



Weekly Briefing

Hungary Political briefing:
Briefing on Hungarian Politics in 2017
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After the negative signs in the first half of 2017, a decline in the Fidesz' political support could be reversed by the party. During this campaign, the party has mainly relied on the strong emphasis of 'mass migration' and measures taken by the government. The content analysis of the National Media and Info Communications Authority' (NMHH) shows the share of different political topics in the most important 11 radio and tv news. According to this publication, the share of the topic 'migration crisis' in January 2017 slightly decreased by 0.1 percentage points (January: 1.9; August: 1.8 percent), however in January the topic 'migration measures of the Hungarian government' was absent in the news. In August, this topic's share was already 2.1 percent.

When characterizing the main events of the Hungarian politics in 2017, it can be stated, that Hungarian politics (r)evolved around this topic in 2017. The topic 'migration' has dominated the public opinions in 2017 as well. This narrative which is built on the assumption that mass migration would threaten the existence of the Hungarian nation and thus, it is irreconcilable with Hungarian interests, is extremely popular among Hungarians. This popularity can easily be explained by different paths of history in Central and Western Europe. Therefore, this political argument is not confined to Hungary, it can be found in Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania etc. The fear of the nation's death is common in most of the Central European nations, so it might not surprise us that political strategies can be built on this narrative. And that can have consequences on the political development of the European integration as well. The reluctance of the Central European countries to go further in the European integration project has come as a shock to the EU-governing elite and the core countries of the EU (Germany, France, Benelux-countries). It was surprising to them since those Central European countries, who became member states of the EU only in 2004 have received significant EU aid for over more than a decade. Despite these clear financial benefits, dissatisfaction with the EU among these countries grew significantly in 2017.

Fueled by this dissatisfaction, the governing party, the Fidesz was successful to stop the loss of its popularity that characterized trends until mid-2017. Afterwards, the Fidesz grew stronger, reaching 31 percent among the electives.

Table 1. Party support among electives

	Jan.	Feb.	March.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.
Fidesz	34	33	32	31	29	30	30	30	30	31
Jobbik	11	12	11	11	10	11	11	11	11	10
MSZP	7	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	5
DK	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
LMP	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3

Source: Nézőpont

The trend of a strengthening Fidesz has been collaborated by the newest data in November. The Századvég Foundation published its recent research results on the support of political parties this week. According to the findings of the Századvég, the support of the Fidesz grew stronger again over the last month, the party improved its support by 2 percentage points (36 percent) from September to October, while 9 percent of the votes would go to the Jobbik and 8 percent to the MSZP. The LMP would receive 7 percent among the electives, but the DK's 4 percent would be below the threshold. The picture is slightly different when looking not at the entire group of the electives, but the group of likely voters. The support of the Fidesz among likely voters was 51 percent in October compared to 49 percent in September, at the same time the Jobbik had 15, the MSZP only 14 percent of support in the group of electives, however based on this dataset, the DK would get 5 percent which would allow the party to form a parliamentary party faction.

In recent weeks, Hungarian opposition parties (LMP, Jobbik, MSZP, DK) have started new political initiatives, campaigns while the Fidesz seems to stick to the so far successful strategy emphasizing questions related to migration and the so called 'Soros-plan'. As for these parties' strategy, there is a divergence

among these parties, which can be easily demonstrated; the LMP and the MSZP center political debates while the Jobbik and DK are underscoring questions of economic nature. Data show both strategies can be successful if they are bolstered by credibility.

For the time being, a reshaping of party strategies is taking place right now where two different lines of strategies are evolving, the strategy of the LMP and the MSZP seek to shift the focus on economic issues while the DK still is centering political issues. It is worth looking at these dissimilar strategies since their effectiveness will influence the 2018 parliamentary elections.

1. The improvement in **LMP's** support might be linked to a reinforced new strategy of the party, however, not only here, but in other small parties there are clear efforts to revive strategies, and launch new actions, using the opportunity provided by the very long Fidesz campaign only focusing on one topic (migration or the so-called 'Soros-plan'). That campaign has been losing steam in recent weeks, so small parties are very likely to use this to get their messages to the public in the remaining time before Christmas.

2. A very similar strategy (emphasis on political issues) is being applied by the **MSZP**, however, the results cannot be shown in the survey, which is most likely to do with party-infightings of the last months, decreasing credibility of the party and the party leader. That might be the explanation to why the MSZP strategy doesn't work, however that way one cannot entirely explain the success of the LMP. It must be also added that the clear focus on political issues might have been more effective over recent months, because economic conditions have clearly been improving, wages have been on rise, unemployment rates are low in Hungary.

3. A short analysis of the topics that the **DK** keeps on the agenda, reveals us a lot about the party's political strategy in the next year's elections. The following topics were stressed by the party in recent weeks: problems in the health care, postal services, flaws of the tax system (VAT, and family allowances etc.), and need for reconstructions in the public transport systems of

Hungary, problems around the renovation project of the M3 metro line by the Russians etc. Economic and social issues clearly dominate the agenda, which contrast with the topics discussed by the LMP, and MSZP that rather center political issues (corruption, migration, and problems around the supreme prosecutor).

4. The **Jobbik** is retreating in many fronts, since party's communication has been built around the 600 million HUF, withdrawn from the party's budget by the Hungarian Court of Auditors. That is the reason why the party called for a peaceful march the 15th December. The Jobbik presents the opinion the decision of the Court of Auditors is being influenced by the governing party, it evaluates the decision as a clear sign of 'dictatorship'.

To sum it up, the governing party has dominated the main political topics in the media in 2017, the opposition parties has tried to catch up and give new topics (the problem of private household indebtedness; migration of Hungarian to Western European countries; introduction of the euro or an European union of wages etc.), in most cases they have been unsuccessful in their attempts during the last eleven months. The strong political background the Fidesz enjoyed in the 2017, can be explained by solid economic fundamentals. The population can benefit from sustained economic growth, rising incomes, low inflation, stable budget, and access to EU-transfers, so for the time being there is no too much of threat to the Fidesz government, and its re-election in 2018, however, there are two important elements which must be taken by the strategists of the Fidesz into account:

1. Hungarians and the younger generations clearly support the EU-membership and the four freedoms of the Single Market (freedom of movement, capital, trade in goods and services). Younger generations are less likely to tolerate a policy leading to 'Hungxit'. Thus, the Fidesz must balance between its core supporters with strong anti-EU-views and those supportive of the EU and euro zone membership.

2. There is a question as for the Fidesz-strategy, how long the narrative of ‘mass migration’ can be ‘sold’ to the Hungarian voters. There must be a point after which new topics must be found by the campaign strategists of the party. There is also a likelihood, that the Hungarian politics will be dominated by economic questions again in 2018.

However, it is very clear, that currently political machines are gearing up for the first six months of 2018. The Fidesz can lose more than win from the change in status quo, so, it is more likely that the party will stick to the original strategy with emphasis on the ‘Soros-plan’, migration and reference to economic successes, while other parties still seek to find news ways to address broad layers of the society.