



Weekly Briefing

Hungary Social briefing:
Think Tanks in Hungary: An Overview
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Think Tanks in Hungary: An Overview

This briefing attempts to give a brief overview of the think tanks based in Hungary. The Merriam-Webster defines the notion of think tanks this way: “an institute, corporation, or group organized to study a particular subject (such as a policy issue or a scientific problem) and provide information, ideas, and advice.” Though this briefing utilizes this notion, we limit the scope of our study to think tanks focusing on foreign policy, domestic policy, or economic topics. Even in this limited field of study, the briefing tries to focus on the most relevant think tanks based in Hungary. Since it is not always clear, which financial sources these think-tanks have access to, or the revenues come from many sources, the briefing doesn’t focus on these elements, basically, topics of the think-tanks are centered in this briefing.

Since there a large size of Hungary-based think-tank, the briefing first utilizes the global survey compiled by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP). The TTCP at the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the global role of think tanks and policy institutes and it also lists the globally important think tanks annually. According to this list there are six organizations or think-tanks from Hungary of global relevance:

1. the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT);
2. the Center for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy (CEID);
3. the Center for Security and Defense Studies Foundation (CSDS);
4. the Center for Policy Studies (CPS);
5. the Danube Institute;
6. and the TARKI Social Research Institute;

Although the local relevance of the think-tanks not always equals to the listing, the briefing looks first at the profile of these think-tanks, then we add other think-tanks to the list as well.

1.1. IFAT

The Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT) basically serves as the think tank of the Hungarian foreign policymakers. It is a separate legal entity of the Center for Democracy Public Foundation (DEMKK in Hungarian), which was established by the Hungarian government in 2005. This think tank has the largest scope and depth as for the analysis of foreign and trade policy questions in Hungary. It publishes the Foreign Policy Review, the KKI Studies, the KKI Policy Brief. The IFAT is by far the most influential think tank of the field, since it serves as the intellectual basis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

1.2. CEID

The CEID (Center for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy) was founded in 2001, the main task of the CEID is to promote the Euro-Atlantic dialogue. According to the self-definition of the CEID, it is non-partisan, non-governmental and non-profit. The research areas of the CEID are Security and Defense Policy, Euro-Atlantic Integration, Democratic Transitions, Democracy Assistance, V4 Cooperation, Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership of the EU, European Union, Energy Policy. As for the output, the CEID offers a limited number of short analyses and it basically organizes the expert discussion. The CEID underlines its cooperation with post-Soviet countries and the Western Balkans countries.

1.3. CSDS

The Center for Security and Defense Studies Foundation (CSDS) was established in 1990, the establishment of the center was supported by the Erasmus Foundation for Democracy and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It is a non-partisan, non-profit oriented research and educational institution. The main topics

center on security issues. Their main product of the center is the BHKK Műhely (BHKK Workshop) that is published both in English and Hungarian twice annually.

1.4. The Danube Institute

The Danube Institute was founded by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation in 2013. The Foundation also supports the Batthyány Society of Professors, see later. The message of the Danube Institute is to be “an independent center of intellectual debate for conservatives and classical liberals and their Democratic opponents in Central Europe.” As we can see in this case, there are basic values that are being promoted by the institute. The institute provides a platform for online discussions and interviews, however, it is clear that the think tank’s activities mainly focus on organizing workshops, or discussions of relevant topics.

1.5. CPS

The Center for Political Studies (CPS) was established in 2000, in contrast to the formerly mentioned think tanks, it was founded by an upper educational player, the Central European University. The main topics of the CPS are equality and social justice, governance and participation, social policy and welfare regimes, territory and development policy. The CPS publishes books (f. ex. 3 books in 2018), working papers and other reports. This is a think tank where topics are organized around the basic values of the founder.

1.6. The TARKI

The TARKI was founded more than 25 years ago, it has three entities, which draft consultancy and strategy papers, developing databases, carry out political and general opinion polls and provide business-cycle research reports based on surveys of companies. Basically, this is the only one in this list, that has significant revenues from the market as well.

2. Other think tanks

2.5. The Századvég Group

The Századvég Group comprises of two entities, the Századvég Foundation that was founded more than 20 years ago and the Economic Research Institute. In the mission statement of the Foundation the commitment to spread “the values of progressive Hungarian political traditions and the models of the Hungarian development.” The Századvég Group has a broad selection of products: macroeconomic analyzes, forecasts of economic activity and sectoral analyzes and it drafts policy recommendations for policymakers.

2.2. The Batthyány Society of Professors

The Society was founded in 1995, the aim to establish the society was to provide a framework of professors who are deeply committed to “traditional European social virtues”. The advisory role of the Society is outstanding, it seeks to find answers to long-term solutions to the country’s current problems. The Society is supported by the Batthyány Foundation that was established on the initiative of the first Hungarian Prime Minister, Mr. Antall after 1990. In contrast to the above mentioned former think tanks, it doesn’t publish regularly papers and studies, however, it tries to formulate its recommendations for political parties and politician who aim to reform Hungary. Recommendations are drafted in the statements of the Society. (Based on the documents, accessible to the public, the Society drafted and adopted four statements this year.)

2.3. The CFPA

The CFPA (Center for Fair Political Analysis) was founded in 2007, according to its self-definition, it is a non-partisan and independent think tank. The CFPA states it is the first think tank in Hungary, that blends aspects of social and political cohesion. The philosophy of the think tank is built around five principles: the recognition of Hungary’s international embeddedness; a comparative approach, sensibility for historical continuity and changes; focus on internal cohesion of democracies; and the analysis of political networks and

learning skills. The leading figures of the CFPA basically publish in news portals and other media content or books and the scientific work focuses on larger survey projects.

2.4. Political Capital

The Political Capitals was founded in 2001. According to the self-definition of the think tank, it “owes no allegiance to any government or political body”. However, they underline their commitment to values such as parliamentary democracy, human rights, and a market economy. The Political Capital focuses on the following topics: democratic institutions and related challenges, political risks, radicalism and extremism, electoral systems, international migration and policies, international relations (especially between Europe and Russia), the diplomatic ties of the Visegrad countries, and relations between EU member states. When it comes to services, besides core political analyses (attitudinal analysis, risk forecasting, sectoral analysis), the Political Capital also offers services in data mining, event organization, and social media research. The standard product of the Political Capital is the biweekly “Political Forecast in Hungary”.

3. Summary

When classifying the Hungary-based think tanks, it is worth underlining that the difference can be found in the influence these mentioned think tanks can exert in the Hungarian public discourse. As for foreign policy issues, the IFAT’s clout is clear, as or for more general topics, the Századvég Foundation and the Batthyány Society of Professors are pillars of the Hungarian political and social discourse. At the same time, there are also think tanks, that have been in the market for decades, however their influence is more limited, as they have been specializing for certain market niches. The TARKI has significant revenues from the market, which shows a sound business model in the background, the same

applies to the Political Capital. There are other think tanks (f. x. the CP, or the CFPA) that try to convey their clear value-based messages to the public, and thus alter the course of the political discourse in Hungary. These think tanks – despite their own definition – are usually not unbiased, and they can be found in every political camp. To sum it up, basically, the variety and the number of the think tanks render us impossible to take all important Hungary-based think tanks into consideration in this briefing, however, the very variety and sheer size show how vibrant the Hungarian democracy is.