

Soviet troops cheered on their way

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Susan Viets in Hajmasker

AS 130 of the 7,000 Soviet troops based in the western Hungarian village of Hajmasker yesterday marched on to the first troop train to depart from Hungary for the Soviet Union, the youth opposition movement, Fidesz, cried to them: "Hurry, sunny Azerbaijan is waiting for you".

Fewer than 50,000 Soviet troops are now stationed in Hungary. Under a troop withdrawal agreement signed at the weekend 70 per cent of these must leave Hungary by the end of this year, and all must be out by June

30, 1991, beating the Czechs by one day. Hungarian opposition parties want the troops out sooner and some say they will try to modify the agreement after the elections later this month.

"I think we expressed the wish of many people who didn't have the courage to speak out" said Zsuzsa Szelenyi, a Fidesz leader.

"We can't say goodbye to them fast enough," said a 40-year-old villager, Jozsef Kerti, looking on from the other side of the road.

"Sometimes the soldiers would shoot at roof tiles from the end of the street, so for us it's practically been a 40-years-war", he added.

"They should have left years ago, but it's because of Kadar that it didn't happen until now", claimed his wife, Borbala Schweiger.

Some of the 1,000 villagers stood by the train while the band played down below, flanked by the soldiers clutching their goodbye tokens of carnations and salted bread.

Three members of the local branch of the Hungarian Social Democrats scurried up the platform with their flags to join Fidesz and the villagers just in time to catch the battalion commander's final words to his departing troops: "We are leaving with a sense of having fulfilled

our mission". When the train doors slammed shut hats came off, uniforms were unbuttoned, and dozens of 20-year-old soldiers at ease hung out the windows to photograph the photographers and wave goodbye.

In their place will come Hungarian soldiers and Hungarian tanks.

The road leading out across the railway tracks and over the scrub-covered hills connects the village with the motorway to Budapest. The first local bus stop is decorated with a brightly-coloured opposition poster showing the back of an elderly Soviet officer's head. The caption reads: "Comrades, it's over".

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