DESTINED OR DOOMED?

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Destined or Doomed?

Hungarian Dissidents and their Western Friends, 1973-1998

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Through the lens of Hungarian dissidents and their supporters in the West, the following study analyzes the motivations of intellectuals from East and West to engage in an open East-West dialogue, their efforts to change the social and political structure of the Cold War, and their contributions to the peaceful revolutions of 1989. It investigates the alliance of intellectuals from either side of the Iron Curtain, their formative experiences and mutual influences. To understand the origins, functions, and legacy of this network, the study investigates the period from the 1960s to the late 1990s, focusing on the years 1973 to 1998.

Findings suggest that the motivations that would bring intellectuals from either side of the Iron Curtain together in the 1980s originated in similarly formative experiences in the 1960s, which shattered their youthful convictions and initiated a search for a new intellectual identity that would bring Easterners and Westerners together by the late 1970s. In response to the encounter, the participants developed a distinct set of political and historical convictions that rooted in cultural liberalism, their commitment to free, open and democratic societies, and the acceptance of universal human rights.

This case study touches upon developments throughout Eastern Europe and evaluates the history of the Cold War as interplay between East and West. It indicates a retreat from authoritarian rule in the East as early as 1987, and highlights the problematic, one-sided perception of the Hungarian Democratic Opposition in the West. It discusses
the achievements of the former dissidents, and their struggle to adjust to the situation in post-1989 Europe.

The project is based on archival research in six different countries; findings are based on documents found in private collections, national libraries, institutional, national and state security archives. Additionally, over forty eyewitnesses and experts shared their experiences and views in interviews conducted between 2009 and 2012.