

# Hungary seals break with past

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Susan Viets in Budapest

**T**HE Hungarian parliament confirmed its break with the Communist era yesterday by approving a law for multi-party elections by next June.

It also adopted a proposal by the Prime Minister, Mr Miklos Nemeth, that the Speaker, Mr Matyas Szuros, should begin serving as acting head of state by declaring Hungary a republic on Monday's anniversary of the 1956 uprising.

Delegates approved legislation drafted by opposition groups, such as the Hungarian Democratic Forum, and the ruling Hungarian Socialist Party in round-table negotiations earlier this year.

The new socialist party also took a big step away from its Communist past by condemning the Soviet intervention of 1956. "No power has the right to thwart a nation's socio-political efforts with outside military interference," it said in a statement issued just three days before the 33rd anniversary of the Hungarian uprising.

In a decision consistent with the new political line, MPs voted overwhelmingly to disband the Workers' Militia, the Communist Party's army created after the 1956 revolt.

The vote overturned a recent HSP decision to leave the body unarmed but intact. Workers' Militia assets are frozen and the organisation will not be transformed into a civil guard.

In tense two-day debates, MPs exercised their new independence and threatened to scrap the draft law for electing parliamentary MPs. The mixed system of proportional and direct representation increases the chances for small opposition parties to be represented in parliament and decreases the number of MPs who will be elected directly.

The HSP praesidium member, Mr Imre Pozsgay, told parliament it should pass the law for the sake of the nation. The Minister of the Interior, Mr Istvan Horvath, said scrapping it

would jeopardise the entire round-table package because "while the draft law on elections is not more important than the others, it is a domino and if one domino is taken away, all the others collapse."

Parliament accepted the law with modifications. Under the new terms, 176 MPs will be elected directly through the constituencies, 152 will be voted in proportionally on county lists and 58 will come in on a compensation list, where parties can transfer votes from constituency and county elections to win seats in parliament.

Parliament continued to support the Prime Minister and his reformist government, by approving legal and moral rehabilitation as well as financial compensation for the victims of political trials in Hungary's Stalinist period, 1948 to 1962. The revolutionary leader, Imry Nagy, and his associates were rehabilitated earlier this year.

Rules for a national presidential election before multi-party elections were accepted yesterday. An influential opposition group, the Alliance of Free Democrats, has submitted a petition with 200,000 signatures which calls for a referendum to ask Hungarians whether they want presidential elections after, instead of before, multi-party elections.

Parliament will deal with this at a session later this month. If the president is elected after multi-party elections, he will be chosen by parliament.

The Hungarian Democratic Forum, now one of the largest opposition groups with more than 20,000 members and expected to be a leading force in parliament after the multi-party elections, has a candidate for the presidential election.

At a three-day conference starting yesterday, the forum will discuss its election programme and strategy.

Parliament has approved a report detailing HSP assets and an HSP proposal that the party will hand property, which it does not need, over to the government beginning in January.

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