



Weekly Briefing


Hungary political briefing:
**PRE-MAYOR ELECTIONS: THE REAL ANSWER TO
ACTIVATE OPPOSITION LEANING VOTERS?**

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

PRE-MAYOR ELECTIONS: THE REAL ANSWER TO ACTIVATE OPPOSITION LEANING VOTERS?

This domestic political briefing looks again at the last figures regarding the Hungarian parties' public support (see part 1), then the paper tries to shed light on how the opposition parties attempt to profile themselves using the 'institution' pre-mayor election for mayor candidates of the opposition. The idea of the pre-election may not be a novelty, however, it is not common in Hungarian politics. Originally, the main goal has been to increasingly include and activate the new layers of voters, however, there are also downsides of this democratic political innovation (see more on that in part 2.).

(1) Political support figures

Over the course of the last year, the Hungarian political landscape has not changed significantly, there were significant ups and downs in the support of the political parties in the group of the likely voters during the year, however, at year-end, almost everything was the same as in the year's beginning. Basically, the only significant change – looking at the start and the end of the year – was to be found in the political support of the LMP, that lost a significant part of its supporters over the year. The political support of the governing party is almost on the same level in January 2019, as it was a year before. The same applies to the MSZP, the Jobbik and the DK. There is only one party, the Momentum that significantly increased its support in the group of likely voters. Though the conclusion – the Momentum attracted the active supporters of the LMP - is tempting – but we would definitely be quick to jump to conclusions since one cannot exactly know the composition of the new supporters of the Momentum.

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Table 1. The support of the main political parties in the group of likely voters						
	Fidesz-KDNP	MSZP	Jobbik	LMP	DK	Momentum
January 2018	49	17	16	7	5	1
February, 2018	48	18	16	8	5	1
Marc, 2018	47	19	19	8	5	2
April, 2018	49	15	18	5	4	3
May, 2018	48	15	18	5	4	3
June, 2018	48	16	16	5	4	3
July, 2018	49	16	17	5	4	2
August, 2018	52	15	16	4	4	2
September, 2018	53	15	14	5	5	2
October, 2018	52	15	14	4	5	2
November, 2018	54	14	13	4	5	2
December, 2018	48	16	15	4	6	4
Source: Public Institute						

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In our understanding, the basic question was whether the political demonstration of December and January could alter the course of the political debate trends. This is the reason why it was worth looking at the very latest data that just came out this week. Unfortunately, the newest figures for January 2019 show mismatching data of the different surveys. The figures in table 2 demonstrate the political support of the main parties in the group of likely voters, a set of numbers very close to the potential results in an election. According to the Nézőpont, main numbers have not changed significantly in the last month, while the IDEA assumes a definite worsening of the governing party’s position and a dramatic improvement of the Jobbik’s support. Though it is hard to conclude at this point which set of numbers are the closest to reality. However, while preparing the survey, the Nézőpont Institute questioned 5.000 people, which sample is significantly larger than the average sample in Hungary, thus data seem to be more reliable in this aspect. The IDEA included only 2.000 people in the survey. It could be also argued, that events in December and January activated some layers of the opposition parties, however, significant changes could not be achieved, thus the general picture of the Hungarian political landscape has remained the same.

Table 2. The support of the main political parties in the group of likely voters							
		Fidesz-KDNP	MSZP	Jobbik	LMP	DK	Momentum
Nézőpont	Newest dataset	54	10	13	5	7	4
	Former dataset	54	11	14	4	7	4
	Difference	0	-1	+1	+1	0	0
IDEA	Newest data set	47	10	16	3	9	6
	Former data set	51	10	12	4	9	5
	Difference	+4	0	+4	+1	0	-1
Source: Kozvelemenykutatok.hu							

(2) Pre-elections

As we pointed out in our earlier briefings, the amendment of the labor code in the second week of December 2018 was a common reference point for the opposition parties, and for a while they were successfully activating their supporters this way, but – as forecasted in the January political briefing – the intensity and the number of demonstrations was already abating in January. And in February they have had to find new topics, so the institution of the so-called pre-election was to be introduced by the opposition parties.

As mentioned in our political forecast for 2019, one of the main political events will be the local government elections in Hungary this year. The opposition forces seemingly have

learned the lessons of the previous election, at least they try to speak with one voice when they attempt to nominate only one mayor candidate for Budapest.

By doing so, the opposition parties agreed on holding a pre-election that would have two turns. According to the agreement of the opposition parties, the first turn was held last week, in which the candidates of the MSZP, DK, Párbeszéd could participate, the second round will be held in June when the victor of the first turn will run against the candidate of the LMP. The LMP nominated Mr. Puzsér as independent mayor candidate and the victor of the first turn became Mr. Karácsony, the candidate of the Párbeszéd. 34 thousand people cast the votes in the pre-election, and 82 percent voted for the co-president of the Párbeszéd, while only 12 percent supported the candidate of the MSZP.

The opposition parties try to underline the democratic nature of the pre-election in their communication since it was not the party leadership who chose the candidates, but the people of Budapest, they argue. However, there are certain points that contradict the very positive framing of this political innovation.

- The number of candidates was and will be very limited. Only the illusion of choice is offered to the people of Budapest. This limited version of democracy is very obvious when looking at the programmes of the MSZP and Párbeszéd candidates. The two programs are almost identical, even the candidate of the Párbeszéd admitted that around 90 percent of the two programmes are the same.
- It is not entirely understandable and hence it is difficult to communicate to the public why two election's turns are needed and why the candidate of the small LMP runs against the candidates of the MSZP, DK, Párbeszéd (left-leaning parties). However, looking at the original agreement, the LMP, the Jobbik and the Momentum were supposed to have one candidate against the mayor-candidate of the left-leaning parties.
- Though the number of those who participated in the pre-election seem to be impressive at first glance, this is only around 2 percent of the Budapest's population.
- There is already a dispute emerging around the second turn of pre-election since the candidate of the LMP has already announced he won't participate unless there will be a computer-based pre-election, whereas the idea has been immediately rejected by the MSZP. Though the political analysts underlined that the extent of cooperation among opposition forces seems to be on a new

level, when pointing out to the demonstrations in December, the petty disputes around the pre-elections don't prove these statements.

To conclude our analysis on the main political trends in Hungary, one can easily argue, that opposition parties have given significant efforts and tried to step up and act in unison. The main goal has been to convince the voters they would be able to cooperate with each other if it was necessary and thus they were ready to govern the country if the next election brought positive results for them.

Despite these significant efforts, the heavy disputes around the institution of the pre-election and the already emerging debate between the mayor candidate of the LMP, Mr. Puzsér and the left-leaning parties of Budapest doesn't bode well for the future of this co-operation. How deep the fault-lines are running in the opposition forces, the last remarks of the mayor candidate signaled vividly. Mr. Puzsér told on a political forum to the audience: "For the time being, Ferenc Gyurcsány [the former Prime Minister of social democrats] is still the center of the opposition, thus even though the opposition would be able to beat the government, they cannot replace the political system of the last 30 years, and this way Viktor Orbán will come back, but not with two-third but four-fifth majority." He repeated in recent weeks, that not only the government must be replaced, but before that, even the opposition parties must be replaced since rejuvenation of the Hungarian political landscape. We can agree on his statement at least when it comes to the opposition which has not been able to activate its voters since 2010 and its messages could not find real responses from the broad layers of the voters.