



Weekly Briefing

Hungary social briefing:
Public opinion on Hungary's international political issues
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Public opinion on Hungary's international political issues

Most societies focus on domestic political issues in their debates. At the same time, there are international issues that often attract public interest and become fiercely contested topics of domestic political discourse. This briefing focuses on international political issues such as EU funding of Ukraine, immediate ceasefire in the war, corruption in EU institutions, and migration in the European Union. These issues are hotly debated in Hungarian society. The analysis will be based on surveys on these issues and draw conclusions based on the results of the surveys prepared by the Nézőpont and the Századvég Research Institute.

Introduction

Societies in smaller countries and economies tend to pay more attention to international issues because the size of the economy makes the country more vulnerable to external shocks or more susceptible to foreign influences, and also because the open culture of these societies allows these impulses to flow into these societies. Therefore, we should not be surprised that foreign funding of Hungarian political parties during the 2022 elections made headlines and caused great concern among citizens, as foreign funding also means an increase in foreign influence on Hungarian politics and domestic decision makers. We have already analyzed this story in our previous briefings. This time, we focus on four issues that polarize the public:

- EU funding of Ukraine;
- Ceasefire in Ukraine;
- Corruption in the EU;
- Migration policy in the EU.

Issues related to Ukraine

In this part we focus on EU funding and what to do in Ukraine in the current situation. The Nézőpont Research Institute conducted a survey between July 3 and 4, 2023, in which 1,000 people participated. Respondents to the survey were asked whether or not they agreed

with additional support for Ukraine from the European Union. Respondents were offered three options in the survey:

- They could choose to disagree at all with the EU's additional support of 50 billion euros to Ukraine.
- They could also choose the version that they do not agree with Hungary not receiving support from the European Union in this way.
- The third option was that the EU should give Ukraine an additional 50 billion euros in support.

The results show that a convincing majority of Hungarians are clearly against the European Commission's plans to provide additional financial assistance to Ukraine. Only fifteen percent of respondents chose the last option and agreed with the additional support, while 64 percent chose the first answer option and 13 percent chose the second. 8 percent of respondents did not know what or how to answer this question. Even looking at the responses of left-leaning voters, support for the third option was weak (38 percent) and the first two options gave half the responses. (1)

Another issue closely related to the Ukraine war is the attitude of Hungarians toward an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine. The poll, conducted by the Nézőpont Research Institute, found that three-quarters of Hungarians (75 percent) would support an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine, fifteen percent would vote to continue the war, and as many as 58 percent of left-leaning voters prefer a cease-fire to continuing the war. The results of the poll were important because they may end a long-running debate among Hungarian political parties about the appropriate policy on this issue.

Issues related to the European Union

Previous foreign policy briefings have made clear that Budapest has several disagreements with Brussels and has often been criticized by the European Commission and the European Parliament; even involving alleged cases of corruption in Hungary. But this case is about the opposite, as a corruption scandal broke out in Brussels in late 2022 and several MEPs were implicated in this story. Since the European Commission, Parliament and other EU institutions have to abide by the rules, just like member states, Hungarian voters can also raise the question of whether EU institutions and bodies are corrupt or not. The Századvég Research Institute conducted a survey on corruption in EU institutions in June 2023. The results are

convincing, and the majority considers the bureaucratic elite in Brussels to be very corrupt or corrupt. According to the results of the survey, in which 1000 people participated, more than two-thirds (68 percent) of respondents believe that the elite in Brussels is corrupt. 35 percent chose the option “very corrupt” and 33 percent “rather corrupt.” In contrast, 20 percent of respondents think the elite in Brussels are “somewhat not corrupt” and 3 percent think they are “not corrupt at all.” (9 percent of respondents did not know what or how to answer this question.)

In a different approach, pollsters also asked what problems were of most concern in Brussels. Corruption topped the list, but other problems also mattered. (See the table in detail!) Among them, weak enforcement of interests, indecision, foreign interference in EU affairs, and slow, cumbersome decision-making processes are worth noting. (3)

Table 1. Regardless of your positive or negative opinions on the EU, what problems do you find the most concerning ones?	
Corruption	24 percent
Weak enforcement of interests, impotence and irresoluteness	13 percent
Foreign leverage, no attention to EU interests	11 percent
Slow, cumbersome decision making	10 percent
Red tape, too many actors	6 percent
Double standards concerning Hungary	4 percent
Their ideology	4 percent
Dissention, they cannot keep the EU together	4 percent
Unfit leaders	3 percent
The management of the war in Ukraine	3 percent
Bad measures	3 percent
The management of migration	3 percent
Other problems	12 percent
Source: Századvég Research Institute, https://szazadveg.hu/hu/2023/06/29/korrupci-elit-brusszelben-a-tobbseg-szerint-korrupcio-ovezi-az-unios-burokraciat~n3802	

Another issue that continues to polarize Hungarians is the question of migration quotas, which the European Commission has proposed for June 8, 2023. The Századvég Research Institute conducted a survey on the acceptance or rejection of migration quotas among Hungarians in June 2023, in which 1000 people also participated. The results of the survey were very clear, as 68 percent of the respondents thought that Hungary should oppose this plan and firmly reject the mandatory admission of migrants, while only 15 percent thought that Hungary

should accept the European Commission's decision without hesitation and settle migrants on the basis of country quotas. (4) Századvég's findings were confirmed by the results of the Nézőpont Research Institute, which conducted a very similar poll between June 12 and 14. According to that poll, 77 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the EU should not send migrants to Hungary unless the Hungarian government agrees, while 17 percent disagreed. (6 percent of respondents did not know what or how to answer this question.) More than a majority of left-leaning voters also supported the rejection of migration quotas. (5)

Summary

The analysis of the above data is crucial for understanding the reactions of the Hungarian society. In this way, we can easily understand how and why the measures implemented by the government regarding these issues are positively received by the majority of society. This struggle between Budapest and Brussels was described in a government release as follows: “Brussels is making numerous demands on Hungary in the field of the economy, relating to both the Economic Recovery Fund and the European Semester, a system that evaluates the economic policies of European Union member states. He added that among the recommendations made to Hungary under the European Semester is the abolition of regulated energy prices, in other words, the abolition of reduced utility costs, and that Hungary must also review spending on family, education and health. Hungary will conduct these reviews, but cutting family allowances is out of the question, and completely eliminating reduced utility costs is out of the question.” Brussels cannot impose binding conditions in the review of these expenditures that would justify a cut in the amounts earmarked for these areas.” (6)

As we can see from the quote, the above issues are not the only ones where the government can enjoy the broad support of the public, the support of utility costs is also one of the controversial areas where the Hungarian public will side with the Hungarian government. Another point that emerges from the analysis is that Hungarian domestic policy (the issues and the way we deal with them) is very much influenced by international trends and processes. Obviously, European trends and economic processes have the greatest influence on us.

The majority of Hungarians – as we could see above – side with the Hungarian government in its disputes with the EU, while the majority also support Hungary’s EU membership. According to a survey conducted by Median Research Group in February 2023, 53 percent of respondents were in favor of Hungary's EU membership. If people were to vote on EU membership, a majority of three-quarters would support membership in the EU. People

generally cite the free movement of people and workers as the most important benefit of EU membership. The clear support for membership and the clear criticism of the EU institutions show that people are not against the European project per se, but against the way European bureaucrats handle it.

(1) <https://nezopont.hu/a-magyarok-77-szazaleka-ellenzi-ukrajna-eu-penzekbol-valo-finanszirozast/>

(2) <https://nezopont.hu/a-magyarok-haromnegyede-az-azonnali-tuzszunet-partjan/>

(3) <https://szazadveg.hu/hu/2023/06/29/korrupt-elit-brusszelben-a-tobbseg-szerint-korruptio-ovezi-az-unios-burokraciat~n3802>

(4) <https://szazadveg.hu/hu/2023/06/16/brusszeli-migranskvota-a-kozvelemenynemet-mond-a-kotelezo-betelepitesre~n3762>

(5) <https://nezopont.hu/elutasitjak-a-magyarok-az-uj-migranskvotat-is/>

<https://kormany.hu/hirek/evente-legalabb-10-ezer-menekultkerelmet-kellene-elbiralnunk>