

Pozsgay wins nomination for president

Susan Viets in Budapest

HUNGARY'S leading Communist reformer, Mr Imre Pozsgay, was named last night as a candidate for the powerful post of president that is expected to emerge under the new constitution being drafted.

The naming of Mr Pozsgay came on top of a weekend of drama within the Communist Party that saw the power of the country's leader, Mr Karoly Grosz, limited and the leadership of the party vested in Mr Rezsoe Nyers, Mr Pozsgay's close ally.

Following a fiery crisis central committee meeting on Friday and Saturday it was announced that the party would be headed by a four-man praesidium — Mr Nyers, Mr Pozsgay, Mr Grosz and the Prime Minister, Mr Miklos Nemeth — severely truncating Mr Grosz's powers. Mr Grosz, long under attack for failing to respond convincingly to the reform imperative, appears to be in a minority of one in the new four-man body.

Mr Pozsgay, by contrast, goes from strength to strength, as underlined by last night's announcement that the party was proposing him for national president. It is thought that the party leadership could well have been his for the asking but he has previously indicated that he would prefer to run for national president.

Under the new constitution, which will pave the way for political pluralism and free elections, the new post is likely to have wide-ranging executive powers parallel to the posts recently created for President Gorbachev and waiting to be filled in Poland.

It is not yet clear precisely how wide those powers will be, but Mr Pozsgay's candidacy

gives him the opportunity to present himself as a consensual, conciliatory figure looming over any coalition government that might emerge from the free elections to be held next year, or possibly even at the end of this year.

Mr Grosz, who remains general secretary, will manage the day-to-day running of the party but policy will be determined by the praesidium until a new leadership and party programme are voted on at the October party congress.

When Mr Grosz was elected general secretary 13 months ago, the Moscow party daily Pravda heralded him as a champion of political and economic modernisation and reform. Pravda emphasised Mr Grosz's commitment to renewing and "strengthening the leading role" of the party.

Since then events have moved at breakneck speed in Hungary.

Legislation to allow alternative organisations, and the right of assembly and association is in place. The opposition has been quick to make use of the new laws. This month 100,000 people gathered for the public reburial of Hungary's former Prime Minister Mr Imre Nagy, an orderly event which was staged with low police visibility.

In February the party broke with its vision of "socialist pluralism" under the leading role of the party and unequivocally came out in support of the multi-party system. Mr Pozsgay, the most extreme of the party reformers, pushed developments one step further last week when he pledged party support for free elections.

Economic reforms have been slower to materialise but important legislation including a law on business association has been introduced to help create a market economy.

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