



Weekly Briefing

Hungary Political briefing:
Political Developments in Hungary
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The main political event of the last week was the local election held in Hódmezővásárhely and Kiskunhalas. In the Hódmezővásárhely election, electives voted for the town's major and in Kiskunhalas for the local delegate. In the mayoral election, the candidate of the opposition parties received 57 percent of the vote, while only 41 percent voted for the candidate of the Fidesz. The sweeping victory in the election came as surprise for the analysts, however, there are already some conclusions that were drawn by the analysts based on these results:

- The first lesson drawn by analysts is that despite earlier comments, left-wing parties and the right-wing Jobbik are able to cooperate. Thus, it is very likely **that the scenario that all opposition parties cooperate to defeat the governing party, is again on the table, and the pressure on the opposition party will mount in the next weeks.** It must be added, that a full technical cooperation in which every opposition party participates in the elections under the same umbrella, is not possible at this stage any more, since the parties already had to announce in which constellation, under which logo they will appear in the April election. However, **what they can easily do, if there is a consent among them, is that they let their candidates step down in favor of other opposition parties' candidates. It is clear the stepping down strategy can work, but only if it is mutual and all opposition parties benefit from it.** There are already signs, that the oppositions parties try to coordinate their steps in April. Ms. Szél, the President of the LMP called for a meeting with the MSZP and Jobbik this week, however she ruled out the cooperation with the DK. To make things more complicated, the Prime Minister Candidate of the MSZ-Párbeszéd, Mr. Karácsony already indicated that they are not willing to cooperate with the Jobbik. Therefore, it is likely, that opposition parties engage in so-called silent cooperation, which means the cooperation won't be official, they 'forget' to make campaign in some constituencies or they let step down their candidate without official communication.

- The second lesson, often stressed by analysts is that despite surveys, and the pollsters' forecasts, **it seems to be possible to mobilize voters for the participation in the elections.** In our assessment, the election results could surprise the Fidesz and the analysts why the share of hidden voters might be more significant than anticipated earlier.

- The third lesson – underlined in the media – could be that negative campaign of the Fidesz can be defeated, moreover **negative and massive campaign's effects can be adverse to the Fidesz.**

In our understanding, these above conclusions might be foregone, f. ex. the election in Kiskunhalas demonstrated that **the governing party still has strong reserves.** In Kiskunhalas, the Fidesz-candidate received 68.07 percent of the votes, while only 30.88 percent backed the independent candidate and 1 percent supported the candidate of the Labor Party.

- At the same time, results vividly demonstrate that everything could happen in the April elections, and the Fidesz must strengthen its campaign efforts, while there is still time to change course, f. ex. the continuation of the over-emphasis of the migration issue can be contra-productive, and it is very likely that it won't result in more votes in the parliamentary elections.

- Another import less might be for the Fidesz that it must mobilize its voters without enraging the passive opposition-supporters.

- Internal, not published surveys which were carried out before the election in Hódmezővásárhely, predicted a clear victory for the Fidesz. But what is more striking, both analyses forecasted more than 60 percent of the votes for the governing party's candidate. This might show the incredibility of data at this stage. At the same time, it must be underlined, that we are at a dividing point, because if leaders and potential voters of the opposition parties start to believe in success, they might be able to reach a turn in the public opinion.

- It was surprising how slowly government media outlet reacted to the defeat. While opposition media outlets opposing the government party were

already timing with the news on the elections in Hódmezővásárhely, government close media sites, tv and radio channels were mute for a few hours.

- The same strategy can not be repeated in parliamentary elections since the candidate of the opposition was conservative, having a large family. This lucky constellation is difficult to repeat in every constituency. That shows the limitation of the opposition cooperation.

The analysis of the results already started within the Fidesz, and based on the first reactions, there seems to be a dividing line, since the Prime Minister, Mr. Orban said in an interview to the HVG, that **they have to work two times, three times more in the campaign. In his understanding the ultimate question of the election is still the same, whether Hungary will become a migration country.** At the same influential thinker of the Hungarian politics close to the Fidesz, indicated that the campaign focus (migration) and the **very simple messages must be changed**, because the Hungarians are not stupid as these messages. At the same time, it was already announced that a new **Peace March for the government is being organized and it will take the 15th of March 2018.** That would be the third of this kind event, pronouncedly not organized by the Fidesz, but a civil organization (The Peace Association”). In 2012, when the two marches took place, they definitely swayed the public opinion positively.

How much the Hungarians care about the results of this elections, show Facebook data. **According to the lyzR, the news on the result of the Hódmezővásárhely election was shared 548.494 times, while 70.282 comments were posted on the occasion of the election.** Only to show the magnitude of the reactions, it is worth remembering that only the Hungarian Oscar-awarded film (Son of Saul) could trigger an activity at this scale two years ago (756 thousand like, and shares). The Magyar Nemzet (Hungarian Nation) covered a story where it refers to Fidesz internal documents the media outlet had access to and maintains that only one day after the defeat in Hódmezővásárhely, the party center – realizing the Facebook’s importance in the campaign – **instructed its**

politicians not to post anything related to the negative Soros-campaign. The Magyar Nemzet claims, that suddenly news related to Soros disappeared from media outlet close the governing party. **However, it is very likely that this news is part of the campaign, not too much of truth can be found behind. This assumption might be corroborated by the new government's campaign that attacks the United Nations' negotiations keeping the topic on the political agenda.**

I our understanding, although it might sound paradoxical, the defeat in Hódmezővásárhely could help the Fidesz to revise its campaign strategy and correct the mistakes made until now and alter the course of the communication. The Fidesz still has time to change the mainstream of its communication, however we certainly don't agree with the mainstream of analyses predicting the abandoning migration as a campaign topic. **It is very likely that migration won't be focused that much, however, the total retreat on the topic would mean losing face among core supporters of the party.**

For the time being, it is not certain what will be the main topic of the Fidesz campaign, but it is very likely, that economic topics, or success stories will be more focused in the political slogans of the Fidesz. It might not be a coincidence, but a day after the election the headlines of the Magyar Idők (Hungarian Times) close to the Fidesz criticized the labor market policies of the opposition parties, to put it more precisely the absence of these policy-plans. At the same time, the article reminds the reader of the Gyurcsány-government between 2006 and 2009 that immediately after the victory forget its promises to the workers and later the Bajnai-government (2009-2010) that abolished the 13th month pension and wanted to privatize the system of social contributions. The article here cites to the President of Association of the Labor Boards.

In our earlier analyses, we showed three plausible scenarios of the parliamentary elections April 2018. A month ago, we evaluated the cooperation and coalition of the opposition parties as almost impossible. The likelihood of this scenario has been growing over the last week,

however chances of a cooperation are still minimal. Similarly, the chances of a land-slide victory of the opposition parties through ‘political innovation’ are minimal, not many new topics are being articulated by the opposition parties. The third scenario, that the governing parties win the elections is still the most likely scenario in our understanding, since the Fidesz has strong hinterland, however, it has been shrinking. At least, the latest survey of the pollster Republikon shows this trend. According to their data, the Fidesz’ popularity shrank by 3 percent in the adult population of Hungary and by 5 percent among those who intend to participate in the election. The survey was carried out between the 9th and 22nd of February, so the eventual effects of the Hódmezővásárhely election could not be measured in this survey.