

Online Publication

October 2010

Zoltán Maruzsa:

„1968” and its effect on the countries of the  
Soviet Block

document first published in (print):

ÖT KONTINENS, Eötvös Lóránd  
Tudományegyetem, Budapest, 2009

Zoltán Maruzsa

*„1968” and its effect on the countries of the Soviet Bloc*

**H**undreds of conferences and events analyzing the political events of 1968 were held worldwide in the past months. The majority of these dealt with the western student riots and their effects on society. Not by coincidence: the events which took place 40 years ago are considered – especially in Germany – as a change of generation, which laid the foundations of today’s world. However, I see it as a serious problem that the international conferences dealing with these events only present the French, German and American student riots, sometimes the intervention in Czechoslovakia is mentioned, but I have not found a summary which analyzed the effects of the riots of 1968 on the countries of the Soviet Bloc. I wish to make up for this shortage with this current paper.<sup>1</sup> During my research I primarily used the contemporary reports of the Embassies of the Hungarian People’s Republic held at the State Archives of Hungary as sources. Based on these, it can be preliminarily stated that 1968 did not only generate significant student movements – and sometimes riots – in the countries of the western world, but also in the eastern and southern countries of Europe as well. These events triggered state response in almost every country, with the specific aim of intensifying control over university students, and which resulted in the strengthening of the extant social system.

*The general reception of the western European student riots and protests in the countries of the Soviet Bloc*

Before examining the effect of student riots and protests on certain countries, it is advisable to look at what Moscow and its allies thought about the western events and the similar processes happening in their countries.

In my opinion, the official point of view regarding western student riots can be excellently observed through the news published by the state owned and controlled media. A summary of this has been published recently.<sup>2</sup> According to this, the state was moderately enthusiastic about the western clashes: on the one hand they naturally welcomed the protest and considered them as events reflecting the deep crisis of the capitalist world and emphasized that western university students demonstrate against the outdated higher education and

---

<sup>1</sup> The presentation containing the results of the research was held at the University of Vienna on May 15, 2008, the study will be published in German at the University of Vienna Department of Contemporary History in a volume titled *„1968 als Ereignis und Symbol wissenschaftlicher und gesellschaftlicher Konfliktzonen”*.

<sup>2</sup> ILLÉNYI Balázs: *A helyzet fokozódott. A 68-as diákmozgalmak a hazai ifjúsági sajtóban* (The student movements of 1968 in the youth press in Hungary), *Heti Világgazdaság*, 2008. május 28. 51-53.

reactionary social structure, and they blamed the student leaders who rejected the help offered by communist parties. On the other hand, for example in Poland, due to the university demonstrations, which started and which were defeated in March 1968 – thus before the western protests – the state was unable to clearly support the western protests. It has also made the appreciation of the events more complex, that some of the western demonstrators obviously sympathized with the Chinese cultural revolution (which was condemned by Moscow) – or at least with the idealized picture of it appearing in the western media – and Mao Zedong, who at the time had bad relations with the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the leaders of the states of the Eastern Bloc were worried that the example of western demonstrations will be contagious and similar events may occur east of the Iron Curtain. When following Poland, similar events took place in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as well, this worry seemed valid and resulted in state measures. Since protests occurred in states providing the relatively most freedom, the response was the strengthening of the party state and the increase of control over citizens. A special field of these measures was the reform of higher education, the primary aim of which – as we will see – has been the increase of political influence over state owned and party – controlled universities and colleges in every communist country since 1947/48.

Following this review, we should examine what events similar to western student riots took place in these countries. We can categorize the countries to be examined into two groups: countries where specific protest took place (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland), and those where such events did not take place, but based on diplomatic sources, the political leadership issued different preventive measures (Bulgaria, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Romania, Soviet Union). Albania – which was also led by communists, but which oriented towards the Maoist China – is an interesting exception. No protests or riots took place at the only university of Albania, and diplomatic sources have not reported on state measures connected to the examined topic.

### *Czechoslovakia*

I believe that the Czechoslovakian reforms and the events of the military intervention which followed them are widely known, so I do not wish to go into details regarding these antecedents. We can state that before the Soviet intervention of August 21, 1968, partly the reformer wing of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party started to put the programme of „*socialism with a human face*” into practice, however it came into being mostly at universities among the young people at the universities, and this social group was one of the most important supporters of the implementation of the reforms.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> JUHÁSZ József: *1968 Jugoszláviában és Csehszlovákiában (1968 in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia)*. IN: BARTHA Eszter-KRAUSZ Tamás (ed.): *1968 – Kelet-Európa és a világ*

Following the military intervention by five member states of the Warsaw Pact – as soon as the stabilization of the new system made it possible – a series of measures were born, which aimed at increasing control over universities and university students. As a first step, countrywide – but especially at Charles University in Prague – several hundreds of university students and professors were discharged by the disciplinary committees established at certain faculties. The general trend was the almost total elimination of the autonomy of state owned universities; the strengthening of party organisations operating at universities and the increase of their influence; the multitude of organisational changes at universities, colleges and the academy, which made the change of cadres easier; and the development of ideological education, namely, the education of Marxism-Leninism was made obligatory. The report points out that: *„the field of education, within these the internal situation at secondary schools, colleges and universities is still deranged. The main problem is caused by the right wing political activism of the students and the weak influence of the party and state politics. [...] The influence of the communist party has to be strengthened in all levels, at the work of the national committees, at the given institutions, faculties [...] the appointment of university rectors, deans and the heads of important institutes will be directly influenced. According to the party resolutions which were in effect previously, the appointment of university professors and private tutors will also be controlled.”*<sup>4</sup>

A separate report was about the establishment of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, which operated under the direct control of the party and which replaced the eliminated Institute of Social Sciences at the university in Prague. This new institute supervises the ideological education of universities.<sup>5</sup>

The Hungarian Embassy made an expressly interesting compilation, when it sent the full aspect system of the screening of 1969 to Budapest, which was extended to every employee and university publications and students: though I am unable to discuss the document in details due to the reasons of extension, but for example we know it from here that dormitory cards were introduced at this time in Czechoslovakia in order to prevent the infiltration of adverse elements into dormitories. It was also made obligatory to keep records of the visitors of students living in dormitories and of students who arrived home after

---

(1968 – *Eastern Europe and the World*). L'Harmattan-ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék, Budapest, 2009. 84.

<sup>4</sup> Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL) XIX-J-1-j (Hungarian National Archives, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) XIX-J-1-j-Csehszlovákia-7t.-002834-1969. The report of the Hungarian Embassy in Prague dated August 6, 1969 on the situation of the control of education and the start of the 1969/70 school year (*Az oktatásügy irányításának helyzete és az 1969–70-es tanév beindítása*).

<sup>5</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Csehszlovákia-7t.-00770/5-1969. The report of the Hungarian Embassy in Prague dated October 17, 1969 on the ideas of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party regarding the measures on the fields of education and the Academy (*A CSKP KB. illetékes osztályának elképzelései az oktatás és az Akadémia területén teendő intézkedésekről*).

midnight, and the reception of outsider guests was also prohibited after 18.00.<sup>6</sup> The extra attention paid on students living in dormitories is not a coincidence: both in France and – as we will see – in Yugoslavia, the dormitories of higher education students were one of the most important locations of the organisation of students.

### *Yugoslavia*

Regarding the Tito led Yugoslavia, we have to emphasize that it did not belong to Moscow's system of allies since 1948, and though it settled its relations with the Soviet Union in 1955 following series disputes, it did not join the Warsaw Pact. However, since this country was also operated as a single party system led by communists, I considered it worthy of examination.

As I mentioned previously, Yugoslavia is among the countries where serious protests occurred during 1968. The party could feel that tension is increasing among university students: At the 8<sup>th</sup> congress (February 8–10, 1968) of the Yugoslavian Youth Association, Tito talked about<sup>7</sup> the fact that western lifestyle attracts youth more and more, against which measures must be made. Marxist education must be strengthened, the proportion of students of worker and peasant origin must be increased at universities (the speech also emphasizes that the proportion of the children of the party elite is too high among university students).

One of the reasons which set off the riots was the failure of the event organised by the Youth Home in Belgrade on June 1, 1968. The programmes titled the *Caravan of Friendship* with the motto of *the microphone is ours* was originally planned to be organized at the university campus, however, the organisers selected one of the rooms at the worker university as rain location. There was great interest, it rained and the location proved to be too small, but the organisers reserved many seats for the functionaries of the communist youth organisations, which enraged university students who had to stay out: first they only threw stones, then fights started between the youth leaders and the discontented students, which was ended by the police.

In the morning of June 3, university students held meetings at several locations then started to march towards the centre of Belgrade. It shows the heterogeneity of the crowd that beside the photograph of Tito, „*monarchist, Rankovichist, Dilasist and other reactionary demands*”<sup>8</sup> appeared as well. The

---

<sup>6</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Csehszlovákia-7t-002834/1-1969. The top secret report of the Hungarian high consul at Bratislava dated November 4, 1969 on the measures to consolidate the situation at colleges (*Intézkedések a főiskolákon kialakult helyzet konszolidálása érdekében*).

<sup>7</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Jugoszlávia-002701-1968 The secret report of Hungarian Ambassador to Belgrade József Nádasdi dated April 9, 1968 on the event and the content of Tito's speech.

<sup>8</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Jugoszlávia-003148-1968 The top secret report titled the visit of Yugoslavian Ambassador Géza Tikvicki (*Tikvicki Géza jugoszláv nagykövet látogatása*) made by János Péter on

police help up the students at an obstacle created by a railway node and an underpass and started negotiations with their leaders. However, due to the tense mood, riot police forces were deployed from one second to the next, during which live firearms were used. We do not know how many people were injured, but according to unofficial reports, the police intervention resulted in 4 deaths. By night – perhaps due to the influence of the successful French strike which resulted in new elections – a general strike was announced at the Faculty of Arts, to which other universities and many artists, authors and public figures joined. When hearing the news, the police blockaded the university campus and larger dormitories, switched off the telephone system at these institutions and stopped electricity at several locations; in many cases violent activities occurred as well. University students established a university guard, spread leaflets, which demanded amnesty, the discharging of police leaders, free press and the introduction of minimum wage. The motto of „*down with the red bourgeoisie*” was clearly a slogan against the party state nomenclature.<sup>9</sup>

Even though university students attempted to maintain the revolutionary mood through a series of events, the strike was out of breath within a week. Naturally, countermeasures of the state played a great role in this, especially the manipulative effect of the state controlled media: reports depicting the strikers as a bunch of criminals, bums and discontent people, who do not want to study, drastically changed the initially sympathetic public opinion on students. When the strike lost its breath, Tito, who formerly evaded publicity, announced changes in a television speech, the main element of which was the introduction of the minimum wage. The well timed speech was popular even among the strikers, and life returned to normal for the majority of students. Naturally, retribution took place: the leaders of the students – like George Vukovity – were discharged from the university, their passports were revoked and they were considered the enemies of the system. Others were dragged into show trials.<sup>10</sup>

The situation stayed tense even after the end of the protests, until the dispute about the Czechoslovakian intervention, during which Yugoslavian leaders condemned the action of the troops of the Warsaw Pact, perfected diverted attention from the protests of students.<sup>11</sup>

---

July 15, 1968 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports on the events in details (beside other internal political events). In connection with the riots, the author emphasized that the reasons for them are the unsolved (student) problems that had been gathering for years, and stated that the workers supported the demands, but not the method, this is why Belgrade did not turn into a second Paris. He emphasized that there were no nationalist mottoes and the Yugoslavian self governing model was not attacked and stated that even though communist youth organisations tried to influence the events, many people were just going with the flow of events.

<sup>9</sup> JUHÁSZ: 80.

<sup>10</sup> The top secret report (MOL XIX-J-1-j-Jugoszlávia-49d-002993/2-1968) of the Hungarian Embassy reports on the trials of the university students.

<sup>11</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Jugoszlávia-002881/1-1968 The top secret report of Hungarian Ambassador to Belgrade József Marjai dated September 16, 1968 titled the speech of

It is important to emphasize that contrarily to several other countries, Hungarian diplomatic sources do not report on important higher education reforms, however, we can assume that the reforms of 1965-66 towards the self-governing socialism slowed down following the protests because the leaders of the party believed that the riots were the result of liberalization.

### *Poland*

In Poland, the elbow-room of Gomulka continuously decreased following the fall off Khrushchev, and by the late sixties, the opportunities of the Polish way which was achieved in the October of 1956 kept narrowing down, which led to increasing social tension. Discontent came to the surface when authorities banned a popular play due to its anti-Soviet character in January 1968. At the last performance of the play, the university students of Warsaw who protested using the motto „*uncensored culture*” were beaten by the police and 35 protesters were arrested. Several demonstrations were held for the release of the arrested students in Warsaw and in other university cities, during which protests people demanded the freedom of press, the freedom of gathering, free culture and amnesty for the arrested students.<sup>12</sup>

However, the power subdued the demonstration held at the university on March 8 using workers recruited from factories, which resulted in protests in several large cities, primarily in Warsaw, Krakow and Gdansk. Following the speech of Gomulka, in which he unilaterally condemned the protests, university students announced a strike on March 19, which was successfully isolated and soon eliminated by the authorities. Retribution and the seeking of scapegoats followed.<sup>13</sup>

---

Dizdarevics on the international situation and Yugoslavian foreign policy (*Dizdarevics előadása a nemzetközi helyzetről és a jugoszláv külpolitikáról*) reported on the speech of the aforementioned CC member, in which he condemned the Soviet aggression against Czechoslovakia and declared the results achieved since the 20<sup>th</sup> congress invalid, and talked about the reviving neostalinism in the Soviet Union. As a response to a question, he said that a Soviet attack against Yugoslavia is not out of the question, for example Bulgaria would like this idea due to the question of Macedonian territorial disputes, but it is afraid to attack the much stronger Yugoslavia alone.

<sup>12</sup> MITROVITS Miklós: *1968 – A lengyel ellenzéki mozgalom fordulópontja* (The turning point of the Polish opposition). IN: BARTHA Eszter-KRAUSZ Tamás (ed.): *1968 – Kelet-Európa és a világ*, L'Harmattan – ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék, Budapest, 2009. 94-96.

<sup>13</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Archiv der Republik (AdR) (State Archives of Austria, Archives of Republic) 01 POL-II Polen 1968. 126763. The Austrian Ambassador to Warsaw reported in a top secret report dated September 1, 1968 on the cleaning in Polish Foreign Affairs (*Tisztogatások a lengyel külügyben*). In the report, he described the anti-Zionist nature of the retribution. According to the report, since some of the leaders of the Polish student riots were Jewish, the Polish media blamed the riots on Zionists; which perfectly fit to the anti-Israeli propaganda experienced throughout the Soviet Zone following the six-day war of 1967. Within the framework of the anti-Zionist campaign, 8000 members were dismissed from the party and 13,000 people (mostly Jewish) were expelled from Poland within the next three years.

As the first step, a few professors who stood by the students and more than 1.000 students were discharged from the universities, and in order to facilitate the changing of cadres, institutes were organized to replace the departments, the party organisations operating at the universities were strengthened and their influence in the governing bodies of the universities was increased. Also a decision was made about the restoration of the obligatory education of Marxism-Leninism at universities, which was abolished in the autumn of 1956.<sup>14</sup>

The Polish parliament soon modifies the law on higher education as well, which sanctified the structural reforms, further restricted the autonomy of the universities and improved the chances of applicants of worker and peasant origins to get accepted to the university within the class based application system. Furthermore it clearly said that: „*the main goal of colleges is to train and educate students to be the conscious builders of socialism*”.<sup>15</sup> It meant an important change that according to the document: „*the new prescriptions of the college law entitle the minister and the rector to make resolutions to immediately discharge students from the university in case of disciplinary fault whether they commit it individually or in a collective. The prescriptions contain special restrictions for cases of serious breach of order or standing up against the interests of the People's Republic of Poland.*”

As we could see in all three countries where protests occurred, happenings similar to western events took place. We should not be surprised by the fact that these were smaller than western movements, since communist states stood up against these movements more effectively than western countries: the chance for organisation was much lower in countries with continuously monitored and supervised citizens than in open societies. The constitutional state did not bind the hands of the police forces, and the state owned media was able to turn the majority of the population against the students within days. Furthermore it is important to state that following the protests, retribution took place and also measures were taken to prevent further riots. However it is still interesting what happened in countries where no violent events took place.

### ***Bulgaria***

In Bulgaria the party-state leadership dealt with the question of youth in January 1968: Todor Zhivkov announced his well-known theses on youth at the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Youth Organisations in Dimitrov, which the

---

<sup>14</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Lengyelország-7.t.-001739/8-1968 The top secret report of Hungarian Ambassador to Warsaw Béla Némethy dated June 21, 1968 on the situation at Polish universities (*A lengyel egyetemi helyzetről*) describes the reasons of the riots and the retribution.

<sup>15</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Lengyelország-7.t.-003754-1968 The top secret report of Hungarian Ambassador to Warsaw Béla Némethy dated November 23, 1968 on the modification of the Polish higher education law (*A lengyel felsőoktatási törvény módosításáról*).



Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party made into a resolution.<sup>16</sup> These set the following aims in seven points: the strengthening of party leadership, the development of the system of state institutions, making the coordination of youth work more efficient, strengthening the activities of the Communist Youth Organisations, reorganisation of the ideological work and increasing its results, more active participation of youth in the building of socialism, the growth of the population, the achieving of 10 million citizens.

The Bulgarian state power has also implemented measures as a response to the Europe-wide protests. As a result, arrests were made in May: an allegedly pro-Chinese group was ‘uncovered’ at the University of Sofia and 50 people were arrested. The following extract excellently depicts the strictness of state control: *„It illustrates the obscure situation at the State University of Sofia that the Eastern European Institute of the University of Rome offered scholarships to Bulgarian university professors at the beginning of the year. The offer was put on an official way, and as a reply, Italians stepped back saying that ,if Todor Pavlov (Central Committee member, the president of the Academy) picks the people for the scholarship, he would only send former partisans’. At the end of the university year, a professor from the Italian institute travelled to Sofia as a tourist and contacted the university professors directly and negotiated about the scholarships. Bulgarian authorities were surprised that the majority of the concerned professors did not report on the appearance of the Italian professor and his activities only ceased following the intervention of the security bodies. This is the reason for the replacement of several department heads of the State University.”*<sup>17</sup>

In July 1969, the Central Committee made another resolution on educational reform. This aimed at the reorganisation of the institutes of higher education for the purpose of research, the strengthening of the effect of party organisations operating at universities on the leaders of the institution and the development of the ideological work. The reports states clearly: *„[...] The resolution sees patriotic education as the primary direction of the ideological work conducted among the youth, young people must be educated to national pride, internationalism, love of the Soviet Union and the hatred of anti-class theories. Militaristic-patriotic education and the increase of the level of social sciences are emphasized in the educational work. This latter is especially urged at industrial and technical schools, thus fighting the existing primitivism during the education of these subjects. [...] In the future, more emphasis shall be put*

---

<sup>16</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Bulgária-2t-001128-1968 The top secret report of Hungarian Ambassador to Sofia István Roska dated February 3, 1968 on the summary of the youth theses of Todor Zhivkov (*Összefoglaló Todor Zsivkov ifjúsági téziseiről*). The report analyzes the theses and their effects on 14 pages.

<sup>17</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Bulgária-2t-001379/2-1968 The top secret report of Hungarian Ambassador to Sofia István Roska dated December 13, 1968 on a few recent phenomena of Bulgarian internal politics (*A bolgár belpolitika néhány jelensége a közelmúltban*).

*on the more increased ideological education of the youth beside a higher level of professional and scientific education. The aim of this, beside providing Marxist education for the youth, is to decrease the chance of ideological loosening.*"<sup>18</sup> Another point of this source is also interesting, according to which the party wishes to increase state control over the institutions of higher education by placing the bodies of local and regional public administration and party organisations into the governing bodies of such institutions.

### ***German Democratic Republic***

Though specific student protests or riots did not take place in the German Democratic Republic, one of the main locations of western student riots was the German Federal Republic. Furthermore the broadcast of the western German media, which were not controlled by the party state could be received and understood without language barriers throughout the GDR. The leaders of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany were worried about the events. It was also an important factor that serious protests took place in two neighbouring socialist countries, in Czechoslovakia and in Poland. It is not surprising that among countries without protests, the GDR introduced the strictest and widest range of preventive measures, thus among others, a comprehensive reform of higher education. The diplomatic report on this topic states in the introduction: *„The 7<sup>th</sup> congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany dealt with the necessity of the implementation of the reform of higher education. According to the guidelines of the congress, the concerned party and state bodies started the preparation of the reform. The preparatory work went slowly until the spring of this year. But now it has been accelerated. The events that took place at Polish and especially Czechoslovakian universities probably played a role in this. The introduction of the reform of higher education is one of the most important internal political events of the GDR at the moment.*"<sup>19</sup>

The most important elements of the reform were the strengthening of the research character of high education, and the further decrease of the autonomy of state controlled universities and colleges through their obligatory integration with nearby factories, the strengthening of the party organisations operating at universities and the ideological work, the preference of technical faculties over humanities and the structural reform including cadre changes. The ambition, according to which, in order to decrease the autonomy of universities, the *„current structure and leadership method of universities changes is not without*

---

<sup>18</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Bulgária-7t-002886-1969 The top secret report of Hungarian diplomat to Sofia András Sárdi dated August 15, 1969 on the resolution of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party on the educational reform (*A BKP KB határozata az oktatási reformról ...*).

<sup>19</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-NDK-001923/1-1968 The top secret report of Ambassador's consultant László Perczel dated May 13, 1968 on the higher education reform in the GDR (*Felsőoktatási reform az NDK-ban*). the other quotations used in this chapter are also from this document.

parallels. The rector's office stays, but a social council is established beside it, which consists of the party and mass organisations and the representatives of the factories and institutions cooperating with the university. [...] The social council operating beside the rector's office primarily plays a role in theoretical and political leadership. The personal responsibility of the rector remains the same in directing the educational institution, but he turns to the social council regarding fundamental questions.”

It is an interesting fact about the quoted report that its author surprisingly formulates criticism against the reforms to be introduced: „Naturally the planned reform has its own specific threats as well. The reform bears the threat of the decrease of the level of scientific education. The adaptation of university level education to the demands of the industrial production of a determined region bears the danger of practicism in its narrow sense. It is not yet clear whether the new governing bodies of universities and colleges, the sections and social councils, will be able to cope with the special task of the education of young people, since the circumstances are different in factories compared to colleges. The Ministry for Higher and Professional Education here has stated that if a director is able to supervise ten thousand workers at a factory, he will be even more capable of supervising the activities of a university or college. Such notion underrates the role of the necessary pedagogical training and aptitude. Furthermore, we do not see it clearly, whether the leading technical cadres, who are intensively employed in production, will have enough energy and time to carry out the tasks which are expected from them due to the cooperation with higher education. In the tight melting of universities and productive communities, the ambition to change the hitherto somewhat independent political nature of universities and colleges is visible. The tight cooperation with large factories, which brings about the increase of the number of classes of professional practice results in the fact, among other things, that students will spend more time among workers, which will have a beneficial effect on their political development. During one of our discussions with a Free German Youth functionary made the following remark regarding this subject: ‚the intellectual worker consciousness’ must be formed in students from the beginning.

There is a very edifying statement at the end of the report regarding the reason for the reforms: ‚today in the GDR student movements’ take place for the reform reflecting the party policy. According to the concept of the political leaders, the fight for the introduction of the reform entirely engages and satisfies the students, since it created such a situation at universities and colleges that no one has the time to deal with the Polish or Czechoslovakian events.”

### **Hungary**

Hungary proved to be the island of peace in the examined period for several reasons: this is obviously attributed to the success of the Kadarian

consolidation and the effective activities of the state security bodies. It can be stated that Hungarian public opinion was more interested in the question of the new economic mechanism than western riots, on which the media reported moderately.<sup>20</sup> Naturally, the fact that the revolution of 1956 was put down bloodily played a role in this calmness, since no one risked the organisation of protests or riots. Despite this, the Czechoslovakian intervention and the Hungarian participation in it generated a serious echo, and peaceful dispute evenings and forums were organised at the institutes of higher education with many participants.

Due to the fundamental passivity, the Hungarian leadership only took moderate counter-measures which were almost invisible for the public opinion: the ideological educational work at universities and colleges was strengthened, the Political College of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was raised to become a university, the Sociological Research Group was eliminated and the publishing activities of several people were banned. The structural reform of higher education also took place: while in 1965 there were 92 independent institutions of higher education operating in Hungary, despite the new – primarily on the field of technical sciences – institution establishments, their number decreased to 56 by the early seventies due to the structural changes.

### **Romania**

No riots took place in Romania, the efficiently operating party-state control prevented this, however, according to the sources Romanian party leadership was worried about the almost Europe-wide wave of protests. On the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on April 22–25, 1968 – a few weeks after the Polish riots – once again dealt with the issue of educational reform, which had been on the agenda for months. As we can see from the report *„beside the professional aspects of education, the political aspects of education were clearly emphasized at the plenary session. N. Ceausescu states that ,the ideological content of education is not on the level of the current demand of society – and this situation must be seriously examined and the necessary consequences must be drawn in order to improve the educational activity’.*” In regard to this topic, he brings up the issue of the commodity of professors, their responsibilities in dealing with students and says that *„[...] university professors, the teachers of higher education have to handle groups of students.”* One of the director generals of the Ministry of Education mentioned that the education of university students slipped out of the hands of the party, the Communist Youth Association and those directly educating them. It is visible that compared to previous times, the question of

---

<sup>20</sup> FÖLDES György: *1968 és Magyarország* (1968 and Hungary). IN: BARTHA Eszter-KRAUSZ Tamás (ed.): *1968 – Kelet-Európa és a világ*. L'Harmattan – ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék, Budapest, 2009. 19-27.

the philosophical and ideological education of youth gained more ground. Regarding this idea, the director general of the Ministry of Education stated that according to his opinion, the different confusing ideologies that became popular recently among students made this necessary. However he did not elaborate on this. He mentioned that the former changes in the leadership of the Communist Youth Association happened due to the shortages of the political education of the youth. N. Ceausescu emphasized at the plenary session that *„unfortunately ideological confusion and wrong theories can be felt at social scientific departments, and the problem is not only that no one stands up against this, but permissiveness takes place. [...] We should not forget even for a moment that there are still ideologies serving reactionary and imperialistic forces; these infiltrate from outside and may go through us in different shapes. In my opinion, firm measures are necessary in order to make our higher education the centre of the fight against all of the retrograde, outdated, idealistic, mystic and reactionary ideologies.”*<sup>21</sup>

The measures urged at the Central Committee session appeared in the modification of the Romanian Education Law and stretched to every level of education. Regarding higher education, the primary aim was to increase the efficiency of the ideological work and increased the influence of party organisations operating at universities and colleges over the governance of the institutions and aspired for achieving a higher proportion of roped-in students. Secondly, naturally the increase of the level of education, the development of research and the illusory growth of the autonomy of universities were also included in the law.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Soviet Union*

No student protests took place in the Soviet Union during the examined period, however we cannot state that the events happening near Moscow had no effect on the Soviet higher education. This effect can primarily be found on the extension of the education of ideological subjects to foreign students studying in the Soviet Union. Before, these subjects were only obligatory for students coming from socialist countries, but from the 1968/69 university year, every student had to study Marxism-Leninism and political economy during increased number of lessons.<sup>23</sup> This resembles the educational reforms

---

<sup>21</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Románia-002221-1968 The top secret report of Hungarian Ambassador to Bucharest József Vincze dated April 29, 1968, on the educational reform being on the agenda of the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (*Az RSZK oktatási reformja az RKP KB április 22–25-i plenáris ülésének napirendjén*).

<sup>22</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Románia-002221/1-1968 The top secret report of Hungarian Ambassador to Bucharest József Vincze dated April 29, 1968, on the new educational reform of the Socialist Republic of Romania (*Az RSZK új oktatási reformja*).

<sup>23</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Szovjetunió-00615-1968 The top secret report of the Hungarian Ambassador to Moscow József Szipka dated January 8, 1969, on the education of ideological

implemented by countries of the Soviet zone, even if this ambition was not only due to the student riots but primarily due to the Brezhnev's turn. However, it is typical that as in Poland, aliens (western agents, zionists) were made responsible for the riots which erupted in March 1968, the Soviet leadership has also focused more on monitoring foreign students after 1968. One of the signs for this is the resolution of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party made in July 1969, which says that „*specific measures must be made to decrease the number of foreign students studying in Moscow. Currently, 11,000 out of 26,000 students study in Moscow. These measures must be made primarily for security reasons, since in Moscow, certain embassies make contact with the students studying here and often use them for spying.*” The reason of the resolution is „*to make the work and activities of authorities responsible for selecting and dealing with foreign students more coordinated and planned. [...] Focus should be on the selection of students. In order to improve the work of selection, according to the resolution, the role of Soviet embassies should be increased. [...] It is the task of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Communist Youth Organisations to prepare measures in order to improve the social composition in case of students coming from friendly countries, to make sure that there are as many youth leaders and if possible party members among them as possible. They wish to pay more attention on dealing with the social activities of foreign students. They plan to organise training courses, in which state and social leaders would give lectures.*”<sup>24</sup>

In parallel with the monitoring of foreign scholarship holders, the Soviet leadership attempted to improve the social composition of higher education students, since the proportion of students of worker and peasant origin did not increase despite the continuous increase of the number of higher education students, which means that in practice they are pushed to the background in contrast to the children of intellectuals and the party elite.<sup>25</sup> The introduced measure prescribed a one-year preparatory course for the university entrance exam for the most talented workers of factories and kolkhozes.

### **Summary**

Based on the above, I believe that 1968 cannot be narrowed down to the French, German and American events, since the riots in Czechoslovakia,

---

subjects for foreign students in the Soviet Union (*Ideológiai tárgyak oktatása a SZU-ban tanuló külföldi hallgatók részére*).

<sup>24</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Szovjetunió-00615/1-1969 The top secret report of the temporary Hungarian official in Moscow Ferenc Csaba, dated September 9, 1969, on the resolution of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party regarding foreign students studying in the SU (*Tájékoztatás az SZKP KB-nek a SZU-ban tanuló külföldi hallgatókkal kapcsolatos határozatáról*).

<sup>25</sup> MOL XIX-J-1-j-Szovjetunió-003008-1969 The top secret report of the temporary Hungarian official in Moscow Ferenc Csaba, dated September 10, 1969, on a few issues of the higher education of the Soviet Union (*Tájékoztatás a Szovjetunió felsőoktatásának néhány kérdéséről*).

Poland and Yugoslavia did show similarity with the western student riots regarding date, but also regarding their demands. Furthermore, the events of 1968 had consequences in almost all states of the Eastern Bloc. I believe that based on the research we can also state that the states of the Soviet zone reacted to the events similarly: the law on higher education were modified almost everywhere; during which the autonomy of the institutions of higher education were restricted using different methods, cadre changes were made with the help of restructuring, they tried to strengthen party organisations operating at universities and colleges and made the ideological work more intensive.