

Hungary decides to go for multi-party system

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Susan Viets in Budapest

HUNGARY was yesterday transformed from a one-party state into a multi-party democracy when the national parliament voted overwhelmingly to accept a package of constitutional amendments.

The transitional constitution which is in place is expected to guarantee stability in the months leading up to Hungary's first free multi-party elections in more than 40 years.

The modifications proposed eliminate all references to the "leading role" of the now dissolved Communist Party.

Hungary is now a Republic, not a People's Republic, and the constitution guarantees that no single organisation or individual can gain power through force.

It also states that "political parties may be freely established and may freely function", provided that they respect the constitution and the law.

A constitutional court system is being created and the 21-person presidential council, which headed the state, will be dissolved. It is to be replaced by the newly created post of president.

The powers of the president, who is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces and has other additional powers, will be temporarily assumed by the Speaker, Mr Matyas Szueros, pending the vote to determine who will fill the office.

The historic approvals fol-

lowed another landmark decision — the dissolution, only last week, of the Communist Party and its replacement by the Hungarian Socialist Party. The new party professes commitment to multi-party democracy and market forces in the economy.

But yesterday's parliamentary session also revealed differences on a key aspect of the country's democratic strivings — when and how to choose the president.

The proceedings were delayed for nearly 90 minutes as the Cabinet huddled in emergency session on demands that a referendum be held on the issue.

While the government wants Parliament to approve plans to hold an election for president this year, opposition groups seek a postponement.

One-party rule continues at least temporarily, despite termination of the Communist Party. Its successor continues to dominate politics pending the first multi-party elections since 1947.

Opposition parties seeking a postponement assert they have no time or resources to organise against the Socialist Party candidate, Mr Imre Pozsgay, if the presidential voting is held this year. The recess was called to permit a decision on the validity of a petition circulated by the opposition League of Free Democrats calling for a plebiscite on a postponement.

● The Vatican is ready to consider restoring full diplomatic relations with Hungary, the official Hungarian news agency

MTI said yesterday. The offer was made in a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Miklos Nemeth, from Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the Vatican's Secretary of State, MTI said.

Poland is the only Warsaw Pact country that has full relations with the Holy See.

Meanwhile, in a startling throwback to the frostiest days of the Cold War, a Soviet military journal has labelled the 1956 Hungarian uprising as a counter-revolution and called the executed Hungarian leader, Mr Imre Nagy, a traitor.

The article, by General Pyotr Lashchenko in the Military Historical Journal monthly, said Western countries actively supported the uprising. It did not mention that Hungary had since rehabilitated Nagy, hanged in 1958 for his part in the rebellion.

Lashchenko, who said Nagy had played "a traitorous role" in the events, started by quoting a 1966 speech by the former Hungarian leader Mr Janos Kadar in which he thanked the Soviet Union for having helped put down "the counter-revolution."

Mr Kadar, who was installed by Moscow after Nagy's arrest, ruled for over 30 years, during which time the uprising was a taboo subject.

The article appeared to be in sharp contrast to recent Soviet press reports which have taken a generally sympathetic line to the events of 1956. But in the last few weeks there has been a steady trickle of conservative articles.