

Dissidents reject deal on elections

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THE Hungarian opposition grouping, the Alliance of Free Democrats, warned yesterday against the dangers of totalitarianism, clouding the optimism that had accompanied Monday night's agreement clearing the way for completely free elections next year.

The Alliance refused to sign the deal between the Communist Party and the majority of opposition groups because of reservations over the party's true intent. "We cannot take responsibility for the creation of a totalitarian system of government," an Alliance spokesman, Mr Peter Tolgyessy, said yesterday.

Along with Fidesz, the democratic youth organisation, and the free trades union organisation, the AFD rejected the deal because the Communist Party remains intransigent on issues such as giving up its property assets and the workplace-based party committees and because the parliament, which is to pass the legislation to facilitate the elections, remains Communist-controlled.

By talking of totalitarianism, the AFD appeared to be referring to the clause in Monday's deal paving the way for the election of a powerful new executive president, possibly as early as November, before Hungary's new democratic system is up and running.

Mr Imre Pozsgay, the leading Communist reformer, has little competition for the post. He has already been nominated as the

party's candidate and if elected will enjoy a formidable array of powers long before the free elections produce their most probable result: a weak coalition government.

The party insists that a new president is needed soon to guarantee political stability as the country moves into uncharted territory. But the AFD, a small but influential opposition grouping that includes the most prominent intellectual dissidents, is clearly not convinced.

Three months of national round-table negotiations between opposition groups and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) culminated in the document paving the way for multi-party elections, as well as a separate poll for the post of president.

The HSWP's president, Mr Rezső Nyers, called the signing an "historic moment" and said the document would help to "establish a democratic legal state".

The document says that in 238 sessions the negotiating parties agreed on draft laws for the operation and management of parties, the amendment of the penal code and penal procedures and the creation of a constitutional court system which will begin operating next January.

Elections are to be based on a mixed system where nearly half the MPs are elected directly through the constituencies. An equal number will be elected proportionally on county lists and the remainder will be voted in on a national list.

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