

## **What Online Pictures Tell About Demonstrations in Budapest**

### **Comparing photos that have appeared on the net: *Index, Magyar Nemzet Online and Nepszabadsag Online.***

The event: 23rd October 2006, Budapest demonstrations, rioting, confrontation between the police and the demonstrators, dissipation of the crowd in the streets of Budapest after the commemoration of the Revolution of 1956.

Picture galleries: Selection of pictures from *Index, Magyar Nemzet Online* and *Nepszabadsag Online* internet newspapers.

*Links of photo galleries*

**MNO:** [http://www.mno.hu/index.mno?cikk=379917&rvt=61&s\\_text=K%E9pgal%E9ria&s\\_texttype=4](http://www.mno.hu/index.mno?cikk=379917&rvt=61&s_text=K%E9pgal%E9ria&s_texttype=4)

**NOL:** <http://www.nol.hu/cikk/421773/>

**Index:** <http://index.hu/politika/belfold/2006/elkurtuk/galeriak/>

Looking at the pictures at a first glance it is quite evident that all the 3 online newspapers showed different kinds of pictures of the events: from police acts to acts of the Hungarian citizens, from demonstrators holding flags to the bleeding injured. For example a huge crowd in front of the police troop, sortie of the police, these are all available to look at in the picture galleries of the mentioned online newspapers.

The photographers took pictures of everything that met their eyes, without being interested in who is right and who is wrong, they just simply followed the events and took pictures of all incidents. At the same time it would be interesting to know how the selection happened, what principle they used to select 60-70 pictures from the hundreds of photos taken.

The photos are shocking and astounding. The pictures of bleeding people, aggression and violence have a strong effect on the readers. The events were broadcast live by most TV channels, the journalists and photographers being in the front line risking their own physical safety: tear gas, water pump, rubber bullets from the police, demonstrators throwing stones and Molotov cocktails. The journalists were between the frying pan and the fire.

An interesting article was published about the situation of the journalists on 23<sup>rd</sup> October with the title: *The Hungarian media was left alone* (<http://emasa.hu/cikk.php?page=radio&id=1889>). The article describes the consequences that media participation has made on the events and street fights in Budapest - in other words how media participation affected the events. Members of the media had a round-table discussion about this recently with the topic how September and October events in Budapest were broadcast in the media. We are informed that the RTL Klub TV channel broadcast the events every half an hour, while other channels had live broadcasting without pause. According to Mihaly Kovacs from RTL Klub, summary reports every half an hour are more effective than continuity.

The article also mentions the situation of the journalists who participated in the events. The Head of

Hungarian Radio's Publications for example reported that they were trying to plan their escape from the venues. He writes that the police told them that they do everything for their safety, but cannot guarantee their protection.

Members of the media agreed that it is a problem if the journalists are not there during the events, but it can also be a problem if their participation is too much. András Király, journalist of Index writes that: we did too well even when there was no event. On Thursday, after the demonstrations at the Hungarian Television, there were 200 journalists together besides only 10-20 young riotous demonstrators who were asking them where to go. The 600 policemen had to dissipate the crowd because of the journalists. There is a BBC policy, which says that if a journalist feels that his/her participation affects the outcome of the event then he/she has to pull back. Király feels that this principle is not kept in Hungary.

Thinking over the events of the day, this may just be true. Those who caused rioting knew exactly that the media will be there and they made good use of it. The strong effect of the media was tested again. Just think about the War of Words by Orson Welles, which caused people to panic. After a few weeks following the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, we can still feel the effects of the events and demonstrations that took place in September and October in Budapest, which we could follow through the media.

We can learn from the article that the participation of the media affected the events. Peter Gyorgy, lecturer at ELTE said that we should be more economic with participation as currently a few thousand people make use of publicity. Andras Kiraly added that the rioters asked them why the TV was not there". Kiraly thinks that participation of the media was right, otherwise the demonstrators would continue until reaching publicity. Moreover, demonstrators could have gone even further with their acts to reach publicity. To sum up, it is difficult to tell, looking at what had happened and its consequences, whether participation of the media was an advantage or a disadvantage. The members of the media agreed that the acts in the events should be shared with the public however it does not mean that media should mediate the messages as well. I would like to highlight the opinion of Adam Kiss (reporter), who thinks that it is important to be aware of what affects people's every day lives. These events did affect peoples' every day lives, which I can tell from my own experiences. I often go to the city centre and at that time in the evenings I preferred to stay away from the places, which I thought might be dangerous.

The media is said to be something that is only after the STORY, however media can get into difficult situations such as the rioting night on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. Bence György, colleague of TV2 said that it is impossible to answer to what we should give and what we should not. It is certainly difficult to answer this because the demands and expectations of the target audience differ very much from one to another and it is very difficult to set the boundaries between what we can do and what we cannot.

Finally, the article touches upon a topic, which caused agreement between the journalists and members of the media: methods of objectivity and information buying and why they did not interview the demonstrators live. According to Miklos Borsa (Duna TV) the declarations and pronouncements of the demonstrators should be first selected before being published. It would be risky to interview them live as anything they say

the audience would believe, because it was on the TV". Andras Kiraly from *Index* agrees with this in saying that most declarations of the demonstrators are not representative.

The article also mentions that the media was in a difficult situation as neither the police nor the politicians spoke about the case, moreover up to today there are still a lot of conjectures and different points of views, therefore it is difficult to insist on the facts and know what happened exactly and who was right and wrong. The article lists very interesting arguments and thoughts about the many unanswered questions. The events since have appeared through different approaches depending on through whose eyes we look at it: parties and followers of the left side, parties and followers of the right side, police, demonstrators, people wanting to live in peace, etc. After the events we heard about news such as encroachment of the police, audio talks as evidences, resignation of Gergényi, A doctor did not want to cure the injured policeman.

The atmosphere is characterized by oppositions, blaming the other, fighting for truth. Nobody knows at this stage whether there will be an end to the arguments and how it will all end, or will there be a compromise that is suitable for all?

According to the article we understand that mediums do get into difficult situations. The readers and the audience want to see the events, know, see and read about facts and sometimes it is not easy to be sufficient for all requirements and demands.

It is truly a question whether what we see live and the pictures of the demonstrations are equal with the reality and equal with the facts. We see so many types of pictures, there are so many opinions and statements we read and hear, nobody knows where the real truth is. In the overflowing of continuous information people cannot always handle the amount of news and information.

In the three internet newspapers, we can find similarities and differences at the same time between the pictures that appeared on the websites.

As mentioned before, all three picture galleries show the events as they appeared. It is also similar in the use of pictures that we can find bloody pictures in all the three galleries. These pictures have a very strong effect. First of all, we should take a look at the pictures of the **demonstrators**.

We can see pictures where rubber bullets caused injury and there are some others where demonstrators have bleeding faces. We can recognise the same person in all the three photo galleries however the galleries show other injured people as well. *Index* took a photo of an injured person in the hospital, as well.

Looking at all the pictures we can draw the conclusion that there were different types of demonstrators: from peaceful demonstrators to rioters the police stopped or had to stop all demonstrators not paying attention to whether they were peaceful or rioting. It is easy to recognise from the pictures which demonstrator belongs to which group. The gestures, mimics and movements tell everything. The peaceful demonstrators are usually holding flags, they look like they are willing to change the world, insisting on their goals. In the pictures taken of the rioters we can see signs of aggressive behaviour such as shouting, angry eyes and desperate faces, holding guns (metal sticks and Molotov cocktail). In some cases we can make the conclusion by looking at the appearance that the person belongs to the rioters group. In some

pictures we can see them wearing masks not knowing whether its purpose was to hide themselves from publicity or to protect themselves from tear gas. Some pictures are shocking because we can see injured people on them, while others because of the brutal acts we can see. Pictures where demonstrators are standing on their knees, ready to sacrifice themselves have a very strong effect. These demonstrators must be somewhere between the rioters and the peaceful demonstrators - they do not have guns only flags and toughness and insistence. At the same time many of these demonstrators were considered to be rioters as well because the police wanted to dissipate the crowd and if someone did not move away it drew consequences: they either turned against the police and attacked, or ran away and while running away they may have been injured or could escape safely. There were many different types of people according to the pictures from old to young, from every day people (intellectuals as well) to rioters, from rabbles to people enduring to the end. Finally, all of the three picture galleries show pictures of some rioters who stole a tank. These pictures are also very powerful.

From all of the pictures perhaps the most effective one is from *Index*, where an old lady stranding alone turns against a crowd of fully armed policemen. *(picture)*



Another interesting photo from *Index* was taken of the back of a young demonstrator wearing a jacket with "rabble" written on his back. *(picture)*



From *NOL's* pictures I would highlight the one, which the photographer took of the crowd. We can imagine that the photographer could have been in danger but still took photos and did his job. Rioters and demonstrators shouting and holding flags are only a few meters away from him. The faces reflect their desperate determination. *(picture)*



*MNO* has a lot of shocking pictures from the fights in the streets, however there is one picture, which tells much more: two young people, one of them holding a flag, sitting in the middle of the street, while there is the huge police force in front of them about 100 meters away. *(picture)*

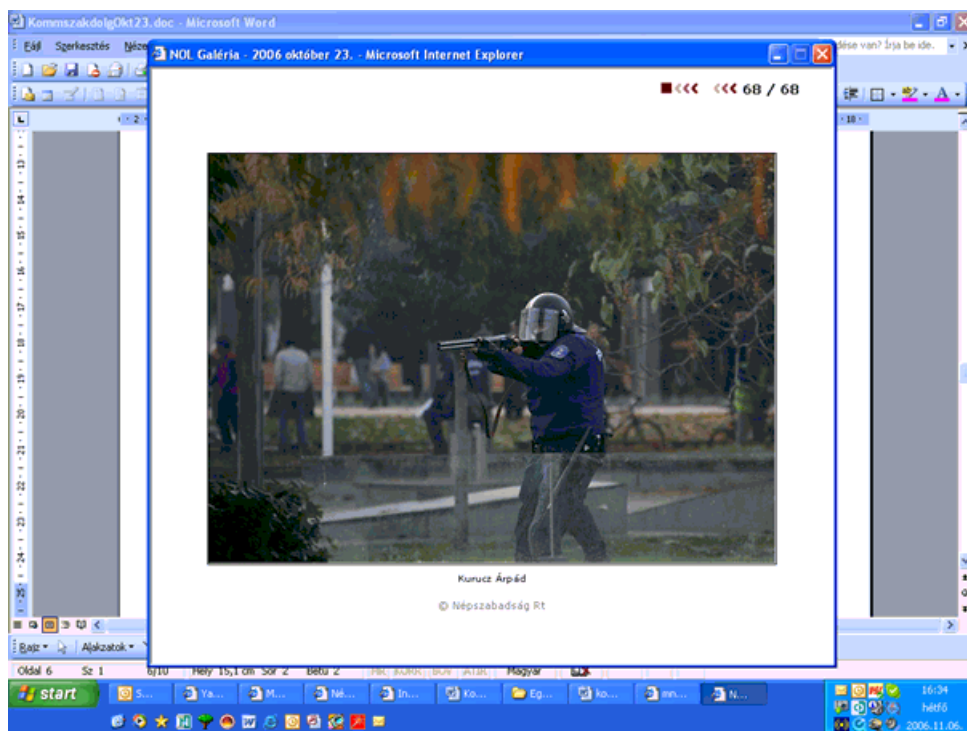


Although finding topics was not a problem concerning the events, these pictures are the most effective and they tell us more about the situation and atmosphere than anybody can really explain since. And, it probably

cannot be explained because there were so many different types of people demonstrating, who had similar purposes and goals, but acted differently to reach their goals. The above mentioned pictures tell this, they are good, because they tell us that different people with their different purposes and truths participated in the events and these people together affected the outcome of the events.

In the eyes of the police, who had an order to dissipate the crowd, all the different types of demonstrators were one big crowd: the cause of rioting. Could there be peaceful demonstrators or people insisting on their point of views and aggressive rioters an order is an order - some could give in and escape, others who stayed and insisted had to face the consequences.

The three picture galleries showed pictures of the **policemen** as well. In the *NOL* gallery we can see pictures where the policemen are standing next to a man who is lying on the street yielding himself. One of the policemen is standing right next to him, and it seems that he wants to arrest the man. We can see pictures where the police are using tear gas on the demonstrators who stole a tank, or a picture where 4 or 5 policemen are leading away a fettered man. The picture from *NOL's* selection of a policeman who is directing his gun (rubber bullet gun) toward someone also has a very powerful effect. *(picture)*



In *MNO's* photo gallery we can see policemen with injured people in the streets, and also find pictures taken of the police using water pumps.

*Index's* gallery shows many pictures of the police the picture with the old lady in front of the police has already been mentioned, probably has the strongest effect.

There are only a few pictures that show differences and contrasts between the use of pictures in the three

internet newspapers. The commemoration at Kossuth square is only included in *Index's* and *NOL's* photo galleries. *MNO's* gallery shows pictures of the demonstrators with the letters "FREEDOM" in front of them there were no pictures of this in the other two newspapers. *(picture)*



Another difference is that *MNO's* photographer took a photo of a poster about the anniversary of the 1956 Revolution with somebody's comment painted on it with airbrush: Gyurcsány AVH. (AVH means State Security Police. This functioned on the basis of the Russian model between 1945 and 1957 in Hungary. It was party operated in secret and its main purposes were to pursue people against the Communist era and to protect the era and its leaders. Many members of the ÁVH participated in suppressing the Hungarian Revolution and defeated the revolutionists in 1956.

<http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81VH>

By writing the name of the prime minister together with AVH probably refers to the relation between the prime minister and the Communist regim) *(picture)*



This picture could not be found in the other photo galleries.

Only *Index* uses written comments under the pictures, *NOL* only wrote down the name of the photographer and *MNO* did not comment the pictures at all - maybe because they do not require any comments.

Above I compared the use of the pictures of the three internet online newspapers during the events of the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2006. I tried to show how pictures tell everything and nothing about the events that day and the acts of the participants. Pictures show real acts, however they do not discover the truth and maybe at this

stage we can feel how important the text is. Texts can supply the missing information and give clue to the secrets, reasons behind the events and answer some questions. Although the texts are written by journalists, who deliberately or unwillingly add their opinions, still even with the pictures and the texts together, we cannot be sure of what had happened. Now, we may find out what features the pictures have without knowing the events.

All three picture galleries show the symbol of flags. In some pictures the flags are in the spotlight and in others they are in the background of the picture. However in *NOL's* gallery one may conclude that flags do not have the same symbolic meanings as in *Index's* and *MNO's* galleries. Mainly in *MNO*, but also in *Index*, we can see that the flags play more of a central position. In *NOL's* selection of pictures flags seem to be only tools of the demonstrations, and the pictures do not pay more attention to them. If we have a look at the *MNO's* gallery we can see many photos where the flags are above the demonstrators or in the middle of the pictures, e.g. in the picture where demonstrators are holding the flag and showing it to the photographer. Moreover, it seems that the flag has blood on it, which makes this picture even more powerful and meaningful. *(picture)*



It is interesting to note that we cannot see pictures of demonstrators posing to the photographers in *Index's* and *NOL's* photo galleries. *Index's* and *NOL's* pictures show moments and crowds. On the contrary, *MNO* has two pictures where the subject of the picture is posing to the photographer or showing something to him/her - one of them we already mentioned, the other picture is taken of an injured man, who is showing the mark of the rubber bullet on his body to the photographer - for this one of his fellows is lifting up his shirt. *(picture)*





Was it *MNO's* journalist who asked the injured man to pose for a photo or the injured man and his fellow wanted publicity?

The fact that *NOL* and *Index* did not show such pictures was because the demonstrators did not talk to them or because these newspapers paid more attention to showing pictures of the moments? Or, the way the pictures were organised was due to which photographer was there at the moment of time? There are again a few unanswered questions, which the readers can decide for themselves.

### Summary

In viewing the sensitivity and the consequences of the event, which are still not closed and cleared, I leave it to the readers what consequences are to be made of the pictures and texts of the three internet newspapers. One thing is sure, the events somehow affected, shocked and revolted us in different ways. Without the media this strong effect and pressure would not be put on us, however we have got used to it as the media has become a part of our lives. We all know what it is that we want to follow and pay attention to from the events of the world. Each of the events makes different effects on us and certainly it does matter a lot how the media informs and reports to us. Some even let the media influence them and they even change their principles and opinions accordingly. Should we believe fully what we see and read are true? Is there news, which only gives us pure information and facts? There does not seem to be any. We have no other choice but to believe and trust only one thing that we always have: ourselves. Finally, to find out whether objectivity is possible at all, let me quote from Fisher from Lajos Domonkos's book (*Practices and theories of journalism in online and offline newspapers*, Press, page 204.): "news does not reflect reality" (...), "we, journalists do not tell the news, what we tell is the news." Fisher suggests for journalists "to pay attention to the evenness, impartiality and trustiness, which are more measurable and analysable than objectivity."

Domonkos in his book proves that objectivity is not possible. "Experienced journalists know exactly that even in the driest news we can find underlying context by the use of words and language or by the choice of synonyms." (Domonkos, )

2 days to 15th March, National Holiday in Hungary: Commemoration of Revolution in 1848. Another upcoming event that may bring political consequences. Another event that makes people fear.

The relationship between the right and left side parties and followers still has not changed since the events

on the 23rd October. Moreover, because of the restrictions and new reforms, it has become even worse. One result of the restrictions is simply that more and more people are losing their trust in the government and the right side politicians make good use of it. They attack and criticise the government and their decisions when and where they can.

In the news, only a few days before 15<sup>th</sup> March, we can hear 'Budapest will be empty?', 'country side hotels are fully booked for the long weekend?', 'demonstrations are expected in Budapest?', 'police will not use rubber bullet this time?', etc. Will there be rioting again? Will there be injured people again? What will the police do? Why all our commemorations have to be about politics nowadays?

15<sup>th</sup> March was always about families wearing 'kokárda' (small Hungarian flag badge) pinned on their coats or shirts visiting venues of the revolution: National Museum, statues of heroes of the day, etc. Now there will be no parents that let their children go out to these venues as it might be dangerous.

We shall see if we could learn from 23<sup>rd</sup> October events or not.

2007.03.13.