

## **THESIS SUMMARY**

to the Ph.D. dissertation of

**Dalma Kékesdi-Boldog**

titled

### **Chernobyl in the media**

The Soviet-Communist type press model  
in the Kádár era in light of a case study

#### **Supervisors:**

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**Department of Communication and Media Studies**

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## **1. Research background and rationale for the topic**

At 1:23 a.m. on April 26, 1986, Reactor No. 4 of the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin Nuclear Power Plant exploded near the city of Chernobyl in the Soviet Union. As a result of the accident, harmful radioactive material was released into the atmosphere, which contaminated tens of thousands of square kilometers and reached the airspace of Hungary. The nuclear power plant accident threatened human lives, but the local and Hungarian population could not be sufficiently informed about the danger due to the Soviet-communist type media policy. The exact number of victims is not known to date, we only have estimates (Aszódi 2006, 2016).

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster is a multifaceted event that raises a number of global and local issues. From the point of view of media history and communication science, it is especially worth paying attention to how the communication of the event took place in the Soviet-type authoritarian press model (Siebert et al. 1956/1984). The fact of the catastrophe affected the geopolitical position of the Soviet Union, as the stability of the state socialist ideology was shaken by the fact that the accident was caused by human negligence and the failure of the nuclear power plant indicated Soviet technological backwardness, but discourse was limited. There were also official Western reports of increased levels of radioactive radiation as a result of the nuclear disaster, so the accident could not be concealed, despite the intentions of the Soviet party leadership.

The examination of public information on the Chernobyl events was also a relevant issue in the context of 'glasnost', the political openness, announced by the General Secretary of the CPSU in early 1986, as the essence of this new type of political guideline was to provide more space for public discussion of certain topics (Gibbs 1999: 8). The nuclear power plant accident was "the first test of a new type of Soviet policy" (McNair 1991: 54) and "pointed out the limitations of information" (Gibbs 1999: 42).

Since the nuclear disaster, the leadership of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party has been accused several times of inadequate handling of the case, stagnant communication and poor information (Balázs et al., 2006, Balázs 2006, Mangel 2020). I argue that a complete picture of the Hungarian media representation of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster can be gained by examining it in the context of contemporary political and information policy, while also revealing what information the Party leaders had about what happened in the first days.

In the Kádár era, there were constant information challenges and problems that were difficult for the public to interpret. Of these, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, as an event affecting many problematic areas, proves to be particularly suitable for presenting the practical operation of Hungarian information policy because the examination of this extraordinary case shows everyday information problems as a magnifying glass, in lack of finding an event of

greater news value in the era. Although the official communication of the nuclear disaster reveals a lot about both Hungarian and Soviet information practices, no Hungarian specialist has yet undertaken a comprehensive scientific study; with my dissertation I try to fill this gap.

In my doctoral research I am looking for an answer to the main question of what the media system of the Kádár era was like, and I present its operation through the example of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. I dedicate my dissertation as a basic research, which on the one hand provides an interpretive framework for a more differentiated characterization of the Kádár-era information policy than before, and on the other hand offers a scientific analysis of Hungarian nuclear disaster communication on media platforms with different news cycles. I use a number of primary sources in an effort to make my work useful in subsequent research that seeks to map the interplay between political and media systems in the context of state socialist systems.

The contribution of my research, in addition to the detailed Chernobyl case study exploring the mechanisms of information policy practice, is to show how certain extraordinary political events can lead to changes in the media system – the connection between the two subsystems.

## **2. Methods used**

My dissertation consists of two main content units: a media system analysis and an examination of the media representation of an unexpected event. My research is on the border of the social sciences and humanities, within which it is related to the disciplines of media and communication sciences as well as historical sciences. In my study of primary sources, I use the methods of descriptive history and content analysis and in the case of secondary literature, I apply secondary analysis and synthesis of sources. I present my research results following a deductive logic.

I begin the literature review with classical propaganda literature (Lippman 1922, Bernays 1928/2005, Lasswell 1938, Klemperer 1947/2013, Boorstin 1961, Ellul 1965, Carey 1989/2009, Herman & Chomsky 2016). Subsequently, Max Weber (1922/1987), Gabriel Almond et al. (2006) and József Bayer (1999) I define the concept of the (state socialist) political system and the institutional system. I formulate the characteristics of mass communication, media and media system based on Manuel Puppis (2010), Petra Aczél (2015) and Denis McQuail (2015), distinguishing between the early, traditional media system (McQuail 2015), the late-modern media environment (Császi 2008) and the new hybrid media system (Chadwick 2015, 2017). The relationship between the media system and the political system(s) is the media capture (Mungiu-Pippidi 2008), the party colonization of the media

(Bajomi-Lázár 2015), the political parallelism (Seymour- Ure 1974) and media instrumentalization (Hallin & Mancini 2004/2008, Mancini 2012). I use the writings of Max Weber (1922/1987), János Kornai (1997), Erzsébet Szalai (1994), József Bayer (1997, 1998, 1999) and Andrew Heywood (2017, 2019) to define the concepts of (state socialist) ideology and political legitimacy. Based on Brezinski (1956/1965), Linz and Stepan (1996), and Heywood (2019), I explain why I use the notion of liberalization rather than democratization to characterize contemporary media policy. In synthesizing the literature, I am looking for an answer to the question of how the media system works in an authoritarian political system and what kind of features it shows.

In describing the Hungarian media system, I use a classical media system theory approach: I examine the relations and interactions of the political system and the media system. I apply the *longue durée* perspective and seek answers to the main question of what the Kádár media system was like and how it has changed over time. I believe that Kádár's information policy is worth to examine in a complex way, and that long-term events must also be taken into account in order to understand the media policy changes of the era. Therefore, I first briefly describe the features of the Soviet-communist type press model (Siebert et al. 1956/1984: 105–146), and James W. Markham (1961), Mark W. Hopkins (1965), Gail W. Lapidus (1987), Based on Brian McNair (1991), Richard Sakwa (1993/2008, 1999), Joseph Gibbs (1999), Jeffrey Brooks (2000) and Brett W. Taylor (2013), I will briefly review the guiding principles underlying Soviet information practice and how it can be divided into main eras in the Soviet Union. In this research I do not discuss Soviet information policy in detail, but focus only on its basic features. In the present context, I consider the Soviet model as a point of reference that can help to understand the operation of the Hungarian media system. In order to support my argument, I consider it necessary to make a comparison of Soviet and Hungarian media governance (see Figure 1 in the appendix). This table is made on an experimental basis, for illustrative purposes, and its role is to show and make comparable the Soviet and Hungarian information policy peculiarities defined in the basic research, and to show that the two media systems have not developed in the same way over the years.

I consider the Hungarian information policy to be a special version of the Soviet-Communist press model. My starting point is that the Kádár media system is very similar to the Soviet system in terms of structure, operation, and principles, but the two practices are not exactly the same because they have changed at different rates and in different directions over time. In support of all this, I first describe the management method and organizational structure of the Hungarian media system, and then I describe the specific features of the practical operation. After that, I will briefly turn to the media management of the Rákosi era, which also

used the Soviet-communist type press model, and the transition period between 1953 and 1956, because these can be considered as direct antecedents of the Kádár-era's (information) policy.

In describing the Kádár-era media system, I focus on the connections between major political events and changes in the management of the Hungarian media, and I argue that the relationship between the media system and the political system has been constantly evolving over time. In other words, the information policy of the Kádár era was a constantly and dynamically changing system, depending on foreign and domestic political factors, economic and social influences. To support this, I propose demarcating six major media policy eras. During the segmentation, I use the epoch boundaries suggested by Tamás Fricz (1988), but I treat these dates and concepts with criticism. I consider it necessary to supplement Fricz's analysis with the scientific results of authors writing on the topic after the change of regime, such as Csaba Békés (2003, 2006, 2011, 2019), Géza Buzinkay (2016), György Földes (2012a, 2012b, 2015, 2018), István Hegedűs (2001), Melinda Kalmár (2014) and Róbert Takács (2008, 2009, 2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2020). During the description of the Hungarian information policy sections, I process primary sources (contemporary political resolutions, decrees, laws, protocols, and public and private speeches of party leadership members), and I also review the relevant items of contemporary political, media and historical literature. I strive to reconstruct the parallels and differences between the Soviet and Hungarian information policy on the basis of a secondary analysis of the literature.

In the second part of the dissertation, during the examination of the Hungarian media representation of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, I am looking for an answer to the question of when and what the Hungarian population was informed about and how understandable and whether the news were informative. I also pay great attention to the content of media with different news cycles and journalistic role models. I examine the Hungarian communication about the nuclear disaster in a complex way, I analyze not only the content of the media, but also the management of the media. I also try to reveal what factors motivated the Hungarian party leadership in general, and also specifically during the (manual) control of the media system during the Chernobyl events.

First, I try to reconstruct when and what information the Hungarian political leadership received from the Soviet officials and when, what measures they put in place with the help of party documents and official documents reporting on the internal organizational communications of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party and domestic information, Daily Operational Information Reports, ambassadorial and consular reports as well as top-secret messages from the Soviet Union. I will also briefly discuss the analyzes of the health status of

the Hungarian population, because I believe that this is also an important -- but in many cases not objectively viewed -- part of the social discourse that developed after the accident.

Subsequently, I examine of the content of the Hungarian media, the articles of three dailies with a high number of national copies (Magyar Nemzet [Hungarian Nation], Népszava [People's Voice] and Népszabadság [Liberty of the People]), two weekly newspapers (Heti Világgazdaság [Weekly World Economy]) and one magazine (Jövő Mérnöke [Engineer of the Future]), broadcasts of Hungarian Radio and I analyze the Hungarian language programs of Radio Free Europe and the recordings of the Hungarian Television. The examined corpus consists of 124 newspaper articles, 241 radio news outlets, 2 radio magazine program outlets, 10 radio audio material, 17 visual press inserts, and 13 video recordings. I perform content description and analysis of written materials, follow the traditions of classical motion picture analysis in the examination of video recordings, and focus on settings and proxemic codes. For all three media platforms, I am looking for answers to the following main questions:

- When was the first news about the Chernobyl accident published?
- What information did the population receive about the extent of radiation pollution in Hungary?
- What health recommendations have been issued?

I consider these three factors to be particularly important because they have had a decisive impact on people's daily lives. This is because the Chernobyl nuclear disaster not only caused environmental devastation but also affected the overall human well-being, and also infiltrated the lives of families at the micro level through adherence to daily precautions (Harper 2001). As radioactive radiation cannot be detected empirically and can only be detected with an instrument, there may have been many dilemmas among the population that determined everyday life (can children be released, how many times do you have to wash large leafy vegetables to wash away radioactive contamination, whether pregnant women are at risk, whether taking iodine tablets is harmful, whether store-bought dairy products can be consumed), which may have increased information hunger, dissonance, and with it the need for accurate information.

The novelty of my media analysis lies in the fact that it is based on the exploration of a large number of sources, examining communication on all three contemporary media platforms at the same time during the event. It is also a novelty that during the analysis of the recordings of the Hungarian Television I show, for the purpose of illustration, still images captured from the original video materials, depicting the most characteristic moment of the given report or interview.

In the media analysis, I break down the basic questions into the following sub-questions:



- Was there a difference in the way and extent of political control of each media platform?
- Did the short news cycle radio work differently than the longer news cycle daily press?
- Was Hungarian Television able to provide more abundant and accurate information through visual communication than other media?
- How did the information practice of Hungarian Radio and Radio Free Europe differ?
- How much leeway did journalists have and what sanctions they had to face if they deviated from official information policy principles?

Due to the fragmentation of primary sources, I also call on the contemporary mass communication analyzes of the Mass Communication Research Center (TK), because these scientifically written, in-house analyzes can supplement the incomplete source material in the archives in several places. I treat TK analyzes not only as sources for my own research, but I also analyze their content in a separate chapter, because these materials generated during the year of the accident also provide information on how social scientists and journalists thought about the domestic communication about the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. I will also briefly describe the results of the opinion polls conducted here, because they report on the impact of the accident and its communication on Hungarian society.

I supplement the research results with semi-structured interviews (Wengraf 2001). I did an interview with Mihály Hardy, a former Moscow correspondent of Hungarian Television, József Barát, a former Moscow correspondent of Hungarian Radio and Iván Bedő, a former news editor of Hungarian Radio, who was working that evening when the accident was announced in Hungary. Mihály Gálik, the former editorial director of the Hungarian Radio, helped me to understand the political conditions of the time and the internal operation of the institution, Tamás Terestyéni shared his experiences with the Mass Communication Research Center with me. These qualitative interviews are needed because they provide a deeper knowledge, as the respondents present their answers in their own wording (Babbie 2001: 336–339, Héra & Ligeti 2005: 142). I do not use interviews to “explore the truth,” but to learn about representations of the past that can be learned from the present (Sipos 2007: 356) and to nuance the results.

### **3. Scientific results of the dissertation (in bullet points)**

In my doctoral dissertation, I processed two major topics by combining the analytical and synthesizing approaches. First, I characterized the Soviet-communist press model of the Kádár era by exploring the political intentions, interests, economic and social reasons and causes

behind the practical operation of Hungarian information policy. Then, with the multi-plane analysis of contemporary press articles, radio broadcasts and television programs -- during which, in addition to examining the content of the news, I also paid special attention to visual communication and journalistic professionalization -- I showed how the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident was communicated in Hungary.

(1) In the first content unit, I demarcated three types of media control in the Soviet-communist-type press model, and I also presented them in a chronological diagram (see Figure 1 in the appendix). During *authoritarian* rule, the need for partisanship and agitator-propaganda journalism came to the fore to the detriment of credible and accurate information. During the periods characterized by *liberalization*, the control of information policy eased, so a more open, objective tone in communication became allowed to a certain extent, and the importance of the role of the public became more valuable. Working conditions for journalists have improved, the infrastructural background of the mass media has improved and the number of non-political publications has increased. During the *transition periods*, the instrumental conception of the mass media was dissolved, and some signs of liberalization appeared in the theoretical management of information policy, but no real information policy results were achieved at that time.

(2) I described and characterized the Hungarian state socialist information policy in a more differentiated way than in contemporary literature, *dividing it into six major eras*. I tried to make it clear that in the case of the Soviet and Hungarian media systems we can see two versions of the same press model, ie it is true that in principles (partisanship, continuous state security control, a system of censorship, and the expectation of self-censorship) both followed the authoritarian, Soviet-communist model, yet they went down a different path of development over time. Contrary to literary tradition, I did not emphasize the constancy of Hungarian media policy, but argued that the relationship between the media system and the political system, as well as the ideas about the role and function of the media was constantly changing over time, so Hungarian information policy segmented and in some respects it can be seen as an adaptive, change-capable system. This is proven by the fact that not only authoritarian control has taken place, but we can also see transitional periods and liberalization efforts. Based on my research results, I proposed the demarcation of six major media policy eras.

(2.1) In the first period (1956–1959), the post-1956 revolution saw the political “ordering” and strengthening of the party’s social legitimacy. In this process, the press was given an important role: it had to promote the spread of state socialist ideology through open agitation and propaganda, and it had to participate in the “education”, orientation and mobilization of society. Despite the fact that a policy of de-Stalinization was taking place in the

Soviet Union at that time, media governance in Hungary showed authoritarian signs (see Figure 1 in the appendix). First among the legal regulators of the new political system were the decisions on press management, which determined the mission of the press, its institutional background, and provided for the conditions of production and reproduction. The Information Office was established, the requirements for the establishment of papers were tightened, and the party exercised a monopoly on communications and the production of paper and printing. The declaration of sole editorial responsibility and the 1958 cultural policy decision resulted in a new type of censorship system in information: manual control of the press and the expectation of prior (self)censorship. During these years, not only the content of the press was influenced, but also the institutional and infrastructural conditions necessary for the production of press products came under full political control.

(2.2) In the second period (1960–1964), authoritarian media management was somewhat relegated to the background: easing began in Hungarian domestic politics, which also had an impact on information policy (see Figure 1 in the appendix). The 1963 amnesty ordinance ended the period of bloody retaliation after the revolution. In 1961, during the XXII. CPSU congress “peaceful coexistence” was proclaimed and it became an important reference base, which brought a new era together with the view “who is not against us is with us” voiced by János Kádár. As a result, expectations of the press were eased, and instead of the former sentimental, agitator-propagandist journalism, information, political and cultural education tasks came to the fore. The more permissive political attitude also appeared in artistic management: at the VIII. Party Congress, it was expressed that the party leadership provides space for “all other well-intentioned, non-hostile artistic activities,” that vaguely outlined the existence of a “tolerated” category in the public sphere. Another important step forward was the decision in December 1963 to temporarily stop interference with Western radio stations - BBC, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe.<sup>1</sup>

(2.3.) In the third period (1965–1970) we can observe the signs of liberalization in Hungarian media policy (see Figure 1 in the appendix): in the 1965 Political Committee decision on “improving information” it was recognized that there is an inseparable connection between mass communication and “socialist democracy”, and the audience is not an unrestricted mass of people, but a differentiated group with different needs and expectations for mass communication. The PB decision has already made it clear that information must be provided on everything, including unfavorable things. After the publication of the 1966 issue

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<sup>1</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-k-USA-18/d-033/1964. 39 d. Foreign Ministry memorandum on the elimination of interference with radio stations (14 December 1963).

of the Cultural Theory Working Community led by György Aczél, the differentiated cultural and information policy, which has so far only been used in practice, was fixed at the rhetorical level of information policy management. As a result, lighter, more entertaining content has appeared in the press and electronic media, as well as in the cultural sphere. The number of periodicals has multiplied and the number of non-political newspapers has expanded. Opportunities for the journalistic profession have also improved: from 1967 onwards, access to higher education and foreign language learning was encouraged. The new economic mechanism announced in 1968 had a significant, multifaceted and long-term impact, as a result Hungary became a leader in the Eastern bloc in several respects and was increasingly forced to open up to Western countries in order to maintain its standard of living (Ripp 2009: 46, Földes 2018: 120, Békés 2019: 195).

(2.4.) In the fourth period (1971–1976), liberalization was pushed back and authoritarian party leadership came to the fore again (see Figure 1 in the appendix). Partly due to Brezhnev's pressure, and partly due to geopolitical events, the new economic mechanism came to a halt and the Hungarian economy began to decline. It was considered problematic in Hungarian media management that domestic political journalism reported on unfavorable domestic social and economic processes in an increasingly critical tone, thanks to the more permissive media policy management of previous years. In 1971, the party leadership tightened control over the activities of the press by openly declaring its expectations: “The press serves the party's policy well if it mobilizes the population with the available means... Mass media and opinion-forming impose a great responsibility on the press staff. ... Strive for accuracy instead of writing supposed truths. Not only do they need to register, but also shape public opinion.”<sup>2</sup>

(2.5.) The fifth phase of media policy (1977-1985) was a transitional period: media governance showed neither authoritarian nor liberalizing features (see Figure 1 in the appendix). After the announcement of the new foreign economic strategy in 1977, the country's foreign policy relations were revived, but - despite the success of the Helsinki Convention - this effort did not help, the Hungarian economy was already in a deep crisis, which could not be hidden. The party leadership noticed that the position, valid from the early 1970s, that only good news could be provided because the people's everyday experiences did not confirm what was said in official communication, could no longer be maintained. Thus, in the second half of the decade, the emphasis in coverage was placed on informing the population. In the Kádár era, the expectation of accuracy and comprehensibility first appeared at that time, which was related

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution of the Agitation and Propaganda Committee of the Central Committee of MSZMP on the situation and some problems with domestic political journalism (21 May 1971) (Vass 1983: 72–73).

to the fact that the phenomenon of social differentiation was once again in the sight of the developers of information policy. After their congress in 1980, the Party had already openly proclaimed the importance of social segmentation and the need for differentiated political communication and credible information. It is worth noting that on a rhetorical level, the intention to liberalize appeared earlier in Hungary than in the Soviet Union, as Gorbachev only announced a new political direction from 1985, which proclaimed more open and honest media coverage.

(2.6.) In the last, sixth period (1986–1990), domestic political issues became more prominent due to growing political divisions within the Party and emerging differences of opinion as well as the economic crisis and growing social dissatisfaction. Recognition of the fragmentation of society and the importance of the public, as well as the intention to improve information in order to develop a dialogue with individual members of society, have become more dominant in information policy. But due to rigid, party-political ideas about not giving up direct control, the involvement of the public in political affairs was not realized. Real changes only appeared after the entry into force of the first Hungarian press law, ie after 1986. At the time, there were several liberalizing, public broadening information policy milestones in the decade that would have been unthinkable in previous years. But these were not the result of a renewable information policy concept, but were due to the strengthening of the second publicity.

(3) In my basic research examining the media representation of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, I presented the Hungarian communication of the event *in a complex way*. Not only did I analyze the media texts, but I also explored with the help of archival sources what information the Hungarian party leadership had about the events in the days after the accident and what measures it took, so perhaps I was able to paint a more nuanced picture of the official domestic information about the event. Thanks to qualitative interviews, I learned valuable data from professionals who were once actively involved in communication that could not have been extracted from either the primary or secondary literature.

(3.1.) My research results show that in the domestic communication of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster we can observe the same mechanism as in the depiction of economic difficulties: the real problem (in this case the danger) was not discussed, and the unfavorable news were counterbalanced and accurate information only appeared later on.

(3.2) The media analysis shows that the Hungarian-language broadcast of Radio Free Europe, the Hungarian Radio and the Hungarian Television reported two- and the newspapers reported three days late. At the same time, we can also state that the Hungarian Radio and Television reported on the disaster immediately after the official Soviet acknowledgment of

what had happened. In other words, the delay in Hungary was not caused by the withholding of information by the Hungarian media, and not or only partly by the information policy, but by the lack of information resulting from the delay and secrecy of the Soviet side.

(3.3.) It can be seen from the Hungarian party records that on April 26 the Hungarian party leadership received information from unofficial sources that higher levels of radioactive radiation had been measured in several parts of Northern Europe, but this information did not yet clearly indicate a threat to Hungarian experts. This is also indicated by the fact that a state of readiness was ordered only two days later, on April 28 in Hungary, but it is important to point out that this took place before the official Soviet information. It can also be seen from the Hungarian party documents that a committee of experts was convened even when only the short TASS report and two cryptographic messages from the Consul General of Kiev provided information about what had happened. At that time, on April 29, even in Radio Free Europe broadcasts, there were only speculations about what might have happened and what the consequences might be. The Hungarian experts held a two-day meeting and the next day, on April 30, ordered regular radiation measurements, the production of iodine tablets, and considering the meteorological conditions, prepared for the worst-case scenario – during this time the radioactive cloud have reached Hungary's airspace. The news about the invariance of domestic radiation levels was valid only as long as the expert committee was uncertain about the details: from May 1, after the Ministry of Agriculture and Food ordered a grazing ban in several counties, there were already announcements in the Hungarian media that indirectly, but acknowledged the presence of harmful substances. The level of radioactive contamination peaked in Hungary on 2 May, which was not explicitly reported in the media – but at which time health regulations were published - and then information on fluctuations and decreases in radiation levels appeared. However, as can be seen from the official records, a significant reduction in radioactivity occurred only in the wake of the 8 May rains.

(3.4.) In the communications about Chernobyl we can observe the following dynamics: in the hours following the official acknowledgment of the accident, all known information were published on Hungarian Radio, and then - after the party leadership changed to manual control on April 30 - only topics approved by the Information Office could be discussed and finally - after the broadcasters of the Hungarian Radio were allowed on 10 May to make audio material on topics not yet covered in the central narrative - total control of the media was not restored and more and more details about the accident and its domestic consequences were published.

(3.5.) The media representation of the nuclear disaster also points to two peculiarities of the Hungarian publicity. On the one hand, it shows the kind of journalistic elbow-room there may have been for each medium. The obligation to provide information appeared in the

interpretation of the role of journalists: Iván Bedő released on Hungarian Radio at his own risk Western news broadcasts captured by the domestic wiretapping service, in the journal of the Technical University, articles that were understandable for lay readers were published. the journalists of the weekly chronologically published, the producers of Hungarian Radio's 168 Óra program also introduced new topics to the public discourse in connection with Chernobyl on two weekends and the employees of Hungarian Television tried to prepare reports on as many topics and at as many locations as possible.

(3.6.) On the other hand, (this) media analysis (also) makes it clear that publicity had circles of different widths in the 1980s. The results show that staff in political dailies were unable to fulfill their informational role due to strict party control: the news here were short and concise and teeming with radiobiology jargon, typically taken from the texts of interviews on television or radio the previous day. That is, for the lay reader, these were less informative. The same was the case at Hungarian Radio, where, with the exception of a few hours of uncensored time, very short coverages could be heard until 10 May, the first thematic program of 168 Óra. In the first days of this „information-starved” period, Radio Free Europe was the one that was able to quench the hunger somewhat by providing information based on Western news sources, and also allowed room for assumptions and conjectures – so even if SZER did not provide more precise information, it was suitable for forming a kind of community by facilitating common thinking about the event. Weekly newspapers with more detailed announcements and background information came out on the weekend of May 10, but due to the longer news cycle, they were always able to provide information only afterwards. Due to the fact that they were aimed at a smaller readership than dailies, there was less party political control here. As a result, the circumstances of the accident were described in detail here, its effects discussed along a number of topics, and multi-page articles were published. The efforts of Engineer of the Future, a scientific journal that sought to interpret the phenomenon, explain the concept, and understand what happened, had been so fruitful that their articles were understandable to readers unfamiliar with radiobiology — the final conclusions in any case, even if the full scientific reasonings were not.

(4) In sum, we can say that the communication of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster can be considered a milestone in the information policy of the Kádár era, because it indirectly facilitated the liberalization of media policy guidelines. Furthermore, this case clearly illustrates a process that has become increasingly prevalent throughout the era, during which information policy rhetoric and practice have gradually diverged. The political instrumentalization of the media prevented objective information in the Kádár era, but in the case of unexpected events, journalistic practice sometimes set the framework for information. In these situations,

information policy was forced to show some flexibility, as the media could not be limited to propaganda activities.

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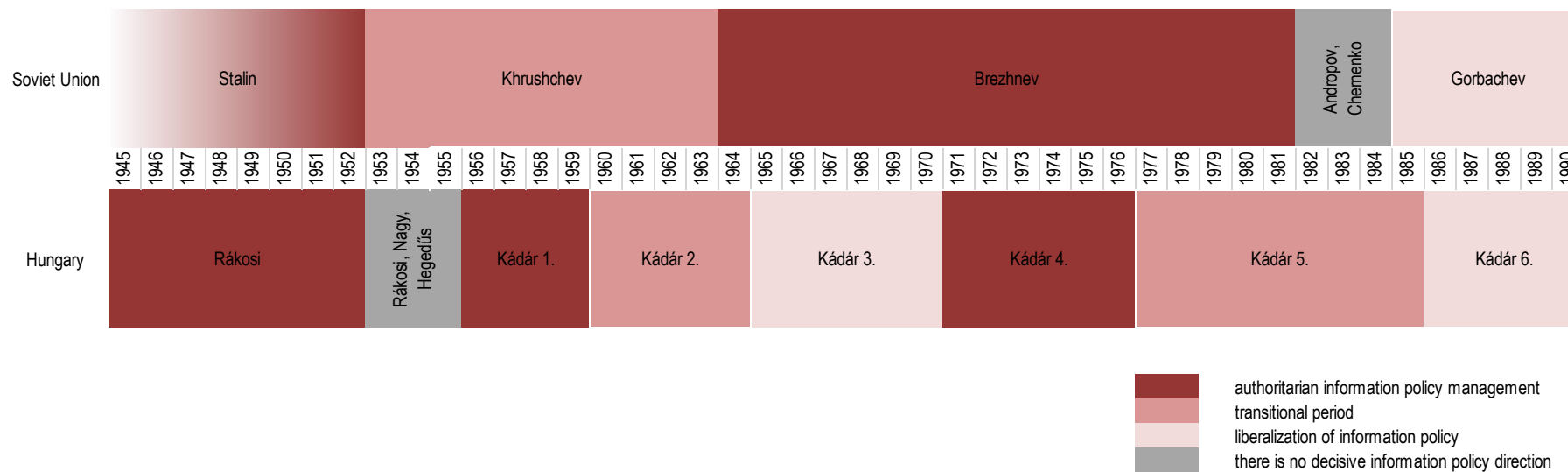
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## 5. Appendix

**Figure 1. Basic features of the Soviet-communist press model between 1947 and 1990 in the Soviet Union and Hungary**



## 6. List of publications on the subject

### Journal articles in Hungarian

1. Kékesdi-Boldog Dalma (2018): Az 1980-as évekbeli magyar tájékoztatáspolitikája egy rendkívüli esemény tükrében: a csernobili atomkatasztrófa a Népszabadságban [Hungarian information policy in the 1980s in the light of an extraordinary event: the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Népszabadság], *Médiakutató*, XIX. évf. 2. sz. 49–61. o.
2. Kékesdi-Boldog, Dalma (2019): Az 1980-as évekbeli magyar tájékoztatáspolitikáról és a csernobili atomkatasztrófa pártállami kommunikációjáról. Válasz Sükösd Miklósnak [On the Hungarian information policy of the 1980s and the party-state communication of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Answer to Miklós Sükösd]. *Médiakutató*, XX. évf. 1. sz. 103–105. o.
3. Kékesdi-Boldog Dalma (2019): A csernobili atomkatasztrófa kommunikációja a Magyar Rádióban és a Szabad Európa Rádióban [Communication of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster on Hungarian Radio and Radio Free Europe], *Médiakutató*, XX. évf. 4. sz. 21–35. o.
4. Kékesdi-Boldog Dalma (2020): A csernobili atomkatasztrófa hírei a Magyar Televízióban [News of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster on Hungarian Television], *Médiakutató*, XXI. évf. 2. sz. 37–55. o.
5. Kékesdi-Boldog Dalma (2020): A csernobili atomkatasztrófával kapcsolatos kutatási anyagok a Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpontban [Research materials related to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster at the Mass Communication Research Center], *Jel-Kép* 2020/3. sz. 82–96. o.
6. Kékesdi-Boldog Dalma (2020): „A szovjet elvtársak nem adnak tájékoztatást” A csernobili atomkatasztrófa utáni intézkedések Magyarországon és a baleset hazai médiareprezentációja [“Soviet comrades do not provide information” Measures taken after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Hungary and the media coverage of the accident in Hungary], *Betekintő* 14. évf. 4. sz. 7–29. o.
7. Kékesdi-Boldog Dalma (2021): A szovjet-kommunista sajtómodell sajátosságai és korszakai Magyarországon 1956 és 1990 között [Peculiarities and eras of the Soviet-communist press model in Hungary between 1956 and 1990], *Jel-Kép (Várható megjelenés: 2021/1. sz.)*.

### Journal articles in foreign languages

1. Bajomi-Lázár Péter & Kékesdi-Boldog Dalma (2018): Zurück in die Zukunft. Das Wiedererstarken autoritärer Medienpolitik in Ungarn [Back to the Future. The resurgence of authoritarian media politics in Hungary], *Osteuropa*, vol. 3–5, pp. 273–282.
2. Kékesdi-Boldog, Dalma (2019). The Chernobyl disaster: A case study on the information policy of the Kádár regime. *Central European Journal of Communication*, vol. 12. No 1(22) Spring, pp. 79–92 DOI: 10.19195/1899-5101.12.1(22).5