

Daniella SCHLAFFER: The reorganization of the press control at the initial consolidation of the Kádár-period (1956–1963)

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1. Introduction

With the declaration of the freedom of the press in the 18th century, the question arises, why does the phrase “press control” even exist? Why should the press be controlled, despite it being one of the fundamental freedoms of the people, by which they are free to express their opinions (within certain limits, of course, without significantly infringing the rights of others)? As political leaders were and still are aware, the press and the media are one of the most suitable means of shaping public opinion in their own interests, that is why they tried to gain even greater influence in this field.

The year 1956 was a turning point in political leadership in Hungary, but unfortunately, the methods did not change so much. In my article, I chose this year as the starting point because during this period, the Kádár-leadership laid the institutional foundations of the press control and its methods, which were decisive for the function of the press until the change of regime in 1989.

2. The organizational system of press management

In many cases, the organizational system of press management shows similarities to those developed in the Rákosi-era even after the 1956 revolution. This was reflected on one hand in the fact that certain institutions were “revived”, and on the other hand,

that the Kádár leadership did not allow the press to operate freely. In the following, I would like to present this complicated, changing, and sometimes casuistic organizational system along the separation.¹

Within the decision-making bodies in the party leadership, the Congress and the Central Committee (CC) did not have any special role in making provisions about the press. In the latter institution's reports, orders were mostly general requirements. However, it assigned the people, who were more participated in controlling the press (e. g. the heads of department of the CC). The orders of the Congress provided the material for the editorial staffs, and they had to inform the readers about these topics.²

The Temporary Management Committee (TMC) and the Secretariat were negotiating regularly about press' issues. After the decision of TMC in January 25, 1957,³ their meetings were attended by the head of the editorial board of *Népszabadság*, the leading newspaper as well. Sometimes the TMC discussed about the problems with the press and evaluated the work of radio and television too.⁴ In some orders it was paying attention to the role of publicity and how individual cases should be published. At the most important questions the TMC accepted a detailed press plan.⁵

The Agitation and Propaganda Committee could also make decisions in less important cases, for instance, it had to do the implementation of some sub-tasks.⁶ This Committee was already established by the former Magyar Dolgozók Pártja (Party of Hungarian Workers, MDP) in October 1948 for the political and ideological control of specified areas in cultural and scientific life. Its main mission was to provide information, working out the mainstream of agitation and propaganda, and using it.

¹ TAKÁCS, Róbert: *Politikai újságírás a Kádár-korban [Political journalism in the Kádár-era]*. Budapest, 2012, Napvilág Kiadó, p. 88.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

³ MNL OL 288. f. 5/12. ő. e. Javaslat a Népszabadság munkájának megjavítására [Proposal to improve the work of *Népszabadság*].

⁴ MNL OL 288. f. 5/151. ő. e. Jelentés a Magyar Rádió és Televízió műsorpolitikájáról és káderhelyzetéről [Report on the broadcasting policy and work situation of the Hungarian Radio and Television].

⁵ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, pp. 89–90.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, reviewing the work of certain areas and defining resolutions on proposals from departments and committees. It could also decide independently on issues that did not exceed the competence of each department.⁷

According to the decision of the Political Committee on 21 January, 1958: “... next to the Central Committee’s Agitation and Propaganda department the party’s press committee should be formed from the senior staff of the press. The committee should regularly work out the tasks of the press and radio, from the party and government policies.”⁸ In March, the Secretariat set up this body, which István Szirmai as its leader and István Darvasi as its secretary. Depending on the issues on the agenda, the most experienced leaders from economic or other areas could also be invited.⁹ However, its operation was short-lived. Its duties and powers were never regulated, and no decision was made to end it. From the end of 1962, the Agitation and Propaganda Committee took over its tasks.¹⁰

Within the CC’s departments in relation to press affairs, one of the most important and largest was the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (DAP),¹¹ which was operating in several versions before the revolution. However, some changes in the internal structure and responsibilities could be still observed: in February 1957, after the separation from the DAP, the Department of Science and Culture (DSC) was organized.¹² The press group¹³ – formed within the DAP in April 1957 – had already become a press subdivision in September, so after this, there were three subdivisions

⁷ MNL OL 276. f. 54/15. ő. e. Javaslat Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottság felállítására [Proposal to set up an Agitation and Propaganda Committee].

⁸ VASS, Henrik – SÁGVÁRI, Ágnes (eds.): *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai. 1956–1962. [Resolutions and documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. 1956–1962.]* Budapest, 1964, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, p. 166.

⁹ MNL OL 288. f. 7/24. ő. e. Javaslat a párt sajtóbizottságának felállítására [Proposal to set up a party press committee].

¹⁰ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, pp. 91–92.

¹¹ GOSZTONYI, Gergely: Censorship and law in Hungary in the past. *Romanian Journal of Legal History*. 2021, no. 1., p. 45.

¹² MNL OL 288. f. 6/10. ő. E. Javaslat a Tudományos és Kulturális Osztály felállítására [Proposal for the establishment of the Department of Science and Culture].

¹³ MNL OL 288. f. 7/3. ő. E. Előterjesztés az Agit. Prop. Osztályon belül sajtócsoport létrehozására [Submission by Agit. Prop. To create a press group within a department].

within the DAP: agitation, propaganda, and the press.¹⁴ The latter's tasks included for example managing and supervising the work of the press and the radio, helping the editorial offices' party organizations, and regularly coordinating the Information Office.¹⁵ Press control was gradually be transferred to the party apparatus, reducing the role of the Information Office.¹⁶ At the end of December 1957, a fourth, so-called theoretical, subdivision was set up with the task was to advance the ideological work of the party.¹⁷

The other departments carried out their activities mainly based on the received instructions from the DAP, during which, they took care of the implementation and operative preparation of press and other party decisions. Their tasks included organizing the public and confidential briefings, forwarding requests and suggestions regarding the administration of the press to the DAP, and mailing decisions to the "page owners". They were required to conduct regular evaluations of the work of certain specific papers, and compile and transmit mood reports as information for their political superiors. In addition, the material conditions for the operation of the electronic and written press were ensured.¹⁸

In the operation of the state organizational system, the Council of Ministers could make decisions regarding the press and the media. Issues related to press administration and newspaper formation were regulated by government decree until 1986.¹⁹ However, the day-to-day activities related to the press were carried out by the

¹⁴ KLEIN, Tamás: *Sajtószabadság és demokrácia [Freedom of press and democracy]*. Budapest, 2020, Gondolat Kiadó – Dialóg Campus, p. 60.

¹⁵ MNL OL 288. f. 7/13. ó. E. Javaslat a KB Agit. Prop. Osztálya feladatkörének és státusz helyzetének meghatározására [Proposal from KB Agit. Prop. To determine the responsibilities and status of your department].

¹⁶ CSEH, Gergő Bendegúz – KALMÁR, Melinda – PÓR, Edit (eds.): *Zárt, bizalmas, számozott. Tájékoztatáspolitikai és cenzúra 1956–1963 [Closed, confidential, numbered. Information policy and censorship 1956–1963]*. Budapest, 1999, Osiris Kiadó, p. 221.

¹⁷ MNL OL 288. f. 8/82. ó. E. Röpszavazás a párttörténeti elméleti munkaközösség és az Agit. Prop. Osztályon létrehozandó elméleti csoport tagjairól [Referendum on the party history theoretical working community and the Agit. Prop. About the members of the theoretical group to be created in the department].

¹⁸ CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

¹⁹ KLEIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–68.

Information Office, which was directly subordinated to its institution, under the supervision of Gyula Kállai, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Council of Ministers. As a result, the most important information bodies (e. g. the Hungarian Radio), although indirectly, belonged to the Government.²⁰

The Information Office was established²¹ by the Imre Nagy government in 1954, but it was dissolved by András Hegedűs in May 1955. In December 1956, based on the decision of the Management Commission of 23 November,²² it was re-established, and initially, the reorganization and management of the press was initially primarily the responsibility of this entity. The question could arise why the Kádár-leadership decided to restore an institution that was established by former PM Imre Nagy. Initially, they thought that this move could act as a “political gesture” and – learning from the mistakes of the Rákosi-era – wanted to push the party into the background, at least at first, this was the idea.²³ The Head of the Information Office held the rank of minister and the office of government spokesman.²⁴ Kádár commissioned István Szirmai to fill this position, who tried to put the press at the service of the political leadership, in cooperation with the authorities and following its instructions.²⁵

Based on the 25/1956. (XII. 19.) Government decree, the task of the Office was on one hand to organize the state’s information work; therefore, it was necessary to ensure *“the regular briefings, smooth work, and participation in significant events of the press”*.²⁶ In addition, the Office made available to the press the statutes, the statutory decrees and the resolutions of the Presidential Council, and also the government’s decrees and resolutions. It was also responsible for carrying out press policing tasks,

²⁰ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–100.

²¹ MNL OL XIX-A-24-b 54. d. Tájékoztatási Hivatal Iratanyaga [Information Office’s File].

²² MNL OL 288. f. 5/4. ő. E. Javaslat a Minisztertanács Tájékoztatási és Sajtó Irodájának megszervezésére [Proposal for the organization of the Information and Press Office of the Council of Ministers].

²³ CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

²⁴ This did not happen until 1958, when the government and foreign affairs spokespersons merged, as a result of which the government spokesperson became the head of the Information Office. See: MNL OL 288. f. 5/62. ő. E. Személyi javaslatok [Personal suggestions].)

²⁵ CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 217., 221.

²⁶ 25/1956. (XII. 19.) Korm. Határozat a Kormány Tájékoztatási Hivatalának megszervezéséről [Government decree on the organization of the Government Information Office].

such as the withdrawal and involvement of newspaper licenses, licensing the import and distribution of foreign press products, providing paper supply. In addition to all this, it gave professional guidance to *“the press policing and publishing activities of the administrative department of the executive committee of the capital city and all county, county status councils”*.²⁷ Initially, the following bodies were also under its supervision: Hungarian Radio, Hungarian Telegraph Office, National Association of Hungarian Journalists, Sanatorium Association of Hungarian Journalists, newspaper publishing companies.²⁸

The press group set up within the DAP in 1957 had already predicted an increase of the party's influence and power aspirations in press control. Subsequently, the role and power of the Information Office also decreased, and management was transferred to the DAP. This was also evident in the fact that János Kádár initiated the dismissal²⁹ of István Szirmai and his transfer to the head of the DAP. However, the adoption of the motion – due to the unpopularity of Szirmai – did not go smoothly.³⁰ Under the 1012/1960 (VI. 7.) Government decision, the supervision³¹ of the Hungarian Radio and Television and the Hungarian Telegraph Office was removed from the competence of the Office, by which the reduction of its relevance was officially recognized.³² Its leader was no longer given the rank of a minister, but only a deputy minister and was also released of his duties as government spokesman.³³ The role of the Office gradually decreased towards the end of the 1960's. In fact, its task was limited to serve the DAP, perform administrative and operational tasks related to press management. Meanwhile, its only department, the press police's – headed by Mrs. Kádár – task was

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ MNL OL 288. f. 5/62. ő. E. Személyi javaslatok [Personal suggestions].

³⁰ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 101.; CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

³¹ A Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány 1.012/1960. (VI. 7.) számú határozata a Kormány Tájékoztatási Hivataláról. 4. pont [The Hungarian Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Government 1.012 / 1960. (VI. 7.) on the Government Information Office. Point 4]

³² TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

³³ MNL OL 288. f. 5/162. ő. e. Javaslat a Tájékoztatási Hivatal jellegének és feladatkörének módosítására [Proposal to change the nature and tasks of the Information Office]

to check and authorize foreign newspapers, increased its responsibilities and authority, as it was promoted to the departmental rank.³⁴

During this period, some ministries and national competence bodies felt that in addition to the operation of the Information Office, they also needed to maintain their own press department, which could facilitate contact with the press and perform related tasks. Their tasks were mainly limited to organizing press conferences and checking articles concerning their bodies.³⁵

3. Censorship

One of the most characteristic features of the era is the “invisible” censorship, the form of operation, which is more difficult to grasp and present, as on the one hand no specific legal provisions can be found about it, and on the other hand the party’s office was able to filter out unwanted documents. Although there was no official censorship office, based on the statements of journalists and editors, and the records of editors-in-chief meetings, it can be seen that in some way the authorities prevented them from communicating negative but real facts regarding the party. However, there were also braver journalists who tried to report on “more delicate” topics, but due to multiple screening mechanisms, they were not always successful. I would like to present the operation of censorship primarily from the narratives and statements of the journalists of the period, which came to light mainly during the period of easing or after the change of regime. However, these opinions should be treated with caution, as they are dependent on the political views of the person concerned whether he or she acknowledged that the party, although covertly, interfered with the life of the press. Consequently, there were also those who stated that there were no restrictions.

³⁴ CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

³⁵ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

The operation of censorship in the Kádár-system cannot be considered a novel phenomenon in Hungarian history. It was also experienced in the years following the fall of the War of Independence in 1848,³⁶ in the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, in the first months of the Friedrich government, during the far-right government after the German occupation, and also during the Arrow Cross regime. From the year of the turnaround in 1949, Rákosi's leadership gradually introduced it as well.³⁷

It is also necessary to mention that during these periods freedom of the press was restricted to varying degrees. In the official sense, we can only talk about censorship during the years of the counter-revolutionary system, exactly until 1921. It was typical for the time, that in addition to a few sentences, even several lines were removed from the newspaper, which was then published in this form.³⁸ Throughout, those in power provided themselves with the means to control the operation of the press. As a result, freedom of the press could be exercised only to a very limited extent,³⁹ according to a socialist interpretation, of which self-censorship and post-censorship were also seen as a natural corollary.⁴⁰

The principle of the undivided management and control of the party could prevail in relation to the press and the media in several ways and, of course, through the joint work of several bodies. The responsibilities of the given body were fixed by the decisions of the party. The regulations prescribed technical and administrative tasks. For a long time, however, customary law prevailed, according to which it was considered natural that the right to decide and overrule ultimately belonged to the

³⁶ KÉPESSY, Imre: National Modernisation through the Constitutional Revolution of 1848 in Hungary: Pretext and Context. In: KLIMASZEWSKA, Anna – GAŁĘDEK, Michał (eds.): *Modernisation, National Identity and Legal Instrumentalism (Vol. II: Public Law)*. Leiden, 2020, Brill / Nijhoff, pp. 51–68. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417359_004

³⁷ VÁSÁRHELYI, Miklós: A Kádár-rendszer tájékoztatási politikája – A cenzúra visszaállítása 1956 után. [Information policy of the Kádár regime – Restoration of censorship after 1956.] In: VALUCH, Tibor (ed.): *Hatalom és társadalom a XX. Századi magyar történelemben [Power and society in the XX. Century Hungarian history]*. Budapest, 1995, 1956-os Intézet, Osiris Kiadó, p. 467.

³⁸ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

³⁹ PAÁL, Vince (ed.): *Magyar sajtószabadság és -szabályozás 1914–1989 [Hungarian press freedom and regulation 1914–1989]*. Budapest, 2013, Médiatudományi Intézet, p. 6.

⁴⁰ CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

party.⁴¹ The tasks related to party papers fell under the direct responsibility of the press departments of the leading bodies and apparatus of the Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, MSZMP), while in the case of individual organizations (e. g. trade unions) the tasks were carried out with the involvement of the Information Office and newspaper owners. In addition, local party organizations and district party committees also played an important role in overseeing the work of the editorial offices.⁴² Resource managers also assisted in the control of major dailies and weeklies, but their work did not always prove effective based on the records.⁴³

There was no official censorship office during the leadership of either the MDP or the MSZMP. However, nothing could appear in the press or media without the party's trusted functionaries checking it before it appeared.⁴⁴

4. Relationship of „trust”, subsequent criticism, and responsibility

The preconditions for one of János Kádár's "great" ideas – that the responsibility should be shifted to the editors⁴⁵ – was the existence of a "confidential relationship". They tried to build this mainly through editorial meetings, where "confidential" information and decisions were shared with those present, and the editors were provided with

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222-223.; TAKÁCS 2012., *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁴² CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁴³ HU BFL XXXV.1.a.4. 32. ő. E. (1958. aug. 18.); HU BFL XXXV.1.a.4. 38. ő. E. (1958. nov. 10.); HU BFL XXXV.1.a.4. 80. ő. E. (1960. júl. 4.); HU BFL XXXV.1.a.4. 117. ő. E. (1961. dec. 22.)

⁴⁴ HORVÁTH, Attila: A cenzúra működési mechanizmusa Magyarországon a szovjet típusú diktatúra időszakában. [The mechanism of operation of censorship in Hungary during the Soviet-type dictatorship]. In: PAÁL, Vince (ed.): *Magyar sajtószabadság és -szabályozás 1914–1989 [Hungarian press freedom and regulation 1914–1989]*. Budapest, 2013b, Médiatudományi Intézet, p. 80.

⁴⁵ MNL OL 288. f. 7/13. ő. E. Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP KB Titkárságának 1957. szeptember 7-i üléséről [Minutes of the meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party on September 7, 1957].

instructions for their work (e. g. on which topics it is early or forbidden to write). Beyond these, they were sure to emphasize the mistakes made.⁴⁶

This type of system was first described by the decision of the Political Committee of 21st January 1958 on the situation and tasks of the press. According to it, *"The most important method of party management of the press is to regularly inform the heads and staff of editorial offices. The press can only politicize well if editorial leaders and staff are thoroughly familiar with the party's policies and decisions."*⁴⁷ As a result, it required the DAP to *"regularly inform editorial heads of party decisions"* and to *"regularly evaluate the work of the papers"*,⁴⁸ due to the latter requirement, the tasks of those working here included "scanning" (post-censorship). Their comments also had to be communicated to the leaders of the papers and to the leaders of the mass organizations or higher state bodies. The first secretary of the CC had to convene the heads of the editorial offices every six months, the competent secretary every three months, and the heads of the DAP every month, and draw their attention to possible problems. In addition, the first secretary of the CC had to meet with the leaders of the press and radio at least once a quarter of a year to provide them with comprehensive information about the party's policies.⁴⁹

In reality, the provisions were not fully enforced, as the editors-in-chief meetings were not held regularly. Therefore, other means were sometimes used to grab the attention of the press. Sometimes Kádár issued warnings and made requests to journalists at the session of the Parliament. For example, on 28th January 1958, he addressed them with these words: *"We ask journalists to act more responsibly. There is always a little bit of error with their data, they are inaccurate, sometimes they wade into*

⁴⁶ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ VASS – SÁGVÁRI, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

people's honour without some real reason or basis for it. We ask them to respect their own vocation at least as much as we do."⁵⁰

In addition to the DAP and the CC secretaries, the decision also imposed obligations on the Information Office. It had to inform the press and radio leaders about the meetings of the Council of Ministers, the Presidential Council, and the parliamentary committees. It also had to ensure that the leaders of ministries and mass organizations provided information to the press about their work. It had to organize press conferences for foreign delegations.⁵¹

However, these meetings' happenings were not always known to the public. The journalists could only report on the topics that the Hungarian Telegraph Office sent to their editorial offices after the approval of the Information Office. To increase trust, information that fell into the category of "unauthorized" news was also shared with those present.⁵²

However, in addition to prior briefings, there were often "telephone instructions" that could serve multiple purposes. Occasionally, a particular journalist was warned in advance that his article could not appear in any way or mention certain things, but they could even make a telephone call in retrospect in which the editor-in-chief was held accountable for the content of the licensed newspaper.⁵³ However, there were efforts to reduce the number of these warnings. Géza Naményi, President of the Information Office, said this at a meeting of editors-in-chief in 1959: *"We often think about whether our comrades don't call our phone calls completely redundant, it's such obvious and natural things. However, in this endeavour, we are reminded of the serious mistake that*

⁵⁰ Kádár János felszólalása az Országgyűlés 44. ülésnapján (1958. jan. 28.). [Speech by János Kádár on the 44th day of the National Assembly (January 28, 1958).] *Országgyűlési Napló [Parliamentary Journal]*, 1953. II. kötet, p. 2317.

⁵¹ VASS – SÁGVÁRI, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁵² PÓR, Edit: A kádári tájékoztatáspolitikája (1956–1962) [Kádár's information policy (1956–1962)] *Kritika [Critique]*, No. 2, 1997, p. 41.

⁵³ HEGEDŰS, István: Sajtó és irányítás a Kádár-korszak végén [Press and control at the end of the Kádár era]. *Médiakutató [Media researcher]*, 2001, no. 2, pp. 51-54.

the editors of the paper 'Hétfői Hírek (Monday News)' made last time."⁵⁴ In this case, the paper did not commemorate the death of an important comrade, György Bölöni.

These inquiries were primarily the responsibility of the editor, the essence of which is summarized most by the statement made by János Kádár in September 1957.⁵⁵ Learning from the mistakes made in the press management of the Rákosi-era, pre-censorship was abolished, and a system of self-censorship and post-censorship mixture was built instead.⁵⁶ Summarizing these, Kádár stated: *"Exclusive party leadership in the daily affairs of the press has so far been negative and has led to... a person with less judgment, less literacy instructing a person with greater literacy and a person with a better understanding of the issue. This may have changed a bit already, but it was from these instructions that overachievements came out, even in the personal cult. It must be organized somehow: it has to be a working system, which includes general management, raising awareness, but it is definitely he who tells you how. If the instruction you receive is not carried out, then in 1 month we can say: you see what you did, you were left to yourself, what you write and how you solve your task. This way we can ensure that he is responsible for the page. (...) Of course, I don't want to swear by the freedom of the press here, but party leadership must prevail elsewhere."*⁵⁷

One of the roughest tools of post-censorship was the banning and crushing of the completed publication. This could have happened if politically significant interests had been jeopardized. In reality, this was not a common phenomenon, and only occurred in a small number of journals.⁵⁸ The magazines intended for publication were strictly and continuously checked by the party. One of the most interesting examples

⁵⁴ MNL OL XIX-A-24-b 10. d. Az 1959. szeptember 18-i főszerkesztői értekezlet anyaga [Proceedings of the Editor-in-Chief Meeting of 18 September 1959].

⁵⁵ MNL OL 288. f. 7/13. ó. e. Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP KB Titkárságának 1957. szeptember 7-i üléséről [Minutes of the meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party on September 7, 1957].

⁵⁶ CSEH – KALMÁR – PÓR, *op. cit.*, pp. 223–224.

⁵⁷ MNL OL 288. f. 7/13. ó. e. Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP KB Titkárságának 1957. szeptember 7-i üléséről [Minutes of the meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party on September 7, 1957].

⁵⁸ TAKÁCS, *op. cit.*, p. 148.; HEGEDŰS, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

of this was the June 1958 conviction of Imre Nagy and others,⁵⁹ which was delivered by the members of the Political Committee, and after this, they closed the editorials and printing houses, and every step of printing was observed.⁶⁰ However, this system could not be considered fully adequate either, as journalists sometimes managed to “circumvent” using appropriate tactical tools, and as the number of newspapers progressed, the inspection apparatus was unable to pay attention to every detail.

5. The prior censorship – the types of self-censorship and its circumvention

Although the prior censorship has been abolished, it still appears in a specific way. This could be observed in the activities of the Hungarian Telegraph Office – which, as one of the largest news providers in the Hungarian press – provided only a part of the received information to the editorial offices. Confidential publications were also sent to them, but they could not be quoted from. This mechanism ensured that sensitive topics were avoided or possibly communicated in the appropriate format.⁶¹

On another note, holding the editors individually and retrospectively responsible laid the groundwork for the development of self-censorship. Management has sought to offset this significant burden on editors by interfering with confidential information.⁶² The self-censorship⁶³ developed mainly because A.) an article that had been rejected many times by the editor-in-chief, or B.) because of the process in the journalist to stay within the limits set by the political leadership.⁶⁴ Restricted journalists

⁵⁹ *Népszabadság [People's freedom]*, No. 142, 1958, p. 3.

⁶⁰ HORVÁTH, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁶¹ PÓR, *op. cit.*, p. 41.; HEGEDŰS, *op. cit.*, p. 50.; TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 155.; *Barcs Sándor-interjú. Készítette Kubinyi Ferenc 1987-ben [Interview with Sándor Barcs. Created by Ferenc Kubinyi in 1987]*. 1956-os Intézet Oral History Archívuma [Oral History Archive of the 1956 Institute]. 1987, no. 81., p. 185.

⁶² TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁶³ GOSZTONYI, Gergely: A cenzúra tipizálása a politikai cenzúra rövid történetének tükrében [Typification of censorship in the light of a brief history of political censorship]. *Médiakutató [Media researcher]*. 2022, no. 1. (forthcoming)

⁶⁴ TAKÁCS, Róbert: Sajtóirányítás és újságírói öncenzúra az 1980-as években [Press governance and journalistic self-censorship in the 1980s]. *Médiakutató [Media researcher]*. 2005, no. 1, p. 61., 64.

had to choose how they imagine their future. Many decided to leave their profession or emigrate to Western-Europe. Those who ultimately stayed, acknowledging their options, sought to remain true to themselves and, under the circumstances, to do journalism as their integrity still allowed.⁶⁵ The limits of self-censorship could change constantly due to political interests and the aspirations of journalists. However, due to this unpredictability and the specificity of the system, a “gray zone” remained throughout, in which the boundaries of the communication were not clarified.⁶⁶

Most journalists have tried to provide adequate information throughout, but due to political expectations, they have had limited opportunities to do so. Self-censorship could manifest itself in several forms, but it most often occurred in avoiding certain topics and silencing opinions. One of the main reasons for this was that, apart from general things (e.g. the revolution of 1956), it was never possible to know exactly what was taboo. It was considered more appropriate to listen than to form an untrue opinion on a political topic.⁶⁷

Another form of appearance was “packaging,” in which journalists sought to fine-tune their statements, so in addition to possible negative criticism, to include positive criticism. This type of technique may have manifested itself in several ways, in which circumvention of censorship can be found at the same time. In the case of “between the lines” writing, they were worded ambiguously, symbolically, and mainly in a literary style. However, in order to understand the messages in this way, the reader had to have an extremely high degree of political awareness and background information, so what the author had to say could not always reach a wider audience. Another typical method of placing the “red tail”, which usually took place at the end of the text. Its function was to protect an article that might be “more delicate” through

⁶⁵ Pethő Tibor-interjú. Készítette Murányi Gábor 1989-ben [Interview with Tibor Pethő. Created by Gábor Murányi in 1989]. 1956-os Intézet Oral History Archívuma [Oral History Archive of the 1956 Institute]. 1989, 189. sz., p. 372.

⁶⁶ HELLER, Mária – NÉMEDI, Dénes – RÉNYI, Ágnes: A magyar nyilvánosság szerkezetváltozásai a Kádár-rendszerben [Structural changes of the Hungarian public in the Kádár system]. In: SOMLAI, Péter (ed.): *Értékrendek és társadalmi-kulturális változások [Values and socio-cultural changes]*. Budapest, 1992, ELTE Szociológiai Intézet, pp. 112–113.

⁶⁷ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 163.; TAKÁCS, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

the connection between the content of the text and the socialist ideology.⁶⁸ A special way of self-censorship was when the news appeared in other foreign newspapers and journalists referred to it. Employees of the Finnish press called this method a “ping pong technique” that was favoured during the Cold War.⁶⁹

Last but not least, self-censorship can be found in the editing. One case is when, instead of a statement, the journalist merely communicates facts, and then drawing the conclusion is left to the reader. On the other hand, the editors also tried to get a sufficient amount of “bolder” writings within a single issue, as press supervisors also looked at the overall impact of articles published within a single paper. On the part of the more experienced editors, it was typical to wait for inter-party leave, which made it easier for the staff of the inspection body to avoid their attention about their work. Thus, “bolder” and “more delicate” writings were published mainly in the August and September issues.⁷⁰

If the editors-in-chief also sympathised with the party’s ideological views, the journalists working there were forced to employ tactics if they wanted to publish a more critical piece of writing. In such cases, the article was only submitted immediately before sheet closure, which made it easier to “slip through”. Another trick was to wait out the rotating deputy editors-in-chief who were more likely to allow the article to be published because of their political views.⁷¹

Political leadership was aware that while self-censorship worked to some extent, journalists could not be completely silenced. Despite all this, there were ideas and efforts to discipline them more or to filter the manuscripts that were printed more carefully. The previously cited Géza Naményi also stated in a note in 1963 the need for certain administrative actions: “... *it is extremely important, because, at least, there would*

⁶⁸ TAKÁCS, 2012, *op. cit.*, pp. 163–164.; RÁCZKEVI, Ágnes: Mesekomunizmus. Egy ünnep a Magyar Rádió 1947-1953 közötti gyermekműsoraiban [Fairy communism. A holiday in the children's programs of the Hungarian Radio between 1947-1953]. *Médiakutató [Media researcher]*. 2002, no. 6, pp. 46–47.

⁶⁹ TAKÁCS, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁷⁰ VÖRÖS, László: *Szigorúan ellenőrzött mondatok [Strictly controlled sentences]*. Szeged, 2004, Tiszatáj Alapítvány, p. 60.

⁷¹ HEGEDŰS, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–57.

not be a plethora of copies of writings that misinform readers and a large number of radio subscribers, and even wrongly influence the public! Yet: this does not change the thoughts and views in the minds of those who have written the listed erroneous articles and will obviously continue to write (or will write) in the future, but 'self-censorship' will not allow it to appear. 'Self-censorship' can be very dangerous anyway, and we could get 'on the other side of the horse' again."⁷²

There is no legal censorship in this era, but it is clear from the above that the Communist power tried to exercise the widest possible control over the operation of the press, with the help of its organization and the editors-in-chief, who can be described as trustworthy. The existence of censorship was a natural corollary of the work of journalists and editors, which was already embedded in their thinking. The Hungarian-Yugoslav writer, Danilo Kiš described this kind of phenomenon and self-control as follows: *"For the self-censor – is the writer's twin, a certain counterpart who leans over his head, reads his text in 'statu nascendi', and warns him not to get lost ideologically. And this alter ego of censorship cannot be permeated, like God, sees everything and knows everything, because it sprouted there, germinated there in our own brainworms, fears, and phantasmagories."⁷³*

6. Summary

The press control of the Kádár-era is extremely difficult to present in a realistic way, as one of the peculiarities of this period was that the will of the party must prevail, regardless of the individual legal provisions. The initial ideas also changed constantly, as well as the structure of the organizational system and the responsibilities of the bodies. The Communist power tried to maintain the appearance of a "freer" operation

⁷² MNL OL XIX-A-24-b III/468/TÜK/63. Naményi Géza feljegyzése Darvasi Istvánnak a sajtóban tapasztalható nem kívánatos jelenségekről [Géza Naményi's note to István Darvasi on undesirable phenomena in the press].

⁷³ Kiš, Danilo: Cenzúra / öncenzúra [Censorship / self-censorship]. In.: Kiš, Danilo: *Kételyek kora [Age of doubt]*. Pozsony-Újvidék, 1994, Kalligram-Fórum Kiadó, p. 133.

of the press with editorial responsibility, but most of the journalist were aware of being controlled in the same way as during the former leadership of Rákosi, however by other means.

In my opinion, the political leadership was aware that if they could keep the press under control, it could be a major “weapon” that could easily manipulate people and shape the public opinion to their advantage. Through a propaganda campaign launched in the press, the opinions of the “ordinary” people could have been easily manipulated in a news-isolated country. Of course, in a dictatorship, one cannot talk about real freedom of press. This right of this freedom could only prevail in the socialist approach, which implemented censorship⁷⁴ as a natural corollary.

⁷⁴ GOSZTONYI, Gergely: „Agyamban kopasz cenzor ül”, avagy a politikai cenzúra története Magyarországon napjainkig [„A bald censor sits in my brain”, or the history of political censorship in Hungary up to the present day]. In: MENYHÁRD, Attila – VARGA, István (szerk.): *350 éves az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kara 2. kötet, A jubileumi év konferenciasorozatának tanulmányai [350 years of the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Eötvös Loránd University Volume 2, Studies of the conference series of the jubilee year]*. ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest, 2019, pp. 989–997.