



Weekly Briefing

**Hungary Political briefing:
Hungarian Politics in the Doldrums
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Hungarian Politics in the Doldrums

August is usually the month, when most Hungarian families go on vacation, this also affects the Hungarian politics. So, it should not come as a surprise that the political support of Hungarian parties hasn't changed significantly and after the turbulent weeks in May, June this period did not bring deep changes in the Hungarian political landscape, though the world economy conditions have changed over the last months for the worse, but it is true that these negative trends don't themselves felt in Hungary yet, thus they can effect political support of the parties until now. After briefly investigating the basic political support data, this briefing looks at the different responses, given on the Sargentini-report by political forces and analyses the domestic political outcomes of its adoption, if it would take place.

First, let's take a look at the data! In August 2018, the political support of the Fidesz-KDNP was 41 percent among Hungarians, who are eligible to vote, while opposition forces haven't been able to make the breakthrough and change their low political backing in the population considerably. According to the Nézőpont Intézet, the biggest opposition party would be the Jobbik that would receive 10 percent of the votes, MSZP 6 percent, and the DK 4 percent of the possible votes. Based on the survey, that includes 2.000 persons, the LMP would also have 3 percent of the votes, in the case parliamentary elections would have been held end of July and early August.

In the group of the likely voters, which is the group that gives the closest results to a real voting), the dominance of the Fidesz-KDNP is more palpable than ever, since the party would get 54 percent of the votes in a parliamentary election. Though this number is slightly, by 1 percent, lower than it was in June 2018, but the political support of the party is still overwhelming among broad layers of the populations. The Jobbik would receive 17 percent, the DK 7 percent, and the LMP 5 percent in the same group of the voters. It is worth

underlining that the MSZP and the Párbeszéd would not have any seats in the Hungarian Parliament, in other words they would not qualify for the parliament if they had a joint list, as they had had in April 2018. The reason for the dropout from the Hungarian Parliament would be that the two parties only would reach 9 percent based on the pollster. (In the case of a joint list, the two parties are required to receive at least 10 percent of the votes to qualify for the parliament.)

As we clearly could see from these figures, the main patterns in the Hungarian politics have not changed considerably over the last two months, and there is not much of change that can be foreseen for the time being, unless the economic conditions in the Hungarian economy changed significantly for the worse in the coming months.

Since for the time being, the Hungarian opposition is not a real match for the governing party, last months the Hungarian government started to take on issues and topics, that are mainly related or close to external politics. This is a not a new phenomenon in the Hungarian politics, but over the last months it has become more and more clear that the classic dividing line between domestic and external politics have been disappearing and got blurry.

By the way, the same trend can be clearly observed in every country, in every continent, because due to the prevailing globalization processes, political spheres (external, domestic) cannot be divided squarely anymore, and as a result, the one political sphere can spill over into the other one. This is without doubt that that happens more often in the EU than elsewhere, where the EU itself with its complex political structures and institutions adds an additional layer to the already confusing picture. That is probably the reason why the Sargentini-report became fiercely discussed in the Hungarian politics.

The main conclusion of the report commissioned by the so-called EP LIBE Committee on the political conditions in Hungary is that the different facts covered by the report “represent a systemic threat to democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights in Hungary.” The EP LIBE report drafted and put together by Sargentini is basing upon four opinion reports from the Woman’s

Rights, Culture and Education, Budgetary Control and the Constitutional Affairs Committees.

It is very obvious, that opposition parties have made a serious attempt to use the negative attitude of the report toward the Hungarian government in their fight for power. For a while, the MSZP hesitated how to vote on the report in the European Parliament, but later the presidium of the party made it clear that its EP members will vote for the report condemning Hungary. The EP member, Mr. Ujhelyi wrote in a Facebook post: “This is our patriotic duty in the interest of the Hungarian people and Hungary when the European Parliament and the European Community call to account the Hungarian government the miscarriage of justice, the dismantling of the Hungarian institutions and the state-wide corruption.” As it can be seen easily, the report is being used for the purposes of domestic politics. A very similar approach was presented by the Párbeszéd while the Jobbik and LMP opposes the report, and according to its press conference the EP members of the party will vote against the adaptation of the report.

It must be emphasized that the adoption of the report needs a two-third majority of the votes (abstention votes are not counted) and afterwards the Article 7 procedure can be triggered, that eventually can lead to the suspension of country’s certain rights, including voting rights, however, only after a longer time, and it can not lead to the expulsion of a country from the EU.

Aside from the meager effects in case of the report’s adoption, the repercussions in the Hungarian domestic policy might be also lower, since the majority of the Hungarian population definitely rejects the conclusions of the report based on a survey carried out by the Századvég. The sampling took place between the 23rd August and 2nd September 2018 including 1.000 persons. 79 percent of the persons in the questionnaire rejected that conclusion of the report, that the EU must determine whether the arriving migrant is an asylum seeker or an economic migrant. The following conclusions of the reports were also rejected by the majority of the questioned persons:

— The report condemns Hungary, because asylum seeker must be kept in the transit zone until the decision on his or her claim is made. (This claim was rejected by 55 percent);

— The report condemns Hungary, because Hungarian authorities send back illegal asylum seekers to Serbia as safe third country. (This claim was rejected by 56 percent);

— The report condemns Hungary, because Hungary doesn't accept the mandatory distribution of asylum seekers (the so-called 'mandatory quotas') (This claim was rejected by 70 percent);

— The report condemns Hungary, because the country enforces law while acting against those assisting illegal migration (This claim was rejected by 70 percent).

It is an irony that this attitude of the average Hungarian toward the report has been noticed by some opposition leaders and politicians, but at the end of the day they have made the opposite decision. Mr. Szakács, who is the deputy leader of the MSZP, said that they would vote for the report, they would be treated as traitors. Only two hours after this interview given to the ATV, the MSZP finalized its decision that the EP members would vote for the adoption of the report. At the same time, the Fidesz-KDNP also tried to minimize the cost of a potential loss in the European Parliament, the Hungarian Prime Minister linked the Sargentini-report to political struggles in the EU of how to settle different questions of migration.

To sum it up, it can be seen that in theory, the Sargentini-report and its potential adaptation by the European Parliament would give a real chance to the opposition parties to strengthen their political support and they try to use this chance and tip the balance of the governing party. At the same time, it must be highlighted that not every opposition party uses this chance, the Jobbik decidedly and the LMP reluctantly opposed to vote for the report. Based on the political attitudes of the Hungarians on the report, the approach of the MSZP is very unlikely to succeed, whereas in our opinion topics related to world

economy tensions, and their possible negative effects in Hungary would give more maneuverings room to the Hungarian opposition forces. It should be also noted that slowly rising world inflation trends, worsening demand conditions in the world economy, currency crises, and dropping returns in the stock markets are harbingers of a cooler world economy and the negative effects sooner or later will spill over into the Hungarian economy, that will change the course of the Hungarian economy policy and force its decision-makers to make swift decisions, such as cutting public expenditures, and raising interest rates.