

University of Miskolc

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**FROM UNITY TO UNITY**  
**The Role of Antal Csengery and the Centralist *Pesti Hirlap***  
**in Organizing the Opposition Party**

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

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## Doctoral Thesis Summary

### I. The Aim of the Research

Through elucidating the press material, my dissertation aims to shed light on the work of Antal Csengery between 1 June 1844 and 7 June 1847 in the context of oppositional debates. At the same time I would like to propose a new perspective on the birth of the Oppositional Party in the Reform Age, a narrative that has not appeared in critical discourse yet and which might answer more questions than earlier accounts. In order to formulate my narrative I need to give credit to what József Eötvös wrote in his letters to László Szalay in November 1845 and arrange the source material accordingly. These letters have not received sufficient attention yet as nobody has pointed out the plan Eötvös devised in these letters, that is, persuading all of the opposition of accepting centralist tenets by holding the *Pesti Hirlap* [Pest News] in centralist hands. However, the key figure in the dissertation is not Eötvös, but the editor who supervised the centralist *Pesti Hirlap* for the longest time (from 1 July 1845 to 31 December 1848), Antal Csengery. The sources allowed me to draw the conclusion that during his editorship Csengery acted as an intermediary among the groups of the opposition, thus the fulfillment of Eötvös's plan was brought about largely because of his contributions. The dissertation thus examines the role of Antal Csengery and his *Pesti Hirlap* in the establishment of the Opposition Party. The unity of the opposition ended in July 1844 with the appearance of the centralists, and it was restored on 7 June 1847 with the signing of the *Opposition Manifesto*. László Szalay managed the newspaper from the beginning of June 1844 to July 1845, when he stepped down in favor of Csengery. Concentrating on press articles, the dissertation focuses on Csengery and the group he belonged to, and discusses the process whereby the different fractions within the opposition reached the point of developing a combined program. My aim is not simply to describe the changes in the relationship between centralists and municipalists, I also want to discuss the elements and the changes in the strategy that Csengery and his circle devised in order to persuade the majority of the reform-opposition. Accordingly, the period I am examining in the dissertations begins when the centralists took hold of the newspaper and ends with the signing of the *Opposition Manifesto* that founded the Opposition Party.

During Csengery's editorship most of the articles in *Pesti Hirlap* appeared without a signature, or with only a sign. The attributional methods of these articles have not been established before my research, and thus there were no given principles for identifying Csengery's articles, so it was inevitable to give a textological foundation to the dissertation. I had to collect the methods for identifying the articles found in the paper, and the attribution of Csengery's texts published in *Pesti Hirlap* between July 1844 and 7 June 1847.

## II. Methods of Research and Sources Used

My dissertation is divided into two parts: the first half of it is a treatise, the second half contains the attribution and the newly published sources. Because of this division I had to employ different methods in the two parts of the thesis. The main part of the dissertation is an essay in political history using traditional methods. By giving credit to what József Eötvös wrote in his letters to László Szalay in November 1845, by using the articles attributed to Csengery (these are included in the *Appendix* of the dissertation), as well as by relying on unpublished archival sources, the thesis aims to modify the critical discourse written about the topic. Among the press materials of the age I used not only *Pesti Hirlap*, but *Budapesti Híradó* [*Budapest News*], *Erdélyi Híradó* [*Transylvanian News*], *Hetilap* [*Weekly*], *Jelenkor* [*Our Age*] and *Nemzeti Ujság* [*National Paper*]. Moreover I examined the correspondence, diaries and speeches of prominent people in the Reform Age, either in manuscript or published form. Many of the observations found in the dissertation were inspired by notable scholars of intellectual history, for example Reinhart Koselleck or József Takáts. (The intellectual historical methods I received inspiration from will be introduced at the proper place in the Results section.)

Many different methods were viable in the second part of the dissertation, which deals with the identification and the attribution of press articles. I believe that the stylistic, dialectological, morphological, orthographical characteristics as well as the tense use and the inflectional methods used by the most important authors of the paper – Antal Csengery, József Eötvös, József Irinyi, Zsigmond Kemény, László Szalay, Ágoston Trefort – can lend considerable help in this process. Another guideline is knowing which of these articles were signed by their authors in the newspaper or in their later publications; how they marked their articles in *Pesti Hirlap* and other papers; which unattributed texts showed similarities with the ideas they propagated; what topics they were interested in and what subjects they often wrote about; when they were unable to send articles to the paper (for example when they were abroad); how many articles they had to write a year according to their contract; whether their articles openly disclosed an affiliation with centralist tenets; and how they addressed their opponents and readers during the press debates. It might also help if we know how long their articles usually were. Still, none of the above methods alone can help us identify the authors with a hundred percent safety. Thus in order to raise the level of efficiency in attributing the articles to certain authors I aimed to employ as many methods described above as I could.

Part of the data needed for the attribution, for example data about where the authors were at these times, I collected from criticism, while the stylistic, morphological, dialectological, etc. characteristics of the authors were pieced together by a careful analysis of their texts. I selected 20 articles from each author for this latter purpose, but due to the change in their authorial style, I sometimes needed more articles than that to establish the key characteristics. In the end I used 27 articles in the case of József Eötvös, 22 in the case of Ágoston Trefort, 20 texts from Zsigmond Kemény and László Szalay. But I only found 17 of József Irinyi's texts, so in his case I had to be

content with a slightly lower number of articles. I found it necessary to analyze all the articles – 49 in total – Csengery claimed his own in his *Írói munkásságom* [*Collected Writings*] as well as the articles that he published with his signature in the paper, because my aim was to collect his texts. The results of my investigation – the methodology needed for identification and the data necessary for the attribution – appear under the *Sources (II/1. Introduction to the Notes)* section of the dissertation. In the process of identifying Csengery's articles I received invaluable help from a list in which probably the editor himself enumerated some of the articles that were published in *Pesti Hirlap* and *Ujabbkori Ismeretek Tára* [*Inventory of Recent Knowledge*]. I came across this list while I was examining Csengery's manuscripts in the National Széchényi Library (OSZK), where I was also looking for the autograph manuscripts of the author, but I only found fragments from the manuscripts of already known texts.

### III. The Results of the Dissertation

In the *Sources* section of the dissertation I publish those 49 articles already identified as Csengery's, as well those 72 texts that were attributed to him during my textological research, thus we have 121 articles spanning 320 pages in total. These texts can be given to Csengery depending on what methods we used when identifying them. (The articles published with his full name can be more surely attributed to him than those that were selected by linguistic methods.) For this reason I divided the *Sources* section into two parts, *Articles Attributed to Csengery* and *Articles Most Likely Attributable to Csengery*. I retained the original spelling of the articles and I also attached textological notes to the texts.

I argue in the first part of the dissertation that centralist could incorporate their reform proposals into the *Opposition Manifesto* thanks to the plan devised by József Eötvös in his letters to László Szalay written in November 1845. The reform proposals of the centralists can only be interpreted in relation to the agenda of the municipalists. The two groups were separated by, and got their names from their views on how the future state structure should look like. Municipalists wished to uphold the decentralized system of institutions. They believed that this is mostly possible if counties continue to be the bastions of the constitution against the unlawful provisions of the Hungarian government, which was under Viennese influence. The centralists however did not find sufficient the constitutional guarantees offered by the counties, and argued that the wide jurisdiction of the county system was a threat to the functioning of the state. (The counties frequently had decision rights in country matters as well.) The centralists thought that a centralized government responsible to the Parliament was suitable for fulfilling the role of the bastion of the constitution. In order to avoid interruptions in this new system, the jurisdiction of the counties would have been restricted, which prospect was understandably rejected by the municipalists. In the end this difference of perspective led to the schism in the opposition. The two different sides were called municipalists and centralists;

municipialists got their name from the designation of the counties in the age (“municipium”); whereas centralists got their label from their centralizing aspirations. Essentially all the liberals within the opposition who did not belong to the centralists could be called municipalists, however the political alignment of certain individuals is not stable throughout the whole period the dissertation examines. I believe that the centralists were a dynamically changing group, whose most important figures were József Eötvös, László Szalay and Ágoston Trefort, but they cooperated with other politicians and journalists in order to realize their reform aspirations. I regard those figures as centralists who closely cooperated with Eötvös and his circle in this period: Antal Csengery, József Irinyi, Zsigmond Kemény and Bertalan Szemere.

It is necessary to provide a little background in order to understand Eötvös's plan I referred to above. In 1843 – most likely without the knowledge of his fellow centralists – Eötvös presented Chancellor Metternich some memoranda in which he discussed the reforms he thought were desirable, and in a letter attached to the second text, he claimed that if his suggestions were agreeable to the government, he is ready to lend his help in implementing them. Metternich ignored the offer, but it seems that after he received these memoranda from Eötvös, he ordered the publisher Landerer to provoke Kossuth's resignation at *Pesti Hirlap*, and offer the now vacant editorial seat to the centralists who longed for a panel to publish their program. Szalay and others who took the newspaper's editorial seat began to delineate their ideas, which led to the result Metternich was expecting: a break within the opposition. But from the beginning of 1845 – or, in the case of Eötvös, even earlier, from the summer of 1844 – centralists sought to reach a consensus with the municipalists. These steps aimed at the reconciliation were unsuccessful because of the differing principles within the opposition, so in November 1845 Eötvös took control of the group and recommended a new strategy to persuade the municipalists about their ideas. He thought that if centralists resigned from the *Pesti Hirlap* in favor of the municipalists, the wing of the reform-opposition defending the county system will realize that it is not because of Eötvös and his group that Kossuth does not get any possibilities for publication. The paper would remain in the hands of the centralists, because Landerer will not give it to Kossuth and his group. The municipalists can appear in the newspaper which remains in the hands of the centralists, whose tenets the municipalists will sooner or later come to terms with, and after this point Csengery and his group can renew their attempts at negotiating the centralization. Eötvös was convinced that the paper will remain in the centralists' hands, because he suspected that they received it because of the memoranda presented to Metternich. Szalay and his group accepted Eötvös's plan, which was realized point after point. The compromise between the two opposition groups was sealed in November 1845. In the conference held at that time most of the participants argued that the forces of the opposition need to cooperate much more closely, and in order to achieve this *Pesti Hirlap* needs to become the joint newspaper of the opposition. The conference forbid *Pesti Hirlap* to propagate centralist ideas, while Eötvös and Trefort promised not to write for the newspaper for the time being. On 1 January 1846 Csengery published a joint opposition program and agreed to consult with the

leaders of the opposition in more important matter. As Eötvös expected, the relationship between the two groups became less tense during this time, which was demonstrated by the fact that the meeting in February 1846 decided that Eötvös and Trefort no longer needed to be banished from the pages of *Pesti Hirlap*. Municipalist leaders were determined to help *Pesti Hirlap* in an intellectual sense too, that is, they decided to publish in its columns, and asked their like-minded friends to do so as well. Judging from this Csengery was successful in carrying out the first steps of Eötvös's plan, as the municipalists accepted the centralists as a force within the opposition and the *Pesti Hirlap* remained in the hands of Csengery's circle.

It seems that between March 1846 and 1 January 1847 Eötvös's circle did not have much space to act because of the decrees passed on the oppositional meeting in November 1845 and February 1846. However in May 1846 there was a debate between Lajos Kossuth and Csengery about matters of customs policy, which clearly showed that centralists attempted to widen the frameworks of the compromise. (Kossuth delineated his views in the columns of *Hetilap*.) The debate was about how should the double customs system be reformed, which was sorely needed because it was detrimental to Hungary's interest. Kossuth and most of the reform opposition argued for a protective customs policy system, which was to be implemented at the borders of the country. This would have protected Hungarian industry against the competition from abroad, including Austria. Centralists reached back to their earlier ideas about a customs union with the Austrian Hereditary Lands. One condition of this union would have been the establishment of a responsible Hungarian government, which would have regulated customs policies together with the Austrian government. The ensuing debate between him and Kossuth ended with a compromise, as Kossuth's new proposal delineated a customs union through the rhetoric protective tariffs. It must also have become clear to him that without a responsible government, it is not possible to change the customs policy. This probably led to the appearance of the principle of the responsible government in the *Opposition Manifesto*.

Centralists finally returned to the exposition of their ideas in January 1847. This time they were more careful in the propagation of their ideas, and they put a greater emphasis on the political language of national constitution used by the municipalists. Their principles were often backed up by the thoughts of municipalist leaders and if their opinion was identical to the majority of the reform-opposition, they presented their ideas together with their political columnists. Meanwhile on many occasions they gave a bigger emphasis than earlier to the political language of the constitutional nation spoken mostly by municipalists. Political language or discourse means concepts, recurrent topics, patterns of correlation, types of reasoning and values, together with the presuppositions and beliefs connected to these. József Takáts has described many of these discourses used in 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungary – the languages of republicanism, the reference to an ancient constitution, enlightened government and advancement [csinosodás] –, while Iván Zoltán Dénes has attempted to ascribe these languages to the political discourse of the centralists and the municipalists. According to Dénes centralists used the discourses of enlightened government and advancement, while municipalists employed the rhetoric of

the constitutional nation, advancement and republicanism. (The political language of the constitutional nation means for Dénes a blend of the republicanist ideology and the reference to an ancient constitution.) The dissertation supplements Dénes's views in this sense, claiming that Eötvös's circle also employed the political rhetoric of the constitutional nation and republicanism, but much less frequently than the discourses of enlightened government and advancement.

As a result of the cautiousness of Csengery and his circle, there was a higher chance that most of the reform-opposition will accept their ideas. So much so that in 1847 Kossuth declared the idea of the responsible government as a long time goal. This point later made it into the text of the *Opposition Manifesto*. Meanwhile the two opposition groups came so close that in March 1847 the leaders decided that if Deák cannot be elected as the next envoy to the parliament, Eötvös needs to lead the opposition in the lower house.

Sources suggested that after the signing of the *Opposition Manifesto* centralists paid less attention not to anger municipalists with their statements. This can be seen in a series of articles called *Teendőink [Our Duties]*: before the signing of the *Manifesto*, Eötvös confined himself to only defending the opposition against Széchenyi, who declared in his *Politikai program töredékek [Fragments of a Political Program]* that things will culminate in a revolution if the opposition gains majority in the parliament; whereas after the signing of the document, Eötvös renewed his interest in developing and publishing his centralist program. Kemény's *Eszmetöredékek a' korteskedés és ellenszerei körül [Fragmented Ideas about Electioneering and Its Remedies]* also followed Eötvös's example. Thus centralists returned to the detailed propagation of their ideas only after the signing of the *Opposition Manifesto*. The birth of that document was an important event not only for the reform-opposition, but for the centralists as well. It meant the unification of the opposition and it gave a chance for Eötvös's circle to discuss their tenets more openly.

Judging from this it seems that from November 1845 to June 1847 József Eötvös was in control of the situation in spite of the fact that municipalists felt that the compromise primarily benefited them. And Csengery, who acted as an intermediary between the two groups, had a key role in these political maneuvers. The centralists' permissiveness in 1847 led to a good relationship between the groups within the opposition, which probably had a key role in spreading the idea of parliamentary government, and must have influenced Kossuth who presented the centralist program as a proposal to the parliament on 3 March 1848.

The dissertation aims to refute claims made both in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary critical discourse that centralists were naïve, inexperienced politicians. When centralists took over the newspaper and began the presentation of their ideas, their opponents within the opposition accused them of a bad assessment of the situation. Municipalists thought that the times called for the protection of the municipiums, because the government had just started appointing administrators to supervise the counties, and the centralists were also agitating against legal authorities. (Administrators were basically paid employees of the state whose most important task was to ensure the majority of

the governing party in the counties.) Contemporary critical rhetoric seems to be an heir to this disdain for the centralists' political skills. Sources suggest that Eötvös and his circle was aware that their ideas were not only unpopular in Hungary, but that most of the voters did not even know them. For this reason they felt it important to publicize and popularize their tenets so that in the subsequent step they would only have to fight for the establishment of the institutions that were based on these principles. Without these institutions the reform measures would not have yielded the desired results. That Szalay's group began discussing their tenets openly right from the start happened not because they were unable to assess the actual political situation properly, but precisely because of their insight into the circumstances.

Centralists were not only aware of the need for publicizing their ideas, but also that their tenets had just as solid an empirical basis as the municipalists'. Eötvös claimed that the centralist concepts had a more solid basis. He thought that municipalists adherence to legal authorities – which he deemed irreconcilable with progress – was essentially an experiment just like the program of the responsible government advocated by the centralists. Eötvös regarded municipalists' experiment as more dangerous because as he wrote, “we have no example of other countries as to their outcome”. Relying on the concepts of Reinhart Koselleck, we are entitled to suppose that centralist ideas had as much accumulated experience behind them as the municipalist tenets. Based on their experiential background, Koselleck divides concepts into three different groups. He calls *experiential concepts* those terms that wholly rely on the past and synthesize already acquired experience. In his terminology, *concepts that generate experience* partly have an experiential basis, but cannot wholly be derived from current experience. Koselleck calls the third type *concepts of expectation*, which are open to the future and have no experiential basis whatsoever. Koselleck regarded concepts borrowed from a different nation as concepts which could create experience. Most of the terms employed by the centralists belong to this type, for example the idea of the responsibilities of the government or a minister was conceptualized by following examples taken from abroad. All the more so, as these concepts had an experiential basis: previous laws clearly spell out the responsibilities of the government, so these ideas need to be regarded as concepts creating experience. The situation is similar in the case of most of the reforms desired by the municipalists. For example the concept of the extension of rights wanted to achieve on a county level that certain residents would get aristocratic prerogatives. That is what the phrase “to include the people within the ramparts of the constitution” means. It would not have altered the political system significantly, it would only have changed the voting rights so as aristocratic privileges would have been replaced by the representation of the people. The extension of rights had an experiential basis, but it also created a new horizon of expectation, thus this concept also needs to be regarded as a concept creating experience. This shows that the conceptual framework of the two groups within the opposition was based on approximately the same amount of experience. It seems that centralists were able not only to properly assess the actual political situation,



but they could launch such a program to oppose the municipalists, which had approximately the same amount of experience as its basis, so it was as plausible as the present legal authority system.

#### IV. The Dissertation's Possible Impact on Scholarship

I believe that the results derived from the dissertation may have a considerable impact on scholarship. The attributing methodology presented in the *Sources* chapter enables us to collect the articles of Antal Csengery that appeared in the *Pesti Hirlap* after 7 June 1847, as well as to identify the authors of other unnamed articles which appeared in the age. The texts of Csengery can become an important source for the researchers of the period and they could prompt a change in the assessment of the age from a political and an intellectual historical sense.

The treatise part of my dissertation comprises a self-sufficient unit, because the signing of the *Opposition Manifesto* led to the unity of the opposition, which was split apart because of the appearance of the centralists. Later on I would like to publish this part of the dissertation in a book format. I see the relevance of continuing this research as the signing of the *Manifesto* did not end the debates within the opposition. The *Opposition Manifesto* located only those points which the party would try to realize in the future, but it stayed silent about the methods of carrying them out. Understandably centralist politicians argued that the changes need to be brought about on the basis of their system. They could advocate these methods, because by then, they were members of the Opposition Party. Due to these emerging differences, the relationship between the groups within the opposition started to deteriorate. The tension between the centralists and the municipalists culminated in 1848 when Eötvös's circle even began to cooperate with Széchenyi in order to overthrow Kossuth. This also means that there is a relevance to examining the relationship of the groups within the opposition even after 7 June 1847, thus the study could be continued until the end of December 1848 when Csengery and Kemény, who became his co-editor, resigned from their positions. In this way the analysis of Csengery's activities as an editor would be complete.

The period to be analyzed could be divided into four units. The first part would need to focus on the questions the centralists wanted the parliament to discuss, how they wanted to achieve these goals, and what tactics they used before the parliament of 1847-48 in order to persuade their fellow politicians about the benefits of these solutions. The second chapter would examine the period from the opening of the parliament to the inception of the first responsible Hungarian government, with special regard to how Eötvös's circle influenced the work of the parliament with their articles and what cooperations they started with powers both inside and outside the parliament. The third unit would analyze the period after the birth of the Batthyány-government until Eötvös's and Trefort's departure abroad. Eötvös became a minister of the government; on 27 April 1848 Trefort became the secretary of state for the ministry of agriculture, industry and trade as well fulfilling his duties as the representative for the Terézváros district in the capital city from the July elections on; Szalay became

the head of the codifying department in the ministry of justice. We would have to bear in mind not only how in this period the *Pesti Hirlap* tried to influence the decisions made by the parliament in various topics, but also what role centralists played in preparing and passing new statutes. As *Pesti Hirlap* became a semi-official government newspaper in the period, we would also need to address how it supported the government. The last part would focus strictly on the analysis of the articles Csengery and his co-editor Kemény wrote in the period from September to December 1848. Centralist politicians like Szalay, Eötvös, or Trefort had already left the country by then, and Irinyi cast his votes with the radicals in the parliament.

I intend to amend my dissertation with these chapters, which will form the basis of another book I would like to publish. This book would analyze how a group fulfilling a crucial role in the Reform Age evolved from its inception to its breakup. The research would focus on press materials and the key figure in the study would be an editor who supervised the paper for the longest amount of time. Despite the fact that he was not the most significant figure in the group, his performance as an intermediary within the opposition and his role as the leader of the newspaper contributed greatly to the realization of the ideas he and his fellow centralists fought for.

## V. List of Publications Related to the Thesis

### Publications

KOVÁCS József, *Csengery Antal és az egységesített Pesti Hirlap = Doktoranduszok Fóruma Miskolc, 2008. november 13.*, szerk. SZŐKE Kornélia, Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetem Tudományszervezési és Nemzetközi Osztály, [2009], 12–15.

GÁBORI KOVÁCS József, „Írói dicsőséget nem kerestem”: Anonimitás és a szerzői attribúció lehetőségei a centralista Pesti Hirlapban, *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 2009/5, 539–574.

KOVÁCS József, *Szerkesztőváltás a centralista Pesti Hirlap élén: A nagypolitika hatása egy reformkori folyóirat szerkesztői stábjának összetételére = Doktoranduszok Fóruma Miskolc, 2009. november 5.*, szerk. SZŐKE Kornélia, Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetem Tudományszervezési és Nemzetközi Osztály, [2010], 52–57.

GÁBORI KOVÁCS József, *Ellenzéki párttöredékek közeledése a publicisztika útján = Doktoranduszok Fóruma Miskolc, 2010. november 10.*, szerk. FEKETÉNÉ PÁL Enikő, Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetem Tudományszervezési és Nemzetközi Osztály, [2011], 16–21.

GÁBORI KOVÁCS József, „A’ tegnapi nap történelmi nyomokat hagyott maga után” (Ki írta a március 15-i beszámolót a Pesti Hirlapba?) = *Versében él...: Mózes Huba köszöntése 70. születésnapján*, szerk. Gréczi-Zsoldos Enikő, Miskolc, Bíbor Kiadó, 2011, 77–87.

GÁBORI KOVÁCS József, *Pártküzdelmek a Pesti Hirlap körül és ezek hatása Kemény Zsigmond pályájára = Határátlépések: A doktoriskolák III. nemzetközi konferenciája*,

Kolozsvár, 2010. augusztus 26–27., szerk. DOBOS István, BENE Sándor, Bp., Nemzetközi Magyarástudományi Társaság, 2011, 144–150, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, <http://mek.oszk.hu/09700/09720/09720.doc> (2011. 10. 24.)

GÁBORI KOVÁCS József, *Taktikák a centralista eszmék elfogadtatására = Tehetséggondozó műhely füzetek 1*, szerk. KEGYESNÉ SZEKERES Erika, FEKETE Sándor, Miskolc, ME BTK Tudományos Diákköri Tanács, 2010, 63–70.

GÁBORI KOVÁCS József, *A centralisták szerepe az ellenzék egységesítésében*, Századok, 2012/3, 563–607.

### **Conference Papers**

KOVÁCS József, *Csengery Antal és a centralista Pesti Hirlap*, előadás a Miskolci Egyetem Doktorandusz Fórumán, 2008. november 13.

KOVÁCS József, *Szerkesztőváltás a centralista Pesti Hirlap élén*, előadás a Miskolci Egyetem Doktorandusz Fórumán, 2009. november 5.

GÁBORI KOVÁCS József, *A magyarországi ellenzék pártküzdelseinek hatása Kemény Zsigmond pályájára*, előadás a doktoriskolák III. nemzetközi konferenciáján, Kolozsvár, 2010. augusztus 26–27.

GÁBORI KOVÁCS József, *Ellenzéki párttöredékek közeledése a publicisztika útján*, előadás a Miskolci Egyetem Doktorandusz Fórumán, 2010. november 10.