



Weekly Briefing

Hungary political briefing:
Stabile position of the governing party in autumn 2023
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Stabile position of the governing party in autumn 2023

Support for the ruling party, the Fidesz-KDNP has remained basically the same in recent years. The only thing that has changed is the voters' attachment to the party. This phenomenon can be explained by relatively high inflation, the economic impact of the war, and the sanctions against the Russian economy, which have affected the European economy, including the Hungarian economy. This briefing looks at the significant social and economic factors that have greatly influenced Hungarian voters in recent months. We start with the political landscape, focusing on the poll results and the main issues in Hungarian politics. Among them, topics such as the "rolling dollar scandal", the ban on Ukrainian grain imports, and the public's reaction to the government's decision are discussed in the briefing.

The political landscape in figures

According to a poll conducted between September 4 and 6 by the Nézőpont Research Institute, the Fidesz-KDNP is still the strongest party in Hungarian politics. As in February, one in two voters (51 percent) would have supported Fidesz-KNP in September 2023 if the elections had been held that month. At the same time, the analysis underscores that voters' attachment to the party has weakened during this period. This means that every tenth voter is not sure about his or her decision. We should also add that the results of the ruling party are still 40 percentage points better than those of the strongest opposition party, the DK with 10 percent and twice as much as the combined results of the opposition parties that joined forces against the Fidesz-KDNP in the 2022 elections.¹

The opposition has gained new players this year. The former prime ministerial candidate has formed a new party called "Hungary for All", which would get 2 percent of the vote, while another new party, "For the People", would get 3 percent. Clearly, this trend does not strengthen the opposition and leads to fragmentation. It also shows that the current parties cannot properly appeal to potential voters. The relative strength of the "Party of Two Tailed Dog" with its 8 percent also shows that Hungarian voters are very critical of the opposition too. A look at Table 1 also shows that the second strongest opposition party does not belong to the opposition

¹ <https://nezopont.hu/biztos-fidesz-elony-gyengulo-kotodessel/>

coalition, which combines liberal and left-wing votes, but criticizes the governing party from the right.

Table 1. Political support in percentage points (likely voters)		
Parties	February 2023	September 2023
Fidesz-KDNP	52 percent	51 percent
DK	12 percent	10 percent
Our Homeland	9 percent	9 percent
Momentum	5 percent	8 percent
The Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party	9 percent	8 percent
Jobbik	4 percent	5 percent
For the People	2 percent	3 percent
Hungarian Socialist Party	2 percent	2 percent
Hungary for All	2 percent	2 percent
LMP	2 percent	2 percent
Párbeszéd (Dialogue)	1 percent	0 percent
Source: https://nezopont.hu/biztos-fidesz-elony-gyengulo-kotodessel/		

One of the biggest scandals of the 2022 election was that it emerged that the opposition received financial support from abroad. The scandal is often referred to as the “rolling dollar scandal” and refers to the fact that the financial support came mainly from the United States, where a non-governmental organization has been involved in the scandal. To prevent this kind of illegal financial support, the ruling party has prepared a legislative package for the autumn session of the Hungarian Parliament, the government announced this week. The loophole that opposition parties found and exploited last year was that the law regulating party financing in its original version did not extend to political movements, but only to registered political parties. For this reason, the former prime ministerial candidate formed a political movement, not a political party, and received foreign support. The American ambassador reacted to the proposed law, and a Hungarian news portal quoted him thus: “David Pressman, the U.S. Ambassador, believes that it is still too early to form an opinion on an unaccepted law. However, he sees it as very dangerous to suggest that foreign powers want to influence Hungarian politics or that there is an invasion, while using this to restrict the Hungarian people's right to express their

opinions. The ambassador hopes that a proposed law will not come before parliament that hints at such intentions based on initial reports.”²

The reaction to the interview came from Christen-democrat politician, Mr. Hollik who said “Mr. Ambassador! Then where did the millions of dollars come from for the left-wing's election campaign? Did that ten million dollars perhaps fall from the moon or were flies responsible for gathering it up?”³ It is obvious that this scandal will be long on the table to be discussed by the public and it will have relevance in the upcoming local elections. (See chapter Local elections!)

Public reactions to lifting restrictions on Ukrainian grain import

On September 15, the European Commission lifted the ban on Ukrainian grain imports into the European Union. The ban was originally imposed in the spring because of the protection of EU farmers and certain health problems with the grain. In response to the Brussels decision, the Hungarian government extended the restriction to the country level. The survey, conducted by the Századvég Research Institute in September 2023, addressed the question of how Hungarians interpret the Brussels decision and the Hungarian government's response.

As a reminder, due to the war and the Russian blockade of the Black Sea, it has become impossible to export Ukrainian grain to Africa. For this reason, the EU established the so-called “solidarity corridors”, but most of the imported grain never left Europe, was sold here, and caused disruptions in the market. At this point, it should be noted, as in the analysis of the Századvég Research Institute, that Hungarian and other EU farmers have to comply with the very strict EU regulations in terms of production, safety and health regulations, while farmers in Ukraine do not have to comply with these regulations and therefore their prices can be much lower than those of EU farmers.

The question asked in the survey was, “Do you rather agree or disagree with Brussels’ intention to force EU members, including Hungary, to import high-quality and genetically modified grain from Ukraine in an uncontrolled way? 73 percent of respondents said they tended to disagree with this decision by Brussels, while 22 percent said they agreed with this request. 5 percent of respondents were undecided as to the correct answer.

² <https://telex.hu/belfold/2023/09/23/david-pressman-amerikai-nagykovet-pecs-szuverenitas-nato>

³ <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20230923-hollik-istvan-fidesz-david-pressman-nagykovet-usa.html>

The government's decision seems to meet the approval of the broad population, even the Hungarian opposition supports this decision, at the same time they consider previous decisions of the government harmful for agriculture. The agricultural expert of DK said that Hungarian farmers lost export markets last year when the government imposed a ban on grain exports in the midst of the Ukraine war, as it was concerned about the country's food security because of the war.⁴

Local Elections

Although local elections will not be held until next year, Hungarian parties are already preparing for the elections. Despite the preparations, it is not clear who will be supported as a candidate for mayor of Budapest. While the incumbent mayor seems to take the opposition parties' support for granted, the DK made it clear in the spring that it has three potential candidates for the post. Péter Unger of the LMP said, “Karácsony Gergely and his advisers owe first and foremost an account to the opposition voters for the half a billion Hungarian forints of campaign support the 99 Movement has received in euros and pounds.”⁵Based on these comments, the opposition is clearly undecided, as neither the current mayor's performance nor his involvement in the “rolling dollar scandal” make him an ideal candidate. We would not be surprised if the DK gave its support to another candidate.

Summary

There are several clear indications that the opposition parties are still unable to take advantage of the political opportunities created by geopolitical uncertainty and the fragility of the global economy. On the one hand, support for the Fidesz-KDNP is still strong among likely voters; it would receive more than half of the vote if elections were held now. On the other hand, the relative and easy success of newly formed parties suggests us that the current opposition parties are not able to properly target potential voters and make them politically active. In this briefing, we have seen two stories that illustrate the opposition's indecisiveness and the government's decisive moves. The Ukrainian grain import ban story also shows that the government can get the right messages out to the public, and target specific groups of voters,

⁴ <https://www.atv.hu/video/20230928/ukrajna-beperli-magyarorszagot-a-gabonatilalom-miatt>

⁵ <https://mandiner.hu/belfold/2023/09/karacsony-nem-dolhet-hatra-adomanygyujto-ladikas-botranya-miatt-is-kivarnak-meg-tamogatasaval-a-balos-partok>

and take decisive action when needed. In our opinion, the opposition's indecisiveness was best demonstrated by the question of who should run for mayor of Budapest. At the center of the story is DK, the largest opposition party, where the issue is not whether or not to support the mayor, but whether or not the party should run in a coalition with other opposition parties.