office", as an ÁEH report testifies, "consulted with Cardinal Lékai and a few members of the Bishops' Conference about the relationships of Church and State ... the leadership of our Office drew attention to the dangerous activity of the Bulányists ... and emphasized the responsibility of the Bishops' Conference". The pressure was not pointless: "Lékai expressed his agreement and his readiness to solve the issue".¹⁶⁷

After the first hearing on fifth of December, a report asserted that the leaders of the "illegal organizations" were frightened by the procedure. The State Security from this respect urged to "support the anti-opposition (*illegáció-ellenes*) ecclesiastical measures

¹⁶⁵ MOL – XIX – B – 1 – x – 10/38/4 – 1982. (38.b.)

¹⁶⁶ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 171 – 231/12.

¹⁶⁷ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 4/b – 1982 (124.b)

operatively”.¹⁶⁸ The Subdivision III/III had a good opportunity to do so when an informant reported that Bulányi and his friends were concerned that the committee would raise moral-theological issues as well, from which they did not want to withdraw. Instead, they planned to show their openness for dialogue and compromise in dogmatic issues. As a counter-move, State Security decided to influence the members of the committee to bring up moral-theological issues and thereby reduce the probability of any rapprochement.¹⁶⁹ In cases when a bishop chose to act before the final result of the procedure of Bulányi, the State Security also made efforts to take advantage of the situation. For instance, Bishop József Bánk of Vác immediately after the first hearing of Bulányi initiated a disciplinary procedure against four “Bulányist” priests. The report dealing with the information proposed to help the “efficiency” of these procedures.¹⁷⁰ As a result, next year Bishop Bánk seriously thought of sending these particular priests in question to retirement, but the punishment was only realized in 1983.¹⁷¹

The next hearing of Bulányi in late February of 1982, accordingly to the expectations from the part of state and Lékai himself, resulted in no consensus. In the same month, the Political Committee of the MSZMP instructed the ÁEH to “provide Cardinal Lékai and the Conference of Bishops support in consistently pursuing their actions against the Bulányi-movement ... and to ask the Vatican to clearly take sides with the Hungarian

¹⁶⁸ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 197 – 265/5.

¹⁶⁹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 199 – 267/74. It is worth noting that the committee consisted of three well-known Hungarian theologians and biblical scholars: László Vanyó, Ferenc Gál and Huba Rózsa. Péter Erdő, the current Archbishop of Esztergom served as notary during the hearings.

¹⁷⁰ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III – 198 – 266/6.

¹⁷¹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 68/3/1982. The report stated that four priests, Endre Halász, László Szegedi, Barna Barcza and László Bisztray were sent to retirement by Bishop Bánk as a punishment for their participation in the Bokor. However, this did not happen. In the light of the original report (ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 68 – 108/9/1982) it is evident that the information was obtained second-hand from the environment of Bánk, and even the informant was unsure about reliability of the rumor. In fact, Halász and Bisztray were sent to retirement only one year later, in the May of 1983, while Szegedi was not punished – probably because in the meantime he left the Bokor. The case sheds light on the fact that the State Security in a number of cases worked with false information.

episcopacy”. In the same document the Political Committee threatened the bishops that in case they failed to solve the issue with the help of political means provided by the state, the state would apply administrative measures.¹⁷² Under this political pressure the Conference of Bishops declared in March that the procedure found six points in which Bulányi’s views were false and called for his withdrawal on these points. The ÁEH considered this development serious success: “the episcopacy acted uniformly against the ... dissenters, whereas previously the conflict only had taken place between the Cardinal [Lékai] himself and the Bulányi-movement”.¹⁷³ When Bulányi’s withdrawal did not happen until June, the Conference of Bishops closed its investigation and submitted the case to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In addition, each bishop prohibited Bulányi from celebrating masses publically, to preach and to deliver sacraments and sacramental in his diocese.¹⁷⁴

Beside its own political efforts, the ÁEH implied that the scandal at the annual “Nagymaros Meeting” in May of 1982 pushed the bishops toward their unified decision.¹⁷⁵ At the event Lékai refused to concelebrate with Bulányi and another “Bulányist” priest, László Kovács (normally all of the present priests concelebrated the mass together). During the mass, a follower of Bulányi loudly called on those who did not agree with Lékai to leave the church. About 30-40 persons left, and continued the celebration outside with Bulányi. Imre Miklós, the head of the ÁEH, reported to the Central Committee of MSZMP that “the harsh provocation” of the Bulányists “proved that they were becoming more impatient and

¹⁷² Szilvia Köbel, *“Oszd meg és uralkodj”*. *A Pártállam és az egyházak* [“Divide and Rule”. The Party-State and the Churches] (Budapest: Rejtjel, 2005), 141.

¹⁷³ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/1982 (124.b)

¹⁷⁴ Benyhe, “Bokor-State-Church” (Forthcoming), 43.

¹⁷⁵ The “Nagymaros Meetings” from 1970/1971 represented the most important – and the most spectacular with their few thousand young participants – semi-illegal event in the life of active catholic communities. The original initiation came from Béla Balás, a prominent priest of the grass-root “Regnum” (see later). Basically all prominent figures of the catholic underground had ties with these meetings. The events gained official recognition from the part of the Church in 1980, when Lékai at the first time visited the meeting.

nervous in their struggle against the ecclesiastical hierarchy”, but they “made serious mistakes”. Their provocation could be evaluated as unsuccessful “not only because just an insignificant portion of the attendees” left the mass, “but they violated important moral values” which violations were “firmly rejected” by “the majority of the catholic public opinion”. Miklós closed his report by stating that “the happenings at Nagymaros facilitated the unified action of the episcopacy”.¹⁷⁶

3.4. Conclusion

To conclude the chapter, in late 1981 the state changed its action plan on the Bokor a shift which however did not affect the overall objective of the religious policy regarding the Catholic Church: keeping the unity of the Church by supporting the authority of the hierarchy over its hierarchical structure for the sake of maintaining the state-dominated status quo in church-state relationships. Indeed, the state intervened in the inner dynamics of the Hungarian Church in order to enforce schism – or “let” the schism happen as an ÁEH report put it¹⁷⁷ – between the Bokor and the rest of the Church. The intervention pushed the bishops and also the Bokor toward bitter and spectacular confrontations, which in 1982 resulted in the ecclesiastical condemnation of Bulányi’s views by the Hungarian Bishops’ Conference. To make the schism complete, however, the “positive” decision of the Holy See was needed.

¹⁷⁶ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 4/1982 (124.b)

¹⁷⁷ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/a – 1981 (119.b)

Chapter 4. The Bokor-movement and the mechanisms of political repression

In the previous chapter I argued that after 1981 a shift can be observed in the policy of the state regarding the Bokor-movement. Whilst prior to 1981 the state agencies were convinced that the issue could be solved by the standard repressive measures of the socialist religious policy – subversion, defamation, and ecclesiastical disciplinary procedures –, in 1982 a new action plan began to be put into practice. According to this schema, the state agencies made efforts to push the controversy toward an open schism between the Bokor and the rest of the Catholic Church. This goal, however, without the official and active contribution of the Holy See could not be realized. Therefore, in this chapter firstly I focus on the role of the Vatican in the controversy, at least as it was perceived by the Hungarian government. Secondly, I take into account by what means the state intervened into the dynamics of the Hungarian Catholic “underground” in order to enhance the isolation of the Bokor. The third section is in turn concerned with the relationship of the Bokor and the political opposition of the 1980s, and reveals how State Security attempted to instrumentalize the apolitical ideology of the movement for its own ends. The three topics are integral aspects of the political efforts I analyzed in the previous chapter, however, in a sense they also go beyond the particular case of the Bokor, and the domestic religious policy in general: the first section offers profound insights on the political mechanisms applied in order to influence the decision-making processes of an international actor, the Vatican; the third in turn sheds some light on the concerns and fieldwork of State Security on the eve of the democratic transition.

4.1. The Holy See under political pressure: the issue of the Bokor and the Vatican from the perspective of the Hungarian government

The available sources suggest that the Holy See did not really know anything specific about the Hungarian grass-roots in general and the Bokor in particular before 1979. The first time the issue appears in relation with the Holy See was in February of 1979. A report mentions that the Provincial Superior of the Piarist Order in Hungary, István Albert, received information from the ex-general of the order, Vince Tomek, according to which at the meeting between the representatives of the Vatican and Hungary the issue of the Bokor was raised. The report does not specify who raised the issue, but it seems plausible that the idea came from the representatives of Hungary. Cardinal Poggi, the representative of the Holy See, said that the Bokor had to subjugate itself to the “official ecclesiastical expectations” and to perform its pastoral work in the parochial frames.¹⁷⁸ This was a clear standpoint, and it seems the Holy See did not change it at all in the course of the following years. Instead, it seems that the Holy See, and especially the General of the Piarists, Angel Ruiz, attempted to avoid the clash within the Hungarian Church by trying to convince Bulányi to go to the Vatican. In December of 1979, Ruiz for the first time asked Bulányi through the hierarchical channels of the order about whether he was willing to move to Rome or not.¹⁷⁹ In October of 1983, Ruiz again suggested that Bulányi should leave the

¹⁷⁸ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 48 – 50/15.

¹⁷⁹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 255 – 281/5. In the same month another report claimed that General Ruiz ordered Bulányi to leave Hungary for Rome. In addition, the report proposed that the “condemnatory opinion” of the General had to be publicized operatively. ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 269 – 299/5. Since this measure was not realized, moreover in the following reports nothing mentions this Ruiz’s letter again, it seems that State Security collected false information or misinterpreted something. It can be also assumed that State Security could not either control or take advantage of the correspondence between Bulányi and Ruiz: After Bulányi’s first hearing in 1982, the General admonished Bulányi in writing to be obedient. The relating report proposed to seize the General’s letter in order to use it against the Bokor; however no evidence suggests that the operative measure was realized. ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 14 – 8/10

country for the Vatican where his reputation had deteriorated significantly.¹⁸⁰ In all cases, Bulányi refused the offer.

In the light of the sources, it can be ascertained that the Bokor had very limited connections to the Vatican. Before the investigation of the Sacred Congregation on Bulányi's views, the hierarchical structure of the Piarist Order was the only quasi-direct link between the leadership of the movement and the Holy See. It is worth noting the ambivalent situation of Bulányi in the Piarist Order. Officially, due to the legal restrictions on the number of monks in permitted religious orders, in the time period which is covered by the scope of my inquiry, he was not an active member of the order, and it seems he did not want to change this situation when it was possible. According to a report, he refused Angel Ruiz's offer to reenter the order in 1979.¹⁸¹ To be sure, Bulányi gave a very different interpretation on the nature of this offer.¹⁸² What can be asserted is that Bulányi considered himself a Piarist monk: he called the leaders of the order his superiors, and signed his writings with the Piarist signature ("Sch. P."). Bulányi's ambivalent relation to the order provided him a certain degree of freedom and protection: although it seems that he did not feel bound by the instructions of his Hungarian superiors, by which he reduced the probability that the party-state might instrumentalize the domestic hierarchical chain of command of the order against him, yet he could still count on the official and personal goodwill of the Piarist General. In light of the fact that a considerably large number of State Security reports were concerned with the relationships between Bulányi and the Generals up to the mid-1980s, the advantage

¹⁸⁰ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 146 – 208/11.

¹⁸¹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – I.5. – 4/5.

¹⁸² "István Albert instructed me to move into the friary, give up my work concerning small-communities, and manage the archive instead. Then I asked him that he had ordered me in the name of Jesus Christ to give up my apostolic duty ... He did not order me ... despite the strong wish of the regime." György Bulányi, *Egyházrend: Erény-e az engedelmesség?* [Church Order: Is Obedience a Virtue?], *Egyházforum Könyvei* 3 (Luzern: Teológiai-Pasztorációs Tanulmányok M. Központ, 1989), 170.

resulted from Bulányi's unsettled status proved to be an unexpected obstacle to the party-state's interests in the following years.

After the ecclesiastical procedure in Hungary on the views of Bulányi, the case came under the authority of the Holy See. The Sacred Congregation, however, started its inquiry only in 1984. In the meantime, the main concern of the state agencies was to maintain its achievement and influence the representatives of the Holy See to take a "positive" stand in the case on the side of the Hungarian episcopacy. They did so partially because in 1982 Bulányi affirmed that – with reason – either the bishops did not get any encouragement from the Vatican to disband the Bokor or the Sacred Congregation did not want to get involved. In his understanding, the Holy See only desired to keep the unity of the Church. State Security may have had similar concerns, since in the evaluation of the relevant report efforts were proposed to influence the Vatican in order to clearly take side against the Bokor.¹⁸³

On the part of the State Office of Church Affairs, a document in 1982 claimed that the efforts of the Office were successful in involving the Vatican in the solution, which helped the Hungarian bishops with a "clear statement". The document adds that the Vatican only gradually recognized that the "schismatic activity threatens the mutually achieved results and obstructs the solution of emerging problems".¹⁸⁴ The "clear statement" could refer to the *ad limina* visit of the Hungarian bishops to the Vatican in October of 1982, where John Paul II declared that any base-community must be in communion with the bishops – at least Casaroli later interpreted the words of the pope in such a way.¹⁸⁵ It could

¹⁸³ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 193 – 229/7.

¹⁸⁴ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 4/1982 (124.b)

¹⁸⁵ Agostino Casaroli, "Szilárd egységben a helyi egyházzal, közösségben a püspökkel" [In Unity with the Local Church, In Communion with the Bishop], *Új Ember*, May 22, 1983. Csaba Szabó cites a report on the meeting of the ÁEH with Archbishop József Bánk. The ÁEH raised questions about the *ad limina* visit,

also mean that the ÁEH anticipated such a resolution on the part of the Holy See as attested in Casaroli's letter to the Hungarian bishops a year later in 1983. According to an ÁEH report, Casaroli indeed confirmed in 1981 that "the Bishops' Conference was competent regarding the dissenter movement [the Bokor], and the Holy See would support its decision".¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, what is crucial here is the indication from the part of the government that the Vatican accepted that the good relationship between Hungary and the Holy See, as well as between the party-state and the Hungarian Church, were more important than a group of believers led by an unknown and in many ways suspicious radical figure.

Without access to the sources of the Holy See on the matter, it is hard to decide whether the Vatican really needed the political "encouragement" of the Hungarian government to take a side with the bishops. The concern in their case may have been that they were well aware that it was more than suspicious that the Hungarian government was so much in favor of the *ecclesiastical* condemnation of Bulányi's views. Nonetheless, it seems – in contrast to the Sacred Congregation which acted upon the writings of Bulányi – in the circles responsible for the foreign policy of the Vatican, the objective of keeping the ecclesiastical unity and maintaining good diplomatic relations with Hungary bore primary significance. In 1983, Cardinal Casaroli, the head of the foreign affairs of the Holy See, in line with his earlier promise sent a letter to the Hungarian episcopacy, in which he claimed that:

however Bánk did not mention with a single word that the issue of the base-communities was brought up in Rome. Considering that in the diocese of Vác, which was led by Bánk in these years, the controversy over the Bokor generated serious tensions, and the ÁEH was certainly interested in this aspect of the visit, this is a quite strange fact. Csaba Szabó, "Egyházpolitika Helsinki szellemében (1982). Bánk József érsek-püspök 'beszélgetése' az ÁEH képviselőjével" [Ecclesiastical Policy in the Spirit of Helsinki. The 'conversation' of Archbishop József Bánk with the representative of the ÁEH] *ArchivNet*. 3, no. 5 (2003), http://www.archivnet.hu/pp_hir_nyomtat.php?hir_id=338. Accessed May 8, 2014.

¹⁸⁶ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 4/b – 1982 (124.b)

“aside from the doctrinal issues ... these communities [the base-communities of the Bokor] elude themselves from the authority of the legitimate bishops ... The Holy See, in sharing with the concerns of the Hungarian episcopacy, confirms and approves by its authority everything that You [the Hungarian Bishops’ Conference] decided on these ‘base-communities’, since the Holy See is primarily driven by the concern to preserve the unity of the Hungarian Church”.

The letter was publicized by Lékai in the official Catholic journal *Új Ember*.¹⁸⁷ A few days later it was reported that the letter caused bitterness in the leadership of the Bokor. They highlighted that the Vatican sold them out to the episcopacy and the state, and that it had to be acknowledged that the existence of the Bokor was an obstacle in the relationships of the Vatican and Hungary. They also mentioned that negative public opinion was increasing around them. Nonetheless, they affirmed that the Bokor should hold on.¹⁸⁸

The political pressure on General Ruiz also increased in 1983, and the related efforts were supported by State Security which attempted to monitor and control the correspondence between Bulányi and Ruiz with varying degrees of success. In March of 1983, the State Security reported that Bulányi had received a letter from Ruiz in which the General provided his support for him.¹⁸⁹ It seems that the officers were puzzled by the fact that Bulányi had a channel to Ruiz which they did not know of and could not supervise. Only in October did it become clear for State Security that a foreign Jesuit smuggled Bulányi’s letters through the border and delivered them to Ruiz. The name of the Jesuit was immediately put onto the prohibitory list.¹⁹⁰ The hierarchy had similar concerns about the uncensored contact between Bulányi and Ruiz. At the meeting of the Bishops’ Conference in September of 1983, Lékai asserted that he would attempt to convince Ruiz personally, since he was concerned that Ruiz may send letters to Bulányi on his own, which could be easily interpreted by Bulányi as he liked. Lékai added that he would also meet Casaroli on

¹⁸⁷ Casaroli, “In Unity with the Local Church, In Communion with the Bishop.”

¹⁸⁸ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 97 – 111/9.

¹⁸⁹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 53 – 63/12.

¹⁹⁰ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 17 – 19/13.

the matter.¹⁹¹ This was not the only unsuccessful attempt to place General Ruiz under pressure in order to make him rethink his support for Bulányi. In the same month, the Provincial Supervisor of the Piarist Order in Hungary, László Varga, in a letter asked Ruiz to stop supporting Bulányi because his activity is “harmful” for the order.¹⁹² The state agencies also put direct political pressure on Ruiz, among other representatives of the Vatican. A report of the ÁEH from 1981 affirmed that “on our official negotiations” with the Holy See “we brought up the dangerousness of the Bulányi-movement to Cardinal Casaroli, Cardinal Poggi and General Ruiz”.¹⁹³ It can be assumed that the political pressure from the part of the Hungarian government was not lifted in the following years either.

As a result of these efforts, the issue soon generated an inner debate within the Vatican. Ruiz was accused by the Bishops’ Conference of giving a false interpretation in an interview on the aforementioned letter of Casaroli. According to the statement of the bishops, Ruiz claimed that Casaroli’s letter only served the cause of calming the Hungarian government down, but it did not aim at the condemnation of Bulányi and his communities. Due to the protest of the Hungarian bishops and Casaroli himself, Ruiz had to withdraw his “false interpretation” in January of 1984 in a letter sent to Casaroli, Lékai and Bulányi, in which, however, he kept insisting that as Piarist General his duty was to defend Bulányi as long as the Sacred Congregation do not declare him a heretic.¹⁹⁴ It seems that Ruiz himself was not really optimistic in connection with the possible outcomes of Bulányi’s case. In March of 1984, the General outlined in writing three possible solutions to Bulányi on the

¹⁹¹ ÁBTL – 2.7.3. – Szakelosztó – 6 – 7/641/83.

¹⁹² ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 151 – 174/8.

¹⁹³ MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 1/1981 (119.d)

¹⁹⁴ Here I use the work of Havasy, since there is no other source on the Ruiz’s letter to Casaroli, yet it is important to mention the case. The available material – announcements of the Bishops’ Conference on Ruiz’s statements in the journal *Új Ember* (on January 1, 1984 and March 25, 1984) – supports the validity of the particular text cited by Havasy as Ruiz’s letter. Gyula Havasy, *A magyar katolikusok szenvedései, 1944-1989*. [The Sufferings of the Hungarian Catholics 1944-1989] (Budapest: Private Publishing, 1990), 261-263.

ongoing inquiry of the Sacred Congregation: a hearing in Budapest, a hearing in Rome, or Bulányi would go to study in Rome for a year, and in the meantime his case would be investigated and settled there. The General advised Bulányi to choose from the latter two options. In his response, however, Bulányi again reasserted that he would stay in Hungary.¹⁹⁵ In June, Ruiz traveled personally to Hungary and assured Bulányi about his support, and asked him to compile a material from his works that he could deliver to the Congregation.¹⁹⁶ However, a month later, in July, Ruiz's mandate expired, and Bulányi lost a valuable and, in fact, his only ally in the Vatican.

The concerns of General Ruiz were soon validated. In November of 1984, Ruiz, as his last act in the case, informed Bulányi that in the current state of its inquiry, the opinion of the Sacred Congregation was that the theology of Bulányi lacked any scholarly basis, and he collected his theses from the theological journal *Consilium*. Therefore, this time the Sacred Congregation considered the option of inviting Bulányi to Rome to study. They asked for Ruiz's help in convincing Bulányi, but the ex-General refused since he was already informed of the fears of Bulányi about the possibility that the government would not let him back into Hungary.¹⁹⁷ The official phase of the Congregation's inquiry began in 1985, when Polikárp Zakar, on behalf of the Sacred Congregation, came to Hungary in order to meet with Bulányi personally. This provided an opportunity for the Subdivision III/III to intervene. After the meeting Zakar asked Bulányi for strict secrecy, however, Bulányi gave an interview three days later to the West-German TV channel ADR.¹⁹⁸ He asked the interviewer to hold back the interview until the Sacred Congregation publicized its standpoint on his views. Nevertheless, the State Security proposed to leak the manipulated

¹⁹⁵ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 43 – 45/8.

¹⁹⁶ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 108 – 112/10.

¹⁹⁷ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 223 – 231/15.

¹⁹⁸ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 120 – 145/9.

information according to which Bulányi did not obey the direct request of Zakar to the Holy See.¹⁹⁹ Two months later, in September, the new General of the Piarist Order, José Balcells came to Hungary without preliminary notification for the authorities. Balcells intended to meet with Bulányi, Lékai and also with the representatives of the ÁEH. During his visit, the General was under operative surveillance.²⁰⁰ When Balcells next came to Hungary in February of 1986, he carried the official assessment of the Sacred Congregation on Bulányi's views.²⁰¹ As Lékai was informed by the Holy See prior to the visit, he was asked to read the document, but not publicize it without the approval of Cardinal Ratzinger.²⁰² This request did not bear much significance, since the General immediately informed ÁEH about the decision of the Sacred Congregation.

Since the reports of State Security only mention that this or that letter was sent or arrived, I do not deal with the content of the correspondence between Ratzinger and Bulányi in detail. I would like to highlight only one aspect here which has relevance: in line with the already mentioned religious-political context imposed by the socialist party-state, Bulányi attempted to justify his views in front of the Congregation by constantly referring to the collaborative and unprincipled deeds of the Hungarian Church leadership, that is to say to interpret the whole case in the context of blurring political, ecclesiological, theological and moral dimensions.²⁰³ The Sacred Congregation was not interested in that. Its only aim was to analyze the views of Bulányi in the light of Catholic doctrine.²⁰⁴ Bulányi, by constantly referring to the authority of individual conscience established in the apostolic constitution

¹⁹⁹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 133 – 150/8.

²⁰⁰ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 159 – 185/16.

²⁰¹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 25 – 28/13.

²⁰² ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 23 – 25/12.

²⁰³ “The Letter of Pater Bulányi to Cardinal Ratzinger” (1986), in György Bulányi, *Nagypénteki levél* [Letter on Good Friday] (Budapest: Irotron, 1995), 25-118.

²⁰⁴ “The Sacred Congregation would like to remind you ... that it is not among its duties to get involved in a theological debate with you ... [but] exclusively to examine your work from the perspective of doctrine.” “The Letter of Cardinal Ratzinger to Pater Bulányi”. (1986), in Bulányi, *Letter on Good Friday*, 123.

Dignitatis Humanae, intended to legitimize its objections against the morally corrupted and politically controlled episcopacy. From the viewpoint of the Sacred Congregation, in this case the reference to conscience was nothing more than just an attempt to relativize the commitment of Bulányi to the Magisterium of the Church.²⁰⁵ This dichotomy was not overcome by the parties in the course of the correspondence, instead the narratives continued to bifurcate on other points as well – for instance when Bulányi criticized the procedure undertaken by the Sacred Congregation, which was considered – with reason – by the Congregation as a direct assault on its authority.²⁰⁶ The pro-longed inquiry and correspondence was not in the best interests of the Hungarian state, whose goal was an open condemnation and schism, but did not make any damage either. While the accusations against Bulányi from the part of the Hungarian bishops were not lifted, the Bokor remained stigmatized.

In conclusion, after the condemnation of Bulányi's views by the Bishops' Conference it became urgent for the party-state to enforce the Holy See to make statements in the favor of the bishops regarding the controversy. In the light of the sources it can be ascertained that in order to do so, the state agencies provided political and operative support for the Hungarian hierarchy. These efforts were successful in no small part because the diplomacy of the Holy See headed by Casaroli found the objective of maintaining the good relationship with Hungary decisively significant. In their eyes these relationships secured the political conditions in which the Hungarian Church with its full hierarchical structure could operate relatively freely. However, it seems that the political and operative pressure of

²⁰⁵ “The Letter of Cardinal Ratzinger to Pater Bulányi,” (1986), in Bulányi, *Letter on Good Friday*, 19.

²⁰⁶ “The Letter of Pater Bulányi to Cardinal Ratzinger,” (1986), 115-117.; “The Letter of Cardinal Ratzinger to Pater Bulányi,” (1986), in Bulányi, *Letter on Good Friday*, 119-126. It is worth noting that the case was only solved in 1997, when the Congregation finally sent Bulányi a formula to sign, in which the reference to conscience was included.

the Hungarian government was not strong enough to hasten the procedure of the Sacred Congregation, which initiated long correspondence with Bulányi, which lasted for years without clear-cut result. On the one hand, for the Hungarian government, which systemically aimed to push the events toward an open schism, this was a relative failure. On the other, it seems that stressing the simple fact that the Congregation investigated Bulányi's views, combined with other political and operative methods, was just enough efficient to keep the Bokor isolated on the margins of the Church.

4.2. Operative interventions into the Catholic underground

Parallel to the state's efforts to enhance the controversy between the Bokor and the Catholic hierarchy, the Subdivision III/III also made steps to facilitate the isolation of the Bokor in its own hinterland, in the unofficial and illegal Catholic underground. In doing so, the operative measures heavily built on personal disagreements, rivalries, anomalies and repulsions – in such an environment in which basically everybody knew each other this was a rather logical and, as it appears, successful mode of intervention. In light of the sources it seems that the focus of State Security regarding the Bokor's relation to other grass-roots was mainly concerned with the initially positive and relatively close relationship between the Bokor and the Regnum-movement.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ The Regnum Marianum officially was founded in 1902, when the organization was registered as a Mary-congregation in Rome. In the interwar Hungary, Regnum had important role in the popular scout movement. In 1951, similarly to other Catholic organizations, the Regnum was banned. The organization continued its activity illegally, which was retaliated by the communist regime in three trials in 1961, 1965 and in 1971. For more information on the repressive measures against the Regnum see: Krisztián Ungváry, "Konceptios per a Kádár-rendszerben: A Hagemann-ügy." [Show Trial under the Kádár-regime: The Hagemann Case], *Beszélő* 12, no. 2 (2007), <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/konceptios-per-a-kadar-rendszerben-a-hagemann-uegy>. Accessed May 13, 2014.

In May of 1979, Bulányi encouraged the priests of the Regnum-movement to be more active in promoting their activity publically.²⁰⁸ Not surprisingly, a report a few days later diagnosed that the Bokor and the Regnum were dangerously close to each other.²⁰⁹ In July of 1979, Bulányi had a fight with Béla Balás,²¹⁰ one of the major figures of the Regnum-movement. As a measure, the relevant report suggested that the conflicts and disagreements had to be enhanced operatively in order to prevent the fusion of the two organizations.²¹¹ Similar proposed measures appear basically in all reports focusing on the relation of Bokor and other grass-roots, and they are very much in line with the aforementioned situation report of State Security in which it was claimed that through its agent network, State Security made efforts to enhance theological, conceptual and personal controversies.²¹²

By late 1981 the probability of any closer cooperation between the Bokor and Regnum was basically eliminated. In November of 1980 it was reported that the leadership of the two groups embroiled in a serious controversy. According to the relevant report, the prominent priests of the Regnum accused Bulányi and his followers of not adhering to the frame of the Church.²¹³ In the following year, Cardinal Lékai, in an interview given to an Austrian newspaper *Die Furche*, condemned the Bokor, and at the same time he praised the Regnum for its work. It is interesting to note that State Security did not share Lékai's optimistic view on the activity of the Regnum. Szilveszter Harangozó, the already

²⁰⁸ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 100 –105/9.

²⁰⁹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 119 –126/7

²¹⁰ Béla Balás was ordained in 1965. In 1977 he was appointed as the parochial pastor of the small village Bajót. In light of the following events it is interesting that he mentioned to an informant in 1981 that Lékai was angry with him since Balás did not agree to displace the “Nagymaros meetings” to Esztergom. (ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Komárom – 69). In 1992 Balás was inaugurated as bishop, and one year later he was appointed to the bishopric of Kaposvár.

²¹¹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 161 – 172/3.

²¹² Gábor Tabajdi, *A III/III. krónikája* [The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2013), 289-290.

²¹³ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 191.

mentioned high-ranked officer of Subdivision III/III, in his situation reports in 1979 and 1982 consequently counted the Regnum together with the Bokor in the category of “clerical reaction” considering them on the same level of dangerousness.²¹⁴ Fashioning the Regnum as the opposite of the problematic Bokor did not describe fairly the viewpoint of the state on the two organizations, thus it can be argued that this differentiation may have been Lékai’s own idea. Yet it served well the purpose of isolating the Bokor from other unofficial groups within the Church. As was reported to State Security, the leadership of the Bokor was strongly disappointed when they heard the news of Lékai’s statement.²¹⁵ It is not surprising that it was reported in October of 1981 that Bulányi and Balás had a fight again with each other.²¹⁶ In the same year, Balás mentioned to an agent of the State Security that at first sight the teachings of Bulányi was pleasing and convincing for him, but his opinion changed over time and he identified the defects and errors in Bulányi’s views.²¹⁷ Balás did not specify what kind of errors he recognized, but in the light of the ongoing debate, it can be supposed that he was concerned with ecclesiological or theological issues.

The relationship of the Bokor to other Catholic grass-roots and prominent figures of the Catholic “underground” further deteriorated in the course of the ecclesiastical condemnation of Bulányi’s views by the Bishops’ Conference in 1982. The scandal at the annual “Nagymaros Meeting” in May of 1982, made this situation even worse.²¹⁸ In June, Ödön Lénárd, himself a piarist monk who spent eighteen years in prison for alleged anti-state activity, fell out with Bulányi and declared that he no longer wanted to participate in

²¹⁴ Tabajdi, *The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.*, 288; 329.

²¹⁵ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – 11 – 15/4.

²¹⁶ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 165 – 225/16.

²¹⁷ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Komarom – 69.

²¹⁸ ÁBTL – NOIJ – Komarom – 35.

common activity with Bulányi.²¹⁹ In July of 1983, the representatives of the Bokor asked the priests of the Regnum to express their solidarity with the condemned movement, but they refused to do so. Among themselves, the priests of the Regnum argued that the Bokor with its teaching went far beyond acceptable limits, and they found that a certain sectarian extremism characterized the inner circle of Bulányi.²²⁰ The less significant group of Ferenc Tomka took one step further when they cut off relationships with the Bokor.²²¹

In the light of the cited sources, the purpose of deepening the breaches between the Bokor and other grass-roots by enhancing personal, ecclesiological and theological controversies seems to be an important procedure of State Security in isolating the “Bulányists” within the Church. Obviously, it is hard to judge to what extent the State Security was responsible for the quickly deteriorating relationships of the Bokor with other grass-roots. What is evident in the sources is that the State Security counted the course of events as the result of its own operative intervention. In 1984, in a presentation for the Ministry of Interior, Harangozó ascertained that setting the Bokor and the Regnum-movement against each other meant great success for State Security.²²² After this, the reports in the file of the confidential investigation “Crows” do not deal with the relations of the Bokor and other grass-roots anymore in detail. The assumption seems plausible to me that State Security evaluated the degree of the Bokor’s isolation within the Church conveniently sufficient, and under the circumstance of the prolonged investigation of the Sacred Congregation on the views of Bulányi it was unnecessary to generate and maintain

²¹⁹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 109 – 130/3

²²⁰ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 98 – 113/8; ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 114 – 130/9,10.

²²¹ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 118 – 133/8. It is not absolutely clear from the report whether the “group of Tomka” refers to the small Hungarian “Focolare” community, in which Tomka was also active, or simply refers to an independent group organized by him.

²²² Tabajdi, *The Chronicle of Subdivision III/III.*, 354.

tensions artificially: they were already present without the constant operative intervention of State Security.

4.3. Bokor and the political opposition of the 1980s

As already demonstrated, the policy of the party-state in connection with Catholic grass-roots, and especially the Bokor, aimed to keep the activity of these organizations in the conceptual framework of the Catholic Church as “inner opposition” (*belső ellenzék*) or, in the case of the Bokor, as a “schismatic” (*szizmatikus*) movement. This effort partially served the purpose of limiting the probability that these religious currents might find connections with the political opposition of the regime. As an ÁEH document put it in 1987, “our efforts in terms of ecclesiastical policy from the beginning aimed to prevent any movement which violated our laws and the real interests of the Church from disturbing the peace of our society ... [and prevent] that the conflict between the hierarchy and opposition movement from becoming a direct confrontation between the schismatic group and the state”.²²³

The issue for the first time appears in the file of the investigation “Crows” in 1981, when two figures of the “civic opposition” approached Bulányi to offer cooperation. Since Bulányi turned the suggestion aside by arguing that the Bokor did not intend to seize political power,²²⁴ State Security did not take additional measures in connection with this. It is worth noting that the Bokor considered itself as a profoundly non-political organization,

²²³ Köbel, “*Divide and rule*”, 145.

²²⁴ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III – 3 – 4/6. The report only mentions the two persons by their codename (“Miller” and “Friend”), however Harangozó’s presentation given in 1982 in the Ministry of Interior reveals that the two individuals were Miklós Haraszti and György Konrád, both of them well-known figures of the opposition circles in the 1980s. MOL – XIX – B – 1 – x – 10/38/4 – 1982.

and even its deeply political critique of the established church-state relationships was understood by its followers in religious and moral rather than genuinely political terms.

Until 1988, when the decay of the communist regime became evident, direct political issues did not appear in the reports of State Security on the movement. It is hard to decide whether the Bokor really did not deal with such political issues before, or in the course of the decay of the regime, the State Security became more sensitive to such topics. In my view, either option is plausible. In April of 1988, for the first time, Bulányi gave a “political analysis of the situation” as the report put it. In doing so, according to the report, Bulányi argued that “if the government wants to stabilize its power, it must listen to opinions coming from outside of the party-aristocracy ... this regime ... has to be replaced with a new consensus, and then maybe the ideas of the Bokor can be realized”.²²⁵ A month later, the leadership of the Bokor discussed the appeal of the Network of Free Initiations.²²⁶ It seems from the report that the leadership of the movement was not unified on the issue. József Merza among others signed the document as private persons. Bulányi asserted that he, as the leader of the Bokor, would not sign it for now. As a proposed measure, State Security planned to “strengthen the influence of the representatives of the apolitical line”.²²⁷ Finally Bulányi and Merza together attended the meeting of the Network of Free Initiations; however Bulányi was not pleased with what he heard. According to the relevant report, “Bulányi did not suggest attendance at the demonstration organized in the memory of Imre Nagy for the members of the Bokor, because of the extremist mood experienced by him at

²²⁵ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III – 79-82/9.

²²⁶ The Network of Free Initiations was founded on May 1, 1988 in order to coordinate the cooperation of different groups of the political opposition. The organization half a year later was transformed into the liberal political party Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ).

²²⁷ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 103 – 106/4.

the meeting, and because of the non-violent and apolitical standpoint of the movement”.²²⁸ This was the last report in connection with the relationship of the Bokor to the political opposition.

In the light of these sources it can be ascertained that the party-state was very much interested in isolating the Bokor from the networks of the increasingly active political opposition. In order to do so, the State Security attempted to intervene in the inner dynamics of the Bokor to enforce the apolitical attitude within the movement. To be sure, Bulányi, and the Bokor in general, did not need much encouragement, since the whole identity of the movement was partially based on the principles of non-violence and non-politics, the two of which in the ideology of the Bokor basically meant the same. These religiously-based ideological premises prevented the Bokor from transforming the movement into an organization with direct political purposes.

4.4. Conclusion

By taking into account the available sources of socialist state agencies, in this chapter I attempted to shed light on three interrelated fields of the Bokor’s history, where the repressive mechanisms applied against the movement are clearly graspable. As a result two main conclusions emerge. Firstly, these repressive mechanisms were undoubtedly successful in isolating the Bokor within and outside the Catholic Church. By putting the Holy See under political pressure, the Hungarian government achieved to involve the Vatican into the controversy. The Vatican took sides officially with the Hungarian episcopacy and thereby contributed to the preservation of status quo in the Hungarian church-state relationships. In addition, at least partially due to the operative intervention of

²²⁸ ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 118 – 122/17. The mentioned demonstration was held on June 16, 1988, on the thirty anniversary of the execution of Nagy Imre.

the state, from the early 1980s on, as Máté-Tóth put it, the Bokor found itself in an ecclesiastical vacuum.²²⁹ Parallel to the open confrontation between the Bokor and the episcopacy, the isolation of the movement significantly increased even among those illegal grass-roots which shared a number of common interests, concerns and experiences with the Bokor. The movement attempted to ease its isolation by publicizing its narrative in the Western media; however these efforts did not result in significant benefits in the Hungarian context.²³⁰ When it came to the risk that the movement might find a common ground to cooperate with the growing political opposition, the State Security chose a slightly different technique: it attempted to manipulate the Bokor's apolitical ideology for its own ends.

Secondly, the Hungarian government could not achieve its objective of asserting its own political interests related to the inquiry of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Sacred Congregation indeed called on Bulányi to publicly express his commitment to the Catholic doctrine, but did not condemn Bulányi as a heretic, and no schism took place between the Bokor and the Catholic Church. From the viewpoint of the government this was a failure, but only a relative one. By this time Bulányi was successfully stigmatized as a suspicious – if not ultimately heretic – troublemaker, and the Bokor was already pushed on the path to marginalization. To be sure, this development was not only due to the state policy, other factors also did play a role. What is important here, however, is the fact that as a result of this process, the movement no longer threatened the established church-state relationships. From this respect, the political repression of the Bokor was a “success-story” of the late Kádárist religious policy.

²²⁹ Máté-Tóth, “The provocative heritage of Bulányi.”

²³⁰ See for instance: ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 133 – 150/8.; ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/I – 233 – 224/6.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that the Bokor-movement in the course of the 1970s and 1980s represented a specific form of political dissent, which first and foremost expressed its critique on the established socialist framework of church-state relationships in religious (theological and ecclesiological) terms. From the perspective of my thesis, the most important element of this ideology was the rejection of any entanglement between the sphere of politics and religion, including the sharp opposing attitude toward any state intervention in church affairs.

With regards to party-state policy, the tactic of the Hungarian state agencies regarding the Bokor-movement from 1976 was to isolate the issue in the conceptual framework by making the church hierarchy deal with it. Originally, as it seems, this meant initiating disciplinary procedures and formulating normative statements of the ecclesiological misapprehensions of Bulányi and the Bokor. When the controversy continued to escalate during the following years, the Bokor became from a simple representative of “clerical reaction” and “inner opposition” to a “schismatic” movement in the terminology of the state agencies. This shift signifies a new practice: by 1982 the state by political and operative means aimed to generate a schism between the Bokor and the rest of the Catholic Church. The first step was to achieve the ecclesiastical condemnation of the Bokor as a schismatic organization. The Hungarian Bishops’ Conference did so in 1982 by suspending Bulányi from his priestly duties and punishing a number of his cleric followers. This was a great success from the viewpoint of the state, since the Church itself condemned a *politically* problematic Catholic current. The Hungarian Church, in line with the expectations of the state, showed unity and took sides with the government.

The Holy See was another issue. Although the Vatican, considering political, diplomatic and ecclesiological aspects, clearly expressed its support for the Hungarian episcopacy – indirectly to the Hungarian government itself – in the controversy, the inquiry of the Sacred Congregation on Bulányi’s views did not come with clear-cut results – although it is easy to presume in the light of the antecedents that the party-state used political pressure for the sake of putting a “positive ending” on the procedure. Since it did not happen, the state did not achieve its ultimate aim – which of course was not publicized either by the ÁEH or by State Security – which was to make the Church indeed cast off the Bokor. Instead, the Bokor continued to live on the margins of the Church, and without open doctrinal condemnation from the part of the Sacred Congregation, it never really ceased to be the *inner* problem of the Catholic Church in Hungary.

In looking for the reasons and considerations behind the state’s policy on the Bokor, I argued that by pushing the Bokor into the category of schismatic and sectarian organization, the main objective of the state was to restore or keep the unity of the Church. Obviously, the state was not interested in this because it advocated a strong and socially active Catholic Church. To be sure, the party-state by enforcing unity at the cost (but not for the sake) of generating a schism within the Church wanted to maintain the church-state relationships in their current form. This political objective remained the focus of the state during the 1980s. What has to be also noted is that in the light of sources not only the state considered the maintenance of church-state relationships in their established form as a primary purpose, but also the Hungarian episcopacy, and to a certain extent the Holy See as well. That is to say, it is apt to speak about strong association between the party-state and the Catholic hierarchy on the ground of shared political/institutional interests. Nonetheless,

in this framework the state remained the dominate actor, the Church in return could enjoy the advantages which came with being a closely associated institution instead of being an enemy in the eyes of the government. Establishing a religious-political context which provides a flexible ground for the state to manipulate actors for its own ends, but which still made the Catholic Church interested in keeping the status quo – this was a serious achievement of the socialist government. The Bokor did not have the capacity to change this religious-political framework; the movement could only become its loudest victim.

The case of the Bokor reveals that it is rather problematic to consider the Catholic Church as a political enemy of the party-state in the late 1970s and 1980s. That is to say, in the examined period and context, the policy of the communist party-state cannot be regarded as a genuinely anticlerical political practice. Similarly, the view which differentiates between collaborationists and oppositionists with regard to individuals' attitude toward the party-state should be revised as well. Firstly because such oversimplification does not contribute to a more nuanced understanding on how different layers and networks of the party-state and the Church interacted with each other. Secondly because such classification does not have any real explanatory power regarding the motivations and considerations behind cooperating with or resisting the state or its intervention in church affairs. The collaborationists did not betray the Church and did not befriend the enemy: a systematic perspective points out that the government no longer represented the enemy for important layers of the Hungarian Catholic Church.

Where the focus should be placed, in my view, is to analyze how the aforementioned religious political framework functioned, and how it was negotiated among different actors. I use the term negotiation in order to make it clear that the church was no mere puppet in the

hands of the government. In light of the sources examined in my thesis, the state indeed had better positions than different layers of the church such as the ecclesiastical hierarchy, yet it heavily relied on the cooperation of the latter. As I demonstrated, the Bokor case represents one story which provides insights into the underlying motivations and considerations of this status quo on the part of the Catholic hierarchy and the party-state, as well as illustrating how this status quo functioned in practice when it faced political challenge. However, it tells less about how this religious political framework was negotiated, and even less about the relationships of the party-state with non-Catholic churches and religious groups. In reaching a comprehensive image of the religious policy of the late Kádárist Hungary, my thesis only represents a starting point for subsequent research.

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MOL – XIX – A – 21 – d – 0033a – 4/1982. (box 124.)

Magyar Országos Levéltár (National Archive of Hungary), Budapest, Hungary. Documents from the Ministry of Interior.

MOL – XIX – B – 1 – x – 10/38/4 – 1982. (box 38.)

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ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 68 – 108/9/1982.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/I – 233 – 224/6

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 57 – 78/6.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 234 – 255/10.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 153 – 235/3.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – I.5 – 4/5.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – I.10.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 36 – 38/5.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 166 – 178/5.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Baranya – 13 – 38/12.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Baranya – 98 – 282/7.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Győr-Sopron – 11 – 29/11.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – Baranya – 81 – 209/2.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 171 – 231/12.

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ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 57 – 78/6.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 22 – 37/4.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – 11 – 15/4.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – BRFK – 146 – 208/11.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 3 – 4/6.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 79-82/9.

ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 100 – 105/9.
 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 103 – 106/4.
 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 108 – 112/10.
 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 109 – 130/3.
 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 118 – 122/17.
 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 118 – 133/8.
 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 119 – 126/7.
 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 133 – 150/8.
 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 14 – 8/10.
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 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 159 – 185/16.
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 ÁBTL – 2.7.1. – NOIJ – III/III. – 32 – 34/8,9.
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