

The Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (KDNP) is one of the system changing parties in Hungary; members of the Demokratikus Néppárt led by István Barankovics returning from a forty-year exile undertook a significant part in reorganising the party officially on 2 April 1989. Since the changes in the system, KDNP has been the only ideological party in the Hungarian National Assembly, the major representative of Christian values in Hungarian political life. In alliance with Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union, the party uses the image of man from the gospel in designing its policies. In accordance with its people's party character, it strives for achieving a socio-economic structure and relations which create favourable conditions for all people, human communities and social layers or occupations to achieve their objectives.

The convictions and beliefs of KDNP originate from the Christian traditions of the Hungarian historic past dating back to Saint Stephen (first king of Hungary, ruled between 997 and 1038) and the Christian inspiration of European culture, as well as the spirituality of modern Western European Christian Democratic parties. The Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt is an ecumenical, democratic and patriotic people's party standing on Christian intellectual grounds. In addition to its definite national character, KDNP strives for close cooperation with the Christian Social and Christian Democratic parties and movements of other countries to benefit from their intellectual achievements and practical experience.

KDNP builds on the international and domestic traditions of Christian Social and Christian Democratic movements. Driven by the intention to serve public good and enforce national interests, without giving up its principles, it has always been ready for dialogue and cooperation in resolving specific issues with other democratic political parties and civil organisations. True to its ideals, the Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt strives for finding answers to questions of social life in concordance with Christian values without, however, directly exploiting Christianity for political purposes or confusing it with political systems of ideas. It serves with its political activity the democratic development of social life, the fostering of public good and a fuller involvement of humans as persons.

It considers its duty to protect human rights and liberties; it fights for justice and making individual and social solidarity taken for granted. Hungarian society went through a lot of crises last century. Each of these crises struck our country tragically. The peace dictate following World War One and World War Two and the subsequent decades have all inflicted serious losses on our country and the Hungarian nation.

Hungarian society was very much looking forward to the period of systems changes. These hopes have not been fulfilled. In the past twenty years tense contradictions have been generated. While the assets of the community faded away, the debts have not reduced but increased significantly. Certain groups in society have become extremely rich while others have had a miserable life. Hungary saw a grave demographic crisis in the past decades: the number of children born has drastically dropped while the mortality rate is very high. The declining number of children is a proof of shattered faith in the future.

Taking accounts of the experience of the past decades, the Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt has been pursuing a policy which serves to elevate the whole of society and to alleviate the most striking contradictions, to protect and aid the families and abolish injustice as soon as possible. The Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt is confident that the future Europe will be built on faith and morality and founded on solidarity between people only.

## The history of the Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt

Christian democracy was present in Hungary only as an underground stream in public life and political thinking until István Barankovics appeared. Between the two World Wars, significant attempts were made in Hungary to democratise social and political life. Social organisations started flourishing and Christian-Social reform movements unfolded with the support of the Catholic and Protestant churches. Uniting about a million members, KALOT (Katolikus Legényegyletek Országos Testülete – Association of Catholic Young Men’s Leagues), EMSZO (Egyházközségi Munkásszakosztályok – Workers’ Associations of Parishes), Professional Organisation (Magyar Dolgozók Országos Hivatásszervezete – National Professional Organisation of Hungarian Workers), KIOE (Katolikus Ifjómunkások Országos Egyesülete – National Association of Young Catholic Workers), KIE (Keresztény Ifjúsági Egyesület – Young Men’s Christian Association) sought to bring about peace, tranquillity and development in society through social education.

The decisive turning point in KDNP’s history occurred in August 1943 when Bishop Vilmos Apor convened the leaders of the social reform movements to discuss how the institutions and values can be preserved which were established by this reform period after the war. They recognised that they could expect any kind of influence over public life only if transformed into a party after the obvious Soviet occupation and to preserve the interest of Christian churches. In the autumn of 1944 the Néppárt was established in secret during the German occupation, and its leaders in illegality met in clandestine locations escaping from the German Gestapo.

### **The party elected István Barankovics to be General Secretary early 1945.**

With the agreement of the other leaders, they dropped the attribute Christian to indicate that they would distance themselves from the moral and political burdens of the Christian politics between the two World Wars. István Barankovics proclaimed the opposition programme of the Demokrata Néppárt in Győr on 10 August 1947. He formulated the essence of the party agenda as ‘the aim is to ensure the most secure and widest human rights, the greatest social security and largest freedom – with the surplus of the supernatural.’ The Demokrata Néppárt received most of the legitimate votes in the 1947 national assembly elections and entered the national assembly with 62 representatives as the strongest opposition power. All this happened at the time when Western European Christian democratic parties were formed.

The communists, however, strived for the moral degradation of the party. They used law enforcement means to frustrate the representatives in carrying out their activities true to their programmes. In the end István Barankovics was forced to announce the dissolution of the Demokrata Néppárt to save the honour of the party in Vienna after his escape at the beginning of 1949. He did so to alleviate the pressure on those who stayed behind and to lessen the anticipated retaliation. Nevertheless many of the party representatives were imprisoned and the majority of them were seriously disadvantaged. A significant group of the leaders of the Christian Social movements was forced to escape Hungary during 1947–49. The members of the Hungarian Christian Democratic emigration thus established were consciously committed to their mission in emigration in the United States and Western Europe. The Hungarian Christian Democratic emigration benefited from the opportunities provided by freedom during its four-decade organised activity and undertook the relevant obligations. This gave them the opportunity to give initial assistance to the reorganisation of the Demokrata Néppárt again re-adopting the attribute Christian in

its name in 1989–1990, and this is how the Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt became a reliable and effective supporter of the system changing Antall Government.

After the crisis between 1997 and 2002 KDNP recovered again thanks to the persistent struggle of László Varga and reoccupied its position in Hungarian public life and the community of the European Peoples' Parties under the leadership of Zsolt Semjén.