

# Hungary election plan in disarray

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Susan Viets in Budapest

**T**HE small but influential Hungarian opposition group, the Alliance of Free Democrats, this weekend demanded that parliament reach a decision on their proposal to postpone the presidential election.

An executive presidency was created last month by the opposition and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), now the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP), as part of a legislative package to guide Hungary towards a multi-party democracy.

The speaker of parliament, Mr Matyas Szeros, became the interim president, and parliament was set to ratify November 26 as the date for the presidential election, when the Alliance handed in its petition and threw the timetable into disarray.

"We want the president to be elected after multi-party elections, and with fear so prominent in this country it is a considerable achievement to have 200,000 signatures on our petition," one of the Alliance's leaders, Mr Imre Mecs, said this weekend.

The opposition group wants a referendum to decide whether Hungarians should elect their president before the multi-party election due early next year, and therefore directly, or after the election, which means parliament will choose the president.

The Alliance says direct elec-

tion would give the HSP's presidential candidate, Mr Imre Pozsgay, an unfair publicity advantage, and sees this as an HSP trick to hold on to power even if the party fares poorly in the election.

In a recent survey, only 5 per cent of Hungarians knew of the 6,000-member Alliance's existence. The brains trust of the country, the Alliance is made up of a group of intellectuals who have the most solid programme to transform Hungary into a Western-style democracy based on a market economy. The referendum will increase its public profile.

At a weekend Alliance conference, a seven-point programme, drafted by one of its leaders, Mr Janos Kis, was accepted and new leaders were elected. The conference moved to create an independent watchdog to supervise the media, which they say is still Communist-dominated, and called for an immediate decision on the date of Hungary's multi-party election.

Members also said the army should be depoliticised and ties with the HSP broken.

The Alliance also demanded that the state immediately specify the amount of money it would give parties for their election campaigns. It suggested opposition parties should co-operate in constituency elections and have moved to restart opposition round-table talks, expanding the membership to include any of the more than 30 opposition groups.

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