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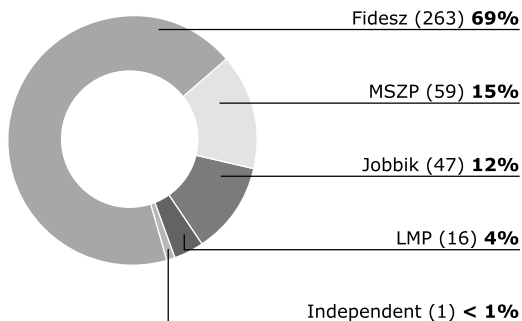
## UPHEAVAL IN HUNGARY:

**FIDESZ-KDNP ACHIEVES A CLEAR TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY AND THE SOCIALISTS ARE VOTED OUT**

*Hans Kaiser*

The Hungarian parliamentary elections of 11 and 25 April resulted in a changed political landscape. What the opinion research institute had predicted as early as summer 2006 has been made by the Hungarian voters into a real political result: a substantial victory for the opposition Fidesz (Civic Union) and their leader Viktor Orbán. With this outcome Orbán once again assumes the office of Hungarian prime minister, which position he also occupied from 1998 to 2002. Viktor Orbán has here succeeded in achieving his greatest goal. Fidesz-KDNP won a clear two-thirds majority. After achieving an absolute majority in the first ballot, the second, which under Hungarian voting rules decides mainly over seats that did not achieve an absolute majority in the first round, brought Fidesz-KDNP a clear two-thirds majority. In the current parliament of 386 seats, this requires 258 seats. Fidesz-KDNP won 263 seats. It was also a success for the superior capacity for mobilization of the middle classes.

Fig. 1: **Seats**



Source: [www.valasztas.hu](http://www.valasztas.hu)

Accordingly, the MSZP has only 59 seats in the new parliament. This was a disastrous downfall for the party that had triumphed in early 2006. Four years ago the party had achieved the feat of entering the office of government; this was then a novelty. Four years on, the MSZP has lost a good two thirds of its previous 188 seats. Some political observers had expected still greater losses, bearing in mind the poor performance of the Socialists and their left-wing liberal partner the SZDSZ. Nevertheless, strong traditional bonds prevented the Hungarian Socialists suffering the fate of their Polish counterparts.

The Hungarian Socialists nevertheless succeeded in remaining the second-largest fraction in the parliament, which had been the declared aim of the right-wing radicals. Apart from its psychological effect, this is of particular importance for the access it allows to the chairmanship of the parliamentary committees. However, the Socialists did not succeed in blocking the radicals' access to the chairmanship of the committee for national security and order. The assignment of this task had later to be laboriously corrected through the intervention of the newly elected president of the parliament, Pál Schmitt. At his suggestion, the committee chairmanship offered to Jobbik was taken away again.

The disagreements arose because the MSZP had agreed with Jobbik that the Socialists should retain the chairmanship of the committee for foreign relations, which was regarded as special. In return the MSZP was prepared to hand the committee for national security to Jobbik. Jobbik promptly showed that it would not let such an opportunity pass and nominated one of the founding members of the now banned Hungarian Guard for the chairmanship. The president of Jobbik, Gábor Vona, gave an insight into the future position of his faction in parliament when he took the oath at the constituent sitting of parliament wearing the uniform of the Hungarian Guard, in the presence of the Hungarian president, László Sólyom. This was seen as an unprecedented provocation, but was however calmly tolerated by the president.

In the Hungarian parliamentary elections 47 seats fell to Jobbik (which stands for "The Movement for a Better

Hungary"). This party had not been represented in parliament before, yet its leadership was noticeably disappointed by this result. Earlier the expectations of the leader, Gábor Vona, to gain three or four seats in the first ballot, had not been fulfilled. As for the presidential election, the European MP Krisztina Morvai was already well positioned. She saw a need to make her appearances as effective in the media as possible, and her candidacy for the office of president accordingly found resonances. The number of seats obtained by Jobbik was however insufficient for a candidacy.

16 seats were won by the newly founded LMP party. This party had already achieved a notable success in the European parliamentary elections, and now it succeeded in gaining an immediate place in the Hungarian parliament. The LMP seeks to address green topics and to build itself an independent profile in this area. In addition the LMP has personal links to the left-wing liberals (SZDSZ) who lost out

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in the parliamentary elections but had come to prominence in the early post-communist years in Hungary. The credibility gained from that time was jeopardized for the liberals by their coalition with the Socialists. A degree of support was also gained from the left (MSZP).

Many disillusioned Socialist voters therefore decided to support the LMP. Even former MDF voters decided in large numbers to support the LMP, as this was recognized as still being a party fit for election.

Another independent contender was present at the Hungarian parliamentary elections who, following the strategic renunciation of a Jobbik candidate in the second ballot, gained a majority in his own constituency and entered the parliament. This involved a former Fidesz candidate whom the party had excluded following a discriminatory utterance against the Roma.

## **THE NEW HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENT HAS A CHANGED FACE**

During the last legislative period it was often assumed that the Hungarian parliament could develop into a two-party house, with a middle-class party on one side and the

Socialists on the other. The voters thought otherwise, however, and saw to it that five parties – Fidesz, KDNP, MSZP, Jobbik, and LMP – would now be represented in parliament. Nevertheless, the European parliamentary elections had already indicated that Jobbik and possibly also the LMP could gain representation in the Hungarian parliament.

The actions of the voters have however prevented two parties from appearing in the new parliament. These are the left-liberal SZDSZ and the MDF, the party of the first Hungarian prime minister József Antall. For the parliamentary election the two parties had joined forces in an electoral alliance. Yet even this pragmatic alliance could no longer convince the voters. In particular the MDF, whose profile had become unrecognizable as a result of endless new U-turns and realignments, was punished by the electorate. There lacked here any clear political position or a programmatic link to the principles of the former prime minister, József Antall. On top of this, at the European level the MDF left the European People's Party in late 2009 and joined the new eurosceptic group of David Cameron. As the last top candidate for the parliamentary elections the MDF nominated Lajos Bokros, the former Socialist finance minister of the Horn cabinet. However, the voters did not want to pursue this unfathomable course any further. The MDF leader, Ibolya Dávid, declared his resignation from the party leadership on the evening of the first ballot.

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Turnout for the elections, at 64% for the first round and 46.64% for the second, was as expected. For many of the more than 8 million Hungarian voters, the certain absolute majority already secured by Fidesz-KDNP meant that the result was already decided by the first ballot. The successful mobilization of Fidesz voters in the second round does however allow one to conclude an extremely high capability for mobilization and campaigning among the victors. This could also be significant for the local elections in the fall. Since, in the second ballot, 54 of 57 still undecided constituencies were won by Fidesz, one may speak here of a clear signal. Rarely has such a landslide victory taken place.

The former majority faction, MSZP, was unable to mobilize enough voters even in traditionally Socialist-voting constituencies. Even if a still worse defeat by the conservative elements was considered possible, the result for Hungary's Socialists is a clear sign from the public for the catastrophic profile of the government in recent years.

### **CONSEQUENCES AFTER THE ELECTION**

After the catastrophic defeat in the first ballot, with the departure of the leader of many years and former justice minister, Ibolya Dávid, the MDF suffered personal consequences. The leader of the Socialists also resigned from her post immediately following the announcement of

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the preliminary results on the evening of the second election Sunday. A congress is expected to agree the successor before the summer recess. Implicit in such a restructuring of personnel will be a preliminary decision as to the future path of the MSZP. It

is possible even that the party might choose a new name. All this also depends on the position that will be assumed by the MSZP presidential candidate, Attila Mesterházy. Additionally, it is said that the former prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány, whom many analysts and observers consider responsible for the downfall of the party, is attempting once more to make a comeback. Ferenc Gyurcsány also comes into question in his role as president of the MSZP-leaning Táncsics Foundation. As the fourth name on the MSZP party list, he also has a secure seat in the new Hungarian parliament.

Attila Mesterházy, prime ministerial candidate of the MSZP, also gave a noteworthy sign on the election evening, giving what almost amounted to a keynote speech despite the poor state of his party. This was remarkable since the young candidate had previously been regarded more as a placeholder for a successor yet to be chosen, who would then disappear without trace after the poor election result, which was already predictable. Yet, surprisingly, this was not the case.

## MSZP IN DANGER OF A SPLIT?

Even in the runup to the constituent sitting of parliament, Ferenc Gyurcsány had to accept a number of defeats. The MSZP would no longer let him run it as he wished. This applied in particular for the much shrunken parliamentary faction resulting from the election. The new faction leader was Attila Mesterházy. This did not, however, prevent Ferenc Gyurcsány from having a thirty-page analysis prepared and presenting it to the public, seeking thereby to return to prominence. His analysis of the current state of the party and the election campaign (which took place without his leadership) was crushing: "The leadership of the MSZP gossips like a gathering of old women [...]. Today the MSZP can hardly be controlled." In thirty-two points the former prime minister and MSZP leader judges the policies of his party colleagues harshly. He sneers that it is not the party leadership that has the last say, but rather the "informal treasurer", or "a pair of small shopkeepers". The climax is in the conclusion: "Fidesz has won, but it is we who have defeated ourselves". Such a daring analysis would not previously have been imagined to come from an elected representative who had shown himself to be remarkably uncritical in judging his own political performance. The policy developments and, not least, the future constellation of personnel of the Socialist party thus remains an exciting topic. Gyurcsány's friends and supporters are already calling for the party to give him an "important function" in its leadership. By no means, then, is he on his own, as some recent decisions may have led one to assume. At the same time, he has no basis at present on which to a decision to let him return to the leadership. It seems more important for him to concern himself with weakening his probable successor as party leader. Additionally, Gyurcsány fared far better in the campaign than had been expected of him. The end of this dispute may well be a split in the MSZP. Up to now the Socialists, who emerged from the Hungarian Communists following the end of communism, have not undergone any splits – unlike the experiences of other post-communist countries. Twenty years on, with twelve of those in government, it is possible that the time for a split has come.

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### THE 2<sup>ND</sup> BALLOT

Fig. 2: Election results

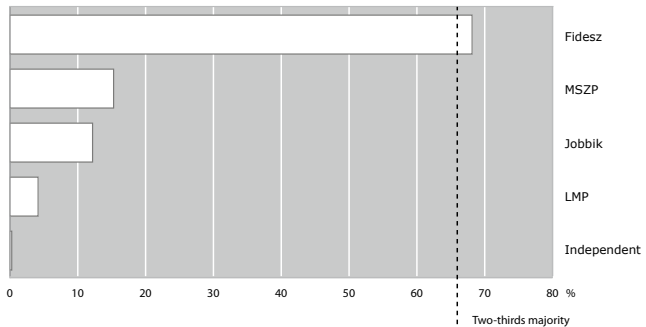
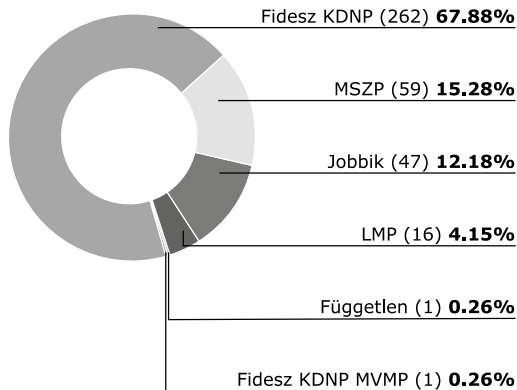


Fig. 3:



Source: [www.valasztas.hu](http://www.valasztas.hu)

### NOT TO BETRAY THE HUGE CONFIDENCE

For the future prime minister Viktor Orbán and his party it is now vital not to disillusion the electorate following such a strong demonstration of confidence. The tasks are immense and the expectations high. Above all, Orbán knows that his victory and his appointment as the new prime minister does not mean that the treasury's coffers will be automatically filled. The victor enjoys the boost of trust that Hungarian society and politics needs in order to have a sense of the future. The votes in both ballots left no doubts in this regard. Never before – in terms of seats – was there a comparable victory. Previously, no two-thirds majority could be achieved except by means of a coalition following the election. On this occasion, however, the electorate chose a clear winner with its own comfortable two-thirds majority. Opinion polls carried out between April

28 and May 1 indicated a strong optimism that existing problems would be solved by the new government. This related to improvements in internal security, the economic situation, and to finances. It follows that there are likewise good conditions to act fast and not allow the public to perceive any change of direction. And this is necessary, since it will not be possible to obtain real solutions to the major problems and concerns quickly.

Viktor Orbán will need his large majority in order to implement fast what he has set as objectives. At the same time, the success of his term in office – and its duration – will be determined and measured by how moderately he handles his victory. On the election evenings he presented himself as a winner who allowed his supporters to celebrate the victory wholeheartedly. He nevertheless made it entirely clear himself what efforts must be called on in order to refurbish the legacies of the Socialists. Orbán's message was clear: this parliamentary election had brought a desperately needed "system change" in Hungary that could otherwise only have been achieved by means of a revolution or coup. This election and its outcome has enabled Fidesz-KDNP to drive the "oligarchs" out of office.

Orbán was fully aware of the dimensions of his victory. And he had called for it on this scale, again and again: the "cleansing of public life from corruption and maladministration", the embarking on fundamental reforms and the need to break out quickly from the crisis made such a majority a necessity. It would be necessary to end the intolerable conflicts as quickly as possible in the national interest. A large majority would thus have to ensure that these tasks be carried out quickly and efficiently.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION OF PLANS BEGAN THE DAY AFTER THE ELECTION**

The two-thirds majority should above all be used to begin the passage of laws on election rules, on the media, and on local authority administration. Additionally, an amendment should be made to the law to solve the question of citizenship for Hungarians living outside the national border. In the latter case it should be shown how tactically and strategically skilled the new government is in handling the matter of "dual citizenship" and the



priorities set must be discernible. Orbán will not get away with evading his pre-election promises on this problem. This is a controversial topic in the region, despite the fact that other states have appropriate legislation covering their nationals living outside their borders. Equally, Orbán must not lose sight of the far right. He must show through strong governing actions that important innovations can be undertaken without the need for extremists. The local government election in the fall is not far away, and may be seen in the wake of the overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections as a further test of the national mood. This is therefore also important because the government must take care to have no blockers of its measures within the county administrations. Above all, Jobbik must not be allowed to increase further in popularity; therefore Orbán will attempt, before these local elections, to go in search of support on the subject of dual citizenship. Even if this is not always appreciated of him, particularly outside Hungary.

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Orbán can also use his two-thirds majority in order to slim down the Hungarian parliament in accordance with the population size. One decision on this has already been taken in parliament; the next parliament, beginning in 2014, only 200 representatives will be present (currently the parliament has 386 seats). A similar procedure will also be applied to the councils and “parliaments” in the local authorities and cities.

The amendment to the media law should also make it possible for the position of president of Hungarian television, which has been vacant for years, to be occupied once again. An amendment is also required to the police law in order to tangibly improve the presence and perception of the Hungarian police in the public sphere. Here the new government sees the need for decisive action. The obvious gaps in internal security, the lack of presence of state order, and violence are a decisive reason why the Hungarian Guard, closely affiliated to Jobbik, could create such a strong position for itself in eastern Hungary. The Guard recognized these gaps left by the absence of law enforcement and the lack of state security and order. All this must be changed urgently in the national interest. Orbán promised to decisively improve the security situation of the country within a few days of his government assuming

office through discernible measures. Offering citizens security from the state is a viable means of undermining the *raison d'être* of the extremists. The promise is, admittedly, a large one – almost as large as are the expectations.

Compared to earlier governments, the new administration will have a heavily modified structure, all of which will take time to become familiar. There are only eight ministries led by secretaries of state and with subdivided portfolios. Never did a Hungarian government have so few ministers. As it appears, the fastest formation of a government since the collapse of communism is pending. From May 29 Viktor Orbán will be Hungarian prime minister and the new government will begin its work immediately. Orbán has wasted no time.

Gradually, the ideas of the new government will become more and more visible. One may await the government declaration of the new prime minister with interest. In the run-up to the elections Orbán did well to say in which direction a government under his leadership would go. He was also wise, however, not to present a government program prior to entering office. Above all, he used his own personality in his campaign to gain trust.

On July 1 a three-year tax-reduction program is expected to start. Of the currently 52 tax categories, Fidesz intends to delete 12 - 16, or at least to condense them. The new economics minister, György Matolcsy, assumes that the tax burden of the Hungarians will be reduced by about a third. Particularly desirable is that areas have their burdens reduced that contribute to the creation of jobs. Matolcsy also announced a second Szécheny plan. With the first identical-sounding plan Orbán will achieve substantial economic success for his country in his first term of office. The reissuing of this plan has awoken highly positive expectations in the Hungarian population.

Contours can also be seen in the question of dual nationality, one of the first measures to be tackled by the new government. The new foreign minister, János Martonyi, made it clear that it would not be conferred automatically; citizenship would have to be applied for. There would not suddenly be a couple of million "new" Hungarian citizens. Nor would the dual citizenship bring with it automatically

the right to vote in Hungarian elections. This would continue to depend on one's permanent residence being in Hungary. János, who like Matolcsy was a minister in Orbán's first cabinet, should serve to guarantee dependable and predictable foreign policy. He also should certainly see to it that the Hungarian presidency of the EU Council, to run in the first half of 2011, is a success. The new prime minister wishes to show that Hungary, when furnished with a suitable government, is fully capable of regaining the good reputation that it enjoyed when it became a member of the European Union.

### **SOUND COMMUNICATION IS VITAL – INWARDS AND OUTWARDS**

The new government will require a very good communications strategy. Voters will have to be reminded constantly that this government is "different" and functions "differently" to the previous government. In any case the latter had accused itself of having cheated and deceived the people. The new government must however communicate clearly that the hangovers from the Socialist government cannot be cleared up overnight. Most important is to seek a still stronger majority, despite the size of the majority just achieved. A majority among Hungarian citizens is necessary that is prepared to think beyond party lines and old patterns of thought to address the real questions of the country and to seek a common purpose and common denominator for the nation.

Sound communication inwards and outwards will therefore be one of the keys to the success of the new Orbán government. Coverage before the election and after each ballot has already made this largely clear. However, the international media will initially adopt a critical position towards the second administration of Viktor Orbán. In Germany in particular, the media went to considerable lengths to propagate a negative portrayal of Fidesz and the future prime minister Viktor Orbán. Hopefully it will be shown in the next few months that this portrayal does not conform to reality. The new government will nevertheless need a longer time and much hard work in order to bring about the necessary change of image. Yet Hungary is now presented with a major opportunity, which its voters have opened up for it with their choice for change.