

HISTORY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE. RESISTANCE IN COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIPS AFTER 1945 IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE WITH A FOCUS ON HUNGARY AND AGRICULTURE

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Introduction

The history of Central and Eastern Europe was affected throughout centuries by the interaction of countries, nations, people, cultures, economies, and traditions. On the pages of this history independence and freedom were among the terms which had the most significant impact on the thinking of the next generations. Identity was shaped and culture was developed because of events linked to independence movements and freedom fights. This topic has special significance for Poland, for Hungary as well. The geographical location of these countries determined their future. Slower development in a political, economic, and social sense was caused undoubtedly by the occupation of foreign forces, Poland was not on the map of Europe for many periods of time, but the Polish spirit and soul remained there which made it possible to restore their state and to resurrect from the dust.

The 20th century was a real challenge for the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Conservatism, nationalism, and then communism were among the ideologies which caused deep wounds in the economy and society. The search for freedom of individuals was developed to larger and more complex structures in dictatorships, for instance to movements and other forms of resistance. One could assume if the instruments of repressive authorities were the same or similar, then the

reactions of society were similar or even the same. In the second half of the 20th century, almost 45 years long communist parties ruled whole Central and Eastern Europe. The goal of uprisings and freedom fights in this region was independence as in the previous many centuries. Occupation and Sovietization meant the abolition of old structures of the society and economy by adopting the Soviet communist state model. Focusing on this time period, forms, and types of resistance against communist dictatorships should be evaluated in international, comparative, and interdisciplinary aspects.

Regarding this research topic, the following questions could be raised: How did the Soviet occupying force and local communist parties handle and control the underground resistance movements? To what extent were the resistances in countries of the “socialist bloc” different? How did the social, economic, legal, and cultural transformation affect the nation in general and the individual in particular? Which factors led to a revolution or to an uprising, what unified people on the local level? How informed were people about events in countries of the “socialist bloc”? What kind of effects of revolutions and uprisings had on communist regimes in countries in Central and Eastern Europe? Why there was no major revolution and freedom fight in the “socialist bloc” against repression in the 1950s? Did resistance form the communist dictatorships? Does the use of terms depend on the extent of area, time, and forms of resistance concerning revolution and uprising? What kind of effect did revolution and uprising have on economic, agrarian, and social policy? How many people left the countries because of repression? What kind of comparison can be applied? Which types of sources can be analyzed? Had the communist regimes at the international level intentionally organized party and state to prevent and repress uprisings or revolutions?¹ This study puts methodological and theoretical questions in the foreground and tries to give ideas to this topic.

The resistance is not a neglected topic in the literature; country analyses contain chapters on it and studies for example on the economy, society ones elaborate it from various aspects. More volumes can be found in English and in German, and some studies apply a compara-

¹ For example, the Warsaw Pact of 1955 was to prevent the military intervention of foreign forces or to coordinate the war against „capitalist countries,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to suppress domestic opponents, uprisings, and revolutions.

tive perspective, some studies present case studies.² However, in-depth analyses are rare; comparisons are harder to be found. What is the reason for this? In each country, specific events, persons, and movements are often in the focus, for example, resistance in the countryside in Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia, the uprising in Czechoslovakia and in the GDR in 1953, in Poland in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the revolution, and freedom fight in Hungary in 1956.³

The resistance and freedom fight in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century can be compared because of their aims, common features, even because of interrelations and connections. Here could be mentioned the year of 1848 or that how the term “revolution” could be misused by radical ideologies in the 20th century. In these cases, there could have relations between states, nations, groups, and individuals, which makes international and comparative methods more relevant. The years of 1944/1945 began a new chapter in the history of Central and Eastern Europe, however, we should take a look at long-term processes and previous events to understand how societies in the region reacted

² J. Sharman, *Repression and Resistance in Communist Europe*, London- New York 2018; *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule*, eds. M. Stibbe, K. Mcdermott, New York 2006; *Die ostmitteleuropäischen Freiheitsbewegungen 1953–1989. Opposition, Aufstände und Revolutionen im kommunistischen Machtbereich*, hrsg. A. H. Apelt, R. Grünbaum, J. Can Togay, Berlin 2014; *Oppositions- und Freiheitsbewegungen im früheren Ostblock*, hrsg. M. Agethen, G. Buchstab, Freiburg 2003; Regarding the Polish events in 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, and 1980, see the comparative approach of Jerzy Eisler, *The “Polish Months”: Communist-ruled Poland in Crisis*, Warsaw 2019. See also the article by Barbara J. Falk, who gave a historiographical overview of the resistance and dissent. She also detailed the current trends of research and pointed out the need for comparative, interdisciplinary, and transnational studies: B. J. Falk, *Resistance and Dissent in Central and Eastern Europe*, “East European Politics and Societies” 2011, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 318–360, especially pages 347–349; On the communist crimes, terror, and repression see S. Courtois et. al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror and Repression*, Cambridge 1999; The volume was controversial for many scholars and the public; it was praised and criticized at the same time. It detailed communist crimes, for example genocides, mass executions by forced labor, deportation, and artificial famine. See also: A. Paczkowski, *The Storm over the Black Book*, “The Wilson Quarterly” 2001, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 28–34; Y. N. Maltsev, *The Soviet Experience: Mass Murder and Public Slavery*, “The Independent Review” 2017, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 183–189.

³ The review article of Paweł Sasanka on the book of Jerzy Kochanowski offers various views on historical approaches (social, political) related to events in 1956–1957 in Poland, as well as on the whole process, effects, and legacy. P. Sasanka, *On the ‘Inter-October Revolution (1956–1957): The History of a Radical Social Change in Poland as Viewed by Jerzy Kochanowski*, “Kwartalnik Historyczny” 2019, vol. 126, no. 3, pp. 97–117.

to changes from above. The communist dictatorships were established and they were based on the repression of societies, and this can be considered as a common point for comparison. The time period of 1945–1990 can be divided assumingly into more periods in which the possibility of a revolution or an uprising was higher or lower. Evaluating the epoch of state communism after 1945 as a line can be concluded in the past of Central and Eastern Europe where resistance and searching for liberty and independence have a long tradition.⁴ From this point of view, the second half of the 20th century shaped further the common history of this part of Europe regarding this research topic.

History in comparative, transnational, and interdisciplinary perspective

The comparison is one of the methodological and theoretical approaches which can provide us a deeper understanding of the history of Central and Eastern Europe.⁵ The second half of the 20th century is a perfect period to find subjects in this regard, which can be put into an international and interdisciplinary context. Interrelations, connections, similarities, and peculiarities of processes can be evaluated in comparative, transnational, and interdisciplinary perspectives. Comparative legal history is a method of jurists and historians to analyze various political and legal systems. The existence of communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe was mainly dependent on the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. However, Yugoslavia chose “another way to socialism” and was “independent,” the Romanian communist regime is described in the literature as a “national communist” state. The Hungarian and Polish communist systems had peculiarities, which made them “softer” than the communist system in the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, or Czechoslovakia. The geographical location was assumingly more significant too: The regime in Albania remained more Stalinist, the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia were direct neighbors of Western “capitalist countries” as Hungary as well.

⁴ *Die ostmitteleuropäischen Freiheitsbewegungen*, op. cit., pp. 22–24.

⁵ About the historical comparison, comparative method, and theory: *Geschichte und Vergleich. Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung*, hrsg. H. G. Haupt, J. Kocka, Frankfurt am Main 1996, pp. 9–45; *Comparative and Transnational History. Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, eds. H. G. Haupt, J. Kocka, New York-Oxford 2012, pp. 1–30.

In the Soviet power sphere and beyond, communist dictatorships tried to realize the basic elements of “socialism.” For many countries, the Soviet communist state model offered and probably was a pattern in a political, economic, social, legal, and cultural sense. From this point of view imitating partly or entirely Soviet institutions became practice, even obligatory in the Soviet power sphere. The Soviet foreign policy, Soviet relations with countries of the “socialist bloc,” and the extent of intervention and interaction should be taken into account to analyze this research subject and to put it in historical context.

Transforming the economy and society could not occur in the dictatorships without the repression. Was the extent of resistance depended on the repression scale? Assumably it was partly dependent on it and local circumstances as well. My main research field is the land policy of the communist party in Hungary in 1944/1945–1967. Concerning agrarian, cooperative, and land policy, the resistance of the peasantry against repressive measures caused by these policies should be evaluated. Forced collectivization and cooperativization of agriculture meant terror and misery in the countryside. Various groups of the peasantry were affected, for instance, peasants with larger agricultural estates labelled generally as “kulaks”, small and middle peasants, agricultural workers, and landowners who did not cultivate the land themselves. The peasantry as a social group was not homogeneous but most of the agrarian population were landowners after the implementation of land reforms. Their attitude was simple and clear: They stuck to their land and property rights. That makes it possible to analyze the complexity of this topic in the mentioned aspects and to try to point out new conclusions on the peasantry, private land use and ownership, repressions, criminal policy, legislation, and resistance. Complex analysis can highlight different points regarding these topics: evolution of criminal legislation, the codification of criminal law, including regulation on amnesty, its function, and use. The main subject of comparison is resistance in the countryside, its forms, and types linked to criminal policy and criminal law. The criminal cases and legislation reflect types and forms of resistance. However, it is disputed in the literature that to what extent sources of this kind can be considered as relevant primary or secondary sources.⁶ It seems self-evident to search for sources

⁶ Gy. Gyarmati, *A Rákosi-korszak. Rendszerváltó fordulatok évtizede Magyarországon 1945–1956*, Budapest 2013, pp. 271–272; However, a meeting was recently organized which explored how archival documents of Hungarian secret state police during the communist dictatorship could be used to analyze resistance in Hungary. <https://gyanusmuveszek>.

of resistance among those who resisted a dictatorship but we should maybe think in the opposite direction to understand resistance in the whole period. The persons, who opposed the system, were in the eyes of the regime “criminals” and “enemies of the people.” So what kind of sources could reveal who opposed the system as a “criminal”? For instance, the sources of courts and the Ministry of Justice.

The spheres of power were not separated, the judiciary system as a whole served the party’s interests. The documents of courts, law enforcement, and secret police allow us to use quantitative methods, to analyze the trends of specified cases concerning popular resistance and opposition. The law, legislation, and judiciary system were the instrument of repression. The legal acts which caused forced transformation provoked also the resistance of the population. The legislation reflects how people reacted to state policies, and also reactions of the party-state to different types and forms of resistance, such as revolution and how the state tried to avoid it, prevent, or punish undesirable behaviors, etc. The law was used to avoid and prevent imminent unrest or to cease the effects of uprisings or revolutions. In my opinion, legal history is one of the most relevant research fields which can provide us more information on the history of this region in a comparative and transnational view.

The comparative approach can be applied regarding levels of societal structures: individuals (a person, a family), localities (a group, a part of the society, a village, or a city), a region or geographical territory (a county, a geographical region), more individuals, localities, or regions within one country (for instance, in the Soviet Union, in the countries of “socialist bloc”), or between more countries.

wordpress.com/ [Access: 28.09.2019]; See also the COURAGE project, which deals with the topic of cultural dissent under communism regimes in a historical view, funded by the European Union: <http://cultural-opposition.eu/> [Access: 28.09.2019]; On the use of sources of state security and state police see: B. J. Falk, op. cit., p. 340; Many studies analyze repression, violence, and resistance by elaborating the history of communist state police: R. Butler, *Stalin’s Secret Police: A History of the CHEKA, OGPU, NKVD, SMERSH & KGB*, London 2018; P.R. Gregory, *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin*, New Haven-London 2009; P. Lagenloh, *Stalin’s Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926–1941*, Baltimore 2009; *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression*, eds. K. Mcdermott, M. Stibbe, Manchester-New York 2012; D.R. Shearer, *Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s*, “Cahiers du Monde Russe” 2001, vol. 42, no. 2/4, pp. 505–534; B. Szalontai, *The Dynamic of Repression: The Global Impact of the Stalinist Model 1944–1953*, “Russian History” 2002, vol. 29, no. 2 /4, pp. 415–442; A. G. Walder, *Rebellion and Repression in China, 1966–1971*, “SocialScience History” 2014, vol. 38, no. 3–4, pp. 513–539.

Types and forms of resistance. Types of sources

First of all, the definition of resistance should be cleared to clarify the types and forms of resistance. The resistance does mean in this context every activity of individuals who tried to counteract the implementation of repressive policies of the illegitimate communist leadership of the state.⁷ The types of resistance could be differenced as follows: passive or active, individual or collective.⁸ Within these types, the following forms of resistance can be observed: economic, cultural, social, and military. However, this is just a formal categorization of larger or smaller structures within the state, economy, and society, because these types and forms could be combined and interrelated. Moreover, more terms should be clearly defined such as unrest, popular protest, riot, revolt, rebellion, uprising, insurrection, freedom fight, outcry, indignation, revolution, and even not just in English but in other languages as well, for example in German *Aufstand* (*Volksaufstand*), *Erhebung* (*Volkserhebung*), *Revolution*, *Freiheitskampf*, *Freiheitskrieg*, or in Hungarian *felkelés*, *lázadás*, *forradalom*, *szabadságharc*. Some aimed at changing the political system, some at demanding less repression or at taking actions to increase living standards.

Some topics could be raised which emphasize special aspects such as participation of women in the resistance, church, religion, relation of resistance with culture, nation, minorities, propaganda, different narratives on resistance.⁹ In communist dictatorships, the people feared

⁷ On the definition of resistance see: *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule*, eds. M. Stibbe, K. Mcdermott, New York 2006, pp. 4–6.

⁸ Furthermore, the various aspects could be emphasized, according to an article by Barbara J. Falk resistance and dissent was elaborated in the literature in the following aspects: „hidden,” political, private/individual, and public. B. J. Falk, op. cit., pp. 320–322.

⁹ W. J. Chase, *Enemies within the Gates?: the Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939*, New Haven-London 2001; J. Harris, *The Great Fear: Stalin's Terror of the 1930s*, Oxford 2017; F.J.M. Feldbrugge, *Samizdat and Political Dissent in the Soviet Union*, Leyden 1975; I. Kashtalian, *The Repressive Factors of the USSR's Internal Policy and Everyday Life of the Belorussian Society, 1944–1953*, Wiesbaden 2016; D.R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–1953*, New Haven-London 2009; J. Sherman, *From Revolution to Repression: Soviet Yiddish Writing 1917–1952*, London 2012; P. Holquist, “Conduct Merciless Mass Terror”: *Decossackization on the Don, 1919*, “Cahiers du Monde Russe” 1997, vol. 38, no. 1/2, pp. 127–162; D. Johnson, M. Titma, *Repressions against People and Property in Estonia: Immediate and Long-Term Impacts*, “International Journal of Sociology” 1996, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 74–99; A. Kim, *The Repression of Soviet Koreans during the 1930s*, “The Historian” 2012, vol. 74, no. 2, pp. 267–285; J. Morris, *The Polish Terror: Spy Mania and Ethnic Cleansing in*

the state, and the state feared the people. If this could be a hypothesis and a starting point, the above-mentioned sources can be more relevant. Concerning agriculture, more studies can be found which analyze violent methods during collectivization and cooperativization.¹⁰ More significant sources are documents of party organs and various bodies of local government on a local, district, and national levels, furthermore, the documents of courts and law enforcement. Legal provisions on criminal justice reveal main tendencies as well. Some sources refer directly or indirectly to resistive behavior or on resistive actions of people; some contain and mention just intentions. Even if it is just an assumption, sources on resistance were mainly not exaggerated or falsified on a massive scale, but the possibility of exaggeration and falsification was probably larger in the Stalinist period. Sabotage was, for example, a more common charge against people who did not fulfill compulsory delivery. From this point of view, peculiarities, differences, and similarities can be evaluated in comparison. The source criticism should be applied in a more proper way in these cases, because evaluating and analyzing these sources do not “justify” the charges, however, the indictments, charges, and provided information should be read more carefully and more critically. The de-Stalinization period is more interesting because people were rehabilitated and acquitted, and at the same time the offenders who admitted crimes against people were not prosecuted (or just partly and selectively). Sources that could be examined to find out more about resistance are memoirs, flyers, diaries, letters, maybe officially published articles in newspapers, complaints,

the Great Terror, “Europe-Asia Studies” 2004, vol. 56, no. 5, pp. 751–766; V. Narkutė, *The Confrontation Between the Lithuanian Catholic Church and the Soviet Regime*, “New Blackfriars” 2006, vol. 87, no. 1011, pp. 456–475.

¹⁰ Regarding Hungary for example publications of József Ö. Kovács on methods of mass cooperativization of the communist regime. J. Ö. Kovács, “Sűrített népnevelő”. *A kollektivizálás tapasztalattörténetei (1958–1959)*, “Korall” 2000, vol. 10, no. 36, pp. 31–54; Idem, *A paraszti társadalom felszámolása a kommunista diktatúrában. A vidéki Magyarország politikai társadalomtörténete 1945–1965*, Budapest 2012; *Állami erőszak és kollektivizálás a kommunista diktatúrában*, eds. S. Horváth, J. Ö. Kovács, Budapest 2015. For instance, in Poland Stanisław Jankowiak wrote a study on the use of repression and collectivization at the local level: S. Jankowiak, *The “Gryfice Scandal” in Poznań: Dealing with Abuses Committed in the Process of Establishing Cooperative Farms in the Poznań Region*, “Studia Historiae Oeconomicae” 2017, vol. 35, pp. 61–71; Regarding Estonia: A. Mai Koll, *The Village and the Class War: Anti-Kulak Campaign in Estonia 1944–1949*, New York-Budapest 2013; Regarding the Soviet Union: R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror Famine*, Oxford 1987; L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin. Collectivization and the Culture of Peasants Resistance*, Oxford 1999.

samizdat, photos, or audiovisual materials. These sources can be useful to zoom on the grass-root level, for example, a village or a family.¹¹

Revolution and Freedom Fight in Hungary in October–November 1956

Another hypothesis can be related to the topic: Because of tradition in this part of Europe regarding independence movements and freedom fights, I assume that search for sovereignty was a factor that contributed to resistance and uprisings against the repression of communist dictatorships and Soviet occupation. The Soviet Union would not be an exemption, because the communist regime used force to establish its illegitimate state power. However, Central and Eastern Europe as historical and geographical formation shared similarities in political, social, economic, legal, and partly religious sense. Iván Berend T. stated that there was a 500-years delay in the development of Central Europe compared to the West, and the region was mostly occupied between the 15th and 18th centuries.¹² Belonging to the West or the East was seemingly determined by the Soviet occupation from 1944/1945, however, deep-rooted traditional institutions could not have abolished by the regime entirely in the legal system, economy, and society.¹³ Maybe the territory was a frontier or a periphery in some aspects, modernization was depended on the interaction of domestic and foreign factors.

From a historical perspective, the difference should be made between uprisings against legitimate-power and non-legitimate power, between aggressor and defender, and between partly or entirely occupied territories. The use of terms like an uprising, revolution, and freedom fight can depend on these differences. The year 1956 was a peak of Hungarian resistance, even though the communist regime eased its hardliner policies during the “new course” and after the twentieth congress of the Soviet communist party in February 1956. It can be speculated that the measures taken in these periods regarding the process

¹¹ A. Komaromi, *Uncensored: Samizdat Novels and the Quest for Autonomy in Soviet Dissidence*, Evanston 2015.

¹² I. T. Berend, *What is Central and Eastern Europe?*, “European Journal of Social Theory” 2005, vol. 8, no. 4, p. 402.

¹³ Regarding the legal system see: H. Slapnicka, *Soviet Law as Model: The People’s Democracies in the Succession States*, “American Journal of Jurisprudence” 1963, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 106–121.

contributed in the long-term to the revolution and freedom fight that started on 23 October 1956 and lasted until 10 November 1956.

The communist state model and the system was in crisis in 1952/1953. The agricultural policy was temporarily eased in Romania and the first months of 1953 in Yugoslavia; Stalin's death gave a significant push to this direction in the Soviet Union and whole Central and Eastern Europe. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the uprising could not have prevented by the repressive actions, by that time the Hungarian leadership feared similar revolts in Hungary. Before the events in the GDR, an uprising occurred in Czechoslovakia in Plzeň from 31 May to 2 June 1953.¹⁴ The next was Poland in 1956 and Hungary in Autumn, many years later Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Hungarian freedom activists fought directly against the Soviet forces for days, and the entire country took part in the revolution somehow, including the countryside. Without Western help, the Soviets suppressed the revolution. The new communist regime had to continue implementing reform ideas to consolidate power, but it was very paradoxical and contradictory. The Hungarian revolution was the longest armed resistance against Soviet occupation in Central and Eastern Europe. While confronting local communist party members and law enforcement loyal to the regime and Soviet troops, the abolition of "cooperatives" went further even faster in the countryside, peasants reclaimed their property, land, equipment, and livestock, destroyed land registers and property of "cooperatives". The roots of the revolution were basically in the Stalinist period when state terror was everyday practice, the causes and motives were deeply linked to this, furthermore, the rigorous economic and social policy led to unsatisfactory conditions and living standards.¹⁵ Retaliation and consolidation followed the revolution, which largely affected agricultural production and livelihood of the peasantry.

¹⁴ K. Mcdermott, *Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Plzeň Uprising, June 1953*, "Contemporary European History" 2010, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 287–307.

¹⁵ Soviet practices of repression were described in many cases as terror or terrorism generally, see: W.H. Chamberlin, *The Evolution of Soviet Terrorism*, "Foreign Affairs" 1934, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 113–121; J.F. Murphy, D.R. Brady, *The Soviet Union and International Terrorism*, "The International Lawyer" 1982, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 139–148.

Resistance in Agriculture during the Communist Dictatorship

The peasant resistance and behavior can be characterized in a very similar way well before and after the revolution in Hungary as well as in all countries in the region. First of all, it should be noted that despite propaganda the farmers of larger agricultural estates labeled as “kulaks” were not considered as the “enemies of the people” by the rural population. They sympathized with them and showed solidarity towards “kulaks,” persons who were pursued violently and were in many cases deported. In the countries where this social group was much less in number, for instance in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, the “kulaks” were eliminated earlier. The resistance of the peasantry concerning land ownership was passive, active, directly, and indirectly. In many cases, the farmers did not leave their lands, instead of that the estates were consolidated and so formed into large-scale fields of “cooperatives” or state farms. If the land was taken away, they demanded to give it back or at least compensation. Some people rather took the land back than accepting another. The “kulaks” and middle landowners divided or sold their land property to get the other category of landowners, and so do to decrease their tax burdens. The landowners left “cooperatives” and took their lands back, demanded proper land surveys to secure their property rights and lower taxes, and to abolish compulsory delivery. It was more common that peasants did not fulfill the quotas of compulsory delivery or taxes because they could not do it under the hard economic conditions. Other forms of economic resistance were leaving land uncultivated, concluding land transfer or land lease without allowance of state authorities, or leaving the country illegally. Considering revolution as one of the most significant forms of resistance, active peasant resistance culminated and reached its peak during the revolution in October and in November 1956, while demanding the abolition of compulsory delivery and “cooperatives” the peasants took back the land and other means of production.

In October 1956, more radical forms emerged as mentioned above, for instance destroying land registers and property of “cooperatives.”¹⁶ After mass cooperativization and collectivization, many farmers did

¹⁶ More studies in the following volume put the Hungarian revolution and freedom fight in 1956 in the context of agrarian policy: *1956 és a magyar agrártársadalom*, ed. J. Estók, Budapest 2006; Two volumes elaborate revolution in the countryside in detail: *A vidék forradalma, 1956*, vol. 1, eds. A. Szakolczai, L. Á. Varga, Budapest 2003; *A vidék forradalma, 1956*, vol. 2, eds. A. Szakolczai, Budapest 2006.

not go to “cooperatives” to work, they sabotaged machinery and shared fliers. After 1960/1961, much of the land was in common use and it was impossible in practice to take it back in private use, even after leaving the “cooperatives”. The private land ownership was gradually or radically abolished, while in two countries, in Yugoslavia and Poland, private farming had prevailed to a higher extent.

I analyze some files from the court of Győr, the city in Northwestern Hungary, to find out how those documents reflect on resistance in the countryside in the first years of the 1960s at the local level. It should be noted that the county Győr-Sopron was the first “fully collectivized” county in the state. After a short time, I found some criminal cases related to resistive behavior and activities against the “cooperative sector.” For example, a person marked with an abbreviation L.N. had not given his horse to the “cooperative” after the forceful attachment to it. In autumn 1959, he said that the party cadres of the “cooperative” were rogue, in October 1960, he was working in crop production, when he saw an airplane and told the party and “cooperative” members that shortly planes come and carry them ammunition and then there will be no longer “cooperative”. While saying this he cried. He was accused of charges, for instance, incitement to public order and was taken into custody. He was sentenced for six months imprisonment.¹⁷ In more cases, drunken persons made statements, which were later considered as a threat against “democratic state order” and it led to charges against them with incitement to public order or with threatening people’s democracy with overthrowing the communist system.¹⁸ The cases show that relatively more persons were against the communist regime and its policies, even if their livelihood changed and were not in the countryside because they were originated from peasant families and had relatives in the villages.

Resistance, judiciary system, criminal justice, and criminal policy

New legal norms and institutions were established based on Soviet legal theory. Nevertheless, these norms and institutions were instruments to forcibly implement the Soviet model to other countries. For

¹⁷ Case of L.N., National Archives of Hungary, Győr-Moson-Sopron County’s Archive Győr (MNL GyMSMGyL), 1959–1960, XXV/11/188, B/806/1960.

¹⁸ For example: case of K.H., MNL GyMSMGyL, XXV/11/187, 116/1960.

example, the legal provisions on securing the “common property” were introduced. The “common property” consisted of state property, the property of various public organizations, and “cooperatives”; it was considered as a higher form of property and “socialist property”. The criminal codes were issued in the countries of the “socialist bloc” based on the Soviet penal law which was reformed in the first half of the 1960s. Regarding agriculture, even legislation of “cooperative criminal law” was considered by party cadres in Hungary. Following, adopting, and copying the Soviet practices in the judiciary system were a common trend in the Stalinist period and partly after it.

However, some documents of criminal cases cannot be considered as reliable sources or simply they do not refer to resistance (or do it just indirectly). Taking into account the psychological factor, it is questionable, if drinking alcohol or committing suicide can be evaluated as forms of resistance or maybe as reactions to state policies. The forced cooperativization increased certainly such phenomena. It seems important to note that analyzing types and forms of resistance in the countryside is important and relevant not just in the period of waves of mass cooperativization but beyond. The extent of repression was not the same in the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, even not in the Stalinist period. Maybe this is one more reason to link the types and forms of repression to the topic of the resistance.¹⁹

A short overview of criminal law reveals legislative actions in the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe and illustrates legislation in this regard. The criminal codes and laws are basic primary sources.²⁰ In the Soviet Union, in 1924 and in 1958, the fundamental principles of criminal legislation were promulgated; the criminal code was is-

¹⁹ Regarding the Soviet Union, following book analyses repression and forms of resistive actions of population after death of Stalin: R. Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union*, Cambridge 2015. About the connection between resistance and repression see: R. Sharlet, *Dissent and Repression in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: Changing Patterns since Khrushchev*, “Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis” 1978, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 763–795.

²⁰ We could count to basic secondary written sources textbooks on criminal law. The textbook on the general part of Hungarian criminal law contains a legal comparison with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Soviet, Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, Polish, East German, and Romanian). *Magyar büntetőjog, általános rész*, eds. I. Békés, J. Földvári, Gy. Gáspár, G. Tokaji, Budapest 1980, pp. 456–489. The textbook on Hungarian law enforcement contains legal comparison with “capitalist” and “socialist” countries as well. *Büntetésvégrehajtási jog I*, eds. L. Balogh, T. Horváth, J. Lőrincz, M. Magyar, M. Deme, I. Gláser, L. Banka, Budapest 1983, pp. 61–151.

sued in 1960.²¹ In Czechoslovakia, in 1950 and in 1961, in Hungary, the general part in 1950, new criminal code in 1961,²² in Bulgaria, in 1951, 1956, and 1968,²³ in the German Democratic Republic in 1968, in Poland in 1969, in Romania in 1948 and 1969, in Yugoslavia in 1951 and 1977, the criminal codes were published.²⁴ Furthermore, the amendments and laws, penitentiary and procedural laws were drafted and promulgated. Taking an example judiciary system, justice policy, criminal policy, and criminal justice were elaborated detailed in historical perspective in the German literature regarding the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany/German Democratic Republic.²⁵ Not surprisingly, not just repression, but resistance stand out in the texts.²⁶ Falco Werkentin's work on political criminal justice during the Ulbricht era takes a logical way to illustrate the functions of political criminal justice in the GDR. Many interesting definitions can be found in German literature: *Erziehungsdiktatur, Unrechtsstaat, Doppelstaat*. Agriculture stays not in focus, but the "land reform" in 1945, expropriations, and forced collectivization are the main topics of the book. Werkentin names some of the most typical forms of resistance in the early 1960s: farming individually, leaving "cooperatives", and sabotage. Additionally, the state took measures to set an example for

²¹ B. S. Nikiforov, *Fundamental Principles of Soviet Criminal Law*, "The Modern Law Review" 1960, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 31–32; W. Meder, *Das Sowjetrecht. Grundzüge der Entwicklung 1917–1970*, Frankfurt 1971, pp. 480–481.

²² *Magyar jogtörténet*, eds. B. Mezey, Budapest 1999, pp. 334–337.

²³ H. Slapnicka, op. cit., pp. 115–116.

²⁴ *Összehasonlító jogtörténet II*, eds. P. Horváth, M. Révész T., I. Stipta, J. Zlinszky, Budapest 1993, pp. 269, 277, 282–283; R. C. Donnelly, *The New Yugoslav Criminal Code*, "The Yale Law Journal" 1952, vol. 61, no. 4, p. 510.

²⁵ J. Raschka, *Justizpolitik im SED-Staat. Anpassung und Wandel des Strafrechts während der Amtszeit Honeckers*, Köln 2000.

²⁶ F. Werkentin, *Politische Strafjustiz in der Ära Ulbricht. Vom verdeckten Terror zur verdeckten Repression*, Berlin 1995; K. Behling, *Die Kriminalgeschichte der DDR: Vom Umgang mit Recht und Gesetz im Sozialismus, politische Prozesse, skurrile Taten, Alltagsdelikte*, Berlin 2018, p. 84; S. Korzilius, *"Asozialie" und "Parasiten" im Recht der SBZ/DDR*, Wien 2005. In Hungary, there are publications on judiciary system, retaliation after revolution in 1956, show trials, and also volumes of source materials, for instance: Zs. Mikó, *A forradalom utáni megtorlás bírósági és ügyészégi szervezete, 1956–1961*, "Történelmi Szemle" 2006, vol. 48, no. 1–2, pp. 121–169; *Iratok az igazságszolgáltatás történetéhez*, vol. 2, eds. Gy. Szabó, I. Horváth, T. Zinner, P. Solt, J. Zanathy, Budapest 1993. The following volume contains various studies about law development, justice policy, and legal education in countries in Central and Eastern Europe: *Recht im Sozialismus. Analysen zur Normdurchsetzung in osteuropäischen Nachkriegsgesellschaften (1944/45–1989)*, vol. 2, eds. G. Bender, U. Falk, Frankfurt am Main 1999.

those who resisted: death penalty, deportation, and forced labor.²⁷ The author gives in the appendix the exact number of prisoners each year. It is relevant to link criminal justice and justice/criminal policy to topics repression and resistance.

The transformation of the public administration and judiciary system began in the mid-1940s.²⁸ In the Stalinist period, the Soviet communist state model was officially propagated and widely adopted. The state “enemies” were pursued and punished by the authorities. The law, criminal policy, and judiciary system were an instrument to achieve the transformation of society and economy.

On the other hand, after the death of Stalin in March 1953, the restrictions were eased and persons, who were prosecuted in the previous years, were partly rehabilitated, granted amnesty, or pardoned. According to a study by Zile Zigurds, the Soviets used these terms to make a distinction between specific cases. If someone was innocent but convicted or the law was enforced not properly, he could be rehabilitated. If someone committed a crime, the partial, individual, or collective amnesty could be provided.²⁹ In the Soviet Union, between 1945 and 1953, there were three amnesties at federal level; between 1953 and 1967—seven.³⁰ While evaluating the first months of the “new course” in Hungary in 1953, more interesting measures can be found regarding the agriculture, for instance, in summer 1953 peasants, who were convicted for various crimes and were sentenced imprisonment, were temporarily released for the harvests. Furthermore, probably based on Soviet practices, the decree on amnesty was promulgated on 26 July 1953. In Czechoslovakia in 1953 more than 15,000 persons were released and later amnesty was extended for military offenders. In the de-Stalinization period, in 1955, a political amnesty was granted for more thousands of people. In Poland, in 1956, the political rehabilitation was issued on 27 April 1956; in Romania amnesty was more limited. In the Soviet Union, in 1955, the rehabilitation and amnesty continued. From the second half of the 1950s, it was almost common in every country to provide amnesty

²⁷ F. Werkentin, op. cit., pp. 105–110.

²⁸ H. Slapnicka, op. cit., pp. 109–110; *Magyar jogtörténet*, eds. B. Mezey, Budapest 1999, pp. 330–334.

²⁹ Z. L. Zile, *Amnesty and Pardon in the Soviet Union*, “The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review” 1976, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 37–39.

³⁰ For instance, there was a partial amnesty shortly after Stalin’s death on 7 March 1953 and a common amnesty on 27 March 1953. Ibidem, p. 44.

on the anniversary of the liberation of the country or of the foundation of “Peoples’ Democratic Republic.”³¹

In Hungary, in 1953, the communist party and the Soviet leadership probably prevented an uprising by introducing the “new course.” The show trials were partly investigated and the institution of deportation was abolished. After the beginning of 1955, while the Stalinist leadership reemerged, new decrees on amnesty were issued in April. However, in 1955, 87% of the pleas for pardon were rejected. In April 1956, the amnesty had been extended and the Stalinists could not counteract this development: On 6 October László Rajk, the minister of interior, who was convicted in a show trial and executed in October 1949, was reburied. The Presidential Council’s resolution on 15 September 1956 prescribed that every plea for pardon should be evaluated, even the ones which were rejected by the Attorney General or by the Ministry of Justice. Nearly 2,000 pleas for pardon per month were sent in 1956. In Hungary, according to archival sources, before the start of the revolution on 23 October, 1,956 drafts on amnesty were prepared and during the revolution, the government promised amnesty for those persons would lay down weapons. The Ministry of Justice drafted a decree on amnesty before the revolution started on 23 October 1956, however, the document is dated on 25 October. According to the archival sources, more drafts were prepared: on 1 November, in mid-November, and in December. In the first half of November, the Ministry of Justice announced a decree on the facilitation of the return of people who left the country after 23 October (more than 200,000 people fled the country at that time).³² The decree would have provided collective amnesty for people who were sentenced in civilian prosecution or received military penalties until 23 October. The draft on 1 November extended the period until the document came into force. This draft would not have given amnesty for the former members of the ÁVH (secret state police) who carried out an armed attack against revolutionaries or gave the order to attack them. Ultimately, however, that version of the decree was not issued. The amnesty for

³¹ http://www.totalita.cz/vez/vez_hist_amnestie.php [Access: 26.09.2019]; <http://www.memorialsighet.ro/decretul-de-gratiere-nr-3101964/> [Access: 26.09.2019]; <http://soviet-history.msu.edu/1954-2/prisoners-return/prisoners-return-texts/first-post-stalin-amnesty/> [Access: 26.09.2019]; <https://mult-kor.hu/cikk.php?id=38627> [Access: 26.09.2019].

³² Classified and confidential documents on implementation of amnesty, National Archives of Hungary, National Archives (MNL OL), XIX-E-1-c 270 0105/3/1953; Strictly classified documents on amnesty, MNL OL XIX-E-1-z 78 00315/1/1956.

people, who left the country after 23 October and returned within a limited time, was regulated by a decree released on 1 December. The decree on partial amnesty was published more than two years later, in April 1959. After suppressing the revolution and freedom fight, the new communist regime used amnesty to consolidate power. In 1959 and 1960, partial amnesty was granted, in 1964—general. In Yugoslavia, in 1962; in other countries after mass cooperativization: for instance, in Romania, in 1964; in the GDR, in 1964; in Czechoslovakia, in 1962 and 1965.³³ Probably in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, there were most of the amnesties granted. But the question is if the amnesty policy of communist dictatorships reduced the predisposition of people to resist, for instance, in the countryside?

In Hungary, 70,000–80,000 persons were labeled as the “kulaks”, furthermore, their relatives were subject to persecution. Between 1948 and 1953, approximately 400,000 persons were sentenced; at the peak of Stalinism in the early years of the 1950s, authorities charged approximately 850,000 persons and conducted prosecution about one million cases.³⁴ Similar to the Soviet legislation, legal protection of

³³ On amnesty in the GDR: F. Werkentin, op. cit., pp. 384–388.

³⁴ Gy. Gyarmati, op. cit., pp. 267–268; On the other hand, the authorities referred to the resistance of the peasantry in many cases to prove that the „class struggle” is real, to intimidate the population, furthermore, they held show trials. The hundreds of thousands were convicted for “crimes”, including “cooperative” members, agricultural workers, middle, and small farmers, “kulaks.” É. Cseszka, *Gazdasági típusú perek, különös tekintettel az FM perre (1945–1953)*, Budapest 2012, pp. 148–149. The purges and show trials within the communist party can be considered as a special type of repression. In many cases, it aimed to create fear among the cadres and to increase their willingness to follow the party’s orders. The leaders and party members were prosecuted and sentenced, deported, and executed. Not just in the Soviet Union, but in all communist dictatorships deportation to forced-labor camps, displacement, and repatriation were specific forms of repression. The resistance concerning deportation (to Gulag in the Soviet Union), labor camps, is part of studies: N. Adler, *Keeping Faith with the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag*, Bloomington 2012; L. Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial: Scenes from the Great Terror in Soviet Ukraine*, New York 2017; Eadem, *The Question of Perpetrator in Soviet History*, “Slavic Review” 2013, vol. 72, no. 1, pp. 1–23; M. Jakobson, *Origins of the Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp System, 1917–1934*, Lexington 1992; B. Bank, Gy. Gyarmati, M. Palasik, “Állami titok”. *Internáló- és kényszermunkatáborok Magyarországon 1945–1953*, Budapest 2012; A.J. Frank, *Gulag Miracles: Sufis and Stalinist Repression in Kazakhstan*, Wien 2019; J.S. Hardy, *The Gulag after Stalin: Redefining Punishment in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union, 1953–1964*, Ithaca-London 2016; O.V. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror*, New Haven- London 2004; T. Krausz, *Gulag. A szovjet táborrendszer története*, Budapest 2001; P. Polian, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*, Budapest 2004;

“cooperative” and “socialist” property was put in the foreground. In the Soviet Union, in 1932, more rigorous regulations came into force: Looting and abusing *kolkhoz* property were punished hardly.³⁵ In Hungary, after starting forced collectivization and cooperativization, the Decree No. 2.110/1949 regulated criminal protection of “cooperatives” and punished hard those who opposed cooperativization. Further punishments were introduced to protect “cooperative” property. The legal provisions gave space for law enforcement to indict and prosecute people without any reason. The Stalinist period culminated in deporting and sentencing people to forced labor in labor camps without indictments and trials.

Conclusions

The identity and national independence were key elements in forming new countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. The regimes which arbitrary and violently used state power to extract resources and “energy” from the economy and society paradoxically organized multiple levels of society against illegitimate state actions. The communist dictatorship was just one of such regimes. The resistance as a topic can be analyzed by different approaches and methods, but I would like to emphasize interdisciplinary, transnational, and comparative perspectives to understand historical problems. The history, law, economics, sociology, and psychology are among disciplines that could use these perspectives and methods. The connections, interactions, analogies, and interrelations between communist states, repressive instruments, and resistance can be put in context in the transnational view. Beyond nations and national boundaries, the common history and experiences like struggles for the development and modernization can be explored regarding Central and Eastern Europe. Many hypotheses could be related to this topic, maybe the two

A. Szolzsenyicin, *A Gulag-szigetvilág 1–3*, Budapest 2018; N. Adler, *Enduring Repression: Narratives of Loyalty to the Party Before, During and After the Gulag*, “Europe-Asia Studies” 2010, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 211–234; A. Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps*, New York-London 2004; J. Carmichael, *Stalin’s Masterpiece: The Show Trials and Purges of the Thirties, the Consolidation of the Bolshevik Dictatorship*, London 1976; G. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948–1954*, Praeger 1987; I. Csicsery-Rónay, G. Cserenyey, *Koncepció per a Független Kisgazdapárt szétzúzására 1947*, Budapest 1998; Gy. Dupka, *Koncepció per a magyar elítéltek 1944–1957*, Budapest 1993.

³⁵ *Összehasonlító jogtörténet*, op. cit., pp. 170–171.

most important are these two: (1) people feared state and state feared people, (2) searching for independence, sovereignty, and autonomy was traditionally a factor in Central and Eastern Europe when people confronted state or occupying forces. Furthermore, many topics regarding the economy, society, law, and culture can be linked to each other; resistance and opposition can be analyzed within these research projects in comparison. An example is an agriculture and rural population. If we want to understand how the “kulak” families resisted and reacted to state policies, we should take a look at the legal system and measures against “kulak” families (for instance, party decisions, official decrees, and legal provisions). Regarding this example, it is hard to estimate if there was any correlation between repressive legal actions by the party-state and the resistance scale. It is also hard to explain if there was a chance of a major revolution in Poland, in Yugoslavia, or Romania in the whole period, and to what extent the Soviet criminal law affected the legislation of countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, it is questionable, if, in 1953, a major uprising or revolution could have happened in the region. Maybe the types of resistance can be related to forms (social, cultural, economic, military, and civil) which could become the subjects of research and comparison. The main aim of the communist dictatorships was to abolish private property or at least to minimize it. Many forms of resistance were linked to this issue.

Whether from above or from below, the comparative approach makes it possible to find connection points and sources, which reflects on the reaction, aim, and achievement of society as well as a state. The forced cooperativization and the whole transformation process in the countryside make the topic more relevant. The peasants’ mentality, rural networks (more generations lived in one household, relatives, etc.) did affect trends of resistance in specific regions. The criminal system, laws, and cases are sources of historical analysis, especially when focusing on violence, repression, and resistance. The typology of oppression and opposition are discussed in the literature, however, types and forms of resistance and repression should point out categories to make the comparative method more effective and to apply properly quantitative and qualitative approaches. The criminal law and legislation were instruments of the transformation of society and economy. In this regard, criminal cases and political criminal law can reflect on types and forms of resistance. The comparative legal history can also contribute to knowledge on trends, analogies, peculiarities, and differences

of the criminal policy of communist regimes in the region. Another significant aspect of the research is the interpretation of resistance in the communist dictatorships and definitions which were constructed and designed by ideological preconceptions, like the “counter-revolution.”

The major active resistance as a protest, uprising, unrest, revolution, and freedom fight can be evaluated in context. The causes, effects, and consequences were part of the process and divide even periods. The lack of legitimacy and sovereignty could increase the possibility of larger resistance movements; however, that could be a simple generalization of the issue. On the other hand, the national communism, soft communism, or “national way to communism” did not guarantee that people remained silent. It can be assumed that the opposing communist state model from below contributed to reforms from above, but this statement could be another simple generalization. The cases of Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the GDR show different measures, responses, and consequences in the long-term period. “Socialist legality” and “democratic centralism” remained official slogans for decades. The popular resistance, dissent, and state control clashed in everyday life, central power sought to deaden dissatisfaction, although some types and forms of resistance could not change. Additionally, in the 1980s, the Perestroika, organized opposition, “negotiating” of the peaceful revolution (or simply just “revolution”) in 1989/1990 should be reassessed in other perspectives.

The criminal policy, judiciary system, and legislation aimed at preventing, retaliating, and punishing crimes against new institutions of the communist party-state, and officially to defend and protect the “socialist society and economy” and “socialist state order.” The criminal law should have protected centrally planned economy and “collective” or “socialist” property. Additionally, the internal orders, regulations, and officially not published legal provisions created insecurity in all branches of law, and basically a “dual legal system” existed in which remnants of traditional law, adopted and newly formed “socialist law” and unofficial law were parallel in force. There are clear points to connect and focus on and on this topic in comparison. A detailed and thematic analysis could reveal peculiarities and differences, similarities, effects of Soviet law, grade of Soviet control, principles, and development of legal systems. Lastly, in addition to words by Ehrhart Neubert, it could be stated that communist dictatorship forced people to violate the law, meanwhile, people could sue the state because of violating and misusing the law.³⁶ Raising

³⁶ *Oppositions- und Freiheitsbewegungen*, op. cit., p. 48.

questions, pointing out hypotheses, and conclusions by the comparison are the further task of historians. The comparative perspective encourages scholars and researchers to cooperate and to work together to better understand their history. Expanding and strengthening cultural relationships between countries in the transnational aspect is necessary and essential to learn more about the history of the region.

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Abstract

Europe was divided by ideologies almost in the entire second half of the twentieth century. Central and Eastern Europe was the place where the communist experiment sought to transform economy, society, culture, law, and the mind of people. Resisting the process was pursued and condemned by the communist dictatorship. Analysis on resistance as research topic can reveal socioeconomic interactions between state and individuals, groups and whole population.

Keywords: Hungary, repression, anti-communist opposition, communism, agriculture

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