

Eminent economics professor Kornai publishes intellectual memoirs

Budapest, March 6 (MTI) - Research institute Collegium Budapest on Tuesday launched the book "By Force of Thought", authored by its permanent fellow and one of Hungary's most successful economists and scholars, Janos Kornai.

Subtitled "irregular memoirs", Kornai explained at the launch that his book combined the genres of memoir and mini-essay in an attempt to revisit his own work as a writer and thinker over the past fifty years and the criticism he had received in Hungary and abroad.

Kornai, 79, has delivered a scrupulous critique of communist command economies and socialist economic administration over many years of a limbo between his native Hungary and Harvard university in the United States, earning himself international fame in the meantime. He is noted for the authorship of his first book on overcentralisation - in reality a PhD thesis - which presented a pioneering critique of the planning system from within the Iron Curtain in 1957 as well as many succeeding books and papers about economic reform in post-communist societies.

In *By Force of Thought*, Kornai describes a troubled era as well as his own continuous dilemma over where to draw the line between science and politics, that is, an involvement in policy-making. The book tells how from the late 1950s up to the political thaw of the eighties and the regime change of 1989, Kornai had to perform the balancing act of disassociating with the system while still retaining the chance to research, publish and travel abroad.

Speaker at the launch, Hungary's former central bank president Gyorgy Suranyi described that line between science and policy-making as being very fine. He called Kornai's contribution to economic policy including monetary policy in the transition period very influential and revealed several economic milestones during the 1990s where Kornai's guidance and support for a transition programme was in the background of planning. Suranyi said, the book sheds light on the motivations of the man who was able to show even the ordinary citizen the "hopeless nature of the (socialist) system."

After the economist and banker's view, historian and fellow researcher of ten years Gabor Klaniczay presented the book from the point of view of its merits as a reproduction of a much-scrutinized era and its retrospective analysis. A personal account as well as a scientific investigation focused on the subject of the man himself, Kornai's thought-provoking journey combines a no-nonsense approach to acknowledging the mistakes of the past and a judgment-free, often optimistic view of the future. Although

Kornai himself said the work was not a personal diary, Klaniczay said the chapters on his conflict with his past as an ardent communist youth and those on how he had lost his father and family members to the Holocaust were heart-breaking. The author offered "passionate confession mixed with calm analysis" of his anxieties after Hungary's ill-fated 1956 revolution, when Kornai had to make many choices, including moral ones, about his career, study and involvement in politics, Klaniczay said.

Addressing the audience, Kornai revealed that the title of his work was to remind readers of his career governed solely by thought and what he could achieve by thinking rather than a strive for power or wealth, as well as its central role in the idea that "thoughts influence history". After decades of life adventures in the east and west, Kornai still sees himself as having "one foot in mainstream and one foot outside," he said.

By Force of Thought: Irregular Memoirs of an Intellectual Journey was published in Hungarian in 2005, and the American edition followed two years later.