



Weekly Briefing

**Hungary Political briefing:
A Further Fracturing of the Opposition Forces
Csaba Moldicz**

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin
Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.
 +36 1 5858 690
 office@china-cee.eu
 china-cee.eu

A Further Fracturing of the Opposition Forces

The Hungarian political landscape is still undergoing a slow, but fundamental change after the parliamentary elections (April, 2018), as we tried to point out in our earlier briefings on Hungarian politics. As these fundamental changes take place, new persons enter the Hungarian political scene and there are also initiatives to new political formations. The outcome of this transformation process reshaping the Hungarian political life cannot be assessed properly yet, however, the winner of the parliamentary elections (Fidesz-KDNP) seems to benefit from this new situation to this date. This briefing investigates the changes in the opposition parties in detail and their changing public support.

2. Jobbik. It makes sense to start this review with the biggest opposition party, the Jobbik, since the success of the opposition seems to hinge very much on the success of the Jobbik. The financial issues of the party haven been covered by the Hungarian media intensely in recent weeks. The Hungarian State Treasury informed the Jobbik last Sunday (01-07-2018), that the Treasury is going to cut the state-support of those political fractions after 1st July that were penalized for violating the law on party-finances. (Not only the Jobbik, but the MSZP, and the LMP are also fined by the authority.) It is being argued that the Jobbik didn't use the state-support properly, moreover it used illegal financial resources while managing the finances of the party. The penalty is 331 million HUF which equals to the sum the Jobbik accepted in form of assets as contribution from legal persons, considered illegal and banned by the law. The decision was based on the report of State Audit Office of Hungary.

Although the Jobbik's reaction was to accuse the governing party by pushing the Hungarian authorities to impose penalty on the Jobbik; this week the party president, Mr. Sneider admitted in one tv-interview that party-close firms offered billboard advertisement opportunities to the party well below the average market price. These opportunities were capitalized by the Jobbik during

the political campaign. Below market prices are viewed as hidden financial support, and thus being considered illegal by the law controlling and regulating the financial issues of the political parties.

Not only financial issues, but infightings have also prevailed within the party in recent months. As we pointed out in our earlier briefings on political developments, the party president candidate, Mr. Toroczkai, who didn't receive the majority in the voting for the new party president, was later expelled from the Jobbik, and now he is about to set up a new party. The party ("Our Fatherland") will most likely attract Jobbik- and perhaps some Fidesz voters, who come from the more radical spectrum of the Hungarian right wing-politics leading to a further fracturing of the opposition forces. In our opinion, this strategy won't help the party activate passive voters, it only will further disintegrate the opposition.

2. The MSZP, the Party of the Hungarian Socialists is the still the second biggest opposition party based on data of the Nézőpont Intézet. After the unsuccessful parliamentary elections, the MSZP party president, Mr. Molnár resigned from his post. It must be stressed, that not only the result of the election but the reprehension received from the MSZP's Council for Ethical and Disciplinary Issues contributed to his resign. (As it was mentioned in our earlier briefing, the former party president exceeded his powers when signing a memorandum of cooperation with the Liberals.)

This situation led to a caucus where the party members could choose from two party president candidates. Originally five candidates were running for the post of party president but three of them chose not to participate during the campaign later. As a result of this campaign, Mr. Tóth became the party president receiving 54 percent of the votes, while the other candidate, Mr. Mesterházi, who was party president between 2010 and 2014, only received 46 percent of the votes.

The relatively unknown new party president emphasized the following messages to the media:

- The MSZP must represent traditional values of the left-wing parties, such as solidarity, equality, justice, and value of a unified nation.

- The MSZP must act as a real community that protects the interests of those being persecuted by the power. (sic)

- The MSZP must be able to give a new and credible government program and the members of a new government while offering a trustworthy critique of the Orbán-government and providing real solutions to the problems of the average citizens.

It is very clear that the party president tries to appeal to those who would positively react to the original and classic messages of the traditional left-wing parties. However, this communication is only attractive to those who have – most likely – already voted for the MSZP in April. Thus, the question can be raised whether these above-delineated slogans will draw in more MSZP-supporters.

The other side of the coin is that the trustworthiness of these messages seems to be very low since it is coming from a party which is usually linked to austerity measures in the mind of the voters.

3. The LMP is the third biggest opposition party to date – based on data of the Nézőpont Intézet. According to the latest media news, there has been an internal disciplinary procedure in place against the former chief of political campaign. Members of the party are accusing him of having conducted secret negotiations with powerful Fidesz-KDNP politicians. To our analysis, it is of not much relevance whether the allegations are wrong or true, but disputes clearly show that there are very strong fault lines within the party.

At the same time, there are also efforts made by these parties to attract dissatisfied voters by giving space to new political formations in the center of the Hungarian political spectrum. This week, the new co-president of the LMP informed the public that the LMP is seeking the alliance of the Jobbik and the Momentum. (The Momentum did not receive enough votes to come into the Hungarian parliament in April 2018.) He stressed that these three parties are the

modern political formations of the 21st century's Hungary and at the same time, they also excluded any form of cooperation with the MSZP and the DK.

The political minimum of understanding between these three parties (LMP, Jobbik and Momentum) can be easily found if one thinks of the approach how they view the MSZP and the DK and how they answer questions raised by globalization. In this later aspect, all three parties have expressed more or less explicit anti-globalization views at different questions.

As a result of the fracturing political landscape, the political support of the governing party skyrocketed in June, the popularity of the Fidesz-KDNP was never that high before. The Nézőpont Institute covered the following data this week. If elections were held this Sunday based on the June 2018 survey:

— the Fidesz-KDNP would receive 42 percent of the votes in the entire population.

— the Jobbik would only receive circa one-fourth of the Fidesz-votes,

— the MSZP one-seventh of the Fidesz-votes, and

— the DK and the LMP would be favored by 3-3 percent of the votes.

Even if one added the votes of the Momentum (2 percent), the above delineated alliance would only get 16 percent of the votes!

Among the likely voters, figures are not much different; 55 percent of the likely voters would give their votes to the Fidesz-KDNP, while the Jobbik has the support of 18 percent, the MSZP 9 percent, the LMP 6 percent, the DK 5 percent of the likely voters, and the Momentum is supported by 4 percent of the likely voters.

The whole opposition is supported by 44 percent of the likely voters, whereas the Fidesz-KDNP would alone receive more than the opposition. Even in this case it is worth mentioning that the alliance sought by the LMP, would only receive 28 percent of the likely voters.

It is worth pointing out that to this date there are no signs of political consolidation in the opposition. The transformation process has only started, and it is going to take a while, until these political formations will be able to form

powerful and credible messages to the public, attracting new voters and thus countervailing the Fidesz-KDNP.

At the same time, they are also having bad times, since the Fidesz-KDNP policies perform more or less well. On political level, the party demonstrates unity to the public, and it shows capacities to pursue and implement appropriate policies if needed. In the economy, things are going well. The forecasts on the Hungarian economy improved further in recent months; forecasters revised GDP predictions from around 3.8 percent to 4.0 percent for this year. Though, tensions in the world economy has hit the Hungarian economy (see the weakening of the Hungarian Forint); even in this case, the ability and definiteness of policy could be shown to the public. In other words, now it is very difficult to the opposition parties to offer powerful and at the same time trustworthy critique of the government.