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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO 25
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN HUNGARY, JUNE 7 2009

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Key points:

- The governing Socialist Party's share of the vote was drastically reduced as compared to the last, 2006, general election and was in fact smaller than in any election since 1990.
- The major winners are the main opposition party Fidesz and the extra-parliamentary extreme right Jobbik party, which unexpectedly came third after the Socialists. In terms of the share of vote received this was both Fidesz's and Jobbik's best ever electoral performance.
- The election saw the fragmentation of the liberal vote, which resulted in both the established Alliance of Free Democrats and the new 'Politics Can Be Different' party excluded from among those securing representation in the European Parliament (EP).
- The campaigns were dominated by domestic issues with almost no attention paid to Europe.
- A major change as compared to the previous EP election, after which all Hungarian MEPs joined the three major, established EP groupingss, is that this time 3 of the 22 mandates went to hard Eurosceptics (Jobbik).
- Two factors are important for explaining this outcome. One is the global economic crisis, and the other the fact that the governing party that was confronted with it had been in office for seven years. Their combined effect was to magnify the characteristic anti-incumbency bias of second order elections to extreme proportions.

The 2009 European parliamentary elections, the second in Hungary, were held amidst considerable political turbulence. In contrast to the first 16 years of the country's post-communist history, characterized by high degrees of government stability, the autumn of

2006 saw mass demonstrations and riots in the streets of Budapest, spring 2008 a referendum and the collapse of the governing coalition, and the first half of 2009 the replacement of the first minority cabinet by a 'government of experts'.

The period of turbulence was ushered in by the last national parliamentary elections held in April 2006.[1] The two major parties, the Socialists (in government since 2002 with the small liberal Alliance of Free Democrats), and the main opposition party, the conservative Fidesz, turned their campaigns into a competition over who could offer the voters more. Both promised to maintain Hungary's expensive and inefficient welfare system – despite a budget deficit of over 9%, which clearly dictated a massive cut in social spending following the elections. The Socialists won, again forming a coalition with their traditional allies, the Free Democrats. The elections returned to parliament the same parties that had been represented before: in addition to the two coalition parties Fidesz (on a joint list with the Christian Democratic People's Party [KDNP]), and the small conservative Democratic Forum.

In retrospect the Socialists won a Pyrrhic victory. The efforts to cut down the deficit involved many very unpopular measures, and already by the summer of 2006 the party paid with a large slump in the polls. Matters only got worse when a May 2006 speech Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany delivered at a closed-door party meeting leaked in September. For the left, the speech went down in political history as a rousing call to arms, to face up and stop telling voters only what they wanted to hear. 'However, Gyurcsány's allegation that all political parties had lied about the state of the economy for years, and the admission that this included himself and his party in the run-up to the elections, was seized upon by the opposition as a frank admission of an election campaign based on lies.' [2] A week of demonstrations and violent riots followed.

Arguably, the government never recovered from this double blow. The Socialists' popularity went down from a high of 48% (among respondents with party preferences) at the time of the spring 2006 elections to just 22% by the time of the 2009 EP elections, with Fidesz in turn gaining ground along the way.[3] An important milestone in this process was a March 2008 referendum, held on the question whether the small fee the government had introduced for using medical services could be maintained. (The fee was the equivalent of approximately 1 Euro for consulting a GP.) Predictably, the overwhelming majority of the slightly over 50% of the voters who participated voted 'No', which Fidesz, having vigorously campaigned for this outcome, interpreted as a resounding endorsement not just of 'free' medical services but also the party's criticism of the government.

The fallout from the referendum in turn prompted the junior coalition partner, the Free Democrats, who had been weary of the economic stabilization package, to quit the

[1] See: Nick Sitter and Agnes Batory, Europe and the Hungarian parliamentary elections of April 2006,' *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Election Briefing No. 28* at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epernhungary2006.pdf.
[2] Ibid.
[3] See: http://www.tarki.hu/hu/research/elect/ppref_table_02.html

government. However, the calls for early elections that have been almost permanent in Hungarian politics since this development were not heeded. Considering that they were likely to share their former coalition partner's fate in the case of early elections, the Free Democrats apparently concluded that giving the Socialists a chance for recovering some of the ground lost to Fidesz was in their interests. They decided to back the minority government in parliament, which could thus stay in office.

As it turns out, there was a major, if admittedly unforeseeable, flaw in the plan: the global economic crisis, which hit Hungary particularly badly, to the extent that the government was forced to rely on an IMF-led bailout. For the average citizen, an immediate and hard-hitting consequence of the crisis was the devaluation of the national currency, the forint, against foreign currencies, which pushed up monthly payments for euro- and Swiss ranc mortgages and thereby put a severe burden on many households. Rising popular discontent and Fidesz's refusal to engage in a dialogue with the ptime minister on his crisis management proposals finally led to Ferenc Gyurcsany offering his resignation in March 2009. As he put it: 'I hear that I am the obstacle to the co-operation required for changes, for a stable governing majority and the responsible behaviour of the opposition…if so, then I am eliminating this obstacle now.'[4]

What followed can only be described as a rather undignified scramble for finding a new prime minister. Having offered the position to a number of candidates, who duly refused, the Socialists, in consultation with their erstwhile coalition partner Free Democrats, finally appointed Gordon Bajnai through a constructive vote of no-confidence in April 2009. Mr Bajnai had been a member of the Gyurcsany cabinet, but not of the Socialist Party, and several (although not all) of his senior ministers – such as the career diplomat and former European Commissioner Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Minister of Finance, recruited straight from Deloitte – were non-partisan appointments. The 'government of experts', as the Socialists referred to the new cabinet, clearly in an attempt to garner wide cross-party and popular support for what was to come, entered into office and promptly introduced a comprehensive overhaul of the tax and benefits system, including a number of measures that had been put off for over a decade.

Fidesz refused to have anything to do with the new measures (or the 'expert' government), and it is not hard to see why: they included a cut in paid parental and sick leave, pensions, and government support for housing; an increase in VAT and excise taxes; and the planned introduction of a property tax (at the time of writing the latter is not yet adopted). Although the crisis management package also included changes that would, in the long run, leave more money in employees' and employers' pockets, the impact of the former, painful measures were more likely to be felt immediately. By spring 2009, even before the introduction of the Bajnai package, public opinion was exceptionally pessimistic and negative towards the government. In a March Median poll, 87% of respondents reported that his/her household's financial situation got worse over the past 12 months (47% thought it got a *lot* worse), and the vast majority expected that it would get worse even in the coming year.[5] Only a few weeks after his appointment and a

[4] See: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7956610.stm
[5] See: http://www.median.hu/object.f8b26847-509d-42dd-adc3-2f8b392a30f5.ivy

month before the EP elections, Bajnai was almost as unpopular as his predecessor, Ferenc Gyurcsany.

It seems that Hungarians were also less than happy about the EU. In the last year before accession, more than half of Eurobarometer respondents in the country thought membership would be good thing. In the autumn of 2008, less than one third expressed a similar opinion, the second smallest proportion in the EU. The proportion of those saying membership was a bad thing doubled from 2003 to 2008, although the majority thought it was neither good nor bad.[6] It is not clear what drives this disillusionment, but given the well-established link between government support and support for the EU it seems likely that people projected the malaise felt over political leadership in Hungary onto the EU as well. But whatever the reason, it seemed quite likely that a loud pro-EU campaign would not be a major vote winner.

The campaigns

The combination of a massively unpopular government, an economic crisis, and limited popular enthusiasm for European issues presented the main opposition party Fidesz with an excellent opportunity for running a campaign focused almost entirely on the mobilization of discontent. And, indeed, the centrepiece of the Fidesz campaign was turning the vote into a referendum on the government. In this they were aided by the timing of the announcement of the Bajnai cabinet's austerity package. Bajnai made no secret of the fact that he thought his job would last for one year only, i.e. until the next parliamentary elections due in spring 2009 at the latest. This apparent lack of long-term political ambition is displayed in what surely has to be seen as a suicidal move for any incumbent government facing an election: the announcement of plans to introduce a new kind of tax only weeks before the vote, having recently cut a wide range of social benefits from pensions to the duration of paid maternity leave.

Clearly, the economic crisis did not leave much room for manoeuvre, but the austerity package in general and the property tax plans in particular offered Fidesz their campaign theme on a platter. They presented the crisis as a direct consequence of the Socialists' incompetence over what they described as seven disastrous years in office. The main message of Fidesz, prominently displayed on giant orange and white posters all over the country, was simply 'Enough – (Go) Vote!'. This was re-inforced by the suggestion that a decisive Fidesz victory would leave no choice for the government but to resign, allowing Fidesz to gain power at the elections then called and 'undo' the most unpopular measures the Bajnai cabinet introduced – including the, not yet adopted, property tax. (There was no suggestion, however, of how the gaping hole this would create in public finances would be plugged.) This is not to say that Fidesz did not have a European programme. On the contrary, the party published a detailed manifesto, entitled 'Yes, Hungary can do better', dealing with a wide range of EU policies. But there was, from the Fidesz point of

[6] See: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_hu_exec.pdf.

view, no point in using it for anything much during the campaign, given that domestic politics provided them with more powerful ammunition.

While Fidesz could afford to lean back and observe events from the lofty heights of as much as 70% support, reported in May in some of the polls,[7] the other parliamentary parties must have had a difficult time trying to think of something that could be a winning message. The main source of the Socialists' difficulties was their record in government, or, more precisely, how to communicate what could have been seen as important achievements in their last years in office – for instance managing to significantly curtail the budget deficit[8] – before the global economic crisis hit. They attempted to do this by, for instance: running ads focusing on projects financed by the Structural Funds, inviting visitors to the party's website to click on a banner 'What was built in your district between 2004 and 2009?', or emphasising the gains an average taxpayer would make in 2010, once the new personal income tax system kicks in. They also tried to draw attention to the Bajnai government's apparent success in stopping the slide of the forint. However, the crisis obliterated all else in people's memory with regards to the past few years, and the future income tax gains (which, thanks to a Fidesz counter-campaign, many people probably did not quite believe in anyway) could not compensate for the losses households had already suffered. In addition to this, largely defensive, stand on domestic issues, the Socialists offered relatively bland messages such as stressing the need to send 'left wing' politicians to the EU.

Despite their 2008 departure from the coalition, the Free Democrats also suffered from the anti-government mood of the times. Having propped up the Socialist minority government in parliament, they could not distance themselves from the austerity measures, but neither could they take any credit for whatever achievements the cabinet might have been able to claim. The liberals thus resorted to trying to scare their traditional voters into voting for them by holding up the spectre of the march of the extreme right. Free Democrat posters showed pictures of ordinary Hungarians side by side with menacing neo-Nazis, inviting people to choose between these alternatives. They also appealed to their supporters' core liberal values, stressing that the Free Democrats were *the* party of tolerance and inclusion. Other posters posed the question 'Will there be 200,000 free, democratic voters?', which in retrospect seems only to have reminded people how uncertain the polls were about the party's ability to pass the 5% electoral threshold.

The Democratic Forum's situation was similar to that in the 2004 European and 2006 national parliamentary elections: as on those occasions, this time too the party was hovering around the 5% threshold, its main asset was its popular leader Ibolya David, and it was very visibly divided. The core of the Forum's strategy was also, again, to position itself in the centre between Fidesz (portrayed by the party as irresponsible populists) and

[7] 70% Fidesz support refers to voters with party preferences who said were certain to vote. The corresponding figure was 65% among those with a party preference (but not certain to vote) and 37% among all respondents, in a Tarki poll in May 2009. See: http://www.tarki.hu/hu/research/elect/2009/pp_table_09_01.html.

[8] http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/pdf/2008/autumnforecasts/hu_en.pdf

the Socialists (portrayed as incompetent and weak), particularly by the party leader projecting a calm, critical, no-nonsense image. But the Forum's leadership clearly felt that this time around this might not be enough, and decided to make a surprising and extremely risky move: they invited Lajos Bokros, a former minister of finance in a *Socialist* cabinet who had been in charge of the most unpopular austerity package of the 1990s, to lead their European parliamentary list. (Almost equally bizarrely, the second on the Forum's list was George von Habsburg). The party leadership apparently gave the position to Mr Bokros without consulting internal critics. Consequently, the Forum's parliamentary group promptly split and, having lost too many MPs, was dissolved. The media was then treated to a very public internal debate about who had the right to expel whom from the party, but eventually the Forum's campaign settled on a message focusing on Mr Bokros' proven crisis management competence. (After prime minister Gyurcsany's resignation Lajos Bokros was even suggested as a possible successor to lead the crisis cabinet). Posters around town featured only two words in giant letters: 'Bokros-Habsburg'.

The other parliamentary parties' MEP candidates were less high profile. The top positions of the lists of the two big parties and the Free Democrats were held by their MEPs (the leader of the Socialist list was the former minister of foreign affairs of the Gyurcsany cabinet – normally not regarded as a Socialist 'heavyweight'). While Fidesz leader Viktor Orban and Democratic Forum Ibolya David were very active in their respective parties' campaigns, the prime minister and members of his cabinet kept a distance – again stressing the non-partisan character of the 'expert government'. The trans-national party federations were not at all visible in the campaigns, although MEPs seeking re-election would make reference to the relevant party grouping's positions when taking about EU issues. Whatever nuanced differences existed between the parliamentary parties' stances on European integration, they did not leave a mark on the campaigns: as mentioned, Fidesz, which had been the most critical about particular EU issues in the past, particularly around the time of the accession referendum, was largely silent on Europe.

Apart from the parliamentary parties, four other organisations fielded candidates: the militant extreme right Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary), the leftist-green 'Politics Can Be Different' (PCBD- running on a joint list with the tiny Humanist Party), the old-style communist Workers' Party, and the Romani Unity-Forum of Hungarian Roma Organisations. A notable absence was the Hungarian Justice and Life Party, 'traditionally' the flag-bearer of the extreme right, which had been squeezed out by Jobbik. Apart from Romani Unity, a single issue party focused on the representation of the Roma minority, all three were Eurosceptic protest parties standing in opposition to the club of parliamentary parties. Among the four, only Jobbik was predicted to pass the electoral threshold. Its campaign slogan was 'Hungary for the Hungarians', and their main message was to mobilise 'real Hungarians' against traitors within the nation's body, multi-nationals, and the Roma.[9] Founded in 2003 as a party by a movement with the

[9] In an interview, a party vice-chairman said that: 'Hungarian people are fed up that from their money, their tax, gypsies are bread in Hungary with state supervision and coordination.' See: http://www.euractiv.hu/europai-parlament/interju/morvai-a-100-szazalekig-magyarok-dntsenek-001697

same name, Jobbik defined itself, according to its website, as 'a principled, conservative and radically patriotic Christian party', which 'stands up against the ever more blatant efforts to eradicate the nation as the foundation of human community' and 'as the only party to face one of the underlying problems of Hungarian society, the unsolved situation of the ever growing gypsy population.'[10] What made the party's growing popularity particularly worrying for observers in Hungary was its foundation in 2007 of the Hungarian Guard, a now notorious para-military organisation.

With respect to European integration, Romani Unity merely called for the EU to take a more active role in improving the situation of the Roma, while the three other extra-parliamentary parties arrived at a rather similar position – being highly critical of the EU in its current form, albeit on different grounds, without rejecting it explicitly. The 'Politics Can Be Different' position was novel on the Hungarian scene, representing a Scandinavian style, leftist blend of Euroscepticism based on anti-globalisation and environmentalism. The Workers Party's Euroscepticism also fed on an anti-capitalist stance, and Jobbik's on all of these plus a hefty dose of nationalism.

Results and analysis

As **Table 1** shows, the results were in line with what the 'second older elections' model would predict:[11] at 36% turnout was much lower than at the previous national election; the governing party and its (former) coalition partner did badly; and most protest parties did well. These results are also in line with some EU-wide patterns. Firstly of low and declining turnout: Hungary's 36% is considerably lower than the EU average of 43%, but higher than in most other new member states. Secondly, the centre-left governments suffered losses across the EU, while centre right parties did not, or much less, suggesting an EU wide swing to the right. Thirdly, populist, extreme right, and hard Eurosceptic parties did very well in a number of member states.

What may require some explanation is the extent of the Socialists' and Free Democrats' losses, and Jobbik's gains. The Socialists and Free Democrats received the smallest share of the vote, since 1990 and ever respectively, while Jobbik got the highest that any extreme right (or left) party achieved in Hungary since 1990. (Although, in light of the British National Party or the Dutch Volkspartij performances, the latter is also not unique). In Hungary, the swing to the right was also very pronounced: Fidesz and Jobbik together secured over 70% of the vote, and Fidesz alone collected more votes (1.6 million) than all the other parties put together, and over three times as many as the Socialists (0.5 million), coming in second. The main explanation for all of this is found in the circumstances of the elections; or, more precisely, the coincidence of two, rather exceptional factors. One is the global economic crisis, and the other the fact that the governing party that was confronted with it had been in office for seven years. The

[10] See: http://www.jobbik.com/?page_id=2

[11] See: Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, 'Nine second order national elections: A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results, *European Journal of Political Research. Vol* 8, 1980, pp.3-44.

combined effect of these two factors was to magnify the characteristic anti-incumbency bias of second order elections to extreme proportions.

Table 1: Results of the 2004 and 2009 EP and 2006 Hungarian election results

Election	**2004 European**		**2006 national**		**2009 European**	
Parties (only those with lists in 2009)	**%**	**Seats**	**%**	**Seats**	**%**	**Seats**
Fidesz (with KDNP in 2006 and 09)	47.40	12	42.03	164	56.36	14
Socialist Party	34.30	9	43.21	186	17.37	4
Jobbik (with the Justice Party in 2006)	-		2.2	0	14.77	3
Democratic Forum	5.33	1	5.4	11	5.31	1
Politics Can Be Different – Humanist P.	-		-		2.61	0
Alliance of Free Democrats	7.74	2	5.04	24	2.16	0
Workers Party	1.83	0	0.41	0	0.96	0
Romani Unity	-		0.08	0	0.46	0
Turnout	**38.5**		**64.3**		**36.29**	

Note: The 2006 figure is the share of the vote and turnout in the second round; the 24 Free Democrat seats include 6 joint Free Democrat-Socialist MPs.
Source: Compiled from www.valasztas.hu (National Election Office)

Nonetheless, Jobbik's 15% of the vote should not be put down simply to the government's unpopularity – this party did well in comparison with the other protest parties as well. The party tapped into widespread existential anxieties and prejudices by doing what no mainstream party could (or would want to) do, in putting the blame on minorities and thereby offering easily identifiable scapegoats for voters. Jobbik was also better than any other party at mobilising core supporters. A Median poll showed the party's base as both the least supportive of the EU and the most likely to vote: over 70% of them said they were certain to participate.[12] This contrasts strongly with the governing parties' very passive supporters: the corresponding figures in the same survey were just 40% for the Socialists and only slightly over 30% for the Free Democrats, respectively (the two parties also possessed the most pro-EU voters, although Fidesz or Democratic Party voters were not far behind on this score). Differential mobilisation across electoral camps thus provides an important part of the explanation for the outcome. It seems that rather than switching to other parties, many Socialist supporters decided to send a signal to their party by staying at home.

The Free Democrats, once the second strongest party and a major player at the time of Hungary's negotiated transition, received perhaps the strongest blow in not passing the threshold of representation, for the first time since regime change. The party's 'neither in,

[12] See: http://www.median.hu//kepek/upload/2009-05/Eutagsag.pps#720,14,Slide 14.

nor out' status as a party externally supporting the government put off many of its traditional supporters, who would have expected the party to take a principled stance. Thus, paradoxically, it was precisely the party's fear of electoral annihilation that led to all but a handful of their most loyal supporters deserting them, by either not voting at all, or switching their allegiances to the new competitor 'Politics Can Be Different'. Another paradox is that the party may have inadvertently aided Jobbik: although the Free Democrats apparently correctly identified the extreme-right threat, their negative campaign actually gave the latter party a higher profile than it otherwise would have had.

Amidst the electoral upheaval, there were however two stable points: the Democratic Forum doggedly delivered its usual 5%, barely scraping by the electoral threshold for the third time in five years; and the Workers Party which, again consistent with its past record, failed to show up on the political radar screen. Romani Unity suffered the same fate, probably explained by its low-key single issue campaign, the fragmentation of the Romani vote, and low electoral participation among the Roma.

As for how much European issues mattered for party choice, the largely domestically oriented campaigns suggest that the answer is: not a great deal. Differences among the mainstream parties were too nuanced. Jobbik and other protest party voters were certainly not put off by their parties' stance on Europe, but (perhaps apart from the ideologically most radical core of the Jobbik camp) sending a signal in domestic politics was probably a more important motivation for choosing them. This conclusion is supported by the fact that voters were badly informed about the EP. In a May 2009 Median poll, almost half of the respondents said they thought that MEPs from one member state make up an EP parliamentary group. Only a quarter of respondents gave the correct answer (MEPs belonging to different party federations). The rest, 17% said they did not know the answer or did not know what the EP was.[13]

Conclusion and outlook

The 2009 EP elections were in many respects similar to the first European elections held five years prior, so much so that the conclusions of the election note on the 2004 vote can be simply restated here: 'The first [and now the second, AB] European election in Hungary sadly repeated the pattern well-known from long(er)-standing member states: even the active part of the electorate felt that the main purpose of the exercise was to send a signal to the prime minister's office, rather than to send representatives to the EP.'[14] European issues played little part in the campaigns, even though three parties - the Socialists, the Free Democrats, and the Democratic Forum - had incentives to talk about their MEPs' planned or past activities, if only to divert attention from domestic politics. But against the background of an eventful spring in Budapest, the EU and its policies did

[13] See: May 2009 Median poll, in 'Heti Vilaggazdasag', 5 June 2009.

[14] See: Agnes Batory, 'The European Parliament election Hungary, June 13 2004', *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network 2004 European Parliament Election Briefing No. 8* at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epernep2004hungary.pdf.

not stand a chance against far more salient bread and butter issues connected with the economic crisis and the austerity package introduced during the campaign.

As a textbook case of second order elections, the 2009 Hungarian poll was mainly about the expression of protest – against a very un-popular government and, more broadly, the political establishment. The Socialists and Free Democrats received their smallest shares of the vote ever. They proved unable to defend their record in office and, given that their coalition has been in power since 2002 (until 2008 in the case of the Free Democrats), shifting part of the blame to a previous government was not really an option. The major beneficiaries were those parties that harnessed and capitalised on the public's existential anxieties in the wake of the crisis, and seemed to offer appropriate outlets for swing voters for doling out punishment to the culprits in office, successfully portrayed as solely responsible for the hardships. 'Politics Can Be Different' also benefited from this, mopping up support from liberals who had wanted to punish the Free Democrats but had nowhere else to go before.

Given that Fidesz had been riding high in the polls for a long period of time already prior to the election, its best ever performance is no surprise. This party, and particularly Jobbik, were considerably more successful in mobilising their voters than the parties of the left, with the simple message 'Enough'. Conversely, Socialists and Free Democrats did particularly badly partly because many of their remaining sympathisers did not bother to vote – sending a signal to their parties by staying at home. Socialist Party strategists probably hope that, with the stakes seen as considerably higher, at least some of these passive voters will participate in the next national election, if for no other reason than to stop Fidesz from securing a similarly overwhelming majority of mandates in the Parliament in Budapest.

The most important consequences of the election for domestic politics can be summarised as follows:

- Fidesz confirmed its dominant position and its leadership can look ahead to the next national parliamentary elections, to be held in less than a year, with considerable confidence. The centre of gravity of the electoral spectrum has clearly shifted to the right. At the same time, Jobbik's 15% and the Democratic Forum's 5% are clear evidence that the strategy of trying to unify the entire centre-right of the political spectrum under the Fidesz banner is not feasible.

- After many years in the electoral wilderness, the extreme right has proven itself to be a force to reckon with. Jobbik's unexpectedly high share of the vote expands the group of parties with national or EP representation for the first time in over ten years. The same may well give voters, who otherwise would have been reluctant to risk wasting their ballots by supporting the party, a signal, thereby making it likely that the party will secure representation in the national parliament too. This also raises the question of co-operation between Fidesz and the extreme right, should Jobbik be needed for a parliamentary majority for a Fidesz-led government in 2010 (although, given Fidesz's current popularity, this scenario seems unlikely).

- The Democratic Forum's risky strategy paid off, and its success in passing the threshold is likely to re-affirm the party leader's position, as well the party's strategy to compete with Fidesz and the Socialists from the political centre.

- The liberal pole of the Hungarian electoral field is closer than ever to disappearing. The Free Democrats have used up their electoral capital, and now have to compete with 'Politics Can Be Different' for the same, small segment of the electorate. Given that this will inevitably split the vote (as it did this time), this may well result in the same outcome in the parliamentary elections, i.e. neither party securing representation.

- The greatest challenge for the left is for the Socialist Party to re-invent itself and avoid yet another divisive leadership battle in the wake of this defeat, giving time for some of the positive impacts of the current cabinet's recent measures to be felt before the next elections are called.

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