

András INOTAI – 1 May 2022

Personal comments on the parliamentary elections in Hungary on 3 April 2022

The Consequences of a Decade-long Systemic Trap

As confirmed by official sources, the parliamentary elections in Hungary resulted in a two-third majority of the ruling coalition since 2010 (FIDESZ-KDNP). Even the coalition of the opposition parties, the first attempt since 2010, could not change the decade-long (im)balance. Just the opposite, while in 2018 opposition parties separately represented in the elections got 49 per cent of the votes (as against 47 % of FIDESZ-KDNP), in 2022 the united opposition was able to collect 34 per cent of the votes as compared to 51 per cent for the ruling coalition. In addition, a new ultra-right party (Our Homeland) could enter the parliament with more than 6 per cent of the votes. As a result, out of the 198 parliamentary seats 135 will be owned by FIDESZ-KDNP (against 133 in the last cycle), 56 by the opposition parties) against 65 between 2018 and 2022) and 7 by the newcomer party. In sum, the coalition with a two-third majority since 2010 could not only keep its dominant role but could even further strengthen its position.

The purpose of this short paper is not to analyze the factors leading to the unexpectedly disappointing performance of the united opposition (starting with internal struggle over missing the right messages during the electoral campaign to the rise of the ultra-right). These issues have been addressed by several surveys in the last four weeks¹. My personal notes focus on the systemic trap continuously and shamelessly built by FIDESZ over more than one decade not only without any attention or critics by organisations and various member countries of the European Union, but in several cases consciously or unconsciously, supported by various activities (from financial transfers to political support, disregarding the decade-long and deliberate violation of basic European values and standards).

An undemocratic electoral system with several areas of unfair competition

To be sure, there is much more at stake than corruption, media, courts, etc., as can be read in the relevant EC and EP documents. The current electoral system is illegal from the very start and represents the undermining of fundamental democratic freedoms and values, Western politicians, not least the European Union, have still not noticed. Instead, they have been and keep on being preoccupied with anti-democratic signs on the surface. Under the given electoral conditions, it would really have had to come to an earthquake-like electoral victory of the opposition to even question this system. Several distorting instruments and factors have played a significant role already in the previous – 2014 and 2018 - elections though not to the present extent. Just to name but a few:

(a) The regular, voluntary and highly anti-democratic redesigning of electoral districts in order to boost FIDESZ votes in shaky constituencies. This was not possible during the local elections in 2019, because each entity of local self-government has clear geographic boundaries. As a result, the opposition could foster its position not only in most districts in Budapest but also in various larger towns in the province. In contrast, parliamentary elections have different geographic boundaries. (Metropolitan) districts clearly governed by the opposition could be enlarged by nearby villages governed by FIDESZ. As a result, the latter could easily change the balance in favour of the ruling party even in districts where a convincing opposition victory has been anticipated by most public opinion surveys shortly before the elections.

(b) At the last moment announced and mostly organised and massive moves/re-registrations (several hundreds or thousands of voters) between/among the individual constituencies, once again with the above mentioned aim.

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(c) An unprecedented preponderance, and in some parts of the country exclusive rule of the public media, which, using public (and not party-related) tax money, became a vehicle for FIDESZ party propaganda (in itself a blatant violation of basic democratic values). The opposition had hardly any means to address the electorate in large parts of the country (let alone to communicate, disseminate and discuss their messages, priorities, proposals, promises and expectations).

(d) The FIDESZ campaign was (as in the past) based on hatred, hostility, a negative attitude towards the opposition representatives plus Brussels, Soros, Gyurcsány, etc., but not on a positive picture of what might have been achieved in the last four years, even less on promises for the future. Clearly hatred, and it worked just as in the past. No wonder that a large part of Hungarian society is mentally poisoned to such an extent that it seems to be largely incapable of successful survival, let alone quick awakening in the rapidly changing global, European and regional environment. The accusation is: mental and moral genocide, self-made, not imposed or carried out by external powers.

(e) The different and highly anti-democratic treatment of Hungarian voters in Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine on the one hand, and all those Hungarians working abroad, but either themselves or their family members residing in Hungary on the other, to whom the vote by mail was denied. Of course, of the 500,000 or so people (80 per cent of whom had emigrated during the Orbán governments between 2010 and 2022, and by no means only for financial-economic reasons), only about 13 per cent were able to go to the ballot boxes set up in the relevant Hungarian embassies and consulates. (An example: there are about 100,000 Hungarians working in Great Britain who could vote in three constituencies. There are about 25,000 Bulgarians in the same country who could vote in 62 (!) constituencies.) A shortfall of more than 400,000 eligible voters, most of whom would have voted against FIDESZ - they have, after all, already made it clear when they had decided to leave Hungary. In contrast, double-nationality eligible voters in Romania, Serbia and Ukraine were allowed to vote by mail instead of personally attending a voting place at the corresponding embassy or consulate. More than 90 per cent voted for FIDESZ, which is no wonder for two reasons. First, they used to get substantial financial support from the Hungarian budget for sev-

eral purposes, from business through churches to sports. Second, the opposition was in most cases, both in Romania and in Serbia, not even admitted by the dominant FIDESZ-funded regional organisations or considered as the enemy. Moreover, there were clear abuses in the handling of the votes by mail. On the one hand, since the electoral list is still based on information from 2012, several thousand people who are no longer alive received the election documents. The letters sent to their address were filled in either by family members or by the regional Hungarian authorities. On the other hand, near to Marosvásárhely, bags filled with votes were found on dung heaps and partly burnt - probably those that were not cast for FIDESZ. The opposition asked the Hungarian election commission about this - the answer was: we do not interfere in Romanian internal affairs...

(f) Concrete abuses were reported during the elections (in north-east Hungary cash, in south-east Hungary meat and other food in order to buy votes). No verification, everything is absolutely in order and of course highly democratic, Christian and moral.

(g) Last, but very important: the topic and treatment of the Russian invasion and aggression on Ukraine unambiguously violating basic international law, became a last-minute winning card for FIDESZ. On the one hand, there was shameless restraint by not condemning the Russian leadership, and, on the other hand, step-by-step accusations were made against the Ukrainian politicians that they (together with the USA and other Western powers) had brought about the conflict, or at least helped to foment it. At the same time, the Hungarian opposition was accused of wanting to send Hungarian soldiers to Ukraine and involve the country into an external „conflict”. Officially, it was emphasized again and again that Hungary remains neutral in this “conflict(!)”, the word invasion or unilateral aggression has never been mentioned. Moreover, not a word about the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, a stronghold of FIDESZ voters. Let alone that neutrality of a NATO country is only the most recent element in the decades-long series of lies. Of course, NATO has - with full justification - used Hungarian territory for arms deliveries, partly by refuelling on trains, which was photographed by residents of the given regions, partly through using the NATO airbase in Pápa for deliveries, even if first flown to the Netherlands or the UK for military material and then from there back to specific target points.

Side-remarks

(a) Together with the parliamentary elections, FIDESZ organised a referendum on gender issues (from the beginning with the clear and shameless intention to achieve a common denominator for FIDESZ support on both issues). The gender referendum was invalidated because there were only 44% yes votes (with a minimum threshold of 50%). In the euphoria of the election victory, this debacle was not mentioned at all, but the issue remains on the table, also as an ongoing attack on the EU and a means for further mental pollution of certain parts of the population.

(b) There has been even less comment on the fact that the Hungarian population is even more divided than we already knew it from before, especially since the local elections in 2019 with the success of the opposition not only in Budapest but also in several larger and medium-sized cities. The fact that the opposition in Budapest won in all but one constituencies, whereas it managed to win a scant 2 (!) of the 90 or so regional constituencies, speaks for itself - and is not a positive sign for collective thinking, action and solidarity in the coming period. On the contrary, the deliberate, highly amoral and irresponsible bleeding

will continue or get even bigger dimensions in order to make Budapest and all opposition strongholds incapable of action and to make clear for large parts of the population that their mayors themselves are to blame for the problems and that they are incapable of acting (i.e.: they have to disappear as soon as possible).

Finally, a question: What will the EU and the individual member states do, and not least the companies that are involved and integrated into the Hungarian economy? Where and when will it finally be acknowledged that there is and should be a clear red line between the representation of economic and political interests and the observance and enforcement of basic European and democratic values?

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Reference:

(1) *András Bíró-Nagy and Gábor Győri: Hungarian parliamentary elections 2022. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, April 2022, András Bíró-Nagy: Hungary: why Orbán won again, Progressive Post, FEPS Brussels, 07 April, 2022*