

TWELVE FRAMES FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE 1980s

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Poet, Politician

1. The fall of 1981, New York. László Hámos takes me out to the airport. He has organised a literary meeting for me. The Ceaușescu regime considered him one of its most dangerous enemies. And this was true: he was almost always implicated in the decisions of the Congress regarding Romania. Which is almost unbelievable when I have a look at the basement and the simple office in 92th Street: is this the place from where the fate of countries is influenced?

I have been warned to take care: although Hámos is a decent chap, he is surrounded by agents.

We pass the Triborough Bridge when I start speaking. I ask him whether I can count on his help, because the situation is already unbearable - not my situation but our situation, that of the country, and of the Hungarians within it; the time has come for showing our true colours. Open opposition, with all the consequences.

Transylvanian Hungarians are like frightened, dumb children. Noone helps them unless they themselves do not ask for help, or at least tell what is happening to them.

What am I thinking of, asks Hámos.

A proclamation, that should be undertaken by a hundred - or fifty, or ten or three - known people. Or a samizdat, similar to *Beszélő*. Or a protest meeting. A radio station. Something, that calls attention worldwide. This must then be amplified, up to the Congress and those who stepped to the battle-ground must also be saved from the gallows if possible, without helmets, arms and bandage.

I have still not asked him if he took this talk seriously. Anyway, when it came to it, his help proved to be important: perhaps even life-saving.

2. Already at home, at Kolozsvár (Cluj). I show Laci Cselényi the project that I have written. He says that the style of the text betrays me immediately. Walking along the Malomárók, he says: suicide is not so bad, but this means playing with everyone's life who can be associated with me personally. Moreover, nothing will change.

Do you think something will change, I ask Attila Ara-Kovács, if some people would take on... if we would take on... because the situation is unbearable and we cannot remain silent...

Let's do it... says Ara-Kovács.

(After putting down these recollections, I came across the article published in the periodical *Köztársaság* which has since ceased to exist, which echoed my words uttered in Nagyvárad at the tenth anniversary of the appearance of *Ellenpontok* (Counterpoints). Perhaps it is not uninteresting to quote the lines that refer to this : "We must separate certain periods, namely: the conception, planning and creation of the periodical. If my memory is good (it may be wrong, of course), it was in the summer of 1980, when I came home after my scholarship in Vienna in, that the idea of a samizdat periodical occurred to me. I consulted some of my friends about launching a periodical in the Hungarian or Polish pattern. Laci Cselényi was the first with whom I spoke about this, then Attila Ara-Kovács. On my second Western tour in 1981 I spoke with László Hámos and others about the political support in the case of the appearance of such a periodical. I had to know the extent to which the deed of Transylvanian risk-takers would break the walls of silence and of being unknown by the West. Will we have "amplifiers"? Will the world amplify this towards the institutions? Well, it seemed that our agreements provided a guarantee to the appearance of such a periodical. So much about preliminaries. As to the concrete things, the plan, the conception of the execution and the practical starting impulse, they were not my merit. I was not operative and practical enough for

that. This was the merit of my friend Attila Ara-Kovács from Váradi (Oradea).” (In: Tiltott lapok ünnepe, *Köztársaság*, 1993/9, p.83-84)

3. I undertook to distribute the periodical, mainly in the country but also on certain channels abroad, accepted to take part in editing it, carrying manuscripts and news, but avoided writing in *Ellenpontok*.

The opinion that my writing is immediately recognizable, was unanimous.

On the other hand, I did not want to burden others’ bill with my opinion about the nationality question.

It had become my conviction by then that in the circumstances of the party system it was impossible to ensure the rights of a greater minority in the long run.

Or, if this would be possible, those rights would become privileges, because special rights are not enough: the basic rights of which the majority of the society is also deprived, are also necessary.

There was an essential difference between the way I saw the situation and the way Karcsi Tóth saw it, who summarised our grievances well-known by all of us but never systematised. I am quoting again from an old document. The editors of *Ellenpontok* recorded their mutual memories in the middle of September 1986, in Budapest, Vérhalom street nr. 3, the Kodolányi’s apartment where the Tóth family lived. The following conversation is taken from that document: “K.T: Now, was there a previous discussion when the idea of the program proposal and the memorandum was raised?

G.Sz: I think there was.

K.T: It was, as far as I can remember. True?

G.Sz: Yes.

K.T: And if my memory is right, I did not propose the program proposal first, but the memorandum. That was my first idea, wasn’t it?

A. A-K: Yes, and ...

G.Sz: Yes, I think I said that the program proposal is more important and I still think so.

K.T: Obviously.

A. A-K: It is obvious. (Library of the Teleki László Institute, K-2970, manuscript, p.18)

Karcsi approached the issue first of all from the perspective of the rights that are due to the Hungarian community in Transylvania from a historical point of view. I considered this justifiable but unsolvable within the dictatorship. However, starting from the basic rights due to every human being, we immediately faced the unavoidable imperative of the elimination of the one-party system, the party state, the dictatorship which served the purpose of class-struggle and the communist world power, after all. Whereas to fight the Securitate, the KGB and - metaphorically and self-ironically speaking - the Red Army, or to dare encourage someone to this fatal confrontation, was beyond the limit I thought I could go to. Thus we raised certain issues only meditatively; I remember for example that in the first draft of the Program Proposal there was the clause that every Hungarian in Transylvania should be able to travel to Hungary without limitations and maintain his cultural, personal, etc. relations with the mother country. This meant, I argued, that Hungarians in Romania would have a permanent passport, while Romanians, just like before, could travel abroad only occasionally, after all sorts of official "tortures". Finally, we added a sentence which expanded the scope of the claim to every Romanian citizen. Thus the claim did not refer to a special privilege but a basic universal human right. We attacked a basic dogma of the Romanian national communist phalanstery, which wanted to restrict the liberty of movement of its citizens to zero, irrespective of their nationality.

This difference in vision meant after all that I have already given up the illusion that the nationality question can be solved in Romania while the communist world order exists.

The collapse of the empire is the basic requirement for the political, but after all moral, mental and psychic change which could point towards the acceptance of otherness.

However, I did not want to “burden our account” at the expectable military tribunal with the attempt of overthrowing the socialist state order and world order, besides the charge of traitor to the country.

I thought that calling a spade a spade is also a courageous and important deed. Expressing my opinion about communism - let this be a further task. It became more and more clear for me that the West also does not really want the collapse of communism.

4. I don't know if it will ever come to light that if we had gained some time in dispelling from us the suspicion snooping around everyone by those small dodges like writing the name of Marius Tabacu incorrectly i.e. Tabacariu in the news concerning the Lăncrănjan book. Perhaps these misleading tricks only set our minds at rest or increased the game-like thrill of the situation.

Undoubtedly, and I am speaking here of myself, the whole venture was not only a moral and political test and an adventurous happening but also getting weighed and measuring swords; as comrade Oprea has correctly defined later, it was the clash of two intelligences. He meant them and us. He thought that they had won because they liquidated the *Ellenpontok*, neutralised the editors and wiped themselves clean of professional shame.

Whereas we thought that we had won: not only did we call worldwide attention to the situation of Hungarians in Transylvania, but we also remained alive. That we remained free, this was more than one could hope for.

But we were still at the point of discussing the Program Proposal in the fall of 1982 in the apartment of Karcsi Tóth, in the presence of Enikő Bollobás; whether we should appear in front of the public as authors with our own names, if the Program Proposal reaches Madrid. Karcsi and me agreed, Attila objected to it. Finally we agreed to send it anonymously to Madrid, to the EBEE Conference. However, if its authenticity would have been doubted, the Romanian delegation would have denied its being born within Romania for example, then our identity could be revealed: Attila Ara-Kovács, Géza Szócs, Károly Antal Tóth.

From this moment I considered myself one of the authors of the text. And I did not trace this back to the discussions finalising the text of the program proposal or parts in the text which belonged to me but to this unique experience: when listening to an inner voice, you say, against every sound, rational, tactical and survival arguments: the text has an author. I am one of them...

5. We thought it advisable to send the text to Madrid through several channels. Enikő Bollobás, who translated the texts and entrusted his friend Jerry Rothenberg, an American literary historian to send them, also sent a copy to János Tóth. The 1999 documentary about *Ellenpontok* (Seregi Zoltán – Horváth Károly – Poros László) shows Enikő Bollobás too, who names the American diplomat who sent the text to the Madrid Conference. Tóth lived in Genf and was an international lawyer. Enikő asked him two things in my name. The first was our standpoint regarding the authorship of the text with the completion that if they decide it expedient to make our names public, then let them do it, but announcing us previously. The second request was to ensure the proper French translation of the text, as well as its commentary if necessary, using the latest terminology, patterns, codification and references regarding minority communities.

The text, translated by Enikő Bollobás herself, was sent to Madrid; we were arrested but it seems that not with the help of a grass coming from there. János Tóth died shortly afterwards. The text started its own life. It is difficult to judge its direct impact on politics. According to the knowledge of László Hámos, it affected positively the rather non-committal North-Atlantic political thinking about minorities.

6. Let me mention the Judases too, who ran to the police or state security organs with copies of the periodical that reached them. They live well and are respected highly, nobody has denounced them. Recently, one of them has insolently addressed me at the border-station. I only answered him: he should be glad that I did not write my memoirs yet.

It is said that agents and spies in the dictatorship could choose themselves any code-names except Judas. True, they were not agents or spies, just weak people.

7. After being caught. They turned the country upside down for me. They dashed to my grandparents in Magyardécse (Cireșoia) to ask where were they hiding me. My grandmother, Rákhel did not know a word in Romanian; they did not talk Hungarian. My granny did not understand the situation, she gave the henchmen fresh doughnuts: "don't be so angry, help yourselves, I have just baked them."

In the meantime I was hiding from Gyergyótölgyes (Tulgheș) to Temesvár (Timișoara), spoke to drivers of cars with Hungarian registration numbers, sent word and written messages through friends of my friends. István Szilágyi and his wife took me out of the swarming Kolozsvár (Cluj) by car to Maroshévíz (Izvorul Mureș). Irén Mátyus and the Puskás family helped me to reach the asylum in Gyergyótölgyes. Dr Zoltán Krisár, an acquaintance of Ági Cselényi, accepted hiding me among his patients. We wrote a case-history for me, so that he could have at least a minimum coverage. This said that I had serious persecution mania: I came to the hospital saying that I am persecuted and they want to kill me. When they asked me, who, I answered "hush, they will hear me!"

When Doctor Krisár was interrogated, he obstinately stuck to this version and when they asked him how was it possible that the whole country knew that Géza Szőcs disappeared, only the doctor did not, he just shrugged his shoulders: unfortunately, he did not listen to Radio Free Europe. Apart from Zoli Krisár, László Szőcs, László Kolcsár and Zsófia Gál knew about me. I did not stay permanently at Tölgyes; I was also to Temesvár, where Feri Bárány was hiding me; Dr Ervin and Judit Keszenbaum and Vilmos Ágoston were hiding me at Marosvásárhely (Tîrgu Mureș). I did not want to stay long in all these places, but tried to limit my obviously troublesome presence for the shortest period possible. Vilmos Ágoston was often under observance, anyway, he was a black sheep in the eyes of the authorities, but one night I had to

take refuge at their place, as nothing was more dangerous than remaining on the continuously patrolled, but otherwise empty streets and railway station during the night.

In the morning Mrs Ágoston told their little girl: “No words at school about uncle Géza being at our place: they will take us too, then you’ll remain here on your own...”

But not everybody was so courageous and solidary: Béla’s wife threw me out of their apartment, true, her husband was not at home; after all, I can be grateful that she did not call the police. Jutka Burghardt, György Gálfalvi and the poet László Hodos also knew that I was at Vásárhely. When Dr István Décse put my broken left leg in plaster, I saw from his eyes that he perfectly knew who I was, though I said a false name, and they dispensed with checking my ID that I have “left at home”, which was against the rules. (Having no ID card, they should have treated me only with permission of the police.)

After the arrest, the question “who hid me after my disappearance” was again a torture, because this was tantamount to complicity if not conspiracy in the eyes of the state security; however, I stuck to the version that wherever I was, they received me with love, without suspecting anything. I’d have rather bit my tongue than denouncing them. So apart from those of whom the secret service knew independently from me, they can now get to know from this writing the names of those who hid me, starting with the Ágostons and ending with the Kesztenbaums. I hope that after twenty years, nothing will happen to them...

Much has changed in the last two decades; we are better off in many respects. But where is the single delightful experience of the secret solidarity and resistance of the community? Where are the people like Józsa Márta, who became even stronger and more obstinate in assuming her belonging to us when she was beaten? And where is the Kertész family who gave shelter and covered us, and filled with energy the whole conspiracy? We also became poorer...

This short enumeration, which hardly shows how grateful I am for those who helped me, probably reveals that the thought of

supporting resistance worked as a collective force during the Ceaușescu dictatorship.

Solidarity with resistance which was not without dangers, was at the basis of the distribution of *Ellenpontok*. This periodical had eight issues without our getting arrested because this power existed in the Hungarian community in Transylvania.

8. Finally someone reported that I was at Tölgyes. Half an hour after I took leave of Zoli Krisár and got on a bus, an assault party appeared in the asylum and stared into the face of every mental patient and nerve patient. They caught me at Maroshévíz within two or three hours and it became clear that it was very easy for them because who stepped out of one of the cars but the comrades from Kolozsvár, with Captain Valer Rusu at their head. They knew where I was and came to take me back to Kolozsvár. I can imagine their faces when it came out that I was no longer at Tölgyes: they had already seen themselves degraded - and how did they feel when shortly afterwards they found me at the post office at Maroshévíz.

9. That's all very well, but I had an unfinished letter to András Sütő with me. I warned him not to let himself be tricked, not to believe if they told him that I acknowledged having sent him the *Ellenpontok* regularly. The secret service often used this trick. They draw an imaginary confidential circle within my acquaintances supposing that *Ellenpontok* was spread within this circle. They took these people in custody saying that I had already confessed - now let them confess too, that they were readers of the subversive literature spread by me. I cannot take it amiss that some of the gullible were taken in by the provocation and confessed having received *Ellenpontok* from me. Thus they made my situation more difficult because the degree of the "social dangerousness" of the political crime increased, but they also gave evidence against themselves.

András Sütő was an emblematic character for Transylvanian Hungarians, who, due to some miracle, still remained within the highest structures of party and state leadership, although

in a marginalised position. It was obvious that his days were counted in that position, and they only waited for an opportunity or a pretext to beat him up.

One couldn't even imagine a more favourable opportunity for shaming, a more appropriate moment for them to prove that Comrade Sütő was reading (and, obviously, disseminating) subversive literature, conspiring with the enemies of the socialist homeland. This is why General Ioana and the General from Bucharest hit my head to the concrete with such infatuation and demonic power, to make me confess that Sütő was also our "accomplice"; this is why they stressed the weight of my "honesty" in this issue in the final judging of the case.

And then we got caught. I denied but the unfinished letter I had with me spoke for itself. "Dear uncle Andris, if they tell you that I confessed, don't believe them!" - you do not write something like this to an innocent person who hasn't got the faintest idea what is it that he must not acknowledge.

I had no way out: when they searched me - the excited secret service people from Kolozsvár, making phonecalls right and left and taking measures, left the search for local policemen - when they found the letter, I quickly swallowed it. What came next, was like a horror movie.

10. After the first rushing-over, there was an unexpected turnabout. After the tough guys the amiable Colonel Oprea (Florian Oprea; there was also a Ioan Oprea), beaming with well-meaning, took over my examination. And he said something appalling. He said that the Security Service had been mistaken regarding my identity. My enemies wanted to involve me in the dirty conspiracy against the country, and the clearing up of the case had lasted until now. That is, it seemed that it had been cleared up. They believe me that I am completely innocent. Let us forget the denigration and I will be rehabilitated. I must do nothing else than repeat my confession that I have nothing to do with the *Ellenpontok* and the Program Proposal. The enemies of the country, Radio Free Europe and the imperialists shouted the shameful thing that I was the originator, creator and leader of the

whole. Now let me deny. I should only write what I have already put down: that I knew nothing about this and I did not have any role in it, I could not even have because I deeply detest this base attempt against socialist Romania. We neatly put this down and send it to Radio Free Europe. He gave his word of honour that after this letter they will immediately release me. My girl was waiting for me... I cannot imagine how much she waited for me. She asked her mother every day when will I go home.

When would I have got out if I still had not written (or signed) the letter and thereby acknowledge that I was part of the case - Colonel Oprea had an estimate for this too: I will be released after approximately 15 years, but anyway, no sooner than 12 years.

Right now, or after 15 years – this was the dilemma.

If I accept what Oprea suggested, the others will have Ernő Borbély's fate, imprisonment, that is, because I was the only known person from *Ellenpontok*. But I wouldn't be honest if I said that it was because of them that I said no. Perhaps because of them too; and because of all those who protected me, from the Hámos family to Radio Free Europe, and for whom it would have been a blow across the face if I had accepted this emergency exit. Besides, I felt that I would make this case a laughing stock worldwide. Having taken it on, I could only get out of it by treason. But then I would have lost my moral self forever. Instead of eternal moral death I rather chose 10-15 years of prison.

11. Fate was kind to me. I was set at liberty without committing treason. International pressure had its role in this as well as my bad physical condition. They did not want me to die in the cellars of secret service, and I was really on my last legs. They did not need martyrs.

I was released. I needed a few weeks' intensive treatment to get to my feet again. Through the good offices of the Tőkés girls, Anna and Eszter, Dr Kaufmann, a Romanian from the region of the Low-Danube, who was never frightened, accepted to treat me in his ward, which was a redemption as compared to the treatment I had received in the first hospital where the ambulance took me.

12. The secret service does not forget and does not forgive. Their work, their attention given to my person, their interference into my life can be felt at every step, whether this was about great scale defamation, disinforming, manipulation or telephone tapping.

I worked as a journalist after we were forced to leave the country, and returning after Ceaușescu's fall I continued what we have started in 1981, as a politician. Ara-Kovács is a journalist in Budapest, and I think he will never forgive "Hungary" or at least the forces governing then and partly today, that he was there on sufferance, like a political homeless. He never received any public, official or half-official recognition for what he did for the Transylvanian Hungarian community. The same happened to Károly Tóth and his family. They led a miserable life for years; the Kodolányi-Illyés family helped them to find a place where to live. They got tired of it and left for the West.

There are some who try to set us at variance, or at least incite us against László Tőkés, saying, "You have done and risked much more than he. Why did he get the nimbus of the resistant?"

This is a dividing device. First of all, Tőkés himself had written an important study in *Ellenpontok*. Secondly, after the liquidation of *Ellenpontok*, in spite of the pressure because of this and his own character and scale of values, he had the power to stick out at home, experimenting with new and new forms of resistance. This is significant, and not comparing his 1989 interviews and his stubbornness in a housing debate to the political-spiritual achievement of *Ellenpontok*. When the interior and exterior imbalance of the system reached a critical value, the moral courage of Tőkés and his consistency of principle trained on *Ellenpontok* was able to tilt the whole structure and move it towards collapse.

Nevertheless we must say that the howling of the speculators who gathered round Tőkés and then attacked him from the rear, hid the fact: as compared to the recognition, celebration, appreciation and thanks due to Tőkés, the *Ellenpontok* received not even the ten-thousandth of this. This is unfair just as it would be unfair to dispute the merits of Tőkés.

There is nothing wrong with Tőkés, more with the anomalies and perversions of the Hungarian conscience of values.

My opinion about this will not change until Károly Tóth is not welcomed by a celebrating crowd at Ferihegy Airport.