



# Weekly Briefing

**Hungary political briefing:**  
**The logic of the central force: Hungarian politics in 2023**  
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## **The logic of the central force: Hungarian politics in 2023**

*In any political field of forces, there are several principles or basic rules whose functioning can be demonstrated again and again and can be easily recognized by the observer. In Hungarian politics, there is a tendency toward political centralization. The centralization can currently be seen in the left-wing parties, as the DK and 'Our Homeland' seem to be the winners of this process, while the Fidesz-KDNP still has the same support as a year ago. This briefing looks at the reasons for this process and takes a closer look at the polling data and the main topics of political discourse in Hungary.*

### **Introduction**

The main topic of Hungarian politics is still the war in Ukraine and will most likely remain so until its end. For this reason, the Hungarian way of dealing with the horrific consequences of the Russian- Ukrainian war is of crucial importance for the political discourse, but the question of how to end the war is also heavily debated. As we pointed out in the last Foreign Policy Briefing, Budapest, unlike other Western countries, wants to achieve an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and the start of peace talks between the parties involved as soon as possible, while other Western countries seem to be in no hurry and are not pushing for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. We have pointed out several times that this unique approach sets Hungarian foreign policy apart from the mainstream opinions in Europe, so it is worth looking at domestic support for this policy. But before we do that, let us take a look at recent polling data.

### **Polling data**

The most recent poll on political opinions was conducted by the Nézőpont Research Institute, which surveyed potential Hungarian voters on their political sympathies between Feb. 20 and 22, polling 1,000 people. Among likely voters, 52 percent would vote for Fidesz-KDNP if the elections were held this weekend. This level of support would give Fidesz-KDNP the same share in parliament as it had in 2022. The strongest opposition party remains DK with 12 percent, followed by 'Our Homeland' (9 percent), whose camp of supporters has grown by half

since April last year, and the 'Two-Tailed Dog Party' (9 percent), which has also grown stronger and whose voter base has tripled since the last elections. None of these parties belongs to the opposition camp. 'Our Homeland' describes itself as a right-wing party, and the 'Two-Tailed Party' was born out of disappointment with Hungarian politicians, so the strengthening of these parties does not necessarily lead to the defeat of the ruling party. Several traditional opposition parties – such as MSZP, Jobbik, LMP, Párbeszéd – would not qualify for parliament based on this data. (See Table 1 for more detailed data!)

Table 1. Support of political parties in Hungary (February 2023)	
Parties	Support (in percentage)
Fidesz-KDNP	52
DK	12
Our Homeland	9
Two-tailed dog	9
Momentum	5
Jobbik	4
Everyone's Hungary People's party	2
MSZP	2
LMP	2
For the People	2
Párbeszéd	1

Source: Nézőpont Research Institute: Megkérdőjelezhetetlen a Fidesz előnye. Retrieved from: <https://nezopont.hu/megkerdojelezhetetlen-a-fidesz-elonye/>

It is a similar story with the question of who the appropriate prime minister in Hungary is. According to the latest results, 49 percent of likely voters would support incumbent Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, while 19 percent would support the DK politician Klára Dobrev, László Torockai, the leader of the 'Our Homeland' party, ranked third with 7 percent and Anna Donáth of Momentum received 6 percent of the electoral votes. The sample was conducted between February 13 and 15, 2023, and 1,000 people were interviewed. Looking at the data, we can agree with the analysis of the Nézőpont Research Institute, which concludes that opposition prime ministerial candidates do not pose a challenge to the incumbent prime minister but they contend with each other.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://nezopont.hu/orban-viktort-tartjak-a-legalkalmasabbnak-a-miniszterelnoki-poziciora/>

## **Public support for peace policy**

While support for peace appears to be the only rational choice for the crisis in Ukraine, the response does not seem to be not self-evident to Western countries. Therefore, strong domestic support for Hungary's foreign policy is crucial at the moment. We should not forget that the Hungarian approach has been criticized by Vera Jourová, the Vice-President of the European Commission, David Pressman, the U.S. Ambassador to Budapest, or Guy Verhofstadt, a liberal member of EP. And this way, a strong pressure has been building on Hungary in recent weeks or months.

The Századvég Research Institute conducted a survey on this policy. 1,000 people participated in the February 2023 survey. 91 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the war must end and the parties involved must begin negotiations immediately. 7 percent said the war must continue until Putin is defeated, while only 1 percent of respondents were unsure of their answer. One possible explanation for the strong support for peace talks is that the majority (62 percent) believe that neither Russia nor Ukraine can emerge victorious from this war. twenty-six percent of respondents strongly believed Russia would win and 7 percent believed Ukraine would win the war at the end of the day.

As for economic sanctions, 70 percent of Hungarians firmly believe that imposed economic sanctions have hurt Hungary and Europe, while 27 percent believe that sanctions have benefited the Hungarian and European economies. In this case, the share of uncertain voters was 3 percent. Based on these figures, the Századvég Research Institute's analysis concludes that the Hungarian government's pro-peace policy not only represents the opinion of the majority in Hungary but can be seen as a unified national position on the war and sanctions.<sup>2</sup>

As we could clearly see from the above poll, the majority of Hungarians support peace and the lifting of economic sanctions against Russia. For this reason, the Fidesz-KDNP has submitted a peace resolution in the Hungarian Parliament. This is to ensure that Hungary is not dragged into the war and continues to support a process leading to peace in Ukraine. The leader of the Fidesz-KDNP parliamentary group said in an interview that the Hungarian government is now being pressured by the heads of EU member states, the elite in Brussels and the American ambassador in Budapest. He added that those pressuring Hungary want Hungary to supply arms or allow arms shipments to pass through the country. The peace resolution condemns Russia

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<sup>2</sup> <https://szazadveg.hu/hu/2023/03/03/nemzeti-egyseg-a-tuzszunet-es-a-beketargyalasok-mellett~n3595>

for its military aggression and concede Ukraine the right to protect itself, but that does not mean that any country can pressure Hungary to give up its own interests.

### **NATO membership of Finland and Sweden**

There are two members of NATO – Hungary and Turkey – that have not (yet) officially supported the membership of the two Scandinavian countries in the NATO. The irony of the situation is that two Scandinavian countries that have unhesitatingly interfered in the internal affairs of other countries are not surprised that this policy could have consequences. The "tradition" of Western and Northern countries condescendingly criticizing other "less developed," "backward" countries is now backfiring. In our case, these countries are asking for ratification from the Hungarian Parliament, whose parties and members often criticize Hungary harshly. Let us take the example of the former Finnish ambassador in Budapest: "During the long reign of the Fidesz Party, Hungary has become a one man and one-party monarchy. Democracy as we understand it in Western countries is no longer in Hungary."<sup>3</sup> The Hungarian prime minister has stated in the media that he supports NATO membership for the two Scandinavian countries. However, his hands are tied, as the Fidesz-KDNP members in the Parliament obviously have the right to democratically support or reject the NATO membership of these countries.

### **Summary**

The briefing showed that the political landscape is dominated by the ruling Fidesz-KDNP party, while we can see some signs of political centralization among the opposition. At the same time, there are two opposition parties that are not part of the so-called opposition camp and have been able to strengthen their positions ('Our Homeland and the 'Party of the Two-Tailed Dog'). The traditional opposition can be characterized as left-liberal, and these parties do not belong to this ideologically defined group.

Although the debate about NATO membership of Sweden and Finland seems to belong to foreign policy, we can see domestic elements too, as the peace resolution is heavily debated by the Hungarian opposition parties.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/hungary-and-finland-wage-media-war-of-words/>

In terms of domestic political topics, we have seen that the Hungarian government, with its policy of peace and no sanctions, enjoys strong domestic support among voters. This may also explain why and how the Fidesz-KDNP has been able to maintain its support among voters and would still be considered the strongest Hungarian political party if elections were held now. One debate that dominated the agenda of Hungarian politics in January and February was the direct investment of the Chinese CATL in Debrecen. The debate is still there, although with less intensity than before. However, we cannot rule out that the debate about the CATL investment will not come up again next month.